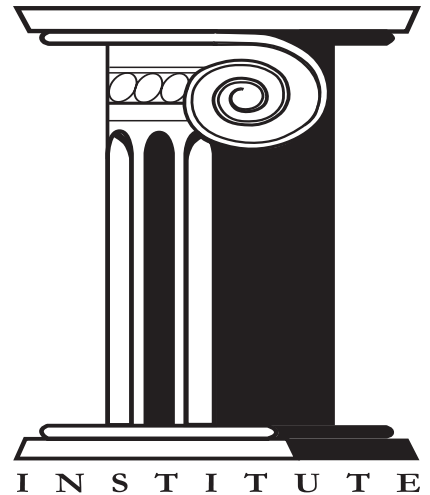


LIMITS



On Power and the Use of Coercion

Washington Isn't Broken — Just Broke

by Edwin Feulner, Ph.D. and Senator Jim DeMint

All of America's problems, the liberal theory goes, are due to gridlock in Washington, and that's due to conservatives who refuse to compromise.

If only pesky conservatives would get out of the way, liberals assert, and allow Congress to do more, if only more laws were passed, more spending programs created, more bureaucracies to regulate — things would get better.

The left invariably charges up this rhetorical hill whenever public opinion, election results, and constitutional checks and balances prevent them from imposing their agenda on the country. Washington is broken, they say, and it's all conservatives' fault.

The latest version comes from Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute and Thomas Mann of The Brookings Institution in their book, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*. They blame Washington's acrimony and gridlock on a GOP held captive by Tea Party conservatives, who, they say, are "scornful of compromise."

It's all nonsense. What Ornstein, Mann, and their ilk are really upset about is that there are more and more conservatives in Washington today willing to tell voters the fundamental truth about our government: Washington isn't broken — it's broke.

As a nation \$15 trillion in debt, with historic unemployment three years after

liberals supposedly "fixed" the economy with their \$800 billion stimulus, voters are agreeing with conservatives that maybe government isn't as good at solving economic problems as liberals would like us to believe.

Indeed, what the Washington liberal establishment ignores — or tries to hide — is that the grease that has always lubricated partisan friction and facilitated bipartisan legislative compromises has been bigger government, more taxes, and more spending. Republicans would tolerate Democrats' expansion of government and Democrats indulged Republicans monkeying around with the Tax Code because the economy was growing so fast and creating so many jobs, so much wealth and so much tax revenue, that both sides could still get what they wanted.

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Washington Isn't Broken — Just Broke by Edwin Feulner and Senator Jim DeMint (continued from page 1)

The problem today is that the big government we're left with after decades of establishment compromises won't allow our private economy to flourish anymore. We're killing the golden goose.

By refusing to reform the entitlement programs that are the crown jewels of the New Deal and the Great Society, the establishment has dug itself into a hole. To make up for the shortfall for the next 75 years of Social Security and Medicare spending, we would need to raise nearly \$50 trillion in new taxes, more than three times the size of our current economy. The moment Margaret Thatcher once joked about has come: Liberals have finally run out of other people's money.

Bitter experience has taught Americans that "compromise" in Washington means more spending, higher taxes, and more debt. And they know we can't afford any of those anymore. What the American people now understand is that the great crisis in America today is not the inequality between rich and poor but the inequality between the government and everybody else.

That's where the Tea Party came from — as a rational political response among a citizenry that realized its

political leaders were driving our nation off a fiscal cliff.

That's also why Americans are supporting Congress's true problem solvers, like Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), and Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.). They have all put forward credible budget blueprints for fixing our fiscal crisis.

Liberals have put forward no ideas at all. Their only hope is to find gullible Republicans to agree to new tax hikes to finance more spending so they don't bear all the blame.

Americans see what's happening in Europe — where big government, dependency, and special-interest liberalism is destroying economies and lives. They see Washington trying to pass the same kind of policies, so they sent new representatives to Washington to fight back.

Ultimately, the gridlock we see in Washington is not the result of one party or another. It's a function of the basic laws of mathematics. Washington is broke, and it's hurting the rest of America's ability to expand our economy and end this government-created downturn.

The results of all the runaway spending, debt, and bailouts have proved Ronald Reagan correct. "Government is not the solution to our problem," Reagan said. "Government is the problem."

This is obviously the last thing the Washington establishment — especially on the left — will admit: that

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Democrats' Leftward Drift Is Blocking Tax Reform

by Chris Edwards

Is Washington gridlock the GOP's fault? That's what Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute and Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution claim in a recent *Washington Post* op-ed. According to them, Republicans have become "ideologically extreme" and are blocking needed bipartisan reforms.

