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WHO WILL BE REAGAN'S RUNNING MATE?

"Who will be Ronald Reagan's choice for a running mate?" seems to be the only major question not yet resolved about either of the National Nominating Conventions scheduled for this summer. At least three factors make Reagan's choice this year especially sensitive. Some believe the selection is crucial to his November election.

First is the lingering bad taste from John Sears' mistake in announcing before the 1976 convention that Pennsylvania Senator Richard Schweiker would be Reagan's running mate if he won the nomination. That was widely perceived as a Reagan "sellout" because Schweiker was perceived by conservatives as a northeastern liberal.

Actually, that was an unfair characterization of Schweiker, who is a social conservative, pro-life, and opposed to the Panama Canal giveaway and to SALT II. The Schweiker announcement was not a Reagan sellout, but it was a Sears blunder. It not only didn't gain any convention delegates for Reagan, it actually lost him some.

Sears has departed from the Reagan campaign, fortunately (and now is writing articles about how John Anderson can win as a third-party candidate). But Reagan is naturally sensitive about naming any running mate who would arouse similar antagonisms.

Secondly, because of Reagan's age, it is more important than usual that the vice presidential candidate be perceived as one who can succeed as President in four years, or earlier if emergency requires it. The Republican vice presidential candidate must be perceived as a man who is capable of governing the nation.

Thirdly, Reagan has promised the pro-lifers he will name a pro-life running mate. That promise would eliminate George Bush or Howard Baker.

The pressure is already strong on Reagan to name a running mate from the eastern liberal wing of the Republican Party to balance the ticket. Although ticket balancing, geographic or ideological, is a valid consideration, the more important question is, what are the best balancing factors?

If Reagan wants balance on age and vigor, former National League football star and now Congressman Jack Kemp would be ideal. If Reagan wants a balance of financial

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factions of the Republican Party, the Rockefeller-Trilateralist candidate George Bush would be the one. If Reagan wants balance on Washington experience, John Connally, Howard Baker, Bob Dole, Philip Crane, and Jesse Helms all have something to offer.

Far more important than "balance" is the question, who will add states for Reagan in the Electoral College? That should be the prime consideration for all those who believe a Reagan victory is essential.

George Bush, Jack Kemp, Richard Schweiker, or Gerald Ford would each add some votes to a Reagan candidacy. But it is unlikely that any of those could carry a single state for Reagan, and therefore they could not give Reagan a single vote in the Electoral College. Baker might carry Tennessee for Reagan, Connally could carry Texas, and Crane could help in Illinois. But one swallow does not a summer make, and a running mate should be able to carry more than one state to justify his selection.

Before Reagan chooses his running mate, he must choose his winning strategy. Will his compass point northeast and chase the votes of the liberal Rockefeller faction of the Republican Party, which are now a minority and are destined to shrink further under the John Anderson independent-party candidacy? It makes much better sense for Reagan to aim his compass south and seek the votes of conservative Democrats, social conservatives of all parties, and those who did not vote in the 1976 election.

The problem Reagan has in carrying the South against Carter is that blood is thicker than water, and sectional pride will be a stronger emotion in the privacy of the voting booth than the political popularity Reagan obviously enjoys. If Reagan selects a running mate who is perceived as a moral compromise (such as one who voted for abortion funding or the Panama Canal giveaway), the big bloc of those who did not vote in 1976 will be neutralized right back into their traditional nonvoting posture.

A southern conservative on the ticket would deliver the South to Reagan with its tremendous bloc of electoral votes, and thereby assure his election. Among those who would meet this qualification are Texas Governor William Clement and Senator Jesse Helms. It might be even smarter if Reagan chooses a Democrat conservative such as Alabama Governor Fob James or Virginia Senator Harry Byrd. A southern conservative (Republican or Democratic) as a running mate would give Reagan a winning strategy because the South is where he has the best chance of winning enough votes in the Electoral College.

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