***Romney's Choice***

***By Mel Lavine***

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Was picking Paul Ryan a smart move for Mitt Romney? The selection excited the conservative base of his party but at what price?

Throughout his public life Romney has stayed the middle road. His far-right bromides persuade no one. He often comes across as a bumbler, not terribly quick on his feet, a multi-millionaire out-of-touch. Slick political ads aside, we perceive he's not the villain Barack Obama would like to portray.

A few days after the news it seems as if Paul Ryan was at the top of the Republican ticket instead of Mitt Romney. Four years ago a similar thing happened. With the selection of Sarah Palin as John McCain's running mate, he was all but invisible. Then the scales fell as the true picture of the nominee for the second highest office became clear. She was unfit for the office. In the view of many, Palin was McCain's undoing.

In the present instance, we know the young congressman from Wisconsin is smart and articulate and ambitious to do big things. But could that be the problem?

A member of Congress since 1998, he supported  Bush era policies that led to today's huge budget deficits. In a recent article in the New Yorker, Ryan Lizza counted the ways: "sweeping tax cuts, a costly prescription-drug entitlement for Medicare, two wars, the multibillion-dollar-bailout legislation known as TARP. In all, five trillion dollars was added to the national debt."

The Wisconsin representative reportedly has regretted some of those votes but that was then when he was making his way up the greasy poll. These days as head of the House budget committee he has proposed privatizing Social Security, replacing Medicare in the future with a voucher program for those under 55, and turning Medicaid and food stamps into block grants to the states, according to Wickipedia.

Based on his voting record in Congress, Ryan, is said to be the most conservative Republican

member of Congress to be tapped for vice president since 1900.

So how to account for Romney's gamble to go with so conservative a running-mate? Nate Silver, a pollster for the New York Times, said Sunday, the day after Romney announced his decision:

"When a prudent candidate like Mitt Romney picks someone like Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, it suggests that he felt he had a losing position against President Obama. The theme that Mr. Romney's campaign has emphasized for months and months – that the president has failed as an economic leader – may have persuaded 47 or 48 or 49 percent of voters to back him. But not 50.1 percent, and not enough for Mr. Romney to secure 270 electoral votes."

By rolling the dice, Romney may have cause to rue his choice of the strong-willed Ryan even if Romney wins. Just ask the last Republican to live in the White House under his vice president Dick Cheney.

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