If Romney is elected president tomorrow, the sun will still rise in the east and sea will still be salty. Beyond that, predictions about a Romney presidency become more difficult, given his exceptionally inconsistent history on the issues.

As I showed in an earlier post, Romney's views about environmental and energy issues flipped 180° between his term as governor and his positions as a candidate. Late in the campaign, he seemed to shift toward more moderate views on some issues, although not on environment and energy. A look at his transition team suggests the possibility of a pragmatic approach — but then again, maybe not.

Given that we can't be very sure of his policy preferences, it may make sense to think about politics instead. In seeking reelection, Romney would face the same fundamental political problem he has encountered in this campaign: the need to maintain support from fiercely conservative voters and big donors while also attracting moderate votes. How might this political problem shape his presidency?

A plausible view is that his best strategy would be to start moderate, move sharply to the right, and then move back to the center shortly before the next election. The rationale would be that many moderate voters will continue to pay attention just after this campaign, but their attention will then wander until the next one begins. However, ideological voters pay more careful attention and are more motivated to remember an official's track record. So this strategy — a conservative presidency bookended by periods of moderation — would allow Romney to appeal to both groups.

Just as in the current campaign, Romney could win over conservative voters with two to three years of conservative governance. Like President Bush, he could also use relatively low visibility administrative actions to roll back energy and environmental policy — something ideological voters and big donors will notice and remember, but not less engaged voters. Once they accept him as truly conservative, they would then tolerate more moderate election year behavior — just as they have in the closing weeks of this election. In the meantime, moderate voters would remember his moderate first months and final year, exhibiting the same amnesia about Romney's conservative positions as in the current election.

The best argument for this scenario is that it jibes with the one thing we know with most certainty about Romney: his willingness to devote himself over multiple years to campaigning for the White House. It also fits the general shape of his political career so far. Of course, there's no way of being certain what Romney would do in

office. After six years on the national scene, Romney has still left considerable doubts about what he really believes and what makes him tick. Still, a Romney presidency shaped around reelection strategy seems plausible. Depending on how the vote goes tomorrow, we may have a chance to test this theory against reality, or it might end up being purely hypothetical.