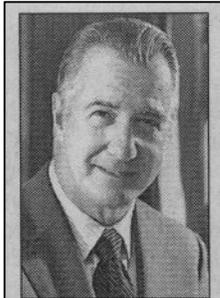


OBSCURE VICE PRESIDENTS WHO ALMOST BECAME PRESIDENT

By Michael Gunter

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Although only a heartbeat away from the presidency, most vice presidents have languished in obscurity. John Adams, the first vice president, once characterized the office as “the most insignificant that ever invention of man contrived, or his imagination conceived,” while Woodrow Wilson, not usually the humorist, supposedly once declaimed: “There is nothing to be said about the vice presidency and after you have said that, there is nothing more to say.”



Spiro Agnew



Henry Wallace

Thomas R. Marshall, his vice president and one of the obscure men discussed below, is maybe best known for his joke about how insignificant the office was. “A woman had two sons; one ran away to sea and the other was elected vice president; neither was ever heard of again.” John Nance Garner, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first vice president reportedly said “the office was not worth a bucket of pit.” His actual word for these contents was actually more scatological.

Even Richard Nixon, who was arguably the first vice president to exercise some meaningful position in American government, still received little respect from President Dwight D. Eisenhower when the latter answered a query about Nixon’s involvement in any major administration decision by asking for a week to come up with an example.

Why was the vice president historically so insignificant? Basically there were two reasons: 1. he had no power independent of what the president saw fit to give him, and 2. He was usually not a chosen confidant of the president and therefore, not somebody the president felt comfortable with or prone to give any power to. Indeed, maybe the most important constitutional job the vice president had was to sit like a dummy in the U. S. senate as its president, unable even to vote except to break a tie.

Lyndon Johnson illustrated the frustration of this situation when as vice president under John F. Kennedy, he had to sit impotent in that body where during the previous decade, he had dominated as the majority leader.

Other than this largely powerless senatorial role, the vice president’s only other constitutional job is to sit on the board of directors of the Smithsonian Institute. As vice president the, his main job is to sit around waiting for the president to die in office, but while he is doing that, he better not seem too eager for it to happen.

When President Ronald Reagan was shot and almost died in 1981, his secretary of state Alexander Haig apparently became confused about his position and burst upon the scene

proclaiming that he was in charge. The real vice president George H. W. Bush handled himself with more dignity in that situation, not appearing so eager to assume the office.

Why though is the vice president usually distant from the president and therefore not somebody the president will grant much power to? The practical requirements of how to win election to the White House in the first place offer the explanation. When first nominated to run for president, one must try to win as many votes as possible. Choosing your close personal confidant will not bring in any of these necessary extra votes, but choosing somebody from the other side of the party will. However, if this classic balanced ticket prevails, the president is guaranteed to be distant from his running mate or even hostile. Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush were a good recent example of the so-called balanced ticket. Before being tabbed to be Reagan's running mate in 1980, the more moderate Bush had been going around the country denouncing the more conservative Reagan's supply-side economics as "voodoo economics."

Indeed Bush came close to knocking Reagan out in the first primary. The two were certainly not friends, but their "political marriage" was deemed necessary to win the presidency. However, in this particular case, to their credit, Reagan and Bush at least managed to get along.

Harry Truman was another example. Following Roosevelt's sudden death in office, his advisers had to call the new president aside and tell him about the atomic bomb. Truman had never heard about this new weapon, but was now suddenly called upon to make the awesome decision on whether or not to use it against Japan. Only in the past half century has this situation of having nobodies as vice president practically changed, as will be explained below.

First, however, it is interesting to look back upon some mostly obscure and forgotten vice presidents who almost became president. Daniel Webster, of course was anything but obscure and was never vice president. Indeed, he was considered by many to be one of the greatest American politicians of the first half of the 19th century. He also unsuccessfully sought his party's nomination for president on three occasions but never came close to it. However, on two occasions (1840 and 1848) he was offered the Whig Party nomination as vice president only to turn it down, explaining "I do not propose to be buried until I am really dead and in my coffin." On both occasions, however, it was the Whig Party president who died in office. Thus, Webster would have succeeded to the presidency if he had accepted the vice presidency. Possible a man of his high caliber might have been able to do more to have prevented the subsequent Civil War than the two lesser men who did become president on those occasions, although this is doubtful.

