

# **AFJ Report**

**Peter Roff talks about America No.3**

## ***Picking the Next U.S. President***

**By**

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The critical, first in the national Iowa caucuses are less than two months away yet America is no closer to knowing who will be its next president than it was when the whole process started. Things remain much as they were at the beginning.

No Republican candidate besides billionaire real estate developer Donald Trump has any kind of claim to front-runner status while former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton looks to win her party's nomination easily.

It's all a kind of political meringue. It looks solid from the outside but is all fluff just below the surface. There are few people outside the bloc of those who support him who believe Trump really can win the nomination. He leads nationally by a considerable amount: the latest nationwide surveys have him at 41 percent of those responding.

The numbers in the individual states are much closer. In Iowa Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz appears to be pulling into the lead, winning over votes from Dr. Ben Carson, a onetime leader of the field who is rapidly collapsing.

This is, however, all highly speculative. It depends on the polls being right and that is a great uncertainty. The American political class may still depend on them but it has lost confidence to a considerable degree on what they say. There have been a number of recent elections going back at least as far as the Scottish referendum on independence and going up to November's gubernatorial race in Kentucky where what the pre-election polls suggested would happen was vastly different from the actual result.

No one has been able to present a convincing explanation as to why. There are many theories, from the idea that people are reluctant to tell strangers what they are thinking in a survey call to the reality that the proliferation of personal telephone technology has punched a great big hole in any system that relies on residential phones to collect survey data. Simply put, the chance that the numbers are not reliable affects greatly the ability to analyze the race and to make confident predictions.

Secretary Clinton should win her party's nomination easily, especially now that Vice President Joe Biden has formerly announced his intention not to run. The left-liberal bloc of votes now going to Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders will eventually rally to her side at the convention, specifically because she is making rhetorical concessions to their demands. She may not govern from the left but she has found it safe to campaign from there, especially with the Republicans in disarray.

There are still those who believe the FBI or the U.S. Department of Justice may drop a hammer on Mrs. Clinton in the form of an indictment sometime during the course of the election. It remains enough of a possibility that it has to be factored in no matter how unlikely it is that it will actually occur. If she is forced from the race then Biden will no doubt reverse course and step up to seize the nomination at the convention but that means a fall contest quite different from what anyone currently expects.

As background that constitutes an explanation as to why it is so difficult to predict how the fall campaign in the United States will be waged and what the main issues will be.

If Mrs. Clinton is the nominee then the Democrats can be counted on to run a campaign most similar to the campaigns they have run since 1992. Jobs will be a big factor as well health care and the environment. This reflects the issues of importance to the party's activist base as well as what it believes is a tried and true pathway to electoral success. This is likely true for anyone else who might be the nominee. And, of course, they will deliver a generous beating to any Republican nominee as being out of touch with middle America, elitist, too conservative, and uncaring about the needs of the average voter.

Things on the GOP are much murkier. If the nomination goes to Cruz or Florida Sen. Marco Rubio or former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, the campaign will focus on centrist-conservative ideas including immigration reform, tax cuts to stimulate economic growth, regulatory reform, and social policies designed to reverse the nation's cultural decline. If the nomination goes to Trump it is impossible to predict, outside of immigration reform, what he will focus on. It is almost certain he will attempt to run a campaign that is heavily negative, one that explains through a well-funded advertising program why it is the Democratic Party that is out of touch with America. Of all the candidates in the race Trump is the only one with the resources at hand to go outside the media filter to the degree necessary to make the charges stick.

The other major unknowable that would truly shape the outcome of the race beyond the ability of either candidate to control it is terrorism. Another attack or a series of attacks like the recent one in San Bernardino, Calif., between now and the election would certainly shift things. If that happens then the Obama record becomes the central point of argument. Mrs. Clinton would be hampered by her record whereas the Republican candidate, no matter who he might be, would be free to swing away for the fences. The voters trust the GOP to keep America safe more than they

trust the Democrats. That issue alone could be the decisive one no matter whatever else the candidates wish to run on.

Ultimately, no one will be able to predict how the fall campaign will shape up until we have a better idea about who the nominees will be.

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