

Poll surge raises scrutiny of Huckabee: Shifting views

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Mike Huckabee went from long-shot candidate to serious GOP presidential contender in only a few weeks—and the tone of media coverage went from bemusement to serious critical analysis of his 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 nationwide polls released early last month showed Huckabee suddenly in a statistical dead heat with former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani among Republican voters. The CBS/*New York Times* poll showed that Huckabee had increased his share of the GOP vote by 17 percentage points since October.

Other polls had already shown Huckabee pulling ahead of Mitt 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 *Newsweek* issue that hit newsstands December 10 features Huckabee on its cover. A campaign that practically had to beg for attention from major media outlets a few weeks earlier is now beset by journalists' inquiries. The new attention brings scrutiny that Huckabee has not had to endure on the national level before.

The *Newsweek* article, as well as articles in newspapers, delves into controversies from his tenure in the Arkansas governor's mansion, which include investigations and fines for ethical lapses and a controversy over a convicted serial rapist that Huckabee pushed to have paroled. The convict, Wayne Dumond, raped and killed a woman after he was released in 1999—25 years before his sentence would have ended.

A story detailing Huckabee's answers to a questionnaire from his unsuccessful 1992 campaign to unseat former senator Dale Bumpers also created unwanted publicity. In his answers he endorsed a call to isolate people infected with the virus that

causes AIDS, and he harshly denounced 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,” Huckabee said. “I feel homosexuality is an aberrant, unnatural and sinful lifestyle, and we now know it can pose a dangerous public health risk.”

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

In a Fox News interview, 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,” said a *Post* editorial last month. “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.”

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.

Huckabee acknowledged that his views have hardened on Cuba since 2002 when he wrote President Bush describing how the Cuba trade embargo was hurting Arkansas rice growers. Former senator Fred Thompson of Tennessee criticized Huckabee for changing his stance on Cuba rapidly “to appeal to a particular group of people right before an election.”

Even an offhand religious comment got Huckabee in trouble. He said during a *New York Times* interview that he didn't know much about Mormonism, but then was quoted as asking, "Don't Mormons believe that Jesus and the devil are brothers?" (An official LDS church Web site does contend that "Jesus was Lucifer's older brother," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. But Mormons believe that all spirits are offspring of God.)

Romney reacted on the *Today* show: "Attacking someone's religion is really going too far. It's just not the American way, and I think people will reject that." But Huckabee said he apologized to Romney after the GOP debate in Johnson, Iowa. "I said I would never try . . . to somehow pick out some point of your faith and make it an issue, and I wouldn't," Huckabee said. -*Associated Baptist Press*