

John Huntsman: Liberal media's' pet candidate

By Jennifer Rubin

[Michael Scherer](#) of Time is one of many in the punditocracy who is taking Jon Huntsman's possible run for president seriously. He spins a tale that the country is all about moderation and Huntsman is just the fellow to run a non-aggressive, high-minded campaign against Obama:

What if in 2012 moderation rules? What if competence is a more important message than ideological difference? What if having worked with Obama is an asset? What if reasonableness trumps outrage? What if people don't just want to throw the bums out, because they tried that three times and it hasn't really worked?

This sounds like PR for [No Labels](#). But what about the, you know, really conservative Republican primary voters (the "extremists" and the "radical" Tea Partiers, as liberals usually characterize them)? Scherer says that's no problem: "Pro-life, pro-gun, rides motocross, and his gray highlights are even slicker looking than Mitt Romney's."

Is he serious? This, Scherer certainly must know, is not sufficient to win a Republican primary.

I've yet to find a single Republican office holder, former campaign adviser, or conservative activist who takes Huntsman seriously. A Republican campaign adviser e-mails me: "I did think maybe it's a way to come home after being in China as part of the Obama administration, but then again while he's been there, he may have become delusional and thought, 'Look at me --all I can do!'"

There is a reason for Republicans' near unanimous dismissal of a possible Huntsman run. Not to state the obvious, but Republican primary voters find nothing attractive about the Obama administration. (To be blunt, they loath it.) If Huntsman were a dyed-in-the-wool conservative, his decision to join the administration would *still* be a dealbreaker. But Huntsman isn't, and never has been, a rock-solid conservative. The Cato Institute's 2008 [governors' scorecard](#) acknowledged Huntsman's conservative tax policies, but then found: "Unfortunately, Huntsman has completely dropped the ball on spending, with per capita spending increasing at about \$70 million annually." Not exactly the Republicans' ideal man for the job in 2012, is he?

Then there is his infatuation with [cap-and-trade](#) regulation. So what's he going to sell to conservative voters? Not his mastery of China policy (conservatives are none too pleased with the Obama administration's reticence to confront China). Not his party loyalty. Not his opposition to the Obama agenda.

Frankly, it doesn't pass the laugh test. A GOP strategist e-mailed me, "The problem for Huntsman is he seems to have a bigger base of support among D.C. journalists than he does Republican primary voters in any state outside of Utah. Much like Fred Thompson, Huntsman is the first of many candidates in 2012 who will be momentary fads quickly to fade away because they have no rationale." But at least Thompson was a favorite among movement conservatives until he proved essentially uninterested in running a top-flight campaign.

But the strategist is on to something. The buzz is entirely a creation of liberal media outlets and cable TV talking heads within the Beltway. True, the media have some help here. They are the recipients of whole lot of spinning by John Weaver, the man fired as John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign chief. Scherer gushes that "John Weaver, Huntsman's main political adviser, loves long shots who scramble the partisan algebra."

You can understand why Weaver is pushing a Huntsman run. (Follow the money!) But why are liberal outlets gobbling this up? Chalk it up to boredom. But maybe -- my stars, could it be true? -- Huntsman is a convenient foil to use against all those "partisan" and "strident" conservative candidates, one of whom is actually going to be the nominee.

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