

Coming to Grips With My Gripes



Mitt Romney

I have my own problems with Mitt Romney, but I have to confess that when Rick Perry and others deride him as a flip-flopper, I take personal umbrage. For one thing, I was raised to be a Democrat and remained one until the strain just got to be too much for me, just as it did, you may recall, for Ronald Reagan.

For another thing, talk about the obvious disadvantage for people in glass houses when it comes to stone throwing, Gov. Perry campaigned for Al Gore. And that was back in the late 80s, when Reagan had shown all of us the advantage of being a Republican.

I, personally, don't care if people flip-flop along the way, just so long as they wind up agreeing with me in the end. I mean, are people never supposed to change their minds or their hearts? What is the point of maturing and learning from experience if you go to your grave with the exact same dumb opinions you had when you were 20 or 30 or even, Governor Perry, 50 or 60?

If wisdom doesn't come with age, what does? Merely wrinkles, fallen arches and an aching back?

The truth is that I had expected the Occupy Wall Street movement would be over by this time. I assumed that foul weather would send the dumb schnooks scurrying home, but I guess I underestimated the appeal of being in the media spotlight. I say, shame on me for being so myopic. After all, one merely has to consider all those tawdry afternoon shows, with people constantly trooping out to disclose their

deepest, darkest, most embarrassing secrets, to grasp the lengths some fools will go in order to have their silly mugs on TV.

To me, the astonishing thing is that so many prominent Democrats, including Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi and Barbara Walters, have given the mob a big thumbs-up. But, in case you didn't notice, so have CAIR, David Duke and the despots of Iran and North Korea. It's odd the way that politics so often makes for strange bedfellows. Although in this instance, a more appropriate term might be gutter-fellows.

Every so often I find myself being driven mad by words and terms that become the rage for a while. In the past, we had "dy-no-mite!" thanks to a dumb sit com. No sooner did that fad pass then "like" was being interspersed between every other word, thanks to Valley girls. That, in turn, gave way to "at this point in time," thanks to stupid people trying to sound intelligent, while ignoring the fact that "now" was a perfectly fine word.

These days, we are saddled with "alleged." Apparently, as a way to avoid legal action, media people are compelled to employ that word when referring to every schmuck until the day, even if it takes years of trials and appeals, that he's finally led away in shackles. If Hitler were suddenly discovered hiding out in an Austrian chalet, I assume one couldn't get away with calling him a madman.

I'm not an attorney, but wouldn't it be possible to avoid a possible lawsuit if a TV anchorman showed us that his fingers were crossed if, prior to sentencing, he referred to, say, Bernie Madoff as a thief and Charles Manson as a serial killer?



Herman Cain

Another term I would like to see retired from active duty is the blatantly hypocritical "With all due respect..." The one thing you can count on is that whatever follows those four innocuous words will be, at best, extremely disrespectful, and at worst, slanderous and just possibly obscene.

I have heard people insist that Herman Cain is not prepared to be president because he lacks experience when it comes to foreign affairs. When you consider the state of our relations with other countries, I would think that it would be a plus for a candidate to be able to say, "I had absolutely nothing to do with it."

On the other hand, it now appears that Mr. Cain had far too much experience when it came to affairs closer to home.

For my part, when it comes to foreign affairs, all I ask of a president is that he gets us out of the U.N., gets the U.N. out of the U.S., and that he seriously considers bombing Teheran before the end of the week.

Finally, it has been fascinating to watch Obama try to bribe his way to re-election. The guy may have gotten a law degree, but his real passion is engineering. Social engineering, that is.

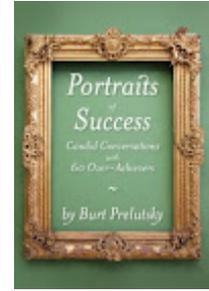
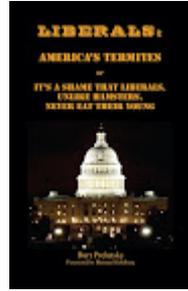
After first seeing to it that college students would continue to be perennial juveniles by keeping them on their parent's health insurance until the age of 26, he decided he'd double down by cutting their student loans through presidential fiat. Then, having ensured their gratitude at least through November, 2012, he decided to keep people in homes they had no business buying in the first place by finagling their mortgage rates.

