

ARKANSAS TIMES

The Huckabee legacy

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Whether they lean left or right, rank unvarnished truth above convenient lies, or prefer uncomfortable knowledge to pleasurable ignorance — the great divisions in today's society — every voter deserves to have some hope when he or she casts a ballot, particularly in a year like this when every issue and race is cast as a doomsday choice. Even if the other candidate wins, every voter should have some hope that things are not going to be as desperate as they fear.

Hope defines democracy, doesn't it? We're here to help.

Politicians are known to sometimes promise one thing and deliver the opposite and then, at least with the cleverest of them, to claim credit with both sides. For example, liberal skeptics fretted when Donald Trump promised in 2016 to tax billionaires and hedge-fund managers, eliminate the national debt by the end of his presidency and also to be the biggest job creator by far of any president in history. He actually did none of those things. Instead, in four short years he lowered taxes on billionaires and hedge-fund managers, added \$8.2 trillion to the national debt — by far the most in any term of any president in history — and is the only president since Herbert Hoover to leave the country a net loss of jobs after his time in office — a loss of 2.7 million jobs, to be exact. Even the Bushes didn't do that. Yet a Republican cult adored him for doing the things they feared most.

So this is an exercise in electoral optimism: how to go to the polls bubbling with hope, no matter what your leanings are.

Let's use the Arkansas governor's race for this exercise. Voters will choose among Democrat Chris Jones, Republican Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Libertarian Ricky Dale Harrington Jr. None has ever held public office. The common expectation, based on polling and money raising, is that Sanders will win easily. She has the backing of Trump and nearly every moneybags in the country who delivers on demand for Trump. Thanks to Trump, her campaign treasury and spending have been by far the largest in Arkansas history.

Sanders has said almost nothing about what she would do as governor except slash taxes (specifically, forever eliminate corporate and personal income taxes), stop President Biden from socializing Arkansas and make sure that everyone convicted of a violent crime stays in prison as long as they live or else is dumped across our borders to terrorize people in some other state. They will never set foot in an Arkansas community again, she promises. Sanders hasn't said where she will drop them if the prisons are full and their terms have ended, but one might expect

that it would be a state or a city with a Democratic executive or voting majority. This is a popular political strategy now. Republican governors are hauling new immigrants to the northeast, dumping them and twitting Democrats about taking care of the dark-skinned beggars.

We have our own celebrated history of that sort of thing. I was at the Trailways bus station in downtown Little Rock in the summer of 1962 when a sneering and gleeful Amis Guthridge, the head of the state's white supremacist gang, the Capital Citizens Council, loaded up another bus with Black women and their children and sent them off with \$5 to Hyannis Port, Mass., President John F. Kennedy's summer home, expecting the liberal communities to send them packing somewhere else. Instead, Hyannis Port welcomed them. "Welfare mamas" was the description of the women, later popularized by Ronald Reagan. Guthridge, by the way, was a midcentury adherent of Sarah Sanders' repeated myth that socialists/radical leftists are taking over America. He headed the Arkansas Free Enterprise Association, which amended the Arkansas Constitution in 1944 to try to stop the unionization of industry, which was supposed to be the key to halting the imminent socialist revolution.

But I digress. Back to spreading hope.

Sanders is running on the names of her daddy, Mike Huckabee, and her guru, Donald Trump. She includes her maiden name in every ad and sign. If you wonder what to expect of her, think about what Mike and Donald did as well as what they say they did. Whatever your own leanings, that might give you pause to hope. Maybe Sarah will be a carbon of her old man, Gov. Mike Huckabee, when he was in his prime before falling into the Trump cult.

So, let's reexamine the Huckabee Sanders issues, such as they are:

TAXES

Getting rid of taxes, at least those that burden wealthy people, is the Republican Party's universal plank and Sanders takes a back seat to no one. She said she would end corporate and personal income taxes by the time she left office in eight years, fulfilling the Republican prophecy for a century that cutting taxes, especially for the wealthy, will produce furious economic growth — a prophecy that has never come true, in Arkansas or elsewhere, unless you buy the theory that it was the tax cuts after World War I that produced the roaring 'twenties (and finally the Great Depression). That is all speculative but one result is inescapable: If she eliminates income taxes, schools would have to close for half the year or teacher salaries halved, prisons would have to close or free inmates, and every college would have to slash its payroll and reduce its offerings.

