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## Mitt would be 'honored' if v.p. choice

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WASHINGTON — Could there still be a "silver" lining to Mitt Romney's unsuccessful presidential run?

Romney, speaking in his first formal television interview since ending his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination last month, told Fox News Channel's Hannity & Colmes that he would be "honored" to be selected as Sen. John McCain's running mate if offered the spot on the ticket.

The Arizona senator locked up the Republican nomination last week, complete with an endorsement from President Bush. McCain and Romney, the former Massachusetts governor who ran the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, waged a sometimes bitter fight for Republican delegates during the first two months of GOP primaries.

"I think any Republican leader in this country would be honored to be asked to serve as the vice presidential nominee, myself included," Romney said Tuesday.

Romney also used the interview to show he isn't shy about attacking the Democratic hopefuls.

Listening to Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton discuss their national security credentials, Romney said, is akin to "listening to two Chihuahuas argue about which is the biggest dog."

"When it comes to national security, John McCain is the big dog, and they are the Chihuahuas," Romney said.

Romney said he expects Obama to eventually emerge as the Democratic nominee, which he thinks is the better matchup for McCain in November.

Talk of Romney being on the short-list of vice presidential picks began soon after he dropped out of the race in a Feb. 7 speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference. He endorsed McCain on Feb. 14.

Recently, Romney has been mentioned as a potential McCain running mate by former White House deputy chief of staff and adviser Karl Rove and political pundit Bob Novak.

Also in the mix are popular Florida Gov. Charlie Crist, whose 11th-hour endorsement of McCain before the Jan. 29 Florida primary is credited with him winning the state, South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who was mathematically eliminated from the presidential race last week.

Some say Romney brings too many positives to a potential M&M (McCain and Mitt) ticket to be ignored.

Ardent Romney supporter Kirk Jowers, director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics, said putting him on the ticket makes sense although it's unlikely McCain would choose a running mate before the Democrats select their own nominee.

"With a 72-year-old president, the vice president has to be ready to take over," Jowers said. "I think Romney is the best choice for a vice-presidential candidate McCain could have."

Additionally, Jowers said, Romney brings an important talent to the race — the ability to raise a lot of money. Romney said during Tuesday's interview that his top fundraisers have met with the McCain campaign.

Romney's campaign was also viewed as well-organized. Add to that Romney's acceptance by many

conservatives — something McCain still struggles with. And, of course, don't discount those presidential — or vice presidential — looks Romney brings.

"The 2008 election is the Democrats' to lose," Jowers said. "Everything seems to be going in the Democrats' direction." But a McCain-Romney ticket could bring moderates and conservatives to the polls.

Jowers said with McCain's popularity and the number of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in California, the biggest prize of electoral college votes could go Republican.

But, as usual, the religion issue can go both ways.

Charles W. Dunn, dean of Regent University's School of Government, who has met Romney on several occasions, said Romney would bring geographic balance to the ticket, putting states like Michigan and Massachusetts into play for the Republicans, but "he doesn't score high with religion."

Dunn said McCain needs help with Evangelical Christian voters and voters in the South — often one in the same — and Romney does not do well there as many evangelicals do not believe Mormons are Christians.

But Jowers said he doubted the Southern states would go for Democrats, so Romney is still a good choice.

Dunn said Romney would be a "strong asset" for McCain when it came to the age issues as well as McCain's often quoted line that he does not understand the economy well — which Romney himself used against McCain while on the campaign trail.

Romney has strong support among conservatives, as illustrated by the crowd's reaction when he dropped out of the race at CPAC. "That would give the conservatives the enthusiasm to go all out for the McCain-Romney ticket," Dunn said.

But could the former rivals get along?

"Time is a great healer," Dunn said. "What we are seeing now is someone that is willing to be a loyal trouper."

The way Romney left his campaign and then endorsed McCain so soon after "has eliminated the bad taste," Jowers said. "Every primary worth having has had uncomfortable moments."

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