

RALPH NADER: SPOILER ON THE LEFT?

By: Anthony J. Sacco. © Copyright November 2000
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TOWSON – Prior to the presidential election of 2000, Ralph Nader needed to win 5% of the popular vote in order to reach his publicly stated goal; to qualify the Green Party for twelve million dollars in federal election matching funds for the election of 2004.

According to media returns immediately after the 2000 election, he failed to get 5% of the popular vote nationwide. Later vote counts and in-depth analysis of voting in all fifty states showed that, in fact, he managed just half of that.

It didn't become apparent to many until the beginning of October 2000, that voting for Mr. Nader would hurt Al Gore. After the initial shock, Democrat Party leaders, major media pundits, and assorted liberals mounted campaigns to convince Mr. Nader to withdraw. First to draw blood was a group of former Nader's Raiders, who went public with the claim that Nader had broken a promise not to campaign in states where he could hurt Gore. Then, Jonathan Alter, a *Newsweek* columnist, expressed his disappointment and concern. Many others followed suit, including a group of prominent American intellectuals, who published an open letter to Nader, suggesting that he was running "a wrecking ball campaign, one that betrays the very liberal and progressive values it claims to uphold."

Unfazed by this criticism, Ralph Nader appeared on *Good Morning America* and spoke negatively about his old pupils, calling them "frightened liberals." Returning

to the stump, he campaigned extensively in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Washington and Oregon during the final weeks of the election. These were all states where a strong Nader showing might have delivered a critical blow to Mr. Gore's election bid. A report to this writer by an eyewitness in the Seattle area indicated that Nader was well received at a rally there in October 2000, drawing close to ten thousand people. And according to an article by Tom Squitieri, a writer for *USA Today*, "since last month, Nader has not held a major rally that drew less than one thousand people".

Sensing that their appeal to withdraw was falling on deaf ears, Mr. Nader's attackers switched to a national campaign to convince his supporters that a vote for him would be a vote wasted. Some went to the extreme of advocating a vote-swapping plan over the Internet, a scheme of dubious legality. At least one such web site was shut down in California after a warning by the Attorney General there that vote trading violated California state law.

Many pre-election polls put Mr. Nader's support at about 4% going in to the election. Apparently the widely-circulated stories that a vote for Nader was a wasted vote had some effect. According to an in depth analysis of voter patterns, it looks like about half of his supporters deserted Nader for Al Gore when they entered the voting booth.

Nationwide election results reported by Voter News Service indicated that in most States, Mr. Nader received only two to two and a half per cent of the vote, although in Washington state, he did reach his goal of five percent. And in the so-called battleground states, Mr. Nader was not a deciding factor. Although extremely close, all those states fell into the Gore column. That seems to have been due to many of Mr. Nader's voters switching to Mr. Gore at the last moment.

But in Florida Mr. Nader appears to have been a big time spoiler for Gore. Not counting absentee and overseas military ballots, he got 96,698 votes out of 5,876,265 votes cast in that State. If just a fraction of those votes had gone to Mr. Gore, he would have won the state's twenty-five electoral votes and been elected President on November 7th. So Mr. Nader has gone into the history books as playing the roll in 2000 on the Left that Ross Perot played in '92 on the Right. Of course, few complaints were heard from the liberal media about Mr. Perot following the 2000 election, since he took votes from the Republican candidate, George H. W. Bush.

Because of the situation in Florida, Ralph Nader is now Public Enemy #1 among some members of the media, some liberals and many Democrats. Despite thirty years of worshipping big government and championing countless socialist causes, Nader, who was their saint just six months ago, is now the devil incarnate. So far, liberals have impugned his integrity, his credibility, and even his personal life. They have suggested that Mr. Nader, who is not, and never has been, the best dressed man in America, is "narcissistic." Then the liberal wing of the Gore campaign circulated thinly veiled innuendos that he is a "homosexual." Why this, even if it were true, is now held out as a bad thing by those who, eleven months of the year defend homosexuality, is unclear. But then, these are also the same people who, tip-toeing gingerly around Bill Clinton's perjury and subornation of perjury, once claimed that Mr. Clinton's "personal life" was no one's business.

You can expect to see more of this in the next few months. George W. Bush won Florida by a razor-thin margin. Mr. Nader has been and will continue to be blamed for "delivering the election" to him. Look for Mr. Nader to be treated like the eccentric elderly uncle; always underfoot, but an embarrassment to the family.

Using the tactic of personal abuse of its so-called enemies was a favorite of the Clinton -Gore Administration during its eight years in office. It was used to assassinate the characters of Jennifer Flowers, Paula Jones, Kathleen Willey, and others who claimed to have been sexually abused by Mr. Clinton. It was dragged out and dusted off again immediately after the Presidential election, to impugn the motives and attempt to destroy the reputation of Florida's Secretary of State, Katherine Harris. Her "crime?" Attempting, in accordance with the rule of law, to apply the election laws of the State of Florida, as they appeared on the books at the time.

All of this clearly indicates a need for more civility and less arrogance and abusiveness in the political arena. People need to tone down the rhetoric, to understand that "reasonable minds will differ" on many issues. Just because someone holds a different viewpoint, even a radical leftist minority view, as do Mr. Nader and many of his supporters, doesn't mean he or she should be subjected to personal attacks, vilified or ridiculed. It assuredly also doesn't mean that Ralph Nader's ideas are correct, or that others are required to adopt them. All ideas are *not* of equal validity. But it *does* mean that in a country that values free speech, Mr. Nader has the right to express those ideas in his attempt to convince others to adopt them.

That's what Freedom of Speech is all about.

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