

## Mike Huckabee - A Political Profile

Mike who? Most Americans hear "Huckabee" and think (a) it's a spin-off restaurant from the Applebee's chain, or (b) that Fox Searchlight movie from 2004 with Dustin Hoffman and Lily Tomlin. But, no Mike Huckabee is a real candidate with real ambitions, and he has lately surged ahead in the polls, trouncing John McCain and giving Rudy Giuliani some serious heat, despite Huckabee's having raised only a paltry sum of campaign contributions so far. So what kind of President will he make?

People who recall well the Clinton administration will recognize something special in Huckabee: he's got charisma to spare. While Clinton showed everybody how cool he was by playing the saxophone on The Arsenio Hall Show, earning criticism from the right wing that he was "the MTV President", Huckabee can rock out with a bass guitar with his band, "Capitol Offense". So who's the MTV candidate now? Huckabee also has the advantage of being an ordained Southern Baptist minister and a professional public speaker, so he can give a great speech and he won't need to rely on speech-writers and cue-cards.

Huckabee spent his first term as Governor of Arkansas doing largely bread-and-butter civic functions. He attended to trivial matters like managing taxes and instituting a new school program and a health insurance plan. Nothing too radical or controversial here. He did run aground of some minor auditing from the Arkansas Ethics Commission over inappropriate use of funds and failing to report a minor contribution, but otherwise managed to stay level.

His second term saw some more tax tweaking and another school improvement program. His most famous act of 2000 was to move into a trailer home on the grounds of the Arkansas Governor's Mansion while the mansion was being renovated. Although the trailer was barely roomy enough and was a humbling dwelling for a Governor and his family, the move saved the state a costly sum since they didn't have to relocate his entire staff, had he chosen fancier digs elsewhere in town. He was also named ?Friend of a Taxpayer? by Americans for Tax Reform in 2001.

One cannot escape the religious influence on the Governor. He has been the very model of a "Christian Conservative", moving to increase the sacredness of the marriage act by instituting covenant marriages, and proclaiming October "Student Religious Liberty Month" in an effort to encourage kids to pray in school. He has of course sided with pro-life issues, and has delivered impassioned speeches outlining why he felt pro-life is important.

For being fiscally conservative, he has used tobacco companies as a cash cow,

first funneling all funds from the state's tobacco settlement into the health care system, then increasing cigarette taxes later. He has raised taxes some, but overall has done the minimum necessary to balance the books. During his time in office, welfare rolls declined by nearly half while the state's economy grew at a rate faster than the national average.

"Time" magazine named him one of the five best governors in the U.S. in 2005. He has found the media very easy to charm, having appeared on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" to make the obligatory chin joke, appearing on "Meet the Press", and he has popped up on TV and print on a semi-regular basis. In his bid to lose weight at a time when his weight severely threatened his health, he ran in the 2005 Marine Corps Marathon, the Little Rock Marathon in 2005 and 2006, and the 2006 New York City Marathon. Not only did he finish these and successfully meet his target weight, but he wrote a book bearing testimony to the power of healthy weight management and won an award for his work as a "health crusader" from the American Association of Retired Persons.

All has not been rosy in the Huckabee garden, however. There was a scandal involving a violent criminal whom Huckabee released, and said criminal went on to commit further crimes. Huckabee has also come under fire for his tax-and-spend record, from groups such as "Club for Growth". He earned an "F" from the Cato Institute for spending and taxing policy in 2006. It seems like they are a lot of feisty attack dogs nipping at his heels; other groups also criticized him for not raising taxes enough, and when he brought up the creative solution of a "tax me more" fund where people could voluntarily pay money to the state if they felt taxes weren't high enough, he was further criticized for making a "campaign move".

Indeed, he has a bad habit of drawing fire for his off-the-cuff remarks. He tends to phrase things in religious terms a little more than is good for a politician. He has also written a book, "Kids Who Kill: Confronting Our Culture of Violence", in which he quite clearly demonizes homosexuality, environmentalism, sadomasochism, and other legal and victimless alternative lifestyle practices. Even his recent Christmas ad drew fire for having a very obvious and deliberate cross in the background. Huckabee has stated very firmly that he believes religion and politics cannot be separated at all, and he'd be the last one to try anyway.

One thing for certain, we have Huckabee all out in the open. About the best way to sum up his likely popularity as President is to steal from Abe Lincoln: "people who like this sort of thing will find this to be the sort of thing they like."

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