That certainly isn't true, with respect to tax reform. The landmark Tax Reform Act of 1986, which slashed tax rates in a bipartisan deal, passed both chambers with large majorities. It was designed so as not to raise taxes on any income group. But today, the Democrats are not interested in any such revenue-neutral deal.

The comments by Harvard University's Lawrence Summers, arguably the most important economist on the Democratic side for the last two decades, last week at Brookings exemplify this attitude. Summers discussed four priorities for tax reform.

First, he stressed the "central importance of revenue raising." He opined that "any discussion of tax policy needs to start there" because the government needs a "significant increase in revenues."

Next, he said he wants to strengthen "progressivity" and ensure that high earners pay a "fair share." Summers implied that the tax code should

be a tool for redistribution with government policy targeting the ratio of high-earner incomes to middle-class incomes.

Summers rated the other two goals of tax reform — economic efficiency and simplification — as less important. Indeed, he pooh-pooed them. Yet those two goals have long been synonymous with the meaning of "tax reform," and were central to the policy thrust of the 1986 act.

Republicans today still support the goals of 1986 — cutting rates, ending loopholes, and improving efficiency within a revenue-neutral package. House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan's (R-WI) tax plan is a good example. But for Summers, President Obama, and Democrat leaders in Congress, tax reform has morphed into an agenda of growing the government and penalizing high earners.

For further evidence of the Democrat shift, let's compare Summers' goals with the tax reform goals that Democrat Dick Gephardt (R-MO) described in his 1985 *Cato Journal* article. Gephardt — who would become House majority leader — was a key player in the 1986 tax reform effort. In his article, he says, "We in Congress take pride in the free-market system," which illustrates why he was able to forge a deal with free-market Ronald Reagan. You never hear Democrat leaders say that sort of thing today.

Gephardt said that the "most important" goal of tax reform was to "stimulate the growth of our economy" and to "achieve greater efficiency in the way the tax code works." By contrast, with respect to tax efficiency and neutrality, Summers said that he puts "less emphasis on these questions right now in the United States than I would have over most of the last 25 or 30 years."

Gephardt's second most important goal for tax reform was "fairness," but his usage of that word was different from the usage of today's Democrats. For Gephardt, fairness meant closing loopholes and reducing tax rates. His aim was horizontal equity, meaning that people with similar incomes pay similar amounts of tax.

By contrast, today's Democrats use "fairness" to mean raising taxes on high earners. Back then, Gephardt stressed the opposite: "If we are going to pass a tax reform bill, we desperately need to avoid the distributional debate." The tax plan that he wrote with Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) — the Bradley-Gephardt Fair Tax — cut the top personal tax rate to 30 percent.

Today, President Obama puts redistribution at the center of his tax agenda, and he wants to hike the top rate to more than 40 percent. He is determined to raise income taxes on high earners,

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Democrats' Leftward Drift is Blocking Tax Reform
by
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even though they currently pay a much larger share of taxes than they did in the 1980s. Obama's emphasis dooms any chance of serious reform in the personal income tax.

Gephardt's third goal was simplification. He wanted to reduce the "constant meddling" in the tax code and enact lower rates with fewer deductions, credits, and other breaks. Today, Obama is proposing one special tax break after another.

The Bradley-Gephardt plan had serious flaws, as did the 1986 Tax Reform Act. And Gephardt was no champion of free markets in other policy areas. However, the Democrats of the 1980s were willing to give the Reagan pro-growth agenda a chance, not just on tax reform, but on deregulation as well.

Today, I wonder whether Ornstein and Mann can think of any policy areas where President Obama and Democrat leaders are willing to accept pro-market, small-government reform ideas.

Chris Edwards is the Director of Tax Policy Studies at the Cato Institute and the editor of Downsizing Government.org. This article first appeared in the Daily Caller on May 8, 2012, and is reprinted with permission from the Cato Institute.

Defending Liberty and the Second Amendment

by **John Hendrickson**

A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

-Amendment II, United States Constitution

The aftermath of the tragic shooting in an Aurora, Colorado, movie theater is reigniting the debate over gun control in the United States. Many liberals and progressives are arguing that stricter gun control laws are needed in order to prevent violent acts such as the shooting in Colorado. Defenders of the Second Amendment are arguing that current gun laws are sufficient and the right of the people to keep and bear arms is a sacred tradition and liberty in our nation which must be honored and protected. Conservatives are also correctly challenging the liberal notion that every societal problem needs to be solved with some legislation, in this case gun control laws, that will prohibit future gun violence.

