



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 25, 2010

Are Republicans Serious About Their “Pledge to America”?

“These days one of America’s two great political parties routinely makes nonsensical promises,” writes Paul Krugman in his Sept. 23 New York Times column. To which party is Krugman referring: the one promising that a gigantic federal bureaucracy and a massive number of new mandates on health insurance companies will improve the quality and reduce the cost of healthcare, or the one promising to rein in government spending even though the last President and Congress from its party made Lyndon Johnson look like Ebenezer Scrooge?



Anyone familiar with Krugman’s work knows the answer. As a Democrat partisan, Krugman naturally claims that the Republicans are making nonsensical promises while the Democrats are being sober and responsible in their public pronouncements. When the Obama administration forecasts impossibly low spending and deficits far into the future despite ever-increasing spending (including ObamaCare), its projections are merely somewhat too optimistic and a matter of technical details, according to the columnist. On the other hand, he avers, Republicans are making war on arithmetic by promising lower deficits in the future without specifying what programs they will cut to achieve this objective. As a result, he says, if the GOP takes Congress in November, Banana republic, here we come.

In truth, were probably headed down that path no matter which party is in control come January. Krugman is correct that Republicans are mathematically challenged; it's his inability to recognize that Democrats suffer from the same disability that makes reading his column so frustrating.

The subject of Krugman’s piece is the Republicans [Pledge to America](#), released on Sept. 23. He writes, In essence, what they say is, Deficits are a terrible thing. Lets make them much bigger. By that he means that while Republicans complain repeatedly about federal debt in their document, their only substantive policy proposal is to make the Bush tax cuts permanent, thus supposedly reducing federal revenue, while simultaneously proposing next to no specific spending reductions. Krugman explains:

True, the document talks about the need to cut spending. But as far as I can see, there’s only one specific cut proposed canceling the rest of the Troubled Asset Relief Program, which Republicans claim (implausibly) would save \$16 billion. That’s less than half of 1 percent of the budget cost of those tax cuts. As for the rest, everything must be cut, in ways not specified except for common-sense exceptions for seniors, veterans, and our troops. In other words, Social Security, Medicare and the defense budget are off-limits.

Regardless of Krugman’s partisan pedigree, these are reasonable criticisms. The GOP has essentially declared the overwhelming majority of the federal budget, including the two largest and most unsustainable entitlement programs, immune from its supposed full frontal assault on out-of-control spending.

The *New Republics* Ed Kilgore, too, [spots](#) the inconsistency between Republicans conservative rhetoric



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and the reality of their Pledge. The document, says Kilgore, highlights the gap between grassroots, Tea Party-type activists, who seem to want genuine federal retrenchment, and the GOP leadership, which just wants to be in charge of the spending spree:

But when it comes to specifics, the Pledge limits its wrath to reversal of the Obama administrations policies. By vowing to repeal TARP, the authors promise to carry their counterrevolution all the way back to September of 2008, but that's it. There's nothing about repealing No Child Left Behind or the Medicare prescription drug benefit, both of which have been routinely denounced by Republican congressional candidates this year. And the document doesn't contain any proposals touching on the broader Tea Party agenda of revoking unconstitutional policies and practices dating back to the New Deal. Even though most Tea Party-affiliated GOP candidates have embraced a phase-out of Social Security and Medicare, or other radical changes to our welfare system, all the Pledge contains is vague language about accountability in these programs. It doesn't even tout Paul Ryan's Medicare voucher proposal, and its one real reference to Medicare attacks the alleged benefit cuts contained in the health reform legislation. In other words, the White House is right to accuse Republicans of simply wanting to take America back to the same failed economic policies that caused this recession but they haven't gone back any further than that. That's how thoroughly the House GOP has eschewed the more radical stance of the conservative movement and its Tea Party base.

In fact, Kilgore adds, the House Republicans commitment to fiscal responsibility is so anemic that the Pledge fails to promise a balanced federal budget, or even the hoary symbolic demand for a balanced budget constitutional amendment.

RedStates Erick Erickson, quoted by Kilgore, is even [more blunt](#) about the mom tested, kid approved pabulum that he says is the Pledge:

The pledge begins by lamenting an arrogant and out-of-touch government of self-appointed elites issuing mandates, then proceeds to demand health care mandates on insurance companies that will drive up the costs of health care for ordinary Americans.

The plan wants to put government on the path to a balanced budget without doing anything substantive. There is a promise to immediately reduce spending by cutting off stimulus funds. Wow. Exciting.

The entirety of this Promise is laughable. Why? It is an illusion that fixates on stuff the GOP already **should be doing** while not daring to touch on stuff that will have any meaningful longterm effects on the size and scope of the federal government.

This document, Erickson concludes, proves the GOP is more focused on the acquisition of power than the advocacy of long term sound public policy.

Krugman's assertion that the GOP isn't serious about cutting government is, therefore, on the mark. Why, then, does he fear that the party, if given power, will implement its real, not-so-secret agenda, which mainly involves privatizing and dismantling Medicare and Social Security? Where does Krugman even get the idea that most Republican politicians want to do such things? Ron Paul is probably the only person in Washington who is serious about eliminating these programs, and even he has stated that he would do so gradually. George W. Bush's so-called Social Security privatization plan was never much more than a campaign gimmick and would, in any event, have done little to reduce the programs long-term liability.



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In the end, Krugman recognizes that even if the GOP does have some hidden slash-and-burn agenda, it didn't implement it the last time it was in power; in fact, it did just the opposite. So, he writes, the clear and present danger isn't that the G.O.P. will be able to achieve its long-run goals. It is, rather, that Republicans will gain just enough power to make the country ungovernable, unable to address its fiscal problems or anything else in a serious way. In other words, Krugman worries that those foolish, unserious Republicans will get in the way of the super-intelligent, highly responsible Obama and his agenda the one that is already [shattering](#) Bush's deficit records. We can only hope that he isn't fretting over nothing.

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