



COMMENTARY &amp; OPINION ON HISTORY &amp; POLITICS

## Hugh's News

# Presidential election choices?

By Hugh Turley

The U.S. presidential election resembles the recent presidential race in Yemen. On February 21, Yemen elected President Abdurabu Mansur Hadi, the former Vice President under longtime ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh. Hadi was the only candidate on the ballot. On April 3, Barack Obama will be the only presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in the Maryland primary.

One might think at least one person in the Democratic Party would challenge President Obama for continuing the Patriot Act and for breaking his promise to close the Guantanamo prison. Where are the 2008 anti-war candidates Ralph Nader and Dennis Kucinich, now that Obama has expanded President Bush's wars into

Pakistan, Libya and Yemen?

On the Republican side, the media has narrowed the field by giving most attention to Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum, although Newt Gingrich has vowed to stay in the race until the party convention in August. None are likely to be accused of being a "dove."

Democrats and Republicans who oppose war and a police state may think they have a choice in Ron Paul. But it's a magician's choice – meaning there is no choice, only the illusion of one.

Unlike candidates who walk into a busy restaurant to appear with a crowd, Paul has genuine popular support. But, strangely, he seems to avoid his supporters. On February 20, Presidents' Day, some 2,000 military veterans who support

Ron Paul marched from the Washington Monument to the White House to rally against the wars. Some came from as far away as Detroit.

But not Paul, who is himself an anti-war military veteran.

Earlier in the month, Paul skipped the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, D.C., where he had won a presidential straw poll two years in a row. Sales were brisk at Daniel Williams' booth selling Ron Paul swag, and button salesman Frank Enten, who has attended every CPAC convention, said, "Ron Paul buttons are my best seller, with Romney a close second."

This year, when it matters most, the popular favorite did not show up or even have a booth in the exhibit hall

like the other candidates. Romney, Gingrich and Santorum all spoke at the convention. Romney won the straw poll this year, with the absent Paul finishing dead last, behind even Gingrich, with only 12 percent of the vote. Is Paul really a serious candidate?

In Yemen, the paper ballot had only a picture of Hadi with a circle next to it for the voters to mark. The American press dutifully reported the election of Yemen's new president, complete with images of people lined up to vote at the polls. Why vote when there is no choice?

American elections provide a better appearance of choice. In November Americans will choose between two candidates who will continue the same Middle East policy, wars, Patriot Act, searches of citizens, and indefinite detentions.

Voters in neither the U.S. nor Yemen have any real choice. But at least in Yemen, they don't pretend to.