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Who Is Mike Huckabee?

When **Mike Huckabee** moved suddenly from the second tier of Republican presidential contenders to front row center, interest in him surged, along with his presidential prospects. With that in mind, we decided to go back into SPR's archives to see what we have written about Huckabee, who served almost eleven years as governor of Arkansas, over the years. On a personal note, I have interviewed -- and observed him -- many times over the past 15 years, mostly at the annual meetings of the Southern Governors' Association. I have always found him an approachable, personable and interesting public figure, with some apparent contradictions that upon closer examination reveal a man of conviction, but also with a genuine concern for others.

Sense of Humor. As for the contradictions, the first one is that, despite being a Baptist minister and a social conservative, Huckabee has a sense of humor -- amply demonstrated in the presidential debates -- which has long been part of his personality. In 1997, he allowed television host **Don Imus** -- long before his racial *faux pas* -- to broadcast his morning show from the grounds of the governor's mansion in Little Rock. In defending term-limits, Huckabee told me in 1999 that the new law was "opening up some seats. It used to be

they left in a pine box." (On a serious note, he praised the effect of term-limits on lawmakers: "People know they won't be there that long and don't have long to get things done.") When the Southern governors sponsored a panel on the region's quality of life, Huckabee quipped, "You never hear people say, 'I'm going to retire and move North.'" And at a gathering of Southern Republicans in Louisville, he said, "Politics is like a Wonderbra -- you take what you got and arrange it so that on Election Day, you're over the top."

He almost got in some trouble once, when he discussed some election irregularities in Arkansas and referred to his home state as a "Banana Republic," leading some Democratic legislators to wear buttons proclaiming, "I'm a Banana Republican."

Compassionate Conservatism. Despite his consistent conservatism on social issues -- he opposes abortion, including the FDA's approval of RU-486, an abortion drug, same-sex marriage, gun control and favors strict controls on illegal immigrants -- he manages to take these stands without using harsh, judgmental language, sort of a compassionate conservatism, if you will. In the presidential debates he praises legal immigrants and



recently said he would accept the support of the gay Log Cabin Republicans.

This may reflect the fact that Huckabee is a conservative Christian by instinct, but did not win office in Arkansas as the candidate of organized fundamentalists, who have not been strong politically in the state. And though, as a conservative Republican, Huckabee has not been in the forefront on issues of concern to African Americans, in 1998 he actively courted support from black leaders and black churches; as a result, exit polls showed he got some 48% of the black vote.

A Feisty Family. His family has the same streak of individualism that Huckabee exhibits. His wife, **Janet Huckabee**, got in a squabble with members of the Mansion Committee when she took down drapes in order to let in more light. Arkansas columnist John Brummett, writing about her at the time, noted that she would “rather ride a jet ski any day” than fight over the mansion’s furnishings. And in 2002, she ran for Secretary of State at the same time her husband was running for re-election as governor. The dual office seeking went over poorly with Arkansas voters and though she was an early favorite, she lost badly (38% to 62%). During the campaign, one Huckabee aide told SPR, “Our governor’s wife is a great big anchor” on his re-election.

In 1999, as the next year’s presidential campaign was developing, Huckabee first supported **Lamar Alexander**; when Alexander dropped out, he endorsed **George W. Bush**. However, Huckabee’s son, **John Mark Huckabee**, at the time a 22 year-old political science major, chaired Steve Forbes’ “Youth for Forbes” campaign in Arkansas.

Governing and Politicking. During his two-and-half terms in the Arkansas governor’s office, Huckabee always had an

overwhelmingly Democratic legislature. Sometimes he got along with them, sometimes he did not. He established some records for vetoing legislation, and some records for having his vetoes overridden. He took on some major challenges, including coming up with a new formula for funding education when state courts ruled the old one unconstitutional. Through a series of special sessions, a new plan incorporating many of Huckabee’s proposals was passed. His plan for reorganizing state agencies in order to save money did not pass the legislature, however, although some of his proposals have since been enacted piece-meal.

The governor has always been a political player, and has been active behind the scenes in backing various candidates for public and party offices in Arkansas. His preferences were often at odds with those of the influential brothers **Tim and Asa Hutchinson**, conservative Christians like Huckabee. However, in 2005 when Lt. Gov. **Win Rockefeller** (R) withdrew from the 2006 governor’s race due to illness, Huckabee -- a Rockefeller supporter -- held a press conference and endorsed Asa Hutchinson for the seat (he lost to **Mike Beebe** [D] 55% to 41%). Today, Asa Hutchinson, in private business in Little Rock, has endorsed Huckabee for president, including signing a fundraising letter for him.

