

What Should a Candidate Know About Islamist Radicalism?

On Thursday, radio host Hugh Hewitt conducted an interview with GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump. The discussion was about Islamist radicalism in the Middle East, and it was clear from the outset that Mr. Trump had little knowledge of the influential leaders and groups (including terrorist organizations) in the region.



When Hewitt asked Trump if he was familiar with Quasem Soleimani (a major general in the Iranian Army and head of the Quds Force), Trump acknowledged that he was, and began talking about America's mistreatment of the Kurdish forces in Turkey.

Hewitt quickly interrupted him. "No, not the Kurds. The Quds Forces. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Forces – the bad guys."

"Right," Trump acknowledged, adding a moment later that he had simply misheard Hewitt. Trump then offered a general criticism of President Obama's Iran deal.

Hewitt said that he believed it was important for someone vying to be our commander in chief to be familiar with major players in the Middle East. He rattled off some names (like the secretary general of Hezbollah and the leader of the Islamic State), and asked Trump if he knew them "without a scorecard."

"No," Trump answered. "You know, I'll tell you, honestly, I

think by the time we get to office, they'll all be changed. They'll be all gone. I knew you were going to ask me things like this and there's no reason because, number one, I... I will hopefully find General Douglas McArthur in the pack. I will find whoever it is that I'll find and ... but they're all changing. Those are like history questions. 'Do you know this one, do you know that one.'"

Hewitt explained that his intent wasn't to ask 'gotcha' questions.

"That *is* a gotcha question, though, when you're asking me about who runs this, this, this." said Trump. He then added, "I will be so good at the military, your head will spin, but obviously I'm not meeting these people. I'm not seeing these people."

Hewitt rejected the notion that it was a 'gotcha' question, and said that at the GOP debate on September 16 (where Hewitt will be a moderator), he may ask the candidates questions about the leaders of different terrorist organizations. He asked Trump if he considers such questions to be of the 'gotcha' nature.

"Yes, I do. I totally do," Trump said without hesitation "I think it's ridiculous. I'm a delegator. I find great people. I find absolutely great people and I'll find them in our armed services, and I find absolutely great people."

Hewitt seemed stunned, but Trump attempted to put the host's concerns to rest.

"By the way," said Trump. "The names you just mentioned, they probably won't even be there in six months or a year ... First day in office, or before then – the day after the election, I'll know more about it than you will ever know. I can tell you that."

Hewitt finished up his questioning: "Last question: So the

difference between Hezbollah and Hamas does not matter to you yet, but it will?"

"It will when it's appropriate," answered Trump. "I will know more about it than you know and believe me, it won't take me long. And if you ask any of these candidates, nobody's going to be able to give you an answer. I mean, there may be one that's studied it because they're expecting a fresh question from you. But believe me, it won't matter. I will know far more than you know within 24 hours after I get the job."

At this point, I'm going to go ahead and make a prediction that the Trump supporters who frequent this website are not going to be happy with me for drawing attention to this interview. They'll insist that Trump's lack of knowledge about what's going on in the Middle East, and who's involved in it, is unimportant at this point in the campaign. They'll remind me that he's a smart, "big picture" guy. They'll insist that he'll study up on foreign policy at some point, and use his talents as a successful business man (should he get elected) to delegate the right people to the right jobs when it comes to dealing with overseas matters.

I would ask those people two questions:

1. Is it a 'gotcha' question to ask someone running to be our nation's commander in chief about major players in the Middle East?
2. Would you object to a different presidential candidate being asked the same questions?

Back in 2008, Republicans relentlessly chided candidate Barack Obama for his lack of foreign policy experience (and overall experience for that matter), and recognized the absurdity of electing a president who would require an enormous amount of *on-the-job training* to even begin to address our nation's greatest challenges. A majority of the electorate didn't share our concerns, and the result has been a foreign policy

catastrophe, accentuated by the losing of a war we had already won, the rise of ISIS, and an Iran far more powerful than we could have imagined.

Now, we have a GOP presidential front runner who believes that specific questions directed at him about leaders in the Middle East are *cheap-shots*, and that voters should just trust that he'll figure it all out later. And of course, we shouldn't worry at all about that candidate's disinterest in some of the region's most dangerous men, because he will be "so good at the military" that our "heads will spin."

