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Huckabee Proves a Potent Ally for Conservative Candidates

By [Scott Conroy](#) - August 13, 2010

Is it possible that an Iowa Caucus winner who currently hosts two prominent television shows and a nationally syndicated radio program is flying under the radar?

For a politician who carried eight states in the 2008 Republican primaries and has the top-rated weekend cable news show, former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee still has an uncanny ability to sneak up on people.

Though Sarah Palin's primary endorsements have been highlighted and analyzed to no end, Tuesday's closely watched gubernatorial runoff in Georgia served as a reminder that Huckabee can make his mark on 2010 races, too.

In Georgia, Huckabee held off on endorsing Rep. Nathan Deal until just five days before the election, which Deal won by fewer than 2,500 votes over the Palin-backed candidate, Karen Handel.

In a margin so tight, Huckabee's Sunday rally with Deal and the phone banking his political action committee conducted in Georgia may have been just enough to put Deal over the edge. Reached by email on Wednesday, Huckabee alluded to the impact his visit seems to have made.

"Check the poll numbers before I went and compare them to the election," Huckabee wrote in an email to RealClearPolitics. "You can draw your own conclusions."

Polls taken just before Huckabee's visit showed the two candidates either in a statistical tie or with Handel maintaining a slight lead.

HuckPAC executive director Hogan Gidley pointed to the approximately 1,000 calls that HuckPAC made to voters in suburban Gwinnett County, which was considered part of Handel's home turf, but where Deal ended up winning by 740 votes.

"We do a lot of the things that fly under the D.C. radar like robocalls, get-out-the-vote messages, e-blasts, and things like that," Gidley said. "And while they're not something that excites members on the press, the people on the ground who receive the votes and the benefits of the governor's trust do appreciate it."

Huckabee's already busy schedule is about to become even more jam-packed. He indicated to RealClearPolitics that he will soon stump on behalf of several 2010 candidates, including two Florida conservatives locked in crowded August 24th primary fights.

The first, Daniel Webster, is one of six Republicans vying to unseat outspoken Democratic Rep. Alan Grayson in Florida's 8th District.

Huckabee also intends to campaign for Karen Diebel, who is facing off against four fellow Republicans in Florida's 24th District just east of Orlando.

Huckabee indicated that he will also hit the road on behalf of the general election campaign of Chuck Fleischmann in Tennessee's 3rd District and for Christian youth camp director James Lankford, who faces an August 24th runoff against the better known former state Rep. Kevin Calvey in Oklahoma's 5th District.

Huckabee said that he hoped to campaign for Lankford, whom he endorsed before Lankford finished first in the initial round of voting, alongside former Oklahoma Rep. J.C. Watts.

Palin may be getting the lion's share of attention in the national media, but Huckabee hasn't exactly been making himself scarce in the run-up to the midterms.

His top-rated Fox News show, "Huckabee," is seen four times each weekend, his ABC radio show "The Huckabee Report" airs daily, and he is a frequent guest analyst on other national programs. In addition to all of that, his new daytime "The Huckabee Show" is being tested on several Fox-owned stations and could expand to nationwide distribution.

"He's casting a long shadow," longtime advisor Kirsten Fedewa said. "He has a very high-profile venue to showcase his guests, and he is also able to build relationships with his guests. I think that's going to have a long-term impact on his career and whatever he decides to do."

There is that question, of course, of what *will* he decide to do? But whether or not he gives a presidential run another shot, he is poised to have a big impact on races this November.

Raising money has never been Huckabee's thing. He doesn't seem to like doing it, and he hasn't proven particularly good at it. But what he does as well as almost anyone is retail politicking, and he plans to do a lot more of that as summer turns to fall.

"I love the campaign trail and try to help other candidates, especially underdogs because there were people who were willing to help me when I got started and when no one thought I could win an election," Huckabee wrote.

Huckabee shares that particular affection for the underdog with Palin, and as he and she continue to lend their weight to candidates across the country, the comparisons between the two populist conservatives who share a natural gift for retail politics will remain inevitable.

But it is also clear that in spite of his on-air success, Huckabee's national profile does not figure to reach Palin-esque levels any time soon.

When Huckabee was asked directly about Palin in an NPR interview on Wednesday, he lauded her celebrity status in what sounded suspiciously like a backhanded compliment.

"She's a very popular person-a lot of people love her," Huckabee said. "She's a celebrity, and I respect that very much."

Though he has frequently endorsed candidates who were competing with Palin-backed rivals (most prominently in closely watched contests in Iowa, South Carolina, and California), Huckabee does not seem to have done so out of a desire to differentiate himself from his Fox News colleague.

Indeed, perhaps his most unexpected 2010 endorsement to date came when he followed Palin in lending his support to longshot candidate Joe Miller in his race to unseat Sen. Lisa Murkowski in Alaska.

In a nod to the idiosyncrasies of Alaska Republican politics and Palin's declining popularity in her home state, it is Huckabee's image and endorsement text, not Palin's, which greets visitors on the home page of Miller's campaign web site. Palin's name is not even listed among the four prominent conservatives whom Miller touts on the top of his campaign site for having backed him.

If Miller were able to pull off a shocking upset in the Aug. 24 primary, he may well have Huckabee to thank even more heartily than his fellow Alaskan.

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