Huckabee has apparently been interested in the presidency for some time. In 2000, for example, he headlined some 80 fundraisers for Republicans across the nation, mainly in the South. And during the campaign, he also addressed the Christian Coalition in Washington, whose adherents form a major target of his current campaign.

Negatives. On the down side, Huckabee has occasionally come under criticism back home,



mostly for what one critic (D) termed “penny ante stuff,” such as accepting a canoe from a soft drink company or buying a small airplane and renting it to his campaign. Huckabee did not take kindly to the attacks. He is “thin-skinned,” said SPR’s source, and got “real blustery” over the attacks.

Mostly he has been very popular in Arkansas, with approval ratings as high as 77%. By the time he was re-elected for his last term in 2002, however, he began to get some criticism and had a stiff challenge from state Treasurer **Jimmie Lou Fisher** (D), who criticized the governor as unfairly claiming credit for some accomplishments. But he won by 53% to 47%.

Mississippi Senate Race: Pickering or Wicker vs. Moore?

The latest word out of the Magnolia State is that Gov. **Haley Barbour** (R) is like to pick either US Rep. **Chip Pickering** (R) or US Rep. **Roger Wicker** (R) to succeed Minority Whip **Trent Lott** (R) as the next US Senator from Mississippi. On the Democratic side, the scuttlebutt is that former Attorney General **Mike Moore**, probably the most electable politico among the state’s beleaguered Democrats, has decided that he will run, setting up what is likely to be a fierce, well-funded competition that is sure to receive national attention.

Whether Barbour will choose Pickering or Wicker is uncertain, but the governor is a pragmatic politician. “The only criteria for the appointment is the person who can beat Mike Moore,” says a Jackson insider. In this regard, both Pickering and Wicker have plusses and minuses.

Pickering. Both by virtue of his high profile as a six-term congressman in a district that cuts a wide diagonal across the center of the state and

as the son of Judge **Charles Pickering**, who is also a former state Republican chairman, well-liked by state and local party officials, Pickering is well known across the state. Moreover, Chip Pickering won points defending his father’s nomination for a federal appeals court judgeship against the opposition of US Sen. **Edward Kennedy** (D) and other liberals. (The senior Pickering, already a district judge, was not confirmed by the Senate, but **President Bush** gave him a recess appointment to the appellate bench, which he held for a few months.) Finally, Pickering has the kind of resume -- including service as a Baptist missionary in Eastern Europe -- that has a lot of appeal here.

On the negative side, Pickering recently announced that he would not seek re-election because he wanted to spend more time with his family. Even though Pickering indicated he was not ruling out a return to politics in the future, to turn right around after only a few months and undertake the time-consuming responsibilities of a statewide campaign raises questions about his sincerity. Some have even raised the question of whether Pickering would accept the Senate appointment. “I don’t think there’s any doubt he’d take it if it’s offered,” says the Jackson insider.

Both congressmen are members of Barbour’s circle, though Pickering is closer than Wicker to the governor. When the senior Pickering was state GOP chair, Barbour was his executive director. Barbour’s nephew, political operative **Henry Barbour**, has managed campaigns for both Barbour and Pickering. And Pickering also has the advantage of the apparent backing of Lott, who publicly mentioned the need for someone in his 40s to take the job. Pickering is 44, Wicker 56.

Wicker. Wicker, like Pickering, is a former staff member for Lott. He has one more House



term under his belt than Pickering, not very significant, but unlike Pickering, he served two terms in the state senate, giving him some personal ties in the state's political establishment. In addition, his 1st District is in North Mississippi, and includes the hill country, not so long ago a Democratic stronghold. Were Wicker the nominee, it might blunt Moore's efforts to reconnect with these ex-Democrats. Like Pickering, Wicker has strong ties with the governor; **Jim Perry**, Barbour's policy advisor, previously served as legislative director for Wicker. And Wicker also comes from a political family: His father was in the state senate. Moreover, Wicker is a high ranking Republican on the House Appropriations Committee and is the ranking GOPer on the Military Construction/Veterans Affairs Subcommittee. This gives him some extra muscle for a campaign. On the other hand, one could argue he would serve Mississippi better by staying put and preserving his House seniority.

