



Everything Jersey

The scandal of poverty and the cowardice of the Republican Right

By Linda Stamato - September 28, 2013

While Ted Cruz (R-Texas)—big Tweet-getter of the week—and his band of fellow travelers continue their efforts to shut down the government, set back the economy and hurt the American people if they don't get their way, let's take a look back at the last two weeks to see what other evidence of "leadership" we've seen from this crowd (and that includes you, Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) "my" representative from the Eleventh District, I'm embarrassed to say.)

They cheer for freedom, our tea-party-inspired Republican members of Congress, they do, but they ignore the "freedom from want" as they go about slashing food stamps and doing their best to obstruct efforts for the uninsured to secure medical coverage. Not a priority at all for our current elected, well-paid, well-insured Republican friends in the House of Representatives. They are content to support Big Agriculture, though, as they avoid the moral--and economic--imperative to help the poor eat. Ironic, isn't it? The poor are cut off from eating the food produced with public subsidies. Ironic, and, lacking in fundamental decency as made plain in *"Food stamps and politics: Nothing for the hungry and the poor in the House."*

All of New Jersey's Republican representatives were in attendance and voting against the hungry and the poor, while, again casting their votes for Big Farm subsidies: Leonard Lance, Jon Runyan, Chris Smith, Scott Garrett, and, of course, Rodney Frelinhuysen. Only Frank LoBiondo refused to join them. No help for the poor or hungry people in their districts or, for that matter, for those anywhere else in the nation. What a dismal, disappointing, and ultimately, sad performance! We need to remember their votes when we, the citizens, vote.

We have additional cause to be disturbed. Our courageous cohort of House Republicans from New Jersey--again, excepting Frank LoBiondo (2nd District) who, this time, was joined by Christopher Smith (4th District)—voted to cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (S.N.A.P.) by nearly \$4 billion

annually over 10 years. Democrats, with LoBiondo and Smith standing with them, voted to oppose cuts to food stamps.

Remember how the Republicans said, in passing their version of the Farm Bill, the one that excluded any support for S.N.A.P. at all, that, 'no worries, we'll get to it.' Well, get to it they have, and what they have produced is a disgrace.

It really is crucial that the citizens of New Jersey comprehend what these men think about feeding their fellow citizens, how they view the hungry and the poor who desperately need their help. They receive the back of their hand and, to add insult to injury, disapproval for their very condition. They are called lazy, couch-sitters, eager to remain on the dole, unwilling to work, and so on. As if....

At the same time that they were slashing aid for the poor, this crowd also refused to prevent cuts in food stamps for veterans, pregnant women, seniors, the disabled and minor children in the event of a U.S government shutdown or default on its debt. Nice! They must feel really proud of themselves, Lance, LoBiondo, Ryan, Smith, Garrett, Lance, and, yes, of course, of course, our courageous leader from Morris County, Rodney Frelinghuysen. (I just heard a gathering of people in town, Republicans and Democrats alike, expressing their disappointment in him, observing that he falls short of the standard set by his father.)

Now, you'd think, well, these folks are concerned about costs, and so that's why they cut S.N.A.P. Well, not really. They're o.k. with the farm bill that subsidizes agri-business, as noted. And, they're entirely o.k. too, with the public subsidies lavished on the well-placed who feed at the public trough. Writing in *"The Nation,"* Paul Burchett says that the average American family pays \$6,000+ to corporations, to support hand-outs to the wealthy, the privileged, the big business-with-extensive-lobbying-support interests. And the Cato Institute estimates that corporate welfare, in the federal budget, costs taxpayers about \$100 billion a year.

And, let us not also fail to note that this same crowd of tea party loyalists wants more oil drilling on federal lands, prefers to drop regulations on greenhouse gases, and, well, why not, they throw in the usual suspects, supporting moves to make it harder to sue for medical malpractice and, of course, preventing health coverage from reaching the currently uninsured.

Decent crowd, isn't it? How to account for their stance? Can it be that they simply support the position of those who will keep them in office? The well-connected, who have lobbyists all over the place, get their positions supported while the poor, unable to participate in such lobbying efforts and unable to contribute to the election campaign troughs of the privileged, lose out? Or, maybe, as Michael Reisch of the University of Maryland's School of Social Work points out: "African-Americans and Latinos are 2.5 to 3 times more likely to be poor" and thus, perceived as either non-voters or Democratic voters, are greeted with Republican indifference?

Well, there is that and, then, there is the spin. Just listen to Rodney Frelinghuysen's view of what happened. In his weekly, the headline reads:

"The Week Just Passed: Keeping the Government Open for Business"

"With the new fiscal year starting on October 1, the House, on a bipartisan basis, approved House Joint Resolution 31 which funds the operations of federal agencies into mid-December with the exception of those programs that implement the President's new health care law!"

"Let me repeat: the so-called 'Continuing Resolution' funds the operations of federal agencies into mid-December with the exception of those programs that implement the President's new health care law!"

Say, what? Not a word about the tribute he and his colleagues want to exact for that commitment to keep the government open for business, not a word. And, no mention whatsoever about the needs of the poor.

Please note, Rodney, fully one-third of Morris County's residents fall below the level of self-sufficiency. Which, by the way, is why, when you were cutting allowances for people on food stamps and dropping millions off the rolls entirely—including poor, unemployed parents who want to work but cannot find a job or an opening in a training program, along with their children—an effort was underway, in your county, the Morris County's Hunger Awareness Month food drive, that was organized to meet the needs of the county's poor and needy during, yes, the Freeholders' Hunger Awareness Month. Good job, Rodney. You're working at cross-purposes, not only with your own constituents but your local party leaders!

But, food stamps aside, here he is, Mr. Frelinghuysen, along side his colleagues, arguing against funding the Affordable Care Act that may help some of the same residents afford health care coverage. So, an act of Congress, passed on a bi-partisan basis, vetted by the U.S. Supreme Court, we should not fund? Like toying with nullification, do we? Curious, Rodney, and your colleagues, you who are asking for bipartisan action, had it in the Affordable Care Act that was passed! You may not like it, may not have voted for it, may want to change parts of it, but failure to fund an act of Congress, and, thus, nullify it? Really? Nice precedent guys!

Rodney goes on to say:

"I hope the President will enter into good faith negotiations with Congress in the weeks ahead to address the underlying economic problems that are harming job creation. We can and should do that while keeping the government 'open for business!'"

What gall. He and his companions should slink away in shame, cowards that they are. Their loyalty to the right wing of their national party may be in tact but their souls are in shreds.