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Will the Bush team kill Perry's campaign?

By JOSHUA SPIVAK

Rick Perry's quick ascent to the top tier of Republican Presidential candidates has been met with the expected sniping from other Republicans. What has been unexpected, though, is the source of the attacks against the Texas Governor. Criticism is not just coming from other candidates or interest groups, but, from former members of President George W. Bush's team. In fact, they are the ones leading the charge against Perry. And, if history is any judge, this could be a real cause for concern for Perry's election prospect.

Recently, Bush's biggest supporters, including campaign strategist Karl Rove, have not been afraid to take swings at Perry. The anti-Perry movement actually began in 2010, when Bush supporters, including George H.W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of State and the leader of W.'s 2000 legal team James Baker, all lined-up behind Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson in her failed campaign to topple Perry from the governor's mansion. Perry's triumph in 2010 led the Bush team to tamp down their criticism, but it is starting up again. Lately, Rove has called Perry "unpresidential."

George W. Bush has shied away from the attacks so far, but there is an unmistakable sense that he is strongly opposed to Perry. What makes this all the more surprising is that Perry arguably owes his political success to Bush. Perry was Bush's elected Lieutenant Governor during Bush's second term as Governor of Texas, and Perry stepped up to the Governor's mansion thanks to Bush's 2000 election.

So far, the anti-Perry talk from the Bush camp does not appear to have damaged Perry. At the beginning of the year, his name wasn't even being mentioned. Now, despite the jabs, he is leading the Republican pack. But there is reason to think that Team Bush's anti-Perry positions could have a deleterious effect on Perry's chances for his success in November.

In previous years, especially since the primary and caucus system have dominated the presidential selection process, presidents have been noticeably quieter about their intraparty presidential nomination fights. Even though there have been plenty of personality clashes, there was no love lost between Carter and Clinton, George H.W. Bush and Bob Dole, George W. Bush and John McCain. Nor did their staffers act in a uniform matter to attack a candidate. The biggest counter example, Bill Clinton going after Barack Obama, had a very good excuse – it was in support of his wife, Hillary.

But the Bush v. Perry battle is clearly different. Perry is the only Republican candidate on any level that Bush's team has uniformly gone after. And it may not be for ideological reasons. In fact, the reasons may be personal — Rove and Perry have a longstanding mutual dislike. Perry has also made it clear in his campaigning that he holds different positions than Bush, and he has attacked the policies of the former president.

Historically, though, ex-presidents love to get involved in choosing their intraparty successors, even years after they have left office. Moreover, they were quite willing to go at it with their party's contenders, usually to the detriment of everybody involved.

Most famously, Teddy Roosevelt, who pushed William Howard Taft into the role of his successor in 1908, ran a ferocious primary and general elections campaign against him in 1912. In 1956, Harry Truman went after Adlai Stevenson, whom he had supported in 1952, in an attempt to derail his race for the Democratic nomination. Stevenson won the nomination, but it certainly didn't help his doomed race for the White House. And in the 1960 race, President Dwight Eisenhower took a swipe, which he later claimed was a joke, at the Republican nominee, Vice President Richard Nixon.

If Perry took a look at all of the president-contender fights, he would see the same underlying pattern – all the contenders lost their presidential race. For now, Perry may be the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, but if history proves correct he may not just lose the lead in the race, he may lose the race all together.

Joshua Spivak is a Senior Fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College. He blogs at <http://recallelections.blogspot.com>.