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Smitten with Mitt TV

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To experience why former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney may be a better than even bet for next Leader of the Free World, point your web browser toward "[Mitt TV](#)," the streaming video site of Mitt Romney's presidential exploratory committee.

"Experience" is key here, because you won't get an understanding of his appeal from the print journalism caricature of telegenic (but Mormon) family values conservative (but Mormon) elected in liberal Massachusetts (in spite of being Mormon).

No one else in either party's field of presidential wannabes comes close to Romney's communication skill and executive presence. He makes Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., look like just another charming candidate for high school class president.

For the past year, I have been haranguing the college political journalists I teach with the prediction that Romney is going to get the Republican nomination and will likely be the next president, because Democrats have no farm team of successful governors. And America almost never elects a sitting member of Congress president (only three times in our history, Garfield in 1880, Harding in 1920 and Kennedy in 1960) because voters intuitively know the difference between a legislator and a leader.

But I have been hedging that bet lately, after George Bush drove Republicans over an electoral cliff in November, and because the Talibanic wing of the Republican Party is so out of sync with the center of the electorate on social and cultural issues. Can anyone wearing an elephant label overcome those liabilities in 2008, even if Democrats can draw a presidential candidate only from their legislative bench?

All of that was before I had actually seen more than a still photo of Romney. But now, having viewed the Mormon (did I mention Mormon?) ex-governor of liberal Massachusetts in digital, virtual reality flesh, every bone in my libertarian Democrat body tells me the presidency is Mitt Romney's to lose.

The images and sounds of the "savior" of the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Olympics bring to mind former White House press secretary Dee Dee Myers' observation about Bill Clinton: He seduces women, he seduces men, he seduces pets.

Mitt Romney is Bill Clinton with his pants up. And he'll very likely be cast in 2008 ("nominated," if you prefer the political science verb) against Clinton's wife, who has all the seductive qualities of John Kerry in a pants suit.

Kerry's problem in 2004 was not flip-flopping, not that he had changed his mind. Rather, he came off as a candidate whose mind often held two simultaneously competing views: for and against the war in Vietnam, for and against the war in Iraq.

Ms. Rodham Clinton (two competing names) would have you believe she is tough on defense for her initial support of the war in Iraq, at the same time she is also, now, against it. Or that perhaps, like Romney's father in his short-lived 1968 presidential candidacy, she was brainwashed into war support.

But unlike the late Michigan Gov. George Romney's son, and unlike her husband, but very much like Mr. Kerry, Ms. Clinton is unable to seduce you into a state of cognitive dissonance that will allow you to ignore the contradictions. Observe how Romney looks straight into the camera and almost laughs off his switch from gay rights in his failed Senate campaign to anti-gay marriage in his presidential bid. Just got 13 years older, more gray hair and wiser, he deadpans.

If all that reads like cheap armchair psychoanalysis of the candidates and the voters, go to Mitt TV and see what I mean. I scared myself. I believe the Iraq war is a nearly criminal enterprise. I'm a social-cultural leftie who

wants the government out of my bedroom and away from my body. But I was nearly mesmerized by a guy whose religion I consider akin to a cult, whose Iraq war support angers me and whose posturing against gays I find obnoxious.

So, I find it kind of appalling that I find him appealing.

Political seduction is a powerful drug.

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