Much less known is Hannibal Hamlin, who served as President Abraham Lincoln's first vice president, but was dropped from the ticket for Lincoln's second term in favor of Andrew Johnson. Thus, Hamlin left office on March 4, 1865, just five weeks before Lincoln was assassinated, and Lincoln's second vice president assumed the office. Possibly even less remembered is Garret Hobart, who served as President William McKinley's first vice president but died in office on Nov. 21, 1899. Hobart and the

president were close friends, so if he had lived, Hobart probably would have been kept on the ticket for the next presidential election in 1900 and succeeded to the presidency in 1901 when McKinley was assassinated. Instead the new vice president Theodore Roosevelt became president. Thomas R. Marshall, Woodrow Wilson's estranged vice president, would have assumed the presidency if Wilson had died following his crippling stroke in October 1919.

Many Democratic and Republican officials, including Secretary of State Robert Lansing, actually urged Marshall to become acting president, but he declined to do so, fearing that he would set an unsavory precedent. Wilson's wife and closest advisors disliked Marshall and were determined to block his ascent to the White House. Opponents of the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations also opposed Marshall because they believed they would most likely prevail as long as the incapacitated Wilson remained in office. It was only after the Kennedy assassination a half a century later, that the 25th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution provided for the vice president to become the acting president when the president was incapacitated.

Henry Wallace, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice president from 1941 until January 1945 when Roosevelt was inaugurated for his fourth term in office only to die less than three months later, is yet another vice president who almost became president. If Roosevelt, a desperately ill man during his last year in office, had died just three months earlier, Wallace would have become the new president. Unlike most previous vice presidents, Wallace was a rather able and prominent politician in his own right, but much more sympathetic to the Soviet Union than Roosevelt's ultimate successor Harry Truman. Indeed Truman and Wallace eventually came to strong disagreements over the emerging Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is interesting to speculate whether the Cold War might have developed differently if Wallace had been president rather than Truman. Given the inherent hostile intentions of Stalin, probably Wallace would have only postponed the inevitable.

Spiro Agnew, President

Richard Nixon's first vice president, would have succeeded him as president when Nixon was forced to resign in August 1974 because of the Watergate scandal. However, Agnew already had been forced to resign himself in October 1973 when his involvement in earlier corruption incidents was revealed. Gerald Ford, a much more qualified man and Nixon's new vice president, instead succeeded to the office.

In the past half century, starting with Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson, the vice president has taken on greater importance. Indeed both subsequently became president. In Nixon's case, despite Eisenhower's cruel comment cited above, his whole philosophy of government was to delegate significant power to those below him. In addition, after his first heart attack in 1955, Eisenhower per force had to delegate significant powers to his vice president. In Johnson's case, although he and Kennedy were not particularly friendly, Kennedy was at least grateful to Johnson for helping him win the office by carrying some important southern states.

Kennedy gave Johnson a few somewhat meaningful things to do. And when Johnson assumed office upon Kennedy's assassination, he realized how serious his choice of vice president had to be and so he went out and chose Hubert Humphrey, the next leading Democrat in the party, to be his running mate in 1964. After this, the American people began to expect the vice president to be somebody who was significant in his own right and could, if necessary, assume the presidency. Thus, most subsequent vice presidents like Nelson Rockefeller, Walter Mondale, George H. W. Bush, Albert Gore, Richard Cheney, and Joseph Biden were seen by most as substantial personalities in their own right and qualified to assume the presidency if necessary. Therefore, when George H. W. Bush chose an obviously less qualified Dan Quayle as his vice president and John McCain picked Sarah Palin as his running mate, these weak choices were roundly criticized by many. In earlier times such criticism would have never occurred. In the current election campaign, most observers felt that the two main vice presidential candidates, Joseph Biden and Paul Ryan, would be qualified to become president if necessary.

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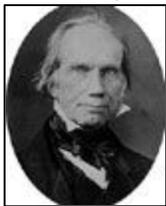
THE ALMOST PRESIDENTS: Washington Monthly.