Understand, I'm not claiming to be morally superior to any of these people. The truth is, I don't really know how susceptible I'd be to a bribe. Let's just say I'm waiting to see if Barack Obama ever gets around to offering free hair

transplants.

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Talking Politics

by BurtPrelutsky

Although the general election is still a long way off, the primaries are right around the corner, unless you happen to live in California. Out here, I think we get to vote sometime in July or August. But since we west coast Republicans comprise such a small band of rebels, it probably doesn't matter that New Hampshire and Iowa, whose cumulative population is about half that of L.A. County, actually get to play a major role in determining who will be the GOP nominee.

But, unlike some perpetual pessimists, I remain confident that whoever our candidate turns out to be, he or she will defeat Chairman Obama even if he's armed with a billion dollar bankroll. All that dough squandered in a losing presidential election only means the Democrats will have less money to spend in their futile attempt to maintain control of the Senate.

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Still, at this point, I think just about all the contenders have made some major gaffes. Mitt Romney should have disowned RomneyCare the first chance he had. Rick Perry should not have called Republicans heartless bigots. Herman Cain should not have stooped to calling Rick Perry a racist. Michele Bachmann should not have engaged in pissing contests with Rick Perry or Tim Pawlenty. Newt Gingrich should not have cheated on any of his wives. Jon Huntsman should not have believed the person who said he should throw his hat in the ring simply because he looks like a smaller version of Mitt Romney. Ron Paul should not have believed the person who said he should throw his hat in the ring simply because he looks like a bigger version of Mr. Magoo.

This being an election year, it figures that I am hearing a chorus of "Throw the bums out!" from my readers. If they were merely referring to Obama and his cronies in the House and Senate, I would sing right along with them. But, in most cases, they're referring to everyone in Congress. Although I can share some of their frustration with politicians in general, the fact remains that there is no good reason to toss out people like Allen West, Paul Ryan, Michele Bachmann and Marco Rubio.

Furthermore, the problem isn't simply with liberal politicians, as awful as they are. After all, if term limits applied to the likes of Nancy Pelosi, Charles Rangel, Harry Reid, Barney Frank, Chuck Schumer, Dick Durbin, Bernie Sanders, Maxine Waters, Henry Waxman, Dennis Kucinich, Brad Sherman and Sheila Jackson Lee, do you actually imagine that their constituents would belatedly come to their senses? Don't you realize that they would simply go out and elect younger versions of those very same leftwing knuckleheads?

Speaking of leftwing knuckleheads, I wouldn't want anyone to get the idea that I favor socialism or that I have an anti-capitalism bone in my body, but I have to confess that when I see billionaires in their 80s, guys like Warren Buffet and

George Soros, still devoting so much of their time and attention to making more and more money, I find myself wondering what part of “You can’t take it with you” they don’t get.

Finally, I haven’t yet made up my mind which of the people vying for the GOP nomination I will support. The one thing I do know for certain is that whoever it is will be a crazy person. I’m not happy about it, but what else can it mean when in a nation of 310,000,000 people, someone decides he or she is the one person best-qualified to be the boss?

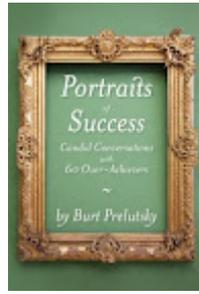
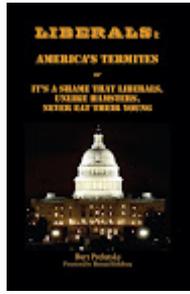
When I was young, if a cartoonist wanted to show us a crazy person, he would draw a little guy with his hand tucked in his vest insisting he was Napoleon. How does that differ in any appreciable way from someone insisting that he or she is cut out to be leader of the free world?

Perhaps if they all wore fancy coats and three-cornered hats, and spoke with a French accent, you would notice the resemblance.

