

Forbes[®]

Mitt Romney v. Barack Obama: Go To Bed Early On Election Night

Edward H. Crane – November 6th, 2012

Today marks the end of the interminable presidential race between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. Lots of money has been spent on television, Internet and radio ads by both campaigns, SuperPacs and biased media to persuade us of the importance of this, the most significant election in America since 1860 (or thereabouts).

Pardon my cynicism (I'm a libertarian), but I truly wish we lived in a -nation in which it really didn't matter who was elected President, senator or congressman. Don't get me wrong, because I'm not saying it doesn't—only that it shouldn't. I believe the Founders had a similar view. We had the vote and people cared—we even bought votes with whiskey—but it -didn't really matter that much who won. We had a Constitution that said, sure, vote for the legislature and the presidency, but keep in mind these folks don't have a heck of a lot of power over you or your neighbors. Congress and the presidency were constrained by the enumerated powers of the -Constitution, which the father of said document, James Madison, described as “few and defined.”

There are historical reasons that the franchise was constricted in the new United States. Those reasons were wrong both from a moral standpoint and from a practical standpoint. By denying women, minorities and in some cases those who didn't own land the right to vote, the early Founders set in motion long, just and difficult battles for full suffrage. The result of those battles was an inflated view of the nature of the vote. If we have the vote, now we can do this and we can do that. But that wasn't the idea. America used democracy to elect certain government officials. But America was never intended to be primarily a democracy. We are a republic of limited governmental -powers. We cannot, by majority vote, eliminate disco, much as we'd like to.

How we came to the point where politicians had so much power over our lives is a sad, if predictable, story. When asked what the convention in Philadelphia had given us, Benjamin Franklin replied, “A republic, madam, if you can keep it.” The Founders were very smart people. They knew the odds against keeping a limited-government republic were long. Jefferson once wrote, “The natural progress of things is for government to gain ground and liberty to yield.” Most would have been amazed that the system prevailed for about 150 years.

But our heritage of liberty is still worth fighting for. More than 80% of Americans now favor term limits for Congress. I've testified before Congress a few times, and it always

annoys me that the congresscritters sit high above those who are giving testimony. A remnant from the monarchies of Europe. The iconic founder of the first libertarian think tank, Leonard Read of the Foundation for Economic Education, used to argue that the House of Representatives should be chosen by lottery, much like a jury. That way they wouldn't think of themselves as superior to the rest of us. Indeed, he thought the end result would be higher moral standards and more common sense in Congress.

Both Republicans and Democrats assume it is the President's job to create economic growth, be the voice of the people, stop the rise of the oceans and calm our souls in times of trouble. Obama's most recent attack on Romney reflects this mind-set: "When you are President as opposed to the head of a private equity firm, your job is not simply to maximize profits. Your job is to figure out how everybody in the country gets a fair shot." Go figure.

Personally, I prefer this Jeffersonian construct: "A wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from -injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities."

Such a nation allows for sleep on election night.