



The Debt Ceiling Deal: A Victory for the Tea Party?

It appears that Republicans and Democrats, Congress and the White House, have arrived at agreement on the debt ceiling. To sum it all up: the debt ceiling will be raised (shocker there) and Armageddon will be averted! Both Republicans and Democrats are claiming victory for their respective sides.

All of this was more than just a bit predictable. Republicans swore that they would not vote to raise the debt ceiling unless Democrats in turn swore not to raise taxes. Presumably, then, Republicans believed that we could afford not to raise the debt ceiling, that the alternative to not doing so, though perhaps not all that pleasant, would nevertheless be tolerable. At the same time, they continually told us that unless they agreed to raise the debt ceiling, world-wide economic catastrophe would ensue. So, the debt ceiling would have to be raised.



Once Republicans reduced their position to a logical impossibility by simultaneously claiming that it is necessary to raise the debt limit *and* that it is *not necessary* to raise it, it should have been clear to all with eyes to see and ears to hear that along with their ostensible foes the Republicans had every intention of increasing the debt ceiling.

Considering the Republicans' track record, it would be foolish to expect otherwise, would it not? President Obama and the Democrats are unmitigated proponents of a robust Welfare State. This conservatives, libertarians, and Tea Party activists know all too well. What we do not know as well, however, what we need to be reminded of at every turn — especially now — is that the GOP, the party of "limited government," is no less committed to sustaining — and *growing*—the Welfare State.

[Obama famously pledged to "fundamentally transform" America.](#) His opponents have seized upon this remark as proof that [our "historic" president](#) holds the United States in low regard, and that it is from this contempt toward his own country that his desire to remake it in the image of a Western European (socialist) state is born. Now, that Obama has disdain for the Anglo traditions of liberty in which America was conceived and nurtured can be denied only by those who choose not to recognize it. Equally certain is that he does indeed seek to "fundamentally transform" our country by stamping out even those few remaining vestiges of our Founders' vision for the Republic that they bequeathed to their posterity.

However, as of yet, at any rate, Obama hasn't come nearly as close to achieving his professed goal as did his immediate predecessor, President George W. Bush.

Bush never vowed to "fundamentally transform" America, it is true. Yet our 43rd president and his



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on August 4, 2011

Republican-controlled Congress made profound and abrupt contributions to the bi-partisan project of transforming the United States from the association of free agents that it was originally intended to be to the association of servants that it is rapidly becoming.

Bush not only never slashed a single government program, let alone a whole agency; he expanded what programs there were, added new programs of his own, and created entire bureaucracies. For example, just when you thought the states couldn't be more subservient to the federal government than they already are, along comes Bush's signature "No Child Left Behind," a law that, far from divesting the Department of Education of just a modicum of its vast power, further enriched its resources.

Yet this was just the beginning of his agenda of "[Compassionate Conservatism](#)."

Bush's "Faith-Based Initiatives" rendered religiously-centered charitable organizations that had always been private and voluntary subject to the mercies of the federal government. In light of the fact that it was *this* president that further eroded the autonomy of religious institutions, it is more than just a little ironic that Bush's critics not infrequently blasted the president for what they deemed to be excessive displays of his religiosity. But the irony is compounded when it is considered that it was also the "pro-life" Bush who was the first to extend federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, a move that, by contradicting the central claim of the enemies of abortion — i.e. the fetus *is* a human life — substantially weakened the anti-abortion cause.

Many apologists for Bush have justified both his declaration of a "War on *Terror*" as well as the means by which he has prosecuted it — two wars, one in Afghanistan, the other in Iraq; "the Department of Homeland Security"; and an expansion of the state's police powers in general — by pointing to the events of September 11, 2001. "We were attacked!" they will shout, as if the president's critics weren't as impacted by that horrific day as anyone else, and as if Bush's response to those attacks is self-evidently right. But by declaring *war* on an abstraction, the president essentially set his nation on a course for a war *in perpetuity*, for terror there has always been and will always be. A genuine lover of freedom, though, will engage in war only when absolutely necessary, for he is painfully aware of the reality, both historical and political, that a government is most inimical to freedom when it is at war. As Rahm Emmanuel famously (or infamously) said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste;" well, war is the mother of all crises, and a war on an abstraction like "terror" is a crisis from which, *in principle*, relief is sought in vain.

On this topic, much more can be said. For now, though, suffice it to say that while Bush was undoubtedly concerned to insure that Americans never again had to endure an attack on their soil under his watch, the measures that he appropriated toward the end of realizing that objective were, at the very least, fundamentally misplaced. The most cost-effective, reliable, and, most importantly, *constitutional* means to secure Americans against terrorist attacks would have been to, one, seal our porous borders and, two, radically revise our current immigration policy so as to render it vastly stricter than it is at present. However we would have decided to do this, the point is that Bush did *not* do it. Instead, he pursued an aggressive plan of inflating the Welfare State both at home and abroad.

There is much more that Bush and his Republican colleagues did during his tenure that time and spatial constraints preclude me from recounting. Hopefully, the reader's memory of their abysmal record on the issue of "limited government" is now refreshed sufficiently to recognize why only a sucker would uncritically (or even critically, for that matter) trust this current Republican Congress to deliver on their promise to drastically reduce the size and scope of the federal government by acting in accordance with their rhetoric.



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So as to avoid involving myself in any of the quarrels that are now transpiring over the many staggering numbers that have been thrown around throughout this debt ceiling debate, I will further justify my skepticism toward the Republicans by adding this one simple observation:

Notice, for all of the talk of spending cuts of which this deal is allegedly replete, we haven't heard of one *program*, let alone an *agency*, that is going to be cut.

No, I suspect that this widely heralded "Tea Party victory" is but the latest instance of political theatre at its best.



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