

Power Line Blog: John Hinderaker, Scott Johnson, Paul Mirengoff

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THE HUNT FOR HUNTSMAN

June 2, 2011 Posted by Steven Hayward at 9:43 AM

[Like John](#), I am puzzled by the media elite fascination with Utah Governor Jon Huntsman. Actually, I'm not puzzled at all. He perfectly fits the specs of Beltway consultants and journalists for a non-ideological, technocratic Republican who won't threaten fundamental change in Washington, even though he hails from the outré state of Utah, which for most of the Eastern Establishment is barely America at all, except for the Sundance Film Festival, the cultural Guantanamo Bay of the Bee Hive state.

Morgen Richmond of the sprightly Verum Serum blog put together [this terrific faux-campaign ad](#) detailing everything that is wrong with Huntsman (the rhino at the very beginning is a nice touch), from his support for cap and trade and the whole climate claptrap generally, to his embrace of universal health care as "a right," culminating in his boast of being different from "a traditional Republican." Huntsman has managed the dubious achievement of having "grown in office" without even going to Washington.

The very first time I ever heard of Huntsman was way back in 1999, when I was supposed to debate him in Sun Valley on the subject of "smart growth," which was the environmental crusade of that time against "urban sprawl." At that time Huntsman was still in the private sector in Utah, but he was an enthusiast of "smart growth," which is a euphemism for giving government bureaucrats more planning power over private property and economic development. Did Utah suffer from urban sprawl? I planned to point out that less than 2 percent of Utah was developed, and that two-thirds of the state still fit the Census Bureau's year 1900 density definition of "frontier." But Huntsman cancelled out of the debate at the last minute. (By the way, it is worth noting in passing that the whole "smart growth" enthusiasm of the late 1990s and early 2000s played its own role in the housing bubble, which the great analyst [Wendell Cox explains in a new paper](#). NB: Randall O'Toole of the Cato Institute has also [made this case with equal persuasion](#).)

Back around 2006, a year after Huntsman became governor of Utah, I saw him up close in Pebble Beach, at a swanky gathering of top California Republican donors. (I was there to talk about Reagan.) I wondered why the governor of Utah would want to be talking to a group of California Republican donors, but five minutes into the speech it became obvious: this man intends to run for President some day, and he's getting started early on the networking part of the enterprise.

He's a very smooth speaker, exuding confidence and energy. The one fully conservative trait on display--in fact the main subject of his speech--was school choice. He's strongly for it, and gave a compelling case for it and his attempts to get it across the goal line in Utah. But I wonder if his enthusiasm for school choice has less to do with latent conservative principle and more to do with Utah's Mormonism, which is more naturally hostile to the secularism of

contemporary public education than most denominations. (I'd argue that Mormons run the world's only truly successful private welfare state--a subject that fascinated the late Edward Banfield. But that's a subject for another day.)

Otherwise he appears even more technocratic than Romney. Is there really room in the Republican nominating process for *two* Mormon technocrats? The rivalry between these two men could get interesting.

UPDATE: I filed this original post before noting [George Will's column about Huntsman](#) today. (I left for an early breakfast meeting without even glancing at my *Washington Post*.) Will makes the best case for some of Huntsman's conservative positions, especially his embrace of the Ryan plan, and his opposition to ethanol subsidies (which, I predict, will become the required position for all GOP candidates before this is all over). Huntsman's foreign policy views, Will thinks, may be a little more dodgy, though Will clearly sympathizes with them. But Will concludes:

So it is difficult to chart Huntsman's path to the Republicans' Tampa convention through a nominating electorate that is understandably furious about Obama's demonstrably imprudent and constitutionally dubious domestic policies. Even if that electorate approves Huntsman's un-Obamalike health-care reforms in Utah and forgives his flirtation with a fanciful climate-change regime among Western states, he faces the worthy but daunting challenge of bringing Tea Party Republicans -- disproportionately important in the nominating process -- to a boil about foreign policy.

I think Will underestimates here the dislike of our foreign commitments among Tea Party types. There may be more traction to be had here, except that Ron Paul may have this segment of the right-leaning vote cornered.

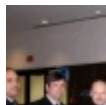


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Al Sparks · Computer and Network Engineer at Golden Valley Electric Association

Re: the comment on Mormon's running the only private welfare state; the Catholics actually did a pretty good job at that prior to FDR's new deal. Government took the wind out of that kind of thing.

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