Though Barbour is most likely to choose either Pickering or Wicker for the Senate seat, several other names are getting attention, including state Treasurer **Tate Reeves**, elected in 2003, and **Jim Barksdale**, a former CEO of Netscape and Barbour's choice to head his Hurricane Katrina recovery effort. Although many other names are being mentioned, "Once you get past these," says a Mississippi political insider (R), "you're thinking out of the box."

Moore. Mississippi may be a strong Republican state -- Barbour just got re-elected 58% to 42% and Bush won the state 59%-41% in 2004 -- but the even most ardent GOPers begin to quake in their boots at the mention of the name of former Attorney General Mike Moore (D). Moore gained fame in 1998 for winning a settlement of some \$565 million for the state of Mississippi in a ground-breaking lawsuit against the tobacco companies. With

part of the funds, he established the "Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi," which created a network of contacts among public health professionals and others that would be a major boost to him in a campaign. (A Barbour proposal to transfer state funding from Moore's "Partnership" to state agencies is currently tied up in court.) Moore's history of helping this economically challenged state -- made worse by Hurricane Katrina -- could allow him to sidestep the polarizing social issues, including those that are race-related, and gain enough white votes, combined with black support for Democrats, to win the seat.

Moore's interest in the Senate seat may -- or may not -- be complicated by the Nov. 28 indictment on federal bribery charges of prominent Mississippi trial lawyer **Richard "Dickie" Scruggs**. The brother-in-law of Lott, Scruggs was hired by Moore as attorney general to negotiate the settlement in the tobacco case brought by Mississippi in the late 1990s. Scruggs' law firm earned some \$1.4 billion in the matter.

In the event Moore decides not to run -- and in 1999, he backed out of the governor's race -- two former governors are still in the Democratic mix, **Ray Mabus** and **Ronnie Musgrove**. But if Moore is in, they will stay out. Other potential Democratic contenders include three African Americans, state Rep. **Erik Fleming**, who got 35% against Lott in 2006; former Jackson mayor **Harvey Johnson Jr.**; and former US Rep. **Mike Espy**.

The Election Date. This scenario of a potential Democratic victory is partly why Democrats and Republicans are digging in their heels over the question of whether the state constitution allows Barbour to call the election for Nov. 4, 2008, as he has done, or whether it should be held within 90 days of Lott's resignation, as Democratic state



Attorney General **Jim Hood** contends is required by law. If Moore is a candidate, the Democrats have a chance, but they'll need every break, including holding the election on a different day than the presidential balloting, which usually brings out Republicans in large numbers. Lott could resolve the matter by resigning after Dec. 31, 2007, which would leave Barbour's election day designation uncontested. If he does, however, he gives up another year of not being able to lobby congress, hardly an economic plus for the cash-strapped lawmaker who is rebuilding his storm-destroyed home on the Gulf Coast.

Update on Alabama 2

Since US Rep. **Terry Everett** (R) announced that he will retire at the end of his current term, his eighth, interest in running for his seat has been high, especially among Republicans. Three GOPers have announced, Montgomery-area state Reps. **David Grimes** and **Jay Love**, and from the Dothan area, three-term state Sen. **Harri Anne Smith** (R).

The -- admittedly early -- favorite is Smith, 45, the sole candidate from the Wiregrass, the region in Southeast Alabama in and around Houston County (Dothan) that is named for the stiff grass that flourishes there. It is the largest cohesive area in the district and probably accounts for some 40% or more of the electorate. Traditionally, the business and political establishment of this rural and small-town region have dominated the district's elections. Everett, for example, was a newspaper publisher in Dothan, though little known elsewhere, when he was elected in 1992. "There's a group in Dothan already raising money for her," notes a GOP insider. Before she announced, Smith, a three-term state senator, former mayor and a banker, commissioned a poll which showed her first

with 24% in a group of five potential contenders; 44% were undecided.

Smith also might benefit from being a woman in an all-male field. If she is elected, however, Smith will be the first woman on Alabama's congressional delegation since **Maryon Allen**, widow of US Sen. **James Allen** (D), was defeated in 1978, which suggests there may be a political down-side to her gender. In her announcement, Smith stressed winning the war in Iraq, helping farmers with drought relief, and encouraging industrial development.

