

The Republican (and Tea Party) Way Forward

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Well, we certainly lost a big one. Despite hopes I share that this November's polls will help mitigate the damage, this giant leap towards socialized medicine is a big loss for the Republican Party, and for the American people. And I say "leap towards" socialized medicine as this bill is not nearly the Left's end game. It's not meant to work, it's meant to destroy the private health insurance industry, an industry that realized this only too late.¹ It's meant to help bring on, through socialized medicine, further breaking of the budget, and further conditioning of the American people to dependency and an expectation that government will provide for all their needs, the full European style welfare state. While it is obvious we must fight this, it's not as obvious how. This note offers a few thoughts on the matter.²

First, as most Republicans would now admit, we share a lot of blame for this calamity, at least in the sense of having it happen on our watch. While in power we let government expand, not contract, as is our mandate. We let the easy pabulum of "compassionate conservatism" blind us to the fact that even though compassion is a virtue of the first order, along with benevolence, honesty, and others, these are private not public virtues, and importantly they are not virtues, if not voluntary. When the State claims to practice any of these virtues it is always being generous with someone else's resources, and usually most so to the constituents of whoever is currently in charge, and almost always with eyes firmly on the political advantage it will bring. When one is benevolent privately, it's usually, well, just to be benevolent. The two are not equal, they aren't even both virtues. We forgot this for quite a while. We are not completely responsible for the Democrats' large majority; there was bad luck as well. But, we must

¹ Many foolishly believe this bill is a big positive to the health insurance industry (this includes many in the health insurance industry). That may (or may not) be true in the short-run as people are forced to buy their products. But in even the medium-term, health insurers are the walking dead. There is no purpose to private insurance companies when you take away their power to price risk (assessing so called pre-existing conditions). They are simply paper-processing, publicly-regulated utilities soon to wither and die as the State completely takes over their last few clerical functions.

² As should be clear from this essay I'm closer to a libertarian than a conservative, though I believe the battle between large vs. small government and how it pertains to the economy and the dependency-state is the defining issue of our times, and this makes my choice of unstinting support for the Republican Party an easy one.

acknowledge that we greatly abetted the damage they have wrought to our liberty.

I was much more proud of my party during the recent healthcare debate. Despite the Left's cries over our "fear-mongering" (death-panels, Medicare cuts), our level of decorum and honesty, while focusing on the facts dwarfed our opponents with their spittle flying mendacious attacks on insurance companies, their kiddie human shields, their out-and-out CBO lies, and their now infamous legislative bag of dirty tricks. At the Potemkin bi-partisan "summit" ("Potemkin" as its sole purpose was for the President to say he heard from Republicans) we, and a special nod to Representative Ryan, showed more substance and grasp of the issues, despite the disadvantage of a sitting president hogging the air-time, and controlling the meeting, because "he's the President." Overall, we convinced the country handily that we were right, and we convinced them because they listened and thought hard, not because, as the President said repeatedly, he just didn't explain it enough.³ Sadly, convincing the country was not enough this time given the power, and lack of ethics, of our opposition. But convincing people the hard way, no matter how complex the issues, must still be our strategy for the future.

So, here is the crux of the matter. Going forward, we must continue to make the difficult arguments. We must eschew the easy "sound bite" attacks. They have a short shelf-life, little resonance beyond their utterance, and only open us up to bizarre counter-attacks simply for the temerity of pointing out our opponents' failings. We must focus on how we truly differ from them. Essentially, we believe in small government and freedom, while they believe in big government and the accompanying tyrannies small and large. We believe in our way because it offers the best life for the most people, and, importantly, because liberty is the morally right answer. But, frankly, as odd as this may sound, their false argument is easier to make than our true one. Their argument is "look at all the free stuff government can give you, and look at all those evil corporations and Republicans who want to stop it." Forget that their boogeyman — "Wall Street" — donated huge amounts to Democrats in the last election, forget that insurance companies were on board with their "reform" plan (to insurance companies' shame) until the Left turned on them after Scott Brown. We will never beat them by pointing out their hypocrisies. They smile and ignore it. We won't even beat them by pointing out the utter immorality of how they passed this horrific legislation, from bribes to threats to every legislative piece of legerdemain ever

