



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on March 21, 2011

Rand Paul on the Intellectual Bankruptcy of the GOP

Whereas traditional conservatives, regardless of party, assiduously adhered to a belief in individual freedom, a foreign policy of nonintervention, and the primacy of the Constitution, of limited government, and of the free market, today's conservatives have gone astray, as evident in the GOP's embrace of liberal internationalism, Keynesian economics, and heightened spending.



In a recent interview with *Reason*, Senator Rand Paul [discussed](#) what he believes is "the intellectual bankruptcy of both political parties," as the GOP continues to struggle to articulate a cogent vision of what it believes the proper role of government ought to be.

Considering the political developments of the past several months, in which constitutionalists have found themselves at odds with the party establishment, it is an opportune time to explore Paul's claims.

Many have said that when one political party controls the executive branch and both chambers of Congress, spending will be out of control, because of the absence of checks on power. This was the case for the six years that Republicans controlled the House, Senate, and White House (from 2000-2006), when the deficit skyrocketed and government spending rose to unprecedented heights.

The fiscal conservatism that characterized the Clinton years (when Republicans controlled Congress) gave way to an entirely new, destructive paradigm that led to the financial ruin of 2007, and the equally ruinous [Keynesian](#), deficit-spending policies of [TARP](#) and stimulus spending.

In addition, Republican opposition to overseas intervention in the Clinton years (such as military intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo, and George W. Bush's relatively non-interventionist-sounding campaign promises in 2000) gave way to unquestioned support for prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have proven to be a fiscal nightmare for the United States. It is developments such as these that lead Rand Paul and other conservatives to save some of their most impassioned criticisms for their fellow Republicans. As Senator Paul states in his book, *The Tea Party Goes to Washington*:

When John McCain joined Bush in 2008 to bail out troubled banks, automakers, and even the housing market with the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), grassroots conservatives vowed that the politicians who voted for these financial schemes — Republicans included — would pay a political price.

Any self-described conservative who "misses" the last president and his version of the Republican Party should probably quit subscribing to that label. If judgment is based on spending and the budget, then Bill Clinton should be considered preferable to Bush, given that he spent less money than his successor.

This is a perfect example of the intellectual bankruptcy of the GOP — when Republicans reject the free-



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market principles of Milton Friedman, and the [Austrian School](#) in favor of John Maynard Keynes, the ideologies of the two parties become blurred, such as when House Speaker John Boehner proposed cutting spending by only \$61 billion, despite the United States having a deficit of \$223 billion in February and a debt that hovers around \$14 trillion, while Paul recommended \$500 billion in cuts (which is opposed by most Republicans, who refuse to cut defense spending).

The next area in which Big Government Republicans betrayed conservative principles was in their unconstitutional creation of Medicare Part D (BushCare), the largest increase in the Welfare State since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Former U.S. Comptroller General [David Walker](#) called this "the most fiscally reckless piece of legislation since 1965."

Likewise, Republicans have [supported](#) other unconstitutional [programs](#), such as the Education Department (ironically, while almost all Republicans voted for its creation in 1979, its formation faced notable opposition from liberals such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan), the Environmental Protection Agency (which was created under the presidency of self-admitted Keynesian Richard Nixon), and the Departments of Health and Welfare (started under Dwight Eisenhower).

Since the predominant factions of the GOP see nothing wrong with this ([neoconservatives](#) support the New Deal, but not the Great Society, and are self-admittedly not concerned with fiscal issues, and moderates support both, except they advocate for these on Tory "good government" grounds), Paul cautions that those concerned with the core principles of liberty must not place their faith in the Republican Party. Instead, constitutionalists should have faith in their own ability to transform the GOP into the party they want it to be.

Another example of this failure to adhere to the proper role of government (to include incursion into areas best left to the states and the private sector) is Bush's "No Child Left Behind," which nearly doubled the size of the Education Department, as a supposedly "conservative" President joined forces with Ted Kennedy to create one of the most micromanaged and centralized education policies ever seen. (Bush and Kennedy also partnered to create a new federal entitlement program, the Child Health Insurance Program.)

The 68 percent increase in federal spending [also included](#) increased foreign aid. In 2003, Bush led a bipartisan coalition, with the support of Democratic Senator John Kerry, to create a program called the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which has spent over \$67 billion since its inception. This is yet another example of the GOP's commitment to ideology that is neither compassionate nor conservative.

And, unfortunately, any true conservative can agree that the current Republican-controlled House has not taken any substantive steps toward reducing the deficit, as entitlements and defense spending remain "sacred cows" that continue to go unaddressed. Instead, Republicans remain fixated upon defunding programs which, although unconstitutional, are not the true source of America's fiscal woes, and instead carry more symbolic value for conservatives because of their liberal connotations. (Planned Parenthood, NPR, and PBS, taken as a whole, account for a paltry \$692 million, and foreign aid is less than 1 percent of the budget.)

The Republican Party has abandoned a principled commitment to the Constitution and the ideas of free-market capitalism in favor of "bipartisanship." Most of the GOP-sponsored spending programs under Bush were bipartisan in nature (such as John McCain's sponsorship of campaign spending and immigration bills with Russ Feingold and Ted Kennedy). To [quote](#) from Ron Paul's 2011 CPAC speech,



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“we need less bipartisanship.”

Instead of clinging to the paradigm of the “Great Compromiser” Henry Clay (who, in the interest of compromise, was willing to allow the evils of slavery to continue), Republicans should look to the example of his cousin, Cassius Clay, who never wavered in his commitment to the abolitionist cause in which he so deeply believed.

The GOP must return to the maxim of Barry Goldwater — “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice, and moderation in the defense of justice is no virtue” — if it seeks to be a party with a future.

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