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## Should Obama Have Picked Hillary As His Running Mate?

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With Obama up in polls, the Palin narrative unraveling, and McCain embracing the mantle of underdog, events are starting to answer the question of whether Barack Obama should or should not have picked Hillary Clinton as his running mate.

In the months since Obama decided against adding Clinton to the ticket, much has transpired -- but nothing has changed. He made the right choice. He gained his current lead in spite of her and he very likely avoided big problems because of her.

First, there is -- let's just call it the Clinton factor.

True, disrespecting a woman who had made political history stirred up a swarm of Hillary supporters who swore they would vote McCain before supporting this interloper, who not only stole Hillary's moment, but wanted to award her second place.

But it quieted an equally passionate nation of Hillary-haters, who would give time and treasure to make sure the only way she got back to the West Wing is with a visitor's pass.

And then there is Bill. This is not a man who plays second fiddle easily. So playing second fiddle to the second fiddle sets up some dangerously untested dynamics. Obama must have watched his performance in Hillary's campaign and thought; "with friends like these ...". Also, of course, another national scandal and a crippling media frenzy could never be discounted.

The Clintons' combined lackluster performance on behalf of Obama so far in the general election offers a view of the kind of team members they would be in an administration. Hillary was visibly invisible until the numbers were already tilting toward Obama. Bill still seems to find it physically painful to offer anything but the faintest of praise.

But baggage aside, the rightness in Obama's call is also clear in the relative strengths of the two tickets.

If Obama had picked Clinton, it would not have helped his greatest vulnerability -- his inexperience. If you don't count time logged as first lady, (which did not resonate in the primaries and her fabrications of near-death experiences in the service of the country didn't help), then you have a four-year senator paired with a seven year senator.

McCain could have countered by finding a woman of his own. Transparent, maybe, and even sexist, but it would have given a female alternative in an election where women could tip the balance.

Would he have picked someone with the experience and gravitas of a Kay Bailey Hutchison, or would he have gone the glittering novelty of Sarah Palin? Given voter angst, economic agony, McCain's age and the excitement generated by the Obama campaign, odds are he would still have picked Palin.

Would Obama-Clinton have made a stronger counter to McCain Palin in attracting women? Doubtful.

Given Hillary's pro-choice problem with conservatives and the fact that liberals find virtually all Palin's positions toxic, most women will land where they would have anyway -- Hillary in or Hillary out. Most women have come to realize that Joe Biden has, in fact, one of the strongest voting records on women's' issues in the Senate.

Finally, remember: it was Obama who turned this race on its head. He is the one who energized the process and changed the assumptions.

Few if any vice presidential picks ever helped anybody win the White House. But as George McGovern learned with Thomas Eagleton; George H.W. Bush learned with Dan Quayle and John McCain is quite possibly learning with Sarah Palin, they can certainly help you lose it.

With Hillary Clinton, Obama would have added considerable risk to the ticket, but very little reward.