



Posted on Sun, Apr. 29, 2007

Giuliani solid in S.C. polls

GOP presidential candidate doing well despite his views on social issues

By LEE BANDY

lbandy@thestate.com

Will S.C. Republicans vote for a presidential candidate who is pro-abortion rights and pro-gay rights?

The answer to that key \$64,000 question may be "yes."

No Republican ever has won that party's presidential nomination without first taking the S.C. contest, the nation's first-in-the-South primary.

The man on the hot seat is Rudy Giuliani, the combative former New York City mayor with liberal views on abortion and gay rights. Standing in his way are conservative Christians. They hold sway in the S.C. GOP primary. They constitute about 35 percent of the Republican vote.

But conservative Christians aren't united. Many like Giuliani. Consequently, they are able to shove aside their disagreements with him on liberal social issues.

In a surprise, a Zogby poll released last week showed Giuliani running even with his chief rival, U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., in the S.C. primary.

Why is Giuliani doing so well in a state where most evangelicals cast a wary eye on the New Yorker?

"He's personally popular," said Oran Smith, president of the Palmetto Family Council. "He is star quality. He's charismatic. People want to have their pictures taken with him. They want to rub shoulders with him." "Rudy is popular because he's frozen in time," said U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., referring to the mayor's handling of the terrorist strikes of Sept. 11, 2001.

But the ground is likely to shift once voters start focusing on issues, said Graham, a McCain supporter.

"Comparative shopping hasn't started yet," he said. And when will it? Labor Day, Graham said.

Right now, the public is watching a beauty contest between nearly a dozen Republican candidates.

Eaady Roe, secretary of the state GOP, is an opponent of abortion. But she supports Giuliani. Why?

Because she thinks he can win and because he proved his leadership ability during the 9/11 crisis. Also, she added, "We need a leader who can bring our country together."

There are others like Roe. They disagree with Giuliani on social issues but lean toward him anyway.

Still, some conservative Christians pose a threat to his quest for the Republican nomination. They remain strongly opposed to his candidacy.

Asked if S.C. Republicans would nominate a pro-abortion rights, gay rights presidential candidate, some conservative Christian activists respond swiftly and with firmness. They leave no room for compromise.

"In my mind, absolutely not," said Drew McKissick, a Christianright activist who supports former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney for the GOP's presidential nomination.

Clemson University political scientist Dave Woodard said, "Between now and Election Day, a lot of people are going to fill in the blanks" on Giuliani, and he is not going to like it.

Giuliani hopes Republicans will focus on his public record as mayor and the various things he has done, not his personal life.

"You can get a pretty good idea what kind of presidents we're going to be from what we've done already," he recently told a television interviewer. So the ex-mayor hopes.

But if Giuliani pulls off an upset here, it will be because a new day is dawning in the S.C. Republican Party.

Lee Bandy, a retired political reporter for The State, has covered S.C. politics for more than 40 years. His column typically runs Sundays.

© 2008 TheState.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.thestate.com>