



Trentonian Editorial: Pick your poison

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Presidential elections tend to be free-lunch contests, and this one, unfortunately, is no exception. Who's free-lunch come-on can draw more suckers to his cause?

The most successful come-ons of recent times were the ones that combined grandiosity with ambiguity. These come-ons suggested that government would deliver amazing results but avoided going into specifics. There was, for example, Ronald Reagan's uplifting "It's Morning in America!" And Barack Obama's inspirational "Hope," "Change You Can Believe In" and "Yes We Can!"

For whatever reason — perhaps the omens were simply more propitious — Reagan's slogan proved to be a more successful marketing effort than Obama's efforts so far. In this election, neither candidate has come up with a snappy slogan — and maybe didn't even bother to try. This time it's strictly a free-lunch showdown — Barack Obama's vs. Mitt Romney's.

If Romney did have a slogan, it might be something along the lines of: "We CAN Have Our Cake and Eat It Too!" Tax cuts, military spending hikes, an aggressive, global-meddling foreign policy such as led (and continues to lead) to the expenditure of colossal sums of tax dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and — AND — fiscal discipline to bring the national debt under control.

Obama's slogan this time could be: "Same Old Same Old!" Or maybe: "If Not For My Policies, Things Would Be Even Worse Than They Are Now!" Obama's free-lunch menu offers continued government spending and borrowing on a massive scale. "And" — goes the pitch — "it won't cost you a dime!" The rich will pick up the bill by being forced to pay their "fair share."

If that sounds too good to be true, it's because it is. The numbers behind Obama's free-lunch facade don't add up any more than Romney's do. Basic math is the fly in the both Romney's and Obama's miracle ointments. Especially Obama's. Spending is projected to continue in the trillions, but a "fair share" of taxes from the rich — i.e., an even bigger share — is projected to bring in billions. Billions providing that a bigger share from the rich doesn't actually run the economy off the rails, which it arguably might. In any event, the math simply doesn't work.

Romney has the advantage of making the pitch that his way (whatever the particulars may be) offers at least a politically marketable prospect of "growing the economy." Obama has the disadvantage of having to persuade voters that what hasn't worked so far somehow has future prospects of delivering on those promised but delayed miracles. It seems to be coming down to a case of picking your poison.

Guv explains self

"See, I'm not looking to be loved. I get plenty of love at home — and when you're looking for love in this job, that's when deficits get run up." — Gov. Christie speaking to a gathering of libertarians assembled last May in Washington by the Cato Institute