³ A few Monday-morning quarterbacks among Republicans, David Frum is one notable example, are highly critical of Republican strategy saying they should have worked with the Democrats. This is ridiculous. The Left would've given tiny concessions to call this bill "bi-partisan", e.g., perhaps some tort reform, but nothing essential. We'd still be well on the road to socialized medicine but with seeming approval of that road by both parties and without the illuminating fight, and the electorate not exposed to the differences in opinion, and to the depths the Left would sink to get their bill through. This view is also guilty of tremendous 20-20 hindsight. If you lose a supposedly even contest 73-0, you probably had a flawed strategy. If you lose 28-27 in overtime when the other side had to cheat, that's bad luck, but it does not mean your strategy was fundamentally flawed. If Mr. Stupak had not traded his principles for those magic beans, would David Frum be lauding the Republican strategy right now?

devised. We must beat them by repeatedly making the hard arguments as to why liberty works and why it is the moral choice.

We must win by explaining, no matter how long it may take and hard it may be, that free people acting in a free market is what this country stands for, is the only ethical way to live, and happens to be the greatest anti-poverty and civil rights program on earth. This is harder than saying “here’s some free stuff, now vote for us forever or you’ll lose it.” But, it’s the right thing to do for America, and even the right thing to do politically. If the other party is trying to hook the American people by pushing drugs (entitlements and such) on them, we won’t win elections by pushing slightly less attractive drugs!

The disadvantage to this approach is, again, it’s far harder. It does not fit well in a sound bite. It requires faith in our audience. I think the American people are ready for it, and will reward the party that shares the truth with them. I think so no matter how much more complex the truth is than simpler feel-good lies.

Furthermore, we must reject our fear of seeming like the “bad guys” versus those who seem like “good guys” because of their short-term largesse with money we collectively don’t have. These peddlers of “what government can do for you” hurt our people, our country, and our liberty, even if it’s too often an effective short-term campaign strategy. We are the true good guys who care about America’s long-term welfare and freedom. We need to be confident in that, and that the American people are smart enough to understand it, as we make the tougher, more complex arguments for freedom. We have already started in this healthcare debate, though too little, too late, for this time after years of neglect. But, we are on the right path and that’s vital and uplifting. Let’s not retreat back to becoming a more socially conservative version of big government Democrats, and wanting so much to be loved today that we sacrifice tomorrow. We have the advantage of being right about small government and liberty, and we must trust that advantage going forward.

Now a quick thought for the Tea Party members. Your aggressive stand for freedom and small government has inspired the country. You value your independence. That’s good. But let’s not kid ourselves — if we had to break it down, not by bodies but by ideals, you’re 95% Republican, at least in terms what Republicanism should be. Please savagely hold Republicans to the principles of small government and support them as they change this country back to a land of liberty. That does not mean litmus tests that cast out members for small offenses against dogma, something all popular movements can tend toward, but it does mean making sure Republicans are first and foremost for small government, individual liberty, and the Constitution.

But please don’t think for a second you’re a neutral Switzerland between the two parties. Like it or not you have a dog (or elephant) in this fight. Look at the evidence. Republicans, while sometimes failing to meet your standards, identify

with you, actively seek your support, and share most of your core small government values. Democrats and the Left call you sexually explicit names (without irony as the purveyors of political correctness in all other arenas), deem you racist for the (possible) actions of a tiny minority, and stand directly against the liberty-driven small government ideal that underlies your movement. If Republicans sometimes represent you imperfectly, Democrats represent everything you stand against. This is not a tough choice. So, consider this a call to continue what you're doing, but with more directed purpose, more willingness to choose, name, and support your friends, and help us even more than you have already to change this country back to the shining city on a hill it is meant to be.

No matter how dark things look now, and how difficult making the complex case for freedom may seem versus the easy case for government giveaways, let's always remember that we have one small advantage. We are right. Large government is antithetical to liberty, and liberty is the only moral answer, and the best practical one for all Americans. They can't take that away from us, we can only abandon it ourselves.

I'll end with an apropos excerpted quote from a mildly well-known Republican,

“It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us ... that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

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