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— William E. Saracino

I'm sorry, but I just don't get it. What the religious-right (and, by the way, being both religious and right-wing, I could be considered part of that group) leaders imply — meaning to or not — (and this goes for any candidate's supporters who declare this or that other GOP candidate impossible to vote for) is that President Hillary Clinton would be a better than President Giuliani — or whichever other GOP candidate is written off as hopeless: that President Giuliani, Romney, Paul, or "X" would damage the country more than would Madam President Clinton.

This is madness.

On a 10 question (or 100 question) philosophical litmus test, I'd score pretty far to the right on both economic and social issues. That said, the 2008 election is being held in a particularly somber, dangerous time for our republic. Such times call for especially sober judgment on our part.

It seems that every four years supporters of one candidate or another trot out the cliché that this year's is the most important election in American history. I don't know if 2008 fits that description or not, but I do know that 2008 presents us with two issues which, in my mind, trump and over-ride concerns about all the others: the war against terrorism and appointing good judges.

If we get it wrong on these two issues, none — repeat *none* — of the other issues, whether economic or social, will matter. If we get it wrong on these two issues, it is likely that 10 years from now our country will be a place far different, and far worse off, than it is today. Can any conservative look me in the eye and say that on these two specific issues Hillary Clinton is preferable to *anyone* in the Republican field?

AS I AM not yet supporting any of the candidates, I don't want to get into specific criticisms about the different candidates or the rebuttals thereto. And having cut my political teeth in intra-party warfare, I do not at all mean to discourage frank and pointed discussions of where the candidates differ on issues or encourage papering over differences. Primary campaigns are absolutely the prop-

er place to discuss where we disagree — but also to remember where we agree. Primary campaigns are the proper place to point out your candidate's strengths and the other candidates' weaknesses. But equally important is keeping those differences and strengths/weaknesses in perspective and not forgetting to include in the calculus the long term health of the Republic. Protecting that health requires defeating Hillary.

Madam President Hillary and First Fella Bill directing the war against terrorism. James Carville, Alan Dershowitz, and Stephen Reinhardt selecting our federal judges. Bill Maher MC-ing the inaugural festivities. Let those images roll around in your mind a bit. If they don't give you shivers than you'd best check your pulse. You could be dead.

Picking a candidate from a field this size is, as the Spoonful said, not often easy and not often kind. I don't know where I'll eventually land, but it will be with the candidate I think stands the best chance of keeping Evita Rodham Clinton out of the Oval Office. Any campaign that even approaches saying that "candidate X is or should be totally unacceptable for November" will lose my vote (but only in the primary).

So my plea to the campaigns is: By all means do all you can to win the nomination, but please keep your eye on the prize: the long-term survival of the country we know and love.

RAY HAYNES

WHY MITT ROMNEY

THE PRESIDENTIAL year about to begin is one of the more interesting ones in recent memory. As George the Younger makes his exit, the question is: what is the key factor defining this unique race that will determine who succeeds him, in the Party, and, Republicans hope, the White House? This isn't 1988, when Reagan's popularity allowed George the Elder to ride his coattails to the presidency, and it isn't 1996, when Bob Dole eclipsed the Republican field after Phil Gramm's incompetence took him out of the running. Nor is this 2000, with George Bush vs. John McCain, where a conservative versus moderate race was defined early, with Bush winning it. While Bush has not been a great conservative (he is horrible on illegal immigration, he did not stop the spendthrift Republicans in Congress, and he has not been a passionate spokesman for conservative issues), he has governed conservatively and he has, for the most part,

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MITT ROMNEY

left this country with a solid conservative judiciary (unlike his father).

In this race, every candidate is trying to make the case to conservatives, including Rudy Giuliani, who never even tried to pretend he was a conservative in the past. In my view, the race for conservatives will come down to two people, Fred Thompson and Mitt Romney. Thompson, whose conservative record in Congress is not sterling, has the support of a lot of the Washington conservative organizations. The question for Thompson is: will he be the passionate defender of conservative values, a key Bush weakness, that the movement truly needs to complete the Reagan Revolution? As a Senator, he was less than passionate, and less willing to upset the apple cart than, say, a Tom Coburn or George Allen. He is also late, and not raising the kind of money he needs to catch up to the rest of the crowd. Indeed, the key problem for conservatives in this race at the primary stage is the defeat of Rudy Giuliani, whose pretend conservatism will ultimately be disastrous to whatever shreds of the movement still exist.

THAT IS why I am supporting Mitt Romney. Romney has the money, leads in the polls in the early states, and has spent the time and the effort to establish organizations in the states that matter. He has clearly run a smart campaign to this point. No, he is *not* ahead in the national polls, but national polls are irrelevant at this point. No presidential campaign is run nationally; they are run state by state. Winning in the early states can create a momentum that will build national name recognition and popularity.

More important than that, Romney has been a passionate defender of conservative values. He is not afraid to talk about the issues important to conservatives. He is not afraid to speak his mind. More importantly, he has made an effort at every turn to look to conservatives for

support (not to dwell on Romney's faith, but it is a fact that Mormons and the Mormon Church have been key players in the political fight over social issues, on the side of families and life). At each turn, Romney has been fighting for conservatives and conservative values.

The only knock on Romney has been that he did not govern as a conservative while governor of Massachusetts. The statement is not true. He kept a *very* liberal, out-of-control Legislature from spinning completely off the deep end — no mean feat, considering that the Massachusetts Legislature included enough liberals to override any governor's veto. To balance a budget, and get some reforms in that situation is miraculous. (Compare that with the governing style of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is about to find out what happens when a Republican governs from the middle: he gets caught in the budget vise caused by his and the Legislature's spendthrift ways.) Romney took a worse situation than Schwarzenegger faces in California, fought for the values in which he believed, and *changed* the Legislature. He did not let the Legislature change him.

Yes, he supported *Roe v. Wade* in his run for the U.S. Senate. He is now unashamedly pro-life. Do we punish someone for changing his mind our way? He has not backed down, he has been fiscally responsible, he has fought for the family, leading the fight against homosexual marriage in a wildly liberal state, and stood tall for our values. He deserves conservative support.

JOHN ALLAN PESCHONG

JOHN McCAIN: LEADERSHIP FOR
A SECURE FUTURE

JOHn McCAIN is best prepared to lead and defend the United States and its global allies in the transcendent struggle of our time — the war against radical Islamic extremists. Having spent a lifetime in national service, John McCain has a proven record of protecting the security of our great nation. His courageous service in the Navy, including a five and a half year struggle in a North Vietnamese prisoner of war camp, distinguishes him as the only major presidential candidate with military experience — experience that steeled him to continue his leadership in the U.S. Senate. This election is about who is best prepared to lead and defend our nation, and John McCain is undeniably the best prepared candidate to serve as commander-in-chief from day one. Defeating radical Is-

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