Ridge: An Advantageous Bush Running Mate?

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America's favorite parlor game at the moment is let's pick the vice presidential running mate for the putative presidential candidates of both major parties. With nothing left of any importance to decide before the national nominating conventions this summer, the debate over vice presidential selection has become something of a media obsession. To continue the hype and hyperbole surrounding this national mania, we enter this discussion with some relevant information regarding how Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge might help Republican nominee George W. Bush carry Pennsylvania, with its 23 critically important electoral votes, this fall.

Various public opinion polls have shown that a Bush/Ridge ticket would help the Republicans carry Pennsylvania this fall. A recent Keystone Poll, conducted March 23-28, 2000 and taken among Democrats, shows how Ridge can help Bush with Democratic voters. The Republican ticket would have some appeal to socially conservative Democrats in Pennsylvania, sometimes known as "Reagan Democrats" or "Casey Democrats". The Casey reference here is to the supporters of Robert P. Casey, the highly successful and popular former Pennsylvania governor, whose son Bob Jr., is continuing the Casey legacy. Ridge seems to help most among the following groups of Democrats:

1. Those living outside of Pittsburgh and in the Southwest
2. Conservatives
3. Married
4. College-educated
5. Born Again Christians
6. Opponents of Gun Control

These Democrats do, on occasion, vote Republican. In fact, these conservative Democrats are often a key element in determining which party's candidates win statewide elections. To some extent, Tom Ridge, U.S. Senator Rick Santorum, and Attorney General Mike Fisher owe their statewide victories to the defection of these Democrats to their candidacies. Conversely, Democratic nominees must hold on to this constituency, commonly considered the base Democratic vote, to win statewide elections. Also, appealing to conservative Democrats raises the possibility that moderate Republican voters, especially those living in the Philadelphia suburbs will vote for Democratic candidates. Bill Clinton's victories in 1992 and 1996, as well as Harris Wofford's stunning upset of Dick Thornburgh in the 1991 U.S. Senate election, point out conclusively that Democrats can win the Philadelphia suburbs, thus denying Republicans a core part of their base vote. The real question is whether a Bush/Ridge ticket can hold onto moderate Republicans and conservative Democrats at the same time. Time will tell.
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