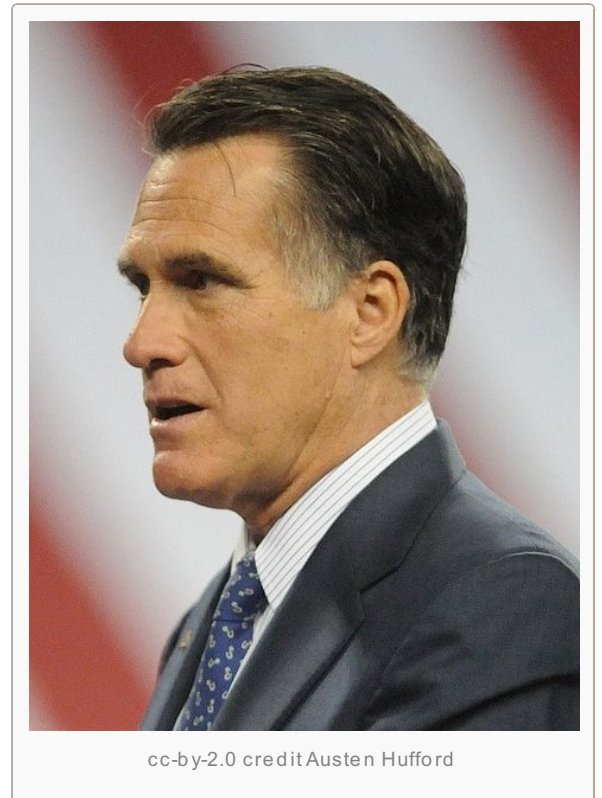


Why Mitt Romney lost – as seen by US conservatives

Much of the UK press and media has run brief pieces by British reporters on what Obama's re-election means for the Republic party. In America, however, there is a far richer seam of analysis. Here [Christopher Ruddy](#), editor of the leading US conservative website [Newsmax](#), and a long-time Romney sceptic, gives an authentic conservative appraisal of what went wrong.

It was the worst of times *and the worst of times*. With the 2012 election results in, there are no short- or even medium-term “silver linings” for Republicans. President Barack Obama has won a decisive victory and the GOP, expecting to gain Senate seats, actually had a net loss of three. The “morning after” will bring the expected explanations and after-game quarterbacking. Still, it is important that the GOP understand why we lost this one in hopes of future victory.

Perhaps the easy explanation is that two hurricanes and two betrayals by Chris Christie killed Mitt Romney's chances. The first hurricane was Isaac, the one that skirted Tampa in late August during the Republican convention. That one seriously disrupted the official schedule. GOP star Marco Rubio — who gave the best speech of the convention — was bumped off prime-time TV coverage, and so was the video biography “introducing” Mitt to the nation. Aging actor Clint Eastwood was scrambled into the schedule to offer a funny but often incoherent monologue with an empty chair. He stole Mitt's show. And prime-time keynoter Chris Christie barely mentioned the nominee or Obama in a speech that sounded like the New Jersey governor was pumping his re-election.



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The ground lost in Tampa wasn't regained until the first debate in Denver, when Romney shined. It was the first, best, and last time he would really sparkle. As a result of the debates, by late October polls showed that Romney was finally beginning to see a surge.

Then the second hurricane, Sandy, struck on Oct. 29. The campaign went into “freeze” mode while Obama swung into “commander in chief” mode. Romney's surge was suddenly frozen too. Enter lingo. It was perfectly fine for Chris Christie to join with Obama in the wake of the crisis. But to lauder the president with praise, calling his response to Sandy “outstanding” in the immediate aftermath of the storm was completely unjustified.

This was another act of treachery. As the disaster unfolded, and with hundreds of thousands still without electric power as I write this, there is plenty of evidence that the leadership by Obama and federal agencies has been seriously lacking, as it has been from Christie and other state and local officials who have failed to adequately prepare and respond to the disaster.

As I said, it is easy to blame Sandy and Christie for Romney's loss. I won't. Sure they hurt Romney. But he lost for other reasons. Sandy and Christie's double-dealing can be compared to bad turbulence that any experienced jet pilot should expect on a long mission. The turbulence may be rough, but it is nothing more than a passing episode for a good pilot with a smart flight plan.

So why were our pilot Mitt Romney and his plan were so flawed. The answer here has eight parts.

1. Paul Ryan Romney's choice of Ryan was almost inexplicable. A good conservative, Ryan was unqualified for the job of vice president, and therefore the job of president. A sitting member of Congress, he held no leadership position on the Hill. Romney's VP selection was the most important one of his campaign, and by it he telegraphed his lack of political wisdom to the nation.

With his VP pick Romney had the opportunity to show he was willing to reach out to middle voters and break out of the GOP's demographic box (think Rubio, Nevada's Brian Sandoval, or New Mexico's Susana Martinez) or pick a Republican heavyweight who exuded gravitas while potentially giving him a state (think Rob Portman or Tim Pawlenty).

