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The Pros and Cons of Hillary

Why she might want to run for vice president—and why she might not.

By Pete du Pont

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"Look, it's the one thing, I think, that the Democrats could do to nearly guarantee Obama re-election," Bill Keller of the New York Times said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" Jan. 13. "It would generate enough excitement that they might actually have some coattails and help out a little bit with the Senate and the House."

Mr. Keller was referring to the possibility of replacing Joe Biden with Hillary Clinton as President Obama's running mate—an idea I discussed in my November column. Not only would it be a winning move, Mr. Keller said, "it would position Clinton as the heir apparent for 2016, assuming she wants to run." That may be true, but the real question is whether Mrs. Clinton would think joining the ticket would be a smart political move.

Certainly there are several factors that would make it attractive for Mrs. Clinton to join the ticket this year. For starters she would have the chance to be the first female vice president in American history. And the press would love every bit of her campaign. In most quarters her coverage would be akin to a coronation.

Her past performance was quite good in some states. In 2008, Mrs. Clinton won 24 primaries and caucuses (including states, territories and the District of Columbia) and Mr. Obama won 33. But she did especially well in primaries, so that her estimated voting was just one-tenth of a percentage point less than Mr. Obama's—48.0% to 48.1%. She beat Mr. Obama in several key swing states—Florida, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio and Pennsylvania—and could help Mr. Obama hold them in November.

She might feel that in a second term she could help compensate for Mr. Obama's many weaknesses--acting as a restraining force on spending, handling dealing with the impending blow-back from the Fast and Furious scandal, and seeing to it such misguided and dangerous policies are never followed by this administration again. Add working to stop the failed policies of trying to pick energy winners and losers that have left us with the Solyndra bankruptcy and other failed energy investments.

Another reason is that if she becomes vice president, everyone would assume she still had the fire to run for president in 2016, sucking air out of the other potential Democrats' campaigns. As I pointed out in November Mrs. Clinton is the most admired woman in politics, with 66% of Americans viewing her favorably. Only 54% in the same poll viewed Mr. Obama favorably, and Mr. Biden's total was just 46%. In an October poll, Mrs. Clinton led all the Republican candidates in a hypothetical presidential match-up by 17% or more.

There are some reasons that Mrs. Clinton might not like the idea of joining a presidential race. For one, Mr. Keller is wrong to say an Obama-Clinton ticket would be guaranteed of victory. Polls show Mr. Obama losing to a generic Republican, by 47% to 42% according to Rasmussen. And even if Mr. Obama does win a second term, the likely Republican control of the Senate as well as the House would be an effective roadblock for most of the White House's liberal initiatives. Further, the usual second-term malaise could end up making the Obama-Clinton administration unpopular as she goes into the 2016 campaign. Since 1836 only one sitting vice president, George H.W. Bush, has been elected to the White House.

There are many factors available to help Secretary Clinton answer the question of whether it makes sense to join the 2012 ticket. But the question for America is how much impact a liberal Vice President Clinton would have controlling the ultraliberal policies of President Obama, especially since he would no longer have any re-election considerations holding him back in his quest to push the federal government into every aspect of our lives.

It is good to ask these questions. There is, of course, a part of America that wants to change our country into Europe. They want to stop the rich from getting richer, they don't want people or businesses to become economically successful, they want taxes to be much higher, and they want the government to manage most everything. Those goals are already an obvious part of the Obama administration: Annual government spending is up around \$700 billion per year, and our economy is haunted by the fear of the administration's tax increases. Next year ObamaCare's new taxes--a 0.9% surtax on higher wages and a 3.8% levy on investment income--will take effect. Unless Congress acts, the Bush tax cuts will expire. And President Obama continues to push for even more income tax increases in the future. Sentencing America to the same long-term economic weaknesses suffered in Europe is not just a possibility; it is the administration's policy.

Most of those are things that Mr. Clinton would have to decide to be in favor of if she stayed on the Obama team. That may be the best reason for her to say no if Mr. Obama invites her to be his running mate.