



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on February 14, 2013

Rubio's and Rand's Contrasting State of the Union Address Responses

One would have thought the twin Republican responses to President Obama's State of the Union address by [Florida Senator Marco Rubio](#) (shown in foreground) and [Kentucky Senator Rand Paul \(shown on left\)](#) should have been almost identical in opposition to the president. But they ended up a study in sharp contrast. Where Rubio deployed vague and glittering generalities in a series of platitudes, Paul emerged as the adult who unveiled specific policy proposals in his [Tea Party Express response](#) to counter Obama.



On the surface, both the Republican senators appear to be coming from the same point of view: Both were elected with Tea Party support in 2010. Both supported a balanced budget constitutional amendment. Both claimed to oppose new taxes and more regulations. Both strenuously opposed Obama's new proposals to curb the right to keep and bear arms.

"More government isn't going to help you get ahead. It's going to hold you back," Rubio [said](#) February 12. "More government isn't going to create more opportunities. It's going to limit them." Likewise, Paul [explained](#) of Obama's heavy borrowing policies, "This massive expansion of the debt destroys savings and steals the value of your wages. Big government makes it more expensive to put food on the table. Big government is not your friend. The president offers you free stuff but his policies keep you poor."

That's red meat for exciting the Republican base. But a closer look reveals that the red meat on Rubio's plate was only the plastic beef that children use on their Playskool kitchen sets for childish afternoon "[Tea Parties.](#)" Rubio liberally dispensed slogans and clichés against big government, but his speech was bereft of — to use a phrase [popularized by Bill Clinton in the 2012 campaign](#) — math. Rubio's response — the official Republican Party response — failed to outline even a single specific recommendation for a cut in federal spending. In fact, other than criticizing Obama's deficits (which, incidentally, were also approved by the GOP-controlled House of Representatives), Rubio's only [mention of numbers](#) was the following:

But if we can get the economy to grow at just four percent a year, it would create millions of middle class jobs. And it could reduce our deficits by almost \$4 trillion dollars over the next decade.

How does Rubio propose to spur economic growth, if deficits are choking off growth? Not to engage in spending cuts. Rubio [overtly opposed](#) even the paltry trimmings of the "sequester":

We don't have to raise taxes to avoid the president's devastating cuts to our military. Republicans have passed a plan that replaces these cuts with responsible spending reforms. In order to balance our budget, the choice doesn't have to be either higher taxes or dramatic benefit cuts for those in need.

By way of contrast, Rand Paul's [speech](#) was loaded with specific policy proposals, including some needed perspective about the much ballyhooed "sequester":



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The president does a big “woe is me” over the \$1.2-trillion sequester that he endorsed and signed into law. Some Republicans are joining him. Few people understand that the sequester doesn’t even cut any spending. It just slows the rate of growth. Even with the sequester, government will grow over \$7 trillion over the next decade. Only in Washington could an increase of \$7 trillion in spending over a decade be called a cut.

Paul [inveighed](#) against the kind of “bipartisanship” being sought by the liberal establishment media:

It is often said that there is not enough bipartisanship up here.

That is not true.

In fact, there is plenty.

Both parties have been guilty of spending too much, of protecting their sacred cows, of backroom deals in which everyone up here wins, but every taxpayer loses.

It is time for a new bipartisan consensus.

It is time Democrats admit that not every dollar spent on domestic programs is sacred. And it is time Republicans realize that military spending is not immune to waste and fraud.

Senator Paul — the son of former congressman and presidential candidate Ron Paul of Texas — [suggested](#) as a start for spending cuts to go after the low-hanging fruit, such as foreign aid to nations that are hardly essential allies to American territorial sovereignty:

Where would we cut spending? Well, we could start with ending all foreign aid to countries that are burning our flag and chanting death to America. The president could begin by stopping the F-16s and Abrams tanks being given to the radical Islamic government of Egypt. Not only should the sequester stand, many pundits say the sequester really needs to be at least \$4 trillion to avoid another downgrade of America’s credit rating.

Paul also backed the [“Penny Plan,”](#) an idea pushed by former Congressman Connie Mack that would cut one cent from every dollar spent every year and balance the budget within seven years. He then pledged:

Next month, I will propose a five-year balanced budget, a budget that last year was endorsed by taxpayer groups across the country for its boldness, and for actually solving the problem.

Indeed, last year Paul [introduced a five-year fiscal 2013 balanced budget proposal](#) with real numbers — actual math — for spending cuts. There’s little reason to think he won’t update his proposal.

Paul was also a study in contrast with Rubio on the Bill of Rights. While both senators claimed to support the Second Amendment-guaranteed right to keep and bear arms, Rand Paul [called for](#) a Republican Party that also would defend the Fourth Amendment, oppose presidential imperial decrees, oppose “kill lists” without due process, and support restoring separation of powers:

We will not let the liberals tread on the Second Amendment!

We will fight to defend the entire Bill of Rights from the right to trial by jury to the right to be free from unlawful searches.

We will stand up against excessive government power wherever we see it.

We cannot and will not allow any president to act as if he were a king.



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We will not let any president use executive orders to impinge on the Second Amendment.

We will not tolerate secret lists of American citizens who can be killed without trial.

Montesquieu wrote that there can be no liberty when the executive branch and the legislative branch are combined. Separation of powers is a bedrock principle of our Constitution.

We took the president to court over his unconstitutional recess appointments and won.

If necessary, we will take him to court again if he attempts to legislate by executive order.

Rand Paul reserved his most strident criticism for Senate Democrats in his February 12 speech. "Senate Democrats have not even produced a budget in the time I have been in office," he [declared](#), something he labeled "a shameful display of incompetence that illustrates their lack of seriousness." But the reality is the Republican establishment's lack of a balanced budget proposal and failure to outline any specific spending cuts also implies a GOP establishment "lack of seriousness." Rubio provided a plastic gloss to that lack of seriousness February 12.

Business Week [concluded](#) of the two speeches that "Rand Paul Made Marco Rubio Look Establishment." But in reality, Rubio made Rubio look establishment.

Photo of Rand Paul and Marco Rubio: AP Images



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