

Four reasons why Obama will repeat

BY R. MICHAEL WARREN

A growing number of observers, including some leading Democrats, think Barack Obama will be a one-term president. They argue the U.S. leader hasn't delivered on enough of his "Yes We Can" election promises.

He's allowed the Tea Party Republicans to gain and maintain the upper hand in Congress. And, some characterize Obama as a "bright amateur" who lacks the political savvy to get things done in a highly partisan environment.

But despite his shortcomings, it's much too early to write Obama's political obituary. There are four basic reasons why he's on the road to winning another term this November.

First, the Republican Party's process of selecting its presidential nominee has turned into a self-destructive circus. Every few weeks, a new candidate has emerged to try to eclipse Mitt Romney, only to collapse in a cloud of controversy.

The reason? Romney, a flip-flopping moderate conservative, has limited support in his party. Lacklustre candidates like Newt Gingrich, Rick Perry and Ron Paul have entered and are staying in the race; each hoping to be anointed by the party's right wing. Their mounting attacks on Romney signal deep divisions within the GOP. These divisions can only help Obama in November.

Romney will likely win the Republican nomination as the best of a bad lot. Against Obama, he will draw some support from independents and disillusioned Democrats. But that support could easily be offset by the legion of hardcore Republicans who stay home in November because they don't trust his conservative credentials.

Second, there's Obama's "balanced" economic recovery plan which should appeal to a majority of Americans. It focuses on creating jobs, while also reducing debt, through a combination



Illustration by Paul Lachine

of tax reforms and spending cuts.

Last fall he outlined a \$447-billion initiative that includes \$253 billion in tax cuts and \$195

billion in stimulus spending. The plan includes payroll tax relief for employees and employers; tax credits to encourage hiring of veterans and the chronically

unemployed; a national "infrastructure bank" and help for states to hire teachers and firefighters.

How is Obama going to pay for

this and still reduce the overall federal debt? By introducing \$1.5 trillion in taxes aimed mainly at the wealthy. He's taking Warren Buffet's "tax the rich" advice, and proposes to eliminate former U.S. president George W. Bush's low tax rate for high-income earners. He would also increase taxes on oil and gas companies and investment fund managers.

When you contrast this with the Republican refusal to support any basic tax reform, and that party's insistence on an austerity-alone solution, the Main Street election appeal of Obama's plan becomes increasingly apparent.

Third, while Obama's popularity has dropped dramatically since winning the White House, he's still polling much better than both the Republican Party and Congress. His latest approval rating of 46% is up five points over last summer.

Equally important, for every drop that Obama has suffered in the polls, it's been even worse for the Republicans. Their approval rating at about 22% is half of Obama's. And how do Americans feel about their Congress? They're deeply dissatisfied. Only 12% think Congress is doing its job well.

So Obama, despite his detractors, carries a considerably stronger base of support toward the November election than do either the GOP or the legislative branch of the U.S. government. As in other aspects of life, everything in politics is relative.

Finally, Obama has the inherent skills to reach over his opposition in Congress and sell both his jobs plan and himself to the American people. When he embraces a challenge that excites him, he can be a formidable and persuasive campaigner.

For much of his early presidency, Obama tried to use tactics from his community organizer background — consultation and compromise — to advance his agenda. But last summer, during the debt limit debate, it became apparent he couldn't reason with the Republican extremists who were willing to

endanger their own economy to make an ideological point.

Obama's failure to come away from that crisis, having won a grand bargain, was seen by many as proof that he was soft — that he lacked the royal jelly to deliver on the "hope" and "change" that he promised so eloquently in 2008.

Since then, something has happened. Obama has toughened up and changed his style. After introducing his jobs plan last September, a re-energized president got out of the White House and started connecting directly with people in town hall meetings. On the hustings, he's rolled up his sleeves and is selling his ideas for economic recovery with a new-found passion and determination.

Expect Obama to run hard against Congress this year in the same way as Harry Truman campaigned successfully against his "do-nothing Congress". It's a safe target and the Republicans seem to be getting the lion's share of the blame for the current paralysis. Andrew Kohut, of Pew Research, says that when voters were asked which party takes the more extreme positions in Congress, "we had a two-to-one margin naming Republicans over Democrats. Very surprising."

Meanwhile, it seems unlikely Obama will be able to break the stalemate in Congress about how the U.S. should generate jobs and deal with its debt. This means the world's largest economy will remain in fiscal limbo for almost a year until the next president is elected.

Not a cheerful prospect for Canada or the rest of the world as we struggle with a worsening economic climate.

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