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## Join the Debate

Apr. 25, 2011

### Driving the Conversation:

Arena Ref: [David Mark](#)

## Can Haley Barbour break through?

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### David Mark

Moderator :

**Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour** is expected to join the Republican field as early as this coming week, according to the AP, and has met with potential donors while traveling to early voting states.

What are Barbour's chances in the GOP field? And how would he fare against President Obama in November 2012?

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### State Rep. Renee Schulte

Member, Iowa House of Representatives (R) :

I have met Gov. Haley Barbour several times. There is no doubt that Haley is the best strategist in the entire field. He knows politics. That skill doesn't always translate into being the best candidate. But his greatest challenge will likely be his many years in Washington as both a party insider and a super-lobbyist. The tea party and the rank-and-file of the new "constitutional conservative" wing of the Republican Party

have deep strains of anti-Washington, anti-establishment sentiment. Is seven years as a very good southern governor enough to wash off the D.C. residue? That's the question.

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### David Boaz

Executive VP, Cato Institute :

I hear that Haley Barbour would make a great campaign manager or White House chief of staff. And his personal skills seem to have made him a successful politician in a small state. But as a national candidate, he will be seriously hampered by his lobbying background and his inability to acknowledge that there were serious problems in Mississippi before the civil rights revolution. Besides, in a conservative state, he got two C's and a D in the Cato Institute's Fiscal Policy Report Card on America's Governors, so his credibility on fiscal issues seems limited.

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### State Rep. Josh Byrnes

Iowa House of Representatives (R) :

Gov. Barbour is a good governor, and that is where he should probably continue his career. He has an impressive political resume. However, his lobbying days are not a positive and he will be attacked on his client list. His failed attempt at a run for U.S. Senate against an incumbent Democrat says something as well. Great person; just not the right fit for this race.

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### Margie Omero

Democratic pollster; President and founder, Momentum Analysis, LLC :

Haley Barbour is talented. As a governor, RGA and RNC Chair, he's had experience running a large political operation and wooing voters. But I think his success will be limited to the primaries. As a former lobbyist with a recent history of racial insensitivities, I just don't see how he appeals to swing voters.

A successful Republican candidate will need to attract some former Obama voters, moderate independents, and convince some minority and Dem-leaning voters to stay home. Birthers, and those focused more on social wedge issues than on the economy will simply fail to attract voters beyond the Republican primary. And the birther-friendly language Barbour and others use ("I take the president at his word," or "we don't know much about this president") will not help make their case.

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**Sandy Maisel**



Professor of government, Colby College :

Barbour will be a formidable candidate for the GOP nomination — and he would be a strong candidate in the fall, if nominated. The most significant part of his declaration, however, may well be that it signals that Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels will not run.

In my view, Daniels might well be the most formidable Republican contender, but it is well known that family considerations have held him back. Barbour has baggage — as a lobbyist and as a southerner who only recently has refuted some positions that would cause him difficulty in northern states — that Daniels does not have.

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### Amy Fried

University of Maine political science professor :

Gov. Barbour's folksy demeanor and strategic abilities do not make up for his record of governing over a state which remains at the bottom in virtually every social indicator, from health care to levels of poverty and K-12 test scores. In a political context when Americans want government -- disliked in the abstract -- to maintain core programs and provide greater educational opportunity, Democratic ads would almost write themselves.

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### Mark Weinberg

Former Reagan spokesman; Weinberg Communications :

Haley Barbour is likely to be a strong candidate with wide appeal. He is reasonable, responsible, has a solid track record of accomplishment as chief executive of Mississippi, a network of supporters across the country, and knows how to get things done in Washington. There is nothing phony or pretentious about him. He is who he is, and would give President Obama a heck of a race.

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### Robert M. Eisinger

Dean, School of the Liberal Arts, Savannah College of Art and Design :

It's too early for GOP presidential handicapping. President Obama is vulnerable because he must win some of the following swing states — Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. We will have a better sense of Barbour's (or any of the GOP field's) ability to energize the GOP primary voters in November of 2011.

