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## THE 1988 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL RACE

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**Vice President Versus Governor / A Never-Ending Campaign / The Effects of Super Tuesday / Why George Bush? / The Democrats After the McGovernite Reforms / Why Did Jackson Do So Well? / Looking Toward the November Election / The Impact on Israel**

### **Vice President Versus Governor**

Barring something unforeseen, the two nominees for the U.S. presidency are now in place. Once again, a sitting vice president is trying to reach the presidency. The last time that happened was in 1836 when Martin Van Buren, Andrew Jackson's vice president, was elected. Van Buren was the first machine politician to organize on a national scale in the United States. He managed to mobilize the emerging class of machine politicians in states around the country in what was then the dominant Democratic party and to achieve election by virtue of organization, certainly not by virtue of any charisma or spectacular performance. By this he made a lasting contribution to the shaping of American democracy. Up

until the 1960s, presidents were indeed chosen in the manner that Martin Van Buren pioneered back in 1836. Today his system no longer functions in the presidential or most other arenas.

We are now about twenty years into a different system of choosing presidents. George Bush, the current vice president, has secured the Republican presidential nomination through good organization in the primaries and sufficient financial resources. He is facing the governor of one of the most visible, though not one of the largest, of American states. State governors are frequent nominees. The present president of the United States had been governor of his state, as had the previous president. Historically, the party in opposition is more likely to

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nominate governors than the party in power and this is true this time as well. However, it is rare in recent times that a sitting governor can win the presidency because of the burdens that the governorship imposes upon incumbents in a very governmentally active society such as the United States is today. Ronald Reagan, for example, was several years out of office in which to campaign for the presidency.

### **A Never-Ending Campaign**

The United States lives with a never-ending presidential campaign. It is likely that the first polls about who is favored for the presidency in 1992 will come out in the first issue of Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report after election Tuesday in November. This never-ending campaign has come to be because the media find it interesting and therefore pull everybody else along with them.

There are so many interesting things happening in American politics all the time; most of them get little or no media coverage because they are not horse races; whereas a horse race, which probably deserves six months or a year of attention, gets all the attention. No governor or congressman can compete with that unless he runs for the presidency. This is a terrible distortion of the political process, but it is a reality.

Once the campaign becomes a never-ending process, the peaks are lower and the valleys are shallower. In other words, presidents can now take initiatives in presidential years, as we saw with the Shultz Middle East initiative, because there is no year that is not a presidential year. The amount of time in which nothing can be done because all attention in the U.S. is focused on the elections, which had expanded considerably in the 1950s until it extended to about a year and a half, is now being compressed again. It will probably go down to a period of about four months, but it means that presidents do not have to be lame ducks anymore.

Reagan is acting accordingly. By all previous standards he is the lamest of

lame ducks. He has all the troubles of presidents in the last year of a long administration and all the problems of credibility that accumulate over time. He has staff problems and problems with key cabinet officials and advisers and a White House in which many veteran staffers are already leaving.

Yet despite the fact that his image has taken a big dip, he continues to function and pursue his program. He walks through as blithely as he did from the first day he took office. It is an extraordinary phenomenon but it is partly made possible by a situation in which George Bush does not want to tell him to keep quiet because it is an election year. On the contrary, Bush hopes to benefit from some of Reagan's popularity.

Unlike the days of Van Buren, today's nominating process is a combination of primaries, caucuses and media hype which is now almost entirely out of the hands of the political leadership. It is now in the hands of voters in such places as Iowa and New Hampshire, where every person has been interviewed at least five times. Iowa is a perfect state in which to open because it reminds Americans of the most all-American form of nostalgia, of what the United States was supposed to have been like in what white Americans at least look back to as the golden age of rural and small town America. New Hampshire, with its image of sceptical, folksy, non-nonsense Yankees, is a perfect second stop on the line -- a hard-nosed referendum on moralistic, provincial Iowa.

### **The Effects of Super Tuesday**

The one set of contests that was the direct result of intervention by the political leadership this time was Super Tuesday. A number of southern governors agreed in response to reformers' suggestions that there should be one national primary on one day. So with the exception of Virginia, a 17-state regional primary was held throughout the South.

The results demonstrate what a bad idea a national primary would be. Super

Tuesday is what guaranteed George Bush the nomination. A one-day primary is ideal for a candidate who has spent a lot of time in advance raising money and building an organization for one hard blow because no one can build up any momentum. In a situation like that, the man with the bucks and the organization wins -- and he did. Once he won, he wiped out everybody else because after that one blow, nobody else could raise any more money or even retain the organizations that they had.

