



New speaker uses same old excuse

Donna Brazile

November 10, 2015

Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin is the new speaker of the House of Representatives. Ryan, Mitt Romney's running mate in 2012, is young (45), very conservative and did not want the speaker's job. But he took it anyway. Ryan has his contradictions. He was a fan of the Russian-born novelist Ayn Rand, whose works celebrated self-

centered capitalism. He told her followers on her 100th birthday in 2005 that she shaped his values. But, when he ran for vice president, Ryan denied his Ayn Rand discipleship as "urban legend."

As a congressman Ryan advocated being close and open with "the people." Yet, in the summer of 2011, Ryan phoned in his town hall meetings, and when he chose to appear in person, the attendees were charged a \$15 admission fee. I wonder how that went over with his constituents?

But Ryan's contradictions, like those of others', are part of the whole package, and they carried over into his first public appearances as speaker. The night before his initial press conference, Ryan told radio host Hugh Hewitt, "If you don't like the direction the country is going — which we don't — then we (need to show) how we would do things differently."

The next morning, Ryan said, "We don't believe that the country is headed in the wrong direction ... we think the president is leading it in the wrong direction." Ryan added, "We feel that we have an obligation ... to get things fixed."

In less than 12 hours, Ryan not only contradicted himself as to whether or not Republicans liked the direction the country was going, he also contravened his promise to "do things differently" and "to get things fixed."

At the same news conference, the new speaker took immigration reform off the table until President Obama has left office. That means no immigration reform until at least 2017. The last

major immigration reform was almost 30 years ago. Ryan has no reason to follow in the footsteps of former President Ronald Reagan.

And while Iowa Republicans and Democrats don't agree on what issues are important, according to a recent Bloomberg/Des Moines Register poll, they do agree on two issues: immigration and job creation. The Republicans know immigration is important; certainly Donald Trump does — he's built his campaign on exploiting anti-immigrant feelings. Former Speaker John Boehner knows its importance. He said immigration reform "needs to be fixed," and Ryan echoed him with "getting things fixed."

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C., published a study in 2012 that said "comprehensive immigration reform would yield at least \$1.5 trillion in added U.S. gross domestic product over 10 years." America's immigrant residents must be addressed for their — and the economy's — benefit. But Ryan kicked the can down to 2017. The fault lies not in Obama, but in the divisions within the Republican Party. George W. Bush attempted immigration reform in 2007, but was defeated by his own party and some Democrats unwilling to compromise. Boehner couldn't get the House to pass a bipartisan reform bill in 2014, which included Sen. John McCain as a major sponsor. Why did they fail?

The House of Representatives is supposed to be closest to the American people. Yet the truth is, for the past five years, the Congress has been closest to a minority in the Republican Party. Making it worse, in order to win the presidency, the GOP must increase its support among Hispanics and others.

To become speaker, albeit reluctantly, Ryan had to agree with some of the demands of the small, but powerful House Freedom Caucus to ditch any plans to work with the Senate or the president on one of the country's longest-

standing and unaddressed problems: comprehensive immigration reform. Ryan has promised zero cooperation with the president, pledged to ditch immigration reform, refused to rule out more government shutdowns, and laid blame for Republicans' non-performance on the bad man in the White House.

Ryan is a good and decent man. We know that this was not the job he wanted. He's a policy wonk, a workhorse. But for now, he's in charge of running the House and is one of Congress' most influential leaders on tax policies. It's been more than two and a half years since the president and Ryan have met face to face. It's time to schedule a sit-down discussion. Hopefully, something good will come out of such a meeting. It's long overdue.

Donna Brazile is a senior Democratic strategist, a political commentator and contributor to CNN and ABC News.