By Michael Gunter

This year's presidential election between President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney shows all the signs of being decided by a very close margin. If Romney loses the election, he might join the others in American history who almost won the office. Here are 11 illustrious Americans who almost reached the presidency but for a variety of unique reasons fell just short: Henry Clay, Lewis Cass, William Seward, William Tecumseh Sherman, Samuel Tilden, James G. Blaine, Charles Evans Hughes, Robert F. Kennedy, Albert Gore, John F. Kerry, and Hillary Clinton.

Henry Clay (1844)

After his bitter enemy President Andrew Jackson (1829-1837), Henry Clay was arguably the greatest American politician of the first half of the 19th century. Clay represented Kentucky for many years in both the House of Representatives, where he thrice served as



Speaker, and even more prominently in the Senate where he promoted the Compromises of 1820 and 1850 that helped postpone the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln once called Clay "my ideal of a great man."

During his long career, Clay made five serious attempts to win the presidency, winning the nomination of a major party on three occasions. He came closest to fulfilling his ambition in the election of 1844 when he ran as the Whig Party's candidate against the Democrat's James K. Polk. New York's 36 electoral votes proved the difference, going to Polk by a mere 5,000 popular votes. A major reason for

his defeat was the expansion issue as Clay opposed admitting Texas to the Union believing it would awaken the slavery issue and incite war with Mexico as indeed it did. In addition, James G. Birney, the candidate of the Liberty Party, took slightly more than 15,000 votes in New York, probably attracting votes, the majority of which otherwise would have gone to Clay.

On a lighter note, Clay has been credited with introducing the mint julep drink to Washington, DC while staying at the famous [Willard Hotel](#), a monument to living away from home that has stood a block away from the White House since 1818.

Lewis Cass (1848)



A former secretary of war, senator and governor, Michigan's all but forgotten Lewis Cass was a leading candidate for the nomination of the Democratic Party in 1844 and 1852, but came up short on both occasions. However, in 1848, he did win the nomination, only to be rather narrowly defeated when he ran for the office against Zachary Taylor in the general election, where he lost the electoral college vote 163-127.

However, if a total of only 3,195 popular votes had changed from Taylor to Cass in Delaware, Georgia, and Louisiana, Cass would have won in the electoral college 146-144. Of course in those days, 3,195 popular votes were a much larger margin than they would be today given the growth of the US population. Nevertheless, it was the seventh closest presidential election in US history in terms of the smallest popular vote difference needed to have changed the result. Former president Martin Van Buren also played a spoiler role for Cass in this election by winning nearly 300,000 popular votes on the [Free Soil Party](#) ticket. Historians believe that many of these Van Buren votes would have otherwise have gone to Cass.

William H. Seward (1860)



In 1860, New York senator and former governor William Seward was widely assumed to be in line for the Republican nomination for president, an office which he then probably would have won given the mortal divisions in the Democratic Party leading up to the Civil War. His leading position going into the Republican National Convention in 1860 was well illustrated by a famous *Harper's Weekly* collage of photographs entitled "[Prominent Candidates for the Republican Presidential Nomination at Chicago.](#)" Seward's enlarged photograph was positioned in the center while eight lesser candidates were placed four on each side. Abraham Lincoln was simply one of those others. What happened?

First of all, his personal friend, the usually politically suave number one political boss in the entire country, Thurlow Weed, poorly advised Seward to take an extended eight-month trip abroad so as to avoid alienating any faction of his party by making an untoward statement. The more obscure Lincoln took advantage of Seward's absence to

tour the northeast and familiarize himself to the public. Lincoln's [famous speech](#) at New York City's still extant Cooper Union resulted. The dark horse from Illinois thus positioned himself as the next most likely choice if Seward were to somehow falter.

Thurlow Weed and William Seward also badly miscalculated how much they had alienated Horace Greeley by earlier denying him patronage, assuming that the influential publisher still would come around to their side. Instead, Greeley exacted his revenge by convincing many that Seward was too radical to win and if nominated would also hurt Republican chances in other elections. Coming from a supposed friend whose alienation was not that well known by most at the Convention, Greeley's position proved important. Weed also somehow erroneously assumed that Seward had the support of Simon Cameron, the political boss in Pennsylvania who supposedly once said "an honest politician is one who, when he is bought, stays bought." On this particular occasion, however, Cameron thought he had found a higher bidder, and Lincoln was rewarded. Chicago, as the Convention's site, also proved important as some historians would argue that if the nomination had taken place anywhere else but in Lincoln's home state, Seward still would have prevailed.