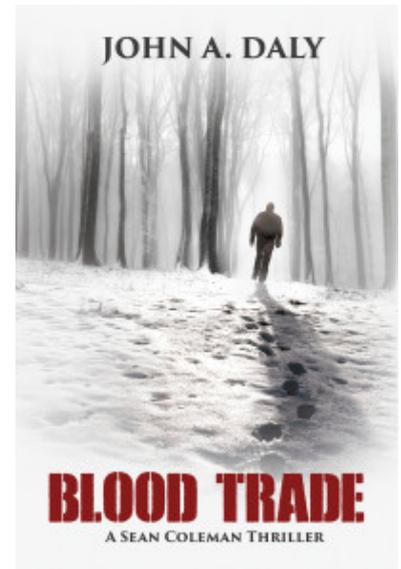
I don't know about the rest of you, but my head's *already* spinning.

My contention is not that our next president needs to be a foreign policy expert. Few candidates could claim such a title, and I certainly wouldn't expect them to know the name of every single terrorist group's leader (especially at this point in the campaign). But shouldn't we, at bare minimum, expect a serious candidate to have enough passion and interest in the topic that they wouldn't feel like they were being personally insulted by being asked about it? Does *any* responsibility at all fall on a presidential candidate to actually familiarize them self with issues that don't fall within their *pre-candidacy* area of interest?

Unless we're willing to accept that any question a candidate isn't prepared for is "unfair", how can we simply shrug our shoulders when that assertion is repeatedly put forth by Donald Trump? And how can his supporters continue to portray him as a victim?

So far, we've learned that if Trump is asked about whether or not he'll run as a third-party candidate, it's an unfair attack. If he's asked about whether or not he'll support the GOP presidential candidate if it isn't him, it's an unfair attack. If he's asked about how he will counter the *War on*

Women campaign tactic that would most certainly be used against him by the Democrats, it's an unfair attack. If *Fox News* personalities speak ill of him and his conduct, it's an unfair attack. And now, if he's asked of his Middle East knowledge, it's an unfair attack.



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Are there any other candidates in the GOP race who have complained this way? I sure can't think of any. Only Trump caused a stink after the first GOP debate, where several candidates were asked tough, uncomfortable questions about their weaknesses. Ben Carson didn't complain when Hugh Hewitt similarly grilled him on foreign policy a few weeks back. Carly Fiorina didn't complain when Hewitt talked to her right after he talked to Trump, and asked her the same questions; she even displayed an impressive amount of knowledge on the Middle East.

So what is it that excludes Donald Trump from the same level of scrutiny as everyone else? What is it that makes him off limits?

One of the things that riles up Trump supporters is that their

guy sometimes isn't treated as a serious candidate. I get that. I can respect that. What I find remarkable, however, is that the same people seem to get even *more* upset when he is treated as a serious candidate.

Trump's Candidacy a Mix of Richard Pryor and the Twilight Zone



I had a good laugh the other day when a regular visitor to this website wrote that Donald Trump's campaign conduct reminds her of six-year-old *Anthony Fremont* from the classic *Twilight Zone* episode, "It's a Good Life."

The comparison was dead-on.

For those of you who've never seen the episode (or its remade version in the *Twilight Zone* movie from the 1980s), here's a quick rundown:

Anthony looks like—and exhibits the same level of maturity as—any other boy his age. What makes him very different, however, is that he has godlike mental powers, including the ability to read people's minds. He uses those powers to keep all of the adults living in his small town (including his parents) from leaving.

The adults tiptoe nervously around the young boy, and lavish

him with constant praise to prevent him from getting upset. Because when someone makes Anthony Fremont upset by having negative thoughts of him, they are deemed by the child to be a “bad person” and get *wished away* to mystical place where they’re never seen or heard from again.

It’s the same complex displayed time after time by Mr. Trump. Whenever someone criticizes him or questions his credibility, his fragile ego compels him to interpret their words as a *betrayal*, and he lashes out at them in a demonstrably adolescent way. Most of the time, it comes in the form of name-calling or the denigration of one’s career. Other times, it’s much uglier.

When Senator John McCain was a “bad person” for taking a shot at Trump supporters, Donald sneered at the notion that McCain was a *war hero*, and went as disgustingly far as mocking American POWs for their capture. When Fox News’ Megyn Kelly was a “bad person” for asking tough questions of Trump at the recent GOP primary debate, Donald decided (and implied to CNN) that she must have been on her period.