Conservatives view human nature as flawed because of original sin and argue that the most well-crafted law or government program will not lead to a more perfect or secure America. As columnist George F. Will stated on ABC News program

This Week: "I defy you to write a gun-control law that would prevent someone like this with a long time horizon and great planning capability from getting the arms he wants."¹ Will also correctly argued that no matter how "meticulously you draft whatever statute you wind up passing, the world is going to remain a broken place."²

David Keene, President of the National Rifle Association, recently wrote in describing the progressive view of gun ownership:

...they tend to blame firearm ownership, rather than criminals, for armed violence and believe that if we would all just give up our firearms it would be possible to usher in a new and far more peaceful world. What they really object to goes far beyond our ownership of firearms. They believe that traditional American individualist values that drove the nation's founders to limit the power of government and protect our right to defend ourselves must give way to a new set of values that cedes governance to the state. In a very real sense

their hostility to firearms and the Second Amendment isn't about guns or violence or crime; it's about values. They see those who adhere to the values of the Founders as a continuing threat to the new world they dream of creating, and quite correctly see those of us who support the Second Amendment as the most hostile to their entire world view.³

The United States Supreme Court in two landmark decisions, *District of Columbia v. Heller* and *McDonald v. Chicago*, ruled that the Second Amendment does provide a constitutional right for an individual to keep and bear arms. Our constitutional right to keep and bear arms has a rich historical tradition in our nation. "A historical examination of the right to bear arms, from English antecedents to the drafting of the Second Amendment, bears proof that the right to bear arms has consistently been, and should still be construed as an individual right."⁴

The individual right to bear arms is not only essential for the preservation of liberty, but many Americans, both Republicans and Democrats, are proud, responsible gun owners who use firearms for hunting, collecting, and participating in a variety of shooting-related sporting activities. Perhaps fundamentally the right to keep and bear arms is an issue of the right of self-defense.

Wayne Grudem, a theologian and author of *Politics According to the Bible*, wrote about the importance of the Second Amendment:

In the United States, the gun-control issue is important for several reasons: First, because it upholds the meaning of the Second Amendment to the Constitution as it was originally intended. Second, and more fundamentally, because it effectively protects a basic human right, the right of self-defense. Third, because the right of citizens to bear arms is a significant protection against tyranny. It is a protection against an oppressive, dictatorial regime taking control of the nation against the will of the vast majority of its citizens. Fourth, because study after study has shown that where private citizens have the right to possess guns for self-defense, that is a significant deterrent to violent crime.⁵

Part of the gun control debate in the aftermath of the Colorado shooting will be over the so called "assault-weapons ban," which expired several years ago. Some policymakers are making renewed calls to reinstate the assault-weapons ban because of the "military-style" weapons

used in the Colorado shooting. John R. Lott, Jr., a noted economist and author of *More Guns, Less Crime* and *The Bias Against Guns* among other works, recently wrote:

Indeed, banning guns on the basis of how they look, and not how they operate, shouldn't be expected to make any difference. And there are no published academic studies by economists or criminologists that find the original federal assault-weapons ban to have reduced murder or violent crime generally. There is no evidence that the state assault-weapons bans reduce murder or violent crime rates either. Since the federal ban expired in September 1994, murder and overall violent-crime rates have actually fallen. In 2003, the last full year before the law expired, the U.S. murder rate was 5.7 per 100,000 people. Preliminary numbers for 2011 show that the murder rate has fallen to 4.7 per 100,000 people. In fact, murder rates fell immediately after September 2004, and they fell more in states without assault-weapons bans than in states with them.⁶

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Lott also correctly explains that although some semi-automatic firearms look like military weapons, they operate differently:

Yes, the M&P 15 and the AK-47 are “military-style weapons.” But the key word is “style” — they are similar to military guns in their aesthetics, not in the way they actually operate. The guns covered by the federal assault-weapons ban (which was enacted in 1994 and expired ten years later) were not the fully automatic machine guns used by the military but semi-automatic versions of those guns. The civilian version of the AK-47 uses essentially the same sorts of bullets as deer-hunting rifles, fires at the same rapidity (one bullet per pull of the trigger), and does the same damage. The M&P 15 is similar, though it fires a much smaller bullet — .223 inches in diameter, as opposed to the .30-inch rounds used by the AK-47.⁷

