



Oops, Republicans Did It Again

Despite a mountain of historical evidence that the Republican Party doesn't seriously stand for smaller government and individual liberty, I maintained some hope that this time would be different. With the GOP's retaking control of Congress and the White House, I actually thought Obamacare could be repealed and maybe even replaced with free market health care reforms. But though the night is still young in terms of the GOP's latest return to power, Republicans have quickly demonstrated that I should have trusted my usual pessimism, because it's clear that they're not guided by any principled support for limited government.



Though a few congressional Republicans sincerely believe in markets and freedom, the party is largely dominated by pretenders and outright statist. One need only look back to when Republicans last controlled Washington. Republicans and the George W. Bush administration massively increased spending and the federal debt.

Military spending skyrocketed to pay for dubious wars. Corporate welfare, including farm subsidies, thrived. The federal government became more involved in what should be local matters, such as education. And civil liberties were trampled on under the guise of "homeland security." The GOP not only failed to tackle unsustainable growth in federal entitlement programs but also expanded them by creating Medicare Part D.

An amazing thing happened, though, when Barack Obama was elected and the Democrats regained control of Congress. Republicans suddenly remembered the horrors of federal overspending, mounting debt and the endless intrusion by the federal government into every aspect of our lives. Republicans lambasted the notion that Keynesian-style big-government spending would boost the economy. They decried Obamacare and the Democrats' love for "socialized medicine." They bemoaned continuous growth in federal debt and conveniently laid the problem at Obama's feet.

Then another amazing thing happened: Donald Trump was elected, and the GOP was once again in charge. Almost immediately, Republicans began touting increased military and infrastructure spending to create jobs and spur the economy — the very Keynesian-inspired policies they attacked when advocated by Democrats. Even the small number of federal program terminations proposed by the Trump administration were too much for congressional Republicans. Nope — when it comes to the federal budget and yet another looming brush-up against the federal debt ceiling, Republicans reveal that they're content to maintain an untenable status quo, despite all the lip service paid to the dangers of big government over the years.

Yes, as part of the failed attempt to repeal and replace Obamacare, the GOP did include Medicaid reforms intended to slow the spending growth for the federal/state entitlement program that provides health care for those with lower incomes. There are many problems with the program, which is in dire



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need of reform. But the same can be said about Medicare and Social Security, which congressional Republicans — and Trump, for that matter — have made clear they won't touch. (Remember then-vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan's emotional attack on President Obama for allegedly cutting Medicare during the 2012 campaign?)

What about the GOP's supposedly bread-and-butter issue of tax reform? Regardless of how big or small the positive economic feedback to any tax cuts would be, the bottom line is that serious, permanent spending cuts must be part of the equation. But as we have repeatedly seen, Republicans are so unwilling to shrink the size of government that they already waved the white flag and are actively advocating a new source of revenue to "pay for" tax reform. Indeed, I fear that the recent fight over the inclusion of a border adjustment tax to generate revenues is only the beginning. At the rate we're going, it may not be long until the GOP gets on board with a value-added tax or carbon tax!

For all of the GOP's deriding of Democrats over the years for being "tax-and-spenders," the sad reality is Republicans are on their way to earning the same label. We might only be six months into the return of Republican rule, but it's already looking as if this second go-round of Republican control in Washington this century could end up being as disastrous — if not more — than the first one. But as the saying goes, fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. I don't intend to be fooled twice, and I hope I'm not alone.

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