

GOOD THING THE DEMOCRATS FORCED THAT VOTE ON THE RYAN PLAN

Most of what I have to say about Mitt Romney's pick of Paul Ryan I said on Virtually Speaking Sunday. I think the Ryan pick will hurt Mitt, and I think it opens up an opportunity for progressives to even box Obama in.

But I am enjoying the response from Republicans, who almost immediately started bad-mouthing the pick. First there was the BuzzFeed story—less than 48 hours after the pick!—describing how the political pros in Mitt's staff opposed the pick. And now Politico describes the opinions of some three dozen Republican operatives, all of whom except Mary Matalin are queasy about the choice. (The Hill has a similar story.)

In more than three dozen interviews with Republican strategists and campaign operatives — old hands and rising next-generation conservatives alike — the most common reactions to Ryan ranged from gnawing apprehension to hair-on-fire anger that Romney has practically ceded the election.

It is not that the public professions of excitement about the Ryan selection are totally insincere. It is that many of the most optimistic Republican operatives will privately acknowledge that their views are being shaped more by fingers-crossed hope than by a hard-headed appraisal of what's most likely to happen.

And the more pessimistic strategists don't even feign good cheer: They think the Ryan pick is a disaster for the GOP. Many of these people don't care that much about Romney — they always felt he

faced an improbable path to victory – but are worried that Ryan’s vocal views about overhauling Medicare will be a millstone for other GOP candidates in critical House and Senate races.

One big reason the operatives don’t like this choice is it makes their job—getting down-ticket Republicans elected—harder.

And that’s just what it does to the Romney-Ryan ticket. Forget how it plays in close House and Senate races.

“Very not helpful down ballot – very,” said one top Republican consultant.

“This is the day the music died,” one Republican operative involved in 2012 races said after the rollout. The operative said that every House candidate now is racing to get ahead of this issue.

And what Politico doesn’t dwell on—but what Crooks & Liars noted the other day—is that it’s already too late for most of the Republicans running for reelection to separate themselves from Ryan’s signature policy. Because they already voted for it.

Even as Mitt Romney was introducing Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan as his running mate, his campaign was preparing a defense of the House Budget Chairman’s draconian Medicare proposals. With good reason. After all, in April 2011 the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office forecast that Ryan’s scheme to convert today’s guaranteed Medicare insurance program into an underfunded voucher system would dramatically shift the health care costs onto America’s seniors. And in February 2010, Ryan acknowledged his privatization plan for millions of future elderly constituted rationing.

But it's not just Team Romney that should be concerned about being caught red-handed with the proverbial gun pointed at the wildly popular program. Last year, 235 House Republicans and 40 GOP Senators—98 percent of all Republicans in Congress—voted for Paul Ryan's budget and its blueprint to rationing Medicare.

What's particularly remarkable about the Politico piece is that, in spite of widely expressed admiration for Ryan, just about all the anonymous sources admit that people hate his plan. The plan their bosses have already voted for.

I don't think any of the geniuses in DC—whether Republican or Democratic—planned for this. I don't think they intended to turn Mitt Romney into the poster child for the elites who have been looting our country. I don't think Mitt realized that by picking Ryan, he would make the problem worse, not better.

But this election has now crystalized into a referendum on the austerity, oligarchy, and looting the Republicans (and more recently, the Democrats too) have been gradually introducing into our country.

Obama may still screw up the election. The economy may recrash, the drought may bring a price spike that makes people desperate enough to vote for Mitt, or there may be an October surprise.

And I'm sure Obama didn't want to be running this election, pointing out how unpopular and disastrous are Ryan's policies—policies which are not that different from some of his own.

But that seems to be where we're heading. A referendum, from the top of the ticket on down, on the unpopular elitist policies that both parties in DC have been pushing for the last decade or so.