As a result, Lincoln won the nomination on the third ballot. Seward was devastated, but in time became Lincoln's closest political confidant in the new president's Cabinet perspicuously called by one historian the team of rivals. On the night Lincoln was assassinated, an accomplice burst into Seward's home and stabbed him repeatedly. Miraculously, Seward survived and continued to serve the new president Andrew Johnson as secretary of state. From this position, the failed presidential aspirant seemingly committed yet another error when he purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 for \$15 million. In time, however, the nation became most grateful for Seward's far sighted folly.

Samuel J. Tilden (1876)



With the exception of the Bush-Gore election in 2000, the presidential election of 1876 was arguably the most controversial in American history. Samuel J. Tilden, the reform Democratic governor of New York, won a majority of the popular votes (51.5 per cent) compared to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes's (47.5 per cent), but Tilden's 184 electoral votes compared to Hayes's 165 fell one vote short of the required majority to win. The 19 electoral votes of Florida (only 4 in those days), Louisiana (8), and South Carolina (7) were in dispute, reflecting the continuing battle over Reconstruction in the South.

Congress decided to settle the crisis by creating a 15-member Electoral Commission to determine which of the disputed electoral votes from the 3 Southern states were to be counted. After much maneuvering, 8 Republicans and 7 Democrats were appointed to this Commission with the result that this body decided in favor of Hayes in all three of the Southern states in question by a vote of 8-7. Thus, Hayes officially won the election

by an electoral count of 185-184, and was sarcastically called “His Fraudulency” by many.

Although it is not possible to conclude conclusively who would have won if the election had been free of all these electoral problems, at first glance it is difficult to conclude that Tilden should not have been awarded at least 1 of the disputed electoral votes and thus the presidency. Upon closer scrutiny, however, one must note that the Southern Democrats had used violence, intimidation, and fraud to curtail Black voting in the South that otherwise would have gone mostly to the Republican candidate Hayes since nearly all Blacks then voted for the party of Abraham Lincoln. Thus, a really fair voting tally might possibly have actually shown Hayes winning the popular vote as well as the electoral vote.

To his credit, Tilden accepted the results, commenting that “I can retire with the consciousness that I shall receive from posterity the credit of having been elected to the highest position in the gift of the people, without any of the cares and responsibilities of the office.” His tombstone carries the simple phrase, “I Still Trust in The People.” The magnificent New York Public Library, whose main building bears his name on its front, stemmed from the Tilden Trust being combined after his death with the Astor and Lenox Libraries in 1895.

William Tecumseh Sherman (Several Times after the Civil War)

After the Civil War the Republican Party sought to maintain its weakening hold on the presidency by running former Union generals for the office. Ulysses S. Grant was the first, serving two disastrous, scandal-filled terms. Sherman, the Union’s second most famous general, was the next choice, but given his friend Grant’s failures in the White House, Sherman was determined not to fall into the same trap. He declared in 1884 that “I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected.”



In Sherman’s case, however, his name kept coming up during each presidential election for the remainder of his life. Since he meant what he said, however, the Republicans had to fall back on less famous generals to keep their hold on the White House. They managed to elect James A. Garfield, Rutherford B. Hayes, and Benjamin Harrison. Surely if these less famous generals managed to be elected, the much better known Sherman would have if he had decided to run.

Sherman held a life long contempt for politicians and politics, which was reinforced by Grant’s sad experience. In addition, he believed that the presidency itself was an overrated office, a theme adumbrated by the well-known British observer of American politics Lord Bryce who wrote a chapter in this book [*The American Commonwealth*](#) on why great men are not chosen presidents.