Dukakis was also a beneficiary of Super Tuesday in a different way. It was possible to predict on the following day that Dukakis would be the Democratic nominee. A breakdown of voting in the southern states revealed that Gore took only those states that were very much like his home state of Tennessee and did no better in any state that was not like Tennessee. Jackson's support was essentially confined to black voters. On the other hand, the great middle of the Democratic voting public voted for Dukakis even in the South.

What this has meant is that American states still play the principal role in the selection of the president, but they play that role in a different way, indeed, in ways that feature the special character of the individual states far more than ever before.

### Why George Bush?

Why Bush? Why not Dole or Kemp or Pat Robertson? In many cases Robertson was robbed of what he was entitled to as Republican party regulars wherever possible tried to stack the deck against him. They simply did not see him as the man they wanted to be their party standard-bearer. He was probably the friendliest to Israel of all the candidates, though for reasons that were not only Christian evangelical, but Christian missionary. A Jewish colleague of mine at the Center for the Study of Federalism in Philadelphia has had contact with Robertson's university in Norfolk, and after spending a nice time with one of the senior people there,

received a letter soon afterwards saying, in effect, "Dear ....., You are such a nice guy, why don't you convert?" Most of the other evangelicals are giving us a couple of generations. In 60-100 years they will be angry at us for not converting. But Pat Robertson's agenda is right out in the open and very clear.

Jack Kemp is a strange phenomenon too. One of the reasons why Kemp did not go any further is that Americans right now are tired of pretty boys. Except for sporadic successes, the pretty boys did not do well in this round. People were looking for somebody whose image was that of greater ordinariness. That, of course, worked to both Bush's and Dukakis' advantage because one can hardly think of people who seem more ordinary than the two of them.

Why not Dole? Precisely because Dole is not ordinary in two very important ways. One is that he has a sense of humor that he uses. Now it is all right to have a sense of humor, but the rule today is that a candidate is not supposed to use it in campaigning, which makes for the dullest campaigns in the world. The great days of American campaigning are gone. Every campaign gets duller than the previous one because anybody who uses humor risks offending somebody and therefore candidates stay away from it. Dole cannot. He is intrinsically humorous, which is one reason why he got very good treatment from the press. He could have been massacred a number of times by the media, but they basically like him because he made life more interesting.

On the other hand, Dole also has a strong mean streak that became evident. A lot of people felt that this was a man who was just a little too mean to be president and that worked against him in very important ways. It was interesting that most of the sophisticated thinking people in the Republican party really wanted Dole and not Bush.

Who is Bush underneath that preppie exterior? A man who has no home? He was born in Connecticut, came on the

national scene from Texas, and summers in Maine. He is a man from nowhere, but has something that gives him strength.

Bush offended nobody except for those people who were offended by the very fact that he offended nobody. He relied very extensively on the organization that he put together and the money he raised. One should not underestimate a man who very quietly goes about putting together an organization and money so that it is there when it counts. People who know Bush say that Bush does not look it, but he knows how to hit where it counts. After he lost in Iowa, he won in New Hampshire where it counted. He had to win there or he would have been out. He won on Super Tuesday where it counted. The rest of the time his record was erratic. In a state like Minnesota in the Independent Republican caucuses, Bush came in fourth. Bush does not look like he has iron in his soul, but he does and we should understand that.

The best thing that happened to Bush was Dan Rather. Dan Rather is a man whom everybody likes to dislike. When he went up against Bush, he made even a "wimp" look good. Bush came through, he functioned the way he should have to make the most out of the incident and that is Bush's great strength.

#### **The Democrats After the McGovernite Reforms**

What happened in the Democratic party is the result of the McGovernite reforms of the early 1970s as modified when it was shown that they were even more impossible than anybody could have predicted. First of all, the Democrats introduced proportional representation and abolished the winner-take-all primary. The delegates from each state are now divided proportionately among the leading candidates. A candidate who gets a certain minimum -- 20 percent -- gets delegates. Then the Democrats built in requirements for balanced tickets -- for fair representation of women and various "recognized" minority groups.

Afterwards they had to see to it that the people who really are the elected officials and leaders of the Democratic party -- the congressmen, governors, and national committee people -- could get to the convention because for several years they were not able to attend the convention as delegates. They had to create a group of super delegates through a process that is totally undemocratic.

