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Left out in the cold

by Kenny Tan - November 4, 2012

Fifteen percent of the American electorate can be classified as libertarian. That's according to a new eBook released last week by the Cato Institute called "The Libertarian Vote: Swing Voters, Tea Parties, and the Fiscally Conservative, Socially Liberal Center." With recent polls showing Romney and Obama closely tied, the libertarian vote may be the swing vote needed to win the election.

Considering the size of the libertarian electorate, students following the election should be familiar with the policies that libertarians support. Unfortunately, Young Americans for Liberty, the official libertarian student organization at Vanderbilt, was not invited to participate in the recent debate between the Vanderbilt College Republicans and Vanderbilt College Democrats, hosted by the CommonDores Programming Council. Had we been invited, we would have shared our thoughts on taxes, Iran and the contraceptive mandate, the three main questions discussed in the debate.

Libertarians can be generally characterized as fiscally conservative and socially tolerant. We advocate for personal responsibility and a minimal state. The role of the government is not to take care of us from cradle to grave. It is also not the job of the United States to be the policeman of the world. We believe that more harm than good is caused by meddling in the affairs of other nations. It is also not the role of the government to protect us from ourselves. It should not be engaged in a war on drugs, raw milk, trans fats, salt or sugar.

On taxes, libertarians would like to cut them across the board. At the same time, we should be cutting back on both the military-industrial complex and the welfare state. Some libertarians, like Libertarian Party presidential candidate Gary Johnson, would like to replace the entire current federal tax system with a national consumption tax called the Fair Tax. The Fair Tax would greatly simplify tax preparation, tax everyone at the same rate but also allow for an advanced rebate to help families below the poverty level pay the tax.

On the issue of Iran, current sanctions on Iran imposed by the U.S. and EU have crippled the Iranian economy, leading to hyperinflation. The monthly inflation rate was estimated at 70 percent in October. While some believe that this will provoke Iranians to rebel against the current regime, it is likely that sanctions are unifying Iranians around and with the current regime. At the same time, the fear-mongering and rhetoric about this issue just mirrors how the U.S. got involved in the Iraq War not so long ago. As I stated in my previous column on Iran, the U.S. has not exhausted its diplomatic options and should not be so eager to begin launching preemptive strikes.

On the contraceptive mandate, most libertarians would agree that this is not the government's role. The free market works best at allocating scarce resources, including health insurance. It is because of the perverse incentives created by bad government policies that have caused the cost of health care to explode. One obvious example is the third-party payer system that has created enormous waste and grown due to the tax incentives for employer provided health insurance.

Could libertarians steal the election from Romney by voting for Johnson? That is what some fear but if libertarians do swing the election, it will probably be in favor of Romney. That's according to a Reason-Rupe Poll in September that found, among likely libertarian voters, 70 percent support Mitt Romney, 14 percent Gary Johnson and 13 percent Barack Obama. I, however, will not be voting for either of the major candidates this election.