



Partisans of freedom

By Jim Waters

One fan e-mailed recently to accuse me of heresy for claiming not to care who wins November's gubernatorial election.

"That makes you a loud clanging gong," he determined. "Pick a team and get in the game."

Judging from the ensuing e-mail stream, my general disinterest in the outcome of the current campaign, which will soon mercifully end, has gained me at least one ex-fan.

However upset this and some other Republicans, who believe that Gov. Fletcher's fate on Nov. 6 determines whether the world continues to exist on Nov. 7, are with me, they should not interpret my disinterest in carrying either candidate's water as opposition to partisanship altogether.

Indeed, I finally must come out of the closet and confess: I am a partisan! There. I said it! The burdens have rolled away!

But if the "Rs" and "Ds" think that means I am now a partisan favoring Fletcher or Democratic challenger Steve Beshear, they couldn't be more wrong.

Rather, I am, to borrow William F. Buckley's phrase, "a partisan of freedom."

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary definition of a partisan is this: "an adherent or supporter of a person, group, party, or cause, esp. a person who shows a biased, emotional allegiance."

Note the ascending order: The lowest of life's partisanships are that of a "person," the next highest of a "group," and then of a "party."

My partisanship is the highest of the heap, the greatest of partisanships. I have a "biased, emotional allegiance" to a "cause."

This greatly vexes my ex-fan. I'm "standing on the sidelines," he protests. He badly wants to convert me to the Religion of Pragmatism.

"Governing is about pragmatism; and idealism is for the young and the naïve," he preaches.

If principles can still be implemented without losing your salvation, fine. If push comes to shove, expediency, not principles, carry the day.

But Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman, who died in November at the age of 94 and was remembered in gatherings nationwide this week – including one at Western Kentucky University – wasn't young. And he

certainly wasn't naïve.

The Nobel committee doesn't make a habit of rewarding naivety when imparting the prestigious prize, which Friedman won in 1976 for groundbreaking work in economic theory.

I couldn't help thinking about Friedman when my ex-fan charged me with "standing on the sidelines by myself."

Judging from others' e-mail responses flooding into my Inbox weekly carrying general themes of, "You're articulating what we've been thinking for a long time. You're saying what needs to be said," if I am on the sidelines, I'm certainly not roaming them by myself.

Besides, is there something inherently wrong with standing on the sidelines when the game is politics?

A lot gets done there. It's essential for the coach to perform effectively on the sidelines by thinking 50 plays ahead – like a good chess player. Otherwise, the game is a bust.

Friedman was about that many plays ahead when, in the 1950s – the 1950s – he created plays on the sidelines for publicly funded vouchers that allow parents without means to secure a quality education for their children.

Imagine how some of the intellectual partisans must have rolled their eyes at this "play." The elitists – especially those with a "biased, emotional allegiance" – still roll their eyes.

But thousands of parents in Milwaukee and Cleveland and other inner cities in America roll up daily in front of schools their children never would have had the opportunity to attend just a few years ago without the Friedman-inspired vouchers they clutch in their hands.

The man on the sidelines went from being a voice in the wilderness to arguably the greatest intellectual leader of freedom's troops around the world.

Millions of people around the world live in greater freedom and prosperity today because of this diminutive giant who clarified complex economic theories, interjected a vigorous dose of liberty and turned them into winning plays for humanity.

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