



The Most Important Question

By Richard W. Rahn

WHICH CANDIDATE WILL RESTORE THE INTEGRITY OF OUR GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS?

If you had a son or a daughter who was a member of a school debate team, and you learned that your child was receiving the questions in advance and the other debaters were not, what would you tell your child to do?

Each year there are some sport scandals, usually breaking down into two different types. One is where a player behaves badly, e.g., beating up a girlfriend or robbing a store. The other goes to the very integrity of the game, e.g., a referee receiving favors from an owner, or something like “Deflategate.” Fans, players, owners and the league usually act rapidly to mitigate the latter type of offense, because they know, if it is allowed to persist, it undermines the integrity of the game, and, if not quickly corrected, the whole sports enterprise will lose and could even fail.

What is true for sports leagues is also true for political and governmental systems. Countries can still survive and partially

prosper even if they have bad policies on tax, trade, spending, regulations, monetary policy, abortion and gay rights. However, they cannot prosper and ensure liberty for long if they do not uphold the rule of law and have institutions with people who insist on playing by the rules, even when they have other personal preferences.

Why are there never-ending scandals with U.S. foreign aid, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund programs — Greece and Afghanistan being current examples? The simple answer is most often money is given to foreign government institutions and individuals on the promise that they are going to reform. However, once they have the money, they have little incentive to reform, and hence the corruption continues. You might ask: Why are the officials of these aid organizations so endlessly naive? It is because they have a vested interest in being naive. If they were intellectually honest with themselves, there would be far fewer countries where it makes sense to give assistance (other than humanitarian aid), meaning far fewer people to administer programs.

The election today is in many ways a decision on whether the voters wish to see the United States as a prosperous beacon to the world, or to increasingly decline, not so much from bad policy but from the growing corruption in government institutions. Think for a moment. Is there any chance that, if elected, Hillary Clinton is going to clean out all of those who have corrupted the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Justice Department and other government agencies? The chances are near zero, because to do so puts her personally at great legal risk — and she showed with the debate questions that she is still willing to cheat. The Clintons have a long track record of using the political system to reward themselves and their friends and to punish their enemies. Pay-to-play will most certainly become even more common and institutionalized.

The Obama administration has already shown that it will use the IRS and Treasury as tools to try to curtail the Bill of Rights in its attempts to deprive gunshop owners of the ability to open bank accounts. The Obama Treasury Department is using anti-money-laundering regulations to deny people basic financial services and privacy rights.

These abuses will almost certainly be expanded under a Clinton administration.

For the record, I am not a fan of Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, and I have strong policy differences with both, for instance her tax and his proposed tariff increases. Mr. Trump and Mrs. Clinton have given their critics plenty of fodder since they both appear to be totally self-absorbed and all too casual when it comes to facts. There are plenty of quotes and video clips to make a case that both have a low opinion of many of their fellow Americans, and might wish to abuse and to deny rights to those they disagree with. Mr. Trump at least has provided a list of solid choices for the Supreme Court, which gives some hope.

As one who once worked for political candidates, including a U.S. president, I learned not to believe much of what is said and promised. So past behavior and self-interest tend to be much more likely indicators of what a candidate will actually do in office. As noted above, Hillary, even if she wanted to be a candidate of reform, has placed herself in a trap of her own making, so it is very hard to see how things could possibly get better. Mr. Trump is a political blank slate, who seems to learn from mistakes (sometimes all too slowly). He has attracted some experienced, quality people, and not dismissed them — despite his famous “You’re fired” line — when they disagree with his statements and actions. And how much more reckless on national defense is he likely to be than one who puts state secrets in unprotected emails?

The most important question in the election is: “Will the integrity of our government institutions be restored?” Will Mr. Trump, like Mrs. Clinton, use government agencies to harass enemies or for personal gain? Or will he seek to cleanse them? Mr. Trump is a gamble; unfortunately, Mrs. Clinton is not. God bless America.

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