

POTENTIAL VP RYAN REPRESENTS WORST OF HOUSE REPUBLICANS

The long presidential primary season is over, and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney has the Republican Party nomination in hand. His next task is to name his choice for vice president. Even before he makes his decision, the names on the unofficial list of candidates circulating in the media say a lot about Romney. One of the names is Paul Ryan.



Photo by Gage Skidmore

Ryan isn't the best-known candidate on the list, but he may be the most startling. He's the member of the House of Representatives from Wisconsin who, as chairman of the House Budget Committee, wrote the House Republicans' plan for devastating cuts in federal safety net programs. Romney's full-throated support for the Ryan budget raises the stakes in this year's election.

The Ryan plan calls for deep cuts in Medicare benefits and in programs that help Americans survive poverty or unemployment—beyond the steep cuts Congress agreed to

impose automatically next year to settle last year's dustup over the debt ceiling. Ryan's plan would repeal President Obama's signature health care law. Blaming federal budget deficits on unionized federal workers and the "privileged rules enjoyed by government employees," Ryan's plan calls for a 10 percent cut in the federal workforce.

Though Ryan justifies the cuts as deficit-reduction measures, his plan also calls for billions in tax giveaways to corporations and wealthy individuals. In fact, the Ryan plan is likely to explode the deficit and put even more pressure on Congress to cut our health and pension benefits.

Indeed, this year Ryan led an effort to make all federal and postal workers pay 5 percent more in contributions to their pensions—effectively cutting their pay by 5 percent. The GOP-controlled House passed both of Ryan's measures. The Senate has not acted on them.

The only things stopping Ryan and the extremist ideologues who now control the House and support his ideas are the Democrat-controlled Senate and President Obama's veto power. Of course, all that could change this fall when the nation votes in congressional and presidential elections.

"The Founding Fathers set up our system of government to prevent bad ideas from becoming law as much as to encourage good ideas," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "We're seeing that with some of the radical plans brewing in Congress now, like Ryan's budget and pension proposals."

Plans like Ryan's would have a much easier path to enactment, and even more radical ones could come out of the woodwork, if Republicans controlled both the White House and Congress.

This year's election is critical. Corporate interests and wealthy individuals are pouring tens of millions of dollars into races nationwide, not just to candidates but also to "super PAC" groups running ads outside the campaigns. Super PACs aren't subject to the donation limits that apply to campaigns.

The Supreme Court decision upholding Obama's signature achievement, the health care law, has renewed anger over the law on the far right—the same force that motivated the Tea Party movement and propelled several of its candidates into office in the House and Senate two years ago. Those Tea Party-backed legislators orchestrated the fight over the debt ceiling last year, but the issue wasn't resolved—it was delayed until after this election, when huge cuts in spending will occur automatically if Congress doesn't act. And as we know, doing nothing is very easy for Congress.

"Every letter carrier needs to be engaged in the process this year," Rolando said. "Every letter carrier will be affected greatly by what happens."

Rolando called on letter carriers to vote, volunteer for campaigns, and support the union's political efforts by donating to the Committee on Letter Carrier Political Education (COLCPE). COLCPE provides funds to help pro-letter carrier candidates, Democrats and Republicans alike, get their message out to voters with direct support and by releasing carriers to help candidates in key races.

NALC members can make donations to COLCPE at any time, but many choose to make it easy by signing up for automatic deductions of a small amount from their paychecks, like participants in the Gimme 5 program, who give \$5 per pay period.

"Every letter carrier needs to support COLCPE, too," Rolando added. "Only a small portion of NALC members, active and retired, is sustaining our legislative and political fund. We can do better. With politicians like Paul Ryan waiting in the wings, we have to do better." ✉