

Why the Small Stuff Will Matter With Scott Walker



Likely Republican presidential candidate Scott Walker has been getting a lot of attention lately. Much of it has been good, including his rising popularity in national polls, a close second-place finish in the CPAC straw poll last weekend, and taking first place in a recent Quinnipiac poll of Iowa caucus-goers.

Some of the attention hasn't been so good. He gave a couple of pretty awkward answers (or non-answers) to media *gotcha* questions, and invited sharp criticism by citing his history with Wisconsin unions when describing how he would be an affective leader against the terrorist group, ISIS.

Regardless, conservatives are gravitating toward Walker in larger numbers, and Walker believes he knows why. In an interview aired Sunday, Walker told Fox News's Chris Wallace: "Well, I think a lot of people admire what we did in Wisconsin, where we were just fighting for the taxpayers, when we were winning for the taxpayers."

Winning. That really is the appeal.

You see, Walker comes from a very rare breed of politician. He not only says what constituents want to hear, but also accomplishes the big, difficult things they elected him to accomplish. He's an effective leader who has defied the odds (in a blue state) to build a record of success as a governor, and that's the kind of person that conservatives like and

expect in a candidate. That's the kind of person that will do well in a Republican primary. The fact that Walker managed to get elected multiple times doesn't hurt either.

Liberal voters are different. They tend to lend their support to candidates based almost entirely on rhetoric. If a candidate can produce soaring speeches on topics like inequality, social justice, and the environment, thus convincing the base that they speak their language, a record of success is of little relevance. The political rise of people like Barack Obama and Elizabeth Warren are perfect examples of this. And if you still don't believe me, try asking one of your liberal friends – even one who actively follows politics – why they think Hillary Clinton has what it takes to be a good president. I'll save you the suspense: Their answer won't have anything to do with her record.

Now, it's easy for conservatives to mock liberals for valuing style over substance, but the reality is that liberals aren't the only voters who couldn't care less about a candidate's record of leadership or success. Barack Obama had essentially no record of either, prior to him becoming our president. Four years later, after scoring fewer wins than the Washington Generals basketball team, he was re-elected.

While a record of success is the mark of a good leader, it isn't necessarily the mark of a good candidate – not in today's political environment anyway. As sad as it is, the small stuff often outweighs the big stuff in politics.

In a general election, Walker can tout his very real achievements until he's blue in the face, but it won't amount to a hill of beans if he doesn't become more comfortable in addressing combative questions and refining his rhetoric. Unlike the Democratic candidate, he won't have the mainstream media to run cover for him when he makes verbal gaffes. They'll be more than happy to exploit the in-artful comments of *any* Republican candidate, just like they did with Mitt

Romney's "47 percent" remark in 2012.

And don't think Walker's Republican rivals won't be looking to do the same thing in the primaries. Rick Perry came into the 2012 race as strong leader with a strong record, and he quickly became the Republican front-runner. Unfortunately, he eliminated himself from contention with his sloppy work in front of the microphone.

Walker has some time to polish up his presentation, and he'll have to do so if he hopes to be considered a good national candidate by people other than conservatives. I'm hoping he gets there, because true leadership is something we desperately need in the Oval Office. The more strong leaders we have vying for the presidency, the better.

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