

#NeverTrump Has 'Jumped the Shark'

Two conservative thinkers for whom we have a great deal of respect, Bill Kristol and Erick Erickson, have finally jumped the shark and entered a bizarre new #NeverTrump political dimension where Mitt Romney is a viable candidate for president and forming a third party five months before the election is a realistic means of electing an alternative to Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

To be clear, we endorsed Ted Cruz and still believe Cruz is the candidate most likely to restore America to limited constitutional government, and if Sen. Cruz had chosen to go to the Convention and challenge Donald Trump on the floor, we would have supported him until the final votes were counted.

If Kristol and Erickson were advocating that Sen. Cruz stay in the race, we'd be there with them.

However, Ted Cruz for the good of the conservative cause, chose to suspend his campaign, and he chose not to engage in a final round of political bloodletting with Donald Trump.

This is a harsh reality for many Cruz supporters who wanted to battle Trump until the bitter end, in part as payback for Trump's scorched-Earth primary campaign.

The battle we wanted right now was Cruz versus Trump, the battle we've got is Trump versus Hillary Clinton, or the pipedream of a third party candidate.

Both Bill Kristol and Erick Erickson have recently made the case that a third party isn't a pipedream and have pulled numbers from various polls to try to prove the claim that "Half the country is open to an alternative. The ABC poll

shows half, basically half, 45 percent saying, we would like to have a third choice,” as Kristol told ABC’s George Stephanopoulos.

The problem for Kristol and Erickson is that their 45 percent is not ideologically conservative, so there’s no reason to believe that a conservative alternative to Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton automatically books that 45 percent of the vote.

So what’s the Kristol and Erickson “unity party” ticket, Mitt Romney and Bernie Sanders?

The idea that movement conservative should join forces with the #NeverTrump establishment Republican perpetrators of what has become a near-treasonous sellout of our country—and the country-class citizens who believe in conservative ideas and have fought for them for decades—would be a disaster for the conservative movement and provide no guarantee of a conservative victory in November.

Setting aside the obvious challenge of funding a competitive campaign in an environment where the Democratic and Republican Party opponents would likely spend a combined total of over \$2 billion, as they did in 2012, when Obama spent \$ billion and Romney spent \$ billion, the numbers just don’t add up for a candidate whose sole base is movement and especially cultural conservatives.

In 2012, about 117 million Americans voted in the presidential election, and in 2008, about 125 million voted.

In 2008, white, born-again, evangelical Christians represented 26 percent of the total vote for president, according to the exit polls. In 2012, white, born-again, evangelical Christians represented 26 percent of the total vote for president, again according to the exit polls.

After four years of Obama’s disastrous anti-religious

policies, we saw no change at all in the percentage of the electorate accounted for by evangelical Christians; no net gain, certainly no surge, and no record evangelical turnout, despite the vast effort expended on contacting and turning out faith-first voters.

What's more, when you zoom in a bit, according to Joel C. Rosenberg, you find that 21 percent of self-identified, white, born-again, evangelical Christians voted for President Obama in 2012—that means more than 6 million self-described “evangelicals” voted for Obama.

It should also be noted that, despite his war on the Catholic Church, 50 percent of the Catholic vote went to Obama in 2012. This was down from the 54 percent that Obama won in 2008.

Plus, the reality is this cultural conservative #NeverTrump third party would not appeal to all cultural conservative voters; Trump booked 42 percent of the evangelical votes in heavily evangelical North Carolina, and in Ohio, 39 percent of evangelicals voted for Trump.

The final issue to be dealt with in this scenario is the myth of the 17 million (or 10 or 5 million) missing Christian voters.

The argument is made every election that, if only we had a cultural conservative candidate, millions of hitherto absent Christian voters would show up and sweep a cultural conservative into the White House, but history has proven the idea that there are millions of “missing” Christian voters to be a myth.

Putting principled cultural conservative Rick Santorum on the primary ballot didn't draw them to the polls in 2012, running Baptist minister Mike Huckabee didn't draw them to the polls in 2008 or 2016, and neither did putting high-profile TV evangelist Pat Robertson on the ballot in 1988.

