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A Libertarian Democrat Considers Mitt Romney

So much for the hope that Obama would move the party in a back-to-the-future Jeffersonian liberal direction.

Terry Michael | January 19, 2012

He flip-flopped on health insurance. He's interventionist. He backed off gay rights. He has no serious immigration plan. He supports the drug war. He's coldly analytical, but with a loving family.

I'm not talking about Mitt Romney. It's my deeply disappointed view of President Barack Obama, as both a libertarian and a former "professional Democrat" (I was party press secretary in the 1980's.) I was hoping—obviously, against hope—that Obama would move my party in a back-to-the-future Jeffersonian liberal direction, which I wrote in a piece for Reason.com in September 2008: "[The libertarian case for Obama.](#)"

There aren't many self-described "libertarian Democrats," so I'm not claiming to represent a block of voters. But contemplating a ballot for my first Republican presidential candidate since I began voting in 1968, my quandary may be a microcosm of what is going on in the minds of many independent voters, as well as libertarians, seduced by hope and change four years ago.



The two best examples of why Obama has been such a disaster are the defining domestic and foreign policy distinctions he drew between himself and Hillary Clinton. He said he was opposed to an insurance mandate for health care "reform," and he claimed to represent the anti-war majority of Democrats, calling the elective war in Iraq dumb, while Clinton voted for it.

Then, within 10 months of taking office, he started a second war in Afghanistan. And he took

three full years to withdraw troops from Iraq, negotiating until just weeks ago to keep troops there. As his premier domestic policy initiative, Obama rammed through a Democratic-controlled congress a welfare program for pharmaceutical companies, the centerpiece of which was—yes—a mandate forcing millions to buy coverage.

Consider other ways in which Obama betrayed a personal liberty agenda. In 1996, running for the Illinois senate, he professed support for gay marriage, but now he uses weasel words to claim his position is “evolving.” He also tries to have it both ways on immigration, eyeing Hispanic voters but with no serious effort for reform. A confessed youthful user of drugs, he led us to believe he would oppose a crack down on medical marijuana, but he’s as bad as George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, willing to put thousands in jail for what they themselves did.

Of course, the skeptical libertarian will respond, “Wouldn’t Mitt Romney be as bad or worse on many of those things?” Yes, he and his party would. On two of the three issue frames of politics—culture and security—Romney carries the un-libertarian baggage of Christianists and militarists in the GOP base.

Most libertarians find scary the politicized religious wing of the Republican Party. But they lost the culture war, reaching an apogee in 1994, when Republicans took the U.S. House. Since then, they’ve made little more than noise, because Baby Boomers and GenX’ers are now the socially liberal center of the electorate.

As for the increasingly strident militarism of the GOP base, including Romney's debate rhetoric, it is nearly matched by the vast majority of Democratic Members of Congress and our present president, slaves to the military industry war profiteers, about whom Dwight Eisenhower warned us in 1961, the year Barack Obama was born.

Thus, do pragmatic libertarians really need to worry much about social-cultural or defense-and-foreign-policy issues, since little is likely to change, whether Obama is re-elected or Romney replaces him? Should libertarians consider voting for either the likely Republican nominee or Obama?

Yes. And it’s because of the awful economy, stupid.

For the first time in my life, I feel my financial future in jeopardy, much the way other middle-aged and older voters felt in 2009, when the Tea Party grew from fears about plummeting home equity and retirement income.

In every other presidential election in which I have voted for 44 years, my primary concerns were war, civil liberties, cultural questions...and, did I mention, war?

Though without the populist know-nothingism of many Tea Partiers, I now instead ponder the puzzling economic policy failures of Barack Obama, his reliance on broken government spending levers to stimulate jobs, and his mind-boggle-ingly stupid corporate welfare foolishly called "health care reform."

I fear economic doom so much I might be willing to place another hope-against-hope bet, this time on the guy with the too perfect hair and picture-perfect family, who at least offers a symbolic affinity for limited government and free markets. Though he didn't make stuff like his car-building father, Romney seems to understand what drives job production and wealth creation.

Will I roll the dice? I don't know. Like other libertarians, I could cast a protest vote for Gov. Gary Johnson if he is the Libertarian Party candidate, especially if he gains enough traction to send a message of "voters like liberty" to the two major parties, as Ron Paul has been doing in the GOP preliminaries.

I may risk the opprobrium of Democratic friends, and lose some of them—which comes with being an apostate. I may act with cognitive dissonance toward all those things I find troubling and even disgusting about the Republican party, and vote my pocketbook. I won't be alone.

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Michael's "thoughts from a libertarian Democrat" are collected at his web site,
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