



## Romney's Your Man, Conservatives!

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**Conservatives see Romney as a flip-flopper of no convictions who should not be the GOP nominee, but he would be a conservative president because that's the only kind a Republican can be these days. Plus, [Matt Latimer on the case for Republican panic](#).**

A piece of advice for my [conservative friends](#): cheer up.

You've spent the last year desperately trying to nominate someone other than [Mitt Romney](#) for president. You've tried to draft [Sarah Palin](#), Chris Christie, Mitch Daniels and Paul Ryan. You have rallied around Michele Bachmann, then [Rick Perry](#), now [Herman Cain](#). But lucky for you, you've failed. Mounting a well-funded, well-organized presidential campaign, avoiding scandal and not making a fool of yourself in debates turns out to be surprisingly difficult. And so it now looks more likely than it has since the presidential campaign began that, despite your best efforts, your party will nominate Romney, the only candidate [with a good chance to win](#).

I know, I know, you don't think Romney is a conviction politician. When it suited his purposes in Massachusetts, he acted like a liberal. Now he's acting like a conservative. That's depressing to those of you who hunger for authenticity, for bravery, for someone untainted by Washington's duplicitous ways. But with all due respect, I think you're missing the point.

It doesn't matter all that much [what Romney really believes](#), or whether he believes much of anything. Romney will be a very conservative president because that's the only kind of president a Republican can be these days. Once upon a time, there was a species in Washington called the moderate Republican. Such creatures served in the administrations of Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. A few hung on long enough to serve under George H.W. Bush. They backed [abortion rights](#) and [environmental regulation](#). They thought government spending on infrastructure was good for business. They believed labor unions were a legitimate part of America's capitalist system. They supported [raising taxes](#) if that's what balanced budgets required. If you look hard, you can still find

such beings. They're like typewriters, fun to look at, but too antiquated to be of much use. Even if Mitt Romney wanted to stock his government with moderate Republicans who believe in seriously regulating the industries that their agencies oversee, he wouldn't be able to find them.

If there's one thing you know about Romney, it's that he's neither very principled nor very courageous. So you have nothing to worry about.



Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, speaks at the Defending the American Dream Summit, Friday, Nov. 4, 2011, in Washington., Haraz N. Ghanbari / AP Photo

To the contrary, 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.

It's true that Romney could, if he really cared, derail this process, and choose someone with a passion for say, mine safety. But if he did, the decision would produce ripples of

discontent: An angry phone call from a Republican member of Congress or large campaign donor. Negative chatter on the conservative blogs. And who would rise in Romney's defense as he alienated the conservatives who run today's GOP? The moderate Republican caucus in Congress? Washington's influential moderate Republican think tanks? The moderate Republican talking heads you keep seeing on [Fox](#)? If anyone rose to his defense, it would be the Sierra Club or the New York Times editorial page, which in conservative eyes would compound the offense. A few high-profile decisions like that and the Wall Street Journal would start muttering about the ghost of George H.W. Bush, who lost reelection after a conservative challenged him in the Republican primary.

The truth is that a president's particular views don't matter as much as they used to when the parties were more ideologically diverse. When Barry Goldwater ran against Nelson Rockefeller in 1964 or George McGovern took on Scoop Jackson in 1972, the Democrats and Republicans were Whitmanesque, each contained multitudes. Today, the presidential primaries cull out people like [Jon Huntsman](#) and Joe Lieberman who transgress their party's ideological red lines. And once a president from one party wins, he's handed a pre-fab administration by his party's think tanks, lobbying shops and members of Congress. In the Democratic Party, the battle between unions and environmental groups on the one hand and corporate and financial interests on the other at least creates a little drama. By contrast, in the GOP, where business has free rein, you don't even have that.

This doesn't make the individual who wins office irrelevant, of course. Hillary Clinton might not have decided to use reconciliation to push the health care bill through Congress, as Barack Obama did. Unlike George W. Bush, John McCain might not have established [Guantanamo Bay](#). But most of the decisions a presidential administration makes flow from the character of the party itself. And in today's GOP, that character is very, very conservative. A particularly courageous or principled president could challenge his own party's permanent infrastructure, even at the risk of courting a primary challenge, which in recent decades has guaranteed reelection defeat. But that's the beauty of it, my conservative friends. If there's one thing you know about Romney, it's that he's neither very principled nor very courageous. So you have nothing to worry about.

To the contrary, with [Barack Obama's approval ratings in the low 40s](#)—and Republicans increasingly likely to nominate the one candidate who doesn't terrify swing voters—it's us liberals who need to worry.