



## Three fit the GOP establishment mold

By Christian Heinze - 05/25/11 06:44 AM ET

Mitch Daniels's decision not to run for president next year left most observers to conclude the Republican primary field is set.

The Indiana governor joined GOP heavy-hitters Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour and Sen. John Thune (S.D.) in opting out of a White House bid.

And that leaves just three candidates who fit in easily with the Republican establishment — former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty and former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman.

### Romney

He showed off his fundraising muscle earlier this month when he raised \$10.25 million in a single day. That was over 10 times the amount Pawlenty raised in his kickoff fundraiser. Further, Romney's political action committee, Free and Strong America, pulled in \$1.9 million in the first quarter, which was good for second place among 2012 contenders. He can also self-finance, a possibility he hasn't ruled out. And Romney is one of the few candidates who can go the distance.

He can also point to strong polling in key battleground states this year. He leads the New Hampshire GOP primary by 23 percent and beats President Obama in the state by 7 percent, which would represent a pickup for Republicans. In polls last month, he edged out Obama in Florida and Pennsylvania and was the only Republican to beat the president in Arizona — a state the GOP must hold to win the general election.

Fox TV analyst Charles Krauthammer wrote that Romney would be the "prohibitive front-runner" if it weren't for one thing, and that one threatens to derail him — healthcare.

Romney's healthcare program in Massachusetts, which critics call "RomneyCare," bears striking similarities to Obama's healthcare plan, and their kinship will be endlessly promoted by his opponents.

In fact, Romney's been on the receiving end of the lone inter-candidate attacks this cycle. Pawlenty, former Sen. Rick Santorum (Pa.), Texas Gov. Rick Perry and former Speaker Newt Gingrich (Ga.) have all attacked him in various ways for the program.

His other problem is more personal, less political. The conservative talk show host Michael Reagan told listeners that Romney "can't relate to anybody making less than \$1 million per year." That's an overstatement, but there's no doubt that the larger your bank statement, the more likely you are to support him. In a GOP primary, for example, Sarah Palin squashes him by 13 percent in the lowest income group, but loses to him by 14 percent in the highest.

### Pawlenty

He's the growing choice among the conservative intelligentsia. Backers point to a record that includes balanced budgets as governor of Minnesota, a vigorous history of vetoing Democratic legislation, praise from the conservative Cato Institute and congenial ties with each of the major factions of the Republican Party — economic, social and foreign policy hawks. In fact, no one seems to have a major beef with him.

But here's a general rule: If you're not passionate and charismatic enough to get anyone mad at you, you're probably not passionate and charismatic enough to get anyone to love you.

And that seems to be his problem. People who come across him often say they'd accept him as nominee without necessarily supporting him in the first place.

So far, he hasn't hit double digits in primary polling in any state except his home of Minnesota. Pawlenty claims that his woes are due to his low name ID, but the fact he's been unable to generate attention — even while looking earnestly for it — shows that the problem might lie in the candidate himself.

Pawlenty's offered many an excuse for his failure to catch on with voters, claiming that record trumps charisma and that voters aren't looking for candidates who can simply “flap their jaw.” That may be true, but jaw-flapping has a long and successful relationship with presidential politics.

## Huntsman

He's quickly jumped into the fray, visiting potential donors, making aggressive hires in key states and delivering high-profile speeches in New Hampshire and South Carolina.

Further, the media loves and is impressed by him. After covering Huntsman's weekend trip in New Hampshire, *Time* magazine's Mark Halperin said he was “blown away by how effective he was,” and columnist Jonathan Alter recently dubbed him the “coolest Republican” in the race.

Plus, he looks presidential and, in 2008, his record in Utah was praised by the Cato Institute as one of the most fiscally sound in the nation.

But he's beset by numerous difficulties. For one, there's the fact that the media does, in fact, love him. Getting praised by former President Carter — as Huntsman was — might get you invited to a fancy soiree, but it won't get you on conservative talk radio host Mark Levin's show.

And there's scant evidence that, despite the media adoration, Huntsman is gaining any ground among Republican activists who are the lifeblood of a primary. His past support for cap-and-trade and the stimulus plan and service in the Obama administration have given many conservatives pause.

Huntsman is the biggest wild card out there, but his potential is reflected in the betting market, Intrade, where he's surged in the past few weeks and now ranks as the third most likely to win the nomination — just behind Romney and Pawlenty.

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