Though many people would insist this to be part of a persona, I believe this is the *real* Donald Trump—a man whose butt has been kissed so many times throughout his career that he now views anyone who challenges his greatness as a disrespectful employee that requires a harsh reprimand.

Though the insults and crassness have certainly earned Trump a lot of media attention, such things aren’t what has gained him such a large, loyal base of support. Let’s face it: No one wants an *Anthony Fremont* in charge of our country’s nuclear arsenal. And even if Trump didn’t routinely say nasty things about people, he would still be topping the GOP polls right now.

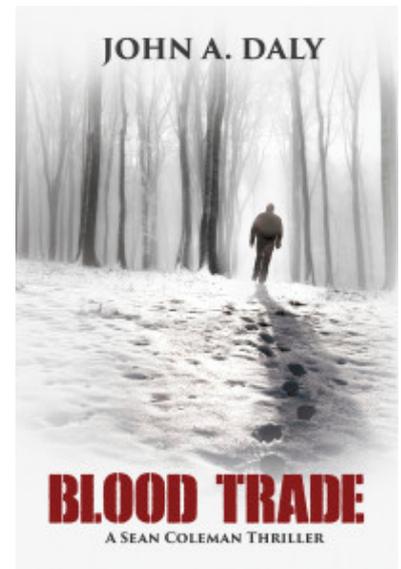
Why? The easy answer is the same one that countless pundits have offered up in canned fashion over the past couple of

months: *Trump's tapping into an angry electorate that is frustrated with 'the establishment.'*

That explanation certainly has some truth to it, but I would take it a step further and suggest that much of the billionaire's support represents a portion of the electorate that has essentially *given up* because of that anger, and is no longer taking the role of the presidency seriously.

For these people, Trump has become the "None of the above" candidate that Richard Pryor represented in the 1980's comedic movie, *Brewster's Millions*.

As you might recall, Pryor's character in the film runs to be the mayor of New York. He does so not because he wants the office or because he believes he can win, but because he needs to burn through a large sum of money in order to be awarded exponentially more wealth. Recognizing the disillusionment of voters and the phoniness of the establishment politicians offering empty promises, Pryor realizes an opening for him. He throws his hat into the ring and runs as the ultimate *protest vote*, labeling himself the "None of the above" candidate. He capitalizes on public discontent, and puts forth a platform absent of serious issues and positions, and heavy on elaborate publicity stunts and blunt rhetoric. Voters get caught up in the fun and throw him their support.



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Sound familiar?

While I'm sure the Trump supporters who are reading this will take exception with me categorizing them as *unserious*, I feel pretty confident in my assessment. I've talked with enough of them over the past couple of months to determine that they couldn't tell you with certainty where Trump stands on *any* given issue. And furthermore, they don't really seem to care. They don't know why his liberal stances don't bother them (when those of every other Republican candidate do), and they shrug their shoulders at his crushing disapproval numbers within key voting demographics.

What they *do* like is the spectacle, and that he's a *thumb in the eye* of the status quo. Somehow that's enough. And to me, it's an unfortunate sign of resignation.

Trump's motivations for running are different from that of Pryor's character, of course, but not as much as one might think. While he's not seeking greater monetary wealth, he *is* pursuing something I believe he values even more at this point in his life: respect from the national pundits and politicians who have long laughed off the notion of a *President Trump*. He

wants to show them that he *can* win, which is why he talked about “leverage” in last week’s debate. *Actually* winning? It’s an afterthought.

This is all about a billionaire’s ego and a desperate need for acceptance...not the betterment of the country. I’d say that I wish Trump’s fans recognized that, but I’m pretty sure (on some level) they already do, which is all the more unsettling.

Personally, I’m ready to cross out of the Twilight Zone and concentrate on defeating an increasingly weak Hillary Clinton. I’m hoping others will join me.

Why Bernie Sanders Matters More Than Donald Trump



It used to be (not so long ago) that when a liberal politician was accused of being a socialist, they’d adamantly reject the notion.

It’s easy to understand why. What kind of American leader, after all, would want to be identified with a system that has not only consistently failed throughout history, but also stands in direct opposition to the tenants of *independence* and *liberty* that our great nation was founded on?

In fact, President Obama (arguably the most liberal president in American history) was so rattled by being asked if he was a socialist by a *New York Times* reporter in 2009 that he later personally called the reporter on the phone to emphasize for a second time that he absolutely was not.

In the conversation, the president added, "It was hard for me to believe that you were entirely serious about that socialist question." The president then touted his "free-market principles" to support his case.

