



Political Markets In Action

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Two Democratic presidential candidates with national campaign experience are stumbling. A Republican candidate who has run only municipal campaigns is confounding expectations, calling into question some assumptions about Republican voters.

John Edwards has learned -- surely he did not know it when they were hired -- that two women employed by his campaign have Internet trails of vitriolic anti-Christian, and especially anti-Catholic, rants. One of them wrote a profane screed about God impregnating Mary and said the Catholic Church opposes the morning-after birth control pill in order to "force women to bear more tithing Catholics." The other woman, who sprinkles her commentary with a vulgar term for female

genitalia, referred to George W. Bush's "wingnut Christofascist base."

When the women's works became known, it was reported that they had been, or were going to be, fired. Thirty-six hours later, after left-wing bloggers rallied to their defense, Edwards's campaign said they would be [retained](#). Edwards [explained](#) that the women had assured him that "it was never their intention to malign anyone's faith, and I take them at their word."

He really does? The two women -- both of whom [have resigned](#), pronouncing themselves, of course, victims of intolerance -- are what they are and are unimportant. But a prospective president being so pliable under pressure and so capable of

smarmy insincerity -- what does he think *were* the women's intentions? - - is very important.

In New Hampshire recently, Sen. Hillary Clinton [said](#), "Now that we have a Democratic president . . ." Quickly correcting this slip, she said she meant "a Democratic Congress," but added: "If we had a Democratic president, we would end the war."

Well. She and others say they can "end the war." That phrase is a flinch from facts. They mean they can end U.S. involvement in the war. No one believes the United States has the power to prevent the war from raging on.

But if a Democratic president *would* implement withdrawal, the Democratic Congress *could*, by forbidding further spending to sustain forces in Iraq. So why is Clinton, who says that a Democratic president would properly withdraw U.S. forces, not voting for a policy she considers proper?

Congress has used denial of funds to express itself on, and influence, conflicts in Vietnam (1973) and Nicaragua (1982 and 1984). Also, on Nov. 2, 1983, two weeks after the bombing that killed 241 Americans in the Marine barracks at the Beirut airport, the House of Representatives voted on a measure to force the withdrawal of the Marines by March 1984 by cutting off funds for the Lebanon operation. The measure was defeated by a vote of 274 to 153, but the 153 included 18 Democrats who are still in the House, nine of whom are committee chairmen.

A question for the 18: If they believed defunding the Beirut operation was proper, why is it not proper to defund U.S. involvement in Iraq? One answer insistently suggests itself: They think that withdrawal would be too risky. Does Clinton agree?

Regarding the Republican race, for many months commentators have said that when the Republican base learns the facts about Rudy Giuliani's personal life (an annulled first marriage, a messy divorce, then a third marriage) and views on social issues (for abortion rights, gay rights and gun control, in each case with limits), support for him will evaporate. But such commentary is becoming self-refuting. The insistent reiteration of it during Giuliani's coast-to-coast campaigning is telling activist Republicans -- the sort of people who read political commentary -- the facts about Giuliani. And so far those facts are not causing a recoil from him: According to the USA Today-Gallup [poll](#), his lead over John McCain has grown from 31 percent to 27 percent in November to 40-24 today.

This does not mean that the social issues have lost their salience. People for whom opposition to abortion is very important might, however, think that in wartime it is not supremely important. Or they might reason, correctly, that presidents can change abortion policy only by changing the Supreme Court, so Giuliani's pledge to nominate justices like Antonin Scalia, Samuel Alito and John Roberts is sufficient.

Furthermore, California's primary is [being moved up](#) to Feb. 5, and New Jersey's and some other states' might be moved to that date, so Giuliani's views on social issues might become, on balance, advantages. And suppose Giuliani convinces Republicans that he can become the first Republican since George H.W. Bush

in 1988 to be competitive for California's (now 55) electoral votes.

Markets are mechanisms that generate information. The political market is working: Americans are learning much about the candidates, and themselves.

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