



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on June 7, 2011

## What's a Conservative to Do Come Election Day?

We know that Democrats, being leftists, view the Constitution and the liberty that it supplies and secures as hindrances to their designs. While this fact certainly deserves to be revisited, it is nevertheless old territory. Less commonly recognized is that Republicans haven't much more sympathy for constitutional liberty than Democrats.

To be fair, I reject the view that there is *no* difference between our two major parties. Differences there are, but they invariably pertain to *details*; there are never differences in *kind*. Thus, the "profound philosophical disagreement" between them that candidates declare during every election cycle is a fiction upon which both parties rely.



I realize that there is only so much any politician, or even generation of politicians, can do to undo the cataclysmic mess that his predecessors created in the way of [the Leviathan](#) that is our federal government. In addition to contending with a whole other party that seeks to resist virtually every move its opponents make, change, as genuine conservatives have long realized, [promises to be most tolerable when it is gradual](#). Doubtless, there are some Republicans who are doing all that they can do at present to reverse trends that have been years and years in the making.

But as for the bulk of establishment party figures, it would be stretching credibility to the snapping point to suggest that these considerations account for their inability to usher in the new era of "[limited government](#)" that they are always guaranteeing. It would require a suspension of disbelief to accept this precisely because the federal government actually continues to *grow* when entrusted to Republican hands.

To establish this, we don't even need to go as far back as the War Between the States when a Republican, Abraham Lincoln, via [the bloodiest war](#) Americans have ever experienced, fundamentally transformed the Republic that our Founders erected by substituting for *these* United States a Union with the federal government at the helm. We need only go so far back as the last decade or so.

If it were the case that the federal government remained essentially the same size as it had been for decades under Democratic-control, that would be one thing; but as it turns out, from the time the Republicans assumed the reins of Congress in the middle of the 1990s throughout George W. Bush's two terms, the federal government actually expanded. In fact, Bush — that is to say, his Republican-controlled Congress — had actually engaged in [more government spending than any President since Lyndon B. Johnson!](#)

Indeed, how could things be otherwise? After all, LBJ was only waging *two* wars — "the War on Poverty" at home and the Vietnam War abroad. Bush the Younger, in contrast, insisted on waging *at least* three: Johnson's "[War on Poverty](#)," plus the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore,



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considering that by the time Bush took office the cost of the domestic “war” that Johnson initiated nearly 40 years earlier had risen beyond anything the 36th President or his contemporaries could have envisioned, and considering that Johnson could rely upon conscription for his war in Vietnam, it is a no-brainer that even adjusting for inflation, Bush and his Republicans would have to be bigger spenders than Johnson and his Democrats.

Yet this isn’t all. It isn’t that Bush and his Republicans can be said to have “inherited” the Leviathan created by the Democrats; our “conservative” party’s enthusiasm over the prospect of strengthening the beast was second to none: [“faith-based” initiatives](#), [No Child Left Behind](#), [federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research](#), [“comprehensive immigration reform,”](#) [Bush’s Home Ownership Society](#), and a prescription drugs entitlement unprecedented for its scope are just some of the ways in which the Republicans under our last President sought to involve the federal government ever further in our lives.

So, what is a real conservative or libertarian to do when Election Day comes around?

Literally, there are several options of which he can avail himself: (a) refrain from voting; (b) vote for a third-party candidate; (c) vote Republican; or (d) vote Democrat. Given current political realities and considerations of conscience, this is not an attractive selection of options from which to choose. However, he can narrow down the field by ruling out “d.” The conscience of a conservative or libertarian could never permit him to vote for a Democrat (as long, that is, as the Democratic Party remains the unmistakably leftist party that it is today).

Choices “a” and “b” are for all practical purposes virtually indistinguishable from one another, for in voting for a third party candidate, one may as well not have voted for anyone at all. Third-party candidates have never stood so much as a long shot at winning anything — and this isn’t likely to change anytime within the foreseeable future. However, during any given election, either choice may be appropriate, for if the only alternative to an unconscionable candidate is a comparably unconscionable candidate, then by availing himself of either “a” or “b,” the conservative or the libertarian has the satisfaction of knowing that if nothing else, his decision conforms to the dictates of his conscience — no slight thing. Furthermore, our disenchanted Republican voter may determine that it is worth it in the short term for the Republicans to lose an election or two if this is what it will take for them to govern more conservatively.

While “a” and “b” will have the same practical effect, the more civic-minded may find “b” preferable to “a,” for if, as many think, it is the duty of every citizen to vote, then the disillusioned Republican can take comfort in discharging this civic obligation.

Finally, there is “c”: vote Republican. Given what has already been said of the Republican Party, the reader can be excused for thinking that the GOP is *not* entitled to the conservative’s vote. Yet this may be too hasty a verdict.

First of all, the conservative is no utopian; he is resolutely anti-utopian. This, really, is what makes him a conservative. So, he is devoid of all illusions concerning his expectations of the Republican Party. That is, he knows not just that there are no “ideal candidates”; he knows that no viable candidate is likely to even *approximate* his vision of an ideal candidate.

The conservative’s aims are modest. All that he wants, all that he feels it is reasonable and realistic to expect, at this point, is for one of our two parties to resist the impulse to create ever greater concentrations of power. The conservative, in other words, is willing to vote for the party most likely to



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stay, to some measure, the rot that has eaten much of our Constitutional Republic away.

*If* the GOP is this party, then he will endorse its candidates. My argument above is a painful reminder that it has not always been this party. Yet with the rise of the Tea Party movement and the backlash over the economy that President Obama and his Democrats have invited, this may no longer be the case.

Indeed, conservative and libertarian voters have a tough choice to make from now on.



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