Even someone as liberal in his philosophies as President Obama recognized the nasty implications that came with being labeled a socialist. Copping to being a proponent of a system that has bankrupted countries and compelled millions of immigrants to flee to our country over the decades would have been political suicide.

My how times have changed.

The big political story in this country over the past several weeks has been the rise of Donald Trump to frontrunner status in the Republican presidential primary race. It's easy to understand why the media's paying attention. Trump's not only a larger-than-life celebrity, but also a walking and talking hyperbole machine. He's mocked American prisoners of war for being captured, accused the Mexican government of using our country as a dumping ground for rapists, and reflexively responds to even the mildest criticisms of his conduct with stinging, over-the-top personal attacks.

What the media has failed to point out is the fact that Democratic presidential candidate and proud admitted socialist, Bernie Sanders, is polling **every bit as well** with his party as Trump is with Republican voters. As of the time I'm writing this column, the *Real Clear Politics* national poll average shows less than one percentage point of support separating the two.

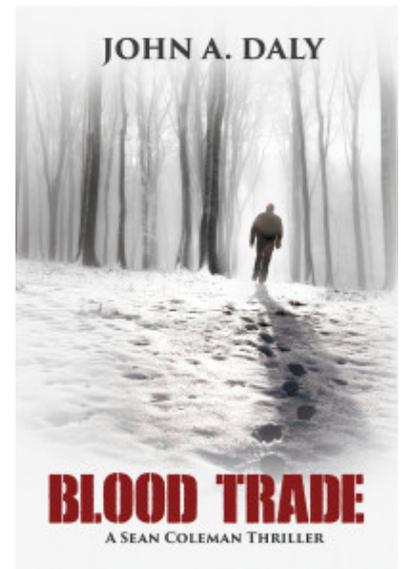
Trump is his party's *frontrunner*, in large part, because there are 15 other candidates in the contest, many of whom have similar resumes and similar stances on the issues. That's a lot of vote-splitting. If any of them who are currently polling around 5% or more (of which there are seven) suddenly dropped out of the race, the GOP would likely have a new frontrunner overnight.

Sanders, on the other hand, has only four competitors. And only one of them is polling at more than 2%: Hillary Clinton, the frontrunner.

More important than these numbers is the fact that Sanders has been setting the narrative for the Democratic presidential platform in this race. In response to Sanders' building momentum, Hillary Clinton, in a move I predicted back in April, has pulled her campaign rhetoric far to the left in an attempt to glom onto the socialist's resonating messaging. Other than some excessive *War on Women* rhetoric from Clinton, the two are almost indistinguishable now on the campaign trail.

Reading Clinton's and Sanders' Twitter feeds is like watching a one-upsmanship contest of the economically and socially absurd. There are calls for a government-mandated 12-weeks of annual vacation time for workers, jailing people on Wall Street, forced company profit-sharing, crippling tax rates, vast expansions of our entitlement programs, and every other form of anti-capitalism, pro-dependency, class-warfare rhetoric one can dream up.

It's like witnessing a postmortem analysis of the collapse of Greece, but presented in the format of cheery slogans to make it all sound sanctimonious and appealing.



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The media has clearly been presenting Donald Trump's support as proof of how "extreme" the Republican Party has become. What they don't point out is that many of Trump's less-publicized views are actually more in line with *the* Democratic Party than they are with the GOP. Couple that with the fact that most (if not all) of Trump's Republican competitors (that make up the other 82% of the party's support) have denounced the rhetoric that has made the billionaire a popular candidate, and the narrative crumbles to the ground.

On the other side of the aisle, a socialist (a title fiercely rejected by our very liberal president just six years ago) is now setting the Democratic Party's presidential platform. I'll repeat that: *A **socialist** is now setting the Democratic Party's presidential platform.*

To me, that seems like a major news story. And if someone eventually decides to run with that story, they might want to revisit the question of: Which party is *really* the party of extreme?

Lindsey Graham Ponders a Brad Pitt Candidacy



Back in 2004, I ordered a DVD of that year's Republican National Convention highlights off of a GOP website. Little did I know (though I really should have) that from that day forward, my email address would end up in the hands of practically every Republican candidate running for national office—well, in the hands of their campaign people anyway.

Most of the emails these campaigns send to me these days go straight to my junk mail folder, which I clean out periodically. That's what I was doing this morning when I noticed an email from presidential candidate Lindsey Graham. It's subject was "Brad Pitt".

