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Too Cute to Fail?

Surveying the 2012 Republican presidential field

[Terry Michael](#) | July 29, 2011

The 2012 Republican presidential wannabes may not have Mount Rushmore-ready leadership skills, but they're an unusually fine-looking bunch of politicians.

And that's not even counting two of the hottest, but as yet undeclared candidates: Texas Gov. Rick Perry, the not-gay caballero on the Rio Grande, and former Wasilla Mayor Sarah Palin, the not-Tina Fey, briefly employed as Alaska's chief executive.

Observing this mind-numbing, made for cable-babble political pageant, those in the business of reporting politics as a spectator sport might ask, "Are these future commanders-in-chief just too cute to fail?"

At least in my 64-year-old memory (a brain area not usually employed by the modern electorate), we have the most physically attractive line-up of potential presidents any political party has ever produced. Not just Perry and Palin, but Mitt Romney, Michele Bachmann, and Jon Huntsman, too.

The rest of the field, unfortunately, look more like those science and math club members who couldn't

find a date to the prom. There's the very white ex-Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, the clearly black pizza mogul Herman Cain, and veteran congressman and weird uncle-look-alike Ron Paul, plus the thoughtful, tri-athletic former New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson, who smokes nothing more than salmon, but doesn't mind if you do. Oops! I almost forgot former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who resembles the Pillsbury dough boy and whose politics are just as malleable.

Voters have always considered physical attributes when selecting a chief executive. For example, tall has always been in. An [instructive Wikipedia article](#) on presidential stature reveals that the average American male was slightly over five feet nine inches in 2005, but only 14 of our 43 presidents have been under five feet 10 inches while 18 have been 6 feet tall or more. We've always wanted to look up to our leaders, beginning with the father of our country, 6-foot-tall George Washington, the seventh-tallest president in history. Honest Abe Lincoln was an impressive six feet four inches, tied for tallest with overbearing Texan Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Imposing height was easy to convey, even in the non-visual, print-mediated political discourse of the first one and one-half centuries of the Republic, when leaders were nominated mostly by peers who had seen them in-person, and who then touted them in newspapers to the unwashed masses.

It could be just coincidence that the first television era, mass-communicated leader was a man with Hollywood good looks, the six-foot-tall John Fitzgerald Kennedy, with the lovely Jackie at his side. But it's probably more than likely a handsome, beautiful, or otherwise attractive face will become increasingly useful to would-be presidents, when we are digitally assaulted nearly every moment of our sleepless lives with youthful beauty. How much time do tens of millions of voters spend each day looking at the appropriately-named Facebook?

That doesn't mean that a pretty face is the only thing that matters to the electorate. Most presidents have also been able to string seven words together to form a complete sentence (George W. Bush notwithstanding.) But since video killed both the print and radio stars of American politics in the late 1970's, no real dogs—other than actual cute puppies—have inhabited the White House.

So how will the top five real and potential candidates for the GOP nomination in 2012 fare in the upcoming beauty contest?

Romney and Perry both have square jaws and industrial-strength hair. Bachmann and Palin are cougar babes in anybody's book. And Huntsman has the lean features and silver highlights of an aging rock star.

That's about as far as I wanna' go with that, so you fill in the blanks.

Of course, a plain face with a brain could theoretically emerge as the Republican nominee. But it's doubtful the Party of Lincoln will make the mistake they did in 2008, and nominate another short, pasty-faced old geezer. Not when the GOP has to run against the Jack-and-Jackie fashionistas now occupying 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Terry Michael is director of the Washington Center for Politics & Journalism. His writing is collected at his "thoughts from a libertarian Democrat" website, www.terrymichael.net.