

BEYOND BARACK: WHO WILL BE THE POST-OBAMA DEMOCRATIC CONTENDERS?

By Stanley Hollenbeck
(Post-Election Edition)

What seemed like the longest, and what was surely the most expensive, political campaign in this nation's history that has blessedly ended changed very little of the political landscape on the Potomac. Six billion dollars later and all we have to show for it is single digit shifts in the House of Representatives and the Senate that effectively cancel each other out. Add to that a second term for President Obama and it appears all that time and treasure was spent just to preserve the *status quo*.

No matter how these next few years play out, there is for me a far more compelling issue. What will life be like for Democrats in the post-Obama era. It is paramount for Democrats to start today to plan for the future.

Who will be the viable Democratic contenders in 2016? Hillary Clinton would certainly be substantial, formidable and electable. My initial enthusiasm was unfortunately dampened by a Google search that determined she would be 69 years of age in 2016. Ronald Reagan at 69 was the oldest president to take office to date. Elizabeth Warren, another possible powerhouse candidate, would be 67. Unless by 2016 medical advancement determines with certainty that 70 will be the new 50, I sadly surmise that, given the rigors of the campaign trail this past election has demonstrated and the demands of the U.S. Presidency today, these two remarkable women will most probably have to pass up a presidential bid so late in life.

In the last century, six vice-presidents, five governors and only two senators have ascended to the presidency. The Democratic vice-presidential list contains only one name, Joe Biden, who would be 74 in 2016 and can probably be ruled out. Relatively recent presidents such as Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were all governors and it would seem that the most likely candidates in 2016 would come from their ranks. However, the last three presidents were all under the age of 55 when they were first inaugurated. The demands of the job today appear to require the stamina and vigor of someone younger. 25 Democratic members of the House of Representatives will be 55 or younger in 2016. However, the last person elected to the presidency straight from congress was James Garfield and, before him, Abraham Lincoln.

By consulting Wikipedia, I discover that there are 20 Democratic governors but only half of them will be under Reagan's age in 2016. All but four will be older than 60. Admittedly, these four on the cusp include some names that have been touted as presidential material such as Massachusetts' Deval Patrick and New York's Andrew Cuomo and they certainly can't be completely ruled out. However, given the presidential starting age trend of the last quarter century, it seems reasonable to place the marker at 55. Only one will be less than 55, and he is the current chair of the Democratic Governor's Association.



Martin Joseph O'Malley

Governor of Maryland **Martin O'Malley** was born in 1963. He previously served as the mayor of Baltimore from 1999 to 2007.

While still in college, O'Malley joined Gary Hart in his abortive 1984 presidential campaign. He volunteered to go to Iowa where he phone-banked and organized volunteers, playing guitar and singing at fundraisers and other events. In 1986, O'Malley became state field director for Barbara Mikulski's successful election campaign for the U.S. Senate. In 1990, O'Malley married Catherine Curran, the daughter of one of Maryland's former Attorneys General. He himself worked as Assistant State's Attorney for the City of Baltimore. That same year, he mounted an unsuccessful bid for the Maryland State Senate. However, a year later, he won a seat on the Baltimore City Council.

O'Malley was elected Mayor of Baltimore twice with overwhelming majorities. In 2006, he was nominated by the Democratic Party to challenge incumbent Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich, defeating him in the November election by a small margin. Had Obama lost in 2008, his friends had speculated that he might have been a 2012 presidential candidate.

Six Democratic Senators also fit the age criterion. Along with Governor O'Malley, they appear most likely to be the 2016 Democratic nominee presidential farm team.



Mark Begich

Mark Pryor

Chris Coons

Mike Bennet

Tina Gillibrand

Mark Begich, born in 1962, is the junior Democratic United States Senator from Alaska. He served on the Anchorage Assembly for almost ten years and ran two unsuccessful campaigns for mayor in 1994 and 2000 before finally being elected in 2003 and winning by only 11 votes.

Begich won the Democratic nomination in 2008 for the U.S. Senate election, facing longtime incumbent Republican Ted Stevens, who was convicted of felony violations involving ethics and corruption a week prior to the election. Begich won by a narrow margin. A member of the Senate's Moderate Dems Working Group, Begich is considered a moderate Democrat.

Mark Pryor, born in 1963, is the senior United States Senator from Arkansas, serving since 2003 and a former Attorney General of Arkansas. He was elected to the Arkansas House of Representatives in 1990 and as the state Attorney General in 1998. In 2001, running for the same U.S. Senate seat his father had held, Pryor was elected with 54 percent of the vote.

Pryor was a member of the bipartisan Gang of 14 formed in 2005 to forge a compromise on the use of the Senate filibuster. He was re-elected with no Republican opposition in 2008. In January 2009, he briefly became the youngest member of the Senate, the oldest "youngest member" of the Senate ever to serve.

One thing might render him absolutely unelectable as a Democrat, however. In the 2008 Bill Maher documentary "Religulous", Pryor confesses to Maher that he is an Evangelical Christian who believes in the Rapture and Young Earth Creationism but he also concedes that evolution might be a "feasible idea".

