

The Road Not Taken **by Dan Jacoby**

Governor George Pataki announced the other day that he will not seek a fourth term as Governor of New York.

His announcement was standard political jargon. He spoke of his own gleaming record, while ignoring his failures. He talked about how elected officials are temporary positions, while disregarding polls showing how low his approval rating is. He seemed to believe that stepping down was his choice, when in fact he'd probably be kicked out anyway. Somebody wake me when it's over.

Probably the only interesting aspect of his announcement (aside from the question of who will be the Republican nominee to succeed him) is how divergent his path is from another statewide elected official, Senator Hillary Clinton.

Both Governor Pataki and Senator Clinton are considered major candidates for President in 2008. Both are believed to have serious obstacles in the way of getting nominated.

But the road each is taking, at least right now, is wildly different from the other's road.

Governor Pataki has decided not to run for Governor, because he's afraid he'll lose. Losing an election, especially when you're the incumbent, is not a good way to start a Presidential campaign. So he leaves before being kicked out, hoping nobody will notice.

By contrast, Senator Clinton is hoping for a big win in her re-election bid. If she wins with 60%–65% of the vote (or more!), she will be able to say she appeals to a wide spectrum of voters. This could be the springboard she needs to vault over her competition. And you can bet she hopes everyone will notice.

The bottom line is that, while George Pataki's star is falling, Hillary Clinton's is rising. Pataki seems to be the party guest who realizes he's overstaying his welcome. On the other hand, Clinton is the party guest few actually invited, but everyone wishes they had. Who would have thought, just a few years ago, that the governor who whipped his opponent handily would look so weak, while the senator who slipped in against an opponent who was barely there would look so strong?

Just for the fun of it, imagine that by some truly strange circumstance, both George Pataki and Hillary Clinton are nominated. The big question then (aside from who wins the election, of course) will be who wins New York.

Anybody wanna place any bets? I'd offer odds, except that election day is still years away, and between now and then anything can happen.