

Our Guide to the Best Coverage on Jon Huntsman and His Record

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This is the latest installment in a series of reading guides on 2012 presidential candidates. [Here are the other guides.](#)

Jon Huntsman's divergence on some core Republican issues, both social and economic, has given him the label of "[moderate](#)" from some and "[second-tier](#)" from others. But [the former ambassador to China](#), appointed by Barack Obama, has also earned conservative praise when it comes to guns and taxes, and presided as Utah's governor as it became one of the top job-creating states in the nation. He's experiencing [late momentum in New Hampshire](#), while [still polling at about 3 percent nationally](#).

[In a profile from The American Conservative](#), Michael Brendan Dougherty wrote: "In Jon Huntsman's America, once a child survives the first trimester, he's well on the way to having a rifle in his small hands and extra money in his pockets. If this qualifies as moderate, why be conservative?"

The Basics:

Huntsman was the subject of magazine features from two high-profile sources: [Matt Bai at the New York Times](#) and [Chris Jones at Esquire](#). Bai followed his profile with a [question and answer session with readers](#). The Boston Globe [recently endorsed him](#), a boon to his chances in neighboring New Hampshire.

His campaign made headlines with [a single tweet](#) aimed at Gov. Rick Perry's skepticism of evolution: "To be clear. I believe in evolution and trust scientists on global warming. Call me crazy." He [explained to ABC News' Jake Tapper](#) that becoming the "anti-science party" will damage Republicans' chances in 2012 and beyond. He said in December that ["there are questions about the validity of the \[climate change\] science,"](#) but that he wasn't walking back on previous comments.

He supported a 2009 effort to [allow civil unions in Utah](#), despite 70-percent opposition from voters. He said in 2009 that the \$787 billion stimulus package "[wasn't large enough](#)" and accepted the money for Utah. He [initially supported cap-and-trade plans as governor](#). He signed a bill that gave [driving privileges to illegal immigrants](#) and [once said the idea of a fence "repulses" him](#).

Such departures from the Republican field have [prompted comparisons to John McCain](#), but also caused others to predict early on that his chances would be slim. [Nate Silver's "Unacceptability Index,"](#) which measures how many Republican voters would refuse to vote for a candidate, had him the second-most unacceptable candidate in June, ahead of only Gary Johnson.

But he has strong conservative footing in tax policy, where the CATO Institute gave him its highest grade in a [2006 report card for governors](#) (but said he "dropped the ball on spending" [in its 2008 report](#)). The Club for Growth, which promotes economic conservatism, [gave him mostly negative marks](#) in its Presidential White Paper, but did praise him on taxes. He now supports revenue-neutral tax reform, and [told PBS NewsHour](#) he "wouldn't hesitate to call on a sacrifice from all of our people, even those at the very highest end of the income spectrum," possibly through means testing Medicare and Social Security. He expanded on those thoughts [with Neil Cavuto of Fox News](#), where he pledged he would not support more taxes, even on the wealthy.

He's been subject to many wisecracks about being the second-most popular Mormon in the GOP field behind Mitt Romney. He told Fortune Magazine that [he is not "overly religious"](#) and gets "satisfaction from many different types of religions and philosophies."

His Record:

Huntsman won re-election as governor in 2008 with 78 percent of the vote, enjoyed [a peak of 90-percent approval](#), and maintained an 80-percent mark after the unpopular civil unions issue. [The Salt Lake Tribune highlights](#) some of the policies and initiatives that led to Utah's high job creation under his governorship. Huntsman enacted tax cuts and reforms that include establishing a 5 percent income tax (he and others often call it a flat tax, a claim [PolitiFact rated as mostly true](#)). Huntsman has claimed Utah was the top job-producing state, but PolitiFact declared that to be [half-true](#).

He signed [NRA-supported self-defense laws](#) that eliminated some concealed-carry restrictions and allowed guns to travel more freely on Utah's roads. He led a fight to [revamp the state's restrictive liquor laws](#). He [favors a constitutional amendment](#) to overturn Roe v. Wade.

[Politico reported](#) that Huntsman didn't appear to have a preference on individual mandates in Utah's health care reform, which [has been hailed by conservatives](#). But the Huffington Post reported that [he did favor a mandate](#), and he said in a [2007 news conference](#) that "I am comfortable with a requirement. You can call it whatever you want, but at some point we're going to have to get serious with how we deal with this issue."

Huntsman has said [intervention in Libya was not essential for U.S. security interests](#) and called for [withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan](#). [Foreign Policy](#) wrote that "China hands who have dealt with him and studied his tenure as U.S. envoy to Beijing give him high marks -- both diplomatically and politically." In [its summary of his foreign policy credentials](#), the magazine said he "arguably has the most foreign-policy experience of any Republican candidate."

Relationship with Obama:

[The Daily Beast](#) noted that Obama's appointment of Huntsman to the China ambassadorship may have been a strategic move to eliminate a 2012 threat. Indeed, their relationship has been a political weight on Huntsman; [he once called Obama "a remarkable leader"](#) in a private letter that later surfaced. Melinda Henneberger noted [in a 2011 Time profile](#): "Democrats who fear that Huntsman would do well against Obama in next year's general election are busy pelting him with rose petals -- take that, you wonderful man! -- that they openly hope will disqualify him in the eyes of Republican Party regulars."

[The New York Times](#) reported that Obama's advisers suspect Huntsman wasn't up-front regarding his presidential ambitions. In his [Esquire](#) profile, Chris Jones argued that [Huntsman scares Obama more than Mitt Romney](#).

Somewhere along the way, Huntsman and his team of advisors -- led by former John McCain campaign strategist John Weaver -- have decided that they can win a presidential campaign, can win two campaigns, in fact, by distancing themselves from rhetoric, from fire. They believe Huntsman's best quality is his dispassion, his realism, his ability to boil the emotion out of everything and leave only reason behind.

Following the Money:

Huntsman had raised \$4.5 million as of Sept. 30, 2011, according to [OpenSecrets.org](#). He also has [assets between \\$17.8 million and \\$84 million](#), according to a disclosure report filed in May. Though he pledged he wouldn't self-finance, [CNN reported in June](#) that he had spent almost \$2 million of his own money.

OpenSecrets wrote that Huntsman has a "[mixed record of political contributions](#)." His finance team in South Carolina drew notice for [its Democratic supporters](#).

The pro-Huntsman Our Destiny PAC, which has [aired commercials in New Hampshire](#) that are sharply critical of Romney, has been working to [keep its donors secret](#). It has spent more than \$1.86 million.