I nearly deleted it, but the notion of Graham's campaign finding a way to connect the senator to the Hollywood heartthrob was too appetizing to discard. Thus, I gave it a read.

As it turned out, Brad Pitt was used simply a metaphor for describing how this year's GOP presidential debate rules were tailor-made for celebrities, rather than serious candidates vying for the Oval Office.

"Under the current debate rules supported by the RNC, Brad Pitt would have a better shot of being on the debate stage

than real candidates for president," states Graham in the email.

Graham may well be right, though it seems kind of silly to reference Brad Pitt when the campaign's really talking about Donald Trump, who is topping some of the latest GOP polls.

As everyone who follows politics knows by now, organizations (like *Fox News*) that are hosting GOP debates have had to make some tough choices over who they'll allow to appear on their stages. The problem comes from the sheer number of candidates that are running (there will likely be around 15 by the time all is said and done) and how much time will be available for each of them to speak and answer questions constructively.

Fox News has limited their prime-time, televised debate (coming up in August) to ten candidates. This is already a pretty hard-to-manage number for this type of forum. They'll be using public opinion polls to select the ten most popular of the bunch. Graham isn't happy about this, primarily because polls show his national popularity ranked near the bottom of the field.

I do understand Graham's frustration. Watching an unserious blowhard like Donald Trump rise to the top of the field on little more than his celebrity and hyperbole has to be tough for a longtime U.S. senator with presidential aspirations.

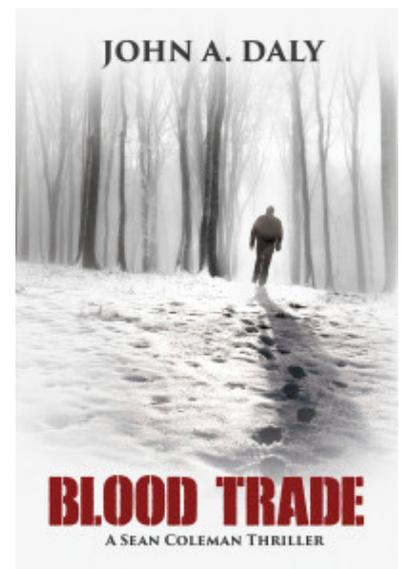
But while Trump may be a problem for the GOP in this election cycle, he's *not* what will keep Graham and a handful of others from participating in the big debates. The *GOP Bucket List Brigade* will.

The *GOP Bucket List Brigade* is a term I came up with for the Republican candidates who are in this race not because they believe they can win, or because they think they're uniquely qualified to lead the country, but rather for the prestige and historical recognition that comes with *being* a presidential candidate.

I don't exclude second-time candidates from this categorization. Beating expectations the first time around has a way of motivating one to try and recapture some of their former glory.

Sure, such candidates exist in every presidential race, but when you get to the point where you can't fit everyone on one stage, that's a real problem. Serious candidates *will* get left out, while those who are in the race to massage their own egos, gin up publicity for future memoirs or television shows, and cross "run for president" off their bucket lists will make the overall field weaker-weaker at a time when our country is in desperate need of strong leadership.

Trump absolutely is a member of the GOP Bucket List Brigade (albeit a high-profile one), but I've got news for Senator Graham that he probably doesn't want to hear: He is too.



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There's just no appetite in the Republican Party—nor is there one with the rest of the country—for a Lindsey Graham presidency. And it's not because Americans don't know him. Few senators have been in front of national television cameras as

often as Graham has over the past ten years or so. People know what he stands for, and although many admire him (count me among those people), they don't want him in the White House. The polls and lack of excitement behind his candidacy have made that quite clear.

Why run then? I'm guessing Graham was encouraged to by his friends (and former presidential candidates) John McCain and Joe Lieberman (who may truly believe he has what it takes), but if they're not leveling with him on his prospects of winning, they're doing him a real disservice. The same could assuredly be said about a number of other candidates and their advisers.

In our great country, anyone should be able to run for president. That goes without saying. But those who run should have enough humility and respect for the office not to use it as some expensive exercise in self-affirmation. The stakes are too high, especially in the year 2016.

Please... leave the acting to Brad Pitt, and leave the campaigning to viable candidates.

