

PERRY VS. PARRY

by Edwin D. Reilly, Jr.
for the Sunday Gazette

By now, dear reader, you certainly know that the fact that native Iowan Michelle Bachmann edged out Ron Paul in the Iowa Republican straw poll, and that, historically, this is a virtual guarantee that she cannot win that state's caucus of next February 6. But Jimmy Carter won both the Democratic straw poll and that party's caucus in 1976 when Michelle was a Democrat. I've read that she attended the Carter inauguration of January, 1977, as I did. Could I have danced with her at the Inaugural Ball? Probably not; there were several of them, and even if she went to the same one as I did, Jean would have frowned on my dancing with a pretty 21-year-old. Or a homely one, for that matter.

It is amazing how fast the initial field of eight Republican candidates has thinned out. The only actual dropout is former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, both because of a poor showing and lack of money. I'm sorry that he did, because although I don't think any of the (still) eight Republican candidates has much chance against even a wounded President Obama, Pawlenty was one of the only three who, if elected, would likely leave me alone for four years rather than making me live his life as Richard Nixon forced me to do. The other two are Mitt Romney and, my favorite, guaranteeing that he won't be nominated, John Huntsman.

The talking heads say that the race for the Republican nomination is down to three finalists. As Chris Matthews said on the night I went to the keyboard, "This weekend the Republican Party baked its cake...It's got two layers—Bachman and Romney—and a Perry on top.

Perry? Who he? Well, for one, he is the Rick "Good Hair" Perry as the late great Molly Ivins used to call him.

James Richard "Rick" Perry, 61, is the 47th and current Governor of Texas. A Republican now, he was once a Democrat who, in 1988, was chair of the "Al Gore for President" campaign in Texas. In October 2007, political convert Perry endorsed Rudy Giuliani for President.

Perry was elected Lt. Governor of Texas in 1998 and assumed the governorship in December 2000 when then-governor George W. Bush resigned in preparation to assume the Presidency. Perry was elected to full gubernatorial terms in 2002, 2006, and 2010. In office over ten years, Perry is currently the longest continuously serving U.S. governor. He has never lost an election, and in 2010 surprised all non-Texans by defeating the very popular U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison in a primary. Eight days ago, Perry announced that he was running for the Republican nomination for President of the United States in 2012.

When Perry rose from Lt. Governor to Governor in late 2000, he actually lost much power. Under the somewhat bizarre Texas system, it is the Lieutenant Governor who leads the state, leaving the governor to run around cutting ribbons and making speeches (which Perry does very well). The pair does not even run as a team, so that they are often of ostensibly opposing political parties.

The Wikipedia article on Rick Perry seems to be "fair and balanced" as I write, but by the time you look at it on Sunday it will probably have been revised many times as friend and foe alike joust to add and revert text posted by those of an opposite view. Why, as of 2:08 a.m. as I write, it was last revised at 3:24 a.m. Pretty good trick, though I suppose that revision was made by someone in a time zone to the east, in Newfoundland, probably, by someone who has escaped from Texas.

Wiki told me that Perry had authored several books (which is not necessarily the same as having written them). Learning that his latest, committed late last year, is called "Fed Up! Our fight to save America from Washington." So I took my Nook from the crook of its hook to look to see if "Fed Up" could be fed down to me. Sure enough, it exists as an e-book, for which I quickly paid \$9.95 and downloaded it in four or five seconds.

Surprise! The book is very well written, quite entertaining, and though replete with opinions that I don't agree with, I found no obvious factual error. Of its 195 pages, only 150 contain text that Perry is accountable for, the first 14 being mainly a boring Foreword written by the hand (not the eye) of Newt, now a feeble competitor to Perry. Most of the last 30 pages consist of extensive numbered notes keyed to marked points in each of the books ten chapters. Early in the book, Perry says "Now cynics will say that I decided to write this book because I seek higher office. They are wrong. I already have the best job in America."

Forgive him his first broken promise; Perry appears to be a "most happy fellow," and we are in for a very entertaining ride. The book is very well organized and reads quickly and smoothly, but as I do so I do not hear Perry's voice in my head. My acoustical imagination cannot detect his strong Texas accent, and my visual imagination cannot picture the cowboy-booted fellow I see swaggering on the tube.

Like his rival Michelle Bachmann, Perry is an anti-scientist, giving no credence to global warming and wanting "intelligent design" taught in schools in parallel with evolution, which they consider to be "just a theory." But Perry is pro-technology and holds the view shared by my son Peter that President Obama has virtually eliminated our space program; he and Perry want to go "to infinity and beyond." Perry favors enhanced use of all forms of energy production, but, like T. Boone Pickens, would prefer to cut back on oil in favor of natural gas.

Perry touts that Texas has a lower unemployment rate than the national average, which it does, about a point lower than 9.1 percent. What he doesn't tell you is that the 8 percent or so of Texas is higher than that of every state that borders Texas: New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. He also says that in recent times "Texas has created more jobs than the other 49 states combined." Yes, but Jim Hightower, a national radio commentator from Texas, says that a more accurate statement would be that Texas has created more minimum wage jobs than all of the other 49 states combined.

Perry deplores FDR's New Deal, especially the creation of Social Security, and regrets that Lyndon Johnson tried to impose a Great Society. The book is the best defense of state's rights that I have ever read. But to his taste, there would be little left for the federal government to do if he could have his way. He thinks that citizens should be allowed to own any kind of gun, even AK-47s, and is proud that Texas allows and promotes the carrying of concealed weapons, as he does.

Texas has executed 234 people over Perry's decade of service. He fervently believes in what is (erroneously) called the death "penalty," and like all who do, apparently never stop to think that if you execute that many people, then there is a statistically high probability that you have executed at least one innocent person. Such people must be made to answer: are you willing to execute, unknowingly of course, one innocent person out of every 100 so "penalized"? Out of every 1,000? Out of every 100 million? If you think hard, it is morally wrong to permit this no matter how high the number.

Well, time will tell whether the electorate will perceive Perry as another Reagan or as just a snake oil salesman. Perry whistles a good tune, but Chris Matthews predicts that the media will now mount an intensive investigatory scrutiny of his record since childhood, and that thus he had better be found "clean as a whistle." But, as Stephen Sondheim wrote, "Anyone Can Whistle."

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