



Q & A



By Frank Caterinicchio

Thoughts About the June 8th Primary Election Results



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1) How is it that Steve Poizner lost so big to Meg Whitman in the GOP Primary For Governor?

Many UAL members are probably surprised by the 37-point victory former E-Bay CEO Meg Whitman won over her chief Republican Primary opponent, Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner. It shouldn't be that surprising. The Whitman campaign outspent Poizner by at least \$45 million, but that's not the only factor.

Remember Poizner supporters were crowing that Whitman's 50-point lead in the polls had been cut to single digits with just weeks to go. Many folks credited the Arizona immigration law with giving Poizner new life, a chance to stake out a tough anti-illegal immigration stand, then use it against Whitman who opposed the Arizona law. In fact, that strategy, short-term for sure, did help. But it wasn't just the Arizona law that helped Poizner get back into the race.

Simultaneously, the Whitman campaign was under tremendous attack from Democrats who began beating her up on her ties to Wall-Street giant Goldman Sachs. The reason: they hoped to run against Poizner who would be a much weaker candidate against Democrat nominee Jerry Brown in the fall.

Despite all of these converging factors, Poizner was unable to take advantage of his good fortune. One reason is he never got off the illegal immigration issue. He had picked up those voters most concerned about illegal immigration, then he needed to go get the others. He never took this new opportunity to reintroduce

himself to voters to, in fact, give them a reason to vote for him and not just against illegal immigration. Consequently, this bounce in the polls faded quickly and Whitman began to pull away from him again.

That said, however, it should be remembered that Poizner was never a grassroots conservative darling and that hurt him among Republican base voters. To be sure, despite his claims, Poizner's past record was anything but conservative and his attempt to recast himself as a conservative failed. That was helped by Whitman reminding voters that Poizner had donated to Al Gore, had worked with labor unions to overturn Prop 13, favored "prevailing wage" laws and, important to UAL members, supported AB 32. Added together, all of these factors explain why Poizner lost by a 37-point margin, and why his political career is over.

2) What affect, if any, did Governor Sarah Palin's endorsement of Carly Fiorina have in the GOP Primary for US Senate?

The answer is little, if any. Fiorina's decision to trumpet a Palin endorsement isn't even a good short-term strategy. Fiorina was going to win the Primary -- with or without the Palin endorsement. Now Fiorina is going to have to carry Palin's significant, polarizing baggage in California. And the long-term result in the November General Election will be negative, not positive. Palin's endorsement of Fiorina says more about Palin, the greatest political opportunist of our time, than Fiorina.

Ironically, Palin has turned out to be the rich elitist she has campaigned against, even going so far as to endorse them now. Clearly, the Republican Senate candidate most in line with Palin's populist, anti-elitist, conservative views was Assemblyman Chuck DeVore; that's indisputable. UAL members on hand to hear DeVore's thoughtful, inspiring speech at this year's annual meeting know that.

But Palin was calculating in her Fiorina endorsement. She knew that DeVore couldn't raise the money he needed to win and, because endorsing a loser is damaging to the Palin brand, she chose to ignore her so-called principles and endorse Fiorina, even making some robo-calls which will come back to hurt Fiorina's effort in the General Election.

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Today California pro-life groups are wrongly hailing Fiorina's Primary win, calling it a victory for a new brand of "Palin feminism" and "pro-woman, pro-life leadership" that will attract new women voters. They say Fiorina now stands tall alongside Palin and Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann, in a pantheon of new female political leaders, proving that Californians are responding to "authentic, pro-life feminism."

It's this kind of campaign rhetoric that sends California's Decline-To-State voters, the key to winning statewide elections here, running away from GOP nominees election after election. And, instead of helping those of us in agribusiness who desperately know that Senator Barbara Boxer must be defeated, it makes our effort that much more difficult, probably impossible in November 2010.

3) What impact will passage of Prop 14 have on California elections?

Proposition 14, passed by the voters with 54% of the vote, will scratch the current method by which we elect our legislators. It allows the two top vote-getters, regardless of party, to run against each other in a November runoff election.

As a result, in some heavily Democratic districts and heavily Republican districts, this could lead to two candidates of the same party running against each other in a General Election. Prop 14 opponents make the argument that this would narrow voter choice by prohibiting the state's smaller third-parties from appearing on the General Election ballot.

That's not the case. Minor parties will still be allowed to run in the June Primary and, should their candidate come in first or second, they will then have earned the right to be on the November ballot. Prop. 14 had the strong backing of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lt. Gov. Abel Maldonado, longtime friend of UAL, who said it could help break the gridlock at the state Capitol by giving voters more control over who is on the ballot.

Schwarzenegger said Prop 14's victory sends a clear message that Californians are tired of partisan gridlock and dysfunction and want a system where representatives put what's best for California ahead of extreme partisan doctrine. Some believe that most General elections that would feature same-party candidates would be between Democrats. There may be some races where Republicans and decline-to-state


voters tilt the outcome to a more moderate candidate. It's likely that campaigns will be significantly more expensive. Candidates will now have to appeal to a wide range of voters in primaries, not just members of one political party.

4.) What are the prospects for the November 2010 general election?

Even now, as President Barack Obama's approval ratings have dropped considerably nationwide and the Tea Party has mobilized conservative activists, Republican registration continues to plummet in California. GOP registration has fallen statewide to 30.8%, while both Democratic and Decline-to-State registration slightly increased.

More importantly, according to Allan Hoffenblum's "Target Book," Republican registration has continued to decrease in legislative districts that are expected to be target races this year. In November 2008, Barack Obama out polled John McCain in 8 out of 19 congressional districts, 5 out of 15 state senate seats, and 12 out of 29 assembly seats that are currently held by a Republican.

There is not a single Democratic-held congressional or state legislative district up for election this year that John McCain carried in 2008. For Republicans to pick up any seats in November, they must defeat a Democrat running in a seat won by Obama. And, according to the latest Fox News/Rasmussen poll taken in mid-May, Obama's current approval rating in California stands at 61% - the same percentage Obama carried this state in 2008.

So, unless the political climate changes significantly in the next five months, it's likely that the Democrats will continue to hold majorities in the State Senate, State Assembly and take back the Governor's Chair. 

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