—

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**How Donald Trump Could
Actually Be Useful to the**

Romney Campaign



Over the past couple of years, I believe that Donald Trump has generally done more to hurt the Republican party's chances of retaking the presidency than he's done to help them. From his mainstreaming of the *Birther* movement to his incessant toying with the notion that he might run for the office himself, he's

displayed a level of clownish and self-promotional behavior that the GOP could have certainly done without. Furthermore, public perception was in no way helped by the stream of Republican primary candidates who, for whatever reason, felt the need to meet with *The Donald* behind closed doors and receive his communal blessing.

It's the recollection of such headlines that probably made plenty of people cringe, as I did, when learning that Donald Trump is considering putting together an Anti-Obama super PAC in preparation for the November election. One can only imagine the type of advertisements that would come out of such a project. Something tells me that they would most certainly serve as instant fodder for the mainstream news media and as punchlines for late night comedians. Needless to say, I'm not a fan of the idea, but I doubt it will come to fruition anyway.

With all that being said, I do believe that Donald Trump has something to offer to Mitt Romney's presidential aspirations. No, I'm not joking. My guess is that people within the Romney campaign agree with me, considering Mitt's personal acceptance of Trump's endorsement back in February, and some joint-campaigning they'll do together starting next week.

Yes, Donald Trump has some value for Romney in this election. His talents just needs to be tapped properly.

As many pundits have pointed out over the last several months, Trump appeals to the non-political, entertainment-oriented demographic that makes up a large portion of the electorate. I'm talking about the people who bypass the national news in favor of reality shows which they watch religiously. I'm talking about the people who care far more about celebrity gossip and daytime *judge* shows than they do about the health of the U.S. economy and geopolitics. These are the very same people who are more likely to vote for candidates based on personalities, gut feelings or whims, rather than on merits. Sadly, they may very well be the most important voting block in our country because they are both sway-able and vast in number.

It's a demographic that Mitt Romney is going to have a hard time courting, because he's running against a man who's a celebrity in his own right: President Obama. After all, Obama won the presidency in the first place based almost entirely on his larger-than-life, magnetic persona. When given the choice between *Captain Charisma* and the respected Vietnam war hero in 2008, that demographic pulled heavily for Obama. Romney will face the same challenge as John McCain did.

That's where Trump comes in.

Despite both Trump and Romney being extremely accomplished businessmen, Trump has been able to achieve an important perception with the public that Mitt Romney has yet to successfully sell: His personal wealth is viewed in an admirable light.

People certainly aren't blind to Trump's barefaced pompousness, but they also don't begrudge him for his wealth the way President Obama's campaign so desperately wants Americans to begrudge Mitt Romney. For the most part, the

common man admires Trump's success, and perhaps is even inspired by him to pave their own path to prosperity. Some of that conception surely comes from the platform of Trump's *Apprentice* television series, but it also comes from the way he handles himself when speaking publicly. He's a seasoned capitalist who speaks in blunt, politically-incorrect terms and makes no apologies for his success. The public doesn't ask him for apologies either, because with him, they *get it*. If Mitt Romney could somehow absorb that gift, I'm sure he would. But that's not going to happen... at least not in the next six months.

Thus, for the entertainment-driven demographic, Trump might just be a good, informal surrogate for the Romney campaign – an *Entertainment Czar* for lack of a better term. It wouldn't be all that dissimilar to how Mike Huckabee used Chuck Norris during his 2008 primary bid – a move that, in my opinion, won Huckabee the Iowa Caucus.

The difference is that Trump has a longer shelf-life than Norris because he's an active public figure. I'd encourage him to go on Leno, Letterman, Kimmel, the network morning shows, and whatever other venues make sense, and let him dress down the president and defend Romney's proposals in the direct, relentless way that only he can. At the very least, the people who normally don't bother with politics (and wouldn't give Romney himself the time of day) will listen to what he has to say. And as long as the Romney campaign doesn't associate itself too closely with Trump, and Trump can refrain from spreading more conspiracy theories, I think the strategy has the potential to peel off a little bit of the superficial portion of the electorate that would otherwise complacently throw their hat back in with President Obama.

The interesting thing about Trump is that the media has a hard time making other people accountable for his rhetoric because he presents himself as an off-the-cuff, beholden to no one, kind of guy. This would work to Romney's advantage.

Donald Trump's campaign involvement, by no means, would be a game-changer come November. The affect would be marginal. Still, in perhaps the most important election of our lifetime – one that promises to be very tight – all available resources should be utilized. Donald Trump does bring certain endowments to the table. They should not go unused.