



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on February 24, 2012

Rick Santorum: No Conservative

Thankfully, the twentieth GOP presidential debate has come and gone. If the American voter doesn't know these candidates by now, he never will. Of the four remaining candidates, three are virtually indistinguishable from one another. This much has been established time and time again throughout this election season. It is true, of course, that there exist some differences between Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, and Newt Gingrich. But such differences are negligible, both in themselves and, especially, relative to the enormity of the similarities that they share.



To those spectators who are all too aware of the unbridgeable chasm between their rhetoric of "limited government" and their respective records, the spectacle of each of these three presidential aspirants leveling allegations of hypocrisy and inconsistency at one another can't fail to appear comedic at best, pathetic at worst.

Most comical — or pathetic — is the frontrunner of the week, Senator Rick Santorum.

Socialized Health Care

The universal health care legislation — i.e. "ObamaCare" — that the Democrats succeeded in enacting into law is unpopular among the electorate, and woefully unpopular among Republicans. It is no surprise, then, that all of the GOP candidates promise to repeal it. To his credit, Santorum has regularly drawn the nation's attention to the undeniable fact that their protestations against ObamaCare notwithstanding, both Romney and Gingrich have in the past favored a government *mandate* requiring citizens to purchase health insurance.

But Santorum is himself guilty of precisely that of which he accuses his Republican opponents.

Granted, unlike Gingrich, Santorum never actively argued on behalf of a mandate. And unlike Romney, Santorum can not be said to have supplied the original blueprint — "RomneyCare" — for ObamaCare.

Still, the former Senator from Pennsylvania is not without his share of blame for having made the way for ObamaCare easier than it otherwise would have been. For as long as Medicare and Medicaid have been in existence, the federal government has involved itself in health care to a much greater extent than anything that previous generations of Americans could have envisaged. Actually, Americans from an earlier time would have found it at once impossible and undesirable that the federal government would involve itself in health care at all, a statement the truth of which is born out by the fact that those who ratified the Constitution ratified a *federal* government — not a *national* one. The federal government is possessed of a severely circumscribed set of "powers" that the Constitution expressly assigns to it. The authority to make provisions for health care is *not* a member of this set. In spite of this, Medicare and Medicaid are entitlements.

And Santorum, along with Romney and Gingrich, expresses no intention of revoking them.



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Moreover, while in Congress, Santorum voted in favor of Medicare Part D, a prescription drug benefit that marked the largest expansion in Medicare since its inception.

In other words, Santorum is no less supportive of socialized health care than is Romney and Gingrich.

In the past, Santorum has also, again correctly, noted that while Governor of Massachusetts, Romney's version of universal health care provided funding for abortion and coerced Catholic hospitals into offering contraceptives for emergency purposes. This, Santorum rightly insists, is entirely unacceptable from the conservative's point of view.

Yet just Wednesday night, Santorum admitted that he himself had voted in favor of appropriations bills that supplied funding for Planned Parenthood — an organization that provides both contraceptives *and* abortion services.

What this in turn means is that while Santorum may not have issued an Obama or Romney-like directive to Catholic institutions requiring them *specifically* to violate the sacred teachings of the Catholic Church, he did indeed endorse a policy that would require *all* Catholic taxpayers to violate *their* consciences in subsidizing practices to which their faith tradition has always been vehemently opposed. For that matter, it isn't just the convictions of American Catholics over which Santorum ran roughshod. The convictions of *all* Americans who object to the government's confiscating their resources in time, money, and labor for the sake of financing contraceptives and abortion have also been undercut by Santorum and his colleagues in Congress.

Bailouts

Santorum remarked, truthfully, that Romney and Gingrich supported the bank bailouts of 2008. Yet Santorum himself supported the airline bailouts of 2001. According to the current frontrunner, the airlines were on the verge of economic collapse because of the federal government's decision to ground their planes during the days following September 11, 2001. Thus, since responsibility for the airline companies' problems rested on the shoulders, not of the airlines themselves, but of the government, it was only just that the government should come to their aid. In the case of the banks, however, matters couldn't have been more different. Because blame for the banks' woes rested squarely with the banks, they should have been left to fail.