In addition, Lott argues that the “large-capacity ammunition magazines are also misunderstood.”⁸ As Lott explains:

The common perception that so-called “assault weapons” can hold larger magazines than hunting rifles is simply wrong. Any gun that can hold a magazine can hold one of any size. That is true for handguns as well as rifles. A magazine, which is basically a metal box with a spring, is also trivially easy to make and virtually impossible to stop criminals from obtaining. Further, the guns in a couple of recent mass shootings (including the one in Aurora) have jammed because of the large magazines that were used. The reason is simple physics. Large magazines require very strong springs, but the springs cannot be too strong, or it becomes impossible to load the magazines. Over time, the springs wear out, and when a spring loses its ability to push bullets into the chamber properly, the gun jams. With large springs, even a small amount of fatigue can cause jams.⁹

In response to national tragedies such as in Colorado or even in response to a national crisis, the right to keep and bear

arms should not be undermined. Jeffery Kuhner, President of the Edmund Burke Institute, wrote that strict gun control laws do not necessarily prevent violent crime and he illustrated his point with the nation of Norway.¹⁰ In response to the terror of Anders Behring Breivik, Kuhner wrote that “Norway has some of the strictest gun laws in the world. That did not stop a madman from acquiring the guns and bombs necessary to unleash a reign of terror.”¹¹

The Second Amendment is a fundamental right and liberty that is unique in the world. Citizens have the right to keep and bear arms to hunt, participate in shooting sports, and to protect themselves, their family, and property. In preventing violent crime, more gun control is not the answer; rather, the answer is to allow people to exercise their right to keep and bear arms through the Second Amendment. If the Second Amendment is allowed to be undermined or destroyed it will be the death knell for all liberty in the United States. This is not a partisan issue, because the Second Amendment is a liberty and right enjoyed by all law-abiding citizens regardless of political party or philosophy. “We hold in our Constitution the most precious, unique and hopeful human freedoms mankind has ever known,” wrote Wayne LaPierre, who serves as Executive Vice President of the National Rifle Association.¹²

Endnotes:

¹George F. Will, "This Week Transcript: Tragedy in Colorado," *This Week*, ABC News, July 22, 2012, <<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-tragedy-colorado/story?id=16824177&page=5>> accessed on August 7, 2012.

²Ibid.

³David A. Keene, "Election 2012: On Guns...and Values," *President's Column*, July 18, 2012, National Rifle Association, <<http://www.nrapublications.org/index.php/13435/presidents-column-28/>> accessed on August 7, 2012.

⁴Judge Sam R. Cummings, *US v. Emerson*, <http://www.txnd.uscourts.gov/pdf/NotAblecases/emerson_2_pdf> accessed on September 1, 2006.

⁵Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010, p. 212.

⁶John R. Lott, Jr., "Military-Style Weapons," *National Review Online*, July 27, 2012, <<http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/312452/military-style-weapons-john-r-lott-jr>> accessed on August 7, 2012.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Jeffrey T. Kuhner, "Aurora and the left's hatred for America," *The Washington Times*, July 26, 2012, <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/jul/26/aurora-and-the-lefts-hatred-for-america/>> accessed on July 27, 2012.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Wayne LaPierre, "Reject the U.N.'s Gun-Ban Fantasy," *Standing Guard*, June 1, 2012, National Rifle Association,

<<http://www.nrapublications.org/index.php/13024/standing-guard-26/>> accessed on August 7, 2012.

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Question of the Quarter:

Do you think higher priority should be given to spending cuts or tax reform?

Send your thoughts on this issue to us at Public.Interest.Institute@LimitedGovernment.org or answer on-line at <http://www.LimitedGovernment.org/LIMSept2012.html>.

We may publish some of your ideas in the December 2012 issue of *LIMITS*.

In our last issue we asked readers if they thought lower tax rates were better or worse for the economy.

Phil from Cedar Rapids responded by writing: "I favor Steve Forbes 17% flat tax rate and no deductions... Lets get back to the basics and not so many exemptions."

Thank you, Phil for your good response and ideas.

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the policy framework they have created with bipartisan affirmation over the past few decades has led our nation into a fiscal and political crisis.

When things go wrong, establishment writers like Mann and Ornstein blame conservatives, tea partiers, voters, and the Constitution — because they lack the courage to look in the mirror and point the finger at the establishment they call home.

Edwin Feulner is President of The Heritage Foundation. Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) serves on the Joint Economic Committee and the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee.

This article first appeared in Politico on July 23, 2012. The article is reprinted with permission from The Heritage Foundation.

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