



Bringing the Conservative Message to America

Shapiro: Keep Their Feet to the Fire

By **Ben Shapiro** January 12, 2012 6:43 am

Mitt Romney is an enormous squish. On the squish scale, he falls somewhere between Jabba the Hut and Slimmer from Ghostbusters. He can't be trusted on conservative philosophy, and he can't be trusted to act as a principled conservative while in office.

And that may be the best thing for the conservative movement.

Since the days of Herbert Hoover, conservatives have rallied around Republican presidents. Republicans are their guys. No matter that Eisenhower prompted the growing power of Arabism in the Middle East; no matter that Nixon imposed price and wage controls and kowtowed to China; no matter that Reagan raised taxes after cutting them; no matter that George H.W. Bush raised taxes after promising not to; no matter that George W. Bush imposed steel tariffs, created a massive new entitlement program, blew up the education budget and bailed out Wall Street. They were our guys.

And then we wonder why our country has moved to the left. It's not the fault of the politicians; we can throw the bums out all day long, and it won't do any good. The answer is more basic: We have to be loyal to principle, not people. Politicians will not save us. We will save ourselves by holding our politicians' feet to the fire.

Great leadership is a luxury, not a necessity. In our 235-year history, we've had perhaps four truly great presidents -- and we consider three of the four great because they were wartime leaders (Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan -- and even George Washington's leadership was contingent on his wartime generalship). We've had many good presidents, many mediocre presidents and many rotten presidents.

And yet we're a great country. Why is that?

It's because until FDR, Americans largely didn't believe in the notion that great men would save us. We weren't looking for a savior or a king. We agreed with economist Milton Friedman, who wisely stated, "People in congress are in the business (of) trying to buy votes ... The same congressman will vote for a different thing if he thinks that's politically profitable It's nice to elect the right people but that isn't the way you solve

things. The way you solve things is by making it politically profitable for the wrong people to do the right thing."

But that places responsibility on us. And the yoke of responsibility is heavy, since we're out of shape. We've been conditioned to rely on "the right leaders" rather than relying on ourselves. When it comes to our politics, we're the obese fellow sitting on his basement couch, waiting for the electronic ab-cruncher to do the work for him. Like as not, he'll be just as fat next year, when he upgrades to the new ab-cruncher model. So will we.

We hear repeatedly that we've lost our trust in government, but precisely the opposite is true: If we'd lost our trust in government, we'd be on the road to healing. It's our trust in government -- our belief that if we just poke the ballot in the right place, there will be a chicken in every pot -- that is dooming America to domination by unanswerable rulers.

Between 1840 and 1880, according to the Cato Institute, more than half of incumbents either voluntarily retired or lost their Congressional races. With the advent of Teddy Roosevelt's and Woodrow Wilson's progressivism -- the notion that government was for experts, and that the people should be kept as far from the lawmaking sausage-maker as possible -- incumbency rates began to climb. In the middle of FDR's presidency, as Americans bought into the comforting liberal bromide of cradle-to-grave government administered by our betters, the rates skyrocketed again. Today, we are a people ruled by our government, not the other way around. Even during the 1994 Republican Revolution, 91.3 percent of incumbents kept their seats.

Now the Republican establishment seems to have selected Mitt Romney as the standard-bearer for the 2012 election. They say he's the most electable, which is probably false -- his poor record of job creation in Massachusetts, his job-slashing at Bain Capital and his embrace of Romneycare pose serious problems.

But here's the good news: Assuming he wins the nomination and somehow wins the White House, most conservatives will be ready to box him about the ears as soon as he steps out of line.

That would be a welcome change. The problem we have isn't with our politicians -- after all, we elect them. Our problem is us. Until we re-learn to hold our politicians' feet to the fire, our country will continue its gradual slide toward irrelevance.

Ben Shapiro, 27, is a graduate of UCLA and Harvard Law School. He is the four-time bestselling author of "Primetime Propaganda."