In a sane universe, you wouldn’t allow such people to take up residence in the Oval Office, at least not until you’d padded the walls.

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Just How Important is Personality in Presidential Elections?

☒ Over the past few months, a number of political analysts have presented multiple economic statistics suggesting the historical infeasibility of President Obama winning a second term. In a nutshell, it's pretty much unprecedented for an incumbent president ending his third year in office with this high of an unemployment rate and this low of an economic growth rate to achieve re-election.

While that information may be interesting, I certainly don't put a lot of stock in it. Being that our country enjoyed a strong economy for the better part of the last three decades, prior to the 2008 meltdown, those statistics haven't been applicable to elections since Ronald Reagan took office.

Therefore, I suspect that the traditional predictors of voter behavior are probably a bit outdated.

The country, after all, has changed a lot over the past thirty years. We've evolved into a media-driven era of ever-shrinking attention spans and a relentless need to keep ourselves entertained. We enjoy public spectacles, prefer style over substance, and are regularly being bombarded with dueling ideological viewpoints that are too often misrepresented as fact. It stands to reason that with such cultural change comes an alteration in how we evaluate our presidential candidates.

When I look back at the presidential elections from the last thirty years, I do notice a certain consistency, but not one supported by mathematical statistics. The pattern I see is that the general election candidate with the most appealing personality has always won. I don't see a single exception.

Think about it for a moment. Completely disregard all of the candidates' individual backgrounds and platforms, as well as the state of the country on election day, and just compare their personalities... Am I wrong?

Stuffy individuals like Walter Mondale, Al Gore, and John Kerry all exuded competence and carried impressive credentials, but they lacked the personable nature of their counterparts. Candidates like George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole and John McCain all came across as genuine and thoughtful. They had impressive resumes, and were war heroes to boot, but they lacked the spryness and natural charisma of their opponents.

Now, I'm not going to suggest that the majority of voters select candidates without any regard to substantive experience, achievements, and visions, but I do tend to believe that personalities play a far larger role in the outcome of modern day elections than most people realize.

Former George W. Bush adviser Karl Rove has made the point on numerous occasions that his boss reasonably "shouldn't have

won" the 2000 election. The Clinton/Gore administration left office with the country in a state of peace and prosperity. It would have stood to reason that the electorate would have chosen to *stick with what worked* and elect Vice President Al Gore like they did with George H.W. Bush following the Reagan administration. Yet, Gore was so personally unappealing and boorish that he lost many potential supporters to his charming and energetic, underdog opponent. Ultimately, I believe it was that alone that made the difference in a race that was much tighter than anyone expected it to be.

The same could be said about the 2004 election. By election day, Bush's popularity rating was teetering on 50%, the Iraq war was extremely unpopular, and the Democratic party was united. With the inclusion of 527 groups, the Democrats outspent the Republicans by \$124 million during the campaign. Yet, Independents just couldn't quite get excited about John Kerry. The consensus seemed to be that Kerry had beaten Bush in all three presidential debates, but in my opinion, he was just so drab and uncharismatic that he couldn't seal the deal with the electorate.

On the other side of the aisle, George H.W. Bush's first term in office seemed to be a fairly successful one. He presided over the fall of the Berlin Wall and successful military operations in Panama and the Persian Gulf. By election day, the economy had recovered from a mild recession. Yet, there was undeniable star quality in a saxophone-playing governor from Arkansas that charmed the voters away.

We all know how well Barack Obama's *cult of personality* has served him. Granted, the Republican Party had a substantial deficit in public support by 2008, but on paper, a junior senator with no leadership experience or legislative achievements should have been a tough sell to the American public... even with a historic candidacy and unprecedented support from the news media. Had Obama not had his glowing personality, million dollar smile, and infectious charm to

gloss over his shortcomings and a stiff opponent, a Republican victory would have certainly been possible.

I don't think personality is as major a factor in primary elections. After all, those most passionate in the political process take their obligations more seriously than the non-ideological voter. But the general election is an entirely different landscape. Candidates are playing to a lot of voters who simply don't follow the issues and current events all that closely. Many look to the general election debates to see who's the better showman and who they find more personally appealing.