Sherman was baptized a Roman Catholic and then married a Catholic, although he actually was an inveterate foe of the Church throughout his life. Still if he had been

willing to become president, it might have cleared away some of the latter encumbrances that Catholicism presented to Al Smith in 1928 and John F. Kennedy in 1960 when they sought the office. Sherman's brother Senator John Sherman (1823-1900) of Ohio was mentioned for the Republican presidential nomination in 1880, 1884, and 1888, and also lent his name to the famous Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890.

James G. Blaine (1884)

Arguably the leading Republican during the Gilded Age, Blaine sought the Republican nomination on five separate occasions. He won it only once in 1884 when he narrowly lost the general election to Grover Cleveland in an ugly contest marred by corruption charges against Blaine and accusations that Cleveland [had fathered an illegitimate child](#). The Mulligan letters that had helped sink Blaine's nomination hopes in 1876 by showing his corrupt influence with railroads resurfaced even more tellingly and counted more than Cleveland's private scandal. Republican reformers known as Mugwumps also supported Cleveland.



In addition, Blaine's hopes to carry a significant portion of the Irish vote in New York, as his mother was Irish Catholic, foundered when he failed to disavow a supporter's claim in the Empire State that the Democrats were the party of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion." New York then as now returned a large Irish Catholic vote. As a possible result, the "Plumed Knight" as Blaine was paradoxically called by his supporters, lost New York's 36 electoral votes by just 1,047 popular votes out of the more than 1.7 million cast and thus the electoral college by 219-182. If he had won the popular vote in New York, Blaine would have won the electoral college by a comfortable margin of 218-183 and thus the presidency. It was the third smallest number of total popular votes by a winner in US presidential election history. Cleveland also won a very close popular vote by one-quarter of a per cent. Ironically, as secretary of state in the late 1880s, Blaine arguably adumbrated NAFTA a century later, by championing reciprocal tariff treaties with Latin America.

Charles Evans Hughes (1916)

Hughes was one of the most prominent American leaders in our history and a man most eminently cut out to have been president. Although he fell just short of this in the presidential election of 1916 against incumbent Woodrow Wilson, Hughes did serve as governor of New York, and as a Supreme Court Justice before running for president—the only person on the Court who ever resigned to run for president on a major-party ticket—and subsequently as secretary of state, judge on the Permanent Court of International Justice, and finally Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. The Republican Party chose the moderate Hughes as its nominee in 1916 to bring itself together after having split during the previous election between conservative president William Howard Taft and progressive former president Theodore Roosevelt, a fissure that had allowed



Woodrow Wilson to eke into the White House with barely 40 per cent of the popular vote.

The 1916 election hinged on the tight returns from California and a fluke that denied that state, and a victory, to Hughes. Just before the election, Hughes campaigned there but neglected to meet with its powerful and popular Republican governor, Hiram Johnson, while both were staying at the same hotel in Long Beach, California. Although Hughes did not even know Johnson was there, the California governor felt snubbed and withdrew his support for his party's presidential candidate. This rebuke almost certainly cost Hughes California's 13 electoral votes and the White House.

Even so, Wilson went to bed that night believing that he had lost the election, while Hughes retired in the belief he had won. Indeed there is a story that the following morning when a reporter phoned Hughes, he was told that the president was still asleep. The reporter then said to tell Hughes when he awoke that he was not the president. Although the story is probably apocryphal, the election was so close that the final results remained in doubt for several days. California was finally awarded to Wilson by less than 3,800 popular votes out of nearly a total of 1 million. Wilson prevailed by the very close electoral vote margin of 277-254, 266 being the figure necessary for victory. If Hughes had not so inadvertently alienated Hiram Johnson, he almost certainly would have carried California and thus squeaked out a most narrow electoral college victory.

Robert F. Kennedy (1968)

One of the saddest stories in American presidential politics was the [assassination](#) of Robert F. Kennedy just a few minutes after he had won the final and largest Democratic presidential primary in California on June 5, 1968.



Kennedy was the younger brother of President John F. Kennedy, who had been assassinated in 1963. The younger Kennedy had served both his elder brother and then President Lyndon B. Johnson as attorney general before going on to be elected US senator from New York. RFK renewed an enormous idealism in American politics and seemed destined someday to run for president. His moment, however, came sooner than expected when the increasing unpopularity of the Vietnam War made Johnson vulnerable. Thus, US senator Eugene McCarthy challenged his party's sitting president for the nomination in 1968. To the amazement of most, McCarthy came in a very close second to Johnson in the first primary, New Hampshire.

