

Rush Limbaugh claims victory in Pennsylvania

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While the title might sound odd, Limbaugh's insatiable ego will not allow him to resist tarnishing Hillary Clinton's presidential ambitions with a strong dose of reality - as well as his confession to his personal involvement in corrupting the presidential election.

The back-story is riveting. In March, Limbaugh launched his infamous, "Operation Chaos," a devious anti-democratic plan devised to undermine the Democratic presidential nominee who he believes will be: Senator Barack Obama. In several of his broadcasts, Limbaugh implored his legions of devout right-wing followers to cast aside their Republican inhibitions and vote in the Democratic primaries for Obama's rival: Senator Hillary Clinton.

Limbaugh's rationale? Obama's momentum had morphed into a genuine grassroots movement, and it had to be stopped at all costs - even unto the gross hypocrisy of asking diehard Republicans to change their party registrations and cast their malicious votes for Hillary Clinton to poison Obama's candidacy.

Is Limbaugh's plot to defeat the first African-American candidate for the presidency: (A) insidious or (B) nefarious? Probably, both.

Come to think of it, is Operation Chaos really Limbaugh's plan at all - or was it designed by somebody else? Who knows - other than Limbaugh and his co-conspirators?



Limbaugh schmoozes with Matalin at a right-wing cocktail party.

That said, James Carville and Mary Matalin are worthy suspects. Carville is a close and long-serving factotum for the Clinton family. Carville's wife, Matalin, is a top-ranking Republican operative who works in the Bush White House. It is well documented that Matalin is a longstanding ally and admirer of Rush Limbaugh. Matalin has appeared on his show to tout her appalling books. The two are frequently photographed at right-wing cocktail parties. They appear to be on warm and friendly terms.

The night after the Pennsylvania primary, Limbaugh crowed,

[What Obama has to do is go out and say this \[Hillary\] win is artificial and this win is phony because of Operation Chaos. He needs to go out there and say, 'Why in the world is everybody taking this seriously? Rush Limbaugh had his listeners register as Democrats for one day to go vote for Hillary to prolong this. We're letting Limbaugh get away with making our party look like it's in a total sewer and a mess. This victory in Pennsylvania is illegitimate, is undeserved because Democrats did not vote for her. Republicans did.](#)

QED. Republican operatives working with Hillary Clinton's campaign have introduced a new mechanism into the presidential nomination process: flooding the polls with Republican crossovers.

Of the final primaries, Indiana and Montana are both "open" elections - where members of any party can vote for any candidate. In Indiana and Montana, Limbaugh's Republican crossovers will be out in force to sabotage Obama by voting for Clinton.

Since Limbaugh is claiming that thousands of Republicans are capable of changing their party affiliation to corrupt the presidential election process, none of the other closed primaries are above suspicion.

The entire 'democratic' system in the United States of America is broken. From Republican crossovers to Diebold, Sequoia, ES&S, Katherine Harris who dealt the death blow to democracy in Florida and J. Kenneth Blackwell who sabotaged the election of 2004, America is staggering toward its new status as a Mugabesque nightmare ruled by invisible Leviathans, audible Limbaughs and deserate, presidential campaigns embroiled in vendettas that would make Michael Corleone cringe.

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Less than one week ago, a scandal hit the presidential campaign of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. The Clinton campaign's Chief Strategist, Mark Penn, was exposed in a searing conflict of interest between his position in the presidential campaign and his other job: CEO of the massive multinational PR giant, Burson Marsteller. While his most prominent client, Senator Clinton, was firmly on record opposing the proposed trade agreement with Colombia, Burson Marsteller were negotiating a healthy contract to represent the South American government in future trade negotiations.

When the scandal hit the front pages, Penn duly resigned from his post as Chief Strategist for the Clinton campaign. This was actually a very odd maneuver. Only two months before in a media interview shortly after the Clinton campaign's disaster on Super Tuesday, Penn had denied that he was serving as Chief Strategist. In a swift response from the campaign's Communications Director, Howard Wolfson, Penn's denial of his responsibility for the damage he had caused the campaign was immediately refuted with Wolfson's assertion that Mark Penn was, indeed, the official Chief Strategist for the faltering campaign. The sacrifice of Penn's title is, therefore, virtually moot since he has been denying it for the past two months.

Penn has a very poor record with Senator Clinton. According to a massive number of reports now boiling out of the mainstream media as well as the blogs, Penn was personally responsible for the major flaw in the Clinton candidacy: her vote for the Iraq War in October 2002. Following on from that, Penn has faithfully followed a textbook Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) right-leaning course to navigate what has become the political equivalent of the Titanic, the Clinton presidential campaign, into the proverbial iceberg.

