

Romney's Big Mouth

By Mel Lavine

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A city councilman in my Eureka days was fond of saying that a man's worst enemy is his own big mouth. I thought of the old fellow when I heard on the news that during a private reception with donors earlier this year Mitt Romney said that almost half of all Americans "believe they are victims" and entitled to government help. He also said that those voters could be expected to support President Obama because they believe they are "entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name it."

In one clip Romney said he would not try to win over "47 percent of the people" because they are Obama voters "no matter what." By his own definition these are the people "who pay no income tax," and could care less about lowering taxes. They are beyond the limits of protection. On the other hand, he is eager to claim the votes of the undecided, an estimated 13 percent of the electorate. As he sees it, the undecided are "thoughtful" voters, worth caring about.

The video shows Romney saying that almost half of the adult population in this country consider themselves as "victims" and entitled to a large amount of government help. "My job," he said flatly, "is not to worry about these people."

Romney's remarks ring with excessive pride. The old Greeks called it hubris. They were secretly recorded on May 17 after he nailed down the GOP nomination. The video was given to the liberal magazine Mother Jones which posted it on line Monday.

In the firestorm that followed, predictably from the left but also from prominent names on the right, Bill Crystal, the neo conservative editor, called Romney's observations "stupid." David Brooks, the conservative columnist for the New York Times, wrote, "as a description of America today, Romney's comment is a country-club fantasy. It's what self-satisfied millionaires say to each other, and it reinforces every negative view people have about him..." And he added, Romney's "running a depressingly inept presidential campaign."

For the record, 46.4 percent of households did not pay any federal income tax in 2011. But most households did pay payroll taxes, said the New York Times quoting research from the Tax Policy Center. "Of the 18.1 percent of households that paid neither income taxes or pay roll tax, the center found that more than half were elderly and more than a third were not elderly but had an income under \$20,000."

I think Romney's problem is that he started at the top. Imagine what he might have learned if he'd done time on a city council in a place like Eureka.

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