The reality is the millions of “missing” Christian voters are not missing.

After 36 years, millions of dollars spent on Christian voter guides, hours spent leafleting churches and intense telephone, mail and social media campaigns, it is time to recognize that these voters are not “missing”; they are simply Christians *who do not vote*.

Counting on such people to power a Third Party campaign to victory is not merely the triumph of hope over experience, it is a fool’s errand that would have disastrous consequences for the preservation of constitutional liberty.

This deep-seated discomfort with Donald Trump’s lifestyle expressed by Erickson and Kristol is real, but from a strictly political perspective, it does not constitute a reason for movement conservatives to abandon their natural populist allies to form a coalition with the establishment Republicans whose misrule, lies and betrayals have created the present political environment and enabled the rise of Donald Trump.

History, in the form of the 1980 and 1992 elections is instructive, and history tells us that the only winning right-of-center coalition is one of conservatives and populists.

In 1980, the all-but-dead liberal Rockefeller wing of the Republican Party chose to walk out and back the Third Party candidacy of liberal Republican Congressman John Anderson against conservative Ronald Reagan.

The liberal Anderson booked 5,719,850 votes or 6.6 percent of the vote while Reagan won a majority of the popular vote with 43,903,230 votes and 50.8 percent of the total.

In contrast, in 1992, H. Ross Perot running as a conservative populist against the moderate Republican George H.W. Bush booked 19,743,821 votes or percent of the popular

vote. Bush was soundly defeated even though Democratic rival Bill Clinton did not get anywhere near a majority of the popular vote, booking only 44,909,806 votes or percent of the votes cast.

So on one side of the scale are principles and values, particularly the principles and values of our fellow cultural conservatives, and our desire to have leaders and elected officials who respect and live those values and principles.

On the other side is the white-hot anger of millions of grass-roots, limited-government constitutional conservatives and conservative-leaning populists who are not only angry with the leadership of the establishment Republican Party, but disappointed and frustrated with many leaders of the conservative movement as well.

The millions of disenfranchised country-class voters who have been turning out for Trump look at the Republican establishment and see enemies who have been complicit in—if not the actual authors of—the three-decade long destruction of their quality of life.

But they have not found relief through many of Washington's conservative leaders, some of whom have often failed to even try to fight the government policies that have contributed to the degradation of our culture that is enforced by political correctness, the vast increase in the spending and the reach of the federal government and the hijacking of middle-class prosperity by crony government policies on trade and immigration.

Country-class Americans are now tired of politicians and conservative movement leaders who lecture them about the Constitution, but who have done nothing to fight crime, improve education, prevent Islam from being taught in their schools, control the borders or encourage domestic economic growth.

The country class wants change and an end to the misrule of politically correct elites who are indifferent to their plight, and they may very well trample anyone who gets in the way of that change—even those who have heretofore led the long fight against the progressive Big Government Republican and Democratic establishments.

Don't get us wrong—Donald Trump's lack of interest in many elements of the cultural conservative agenda is no small thing. That's why we preferred Ted Cruz over Trump.

In 1975, Ronald Reagan was approached by a number of leading conservatives, including ConservativeHQ Chairman Richard A. Viguerie, who wanted to launch a Third Party campaign with Reagan as the candidate.

As Mr. Viguerie recounted in his book *Takeover*, Reagan heard them out and then told them they were nuts because most of America's conservative voters were Republicans and he did not believe enough of them were likely to abandon the GOP to allow him to win a general election.

When faced with a choice between Trump's lack of interest in many issues on the conservative agenda versus the deep and abiding hostility of Hillary Clinton, and the betrayals and lies of the Republican establishment, or a hopeless third party effort, Trump's indifference to much of the conservative agenda would leave us with a candidate who, unlike John McCain and Mitt Romney, might at least be educable.

We haven't endorsed Donald Trump, so at this point call us firmly against a third party effort and skeptical on the Trump candidacy, but persuadable if there's concrete evidence of a Trump commitment to a populist-conservative coalition. {eo}

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