

Why Picking Mitt Romney for Secretary of State Might Be a Genius Move

Liberal political opinion-maker Damon Linker of *The Week*—hardly a fan of President-elect Donald Trump—says the soon-to-be 45th President of the United States is a political genius.

And, if the rumors are true, Trump's IQ (according to researchers, it's a 156) would place him among the top 0.1 percent of people in the world. Again, if it's true, then only about one in 4,300 people in the world is as smart as the president-elect.

Judging from the moves he's made so far, I'm inclined to agree with the assessments, even if it puts me in an awkward place with the rest of my politically connected evangelical friends.

The Wall Street Journal is reporting that former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, a two-time failed GOP presidential candidate, is the man Trump is inclined to nominate as his secretary of state. It's not just that Romney is the front-runner for the job, but also that people in the president-elect's inner circle say the governor's the one Trump wants to nominate.

I'm about to explain why that would be the most politically genius move yet for Trump, but I need to preface this statement with some honest admissions.

I didn't vote for Romney in 2012, largely because—without getting mired in the details—I didn't see any difference in domestic policy between his agenda and the one already in place under President Barack Obama. I was as much a #NeverRomney guy as he was (and probably remains) a

#NeverTrump guy.

So what I'm about to say doesn't come from any sort of fanboy-type self-destructive idolatry. Rather, just as I've been providing since the onset of the presidential horse race last year, it's an honest assessment of the current political situation.

Let's break this down point by point.

#NeverTrumpers

Even if the president-elect becomes the most successful president in history, the #NeverTrumpers won't go away. These are folks who staked their reputations—and in some cases, their careers—on Trump being a failure.

I'd love to be wrong, but I firmly believe that by this time in 2018, we'll start hearing talk about a grassroots conservative movement to oust the president as the 2020 GOP nominee. Such a movement will face an incredibly stiff headwind from the Republican Party, meaning the movement's champion will have to be a self-funded candidate.

Of the #NeverTrumpers out there, only Romney meets that qualification.

Keeping Him Closer

So why bring a sworn enemy not just inside the inner circle of the administration, but four heartbeats away from the presidency (secretary of state is fourth in the line of presidential succession)? Simple: it's all about keeping your friends close and your enemies closer.

By nominating Romney, Trump creates the appearance—even if it's just political theater—of handing an olive branch to the #NeverTrump faction in a gesture meant to help unify the country. The Trump Train knows it isn't. The #NeverTrumpers know it isn't, too.

What matters, though, is the American public believes it. It would be foolish (and politically disadvantageous—call it political mutually assured destruction) for either side to suggest otherwise.

The Department of State

So why the State Department? For the same reasons President Obama nominated Hillary Clinton—his biggest political rival—for the job, despite knowing about the Clinton Foundation and its wheeling-dealing ways (if you don't believe that, I've got some prime real estate in Monroe County, Florida you might be interested in).

While it's never been codified, the role of the State Department is entirely apolitical. Yes, politics are still a part of its functions, particularly when advancing the sitting president's agenda, but it is frequently seen as the one department of government that cannot advocate for or against domestic political issues.

Historically, the secretary of state does not engage in politics. And, as Trump's secretary of state-designate, Romney is effectively removed from the equation as a possible 2020 challenger for the GOP nomination, much the same way Clinton was removed as a potential 2012 spoiler for Obama.

At his current age, 69, there won't be a 2024 election for Romney.

Qualifications

Beyond the political three-dimensional chess move of appointing Romney as Secretary of State, there's also the matter of qualifications. Regardless of what you may think of his personal policy positions, the governor is infinitely qualified to be the nation's top diplomat.

In 1966, he launched a 30-month mission trip (he's a Mormon)

to France and is well-traveled across Europe. In the early 1970s, early in his business career, he worked alongside a young Benjamin Netanyahu, and the two have remained close personal friends ever since.

Then, in 2002, Romney both figuratively and literally saved the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. In doing so, he made connections with leaders from nations around the world, another key ingredient for success as secretary of state.

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So, as you can see, while nominating Romney may not be the best team-building exercise, it may be the most politically genius move Trump has made. And, looking back on the 2016 presidential campaign, that's saying something. {eoe}

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