Now, I know I'm not drawing any groundbreaking conclusion here. The idea that charisma and likability are assets in a campaign is something every political observer has recognized for generations. But 2012 is really going to be a testimonial to just *how* important personality is to us as voters. On paper and barring any dramatic events, there's no way that Obama should win a second term. The country's an absolute mess. Mitt Romney will most likely be the Republican candidate. If that's the case, it will be the *Charmer in Chief* versus the *Disciplined Professional*. Both men are strong, articulate speakers and debaters. Both will come highly prepared. Yet, one can't deny that Obama has a distinct advantage in the personality department. Despite our president's known reliance on teleprompters, he actually comes across as the least scripted of the two. Even Romney's laugh seems carefully rehearsed, and voters will notice that.

2012 will be a landmark election. Voters will be making big choice on how we'll move forward as a nation. But I suspect we'll also determine in 2012 just how superficial we've become as an electorate.

Handicapping the Contenders

I have now sat through all of the GOP debates and have come to a few conclusions. First, they should not be called debates. They are actually Meet the Candidates events. As such, they serve a useful purpose. But they are not debates. If they were, Newt Gingrich would have the nomination sewn up by this time. Unfortunately for the former Speaker of the House, the ability to speak quickly and coherently on a number of issues isn't enough.

I hasten to add that I happen to agree with Mr. Gingrich that he is the smartest man in politics. He probably has more good ideas in a day than some of the other contenders have had in their entire lives. For Gingrich, the tragedy is that he carries around more baggage than the average bellhop. It's not just that he has a checkered personal past that involves wives and lovers. There was also that multi-million dollar book deal he made with Rupert Murdoch while he was still in Congress. Nothing wrong with a congressman looking to make a few extra dollars; the problem was that Gingrich chaired a committee whose responsibilities included determining ownership of media outlets, a matter of great concern to Mr. Murdoch. When the spam hit the fan, Gingrich grudgingly gave back the money.

But from my personal perspective, money remains far too important to the man. Otherwise, why does he send my wife letters begging for donations three or four times a week, and has done so for years, long before he threw his hat in the ring? And while it's really none of my business how anyone elects to spend his own money, I must say I was flabbergasted when we learned that the man had somehow managed to run up a \$500,000 tab at Tiffany's. The question that pops to mind is whether President Gingrich would try to pass his own stimulus

bill just to cover the cost of his wife's jewelry.

If I could cobble together a dream candidate, he would have Romney's looks, Cain's charm, Santorum's values, Bachmann's decency, Gingrich's grasp of the issues and Ron Paul's passionate followers. Jon Huntsman's problems are myriad, not the least of which is that he looks exactly like every villainous politician ever portrayed on "Law and Order" whose corruption begins but doesn't end with his having a bunch of chippies on his office staff.

The good news for the GOP is that Barack Obama, the four trillion dollar man, is the most beatable Democrat since Jimmy Carter. The bad news for certain segments of the party is that Paul Ryan, Sarah Palin, Mitch Daniels, Marco Rubio, Donald Trump and Chris Christie, decided not to run. For some, the problem is that Tim Pawlenty tried but failed. For still others, the heartbreak of psoriasis is nothing compared to the fact that Michele Bachmann, Ron Paul, Jon Huntsman and Mr. Gingrich, haven't managed to gain any traction, with the Iowa caucus looming right around the corner.

That leaves Rick Perry, Herman Cain and Mitt Romney, to duke it out. Of the three, I prefer Mr. Cain, even though I don't believe his 9-9-9 (aka 9-0-9) plan would do much, if anything, to turn around the economy. I like him and I trust him and, of all the candidates, he's the one with whom I could bear to spend time. That may not be the best reason for electing a president, but it's a better reason than I usually have.

