

## Commentary Magazine

### [Have We Been Too Quick to Dismiss Huntsman?](#)

[Jonathan S. Tobin](#) 07.05.2011 - 5:33 PM

It would be an understatement to say Jon Huntsman's presidential candidacy has been greeted with skepticism here at Contentions. But some of our readers think we've been a bit too quick to dismiss him. Others want to know why I left him out of [my survey](#) of how Jewish voters might view the various Republican candidates.

As for the latter point, it is true I left out a discussion of Huntsman's Jewish appeal from that piece, although to be fair it should be noted I also failed to mention Rick Santorum, Herman Cain and Ron Paul.

Nevertheless, to give Huntsman his due, let me quote from an e-mail from one of his supporters, Stephen Richer, a native of Sandy, Utah, who now works at a Washington, D.C., think tank. Richer writes:

In the past two months, Jon Huntsman has become a favorite topic of the COMMENTARY blog. Three authors (Jonathan S. Tobin, Alana Goodman, and Pete Wehner) have together tallied over ten Huntsman commentaries. But only one perspective has emerged from these posts: Huntsman is a weak Republican who doesn't contribute to the primary field. Each of these short posts, however, fixates on side shows (e.g. Huntsman's relationship with the LDS Church or the past international transactions of his father's) while missing the point that Huntsman is exactly what the Republican Party and the country need: a highly competent fiscal conservative.

Opinion polls show that an overwhelming majority of Americans rank "the economy" and "jobs" as the top political issue. Huntsman's past economic performance speaks of nothing but success. As governor of Utah, Huntsman signed the largest tax cut ([\\$225 million](#)) in the conservative state's history, winning him the [2008 Cato Institute tax award](#) and the [2007 Taxpayer Advocate Award](#); he fought against regulations hampering commerce (including, controversially, some of Utah's more stringent liquor limitations); and he brought new high-tech businesses to the states. The result? The [American Legislative Exchange Council called](#) Utah the top state for expected economic recovery.

Judged by economic acumen – the standard that is most important to the America – Huntsman ranks above, or at least equal to, all other Republican contenders, and for this reason, he deserves a second look from COMMENTARY.

Utah's economic record does speak well for Huntsman, but the problem with his candidacy does not stem from worries about that aspect of his record. Huntsman has entered the GOP race as a moderate dripping with contempt for conservatives and clearly attempting to position himself as the darling of media elites and country club Republicans.

After serving two years as President Obama's ambassador to China, he has been slow to understand the one thing that unites the GOP is anger about the president's policies.

Perhaps most to the point for those who inquired about where he might stand with the Jewish vote, Huntsman has staked out a foreign policy position that seems to be the left of Obama on Afghanistan. The former Utah governor appears most comfortable with foreign policy "realists" who have been less than supportive of Israel. But his willingness to abandon Afghanistan to the Taliban cannot comfort any friend of the Jewish state, since any president must always be evaluated in no small measure by their willingness to stand by America's allies.

It is true his attempt to play the moderate would go down better with Jewish voters than any Republican identified with the Christian right. But at this stage, Huntsman still appears to me to be a candidate without a Republican constituency to which he can appeal. That may change, just as his foreign policy positions may evolve to ones more palatable to those who understand the folly of "realism." But until that happens, I'm afraid the prospect of him challenging his former boss for a larger share of the Jewish vote seems as fanciful a scenario as one in which Santorum, Cain or Paul do so. In other words, it's not going to happen.