While the Titanic was proclaimed “unsinkable” in its press releases prior to its maiden voyage, Penn proudly proclaimed Clinton’s nomination “inevitable” in his now notorious memo of last summer. Penn created unrealistic expectations for the campaign, based on his deeply flawed polling that he thought indicated Clinton’s inherent supremacy over the field challenging her for the nomination. In a very public memo of his own John Zogby lamented Penn’s exaggerations of Clinton’s popularity, and the community of political consultants shuddered at the very mention of Penn’s lengthening list of blunders.

Penn has consistently misread his own polls – if, indeed, they were polls at all. In defining the core message of the Clinton candidacy, Penn opted for “experience” as a firewall against Obama’s plea for “change.” This singular judgment alone is sufficient evidence to indict Penn for professional incompetence. With the American nation yearning for relief, release and re-launch after the nightmarish journey through the darkening Bush-Cheney Era, Penn preferred the mythology of a pair of steady hands on the wheel of the ship of state as opposed to bringing aboard a new pilot to steer away from the banks and shoals still submerged beneath the surface.

At this point, it is probably time to revisit Penn’s role and relationship with the Clinton dynasty. The picture that emerges is at once lucid, revealing and troubling. In 1996 Clinton’s Chief Strategist, Dick Morris, sensed problems emerging between himself and their official pollster, Stanley Greenberg. In conversations between the two men, it had become clear that Greenberg would not accept Morris’ every dictum. The two men have gigantic egos as well as long and checkered histories with their most prominent client, the Clinton family. In 1990, Morris had been the victim of Bill Clinton when a midnight conference had devolved into an impromptu bout of fisticuffs, a story preserved by the sage senior consultant, Ray Strother, in his little known book, *Falling Up*.

After healing his wounds and repairing his relationship with the Clintons – procedures that required several years – Morris returned to favor for the 1996 campaign. By that time, Greenberg had been ensconced in his comfortable seat as the court’s pollster for the previous five years. However, cracks and fissures had emerged in their professional relationships. Greenberg had failed to prevent the seizure of Congress by the Republicans during the Gingrich revolution. He had other issues, a burgeoning international practice that was making him the richest political pollster in world history.

From Morris’ perspective, the most unattractive feature of his business relationship with Greenberg was that he feared a challenge to his supremacy at the Clintons’ court. In other words, Morris needed a pollster who would play by Morris’ set of rules and deliver a consistent stream of numbers that would support his strategic profile. In Greenberg, Morris saw a pollster who certainly could not be trusted to play the game by house rules.

Fearing an internal challenge to his authority, Morris sabotaged Greenberg and swiftly introduced Mark Penn, a malleable apparatchik who was making a name for himself by providing his clients with numbers that re-enforced their own ideas of strategy – ie. telling clients what they wanted to hear as opposed to delving deeply into the psyche of the nation to extract the kernels of wisdom that could drive a winning strategy. Convinced of his own wisdom and the strategy he derived from it, Morris did produce a decisive victory in the 1996 campaign re-enforced by Mark Penn’s compliant and predictable numbers.

Since 1996, Penn has acquired many new clients as well as ascending to the majestic heights of what is known as the “PR industry” as CEO of Burson Marsteller. However, it

would seem that what he has gained in contacts and influence has not allowed him to keep pace with his core mission: polling. Polling is far from what it is claimed to be. It is not by any stretch of the imagination, an exact science. In fact, it does not hold any claim to scientific status whatsoever. Polling is actually a liberal art that merely deploys numbers at a very low level - ie. statistics - to produce what is deceptively labeled a 'scientific' method. 'Scientisitic' would be more accurate, because public opinion polling merely pretends to its scientific majesty.

Returning to the disintegration of the strategic matrix devised by Mark Penn for Senator Hillary Clinton, in retrospect it is now possible to pinpoint other miscalculations. First and foremost we observe Penn's total failure to understand the public perception of their primary opponent, Senator Barack Obama. While Penn, the Clintons, their top staff including Patti Solis Doyle, Howard Wolfson and even Maggie Williams all saw Obama as a black candidate, they presumed that the public saw the same image. They were wrong. Dead wrong. Obama is an unusual candidate to be sure but not solely because of his rich racial and cultural heritage. Like other presidential candidates who have launched massive popular movements, Obama has a thick and impenetrable coating of Teflon.

Guided by Penn, the Clinton campaign briefed the press in December that Obama was "unelectable." In so doing, they were actually strengthening him. By calling attention to Obama's race, the Clintonistas clad him in the proverbial Teflon armor. Crude attempts devised by Republicans wishing to strengthen Senator Clinton's presidential aspirations by launching racial and religious hate mail hit Obama in the chest and bounced off - even when it was directed at targets in the Deep South. The mainstream media recognized the hands at work behind the scenes as well as those at work in front the cameras and microphones, and Senator Obama's suit of Teflon was tailored to a nicety coating him in a hardly invisible shield of invincibility. The Rezko rumors did nothing to stop Obama's momentum. Neither did the anomalous result in New Hampshire that was almost certainly hacked by Republican covert operatives according to Bill Maher and David Griscom, author of *Binomial analysis: Was the New Hampshire Primary Stolen on Behalf of Hillary?* Guided by Axelrod and Plouffe, Obama went with the flow, got the breaks largely through the backlash against Penn's blundering, and the tide turned in favor of his now compelling message, "change."

