

Voting for President: The Lesser Evil Is Still Rather Evil

In a little over two months Americans will go to the polls to elect their president, the world's most powerful person. It truly is an awful choice—and another reason to include a “none of the above” line on the ballot.

Last week the Republican Party nominated Mitt Romney. The GOP has continued its policy of primogeniture, selecting the “next-in-line” candidate irrespective of his ideological views or political appeal.

Romney has been running for president for six years but is no friend of liberty. Indeed, he ostentatiously stands for nothing, having taken both sides of several important issues.

Yet the GOP Right again is joining the parade of a candidate it vigorously opposed during the primaries. Conservative activists who once bemoaned the possibility of a Romney nomination now are celebrating his political ascension.

What philosophical libertarian could offer a good word for Romney? Consultant Paul Miller recently wrote: “Libertarian voters will have a choice this November. They can vote for Mr. Romney, stop the expansion of government and give the marketplace an opportunity to repair our nation. Or they can cast third-party ballots and spend election night in self-righteous consolation about their roles in granting the government greater power.”

This dubious argument is trotted out every election. Four years ago libertarians were told to vote for John McCain, the Keating Five Senator noted for his explosive temper and strident war-mongering, to save America. Before that George W. Bush was the “must-vote.” He ended up increasing spending on virtually everything while starting the unnecessary and disastrous war in Iraq.

In 1996 the would-be savior was Robert Dole, who embodied the Washington establishment. Before him was George H.W. Bush, a patrician who really believed that Ronald Reagan's economic program was “voodoo economics.” Bush raised taxes and increased regulation.

This year Americans are warned that if they vote for the Libertarian Party presidential nominee Gary Johnson, or anyone else but Romney, the result will

be bigger government. But it also will be bigger if people vote for the GOP nominee.

After a quarter century, the Republican Party default option has resulted in a government which is vastly more expensive and expansive. It didn't matter whether the Democrat or Republican actually was elected. Government was bigger after *every* president left office. So much for the claim that the latest GOP presidential candidate would "stop the expansion of government and give the marketplace an opportunity to repair our nation."

Of course, anything is possible. Mitt Romney could be different. Just like the Israelis and Palestinians could make peace. But given the succession of truly horrid Republican Party nominees, Romney supporters bear a heavy burden of proof. Why would anyone expect him to break the mold and become the long-awaited conservative messiah and anti-government crusader?

Throughout his long career Romney has flip-flopped effortlessly in search of political advantage. He was for ObamaCare before he was against it. And now he might be for it again, according to his health adviser. Romney was for "cap and trade" energy regulation before he was against it. He was for abortion before he was against it. He even was against Ronald Reagan before he was for the former president: When Romney ran for U.S. Senate in 1994, he assured Massachusetts citizens that he was no Reaganite.

Mitt Romney is going to reverse decades of Republican support for expanded government?

Then there is foreign policy.

The biggest Big Government program is war. Yet Romney spent the entire primary season joining his opponents—other than Ron Paul—in performing the GOP equivalent of the Haka, the Maori war dance. The fact that neither he nor any of his sons served in the military seemed only to make him more warlike. Despite America's fiscal crisis, the Republican nominee is not satisfied that the U.S. accounts for almost half of the world's military outlays and subsidizes the defense of virtually every prosperous industrialized state. He insists on increasing the already bloated military budget. America's best hope is that Romney believes as little in his foreign policy proclamations as in his domestic policy promises.

Overall, a President Romney would greatly expand government. Observed commentator Laurence Vance: "If Romney wins, in four years we will have a higher national debt, and still have a drug war, a police state, troops in 150 countries, and a national security/warfare state."

Of course, as Vance noted, the same will occur if President [Barack Obama](#) is reelected. Are there any important differences? President Obama seems more enthusiastic about spending and less enthusiastic about warring than Romney.

However, in practice the differences are likely to be small. Even vice presidential nominee Rep. Paul Ryan's record is far more checkered than suggested by his supporters and critics. He has cheerfully backed big social programs and bail-outs, and is an unthinking uber-hawk.

If there is a reason to vote for Mitt Romney it is not to restrain government. Indeed, America's best hope is that he is an ideology-free pragmatist. Given Washington's ongoing fiscal crisis he then might press for a few spending reductions. On foreign policy Romney might trim an unnecessary security commitment or two. But he almost certainly would not "stop the expansion of government and give the marketplace an opportunity to repair our nation," as Miller suggested. To believe so is to put delirious hope before consistent experience.

Philosophical libertarians disagree about politics. Some refuse to participate in any way on the theory that voting "only encourages them." Others support the Libertarian Party, whose current standard-bearer is a former two-term Republican governor of New Mexico. Many others vote for the major party candidates, usually choosing the Republican (because of the GOP's professed free market convictions).

The latter might seem to be the most pragmatic choice, but the parties' rhetoric differs far more than their performance. Whoever wins on November 6 will expand government in every way. Whatever Mitt Romney's virtues, he will not "stop the expansion of government and give the marketplace an opportunity to repair our nation."

Moreover, voting for the lesser of two evils irrespective of how evil they are should be the definition of futility. As long as Americans vote for big-spending war-mongers, America's leaders will be big-spending war-mongers. A libertarian wouldn't have to be elected to exert influence. Perennial Socialist Party candidate [Eugene](#) Debs transformed American politics because both major parties ended up adopting much of his agenda. A philosophical libertarian candidate, whatever his party, could do the same if he demonstrated increasing political support for liberty.

As for November, the best outcome would be divided government. The Republican Congress worked overtime to constrain President [Bill Clinton](#). In contrast, the same legislative body gave President George W. Bush every outlay and war that he wanted. The Democratic Congress worked to limit President Bush before later joining with President Obama to greatly expand government. The Republican House has battled the Democratic president. The future is likely to be no different.

Whom to vote for on November 6? There is no obvious answer. But if Barack Obama or Mitt Romney is the answer, the question must be really dumb. After all, these two men are part of America's problem. It is time for real change.