My problem with Governor Perry isn't just that he appears terribly uncomfortable on the debate stage or that he doesn't even speak as well as George W. Bush did. The reason I don't believe he is presidential material is because his attacks on Romney reek of the schoolyard. I couldn't believe it when he decided that by bringing up the old news that Romney once employed a landscaper who apparently once employed an illegal alien, he believed he had a gotcha moment that would send him

soaring in the polls and straight into the White House.

Now I fully acknowledge that Romney wouldn't be my favorite alternative to Obama, but at that moment, I felt as if I was looking at a man being attacked by a gnat and, at least in my mind, the governor's last name changed forever from Perry to Petty.

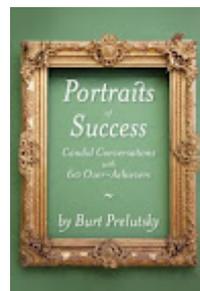
What made the attack even more embarrassing is that the Texas governor has boots of clay. After all, he would not only have seen to it that the gardener's kid received in-state tuition, but labeled any Republican who objected a heartless bigot.

I am willing to wager that Mitt Romney will be the Republican nominee, and not just because he has the most money, the most professional organization and the best-looking family. I give the American voter more credit than that.

Instead, as I see it, he will be the last man standing because he's taller than Perry and has more hair than Cain.

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Mitt Romney and the Mormon Question(s)

✘ Gallup announced Monday that 22 percent of Americans would not vote a Mormon into the presidency, even if he were nominated by their own party. This is a figure that has not just remained steady since 1967, but on the whole has risen five points.

Broken down by affiliation, 18 percent of Republicans, 19 percent of Independents, and 27 percent of America's most open minded and tolerant political party, the Democrats, say they couldn't be persuaded to take the plunge. Though Gallup notes lesser educated people are more likely to reject a Mormon nominee, there "are no significant differences on this question by gender, age, region of the country, or religious preference." What does this mean for Mitt Romney, who is not only the Republican front-runner, but also a Mormon?

Call it a hunch, but it feels like those Republicans are opposed for religious reasons, and those Democrats are opposed because they fundamentally distrust and dislike all religions. (Except Islam, of course, which the Left adores and respects to the utmost, because tolerating Islam is a hell of a lot easier than being stabbed to death in the street.) Problem is, you can't always tell the difference between a Catholic objection and an atheistic one – they both tend to believe their way is the One Way.

For example, this caller to the John Gibson show: "The Mormons and the whole magic underwear thing is what has me tilted out... They believe they wear a special garment that they believe are magical, and if Romney believes that, if he

believes in magic undergarments, I don't want him" to be president. You call it: annoying Catholic or annoying atheist?

Gibson did eventually ask the caller, "Do you know how silly this gets once you open this door?" but at the root of it, just about every religion becomes silly once it's broken down and honestly examined. Whether Romney is a strictly observant Mormon or a Jack Mormon (i.e., the LDS equivalent of a "cafeteria Catholic") is less critical to his campaign than how to address attacks on his religion.

And make no mistake: The strongest points against him are RomneyCare and Mormonism. The Left will be hesitant to attack RomneyCare because that would mean, ipso facto, attacking ObamaCare. So you'll have what we had throughout the 2008 nominating process, mainly fits of disbelief, perfectly encapsulated for the purposes of this column by Lawrence O'Donnell, MSNBC host and professional oh-dear.

"This man stood there and said to you, 'This is the faith of my fathers,'" O'Donnell said on The McLaughlin Group in late 2007. "The faith of his father is a racist faith. As of 1978 it was an officially racist faith, and for political convenience in 1978 it switched, and it said 'Okay, black people can be in this church.' He believes, if he believes the faith of his fathers, that black people are black because in Heaven they turned away from God, in this demented, Scientology-like notion of what was going on in Heaven before the creation of the Earth... When he was 30 years old and he firmly believed in the faith of his father, that black people are inferior, when did he change his mind? Did the religion have to tell him to change his mind?"

These charges will stick because they're spectacular, saying nothing of those few on the Right who will argue Mormonism is a cult. So what seems more likely, that Romney will deftly maneuver around them or that he will stumble badly and, in doing so, clear a path for Governor Perry?