

The Lesser-of-Two-Evils Catch-22

By Roy Minet (Rev. 10/19/16)

Clinton and Trump have long ago convinced most of us that they are both awful. Neither can be respected or trusted. Neither one has any discernable fundamental principles upon which their positions are consistently based. Their mud-slinging, bickering, in-the-gutter campaigning can't sink lower, but then it does. It's a national embarrassment befitting a third-world country.

A recent poll by the Pew Organization found that only 11% of voters say they would be excited if Trump were elected while only 12% say they'd be excited if Clinton wins. Looking at it from the opposite direction, Pew found that 57% are frustrated with the campaigns and 55% are disgusted!

Thus, it appears that Trump and Clinton have only a small "hard core" of voters (say, 15% for each) who actually support them. Yet, when asked, "If the election were held today, for whom would you vote?" the Real Clear Politics average of polls indicates that 49% would vote for Clinton and 42% for Trump. Why?

The vote for the "lesser of two evils" syndrome is alive and well. If we subtract the 15% of actual supporters from the 49% who say they would vote for Clinton, we have 34% whose vote for Clinton really is a vote against Trump; they view Clinton as the lesser of two evils. Similarly, 27% of those who would vote for Trump do so as a vote against Clinton because they think Trump is the lesser of two evils.

So, we have the incredible (and incredibly sad) situation where about 30% of voters would be voting for the candidate they like and about 61% (34% + 27%) would be voting for a candidate they don't like because they like the other candidate even less!

The numbers are approximations, but we all know they are approximately correct. So many people are saying things like, "We just CAN'T let Trump get his finger on the nuclear button" or "The Constitution is toast if Hillary appoints Supreme Court justices."

This is not a new phenomenon, it's just on steroids this time; we have about twice as many voting for somebody they don't like than are voting for a candidate they like. The two old, declining parties have been giving us poor candidates for several elections. They've just hit a new low this time.

As gruesome as this picture is, it would be entirely understandable if there were only two candidates. However, there is a third choice on the ballot in all 50 states plus DC. It is Libertarian Governor Gary Johnson.

Johnson and running mate Bill Weld are both libertarians who ran as Republicans in Democratic states (New Mexico and Massachusetts) and were overwhelmingly re-elected to second terms. Johnson is refreshingly open and honest (what a contrast), even when it may not be to his benefit. He states the principles upon which he would govern (yes, he *has* principles).

But only about 10% say they will vote for Johnson. Why? There may be several lesser reasons, but the big one is, “Because he can’t win, so that would be wasting my vote.”

Obviously, Johnson could win a majority if, in addition to his 10%, two-thirds of the 61% of voters who dislike both Trump and Clinton would simply vote for him. He could easily win a plurality if only half the 61% vote for him. That’s not going to happen as long as people *think* it’s not going to happen. Catch-22.

One has to wonder how rotten the lesser of two evils would have to be to break us out of this vicious circle. If the Democratic and Republican nominees somehow were Joseph Stalin and Adolph Hitler, would people still vote for the lesser of those two evils instead of Gary Johnson? (Skip the hysterical letters; I have just posed an illustrative example, *not* equated either Clinton or Trump to either of these mass murderers.)

You may or may not think our situation is as bad as this hypothetical one, but we should all be able to agree that it would be far healthier for a majority of us to be united in *favor* of a good alternative, than to be so strongly polarized *against* two bad alternatives.

In Governor Johnson’s words: “The political system is broken. Let’s put parties and differences aside while we solve our problems. Together, we’ll stop the spending and end the wars. Together, we’ll restore our industrial might. Together, we’ll rebuild our own roads, bridges, schools and hospitals instead of building them for countries half a world away. And if, in four years, we as a people decide we didn’t like peace, prosperity and freedom, we can always vote the authoritarians back into office again.”

Johnson offers a good alternative that would allow us to escape both of the evils. All we have to do is vote for him.

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