

Right Side News

The Right News for Americans

Right, Wrong, and Romney

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His commitment to health-care statism makes him a weak candidate.

After Rudy Giuliani, my old boss, dropped out of the 2008 GOP presidential sweepstakes, I supported Mitt Romney. That was not a difficult choice for me. The former Massachusetts governor is a good man and he loves the country as is. That I wish he were more conservative is not a deal-breaker for me. I wished the same thing about Rudy. Mitt, like Rudy, would make a fine chief executive.

More to the point, the choice in a nomination contest is not candidate A versus one's ideal nominee. It is candidate A versus candidates B, C, D, et al. On that score, the contest was no contest — Mitt was easily, in my mind, the best remaining in the field.

He may still be. He also may not. I'm not any less favorably inclined toward him than I was four years ago. It is silly, though, to portray as hypocrisy, or at least inconsistency, a reluctance to endorse today the same candidate one was happy to back the last go-round. This time around, B, C, D, and the rest are different. Not necessarily better, but different — most combining ringing positives with steep drawbacks, signal achievements with weighty baggage.

Unless different is better, shouldn't that mean the nod still goes to Mitt? Again, not necessarily. If we could analogize the race to a baseball game, the winner is not always determined by a straight-up comparison of the players. The game is situational. Say one of my best relief pitchers is a fire-baller, and he's done a great job, blowing away hitter after hitter while saving our team's last five games. But now, we find ourselves in a tight pennant race, playing a game we absolutely need to win. In the critical situation, the other team sends up its power hitter, a guy who absolutely crushes the fastball but couldn't hit a curve if his life depended on it. So, when I make the call to the bullpen, I don't want the

guy who throws a hundred miles an hour; I want the pitcher with the big hook. Doesn't mean I like the fireballer any less: It just means this match-up does not favor him.

I'm still very worried that the match-up with President Obama does not favor Governor Romney. I don't mean to overrate Obama's strength or underrate the sundry weaknesses of the other GOP contenders. But Romney's match-up problem is glaring.

In 2008, Obamacare did not exist. In 2012, it vies with our astronomical national debt — to which it will prodigiously contribute — as the most crucial issue in the campaign. It is Obamacare's trespass against the private economy and individual liberty that transformed the Tea Party into a mass movement, perhaps the most dynamic one electoral politics has seen in decades. And of all the Republican candidates, Romney is the weakest, the most compromised, when it comes to taking that fight to the president.

Like most conservatives, I've been hoping that Mitt would disavow Romneycare, the health-care reform he engineered as Massachusetts governor. I've been hoping he'd sensibly conclude it was a bad idea, exacerbated by the politics of a state whose Big Government enthusiasms make it an outlier in a center-right country. Romney, after all, has reversed several positions after being persuaded that he was in the wrong. Alas, despite having flopped more times than Flipper, Mitt has decided that Romneycare is his line in the sand — the crown jewel of his gubernatorial term, the single stand that will prove how constant he can be when passionately convinced he was right.

I have found this doubling down impossible to swallow. First there's the Tenth Amendment business. Being a Tenth Amendment kind of guy, I'm predisposed toward different-strokes-for-different-states arguments: What's right for Massachusetts may not be right for Mississippi or Montana.

Nevertheless, some things are wrong everywhere. One such thing is a massive government infiltration into the private economy, one that coerces the purchase of a commodity (health insurance) as a condition of living in the state. For one thing, such an exercise in steroid statism establishes a rationale in law for government intrusion into every aspect of private life: If health care is deemed a corporate asset, then "bad" behavioral choices must be regulated, lest someone get more than his share. Romney portrayed Romneycare as a model, at least for other states, if not for the nation. But no free-market, limited-government conservative thinks this officious onslaught is a model to be emulated anywhere.

Then there is the Romney line that the people in his state like Romneycare. Well, why shouldn't they, at least for a time? The program schemed to exploit Medicaid's byzantine rules in order to shift hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars from the rest of the country to Massachusetts. This was not a case of a state going its own way; it was redistribution of wealth by which Massachusetts got Americans across the country to pay its obligations. And those obligations are metastasizing: Romneycare has driven up medical costs, driven up premiums, and increased taxes on all Americans as well as on citizens of the Bay State. As the Cato Institute (among others) points out, Romney's

claim not to have raised state taxes is false, although most of the rise occurred after he left office — but only because of his unrealistic cost projections,

Obamacare is the issue that inspires the conservative base. Republicans simply must have the base's enthusiastic support if they are to beat a lavishly funded incumbent who will pull no punches, none, in striving to keep his job. There is no serious person who doubts that Romneycare was the building block for Obamacare: The experts who helped design the former were consulted in the creation of the latter. Yet Romney continues to insist that Romneycare is a smashing success, one he suggests he'd do again without hesitation.

Of course he now says he'd fight to repeal Obamacare, but is Romney really the best candidate to be making that fight? How convincing will he be in decrying wealth redistribution, runaway government spending, and freedom-killing government mandates while he continues championing an overbearing state program that stands as a monument to all those things?

I keep hoping to hear those three words: "I was wrong." But they're not coming. Romney supporters on the right keep rationalizing that he is just doing what he must do to stay viable: resisting a colossal flip-flop that would be more damaging than all the others. The candidate, however, says no, and attests that he is defending Romneycare because he believes in it. I usually worry that politicians lie. I'm worried that this one is telling the truth.