



Will the Tea Party be a Casualty in the Looming Budget Battles?

The finger of Speaker of the House John Boehner is hovering over the power button of the federal government. Despite his posturing, those in the know report that he does not want to push it.

Whether or not Speaker Boehner and the rest of the Republican congressional leadership will actually allow the gears of government to spin down, there will be repercussions for the GOP, particularly for those lawmakers who sailed up the Potomac under Tea Party steam.

In the beginning it was the unleashed frustration with billion-dollar business bailouts, massive healthcare overhauls, and incalculable TARP handouts that propelled the Tea Party into prominence and that momentum was quickly converted into electoral power.

This power play will test the resolve and the mettle of Tea Party-backed legislators. As the pressure increases and the battle intensifies, all these newly elected freedom fighters will now show if Mount Shutdown is the hill they want to die on.

Given the political implications of the result of this game of financial chicken, no matter who blinks first, the Republican party will lose because the bloc of Tea Partiers not willing to sign off on the compromise (and there will eventually be a compromise) will be branded as right-wingers or obstructionists and they will draw away voters from the Republican Party.

Everyone who pulled a lever for a candidate based on that candidate's promise to restore constitutional balance and reduce the size of government will have two choices in 2012, based on how that candidate voted on the government shutdown.

First, if the candidate stood firm and supported the shutdown, he will likely enjoy the continued support of voters. And, given that congressman's opposition to his party's leadership (lets face it, the leadership of both parties have everything to lose by refusing to reach a settlement on the shutdown dilemma), he will further weaken that party's power.

On the other hand, if that freshman legislator fell in line behind the cadre of Republican brass, then he will eviscerate the body of backers that sent him to do precisely the opposite of what he did. Seeing as how most of the Tea Party-promoted representatives caucus with the Republicans, their one and done congressional career will drain the GOP of its freshest blood.

The notion that Tea Party lawmakers are independent isn't borne out by the figures. As one [source](#)





Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on April 8, 2011

explained it:

Although some Tea Party leaders have tried to stress the movement's independence from the Republican Party, supporters of the Tea Party movement overwhelmingly identified with the Republican Party and reported voting for Republican candidates. Eighty percent of Tea Party supporters were Republican identifiers or independents who leaned toward the Republican Party and 54 percent were strong Republican identifiers. And Tea Party supporters definitely were not political newcomers: 93 percent reported voting in the 2008 presidential election and 96 percent of these Tea Party voters cast their ballots for John McCain.

In the face of those numbers, there is yet one variable in the equation that hasn't been defined: How will all this commotion and realignment add up for the Tea Party and affect their status as a relevant force in the future of American politics?

Will Americans, eager for genuine change and burned by the betrayal of men and women who caved into their base cravings for power, abandon not only them but the Tea Party, as well?

There is evidence that voters not registered with either major party are already losing faith in the Tea Party. Some read these numbers as proof that Tea Party congressmen are interested in furthering their own narrow ideological agendas rather than effecting any lasting and permanent change on Capitol Hill and this perception is turning off potential voters.

For example, there is [this](#) from Salon.com:

There is still no consensus on how, exactly, Americans would interpret a shutdown, but the dispute has essentially come down to ideology, with Republicans insisting on a series of inflammatory amendments involving federal funds for NPR, Planned Parenthood, the EPA and other Tea Party punching bags. At the same time, Obama has taken pains to distance himself from both congressional parties and to make the pragmatic case for reaching a deal: It will hurt the recovery if we don't! It's hard to see how swing voters won't find his posture more reasonable than the House GOP's — especially when you consider that swing voters' negative feelings toward the Tea Party have spiked in the last few months. Tea Party is no longer a term that most voters associate with generalized frustration with Obama's agenda; now, it seems, they're just as likely to regard it as the ideological movement behind extreme-sounding Republican proposals.

When the smoke clears on the shutdown battlefield, the casualties will be counted and the pundits will rush to declare winners and losers. Of all the doubts, there is one thing that is clear: the combat will continue.

For example, as we wrote about in another article, the budget proposal recently produced by House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan is chock full of unconstitutional expenditures and at best only pumps the brakes on the runaway federal train and comes nowhere near derailing it.

In light of that and the fact that what is now a budget proposal will soon be a budget bill (or series of bills) subject to very heated deliberations, voters will be witnesses yet again to congressional conflicts and it will up to them to decide if the war of words is a real skirmish over the future of the Republic or the mere pantomiming of professional players adept at pretending to be warriors, and who are always willing to change costumes depending on the level of applause.

Finally, those who self-identify as Tea Party proponents will have a few questions to answer: Can they tell the difference between soldiers and actors? Will the Tea Party be co-opted by the proffer of power



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to those lawmakers anxious to bolster their own political clout? If the Tea Party abdicates its seat of power, where will disaffected voters turn and what movement will fill the vacuum?

And most importantly, will there ever be a majority of congressmen committed to never compromise on issues of constitutional fidelity?



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