

Could a Conservative Democrat Sideline Hillary in 2016?

☒ It shouldn't really surprise anyone that the 2016 presidential election, despite being nearly three years away, has already been talked about quite a bit in the national news media. After all, a number of likely Republican candidates are already beginning to emerge, and they've been finding creative ways to distinguish themselves from their peers. Some of them have gone the subtle route, working on unique messaging and putting themselves on stage in nontraditional venues. Others have staged publicity stunts like one-man filibusters designed to draw attention not only to themselves but also to the issues they believe are important. Some have done both.

National polling agencies have been busy pitting names like Chris Christie, Paul Ryan, Ted Cruz, and Rand Paul up against the politician who is clearly believed not only to be the Democratic Party's frontrunner, but also the coronated candidate: Hillary Clinton.

Sure, there's been some talk in the media about the possibility of a Democratic candidate challenging Hillary from *the left*. Names like Elizabeth Warren (U.S. Senator from Massachusetts) have been brought up, but I believe it's merely been done for the sake of discussion. I don't think anyone really views her as having a serious chance.

What I don't believe the media has talked about at all, however, is the possibility of a conservative Democrat entering the primary race and challenging Hillary Clinton from *the right*. Maybe such a notion seems ridiculous to seasoned political pundits, but I think that if someone like U.S. Senator Joe Manchin from West Virginia decided to throw his hat in the ring, Hillary might actually have a bit of a fight

on her hands.

Conventional wisdom, of course, suggests that I'm wrong. In a presidential primary race, it's been recognized that the successful strategy is to appeal to one's base. In the cases of both major political parties in this country, the base isn't found at the moderate middle, but rather at the outer wing where the ideology is stringent and the passion runs deep.

Thus, the wise move for a Democratic candidate has typically been to campaign as a liberal until winning the party nomination. Barack Obama understood this during the 2008 campaign, and the strategy helped him in his primary race against Hillary Clinton. Clinton chose to position herself as a relative moderate by defending her support of the Iraq War. This seemed a safe strategy for her at the time because she believed she had the nomination locked up from the very beginning. She saw no other candidates as a serious threat. So, she was running as a general election candidate before she needed to, and that left an opening for a charismatic, historic opponent to excite lefties and rally support behind him.

Why then do I think that someone like Joe Manchin has a chance of nabbing the Democratic nomination from Hillary Clinton? It has to do with the country's growing distaste for *Big Government*.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, a record number of Americans (72%) believe that *Big Government* is the single greatest threat to the United States. While some of that sentiment can probably be attributed to a catastrophic national debt and the slowest economic recovery in U.S. history, the spike is mainly fueled by the country's awakening to all of the adverse affects of Obamacare.

The Affordable Care Act is currently generating all-time-low

approval ratings, and there's little reason to suggest that it will become any more popular.

In addition to the millions of Americans who have already lost their healthcare plans as a result of the law, tens of millions more are slated to lose theirs once the employer mandate kicks in. The promise that people can keep their doctors has been exposed as a sham. Insurance premiums aren't lowering as promised – they're rising . Deductibles aren't going up down. They're going up. A \$1 billion website tasked with managing the program has been an IT disaster. Employers are preparing to cut back on work hours and eliminate jobs in order to avoid the costs associated with Obamacare. And to top it all off, the entire funding mechanism of the program relies on the assumption that young people will voluntarily pay into a system that makes no economic sense to them whatsoever.

Reality has slapped the electorate across the face, and the numbers are showing that.

Important demographics for the Democratic party are already turning on Obamacare. Nearly 60% of millennials, who President Obama relied on in two elections, now oppose the law. Not only does a majority of currently insured voters oppose the law... A majority of *uninsured* voters does as well, which is striking considering that they were the very people the Affordable Care Act was primarily designed to help. The GOP has even taken the lead in national polling for the midterm elections, erasing the advantage the Democrats had long maintained.

And unfortunately for Democratic politicians who have supported Obamacare, it's not just Republican and Independent voters who've realized that they've been screwed over by the law.

Some respected political analysts like Charles Krauthammer are even predicting that Obamacare will deal a crushing blow to big-government liberalism that will last a decade.

It may be hard to imagine, but by the time 2016 rolls around, the political environment in this country could look very much different than it does today. If Obamacare truly ends up being a permanent albatross around the neck of the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton may have a pretty tough time escaping its clutches.


She was, after all, a high-ranking member of the administration that gave us Obamacare. More importantly, she was also the architect of Hillarycare, the infamous healthcare plan from 1993 that was actually more government-intrusive and socialistic in nature than Obamacare. I know that sounds kind of hard to believe, but it's true. And if Americans have forgotten about Hillarycare, I'm sure many conservative groups with lots of money are anxious to remind them about it.

Also, I may be in the minority, but I still think Hillary Clinton's handling of the Benghazi attack may still come back to haunt her, especially if the victims' families come forward during the campaign and draw attention to the lies she personally told them to their faces while their dead sons' caskets sat just feet away.

If she's hit with that one-two punch, even a fawning media could have trouble saving her candidacy. Let's face it: Hillary Clinton is no Barack Obama. She doesn't have his charm. She doesn't have his oratory skills. She doesn't connect with people the way he does. Perhaps most importantly, she doesn't have his gift of being able to completely disassociate herself from the things she says and does. She may not be the strong candidate she appears to be today.

In 2016, it's possible that a small-government Democrat like Joe Manchin – someone who came to Washington after Obamacare had been passed, and has been critical of the law – could actually be more appealing to a slim majority of the Democratic Party than Hillary Clinton. If such a person could provide a clean break from Obamacare and Big Government while

still appealing to social liberals within the base on the non-economic issues they care about, it seems to me that they could be a very formidable opponent.

Heck, I would even suggest that Manchin may remind Democratic voters more of *President* Bill Clinton (the man who famously declared that “the era of big government was over”) than Hillary herself does. He’d certainly be less of a lightning rod for controversy than Hillary. 

Is the scenario I’m describing *likely*? As much as I would like it to be for the sake of the country, it probably isn’t. Even if the electorate sustains an ideological shift to the right, I think the liberal base of the party is influential and well-organized enough to effectively slander and destroy the candidacy of anyone in the party that is to the right of Hillary.

Still, I wouldn’t say that the scenario is out of the question, especially if Krauthammer is right and the failure of Obamacare serves as a turning point for how the public views the role of government.

It sure would be ironic if Obamacare managed to achieve the one thing that Republicans have been unable to in recent years: Making the public understand just how dangerous Big Government is, and holding to account those who gave us the problem.