But consider what another anti-taxer, Sarah's daddy, did. As lieutenant governor he opposed even Gov. Jim Guy Tucker's little tax on soda pop to meet the state's Medicaid spending on the poor and disabled. Running for president in 2008, he claimed to have been the fiercest anti-taxer in Arkansas history — the first governor ever to cut taxes, and over Democratic opposition. None of it was true. The income tax cut in 1997 that he claimed was his was written by his predecessor, Tucker, and sponsored by every Democrat in the legislature. He signed it after the legislature passed it overwhelmingly.

Here's the reason for hope that Sanders is just lying or that she will suddenly see the light. Her father did.

Mike Huckabee is the biggest taxer in Arkansas history and it was all for good causes: education, medical care, highways and nursing homes (OK, OK — nursing home owners). He raised more taxes than any governor in history, far more than Clinton, Rockefeller, Bumpers, Faubus or McMath. The billionaire boys club, the Club for Growth, called him out on it in 2008 when he was running for president but, calling them the Club for Greed, he claimed they were lying. They weren't.

The Huckabees will dispute it, but here is the record of his taxes. You can verify it with the statute books and government revenue records. Huckabee signed all the bills into law, after sometimes begging legislators to pass them.

- Act 38 of 2003: a 3% surcharge for two years on the income taxes of individuals and domestic and foreign corporations, an increase in the tax on cigarettes of 25 cents a pack, and also an additional excise tax of 7% on tobacco products.
- Act 1492 of 1999: a half-percent sales tax increase.
- Act 107 of 2003: a sales tax increase of 7/8ths of 1% and an expansion of the sales tax to apply to many previously untaxed services. Huckabee refused to sign the bill because the legislature had not also approved his plan for a massive consolidation of schools, but he let the tax become law without his signature.
- Act 94 of 2003: a near doubling of the corporate franchise tax.
- Act 434 of 1997: an increase of 2% in the tax on chewing tobacco, cigars, snuff and other tobacco products and also an increase of \$1.25 per thousand in the tax on cigarettes and of 2% of the selling price on tobacco products.
- Act 1337 of 1997: an increase in the permit tax on cigarettes and tobacco products.
- Act 635 of 2001: a tax of 6% per bed on the gross receipts of nursing homes, which qualified the nursing homes for a big increase in federal matching aid for the homes. Nursing home owners like the magnate Michael Morton got richer.
- Act 1841 of 2001: a 3% excise tax on all retail sales of beer.
- Act 272 of 2003 and Act 2188 of 2005: extended the 3% tax on beer sales.
- Act 1274 of 2005: revived a 4% mixed drink tax levied in 1989 and added a 4% tax on private clubs.
- Act 1028 of 1999: levied a tax on gasoline of 3 cents a gallon.
- Act 1028 of 1999: increased the tax on diesel by 4 cents a gallon. Huckabee would insist that Arkansas voters approved the taxes, but that was not true. The taxes were passed by the legislature and signed by him, to go into effect when a bond issue that did not mention the tax was approved.

- Act 1500 of 2001: an increase in the Arkansas driver's license from \$14 to \$20. A similar increase in driver's license fees had defeated Clinton in the 1980 election.
- Act 156 of 1997: an increase in the sales tax of 1/8 of 1% dedicated to parks and conservation that was authorized by a constitutional amendment approved by voters. Huckabee claimed he had nothing to do with the tax, but he had campaigned for it, including a series of campaign events in his bass boat on the Arkansas River.

His biggest tax increases were mainly for education after the Arkansas Supreme Court said Arkansas had to follow the constitutional mandate of 1874 that it provide a suitable and equal education for every child in the state. He addressed the legislature and begged the members to pass a bundle of taxes, specifically income taxes.

Might Sarah Sanders have a similar Road-to-Damascus conversion? She doesn't seem inclined, but who knows? She says she wants to help kids learn, including those who are sent to private schools. She wants their parents to share in the limited state funds for public education.

