



Paul Begala on Mitt Romney's Epic Fail in His GOP Convention Speech

It was the most important and difficult sales pitch of the candidate's life. And he couldn't generate enough wattage to power a refrigerator light.

[Paul Begala](#) | August 30, 2012

The long national nightmare is over.

No, I don't mean Hurricane Isaac, which still threatens folks on the Louisiana-Mississippi border. I'm talking about the man-made disaster in Tampa: the GOP convention.

Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney acknowledges delegates before speaking at the Republican National Convention in Tampa on Thursday, Aug. 30. (Jae C. Hong / AP Photo)

After Ann Romney turned her scene-setter into a scene-stealer; after Chris Christie turned his keynote into a one-note (Me-Me-Me-Me-Me); after Lyin' Ryan and a cringe-worthy cameo from Clint Eastwood, Mitt Romney was introduced by Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. Perhaps relieved to not be on the ticket, Rubio began his 2016 presidential campaign. It was almost as embarrassing as the Eastwood Clintastrophe (as Larry Sabato called it). Instead of [introducing Romney](#), Rubio introduced ... Marco Rubio. In an act of political malpractice that reminded old-timers of the Democrats' 1972 convention, when George McGovern was pushed out of prime time, Rubio droned on until 10:37 pm. Seems like Republicans are as bad at staging a convention as they are at winning a war.

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After all that windup, it was finally time for Mitt Romney to make the most difficult and important [sales pitch of his life](#).

Let's be blunt: he failed. Romney, never an electrifying presence, couldn't generate enough wattage to power a refrigerator light.

Romney showed rare and genuine emotion talking about his parents. Not to get all Freudian on you, but one wonders if he knows deep in his heart that his kook-right pandering and hiding his tax returns would not meet with George Romney's approval. "My folks gave us the greatest gift of all," Romney said, "unconditional love." And a free ride to Harvard. And stock options.

Romney seemed especially desperate to rehabilitate his business record. The super PAC I advise, Priorities USA Action, has shone a bright spotlight on Romney's business record. Romney made a vast fortune in part by loading up businesses with debt, laying off employees, and canceling their health benefits. Inconveniently for Romney, some of those former employees have told their stories to the American people.

Romney had plainly hoped his business record would be a huge advantage. Now that it has been made into a negative, he seemed desperate to rehabilitate it. And so he cited Steel Dynamics, an Indiana steel mill once owned by Bain Capital. It is true that, unlike so many other companies, including GS Steel in Kansas City, Romney's firm did not lay waste to the workforce in order to pad profits. No, Romney made money at Steel Dynamics the old fashioned way: with government handouts. As the *Los Angeles Times* has reported, Romney and his investors pocketed \$37 million in government subsidies. The libertarian Cato Institute called it "[corporate welfare.](#)"

Romney had one small task and one large one. He accomplished neither. The small task was to make the case against President Obama. He failed to come up with a succinct new indictment à la Reagan's "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" Whew.

On the larger task, telling us what he would [do as president](#), he at least summarized his economic plan in five easy pieces (eat your heart out, Rick Perry). But here's the problem: everything in his plan could have been endorsed by George W. Bush. Hell, it could have been endorsed by Herbert Hoover.

Romney's challenge was to be a different kind of Republican, to sketch out an economic plan that welcomed former Obama voters. Instead he mocked them and rehashed old ideas with retreat rhetoric. As a veteran speechwriter I was disappointed. But as a pro-Obama strategist, I am heartened.