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### Michael Parkin

Assistant Professor of Politics, Oberlin College :

There is a chance that Barbour could break through. He could emerge as a reasonable choice in a field with some flashy candidates (e.g., Trump) and less-than-flashy candidates (e.g., Romney, Pawlenty). He just might be the ideal match of charisma and real political experience. He may also do well enough in the early primaries to get people's attention.

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### Alvin S. Felzenberg

9/11 Commission Spokesman, Book Author and Professor :

Haley Barbour would enter the race with a proven record of achievement in multiple roles. He is the clear favorite among the party faithful. These attributes plus his sense of humor and keen intelligence will help him go the whole distance. If ever a political party had a "happy warrior," Haley is it.

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### Steve Murphy

Democratic consultant; Managing Partner at Murphy Vogel Askew Reilly :

If Huckabee does not run Haley Barbour can make it to the "finals" by virtue of his regional strength, with the other survivor almost certainly Mitt Romney. Then we'll see if Haley can take down Romney with a concerted attack on the Massachusetts health care law. Barbour is the likely runner-up, but he won't be the vice presidential nominee. That goes to Marco Rubio.

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### Thomas J. Whalen

Professor of Social Science, Boston University :

Actually, the more GOP candidates the better it is for Mitt Romney at this stage. Someone like Barbour would split the conservative southern vote, where the former Massachusetts governor plays the weakest politically. This can't be anything but good news for him.

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### Mike Fraioli

President, Fraioli & Associates :

South Carolina has been historically significant for the Republicans in the presidential nomination process. If Gov. Barbour runs, South Carolina will take on new significance - for him anyway.

Even if he were to get the Republican nomination, I don't know how he beats Obama in the general election.

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### Greg Dworkin

Contributing Editor, Daily Kos :

A weak GOP field means casting a wider net for those unhappy with Tim Pawlenty and especially Mitt Romney, the putative front runner. Donald Trump is not wearing well, and Palin and Bachmann and the rest of the “unserious” candidates continue to fade.

But as a Very Serious Candidate (so says the press), Barbour is no more acceptable now outside the South than when he made a recent gaffe praising Citizens Councils in Mississippi in the 60's. He'll do well in South Carolina, maybe do okay (and maybe not, if Michele Bachmann runs) in Iowa, and get spanked in New Hampshire. He's a regional candidate who can raise money, but so was Phil Gramm. Still, Barbour would have to be ranked third behind Romney and Pawlenty as a likely nominee and ahead of the other distraction candidates, but better liked by the media than the voters.

After the Barbour boomlet fades, the next flavor of the week will be Mitch Daniels. He's the Most Serious of the Very Serious Candidates since, well, Paul (Ayn Rand devotee) Ryan. Then again, he may not run; Barbour will.

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### Darrell M. West

Vice President, Governance Studies, Brookings :

I would put Barbour in the top tier of Republican presidential candidates should he run. He is knowledgeable and well-respected, has a strong governing record, and has a folksy personal manner that would play well at a time of high unemployment. Barbour is someone who would do well with conservatives and also pull in Independents needed during the general election.

His only big negative is his lobbying past. Opponents will be sure to remind voters about his lobbying activities on the part of tobacco companies.

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### John Anzalone

Democratic consultant, Anzalone Liszt Research :

While it is hard to see Barbour's path to the nomination, especially if Huckabee gets in, as the only current Southerner, he could change the dynamics given where South Carolina falls in the calendar. He should be well funded given his lobbyist and Republican insider past. And Southerners (Bushes, Clinton, Carter, Johnson) have a history of presidential success. But there is a stigma about being from

Mississippi. Even Alabamans are happy to have a state that ranks lower down the scale in most important educational, health, and economic indicators.

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**Theda Skocpol**

Professor of Government and Sociology, Harvard :

A former lobbyist with a dubious past on racial issues? Donors yes, voters no.

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**Ken Feltman**

Past president; International Association of Political Consultants :

Running for president is a lot like trying to get across a mine field. That's tough enough. But for Southern conservatives, the mine field contains more mines, as Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour found when the "racially insensitive" mine exploded in his face a few months ago. Initially, he did not understand what he had said that was offensive.

Barbour will need to tip toe through the mine field very carefully because the next explosion could be fatal.

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