Kennedy, who had already decided to challenge Johnson, now officially entered the fray, bringing charges of opportunism against him from McCarthy's supporters and effectively splitting the anti-war movement in the Democratic Party. When Johnson suddenly withdrew from the contest on March 31—forced out many thought by the anti-war sentiment that made his reelection seem increasingly unlikely—his loyal vice president, Hubert Humphrey, inherited the regular party establishment and began to seek the party's nomination by winning delegates in non-primary states.

At the same time, Kennedy and McCarthy went head to head in four major primaries: Indiana, Nebraska, Oregon, and California. Their contest caused enormous excitement within the Democratic Party and came down to the biggest and final primary, California, in which Kennedy prevailed by capturing 46 per cent of the vote to his rival's 42 per cent. However, all the enthusiasm and sense of inevitability to his candidacy came to a horrific end when just minutes after giving his victory speech in Los Angeles, Kennedy was gunned down by a deranged Palestinian upset over Kennedy's support of Israel.

No one will ever know what would have happened if Kennedy had lived, but some believe that given how unpopular Humphrey had become with so many anti-war Democrats, the Party would have eventually united behind Kennedy. Humphrey was never able to unite the Democratic Party for his run against Nixon. Nevertheless, he came very close to winning. Surely, if Humphrey almost defeated Nixon, despite being saddled by a divided and dispirited Democratic Party, Kennedy would have won because he would have been the candidate of a united Democratic Party, many of whose anti-war adherents simply refused to support Humphrey.

Albert Gore, Jr. (2000)

The 2000 presidential election remains a vivid and, in many cases, painful memory. The final result was unclear for more than a month. Although Al Gore had won over a half



million more popular votes in the country than George W. Bush, Bush eventually was declared the winner because the US Supreme Court in effect ruled by a vote of 5-4 that out of almost 6 million popular votes cast in Florida, Bush had won that state by 537 popular votes and thus should be awarded its 25 electoral votes. This highly controversial decision—made by a Court with 7 judges appointed by previous Republican presidents—to stop recounting more than 175,000 disputed votes, gave Republican Bush 271 electoral votes, while his Democratic opponent had to settle for 266. Since 270 electoral votes were needed to win, Bush had prevailed.

Gore's almost was even closer because of the antiquated voting procedure that resulted in hanging and pregnant chads. These notorious chads were the result of unsuccessful voter attempts to punch a hole into the chad in the paper-based card ballots by the candidate of their choice. For various reasons such as old age and infirmity potential Gore voters were more likely to have squandered their vote by not having completely punched out the chad in the ballot for their vote to count.

In addition, the so-called butterfly ballot, which failed to line up candidates' names in a straight line with the chad that had to be punched to vote for them, probably led a significant number of older Jewish voters who wanted to vote for Gore to vote instead for Pat Buchanan. Even Buchanan expressed surprise that so many Jewish people had voted for him. Finally, Green Party candidate Ralph Nader won more than 97,000 popular votes in Florida. If Nader had not been on the ballot, a significant portion of his votes certainly would have gone to Gore, who had legitimate environmental qualifications too.

Given the many political differences between Gore and Bush, one also wonders how history might have been different if Gore had won. Although it is difficult to see how Gore might have prevented the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, one might well argue that Gore would not have reacted by eventually attacking Iraq in 2003 on the erroneous claim that it had aided the attacks by al-Qaeda and was building weapons of mass destruction. As maybe a very small consolation, Bush invited Gore to the White House for a brief visit on the occasion of his having won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.

John F. Kerry (2004)

Like Florida four years earlier, the 2004 presidential election came down to one final state, in this case Ohio. In that battleground state voting controversies over reputed irregularities existed. Officially a switch of a mere 59,301 popular votes out of more than 5.5 million cast would have given its 20 electoral votes and thus the election to Kerry by a tally of 271-266 electoral votes, 270 being necessary to win. However, when Ohio's secretary of state announced that it was statistically impossible for Kerry to make up the popular vote gap with the 135,000 uncounted provisional votes, Kerry conceded, and Bush won the election by an electoral vote of 286-251.



