

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Bye Bye Biden?

Why Obama may be eyeing Mrs. Clinton for the 2012 ticket.

By Pete du Pont

November 25th, 2011

The coming political year, with presidential, House and Senate elections, will be one of the most interesting (and important) ones we have seen in a long while. The main challenge President Obama faces is persuading voters to re-elect him in spite of the disastrous results of his economic policies.

The declining economy has hit people on both ends of the economic spectrum, with the number of taxpayers with more than \$1 million of income declining from 400,000 in 2007 to just 235,000 in 2009, and the number of people 16 and older who have been unemployed over a year going from an average of 1.3 million in the last three recessions to 4.3 million in 2010. The Obama economy is the worst America has seen in four decades, with payroll employment today 5% lower than it was 41 months ago. Over the past three years, federal spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has been higher than at any time since World War II, adding \$4 trillion to our national debt.

So what to do if running for re-election in these terrible times? Many people have asked if I think President Obama will be re-elected. No, as long as the Republicans pick a viable candidate, he stands likely to be defeated. But it seems possible that the Democrat Party will pre-emptively decide that the time has come for some fresh thinking about its ticket.

Democratic pollsters Patrick Caddell and Douglas Schoen have urged the president to forgo re-election for the good of his party and the nation. But those don't seem like factors that would necessarily influence this president. Instead we might see him decide to switch to a vice presidential candidate who will be stronger, better, and change the thinking of a majority of the Democrats--namely, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Last December a USA Today/Gallup poll found Mrs. Clinton to be the most admired woman in politics. A poll in March found that 66% viewed Mrs. Clinton favorably and just 31% unfavorably. Mr. Obama's numbers, which have since declined, were 54% and 43%; Vice President Joe Biden's, 46% to 41%. An October Time poll of last October pitted Mrs. Clinton against Republican candidates. She led Mitt Romney by 17%, Rick Perry by 26% and Herman Cain by 22%. Mr. Obama's leads in the same poll were 3%, 12% and 12%, respectively.

Paul Starr, co-editor of The American Prospect, a liberal-left magazine, has observed that 45 percent of the people who disapprove of Mr. Obama's performance view Mrs. Clinton favorably. It is fair to say that Mrs. Clinton's addition to the ticket would be a substantial gain for President Obama that he badly needs next November, since she is, as Mr. Starr notes, a member of the part

of his administration that has the highest approval rating, and more important she has not at all been a part of the disastrous economic policies that have caused the Obama drop in popularity. Even better for Election Day, she would gain support among older white voters, who did not support Mr. Obama very much in 2008. Mr. Starr also cites a Suffolk University Florida poll that shows that Mrs. Clinton on the Obama ticket would win Florida for the two of them, even if Sen. Marco Rubio is the Republican's vice presidential candidate.

One more advantage: With Mrs. Clinton comes her husband, who would very much want to get his wife elected, and also might be interested in a position in the Obama-Clinton administration.

Add in that the Washington Democrats already see a political disaster coming: the Senate as well as the House is likely to have a Republican majority. Only two Republican Senate incumbents are vulnerable: the appointed Dean Heller in Nevada and elected Scott Brown of Massachusetts. By contrast, of the 23 Democrat-held seats up for re-election, political forecaster Larry Sabato sees six as safe for the Democrats, and two as likely GOP pickups. That will mean that Republicans need only to win one to four of the remaining 15 to take control of the Senate along with its House majority.

So will President Obama make the vice presidential switch? While it is not unprecedented, it is certainly unusual, and it would likely be seen in some quarters as a desperate act of a weakened president. But politicians in general, and this president especially, show a willingness to do such things if absolutely necessary to save an election. If it is just plain essential to Obama's winning re-election next November, it will soon come to pass.