

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Special Issue

March 22, 2012

BELTWAY BUDGET BATTLE: PARTISAN VS. PATRIOT

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Congressman Paul Ryan's latest budget plan *The Path to Prosperity: A Blueprint for American Renewal* once again calls the political parties in Washington to come to the table and address America's continuing budget impasse. Both parties through their handpicked public spokespersons and paid strategists never miss an opportunity to blame the other side for this deadlock. It's simply good politics to play the blame game that helps each side fatten its election-year war chests and feeds the voracious appetites of political junkies. At times, the rhetoric descends into outright lying that is readily dismissed as "everyone does it in an election year."

Today the U.S. Treasury is forced to borrow approximately 40 cents for every \$1 in federal spending. To service current and past borrowings, President Obama estimates that when the books are closed on FY2012 interest payments alone will amount to \$225 billion. In FY 2017 those payments, according to the President's budget, are projected to eclipse half a trillion. The budget impasse is a crisis in self-governance.

To help sort through the central political conflicts that are at the heart of this budget deadlock, Mayo Research Institute has identified the essential differences between Republicans and Democrats that must be addressed to move past this gridlock.

Three core budget principles of the Democratic Party:

► It is the duty of the federal government to respond to unmet human material need. For that reason, it is necessary today to stimulate the economy in order to reduce the unmet need that derives from the loss of jobs and to strengthen the safety net that most recently has added Obamacare in order to assure that everyone has access to affordable health care.

Simply put, Democrats eagerly embrace bigger government with more entitlements and more spending. The additional spending often is packaged in the form of the investments that will "win America's future."

► It is the duty of the rich to share their wealth by paying more taxes because they have been specially favored by the United States and are easily able to pay more. Today they are being asked in the name of justice to "pay their fair share."

► It is the duty of the federal government to cut waste in federal spending, to "scrub the budget." Thus the compelling need for more Congressional oversight, more control of economic affairs.

Three core budget principles of the Republican Party:

▶ It is the duty of the federal government to respect the freedoms and rights set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, notably in the Bill of Rights.

The recent HHS mandate that pits advocates of free preventive health services for women against defenders of the free exercise of religious convictions is a compelling instance of the clash between unmet need and a constitutionally guaranteed freedom.

▶ Leaving aside the Republican's libertarian wing, it is the duty of federal government to respond to unmet human material need only when the private sector and state and local governments are unable to address that need adequately.

▶ It is the duty of the federal government to live within its means. It must not make Americans more dependent on the federal government and burden future generations with the excesses of the present generation.

The Democrats tell us the danger lies in a society split into the haves and have-nots: a plutocracy. They would reduce that danger by providing economic security for all. The unfunded liabilities of Social Security retirement and Medicare will go away when the rich pay more.

The Republicans tell us that the danger lies in a society that surrenders freedom for economic security: a nanny state. They would reduce that danger by limiting the role of the federal government. The unfunded liabilities will go away only when the promises made to current and future beneficiaries are realigned with economic realities.

The battle lines are drawn. The entrenched beltway warriors at the table are willing to risk plutocracy or nanny state to have their way. The statesman-like peacemakers, on the other hand, want a land of freedom and opportunity. Will victory go to the partisans or the patriots? *Unlike* so many other critical public questions, the issues at stake in the budgeting process will be resolved on November 6. At least for the moment.

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