

DAILY NEWS

Presidential Hopefuls: How Does Jon Huntsman Fit Into the GOP Field?

The former Utah governor says he is pro-life but he supports limited embryonic stem-cell research and same-sex civil unions.

BY CHARLOTTE HAYS

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If Jon Huntsman manages to breathe life into his struggling campaign with a surge from behind today in New Hampshire, social conservatives will be confronted with a highly unusual GOP candidate.

Huntsman is pro-life in some respects but supports same-sex civil unions and embryonic stem-cell research.

The former two-term Republican governor of Utah and one-time Obama administration ambassador to China skipped the Iowa caucuses and has pinned his hopes on doing well enough in New Hampshire to convince voters he is a serious contender.

Though Huntsman refused to sign the Susan B. Anthony List's Pro-Life Pledge for presidential candidates, saying he doesn't sign pledges, he has a pro-life record and has publicly rejected the notion that Republicans should soft-pedal the abortion issue in 2012.

"I do not believe the Republican Party should focus only on our economic life — to the neglect of our human life," Huntsman said at a Faith and Freedom Conference earlier this year. "That is a trade we should not make. If Republicans ignore life, the deficit we will face is one that is much more destructive. It will be a deficit of the heart and of the soul."

Huntsman was elected governor of Utah in 2004 and re-elected in 2008. He resigned in 2009 to become Barack Obama's ambassador to China.

While governor, he signed three important pro-life bills. One not only made second-trimester abortions illegal, but raised the penalty, moving it to a third-degree felony. A second bill required that women seeking an abortion be informed of the pain an unborn child feels during the abortion.

Looking to the future, the third bill Huntsman signed into law as governor established a state legal defense fund to fight challenges to an abortion ban if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned and the issue is thrown back to the states. Citizens are allowed to make contributions to the fund.

"His record on pro-life issues is second to none," said deputy campaign manager Rob Wasinger, a former chief of staff and presidential campaign manager for Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback and longtime social conservative. "He has said he would reinstate the Mexico City Policy and would veto a budget if it had funding for Planned Parenthood."

The Mexico City Policy was a Reagan administration rule that barred funding to international organizations that perform or promote abortions. Obama reversed it as one of his earliest acts in office.

Stance on Life and Marriage

Said David O'Steen, executive director of the National Right to Life Committee, "Huntsman, like all the Republican candidates, is pro-life; and what is important is for pro-lifers to be united and make sure whoever wins the nomination will defeat Barack Obama."

A Mormon like former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, Huntsman is the father of seven daughters, the youngest two of whom were adopted from China and India, respectively.

On the related issue of funding for embryonic stem-cell research, Huntsman has staked out a position that runs contrary to Catholic teaching and is not acceptable to most social conservatives. Wasinger said the candidate's



stance was “modeled on the Bush” policy, referring to former President George W. Bush’s Aug. 9, 2001, decision to fund embryonic stem-cell research using cells derived from embryos prior to that date. Huntsman opposes funding for embryonic stem-cell research in most instances. But, he would permit such research with stem cells from what he regards as discarded embryos.

While social conservatives might welcome a candidate with Huntsman’s stance on abortion, they are likely to be concerned about his approach to homosexual “marriage.” Huntsman backed a Utah constitutional amendment to ban same-sex “marriage” in 2004, but then he bucked conservatives to support an initiative to allow same-sex unions.

“We haven’t said much about Huntsman because he’s not going anywhere,” said Maggie Gallagher, co-founder of the National Organization for Marriage, which supports traditional marriage. “But he has consistently refused to state what he would do to defend marriage or whether he would defend marriage at all. His move to endorse civil unions, which startled everyone in Utah, appears to have been a move to make him more palatable as the ambassador to China. His campaign slogan is ‘trust,’ but so far he’s given us little reason to trust him.”

Environment and Health Care

Huntsman’s campaign website calls for producing more energy in the U.S. and supports such processes as fracking (hydraulic fracturing of rock layers) to obtain previously inaccessible gas, which is controversial. Huntsman says that the “federal government’s commitment to safety and the environment must no longer be distorted into a prohibition against American energy security.”

He has called for “reining in” the Environment Protection Agency’s “job-killing regulations” and rolling back or doing more extensive cost-benefit analysis of other regulation. He is on record as saying that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act — known informally as Obamacare — should be repealed because it is needless regulation that will hamper economic growth.