Christopher “Chris” Coons, born in 1963, is the junior United States Democratic Senator from Delaware. He won the special election after Joe Biden resigned capturing 56.6% of the vote. Coons was sworn in as a senator on November 15, 2010 by the former occupant of Coons' seat in the Senate. He was previously a Newcastle County Executive who was a volunteer relief worker in Kenya and worked for several nonprofit organizations.

His résumé might be a bit too thin to attract the kind of funding necessary to make him a serious presidential contender in 2016.

Michael Bennet, born in 1964, is the junior Democratic United States Senator from Colorado. He was previously a chief of staff to former Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and the superintendent of Denver Public Schools. He went to work for Ohio Governor Richard Celeste. He was the Editor-in-Chief of the Yale Law Journal. He worked as a law clerk and later as Counsel to the U.S. Deputy Attorney General in the Clinton administration.

An early consultant to President Barack Obama on education issues, Bennet was touted as a frontrunner for United States Secretary of Education. However, Colorado Governor Bill Ritter appointed him to fill the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Ken Salazar when Salazar became Secretary of the Interior. Bennet was elected to his own Senate term in 2010, defeating Republican Ken Buck. He is currently the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Forestry and Natural Resources. Although born on foreign soil, as the son of a serving U.S. diplomat, he is exempt from the constitutional requirement that U.S. Presidents be “natural born”.

Kirsten Gillibrand, born in 1966 is the junior Democratic United States Senator from the state of New York. Prior to her appointment as Senator by New York Governor David Paterson in 2009, she served two terms in the United States House of Representatives. Gillibrand was born and raised in the Albany, New York area. She graduated from Dartmouth College in 1988 where she majored in Asian studies. She received her Juris Doctor from the University of California, Los Angeles Law School and passed the bar in 1991. She became an associate in the law firm of Davis Polk & Wardwell in Manhattan before becoming a partner at Boies, Schiller & Flexner in Albany.

Gillibrand won an upset congressional election in November 2006, beating four-term incumbent John E. Sweeney by a three-point margin. Her reelection campaign in 2008 was significantly easier, winning by a comfortable 12

points. In December 2008, when President-elect Barack Obama nominated Hillary Rodham Clinton as Secretary of State, there was a vacancy on the New York senate delegation. David Paterson appointed Gillibrand to fill the seat but she was required to run in a special election in 2010, winning it with a 13-point victory. As a Senator, she is viewed as a progressive. Although the youngest of the Under 55 Club, she has demonstrated electability and has built an impressive record of government service. Tina Gillibrand could be an attractive contender for the first female United States President.

Yet one must never rule out the exceptions. If ever there were a time for one, it would be for a Democrat four years hence. As previously pointed out, House members seldom swim in the POTUS pool and for multiple reasons. Their platform and media reach is normally confined to the stage bounded by borders of the district they serve. Since they have only a two-year term, they are in chronic campaign mode, always having to raise funds for their next election thereby precluding the luxury of an “exploratory committee” that would drain the financial lifeblood of congressional survival. Normally, unless they get “promoted” to the extreme luxury of a six-year term as a United States Senator, they will never have the fundraising breathing space to shoot for the White House.



Debbie Wasserman Schultz

However, **Debbie Wasserman Schultz** might just be that exception. Born in 1966, Wasserman would be just 50 in 2016 and is currently the Democratic United States Representative from Florida's 20th congressional district since 2005. She is also presently the Chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee. Previously, she served in the Florida House of Representatives, the Florida Senate and is the first Jewish Congresswoman ever to be elected from the State of Florida. Lately, Debbie Wasserman Schultz has been garnering national buzz by adroitly using her DNC chair as a bully pulpit on an almost daily basis. My first political mentor used to warn that women with three names are a force to be reckoned with.

There is one more interesting exceptional scenario that's a little closer to my home. A fireball racing on an endorphin-induced fast track with a visage like Theo Geisel's Grinch, former ballet dancer and current Mayor of Chicago **Rahm Emanuel** has been chief of staff for two presidents. He has probably been a denizen of the West Wing longer than anyone alive. Although he would be 57 in 2016 (just slightly over the benchmark), if there were anyone that exemplified the energy and ambition needed for the grueling (and never before accomplished) task of keeping the White House in Democratic hands for an additional four to eight years, it would be Emanuel.



Rahm Emanuel

A prodigious fundraiser and dynamic political force field, Emanuel runs in constant campaign mode. Even though he was just recently elected Mayor of the third largest city in the nation, he would be ending his first term and, barring any missteps in the metropolis, could be a quite viable candidate. Also, if he feels as I do, that governors stand a better chance to become POTUS, the Illinois gubernatorial spot could be available in 2014, giving him two years to build a gubernatorial record that attracts favorable national attention. Although he has vigorously denied such ambitions, such denials seem oddly incompatible with his persona.

It really behooves Democrats to look around to see who might be doing some early angling by making the post-election talk show rounds as well as any others among the fold that might be viable. If the conversation isn't started soon, they will find themselves in the same predicament as the Republicans were in ... with a large field of candidates, no unifying or electable consensus and only money as the deciding factor.

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The bureau researches and drafts ordinances, resolutions and orders as well as analyzes and recommends policy at the request of the 50 Aldermen that comprise the City Council.

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