

Huntsman Makes His Pitch

By Christian Schneider

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One day during my junior year, I stood out in left field of my high-school baseball field and sobbed. My team had lost around eight games in a row, and our coach was trying every lineup shift possible in order to turn the season around. But as I looked at the lineup card before the game, my name still wasn't on it. It seems he was willing to try everything — except playing me. When people asked what position I played, I joked that my official position was “left out.”

I don't know if Jon Huntsman ever played baseball, but I bet he can relate to the feeling. Republican voters have grouched incessantly about the 2012 presidential field. But it seems they are willing to try anything — anything — except Jon Huntsman.

Huntsman's hopes lie in New Hampshire, where he is currently polling at 6 percent. (By comparison, a 2007 Zogby poll found that nearly 5 percent of Americans believed the U.S. government actively planned the September 11 attacks.) Over Huntsman, GOP voters prefer a guy who has aggressively renounced conservatism in the near past, a guy whose knowledge of China doesn't extend further than occasionally ordering General Tso's chicken, a guy who left open the possibility that Barack Obama was born on Saturn, a guy with enough personal baggage to double Samsonite's stock price, and Ron Paul.

It's not as though Huntsman doesn't have some genuine conservative bona fides. He was the first (and still technically only) candidate to embrace Rep. Paul Ryan's plan to reform Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. He worked for Ronald Reagan. He is pro-life. As governor of Utah, he cut taxes by \$407 million and supported private-school voucher programs, leading the Cato Institute to deem him the fifth best governor in the nation on fiscal policy in 2008. (Additionally, at age 15, he dropped out of high school to play keyboard in the band Wizard, which will lock down the much sought after “awkward 15-year-old rock-band keyboard player” vote.)

Yet Huntsman remains a third-tier candidate due to some head-scratching campaign strategies. By routinely denouncing Republicans as “anti-science” on global warming, he seems like a know-it-all scold. It gives you the feeling that if you had to drive cross country with him, you'd throw him out of the car after about two hours of his enviro-nagging. (Not to mention how much room his keyboard would take up.) He supported the federal TARP bill (not a death sentence in Republican circles), and complained that the

stimulus plan didn't spend enough money (the electric chair in Republican circles). He has since conceded that the stimulus bill didn't work. He supports civil unions for gay couples and once vowed to veto a bill revoking in-state tuition for illegal immigrants.

Ironically, Huntsman proudly calls himself a "moderate," yet he has a much more conservative pedigree than Mitt Romney, who you will hear say the word "nipples" on the campaign trail before you hear him say the word "moderate." According to Romney, he has always been a strong conservative, even when lighting conservatism on fire as governor of Massachusetts. A conservative friend of mine rationalizes his support of Romney by saying he thinks Romney was lying to the Massachusetts liberals all along, "not us." A strong endorsement indeed. (Maybe Romney's campaign slogan should be "Vote Mitt Romney, I Guess.")

Yet Huntsman hasn't been able to crack into the "Not Romney" discussion. During the 657 GOP debates to date, Huntsman could have walked off the stage and eaten a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in between the questions he was asked. The highlight of his campaign so far has been a video in which his comely daughters wear fake mustaches and blow bubbles.

Even at age 38, I haven't given up — my finely tuned left-handed stroke still dazzles fat-guy softball leagues in which sobriety is frowned upon. But Huntsman doesn't have 20 years to recapture his glory — he has until the New Hampshire primary on January 10. And it appears not even a team of hot daughters will be enough to drag him across home plate.