



Business In The Beltway

Presidential Timber Tends To Be Tall

Ira Carnahan, 05.19.04, 6:00 AM ET

Predicting who's going to win the presidency is difficult at best, but putting your money on the candidate who's taller seems to be about as good an approach as any. Over the past half-century, the taller candidate has won the presidency ten out of 13 times, and most of our presidents have been taller than average.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Franklin Roosevelt, George H.W. Bush and **Bill Clinton** all stood 6 feet 2 inches or a bit more, while **Lyndon Johnson** was 6 feet 3 inches and **Abraham Lincoln**, our tallest president, was 6 feet 4 inches.

For 2004, we have **George W. Bush** at 6 feet (some say he's really 5 feet 11 inches) versus **John Kerry** at 6 feet 4 inches.

Does a candidate's height really influence whether he's likely to become president? There have been too few presidential elections to say for sure, but researchers do find that, on average, taller people earn more money at their jobs.

The height effect is substantial. Among white, non-Hispanic males, those whose height is below the 50th percentile earn on average 10% less than those whose height is above the 50th percentile, report University of Pennsylvania economists Nicola Persico and Andrew Postlewaite and the University of Michigan's Dan Silverman in a new study.

For white males in the U.S., each additional inch of height is associated with a 2.5% gain in annual income; in Britain, each extra inch brings a gain of 2.7%.

What's really striking, though, is that what matters for income isn't how tall a man is as an adult but how tall he was as a teenager. Tall teens earn more as adults than do short teens, the economists found. That some short teens later grow to be tall adults doesn't seem to be of any benefit to them.

Just why it's so valuable to be tall as a teen isn't entirely clear. Taller teens don't appear to have higher self-esteem, for example, and they also don't seem to gravitate toward different or higher-paying occupations. The researchers did discover, though, that shorter boys are less likely than taller ones to take part in high school social activities and sports, and that participation in sports and other high school activities is significantly linked to future income.

Indeed the economic benefits of height are so substantial, the economists say, that many boys who are short might benefit from human growth hormone replacement therapy, such as Humatrope from **Eli Lilly** (nyse: [LLY - news - people](#)). [Other makers of human growth hormone include **Pfizer** (nyse: [PFE - news - people](#)), **Genentech** (nyse: [DNA - news - people](#)) and **Serono** (nyse: [SRA - news - people](#)).] While the cost of a several-year course of therapy can exceed \$100,000, the potential income gains are large enough "that a sizable fraction of the population might be willing to consider treatment purely on an economic basis," the economists say.

While they focus mostly on the height effect for white males, the economists also report that what limited data are available suggest a similar size effect for black males. No statistics are available for black women; for white women, however, the height effect is "economically substantial" but different. It's not teen height that matters, it turns out, but a woman's actual adult height. Just why the effect is different with women as opposed to men is not yet clear.

Nor is it clear why taller candidates tend to win presidential elections. But if you want to handicap this year's contest, it might be a good idea to pore over Bush's and Kerry's old high school yearbooks to see which man stood taller as a teenager.

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