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Don't rule out Mitt as v.p. candidate, some say

Could his conservatism, cash help McCain win?

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Now that Mitt Romney is out of the presidential race, what are the chances he'll get the No. 2 spot on the GOP ticket in November?

The obvious answer would be not good, given how he and the Republican's presumptive nominee, Arizona Sen. John McCain, have sparred in recent weeks over everything from who's the most conservative to who's the most negative campaigner.

But stranger things have happened, say political observers, who suggested there are benefits to adding Romney to the ticket after his stepping down Thursday as a presidential candidate.

"He would shore up the base and do well with conservatives," said Francis Beckwith, a professor of philosophy and church-state studies at Waco University in Texas. "And there's his expertise in economics."

Romney's most effective campaign against McCain came in Michigan, where he said his experiences as venture capitalist in Boston and running the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City made him better able to strengthen the nation's flagging economy.

His personal finances are also attractive. Romney is worth an estimated \$350 million and had already poured \$35 million of his personal fortune into his campaign by the end of the year and no doubt more since then.

That's money that could help McCain, who has lagged behind other candidates in fund-raising, said Kirk Jowers, director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics and a Romney supporter.

"I would imagine that McCain would put Romney at the very top of his potential vice-presidential picks because of his wide support around the country, his ability to raise money and his personal financial resources," Jowers said.

Utah Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert agreed that Romney would be a benefit to the party's ticket "in terms of being able to bring conservatives around. They're going to have a real uphill battle this November to defeat whoever the Democratic nominee is."

A columnist for Canada's National Post newspaper, Diane Francis, has already anointed Romney as McCain's running mate because Romney "nobly stepped aside" and gave what she called "a nonendorsement endorsement" to McCain.

She also points out that Romney, 60, "is young enough to put to rest concerns about McCain's age in office" and sets himself up to take over if McCain, 71, decides to serve only one term or leaves office.

McCain, of course, isn't saying who he's looking at for the number two spot, but there's already plenty of likely candidates, including former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who is still in the race for the White House.

Others mentioned include U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; her predecessor, Colin Powell; and Florida Gov. Charlie Crist, whose endorsement of McCain helped the Arizona senator narrowly beat Romney in Florida's winner-take-all primary last month.

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