Momentum Builds for Rubio as VP; Senator Says He Won't Be On Ballot

Hispanic vote weighs heavily in calculations, but Republican strategists aren't sold yet

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A national boomlet keeps building for Marco Rubio, with no encouragement from the Florida senator.

While the Republican presidential contest remains wide open, a consensus is forming for the junior senator as the party's vice presidential candidate, according to an oft-quoted political scientist. Sabato said Republicans are mindful that their party must at least remain competitive for Hispanic votes if they hope to knock off President Obama.

"The 2008 Hispanic vote [was a] blowout for Obama and it's almost certain to go 10 percent or higher. The GOP has to get at least 40 percent to win a national election," Sabato calculated.

Rubio, a son of Cuban immigrants and a former speaker of the Florida House, polls well among Hispanics, even as he maintains a generally tough stand on immigration issues.

"He's catapulted to the top [of vice presidential consideration] long before anyone I can remember. He's ideologically right where the Republicans are. He would unite all the factions," Sabato told Fox's Neal Cavuto.

Despite the glowing free media, Rubio says he's happy where he is.

"Senator Rubio is flattered to be mentioned in this light, but he is fully committed to serving Floridians in the U.S. Senate. He will not be on the ballot in 2012," said Rubio spokesman Alex Burgos.

One veteran Republican consultant, speaking on background, was slightly less bullish on the 40-year-old Rubio's prospects as a running mate.

"I'd say he's an odds-on favorite for veep. Depends on who gets the nomination," the Florida strategist said.
Among the alternate choices would be the large field of also-ran presidential hopefuls.

Roger Stone, a nationally recognized GOP consultant whose experience dates back to the Nixon administration, was even less enthralled by Sabato's theory.

"You cannot pass scrutiny on the national level due to days as speaker of the Florida House. The [David] Rivera time bomb has yet to go off," Stone said of the controversial first-term congressman who is one of Rubio's closest Miami associates.

Kevin Wagner, political science professor at Florida Atlantic University, speculated that Rubio "would be on any nominee's short list. There are many appealing aspects of a Rubio VP.

"The question is whether he would take the offer. It might depend on the candidate."

Sabato's comments came on the heels of a poll that found 33 percent of Florida respondents said they were more likely to support a Republican for president if Rubio were on the ticket as a vice presidential candidate. The Aug. 8-9 poll was sponsored by the Associated Industries of Florida.