CRIME

Sanders promises to ban violent criminals from Arkansas communities forever. Her daddy, however, had a celebrated soft spot for rapists and murderers, which didn't help him when he ran for president in 2008 and 2016 but may have touched some people as a man capable of acts of compassion. Maybe his daughter, too — who knows? Mike followed two governors, Clinton and Tucker, who had cultivated the image of being tough on inmates. Many still remember Wayne DuMond, the serial rapist and killer with a long history of violent crime that Huckabee freed from prison. A Forrest City cheerleader who was later identified as a third cousin of Bill Clinton accused DuMond of rape, but right-wing outlets propagated the ruse that Clinton had arranged for the innocent DuMond to be framed. Huckabee wrote to DuMond in prison in 1997 that "My desire is that you be released from prison," but he did not get it done until 1999 after visiting with the members of the state Board of Pardons and Paroles and making a personal plea for the rapist. DuMond moved to Missouri, where he was subsequently sent to prison for raping and murdering a woman; he was killed in prison before a trial for raping and murdering a second woman. Among Huckabee's other commutations was Maurice Clemmons, who, after Huckabee commuted his 108 years of sentences for armed robberies and other forms of violence in Arkansas, moved to Washington state, where he raped his new wife's daughter and murdered four policemen who were on a coffee break in a Tacoma suburb in 2009.

HEALTH CARE

Like Trump and her daddy, Sanders denounced the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare, although none of the three were ever specific about what was wrong with it or how they would change it other than repeal the law. Trump promised to get Congress to repeal it but never offered a plan or a bill. Huckabee had become a champion of universal health insurance when he was governor and promised in 2001 that before he left the governor's office every single Arkansan would have good medical coverage, as Gov. Mitt Romney was doing in Massachusetts. He made a couple of feeble attempts to expand coverage.

What he would always claim was his greatest achievement in 10 years as governor was an idea — health insurance for all children — promulgated by Hillary Clinton. After her universal health plan died in Congress in 1994, she went to two Senate leaders, Republican Orrin Hatch of Utah and Democrat Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, and proposed that they at least change the Medicaid law to require coverage of children in every state. Back in Arkansas, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, a children’s advocacy group started by Hillary Clinton and others, decided to take up her new plan. When he took the governor’s office in 1996 after Jim Guy Tucker resigned, the new governor summoned several public-policy advocates, including Hillary’s collaborator, Amy Rossi of AACF, to his office to suggest some things that he might do as governor when the legislature assembled in 1997. Rossi suggested adopting Hillary’s plan for children. Huckabee said great, Democratic Sen. Mike Beebe sponsored the bill, and the Democratic legislature passed it easily. Congress and President Clinton enacted essentially the same legislation later in the year and applied it to all states. Obamacare later expanded the idea to cover tens of millions of people besides children, including a couple hundred thousand Arkansans. It has been a financial bonanza for the state, ensuring medical attention for hundreds of thousands of Arkansans, saving community hospitals, filling the state treasury and accounting for much of the treasury surplus that Governor Hutchinson brags about every year.

Conservatives, including a large contingent of state legislators, expect Sanders to undo Obama’s, Beebe’s and Hutchinson’s health care stuff.

Instead, let’s think about her daddy’s approach to governing in his salad days, before encountering Trump, and contemplate the chances of her doing the right thing rather than the mean stuff in her ads. It could happen.

SCHOOLS

In his first term as governor, Huckabee urged his education agency to develop ways to improve math and reading skills. But no new revenues for schools. Running for lieutenant governor, he denounced efforts to consolidate rural and small-town schools and opposed a plan to do that by Gov. Tucker that was aimed at equalizing educational offerings throughout the state, including rural areas. But when the state Supreme Court said in 2003 that the state had to equalize and improve school offerings to meet constitutional standards, Huckabee became the biggest champion of school consolidation in 50 years. He asked the legislature to consolidate all school districts with fewer than 1,500 students. It refused but eventually went along with closing all schools with enrollments below 350. Huckabee said it was nearly pointless but signed it into law.

DEBT

Sanders praises her mentor, Trump, for always doing what he promised. He pledged to rid the nation of two centuries of debt by the end of his presidency. Instead, he added a record \$8.2 trillion to the debt. Gov. Huckabee had a similar change of heart, from opposing debt to championing it. Arkansas’s general-obligation debt, negligible for the previous half-century, exploded under Huckabee. He asked voters to let the state borrow another \$150 million for the universities, and they obliged. He proposed a bond issue of \$575 million to improve interstate highways in 1999 and voters approved it. But in 2005 he wanted to issue \$360 million of debt for

highways and colleges, but the voters rejected both of them in a special election. The Cato Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington, pronounced him one of the worst governors in America because of spending ways. It scored him an F for his taxes and debt.

If she's not your candidate and she wins, think about the chances she'll do the opposite of what she says, and more like her daddy than her idol.