The Democrats went into the primaries, especially after Gary Hart left the race, with a field of unknowns and Jesse Jackson. Jackson led in the polls for months before the first primary simply on the basis of name recognition alone. In the case of most of the candidates who ran, nobody in the United States, including the most seasoned political leaders, would have predicted that they would have run six months before they announced.

Only two generations ago, the candidates for the Democratic nomination were prominent governors and senators, sometimes fighting each other to the death back when they still had to get a two-thirds majority at the Democratic convention to be nominated. There would be 110 ballots at every convention. While it was not as "open" a process, the old system featured known political figures.

This year just the reverse seems to be true. Theoretically only the most popular people should go into a primary, otherwise no one would know who they are. But it has reached the point where the primaries cannot attract the most popular people, who do not have the time to go through this four-year process if they are going to continue governing in whatever capacities they govern. So we get people who either hold an elected office that they do not have to spend much time at or are out of elective office at the time.

Jesse Jackson in that sense was the perfect candidate. He had no other responsibilities. He had no worries about money to live on. Being also charismatic and a good speaker, he was as close to an ideal candidate, except for his color, that one can have in this kind of system.

This was the first year that the New York primary has been important in almost two decades. In the past New York has been either too early or too late. This time it was important because of the confrontation between Jews and blacks over Jackson. New York was followed by Pennsylvania, and Pennsylvania would not vote for a Jesse Jackson. Pennsylvania Democrats, except for the black population, are among the most conservative Democrats in the United States. They include many "ethnic" union members, Catholics for the most part, who are really quite conservative people except when their own interests are concerned. Jackson was bound to do terribly in the hinterland of Pennsylvania and he did. So when Dukakis hit on two victories in a row, that gave him momentum and that was it.

#### **Why Did Jackson Do So Well?**

Why did Jackson do so well? Partly because the situation was almost rigged for him, partly because he is a very attractive candidate, and in great part because he articulated something that a lot of people in the Democratic party wanted to hear. He represents a real wing of the Democratic party, not a fluke.

The Democratic party is a party that has a very strong left wing that has a primary concern with domestic rather than foreign policy issues; both Dukakis and Jackson reflect that. When it does have foreign policy concerns, it has a strong sympathy with the Third World a priori -- in other words, the West is always wrong. It shares a feeling that Reagan has somehow raped the country by diverting America from its goals of social progress as they understand them. In many cases its supporters experienced some personal decline of income or status during the Reagan years, which in this case strongly helped Jackson. Finally, they took aesthetic pleasure in hearing the vision of social harmony through government action that Jackson presented. Jackson filled the bill in every single one of those categories; he was right on target. Of course it

is a sign of progress in the United States that a black leader, and a radical black leader at that, could do so well, one who is not even liked by his fellow black leaders, who probably represented most of the seven percent of the blacks who voted against him in the primaries.

There are a lot of Americans who believe that other Americans will not vote for a black. In my opinion, today there are enough Americans who will vote for a black candidate to elect a black president of the United States. It has to be somebody like Jesse Jackson who carries such an overwhelming vision with him that his blackness becomes incidental. It cannot be just some ordinary black leader. An ordinary black leader will have a more difficult time than an ordinary white leader, but a compelling black leader can move ahead on the basis of the compelling vision that he enunciates. That is why Jackson is an important figure and an important phenomenon who expresses something quite real in American society and particularly in the Democratic party. This was evident in the Michigan primary where all of these factors came together strongly for Jackson.

The fact that it did not work that way in Wisconsin is partly due to Wisconsin's open primary in which Republicans can vote in the Democratic primary and Democrats in the Republican primary. There were probably quite a few Republicans who, hearing that the University of Wisconsin crowd were about to put Jesse Jackson over in Wisconsin, voted against him.

#### **Looking Toward the November Election**

The election is a toss-up at this point. We have two relatively lackluster candidates who will acquire more stature as time goes on simply by acting as presidential candidates. That is a natural process. They will both appear increasingly presidential at about the same pace, barring some slip on the part of one or the other of them.

If anything, Michael Dukakis has a

slight lead over his GOP rival. On the other hand, the Democratic party is showing all the signs of a party that is on its way to becoming a minority party, at least in presidential politics. It is a party which may have removed itself too far from the American mainstream. Parties in primary elections tend to be the preserves of their activists. In 1964, Barry Goldwater won the Republican presidential nomination because the Republican activists loved him and came out to vote. At the time the activists were repelled by Rockefeller, but had been told for years that they had to support Eastern liberals so as to have a chance to win the presidency. This time they said, "For once we are going to have a candidate that we want." So they got Goldwater and went down to disastrous defeat, but in the process laid the groundwork for rebuilding the Republican party in their image.

