



Christie vs. Paul: Hold the Bacon — Libertarian Contest More Engaging

By: Mark Silva- July 31, 2013

Never mind that bacon business.

(New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie criticized his fellow Republican, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, for representing a state that collects more aid from the federal government than it pays in taxes — as opposed to New Jersey, which pays out more than it gets back. Paul complained that Christie has a “gimme gimme” attitude toward federal aid — witness superstorm Sandy — and said: “This is the king of bacon talking about bacon.”)

None of this would matter if Christie and Paul weren’t concerned too of their party’s most promising candidates for president in 2016 — marking one of the first direct clashes between two potential contenders three years out.

What really matters is another challenge that Christie waged, as Trevor Burrus at the Cato Institute sees it: In dismissing libertarian concerns about the government’s surveillance programs as “very dangerous thought,” Christie also accused Republicans such as Paul of forgetting the lessons of September 11.

“Christie’s comments underscore a growing rift in the Republican Party between the more libertarian minded and those who adhere to more traditional Republican stances of social conservatism and strong foreign policy,” writes Burns, at the decidedly libertarian Cato Institute. “It’s high time for the Republican Party to have this fight and to see which faction voters will favor.”

“My bet is on the libertarians,” he writes today.

“People are increasingly encountering obstructionist, if not oppressive, government in their everyday lives,” he contends. “It’s not surprising that more people are adopting libertarian stances on a variety of issues.”

“New revelations about massive NSA domestic-spying programs (revelations that libertarians warned us about) are just the latest example of libertarianism “happening” to more people. Staying away from a massive government dragnet of its own citizens may be impossible, and unsurprisingly, 56 percent of Americans now believe that federal courts fail to provide adequate limits on NSA surveillance.”

The recent House vote to curtail that NSA surveillance failed by a tiny margin.

“Those Americans have not “forgotten 9/11,” as Governor Christie says,” Burrus writes. “They’ve simply realized that the government should not be given a blank check written against our civil liberties.”

“Governor Christie and many other Republicans stand against the tide of public opinion, particularly the opinions of younger demographics,” he writes. “Christie recently vetoed a bill that would have legalized same-sex marriage, and he has said he would veto any bill that decriminalized marijuana use.”

“After back-to-back defeats in presidential elections, Republicans now have a choice to make: Will they continue to oppose social and political trends and thus alienate younger voters, or will they seize the opportunity to articulate a consistent critique of government overreach and a principled defense of liberty?”

Forfeiting rights for fear of terrorism is a dangerous game, writes Bryant Harris, a young Peace Corps volunteer opining at policymic.com.

“Like Obama and other national security state proponents, Christie is making an argument based on fear mongering and irrational emotional appeals to blow the problem out of proportion rather than performing an objective, statistical analysis of the facts,” he writes. “Based on how frequently the U.S. media and politicians talk about the threat of terrorism, specifically Islamic terrorism, it seems that we are constantly under fire. The truth is, however, that the odds of dying in a terrorist attack are one in 20,000,000 (0.00000005%) and that terrorism has actually become less frequent since the 1970s... You are more likely to be struck by lightning than to be killed by a terrorist.

“Elected officials view the need to spy on the American public as an indispensable tool in combating the 0.00000005% chance of someone dying in an attack,” he writes. “When we surrender our freedoms and the Bill of Rights, the terrorists have truly won. ”

Whichever is the right conclusion to draw from this argument, this is a much better debate for that 2016 campaign than the fight over bacon.