

# Paul Ryan: Don't believe the hype

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If nothing else, Mitt Romney's selection of Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., as his running mate has made a dull and joyless campaign a little more interesting.

When I heard the news, my internal monologue went something like this:

"Are wonks suddenly cool?"

"Why is a guy my age potentially a heartbeat away from the presidency?"

"Does that he really only have 6 to 8 percent body fat?"

"Why do I know that?"

"Will someone please buy Ryan a suit that fits?"

Some conservatives are considerably more exuberant, viewing Ryan as the budget-slashing paladin we've long been waiting for. As a curmudgeonly libertarian, it's my job to pour cold water on the flames of political passion. So -- hey girl: If you're over the moon about the Ryan pick, let me confess: I'm not so excited. And I just can't hide it.

Ryan was a loyal soldier throughout the free-spending George W. Bush years, voting for No Child Left Behind and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, among other debacles. At the dawn of the Tea Party, Ryan lent his support to the auto and bank bailouts. He voted for TARP and gave "one of the most hysterical speeches" demanding others do the same, as Michelle Malkin observed in 2009.

In a newly popular YouTube video, the articulate congressman lambastes Barack Obama for creating, in Obamacare, yet another entitlement we can't afford. It's an impressive performance, but in 2003, Ryan voted for Bush's prescription-drug entitlement, adding over \$16 trillion in unfunded liabilities to the national tab.

Ryan's much-hyped budget plan would eliminate the deficit, "but not until 2040 or so," my colleague Mike Tanner explains, and his cuts in domestic discretionary spending amount to an average of just \$35.2 billion per year below what Obama himself has proposed.

In May, FreedomWorks' Dean Clancy usefully compared Ryan's budget to the much bolder plan introduced by Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky. Ryan's budget "would achieve balance in 26 years;" Paul's, "in five." Ryan's plan is short on specific cuts, whereas "Mr. Paul eliminates four Cabinet agencies -- Commerce, HUD, Energy and Education." Tellingly, "Mr. Ryan increases defense spending. Mr. Paul does not spare the Pentagon from scrutiny."

As Newsweek's Eli Lake explains, Ryan "tilts the ticket closer to the neoconservatives" on defense policy. Indeed, Ryan voted for the Iraq War in 2002 -- and against winding down the endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 and 2011.

Last summer, he gave a foreign policy speech suggesting that the most pressing reason we need to solve our budget problems is so we can continue being the world's policeman. "We can and we must remain committed to the promotion of stable governments that respect the rights of their citizens" in Iraq and Afghanistan, Ryan insisted. It seems he's learned absolutely nothing from a decade spent wasting American blood and treasure making the world safe for democracy abroad.

Wars aren't free: We've spent over \$1.3 trillion in direct outlays on the War on Terror abroad, with the true cost much higher. The Pentagon makes up about 19 percent of the federal budget. If you leave it off the table, as Ryan does, you're just not serious about staving off fiscal Armageddon.

I've been in D.C. nearly as long as Ryan has. And since this is a town where Bethesda's Tom Friedman passes for a deep thinker, I probably shouldn't be surprised that Ryan has developed a reputation as a serious fiscal conservative.

He's not. But there's a silver lining here: his selection means that the 2012 campaign just might bring us a serious discussion of these issues.

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