



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on November 3, 2010

Can House Republicans Govern With No?

The Democratic talking points were reiterated endlessly during the campaign, that the Republican Party can't govern with "no." "Simply saying 'no' will do nothing to create more jobs and strengthen our economy," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid reiterated in an address after the elections. Reid also told CNN that "Democrats have to work with Republicans and Republicans have to work with Democrats. It's not a one-sided deal."



Republicans will probably continue to be attacked as the "party of no," particularly by Democrats. But the constitutional reality is that a majority of fiscal conservatives in the House *can* govern fiscal issues with "no." Since all revenue bills must begin in the House of Representatives (and all spending must be approved by the House), Republicans can successfully insist upon — and win — spending cuts even if they are opposed by the Democrats in the Senate and the White House. But that's a big "if," as the history of Republicans standing up to big-spending Democratic Presidents has demonstrated. The Republican Party's record of fiscal austerity has been entirely lacking for at least 15 years.

The last time a group of freshmen congressmen run by the Republican Party passed meaningful spending cuts, back in 1995, President Clinton vetoed the spending bills and threatened to shut down the federal government (and a partial shut-down actually happened). Back then, the House Republican leadership under Newt Gingrich blinked, [caved in completely](#), and then passed the spending levels Clinton had demanded.

The questions before the nation today are: Will the GOP again become the party voting to raise the debt limits and pass deficit budgets, as it did during the early 2000s? Or will the new tea party influence in Congress infuse a spine in the GOP?

Soon-to-be House Speaker John Boehner [told](#) CNN after the election that he will follow the lead of President Obama: "While our new majority will serve as your voice in the people's House, we must remember it is the president who sets the agenda for our government."

That's not a sign of a new backbone. And Republican leaders like soon-to-be House Majority Leader Eric Cantor have been [quoted](#) on both sides of the compromise issue.



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But incoming House Financial Services Committee Chairman Spencer Bachus [told](#) the Fox Business Network just before the election that House Republicans would not blink in a shutdown threat this time. Like many in the media, he's already talking about a political showdown over a government shutdown. "I would think when we send the spending bills to the President he will veto them, and then the hard vote will be when he sends them back and we will be faced with another situation where he will probably try to force us to shut government down and we are going to have to be brave this time," Alabama Republican Congressman Spencer Bachus said. "We wouldn't be shutting it down, we would be cutting out the excessive spending. And if the President wanted to shut the government down, we would not shut the government down, but we wouldn't allow him to force us to spend taxpayer dollars that don't need to be spent."

Bachus is right on that point. Constitutionally, if the House doesn't pass the spending, there's nothing the Senate and the President can do. The political history does, however, make that a very big "if."

Photo: Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.) speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington: AP Images



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