Santorum's rationale for distinguishing just bailouts from unjust bailouts simply will not wash.

First of all, that the government's suspension of all flights in the wake of 9/11 injured the airline industry is obvious. That it is the ultimate cause of its economic troubles is entirely untrue. The industry had been suffering losses for some time. The events of September 11 exacerbated them — it did not give rise to them.

Secondly, even if Santorum's account was cogent, by his own reasoning, then, Romney and Gingrich were right in endorsing the bank bailouts. While the government was not the cause of the airline industry's financial crisis, it was, ultimately, the cause of the banking industry's financial crisis.

In order for George W. Bush's "Home Ownership Society" — a utopian scheme if ever there was one — to come to fruition, the government compelled lending institutions to radically undercut the traditional criteria in accordance with which they have always issued mortgages. As a result, multitudes of bad mortgages were given to millions of people who could not afford them. In time, as some, such as Ron Paul, predicted, the housing bubble burst and those same lending institutions — along with the entire economy — found themselves on the precipice of ruin.



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In short, by Santorum's own logic, he stands condemned for supporting the airline bailouts *and* supposedly opposing the bank bailouts. At the same time, Gingrich and Romney are vindicated.

No Child Left Behind

If President Obama's agenda can be said to be socialistic — and it can — then that of his immediate predecessor, George W. Bush, can be said to be the same.

Not only did Bush and his Republican Congress fail to diminish, much less eradicate, the Department of Education, through the now notorious "No Child Left Behind" act, they exponentially strengthened its powers.

Santorum was as much a supporter of No Child Left Behind as anyone else — although he now — *now* — claims to regret having cast his vote for it.

In Wednesday's debate, Santorum said that although this infamous law conflicts with his own values, in voting for it he intended to do nothing more or less than "take one for the team." Politics is a "team sport," he explained, and sometimes circumstances demand that players advance the team against their better judgment.

Doubtless, it is with justice that politics has been described as the art of compromise. But compromising in the short term for the sake of advancing one's deepest convictions in the long term is one thing; violating one's deepest convictions in the short term for the sake of advancing one's party in *any* term is something else altogether.

Whether Santorum really did object on moral grounds to No Child Left Behind at the time that he voted for it is questionable. If he did not, then in telling us otherwise, he lies. If he did, then he violated his own conscience for a lesser good and acted immorally. Either way, Santorum has not conducted himself in a manner befitting a statesman, and certainly not in a manner befitting a genuinely conservative statesman.

It is, however, what we would expect from a cynical and opportunistic run-of-the mill politician such as Santorum.

Conclusion

Rick Santorum is not a real conservative. Rather, he is a *neoconservative* Republican. Between the former and the latter there is all of the difference in the world. To put this point another way, Santorum is just another champion of Big Government who, when election time rolls around, talks the talk of "limited government" and the rest.

If Republican voters really are concerned, first and foremost, with reshaping the federal government so that it comes to resemble more closely the ideal embodied in the Constitution, *then* they have no option but to dismiss Romney, Santorum, and Gingrich as the pretenders that they are. Furthermore, if it is a restoration of the Constitutional Republic for the sake of which our Founding Fathers labored indefatigably that Republicans really desire, they have but one candidate to whom they can turn this time around.

And that candidate is Ron Paul.

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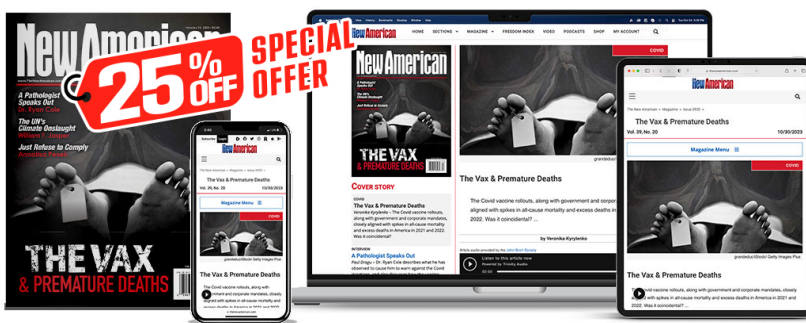


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