

## Business in The Beltway

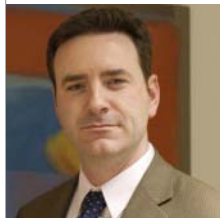
Covering the intersection of money and politics

### Wanted: Strange Bedfellow (To Advocate Defense Spending Cuts)

June 16, 2010 - 6:58 pm

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Consider this a want-ad of sorts. The headline would be "*Wanted: Strange Bedfellow (To Advocate Defense Spending Cuts)*". Because if politics makes strange bedfellows, I need to find mine.

In the White House's recently released [National Security Strategy](#), the president is emphatic that the foundation of American power is a sound economy. He's right — America's fiscal house of cards needs some serious brick and mortar to survive the current financial windstorm, never mind the next.

The White House's [Deficit Commission](#) is taking up this thankless task. If the Commission is going to be successful, then absolutely everything needs to be on the table. It's becoming clear that a tricky grand bargain must be struck — if Democrats permit reform of crushing entitlement programs, Republicans must bend on their holy grail: taxes.

But, as I've learned from folks with access to the Commission, there's one area that hasn't been discussed much: defense spending. It's another one of those thorny issues — hundreds of billions of dollars are at stake, and Congress' pork-barrel culture has little motivation to close the spigot of defense dollars flowing back to their home districts.

To stop this sort of Congressional free-for-all, the Commission desperately needs bipartisan cover on defense spending similar to the grand bargain on entitlements and taxes. Last week, Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) [unveiled](#) an attempt at a "bipartisan report" that claims to eventually cut a trillion in defense spending.

Fair enough, I wish them luck and commend them for talking about the issue. But Frank's definition of bipartisanship unfortunately doesn't pass muster. The group's sponsors and many of its staff draw from the extreme wings of the two ideologies.

In other words, Frank's group lacks credibility with the massive chunk of moderate America.

Consider the political sponsors. Barney Frank, for all his good work, is quickly discredited by mainstream conservatives as a Massachusetts liberal. Joining Frank on the left is Sen. Ron Weyden (D-OR), who has been categorized as a "[Hard-Core Liberal](#)" by OnTheIssues.org, a vote-tracking site for elected officials. On the right, Frank has teamed up with Ron Paul (need I say more?), and Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), whom scores [an 83 percent](#) approval rating from the American Conservative Union. The group's staff has some sensible pragmatists (like Heather Hulburt and Larry Korb), but they're diluted by too many left- and right-wingers.

It's a tragic problem because, at least in theory, some of the report's ideas are quite sound—absent a Soviet threat, reducing America's footprint in Europe makes sense, right?

Because the report was written by too many political extremists, it suffers from three direct problems:

1. Many of the ideas are based on the world as idealists would like it, rather than as it is. It would be great, for example, to save \$113.5 billion reorienting our nuclear defenses, but what if the Russians--whom may shy about reductions beyond the New START treat--don't join us?
2. Many recommendations ignore the harsh political climate likely to endure as these decisions are made. Proposing to cancel or delay the buy of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (total potential savings \$57.75 billion) and the KC-X refueling tanker (\$9.9 billion) are interesting ideas, but fail to account for the Pentagon's firm commitment to both programs over the next several years. Things can change of course, but those are just two examples of acquisitions that, for all intents and purposes, aren't going away any time soon.
3. The report is not universally endorsed by its sponsors or authors. You'd probably be surprised to learn that a proposal written by experts at the libertarian Cato Institute and pacifist Peace Action agree on everything. It turns out that they don't. The first page of the Executive Summary says, "not all the contributors endorse all the options." So why should moderate, MainStreet USA buy into an idea when even the supposed experts don't?

Here's where my want-ad comes back in: On the right, none of the contributors to Barney Frank's report work at mainstream conservative think tanks, like the American Enterprise Institute or Heritage Foundation. As the Director of National Security Project at the staunchly center-left Progressive Policy Institute, I need to find a credible center-righty to advocate moderate, achievable proposals that control defense spending, but maintain a second-to-none national security posture.

Ideas have to be politically viable, and must place the interest of the country ahead of ideology. And, ideas must be realistic enough to make a dent in spending. I've been kicking around a bunch of them in my head, but I need a political strange bedfellow/collaborator to make joint recommendations appealing across the moderate American middle, and the officials who represent it.

The country can't afford to have me sleep alone any longer (metaphorically, of course). My email's [jarkedis@ppionline.org](mailto:jarkedis@ppionline.org) and you can find me at [ProgressiveFix.com](http://ProgressiveFix.com). Just don't ask if I like long walks on the beach.

Tags: [Barney Frank](#)