



For Some Politicians, Enough Spending Will Never Be Enough

Back in 2005, I wrote that when it comes to spending, “Congressional Republicans Make French Socialists Look Like Ronald Reagan.” Looking back now, from the perspective of fiscal prudence, those were the good old days. Yet, as irresponsible as Republicans have been with our finances since then, today’s Democrats seem committed to making the spendaholic GOP look like Uncle Scrooge.

Let’s recap: The worst of the COVID-19 emergency is hopefully behind us, meaning the country should focus on recovery, fully reopening the economy and returning to work. Government should focus on scaling back emergency programs and reducing the deficit. It’s not just the prudent thing to do, it’s also what Americans want. According to a recent Pew Research Center poll, 72% of Americans view the federal budget deficit as a “very big” or “moderately big” problem. This concern is more pronounced than that surrounding any issues politicians are focusing on these days, including illegal immigration and crime.

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They’re wiser than most politicians. After spending almost \$6 trillion on pandemic-related programs, the deficit is up to \$3 trillion from \$984 billion in January 2020 (an alarming figure in itself), and our long-term fiscal prospects are looking red. While a fiscal crisis may be a while off, the economic crowding out and distortions produced by high spending and low growth are already upon us.

However, the Democrats controlling the House, Senate and White House ignore these facts and are pushing through more spending — trying to make many temporary COVID-19 measures permanent programs while expanding existing and already unsustainable programs.

Weary of the trend, Republicans are presenting a somewhat united front in opposition to the measures. But they’re now joined by a few Democrats in both the House and the Senate. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., for instance, announced he wouldn’t support the \$3.5 trillion tax and spending legislation pushed through the reconciliation process. He also noted that he wouldn’t vote for a reconciliation bill that’s more than \$1.5 trillion. That number would increase this fiscal year’s spending to a whopping \$5 trillion.

We should all be grateful to those resisting the entitlement explosion. While beneficiaries of those



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programs (including federal paid leave, universal pre-K and expanded child tax credits) may like the upfront benefits they will get, studies have shown that these measures can backfire and hurt those they're trying to help. For instance, European governmental paid leave programs have resulted in outcomes that include lower pay, fewer promotions and lower employment for beneficiaries.

The progressive members of the Democratic Party disagree. Hence, the political pressure they're putting on the opposition by refusing to vote on a separate \$1 trillion infrastructure bill negotiated with Republicans by Manchin and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., until they have an agreement on passage of the \$3.5 trillion one. Never mind that as *The Wall Street Journal* rightfully noted the legislation is a "once-in-a-century bipartisan infrastructure bill" and is supposedly a priority on both sides of the aisle.

And if that blackmail doesn't work, they want to trick them into accepting the entitlement expansion by using some budget gimmicks meant to create the illusion of a reduced cost. For instance, speaking on CBS' "Face the Nation," New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez noted that "Washington math is notoriously funny ... one of the ideas that is out there is fully fund what we can fully fund, but maybe instead of doing it for 10 years, you fully fund it for five years."

Progressives are lashing out at the ignominy that some members of Congress are still allowed to disagree with them and that a radical transformation of American welfare spending isn't easier. But Manchin's \$1.5 trillion compromise is enormous. Also, as the Manhattan Institute's Brian Riedl reminds us, it's not as if Manchin isn't himself a big-government guy. Riedl writes in the *New York Post*, "Manchin already voted for the \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill in March, and helped craft the \$550 billion infrastructure bill that passed the Senate. He also voted for a budget resolution that increases the discretionary spending baseline by \$1 trillion over the decade."

Democrat-driven opposition to this spending expansion should give everyone pause, rather than incite the fury it has unleashed. At the very least, Democrats should take some time to answer Manchin's valid point that "spending trillions more on new and expanded government programs, when we can't even pay for the essential social programs, like Social Security and Medicare, is the definition of fiscal insanity." Indeed, we're definitely not in 2005 anymore.

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