

Here's Who Richard Viguerie Says Should Be Trump's VP

When I asked CHQ readers to help me crowd-source a running mate for Donald Trump, I was already thinking that former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum would make a good prospect, but I wanted to see if CHQ readers saw the same creative disruption in the selection of Trump's running mate that Trump wrought on the presidential nomination in the primaries.

I think the answer is yes, and here are my reasons why Rick Santorum should be added to Trump's short list as an almost perfect match for the criteria expressed by Donald Trump, the CHQ GOP VP poll, and those I developed in the previous columns in this series.

First, let me cover the most important reasons that I think Rick Santorum makes a better prospect than our other top-vote getters in the CHQ GOP VP poll:

Rick has the national campaign experience and exposure that Senator Jeff Sessions lacks.

Santorum outlasted Newt to run second to Mitt Romney in the 2012 primaries, and won eleven states with a plurality of the vote, including the swing state of Iowa. He also won North Dakota, Missouri, Kansas, Minnesota, Colorado, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana.

Senator Santorum developed and maintains a national network of young, politically active, culturally conservative families that are exactly the kind of voters who are struggling with Trump's decidedly non-conservative cultural history.

Santorum is an icon among right-to-life and pro-family voters for being a politician, like Sarah Palin, who really lives by pro-life and pro-family values. Therefore, putting him on the

ticket would do much to allay the concerns pro-lifers have about Donald Trump's apparent flip-flops on pro-life issues.

Finally, although he endorsed Marco Rubio, unlike Ted Cruz, Rick Santorum has no negative history with Donald Trump. After Rubio suspended his campaign, Santorum readily endorsed Trump and said he would campaign with him and for him.

Next, there was no other candidate on the trail this cycle whose views on trade and job creation more closely match Donald Trump's than do Rick Santorum's.

Santorum's 2012 campaign in behalf America's forgotten working families in many ways presaged Trump's 2016 campaign themes. Santorum knows Trump's issues on jobs and manufacturing, and won't have to learn them or explain away a lot of contradictory comments or conflicting policy positions and votes. Aside from Senator Sessions, no one else comes as close to matching Trump's views on this key issue.

While Senator Santorum didn't get much traction with it this cycle, he has a stellar record on national security and national defense issues, especially on Iran. Santorum was the author of the original Iran sanctions regime and is exceptionally well informed on the war Islam has declared on the West. He has the background and brains to help Donald Trump put meat on the policy bones he regularly tosses out.

Speaking of policy, another area where Santorum has not gotten the credit he deserves is in the policy development field. Santorum was elected chairman of the Senate Republican Conference in 2000, the party's third-ranking leadership position in the Senate and was responsible for helping to formulate and sell Republican policy during the early years of the George W. Bush administration.

I think even Santorum's detractors would agree he was effective in that role, and most importantly from my perspective, he helped push the Senate GOP substantially to

the Right.

In addition to serving as chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, Santorum also founded the Congressional Working Group on Religious Freedom, accomplishments that rank with Jim Jordan's leadership of the Republican Study Committee and founding of the House Freedom Caucus.

What's more, the Congressional Working Group on Religious Freedom included members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and met monthly to address issues such as the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, tax-exempt status for churches, the CARE act, international religious freedom, and anti-Semitism.

That's a pretty good match for Donald Trump's stated goal of having a vice president who knows Washington and can work with Congress to help sell Trump's agenda on the Hill. It is also a record of leadership that gives him credibility as president, fulfilling the second half of Donald Trump's job description for his VP.

While no one could say that any competitor matches Newt Gingrich's policy chops, Santorum comes as close as any prospect we've discussed and he comes without the baggage that Newt would bring to the ticket. If Donald Trump wants a vice president who knows Congress and can help him sell his program on Capitol Hill, he would be hard-pressed to find a better running mate than Rick Santorum.

Of course there are some downsides to Santorum as a VP candidate that must be acknowledged. He never got the same kind of traction in 2016 that he had in 2012, and there was a general feeling (shared by me) that Rick had missed his moment in the aftermath of the 2012 election when he sort of fell off the radar for the better part of two years.

Rick has also not been bashful about calling for and saying he would use strong executive powers, as has Donald Trump. Many

conservatives, myself included, were critical of how he did not stand up to President George W. Bush's expansion of big government and executive power during Rick's time in the Senate leadership. The fact that he reinforces Trump in that regard is not necessarily a positive thing.

Because of Santorum's time away from the Senate, and how the conservative movement more generally has come around on how the Bush administration's big-government ways and accretions of executive power were not just wrong, but helped set bad precedent for some of the unconstitutional excesses of the Obama administration, I count him as open to and educable on the constitutional limits on executive power. He would do well, however, to assure constitutional conservatives of his commitment to the proper limitations on executive power and his fidelity to small-government, constitutional principles.

Most importantly, however, for purposes of preventing what would be a disastrous and ruinous episode for America—a Hillary Clinton presidency following eight years of Barack Obama—Rick Santorum as Trump's VP selection would unite the establishment wing of the GOP with the conservative movement. Neither of these two major wings of the Party could claim that Santorum as the VP pick would be a disaster. With all his qualities, he bridges the often-wide gap between the leaders of the GOP establishment and the conservative movement. For Trump, who has given both the conservative movement and the GOP establishment cause for concern, Rick Santorum is almost uniquely suited to help soothe both factions in ways that would help defeat Hillary.

The bottom line is, to my way of thinking, Rick Santorum would, as no other candidate except Ted Cruz, help Trump complete the circle necessary to build a winning populist-conservative coalition by bringing culturally conservative pro-lifers into the fold. He knows Washington and Capitol Hill and certainly after his strong run in 2012 and his leadership in the Senate "could be viewed as somebody who

could be president.”

Putting a candidate on the ticket so clearly identified with the pro-life cultural conservative agenda would do more than merely placate conservatives as the old rules of vice presidential selection would dictate. Rick Santorum is clearly “one of us” a long-time movement conservative, and it is hard to imagine pro-life cultural conservatives not backing a Trump–Santorum ticket.

Rick Santorum is my conservative dark horse who should be on Donald Trump’s short list. I’ve got a new poll with just the top prospects up, please click the link and tell me whether or not you agree that Rick Santorum should be the conservative dark horse on Donald Trump’s VP short list. {eo}

Richard A. Viguerie transformed American politics in the 1960s and '70s by pioneering the use of direct mail fundraising in the political and ideological spheres. He used computerized direct mail fundraising to help build the conservative movement, which then elected Ronald Reagan as the first conservative president of the modern era. As the “Funding Father of the conservative movement,” Viguerie motivated millions of Americans to participate in politics for the first time, greatly expanding the base of active citizenship. He is our era’s equivalent of Tom Paine, using a direct mail letter rather than a pamphlet to deliver his call to arms.