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What Paul Ryan Has and Obama Wants

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According to the Huffington Post, "President Barack Obama's reelection campaign and Democratic political groups have been eager for Romney to pick Ryan, the architect of plans to slash government spending and overhaul entitlement programs that Democrats believe are political losers." ABC agrees: "The selection of Ryan as running mate makes it far more likely that Medicare, Social Security, and dramatic spending cuts will be as central to the campaign conversation this fall as jobs and the economy. Adding some of those famed political third rails into the mix is not just a potential risk Romney is willing to take, it is also clearly a potential risk he felt he *had* to take."

So, cutting Medicare and Social Security are unpopular, and Obama benefits from Romney's risky move in picking a runningmate willing to cut them. That's the story.

Now, however, read this from the New York Times: "The news media have played a crucial role in Mr. Obama's career, helping to make him a national star not long after he had been an anonymous state legislator. As president, however, he has come to believe the news media have had a role in frustrating his ambitions to change the terms of the country's political discussion. He particularly believes that Democrats do not receive enough credit for their willingness to accept cuts in Medicare and Social Security, while Republicans oppose almost any tax increase to reduce the deficit."

So Obama too is willing to take the political risk of cutting the popular programs called Medicare and Social Security. In fact, what Obama wants is not to protect these programs from cuts, but rather to receive appropriate credit from the media corporations for his willingness to cut them. This, we are about to be told endlessly, is in stark contrast to Romney-Ryan's willingness to cut Medicare and Social Security. But the biggest contrast seems to be that the media gives Romney and Ryan the credit that Obama covets.

Oh no, Obama supporters will reply, there's a big difference. Romney *wants* to cut these programs, while Obama *is willing* to cut them. Romney is evil, while Obama is noble and gracious in his appeasing of evil. I'm sorry, but won't the catfood that grandma lives on taste as bitter regardless of whether her income was removed maliciously or accommodatingly?

Oh, but Romney-and-Ryan want to cut *more* than Obama wants to cut.

Are you sure? RR need only triple their demand for Obama to double his. The longer the debate goes on, the more old people Obama wants to starve to demonstrate his willingness to accommodate. In fact, exactly how many old people starve — whether Iranians living under sanctions or Americans living under austerity — is hardly relevant. The important thing is to have gone further toward meeting RR's demand than RR went toward meeting

yours.

But what about the demand of the majority of the country that Social Security and Medicare be expanded rather than cut? What about the popularity of lifting the cap on payroll taxes, lowering the retirement age, and expanding Medicare to include us all? Will that agenda be advanced by cheering for a compromiser over an unapologetic crapitalist?

Of course not. What would move both of these reprehensible candidates away from deeper cuts to decent programs, and toward deeper cuts in the war machine, the fossil fuel funding, the bankster bailouts, and the "Bush" tax cuts is an independent movement that makes its minimum demand an absolute bar on any cuts to Social Security or Medicare whatsoever.

If you don't soon see progressive groups advancing that demand, expect bad times ahead, regardless of who wins the world's worst reality drama.

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