

# THE DAILY CALLER

## Five Big Things The Tea Party Has Gotten Right

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Let's not sugarcoat it: This has been a bad year for the tea party.

“We are going to crush them everywhere,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell [vowed](#). He did his part by easily dispatching conservative primary challenger Matt Bevin Tuesday.

The reasons for the tea party movement's problems have been well rehearsed. From primary challenges to budget fights, they failed to pick their battles. They supported some [bad candidates](#). Groups may have [spent their donors' money unwisely](#).

Fed up after five years of Barack Obama and seven years of Harry Reid's Senate, even many Republicans — fairly or not — were skittish about voting for tea party candidates when there was any question about whether they would be the strongest in the general election.

The thought process likely went something like this: “Gee, I really like Greg Brannon. His views on the Constitution and limited government are closer to mine. But if this race gets down to the wire, do I really trust him to pull it off in November? Err, Thom Tillis it is.”

Consequently, it's fashionable to hate on the tea party. In fact, it has been as long as the tea party has existed. But let's not forget that these angry conservative populists have gotten a few big things right.

**1.) Nobody is entitled to hold any elected office.** Politicians, it should go without saying, serve at the pleasure of their constituents. Sure, political parties have better things to spend their money on than infighting. But there is something seriously wrong with the idea that the only way

an incumbent should leave office is in a pine box or a wave election washing in the opposing party.

Incumbents should fight to prove themselves worthy to their constituents just as much as anyone else. Consider Mitch McConnell. Before the tea party, he would have campaigned on bringing the bacon home to Kentucky. Instead he supported the drone filibuster; [plotted to repeal Obamacare](#); opposed the proposed war in Syria; [hired](#) Ron and Rand Paul's campaign manager; and voted for the younger Paul's to-the-right-of Paul Ryan budget plan.

Whether he meant any of this is in the long term less important than whether Republicans feel compelled by their voters to behave in this manner. Scott Brown — arguably the least conservative politician elected under the tea party banner — had it right. It's the people's seat.

**2.) Republicans were spending too much taxpayer money.** Before there was Barry Obama's \$1 trillion stimulus packages, there was Dubya Bush's \$1 trillion wars. There was also the deficit-financed Medicare prescription drug benefit, No Child Left Behind, the \$700 billion Troubled Assets Relief Program and earmark-laden transportation, farm and energy bills.

George W. Bush joins the dubious company of Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter as the three chief executives to preside over real increases in both defense and non-defense spending at the same time. Under Bush, discretionary spending grew twice as fast as it did under Bill Clinton.

And it can't all be blamed on Bush. After helping to balance the budget for the first time in 1969, congressional Republicans first squandered that legacy by proposing to outspend Bill Clinton in 1998. They created two new significant entitlement programs without reforming the ones already in existence. By 2005, the Cato Institute found, spending on the 101 largest federal programs Republicans promised to abolish in 1994 had instead grown 27 percent.

**3.) Elected officials can't just hear from people who want more government spending.** One of the many reasons it's so hard to cut spending is that members of Congress only hear from people who want to see new benefits created or old programs continue. The tea party may be filled with people who like to wear funny wigs and carry signs with slogans The New York Times doesn't appreciate. But relatively few of those signs featured demands for government checks.

Combine a free-spending mentality with an aging population and you get much bigger problems than a \$17 trillion national debt. Social Security and Medicare each have [tens of trillions of dollars](#) in unfunded liabilities. Liberals may retort that the tea party is less animated by middle-class entitlements like these than food stamps. But the movement has indisputably helped elect entitlement reformers, including a House majority that has approved budgets revamping Medicare.

**4.) Without the tea party, Republicans surely would have thrown in the towel on Obamacare by now.** The Supreme Court upheld the Affordable Care Act. Barack Obama was re-elected. Republicans failed to win the Senate in either 2010 or 2012. The Ted Cruz-led "defund Obamacare" initiative ended not with a bang but a whimper.

Republicans have needed less compelling excuses to give up on fighting a government program. After all, they have failed to abolish the National Endowment for the Arts. They have failed to defund the Legal Services Corporation. Even pajama-clad slackers on their parents' health insurance are far more sympathetic beneficiaries of government largesse than lawyers and symphony-goers, much less the makers of "Piss Christ."

Before the tea party, the conservative Heritage Foundation and the 2012 Republican presidential nominee thought a program substantially like Obamacare *was* free-market health care reform.

**5.) The tea party helped elect the few Republicans thinking outside the box.** The tea party has gotten a bad rap for producing unthinking partisan rabble-rousers. There is some truth to the charge. But the movement has also given us Republicans who are [taking the lead](#) on sentencing reform and rethinking punitive drug laws; lawmakers who fight for [civil liberties, not surveillance](#); and senators thinking of [creative solutions](#) to problems ranging from the high costs of college tuition to corporate welfare.

Some of these tea party Republicans have worked with liberal Democrats to [stop a war](#), reform the National Security Agency and audit the Federal Reserve.

The tea party has a lot left to learn about practical politics. But if the only lesson is to be satisfied with the old Washington way of doing business, Republicans will be disappointed with the 2014 elections no matter how many seats they win.