The Democrats are now in a position where their activists are doing what they want rather than considering the mainstream, only they are at the end of two generations of party dominance -- historically the limit for any party in the past -- not at the end of two generations of being in the wilderness. So the long-range prognosis for the Democratic party is more isolation and fewer victories, at least in presidential races.

It is interesting that Governor Dukakis apparently represents the acceptable wing of the Democratic party, although ideologically he is a McGovernite. Between 1972 when George McGovern was nominated by the left wing of the party and 1988, the Democratic party now defines the McGovernites as the mainstream. This is a critical shift.

The election should be very close. The Republicans are behaving strictly like Republicans, very institutionalized, very unexciting, but they probably are closer to the mainstream of the American voters of today, especially if Bush can put just enough distance between himself and the unpopular side of Reagan's policies, which

he could possibly do. Dukakis, on the other hand, cuts a more attractive public figure which will help him. Americans this year seem to want authenticity rather than flash. If so, Dukakis' sober middle class authenticity seems more attractive than the preppy authenticity of George Bush.

For the Democrats the best-case scenario would be that Bush can be tarred heavily with Irangate. The Democrats have carefully avoided using that issue in the primaries. They are saving it to be able to turn full weight on Bush in September or October, and they may even be able to do it.

For the Republicans, their best-case scenario would be to keep Dukakis in the McGovernite posture and bring that out, which is a more sophisticated thing to do. The American people do not yet know where Dukakis stands on most issues because he has been fighting a primary battle where one does not have to go into details. Nor will he if he can help it. The Republicans' best-case prospect is to try to combine Dukakis' inexperience in foreign policy with a sense that his policy is far removed from the American mainstream, that it is far too appeasing of anti-American forces in the world.

The one thing that will be very hard to do in this campaign will be to challenge Dukakis on domestic issues or to challenge Bush on foreign policy issues other than Iran. The Reagan administration is coming in now with a rapprochement with Russia and the Republicans will say over and over again that the Democrats call them hawks but they are making peace with the Russians just as Nixon did with China, that the Democrats speak about peace but historically get the U.S. into wars. They will make this point over and over again -- vote for us because the hardliners are more likely to keep the peace. Since the American people basically treasure their lives above everything else in the world, except maybe their property, this has a very strong appeal.

### The Impact on Israel

What will be the impact on Israel? George Shultz was absolutely right when he said to Israel, "Take advantage of my good offices because you are not likely to get such a good deal next time around." Dukakis has a Jewish wife and there could be a Seder in the White House, but like Jimmy Carter who felt very close to Jews per se and who also has first cousins who are Jews, when it comes to Israel there is no reason to believe that he will be a particularly good friend in a practical sense. At the height of the New York primary where politicians promise anything, Dukakis would not commit himself to a unified Jerusalem in any peace settlement. He advocated pressing the Arabs to accept a state within the West Bank and believes that is a fair peace settlement. Subsequently he came out for moving the American embassy to Jerusalem and against a separate Palestinian state. His Jewish supporters have great faith in his pro-Israel commitment, especially in light of his wife's strong support for Israel, but the matter remains open.

Bush also has not shown himself to be a special friend of Israel. He has come out against a Palestinian state and he may even mean it. That is now a mainstream position in the Republican party so he does not have any trouble having to take that stance. Israelis in Israel speak well of his past behavior. But still the new team will not be Reagan and Shultz.

With the passing of the Reagan era, there is some question as to whether we will ever again see a U.S. president who is

personally committed to Israel because of his culture and the environment in which he grew up. Reagan is the last 19th century American president, the last president to be elected who was born before World War I when the 19th century essentially came to an end. He grew up in an environment in which the Bible was read, where it was an important book which taught that Jews were an important people and that Israel had a special place in world history because of its historic association with the Jewish people.

Subsequent generations were just not raised in that way and do not know such things. Lyndon Baines Johnson was a pro-Zionist of that school. No one expected that there would be another such president after Johnson, but by a fluke we got Reagan and Israel benefited considerably. To also have an honorable man like Shultz has made a great deal of difference for us. While we may get honorable men like that or friends of Israel again, neither of the next two candidates look as if they are going to be as friendly and we will just have to live with it.

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