

Huckabee no longer a presidential long-shot

By [Kent Covington](#) & [Nick Eicher](#)

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Oftentimes, long-shot candidates for president will run knowing even if they don't win, they can raise their profile. Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee did just that in 2008, when he came in third place for the Republican presidential nomination.

It was apparent toward the end of that campaign that Huckabee had a much longer view. He stayed on the campaign trail even when it was no longer possible to win the nomination. Huckabee sat out the 2012 election cycle, but now appears ready to give it another go.

For the past six years, he's hosted a weekly Fox News show called *Huckabee*. He used that platform to call attention to issues he cares most about, such as religious liberty. Huckabee is a former pastor. When Houston Mayor Annise Parker created a firestorm by issuing subpoenas for the sermons of pastors who oppose a city ordinance that lets men sue if they're denied access to public ladies' rooms, Huckabee issued a call to action.

"It ought to make you mad and scare your pants off that a mayor thinks she can order pastors to turn in their sermons and correspondence to her," he said. "So, I've got an idea. If she wants some sermons, I'd like to ask every pastor in America ... send her your sermons. Obviously, she could use a few."

Huckabee says he's in a better position to run for president than he was in 2008 because now voters know his name. Being a relative unknown in 2008, however, didn't keep him from a victory in the Iowa caucuses or from carrying eight states and some 20 percent of the Republican vote.

He ran on a fairly conventional conservative platform with one exception. The governor was a strong advocate of replacing the U.S. tax code with a so-called "fair tax," reform that would wipe out income, payroll, and other taxes and replace them with a national sales tax on goods and services. Under the fair tax, Huckabee said, taxpayers would have a more transparent system. And he claimed taxpayers at every income level would benefit.

"Drug dealers, prostitutes, pimps, gamblers, non-Republicans ... all of those people out there will be paying taxes," he said. "Nobody's working under the table. And so you have a broad base from which you're receiving the money."

Huckabee did well in primaries in the South and in rural states where social conservative issues and traditional family values are especially important to voters. He's a favorite among values

voters, but that's not enough to win a nomination. There are a lot of people who think of Huckabee as a big-government Republican. Tea party voices on the radio and elsewhere have not had many good things to say about him for years now.

Michael Tanner of the CATO Institute wrote in 2007 that when Huckabee was governor of Arkansas, he increased spending in the state by more than 65 percent and raised taxes more than Bill Clinton did when he was governor.

In a race against likely Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, Democrats probably would portray Huckabee as a religious zealot who wants to take away women's rights and impose his faith on Americans.

But to Huckabee's advantage, he's one of the most gifted communicators in the party. Hillary Clinton could seem wooden next to him on stage. He does convey empathy, he's relatable, and he has working class appeal. All of those things play well next to Clinton's weaknesses.