



National Review Online and Ron Paul

Mitt Romney's decision to honor Ron Paul with a video tribute at this year's Republican National Convention didn't sit well with some on the nominal right.

In an article appearing in *National Review Online*, "The Problem with Paul," Jamie M. Fly and Evan Moore give expression to this angst when they refer to Romney's and the conventional planners' decision as "ridiculous," "regrettable," and "a mistake."

The authors begrudgingly acknowledge that, given Congressman Paul's number of delegates and the vocal nature of his supporters, the "concessions" that "have already been made to them on extraneous issues during the drafting of the platform" and the allocation of a speaking slot to Kentucky Senator Rand Paul are understandable. Still, they contend, "paying tribute to Representative Paul is a step too far."



Moreover, as if to disabuse Paul and his supporters of any doubts regarding their fellow partisans' feelings toward them, Fly and Moore add that "instead of honoring Paul on the way out, the delegates in Tampa should be cheering his departure." They explain that Paul "has left a legacy of extremism and falsehoods that need to be driven from the party, not embraced by it." (Perhaps Fly and Moore are either too young to remember, or too ignorant of history to have read, Sen. [Barry Goldwater's](#) oft-quoted statement from his [acceptance speech at the 1964 Republican National Convention](#): "I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice.... And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.")

"It's important to remember how far outside the mainstream Paul and many of his supporters are," the authors continue. The views of Paul on which the authors set their sights, as Paul's supporters and their opponents have by now come to expect, pertain to foreign, not domestic, policy.

Fly and Moore are incensed specifically about Paul's position on the issue of Iran.

Paul views the current preoccupation with a potentially nuclear Iran with the same cool skepticism — and even ridicule — with which he greeted the talk leading up to the war in Iraq. Just as hysteria was the order of the day back in 2003, so hysteria is fueling our discussion over Iran. We are once more "beating the war drums," Paul has said.

Fly and Moore criticize Paul for allegedly painting "a picture of a peaceful and benevolent Islamic Republic that has never actually existed." They also refer to his argument as an "apologia for the ayatollahs" and judge it to be "as absurd as it is dangerous." Furthermore, they contend, "it is wholly



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irresponsible for anyone who aspires to national leadership” to take the position that Paul takes.

Paul’s objectors also allude to his “trail of similar factual errors and conspiracy-mongering on issues ranging from the defense budget to America’s position overseas, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and even the origins of the attacks of September 11, 2001.”

For several reasons, Fly’s and Moore’s argument is woefully inadequate to the task of supporting their main thesis. The primary reason, though, is that it isn’t much of an argument at all.

But there are other considerations that expose it for the cluster of aspersions and emotional appeals that it is.

First of all, neither now nor ever has Paul taken an interest in depicting Iran or any other country either as “a peaceful and benevolent Islamic Republic” or along any other lines. He is concerned with insuring that the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other international contracts are observed by all parties — including the United States. His understanding of those terms may be erroneous or arguable — but this is hardly uncommon when it comes to matters of law, whether domestic or otherwise. And his case for his position may conjure up an inaccurate image of a party in question, but this scarcely justifies the verdict that he is an “extremist.”

My second point relates to this last. For all of the frequency with which they are used in our public discourse, t-shirt, bumper sticker terms like “extremist” are not befitting any remotely genuine intellectual exchange. To put it bluntly, it is a conversation-stopper. “Extremism” is a politically or emotionally-charged word that is meaningful only insofar as it reveals how its user feels about those against whom he is leveling it.

Thirdly, Fly, Moore and all Republicans who supported and who continue to support something like George W. Bush’s “freedom agenda” in the Middle East should take care against accusing others of extremism. In droves, war-wearied Americans flocked to the polling booth in 2006 and 2008 to relieve Republicans of power. From this time to the present, poll after poll continues to show that Americans don’t attach nearly as much importance to foreign policy as do Fly, Moore, and their ideological ilk. Furthermore, most Americans believe that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were mistakes, and they positively eschew the robust interventionism favored by Paul’s Republican critics.

That even Republicans know this is borne out by the fact that this Republican National Convention was the first such convention in 60 years that omitted all explicit references to war. Instead, we had euphemistic talk from the likes of John McCain of America’s leadership in the world, etc.

In short, it is not the foreign policy views of Paul, but those of Fly and Moore, that are “far outside the mainstream.” It is *their* views that are “extreme.”

Finally, the criticisms of Fly and Moore are not unlike those raised by almost all of Paul’s detractors in the GOP inasmuch as they center exclusively on his foreign policy vision. But to focus on the latter in isolation from the larger understanding of liberty that informs it is like ridiculing the Catholic sacrament of communion independently of the theological vision that makes it a sacrament. It is like commenting on a piece of a puzzle while ignoring the puzzle.

It is true that Paul regards the conventional foreign policy promoted by the likes of Fly and Moore as both disastrous and dangerous. Yet even if he perceived it quite differently; even if he thought that it promised the most wonderful of consequences for our nation and the world, he would still oppose it with all of the passion that he opposes it now and with which he would continue to oppose the welfare-



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state, regardless of whether he could be convinced that the redistributive schemes of the social engineers haven't always come to naught.

There is one very simple reason for this: it undermines liberty.

Liberty — not some universal abstraction, but the concrete, particular way of life to which Americans have grown accustomed over the span of centuries — consists in a wide dispersion of power. It consists in decentralization. In the popular parlance, liberty is comprised of a “limited” — an exceptionally limited — government, a government essentially divided against itself.

In stark contrast, the enterprise upon which Fly and Moore want to continue to embark our country and to which Paul has always been vehemently opposed, demands a gargantuan government. There are no two ways about this.

Talk radio host Dennis Prager is no fan of Ron Paul. But Prager has coined an expression with which Paul wholeheartedly agrees: the larger the government, the smaller the citizen, and the larger the citizen, the smaller the government.

Paul rejects the foreign policy of Fly and Moore (and Prager) because he realizes, even if they don't, that it can't but have the effect of diminishing the citizen.

If this is the sort of person whom Republicans want to banish from their party, then it should be honest and abandon, once and for all, all of their rhetoric of “limited government.”



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