



There Is No "Real" Mitt Romney

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Peter Beinart has some [encouraging words](#) for conservatives worried about a Romney presidency, but this has relevance for liberals too:

...within weeks of Romney's election, his chief of staff would be culling through lists of potential deputy secretaries of the interior. The list would be generated by places like the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute and Chamber of Commerce. It would consist largely of people who served in the Bush administration, with perhaps a few entrants who stood out at the state level—which is to say, were particularly zealous in serving corporate interests—thrown in. This list would have been approved, if not actually assembled, by the very industries that the Interior Department regulates. It would be similar to the list that would have been assembled for President Perry or President Cain, and it would include no pro-regulation Republicans, because the people who produce such lists are in the anti-regulation business. Once Romney wins the presidency, all this would happen automatically. He wouldn't have to do a thing.

This is important to remember. The presidential campaign, with its intense focus on the personalities and foibles of the contenders, conditions us to ignore all the things about an administration that don't have to do with the heart of the man in the Oval Office. But the president has to appoint over 3,000 people to the executive branch. It isn't like there are a dozen different teams of varying ideological shades within each party, each ready with a full complement of people to fill out an entire administration when called upon. Whether it's Perry or Romney or whoever, it's pretty much going to be the same group that takes all those positions.

Furthermore, all those people, all those departments, and all those policies will offer President Romney ample opportunities to placate and reassure the Republican base. They'll notice what he does - the religious conservatives will pay close attention to policies on things like abortion, the business interests will make sure he appoints properly anti-environment folks at the EPA and Interior, and so on. It's true that Romney will be concerned about not angering the independent voters he'll need to win re-election, so one might expect Mitt's deeply felt terror of offending any potential voter to manifest itself in a more liberal presidency. But that great mass of people will pay attention only to the big things, while the ones to Romney's right will be keeping much closer score.

All of this is to say that any hope or dread (depending on your perspective) that the "real" Mitt Romney is more moderate than the current Republican primary version is not so much incorrect as misconceived. One can presume that somewhere underneath all that calculation there are firmly held beliefs, but what they are is not all that important. The Mitt Romney who is president, just like the Mitt Romney we see today, will act according to the incentives with which he is presented and what he fears. The result will be a presidency reflecting today's Republican party, which is to say an extremely conservative one.