Huckabee's Cat Scratch Fever: Pawlenty or Bachmann's gain?

Aaron J Shuler, University of Oregon
Mike Huckabee exited the Right’s stage this past weekend. To show he was serious about not being a serious candidate for president he joined Ted Nugent on stage to play bass for *Cat Scratch Fever*, grinning meekly while Mr. Nugent hissed, “I make the pussy purr with the stroke of my hand.”

This from the man who did a retread of Dan Quayle of all people when he criticized Natalie Portman for being pregnant with her fiancé’s child and not having the decency to be ashamed of it.

The St. Paul Examiner is sure Mr. Nugent was married to the owner of the kitty kat that was purring.

Still, Mr. Huckabee cut a charming, sympathetic figure and enjoyed a sizeable following, particularly among Evangelicals. So who will gain now that the 2012 race has lost him to Ted Nugent’s Family Values tour?

Michael Gerson and George Will over at *The Washington Post* seem to think it could be Minnesota’s own Tim Pawlenty. Mr. Pawlenty is also an ex-governor and Evangelical. But while it would be harsh to say he is not likeable, he certainly lacks the gregarious good will that Mr. Huckabee has oozed for the past couple of years that engendered him to so many.

Minnesota’s other potential representative in the race to unseat President Obama is also being mentioned as benefitting from Mr. Huckabee’s departure.

In addition to some GOP primary voters being drawn to Michele Bachmann’s Evangelical faith, her fiscal histrionics have also won her the backing of large swaths of people who do not wish to pay for anything that does not directly benefit them.

Ms. Bachmann, however, is a polarizing polar-opposite of the sunny Mr. Huckabee, a Republican that Democrats could smile at amiably while disagreeing with him.

Ms. Bachmann is not only a favorite liberal bogeywoman and bête noir of the DFL, but an outlandish demagogue that alienates not just the center but the thoughtful, reasonable factions of the GOP. She is, quite simply, unelectable in the estimation of many if not most.

We are a long way from knowing the significance of Mr. Huckabee’s exit. After all, around this juncture in the last presidential cycle Fred Thompson and Rudolph Giuliani were two GOP favorites.

Then Mr. Thompson took a nap he never woke up from and it turned out that 9/11 was not actually a state with electoral votes.

Nevertheless, Mr. Pawlenty can be at least moderately encouraged that the candidate that won the 2008 Iowa primary has dropped out to plug in.