

Could Ben Carson Be a Kingmaker in the GOP Primary?



The results of Monday's Iowa Caucus seem to prove what many observers have been speculating: the Republican presidential primary is a three-man race. Though that could change as early as next week, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump, and Marco Rubio are currently the candidates that have the momentum – something that's vitally important in a presidential campaign.

Sure, Iowa was a disappointing loss for Trump; he was favored to win the state, and many people were already considering him to be the inevitable GOP nominee. Still, his poll numbers are looking good for next week's New Hampshire primary, and Cruz and Rubio will likely build on the media hype they're enjoying for beating Iowa expectations.

What does this mean for the other candidates who are part of this large GOP group? Huckabee bowed out Monday night, and Santorum looks like he's soon to follow. Kasich, Bush, and Christie are teetering on double-digit support in New Hampshire polls, where they're dividing the field among voters who prefer a more traditional, policy-focused candidate. Thus, it's worth it for them to stay in the race...at least for now.

One name now notably absent from the conversation is Dr. Ben Carson, a man who once shared front-runner status with Donald Trump. Carson took 9% of the votes in the Iowa Caucus and is currently polling in New Hampshire at around 3%, with no uptick in support anticipated.

It's hard to see a pathway to victory for Dr. Carson, a man whose weaknesses as a politician have included inexperience in governing, a lack of knowledge in key areas of policy, and a propensity for committing verbal gaffes. Still, I think his waning candidacy may yet prove particularly relevant in this primary.

The general consensus among not just Republican voters but also independents (and even some Democrats) is that Dr. Carson is a good man. Sure, he's made some insensitive comments throughout the campaign – most of them tied to his socially conservative sensibilities and a lack of political training. Those comments understandably offended some, and led to apologies from Carson. Still, a lot of people listen to Carson's soft-spoken belief in a peaceful message of American unity, and recognize its authenticity.

It's that message that brought a couple thousand people to a book signing of his that I attended in Colorado in August of 2014, nearly a year before he announced his candidacy; attendees hung on his every word. It's also that message that made Carson the first 2016 presidential candidate whose name I saw turning up on people's car-bumpers – and not just a few. I still see the "America Needs a Doctor" bumper-sticker more than any other.

The evidence of Carson's grassroots support goes far beyond anecdotal, of course. He has continued to pull in huge fundraising numbers in recent months, even as his poll numbers have declined.

Even those who don't agree with Carson, or don't think he's a viable candidate, seem to respect him. And respect is certainly a rare thing in politics.

While I don't think Carson will last much longer in this presidential race, I do believe his endorsement (and active campaigning) could be extremely valuable to another candidate.

Though Trump has long remained the national front-runner in the GOP field, his popularity has never reflected a consensus (roughly two thirds of Republicans still want someone else). Simply put, there is *no* consensus at this point in time.



Breaking: Presidential candidate Donald Trump endorses John A. Daly's new novel.

Carson, as a man many people have come to admire, could potentially wind up as a kingmaker in this respect.

Who would Carson endorse? It's hard to say. I doubt he'd get behind the current front-runner – a man who mocked his faith and compared him to a child molester. He also seems unlikely to support Ted Cruz, whose campaign he believes spread false rumors about him on Iowa caucus night – rumors that cost him votes. Still, anything's possible. I've seen stranger alliances.

What I *am* confident in saying is that "How can I butter up Ben Carson?" is a question candidates should be asking their campaign strategists right about now.