Economics

As with the social issues, Huntsman has a record in office and puts forth policies as a candidate that are highly appealing to his constituents — but not always.

Like most in the GOP camp, Huntsman believes that prosperity will be restored through a system that cuts taxes and reduces regulation.

Indeed, Huntsman had received acclaim for his tax policies overall from some groups. He was awarded the highest grade — a B+ — of all the GOP hopefuls by the Tax Foundation, a Washington, D.C., think tank whose mission is to “educate taxpayers about sound tax policy and the size of the tax burden borne by Americans at all levels of government.”

“[Huntsman’s plan] got the highest grade because it is the simplest and deals most sufficiently with loopholes and the complexity of the current tax code,” said William McBride, an economist at the Tax Foundation. Under the Huntsman plan, all tax rates would be reduced, with the top rate falling from 25% to 23%, 15% to 14% and 10% to 8%. The Huntsman policy is modeled on the Simpson-Bowles deficit-reduction plan, a bipartisan commission established by Obama but whose prescriptions appealed to many Republicans. The president has shown little interest in actually implementing the proposals of Simpson-Bowles.

Huntsman would eliminate the alternative minimum tax (originally designed to prevent the very wealthy from paying too little taxes but now ensnaring taxpayers who are not among the richest citizens) and exempt capital gains from taxation. Supporters of such a plan say it would help the economy by freeing up the income of those affluent enough to invest. Huntsman would reduce the corporate tax from 35% to 25%. Proponents of such cuts say they will produce growth and jobs for ordinary Americans.

“He’s pretty bold about capital gains but less bold about corporate taxes,” said McBride. Several GOP candidates propose similar or more drastic cuts in corporate taxes.

As governor of Utah, Huntsman successfully promoted an optional flat tax with a top rate of 7% for Utah that earned him praise from such groups as the libertarian Cato Institute, which hailed Huntsman’s tax policies as the best of any U.S. governor that year. He made the flat tax mandatory with a top rate of 5% in 2007.

The free-market Club for Growth issued a “white paper” on Huntsman that said his “record on tax policy has some minor blemishes, but overall he deserves credit for generally maintaining a pro-growth stance throughout his career as governor.”

Utah has a distinctly business-friendly ethos, so Huntsman had less to do in the way of eliminating excessive regulations. But those who support free-market solutions to the economic crisis are troubled by Huntsman's support for cap and trade, a system that sets up a government body to regulate carbon emissions. Companies can cut their emissions or pay a fee. A company that cuts more than the required emissions can "trade" its savings to another company.

Further, according to the Club for Growth, he advanced energy policies that would have made energy more expensive for Utah businesses and families.

Some are worried that the former governor is not sufficiently committed to cutting the cost of government. He has said, for example, that Obama's stimulus didn't spend enough, though it is unclear if he was calling for more tax cuts or more spending.

Tad DeHaven, a fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, went through the proposals to cut spending by all the GOP candidates and said that Huntsman's proposals lack specificity.

"I guess I would have to say he is a question mark when it comes to how he would get the budget under control and make specific cuts," DeHaven said. DeHaven said that the voter needs to know more about Huntsman's views on the size and scope of government.

Huntsman ran for governor of Utah as a budget cutter, but the Cato Institute reported that he "completely dropped the ball on spending," and the Club for Growth stated that Huntsman "failed to follow through on his campaign rhetoric" about reducing spending.

"It's good that Governor Huntsman instituted the flat tax," said Barney Keller, spokesman for the Club for Growth, "but what he did with the revenue was that he spent it. If you look at the GOP candidate debates, he never names places he would cut the government. Even Mitt Romney, unlike Huntsman, has embraced block granting Medicare grants to the states [giving the money for Medicare to states, which run Medicare instead of the federal government. The idea is that they will have to make do on whatever they are granted and will be closer to the people using Medicare]. Economic growth is good, but you can use it to cut taxes [not to spend more on government]."

Register correspondent Charlotte Hays writes from Washington.

The Register has been profiling candidates who are vying for the White House in 2012: [Newt Gingrich](#), [Ron Paul](#), [Rick Perry](#), [Mitt Romney](#) and [Rick Santorum](#). The series has also included these candidates, who have since suspended their campaigns: [Michele Bachmann](#), [Herman Cain](#) and [Tim Pawlenty](#)