



Men of Ideas: Conservatives Do Have Policy Solutions

by John Hendrickson

Conservatives have been and are accused often of being the voice of “no” in Congress in regard to the progressive policy agenda of President Barack Obama and the Democrat-controlled Congress. Many Republicans have voted against the \$787 billion (now \$862 billion) stimulus bill, health-care reform, and financial regulation, among other controversial legislation that has the object of extending the entitlement and regulatory state. Many Republicans have voiced their concern over the President’s many appointments, especially his Supreme Court nominees whose ideas and philosophy about government and the Constitution are rooted in the progressive philosophy. Many of the Republicans, mostly conservatives who have voted no, have voted in the negative not for partisan reasons, but rather because the proposed legislation is not only unconstitutional, but does not provide adequate policy solutions to the problems of today. These conservative Republicans are looking for solutions based on ideas rooted in constitutional limited government and free enterprise. A survey of key Republican members of Congress demonstrates that conservatives are offering substantive policy alternatives in the tradition of limited government.

Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI), the ranking Republican on the House Budget Committee, is perhaps the best known conservative who is offering a substantive policy proposal to reform taxes, spending, and entitlements. Rep. Ryan has introduced “A Roadmap for America’s Future,” a bold policy proposal that addresses the entitlement and fiscal crisis at large. “Ryan’s map connects three destinations: economic vitality, diminished public debt, and health and retirement security,” wrote columnist George F. Will in *The Washington Post*.¹ Fred Barnes described Ryan’s plan as “the most important proposal in domestic policy since Ronald Reagan embraced supply-side economics in the 1980 presidential campaign.”²

In regard to health care, the Roadmap calls for “restructuring the tax code, allowing all Americans to secure an affordable health plan that best suits their needs, and shifting the control and ownership of health coverage away from the government and employers to individuals.”³ The plan also offers tax credits for both families and individuals to purchase health plans, which will not only bring more affordability to health care, but allow individuals to be in control of their plan.⁴ In regard to entitlements — Medicare and Social Security — the plan would secure the current program for those already 55 years of age or older, and provides a free-market reform for future beneficiaries.⁵ In regard to Medicare, individuals who are under 55 years of age would get “a Medicare payment, initially averaging \$11,000, to be used to purchase a Medicare-certified plan.”⁶ Individuals with lower incomes would “receive greater support” as well as providing “Medical Savings Accounts,” and it would allow the states to better structure Medicaid resources.⁷ Social Security is also reformed by allowing individuals less than 55 years of age to invest “over one-third of their current Social Security taxes” into a personal retirement account.⁸

The Roadmap also calls for significant tax reform. As Rep. Ryan describes:

The highly simplified code fits on a postcard. It has just two rates: 10 percent on income up to \$100,000 for joint filers and \$50,000 for single filers, and 25 percent on taxable income above these amounts... The proposal eliminates the alternative minimum tax. It promotes saving by eliminating taxes on interest, capital gains, and dividends. It eliminates the death tax. It replaces the corporate income tax — currently the second highest in the industrialized world — with a business consumption tax of 8.5 percent.⁹

Rep. Ryan has correctly been described as a “think tank” inside Congress, which overturns “the idea that Republicans lack ideas.”¹⁰

Senator John Thune (R-SD) has also taken a lead in trying to address the failure of Congress to reduce federal spending. Senator Thune has introduced a budget reform bill (the Deficit Reduction and Budget Reform Act) that

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proposes to find a solution to the uncontrolled federal spending and bring reform to the federal budget. The proposal attempts to roll back government spending, which is threatening the nation's economic stability. The national debt is over \$13 trillion and the deficit is estimated at \$1.5 trillion with deficits projected into the future. In addition, entitlement spending is projected to bankrupt the nation. Sen. Thune's plan calls for discretionary spending caps "for all non-defense, non-veteran, and non-homeland security discretionary spending from 2011 to 2020."¹¹ The proposal would also stop stimulus spending and reform the federal budget process by restructuring budget rules and creating a "biennial budget timeline."¹² Finally, the plan calls for a legislative line-item veto and creation of a standing Joint Committee of Congress on Deficit Reduction, which would be required to "introduce legislation that eliminates or reduces spending on wasteful government programs and achieves a savings of at least 10 percent of the previous year's budget deficit."¹³

Rep. Ryan's and Sen. Thune's plans are two examples of conservative policy solutions that are being offered in Congress. The Republican Study Committee and the Republican Senate Policy Committee have and are working on policy solutions that are based on constitutional limited-government and free-enterprise principles. The examples briefly described above tackle the economic and fiscal problem that is threatening the security of the United States.

Conservatives do have policy solutions. Some of the ideas are considered "old" by progressives, but Senator Barry M. Goldwater, in *The Conscience of a Conservative*, offered a response when he wrote:

To suggest that the Conservative philosophy is out of date is akin to saying that the Golden Rule, or the Ten Commandments, or Aristotle's Politics are out of date. The Conservative approach is nothing more or less than an attempt to apply the wisdom and experience and the revealed truths of the past to the problems of the contemporary world.¹⁴

Conservatives and libertarians in Congress, as well as the many scholars and writers who serve in colleges, universities, and the many think tanks such as The Heritage Foundation, CATO Institute, Hoover Institution, and Public Interest Institute among many others are providing policy solutions and ideas that are rooted in constitutional principles — principles that may be outdated to liberals and progressives, but then again it is the other side that rejects the American Founding in favor of a greater entitlement and regulatory state based on "evolving standards and rights." Conservatives need not be ashamed in defending limited-constitutional government, which our Founders intended and created.

Endnotes:

¹George F. Will, "How to get the country to solvency on entitlements," *The Washington Post*, February 7, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/05/AR2010020503475_pf.html> (August 3, 2010).

²Fred Barnes, "Think Big-Republicans should embrace Paul Ryan's Road Map," *The Weekly Standard*, July 13, 2010, <<http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/think-big>> (August 3, 2010).

³Paul D. Ryan, "A GOP Road Map for America's Future," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 26, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB10001424052748703808904575025080017959478.html>(August 2, 2010).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid. and "A Roadmap for America's Future," <<http://www.roadmap.republicans.budget.house.gov/Issues/Issue/?IssueID=8520>> (August 3, 2010).

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Will.

¹¹Senator John Thune, "Thune introduces common sense budget reform bill," Press Release, July 27, 2010, Office of John Thune, United States Senator, <http://thune.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=3f63ce5f-688c-4f46-840e-777d98fc67db&Month-7&Year=2010> (August 3, 2010).

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Barry M. Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, MJF Books, New York, 1990, p. xxxvii.

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