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IS 2012 A WASTED YEAR?

Since the last presidential election in 2008, Congress has spent wasted, unproductive years because each side was fearful to pass any meaningful legislation thinking it might hurt the next presidential outcome. As you well know, 2011 has been a very partisan year already and 2012 looks to be worse. This extreme partisanship comes at an especially bad time because of the economic downturn continuing in the United States and the world.

Speaking of presidential elections, let's look at the Republican primary for president. There are several candidates vying for the job and a few have dropped out already. Money seems to be the major reason and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Candidate Tim Pawlenty, former Minnesota governor, was doing quite well in the polls when it was rumored that he was short of money, which made him go down in the polls, lose even more financial support, and subsequently had to drop out.

Mitt Romney has held around 20% in the polls since he entered the race. This has always placed him in among top two or three candidates, but hasn't broken away to become a clear leader. One of Romney's problems is that people don't trust him to be conservative enough to satisfy the increasingly powerful Tea Party block of voters. This has caused several more conservative candidates to pull ahead and stay on top for a while but always fall back for several different reasons.

Donald Trump entered the race and led Romney for a short time, then fell back and dropped out of the race. Next was Michelle Bachman who stayed on top longer but made some questionable comments in answers to questions in a debate, then her chief political advisor quit and she lost the lead, and has not been over 10 percent since. When Rick Perry entered the race he had a head start on fund raising and soon was leading Romney in the polls. He stayed on top a little longer but he made some questionable comments in two debates and in a speech in New Hampshire and he was on his way down. He is still in the race with about 10 percent in the polls. The next frontrunner is Herman Cain who was slower in moving up but stayed longer. It was revealed that he had been involved in a sex discrimination suit a few years ago and the woman has come forward and talked about the suit, putting doubt on Cain's ethics. He has also had problems with some questions in debates concerning foreign relations. The answers made Cain look very uninformed. He is still in the race but his numbers are going down quickly. The last candidate to show signs of becoming the leader in the polls is Newt Gingrich. The former Speaker of the House's numbers have been slowly edging up over the past few weeks to the point that he will probably over take Romney as well. It remains to be seen if Gingrich can stay on top

and for how long. John Huntsman of Utah and Ron Paul of Texas probably don't have the juice (a different word??) to knock off Romney, but they both are smart, well informed candidates.

It is pretty amazing when you look at the chronology of this primary race. There is one more important dynamic to be considered in this race: There are several very early state primary elections - Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina - that could change the outcome. Most of the polling numbers we are looking at are national and might have little effect on Iowa or New Hampshire. Some of the so called lesser candidates could do quite well in some of the state primaries. Lastly, don't forget that all this picks only the Republican candidate and the Democrats have to pick their candidate, most likely President Obama.

Whoever the Republican candidate turns out to be, I am afraid the extreme partisanship is here to stay at least through November 2012. Remember, the Minority Leader McConnell recently stated that the number one job for Senate Republicans was to defeat President Obama in the 2012 election. That means another wasted year and little productive outcomes for Americans.