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Q & A: Palin-Palooza

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 29, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

This week, at Q & A, we will look at the prospects of a Palin candidacy. I asked a group of experts to handicap her chances. Is she going to run? What is her greatest asset? Her greatest liability? And, what are her chances? First up, we hear from Colin McEnroe, host of the always entertaining WNPR talk show, "The Colin McEnroe Show [1]."

Colin McEnroe: During the 2010 U.S. Senate race in Connecticut, I decided -- are you listening, Nate Silver? -- that we need a new term of art in polling analysis: the ICIT number. The acronym stands for I Can't Imagine That, and the number represents the percentage of voters who simply cannot wrap their minds around the idea of that job-seeker in that job. These people are unpersuadable by positive or negative advertising. They are not moved by debates or news developments. They haven't made a decision so much as rejected out of hand the idea that the candidate in question could ever hold that post.

In Connecticut, wrestling tycoon Linda McMahon showed tremendous growth in the polls in the late summer and early fall of 2010 and then abruptly plateaued. I am convinced she ran smack dab into her ICIT number. McMahon had essentially no experience in public officeholding and a background in a garish, nihilistic entertainment enterprise. She spent almost $50 million on her campaign, but at a certain point her advertisements were talking to that hardened off ball of ICIT voters, who were incapable of listening.

Sarah Palin has, sans doute, the largest ICIT number in the presidential field. It would be handy to know what it is and how many unaffiliated voters live inside that ICIT bubble, because those people can't be reached. One day in the 2010 race, the Independent Party candidate Warren Mosler told me Richard Blumenthal was sunk. Mosler's background is economics, and he was looking at the trendline. It simply couldn't be reversed, he thought. He didn't factor for ICI`T, the dead end of your upward trend.

That said, Palin has some pretty obvious advantages, starting with name recognition and free news coverage. Silver recently showed off some interesting numbers on La Palin's Google traffic. Her name is searched 16 times more often than Mitt Romney's. She is mentioned on sites tracked by Google News six times more often than any other Republican candidate. One also assumes that Palin can raise money in small donations from her passionate followers, but her passionate followers are disproportionately not college educated and less likely to have a lot of money to give.

OK. Enough havering. She will run (but she can announce late, because she already has the press's attention). She almost certainly will not secure the nomination. If she somehow does, she will not win the election. In the races I followed this year, it struck me that voters were scared and, in that state, more likely to choose the grind in the library over the popular kid in the cafeteria. Frightened voters demand a kind of seriousness that, I believe, many of them will never see in Palin.

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