Later, both Kerry and the Democratic Party chairman Howard Dean declared that possible voting fraud in Ohio had not been investigated by its Republican secretary of state and that had it been, Kerry might have won that state and thus the election. Probably this would not have occurred, so Kerry was relegated to the list of those who had almost won. Ironically, if Kerry had won Ohio, it would have been a complete reversal of how Bush had won in 2000 because in 2004, Bush won over 3 million more popular votes throughout the United States than his opponent.

In another almost, but much lesser known scenario, if Iowa, Nevada, and New Mexico had switched their narrow popular vote margins from Bush to Kerry, the electoral college would have resulted in a 269-269 tie. However, in such a case, Bush almost certainly would have prevailed in the House of Representatives—which Constitutionally chooses the president when nobody wins the majority of electoral votes—because the Republican Party controlled that chamber. The last time the election had been thrown into the House was in 1824 when four candidates won electoral votes, an occurrence that prevented any single one from obtaining a majority.

Hillary Clinton (2008)

No woman had ever before been a serious candidate for the presidential nomination of a major party in American history. Hillary Clinton almost broke through that barrier, falling just short of the Democratic nomination in 2008. Given the unpopularity of Republican president George W. Bush, the Democratic candidate in 2008 had an excellent shot at winning the general election. This became all the more likely when the economy suddenly began to tank



as the campaign began in earnest during the fall. Thus, if Clinton had been able to secure the nomination she just barely lost, she would have been in an excellent position to win the presidency.

As the wife of President Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton had already established her political credentials and ambitions. While her husband was concluding his presidency in 2000, she successfully ran for the vacant senate seat in New York. Upon winning, she quickly became an important political figure. By the time she officially entered the campaign in January 2007, she held a commanding lead in most public opinion polls.

Obama officially entered the campaign one month later and pulled close to her in the polls during the fall of 2007. In the opening Iowa caucuses on January 3, 2008 Obama out-organized and then stunned her by coming in first with 37.58 per cent of the vote, while Clinton had to settle for a disappointing third with 29.45 per cent. John Edwards slightly edged her for second place with 29.75 per cent. Although the difference in actual delegates won by these three was minor, the Iowa results were most damaging to Clinton. Already falling behind in campaign finance raising, Clinton found it difficult to bring in new donations and seemed to be faltering. Panic set in.

Impressively, Clinton managed to right the sinking ship and five days later beat Obama 39-36 per cent in New Hampshire, the first state to hold a primary. Although she lost the South Carolina primary on January 26 by a 2-1 margin, Super Tuesday's primaries in 22 separate states on February 5, resulted in a virtual tie between the two, with Obama taking 847 delegates to Clinton's 834. Among Clinton's triumphs was California, by far the largest state in the nation.

After Super Tuesday, however, the Clinton campaign was not prepared financially or logistically for what was now going to be a continuing test. Obama proceeded to win the next 12 caucuses and primaries, many by large margins, and took a sizeable lead in the delegate count, which Clinton never overcame despite several subsequent primary wins.

Following Obama's triumph, he appointed her secretary of state, the premier position in the cabinet. This was also the position to which Abraham Lincoln had appointed his defeated nomination rival, William Seward, in 1860.

Final Thoughts

In surveying the list of others who might have been included in this list of almost candidates, a few potential vice presidents come to mind. Space permits mention of only Daniel Webster, considered by many to be one of the greatest American politicians of the first half of the 19th century. Webster unsuccessfully sought his party's nomination on three occasions but never came close to it. However, on two occasions (1840 and 1848) he was offered the Whig Party nomination as vice president only to turn it down, explaining "I do not propose to be buried until I am really dead and in my coffin." On both occasions, however, it was the Whig Party president who died in office. Thus, Webster would have succeeded to the presidency if he had accepted the vice presidency.

Possibly a man of his high caliber might have been able to do more to have prevented the subsequent Civil War than the two men (John Tyler and Millard Fillmore, respectively) who did become president on those occasions, although this is doubtful.

*Read more history of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>