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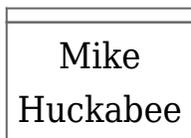
Huckabee's surge in polls brings new media attention, scrutiny

By Robert Marus

Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Mike Huckabee has gone from long-shot candidate to serious GOP presidential contender in only a few weeks—and his media coverage has gone from curious bemusement to serious analysis of his past record.

The result is both good and bad for the former governor of Arkansas and pastor who served as president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.



Two new nationwide polls released Dec. 10 show Huckabee suddenly in a statistical dead heat with former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani among Republican voters.

The CNN/Opinion Research poll, conducted Dec. 6-9, showed Giuliani

garnering support from 24 percent of Republican voters, while Huckabee had 22 percent—within the poll's margin of error. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and Arizona Sen. John McCain were in third and fourth place, with former Tennessee Sen. Fred Thompson a distant fifth.

Meanwhile, the CBS/*New York Times* poll, conducted Dec. 5-9, showed Giuliani with 22 percent and Huckabee with 21 percent. In that survey, Huckabee has increased his share of the Republican vote by 17 percentage points since October.

Other polls had already shown Huckabee pulling ahead of Romney in Iowa, despite the fact that Romney had outspent his fellow former governor by a margin of more than 10 to 1 in wooing voters for that state's famous early caucuses.

The Dec. 17 issue of *Newsweek*, which hit newsstands Dec. 10, features Huckabee on its cover. A campaign that practically had to beg for attention from major media outlets only a few weeks ago is now beset by journalists' inquiries.

But the attention has brought scrutiny that Huckabee has not had to endure on the national level before. The *Newsweek* story, for example, delves into controversies from his tenure in the Arkansas governor's mansion, which included investigations and fines for ethical lapses and a controversy over a convicted rapist Huckabee reportedly urged paroled. The convict, Wayne Dumond, raped and killed a woman after he was released.

Just a few days earlier, an Associated Press story detailing Huckabee's answers to a questionnaire from his unsuccessful 1992 campaign to unseat former Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) created unwanted publicity. Among his answers were a call to quarantine people infected with the virus that causes AIDS and a harsh denouncement of homosexuality when asked

about gays in the military.

“I believe to try to legitimize that which is inherently illegitimate would be a disgraceful act of government. I feel homosexuality is an aberrant, unnatural and sinful lifestyle, and we now know it can pose a dangerous public-health risk,” Huckabee said on the questionnaire.

On the HIV crisis, he said, “If the federal government is truly serious about doing something with the AIDS virus, we need to take steps that would isolate the carriers of this plague It is difficult to understand the public policy towards AIDS. It is the first time in the history of civilization in which the carriers of a genuine plague have not been isolated from the general population, and in which this deadly disease for which there is no cure is being treated as a civil-rights issue instead of the true health crisis it represents.”

Huckabee later said he wouldn't retract any of his answers but that he would phrase his words “a little differently” if asked the same questions today.

In a Dec. 9 interview on Fox News, Huckabee said that, in 1992, “when we didn't know as much as we do now about AIDS, we were acting more out of political correctness than we were about the normal public-health protocols that we would have acted—as we have recently, for example, with avian flu.”

But the editors of the *Washington Post*, among others, took Huckabee to task for what they considered willful ignorance even of what was known about AIDS in 1992.

“Actually, in 1992, the year after basketball star Magic Johnson made the dramatic announcement that he was HIV-positive, it was already widely understood—and widely publicized—that HIV could not be spread by casual contact or even through close physical contact short of unprotected

homosexual or heterosexual sex," a Dec. 11 Post editorial said.

"It was also widely understood that the virus could be spread through blood transfusions or intravenous drug use involving needles shared with an infected person. There was nothing 'politically correct' about this."

Huckabee also opposed new federal funding for AIDS research in 1992 but has since embraced government funding for combating the disease in the United States and globally.

In 1992, he also pledged not to pass any new taxes if elected to the Senate. However, he angered many anti-tax members of his own party when governor, repeatedly supporting tax increases to help fund improvements to highways and social services.

The *Newsweek* article also focused on critics of Huckabee's personal style, including both Republicans and Democrats who worked with him and who characterized him as having a thin skin and a quick temper.

Huckabee told the magazine people get offended in politics. "You'll find plenty of people who will say I was the sorriest thing that sucked air into lungs," he said. "You are going to find a lot of state legislators, both Democrats and Republicans, who are more than willing to tell you what a lousy human being I am ... It was never my desire to be a member of the club, to be chummy and get along with everyone and have these guys love me. My job was to be governor."

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