Penn's attempt to get tough with Obama backfired. Then Penn's attempt to invoke fear through the 3:00 am television commercial backfired. Every appeal to Clinton's "experience" against Obama's so-called inexperience backfired in Penn's face.

At the beginning of April and swiftly drawing down to the final relevant primaries in Pennsylvania, Indiana and North Carolina, much more than the presidential nomination is on the line. The Clinton dynasty itself is now on the ropes.

As a result of his following Penn's advice - and a healthy dollop of his own miscalculation - Bill Clinton's personal popularity has plummeted to levels less than half of where he stood in late 2007. Hillary Clinton is now badly trailing Barack Obama in national polls. Worse news is yet to come for the Clintons for it is abundantly clear that Obama has become the phenomenon of this presidential cycle. With over one million contributors, Obama is the undisputed head of a genuine political movement that is demanding change. Every time Penn, Clinton or Wolfson invoke the e-word, it hurts the Clinton brand that is now seen as passé.

There is little need to point out that the Clintons' once massive popularity among the black

community has vanished. In a series of searing critiques of Bill Clinton's policies vis a vis draconian penalties for crack cocaine, tough law and order legislation as well as the disasters for the working class: NAFTA, CAFTA and the deletion of AFDC, the man who was once hailed as the first black president is now *persona non grata* in the hood where collective hopes of a new president who will bring meaningful reform are soaring free and easy on the winds of change.

Mark Penn should never have accepted Senator Hillary Clinton as a client. As CEO of Burson Marsteller, he had a full plate of professional responsibility. Penn over-reached, and his trademark *schtick* - telling clients what they want to hear before hitting them with the massive invoice - unraveled his career.

Penn's tragedy is much broader. The Clinton brand is now discredited. Hillary Clinton is now facing the prospect of deep and permanent damage to not only her personal credibility, but the Democratic Party has lost what was once its premiere brand. There is more. What is now lacking is any exit strategy for Hillary Clinton. The longer she twists slowly in the wind, the deeper and more irreparable the damage to the Clinton Brand. At this point, the best hope available for the Clinton brand is a graceful exit strategy. It should probably go something like this:

- A gracious concession speech as soon as possible after the North Carolina primary;
- Prior to the convention in August, a series of joint appearances featuring: Bill and Hillary happy, smiling, hugging and kissing Barack and Michelle with Chelsea lovingly holding hands with Malia and Sasha;
- Positive beaming references to the Obamas in every public statement from now until the election;
- A genuine commitment to progressive change in Congress;
- A total repudiation of the Bush-Cheney Era in every malevolent dimension of its malignant being;
- A stalwart commitment to a new era for democracy in America and its chief agency, the Democratic Party.

The Clinton family and their massive retinue of courtiers, attendants, hand-maidens, bards, court-jesters and fools has begun to take notice of the hand-writing on the wall. While it is impossible to blame her erstwhile Chief Strategist for every gaffe, mis-step and blunder in their now plague-ridden campaign - she has only herself to blame for her 'mis-statements' about her experience dodging bullets in Bosnia - Penn must bear the brunt of the professional criticism. Unlike his historical predecessor, Captain Edward John Smith of the flagship of the White Star Line, RMS Titanic, Penn leapt into a lifeboat and abandoned his role in the Clinton campaign leaving it to others to rearrange the deck chairs for the umpteenth time while he returns phone calls from uneasy clients of Burson Marsteller and even more disturbed members of the board.

With calls for Senator Clinton to abandon what is now seen as little more than a schismatic adventure that risks a fracture along a racial fault-line dividing the Democratic Party just as the Whig Party was fractured by race, some have deduced that the probable motive driving the sinking campaign deeper into the mire is a misplaced belief some attribute to James

Carville that they can torpedo Obama's presidential ambitions; survive the disaster of his loss to McCain and prevail as owners of the Democratic Party through the agency of the now discredited Democratic Leadership Council. With DLC operatives: James Carville, Stanley Greenberg and Terry McAuliffe safely back in charge of the DNC - and with that upstart Howard Dean back in Vermont - the Clintons can scheme their way to the presidential nomination in 2012 or so the theory goes.

One prognostication is perfectly clear: If she persists long after the final set of primaries, the damage to the Clinton brand will be irreversible.



SOURCES

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