2. The Ryan Plan Romney had endorsed Ryan's plan for Medicare even before he tapped him as a running mate. But by selecting Ryan, he was nailing the odious plan to the masthead of his campaign. Ryan's plan, which first called for abolishing federal Medicare in 10 years and later for a substitute voucher program, proved to be disastrous for Romney and other Republican candidates.

As far as I could see, the Ryan plan was the No. 1 policy focus of Obama's and other Democratic attack ads against the GOP. I am not sure what the GOP was smoking when they decided to propose demolishing or radically altering the cherished healthcare program for seniors. Apparently, the Romney campaign began to realize Ryan's negatives late in the campaign, banishing his public appearances to secure red states. But it was too late.

3. The Myth of a "Base Election" Romney totally bought into the notion that this was an election about energizing the conservative base. He seems to have ignored the fact that the base was already highly energized because of its dislike of Barack Obama.

This election was just like every other one in modern times — about winning middle, swing voters. We used to call them Reagan Democrats but the better label today is Clinton Democrats. Romney did much to annoy them (like backing the Ryan plan) and almost nothing to reach out to them, "triangulating" so to speak with ideas that showed the GOP cared about them.

4. No Plan Along the lines of triangulating, Romney needed to espouse several simple ideas that explained what he would do if elected president. Romney promised to create 12 million jobs. That's not a plan, it's a promise. He didn't clearly articulate how he could fulfill that promise. In fact, Romney's team offered the fewest specifics of any presidential campaign ever.

5. Crushing Voters' Optimism When, in 1980, Ronald Reagan put the GOP on the path of optimism and economic growth, he not only won two landslide elections, he also changed the political landscape for three decades. When Romney did offer a plan, it was about "hard truths," such as tackling the deficit, cutting the debt, cutting the budget (killing Big Bird), and cutting Medicare.

What happened to the Grand Old Party that once advocated cutting taxes and spurring economic growth — ideas espoused by the late Jack Kemp and people like Arthur Laffer, Larry Kudlow, Newt Gingrich, Mike Reagan, and others? This is the party most Americans and I identify with.

6. Poor Campaign Staff Considering that Romney's presidential quest was the best funded Republican race in history, his campaign staff was certainly not the best money could buy. The Romney staff was insular and arrogant, and his campaign strategy team led by Stu Stevens and Russ Schriefer was simply abysmal.

7. No "Gingrich" Ads Against Obama. Residing in a battleground state, Florida, I had a front-row seat to Romney's ad war on Obama. I was shocked how few ads the campaign was airing over the summer and how many Obama's campaign was. Meanwhile, Obama's ads were nasty, negative ones, while Romney's were of the kinder, gentler, country-club Republican variety.

I asked a high-level Romney operative why the Republicans were spending \$2.5 million to build a wooden stage for the Tampa convention and not putting the money into ads. The answer: The Romney camp believe people don't remember ads until close to the election. The sea of Romney ads never did emerge

that September. I thought perhaps this was just the Florida strategy. But then I read a shocking report in *Broadcasting & Cable*, the respected TV industry publication. By late September Romney's campaign had not even run a single TV ad in several key markets in swing state Ohio! And the magazine reported that because Romney's campaign was not planning its ad buys properly, they were often paying five to 10 times more than Obama was paying for the same ad spot.

Obama's campaign, of course, took the opposite approach to Romney's, defining him early on with hard-hitting TV ads. Romney's failure to run tough ads against Obama is mind-boggling, even more so because of how Romney ran his primary campaign. For example, I saw the negative attack ads the Romney camp ran against Newt Gingrich in Florida last December and January. By February, the Romney team had spent some \$55 million airing some of the most vicious political ads deployed in a GOP presidential primary, most of them against Gingrich. At the time, Rush Limbaugh commented on Romney's Newt ads, and I'm paraphrasing here, "Mark my words — Mitt Romney will never run these type of ads against Obama." Rush's words were prophetic.

8. *Dissing Hispanics* As the elections of 2000, 2004, 2008, and now 2012 have demonstrated, demographics are trumping ideology in national elections. The Republican Party has a difficult time grasping this concept. Romney seemingly ignored this truth by taking an ultra-hardline on immigration — one so tough he called for the "self deportation" of illegal immigrants. Not only is such a plan impractical and immoral, it is unacceptable politically, as yesterdays' results proved. Consider that Obama reneged on his promise to Hispanics to make their concerns a priority. They were there for the GOP's taking. The one Hispanic group that has voted consistently for Republicans, that is, Cuban-Americans, gave Obama a record number of votes this year.

Moving on

Already the liberal spinmeisters are blaming the Tea Party and conservatives for Romney's loss. The facts show the claim is not true. The success Romney did achieve was due to their support. Romney's loss was due to a concoction of things involving the candidate himself, his team, his strategy, and his decisions. Soon we will, correctly, move on. The GOP will learn from this debacle. The Republican Party might start the process with an image makeover — putting away the Wall Street look in favor of a Main Street one — while it takes back the mantle of Lincoln; a party that fights for the underdog and appeals to the aspirations of the American people.

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