Grimes and Love are both from the Montgomery area and are likely to divide that area's vote. The Republican insider says both "are good guys, but Love is working the hardest, meeting with legislators and raising money." Nevertheless, geography is likely to work against the Montgomery lawmakers. State Rep. **Barry Mask** (R), recently elected to his first full term in the state House, has taken himself out of the running.

A number of other GOPers have been mentioned, including former Christian Coalition leader **John Giles**, who helped spearhead opposition to a 2004 amendment removing pro-segregation provisions from the state constitution (on the grounds that the amendment's language could cause court-imposed school tax increases); businessman **Tim James**, son of a former governor and a past gubernatorial candidate; and businessman **David Woods**. It remains to be seen whether these or others will run. The GOP filing period begins January 4, 2008, and ends April 4.

For the Democrats, **William Boyd**, a candidate for mayor of Montgomery, has announced that he is running for the congressional seat. Other Democratic possibilities include state Agriculture Commissioner Ron **Sparks**, state Sen. **Jimmy Holley** and state Rep. **Terry**



Spicer. Montgomery Mayor **Bobby Bright**, currently an independent, has expressed an interest in running, but has not indicated whether he would run as a Democrat or a Republican (though state GOPers view him as strictly a Democrat). The Democratic filing period extends from March 1 to April 4.

The Republican nominee should be a heavy favorite. **President Bush** got 67% here in 2004 and its African-American population -- around 30% -- isn't large enough to provide a competitive base for the Democrats. Talk that Democrats in the legislature would attempt a late redistricting to make the district more competitive has come to naught. The party primaries will be held on June 3 and the General on November 4. Likely Republican.

Senate Updates

Alabama: Sessions Rules. It's 62% for US Sen. **Jeff Sessions** (R), 30% for state Sen. **Vivian Figures**, in a Rasmussen Reports poll released Nov. 19.

Georgia: Chambliss Strong. In a Strategic Vision poll taken Oct. 19-21, US Sen. **Saxby Chambliss** (R) defeated his ex-DeKalb County CEO **Vernon Jones** 57%-28%; ex-TV newscaster **Dale Cardwell** 58%-26%, and engineer **Rand Knight** 58%-25%.

Louisiana: Kennedy Makes It Official. In a statement on his website, state Treasurer **John Kennedy** (R) announced on Nov. 29 that he was filing the necessary paperwork to challenge US Sen. **Mary Landrieu** (D) in 2008. He said that he will kick off his campaign early next year. Kennedy, who did not get along with Gov. **Kathleen Blanco** (D) and other Democratic leaders, changed to the Republican Party earlier this year. The post-Katrina Republican trend in Louisiana,

exemplified by the election of **Bobby Jindal** (R) as governor in October, makes this a very competitive race. Toss-up.

South Carolina: Witherspoon Announces. **Buddy Witherspoon**, the state's Republican National Committeeman, announced his candidacy for the US Senate in 2008.

Witherspoon, an orthodontist who has never sought public office before, will challenge US Sen. **Lindsey Graham** (R) in the Republican Primary. Graham, an increasingly influential member of the Senate, has angered some Palmetto State conservatives by his stance favoring **President Bush's** compromise proposal on illegal immigration.

Grits

? **Alabama: Clinton Gains, but Still Lags.** **Hillary Clinton**, considered a sure-fire vote-loser in the Deep South, is apparently gaining strength, even in the Heart of Dixie. In the latest Rasmussen Reports survey, **Rudy Giuliani**, the strongest GOPer, leads Clinton by 48% to 42%, suggesting Alabama isn't turning Blue. **Fred Thompson** leads her 49% to 42%, **John McCain** 50% to 39% -- and **Mitt Romney** merely ties her, 43% to 43%. But the good news for Clinton is that she's gained between 4 and 16 points since Rasmussen polled in the state in September.

? **Virginia: DC Suburbs Trend Democratic.** Northern Virginia (NOVA), which includes the area outside of the nation's capital, used to be a Republican stronghold. In 1980, **Ronald Reagan** won 55% of the five-city, six-county region, netting him a margin of 94,552 votes. By 2004, however, **John Kerry** took 52% of NOVA's vote, giving the Massachusetts Democrat a margin of 48,324. And in the 2006 US Senate race, challenger **James Webb** (D) defeated incumbent **George Allen** (R) by 116,000 votes in NOVA, more than enough to account for Webb's 9,329 vote victory statewide. Thanks to Atlanta numbers cruncher **Dan O'Connor** for these statistics.