

Ego driven self-destruction

Republicans like Paul Ryan, Mitt Romney, Jeb Bush, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush have refused to endorse Donald Trump. Their decisions have little, if any, persuasive effect upon the electorate but they do speak volumes about themselves.

Ryan, Romney, and the Bushes do themselves a disservice when they announce their unwillingness to back the presumptive Republican nominee. A public announcement that one is not going to back or vote for a person is essentially the same as a statement that one intends to oppose that person. When it comes from individuals who are or used to be party leaders it has the effect of setting a bad example. In effect, they are endeavoring to hurt Donald Trump's chances, which means they are necessarily endeavoring to improve Hillary Clinton's chances of becoming president. On any principled basis, Donald Trump favors positions more consistent with those of Ryan, Romney, and the Bushes than Hillary Clinton, so their unwillingness to endorse Trump is irrational.

For the Speaker of the House, whose job entails maintaining party unity, the failure to endorse the putative nominee is unacceptable. Indeed, that failure warrants Paul Ryan's removal, not just as convention chair but as Speaker of the House. As Speaker he must either back the party's nominee or resign and let another Republican willing to endorse the nominee take his place. Otherwise, he sets an untenable example for the Republican Party, one that is self-destructive: that Republican members need not back the Republican nominee for president. Could a Speaker of the House who refuses to endorse the Republican nominee deny any other Republican the equal opportunity to refuse? Of course not. His decision is indeed an example for the remaining members of the party, in this case an unacceptable example.

To be fair to Ryan, he did say that he was “not yet” ready to endorse Donald Trump and that he had a common perception with Trump on some issues. But indecision from the Republican Speaker of the House on whether he will support the presumptive Republican nominee is not an option. He must either endorse that nominee or step aside and give the job to another Republican who will.

Mitt Romney’s attempt to lead Republicans away from Trump was even more disastrous than his unsuccessful bid for the presidency. While he could have explained what the party’s nominee should stand for and then endorse a single candidate to oppose Trump in the primaries, Romney chose to go on a tirade against Trump, filled with negative hyperbole, and then identify no single Trump opponent worthy of his endorsement. In typical Romney fashion, he was too indecisive and fickle to be anything but ineffectual. It is not enough to be against a candidate, you must be bold in what and who you stand for, and in that department Romney failed miserably.

Reeling from his near total lack of suasion among the Republican base, Romney is beside himself with desire to derail Trump, even if that means handing over the White House to Hillary Clinton. Truth be told, Romney probably would rather elect Hillary Clinton than Donald Trump, because as Governor of Massachusetts he endorsed many liberal policy positions and is probably content to see more big government and less individual liberty in America. Romney is now gratuitously demanding that Trump divulge his tax returns despite the presence of a tax audit.

That petty move on his part is transparently based on his hope that something in Trump’s taxes might be his undoing. His demands are, like most of his efforts, unlikely to persuade anyone. Upon what basis does Romney crusade for Trump’s taxes to be revealed? He is not an IRS agent, a FEC agent, or an SEC agent. He is a failed presidential candidate with a hurt ego. He is simply desperate to do something to derail the Trump

train. There is in this no class; it is pettiness, embarrassing for those of possessed of common sense.

The Bushes have made clear that they will not be voting for Trump. The drubbing that Jeb Bush took during the primaries from Trump they mistakenly ascribe to Jeb's defeat. That, however, is not the reason why Jeb Bush lost. Jeb lost because he ran as an establishment candidate against the tidal wave of anti-establishment sentiment sweeping the party and was neither articulate enough nor persuasive enough to lead a movement in his favor. A governor linked directly to the very leaders a plurality of voters in the Republican Party consider to blame for government's favor could not win the nomination in 2016. Bush lost not because of Trump but because of Bush himself.

A mature regard for what actually happened in the primaries and an appreciation that a Clinton presidency would be more harmful to even the Bush agenda than a Trump presidency would lead rational people to endorse Trump, but rationality is not what is at play.

Ryan, Romney, and the Bushes have a visceral dislike for Donald Trump but that is not their only objection to him. They are horrified by the fact that he cannot be controlled. His independence threatens a largely unspoken pattern of obedience followed by most Republican nominees in the past. They also fear him because he threatens to raise the level of popular involvement in political decision-making and overrule them, regardless of their party stripe to achieve his desired ends. Populism has always been an unwelcome element among those who have wished to keep the Republican Party an intellectually conservative reserve.