



Pataki candidacy revives media talk of the mythical 'social moderate/fiscal conservative'

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So many people want so much to believe that they exist, and so many politicians claim to be one: the "fiscally conservative, socially moderate politician."

You can find such politicians in the same place where you find unicorns.

George Pataki's candidacy has revived talk of this mythical beast. Here are some snippets from media coverage of Pataki's quixotic presidential candidacy:

[Washington Post](#): "Pataki emphasized a message of fiscal conservatism and smaller government, steering clear of divisive social issues."

[New York Times](#): "George E. Pataki served three terms as governor of New York, winning office as a fiscal conservative who was considered a moderate on social issues...."

[Politico](#): "Pataki is pitching himself to voters as an experienced, fiscally conservative executive....He won't be able to compete in many conservative states, where his moderate social views are a nonstarter."

But here's the thing: Pataki was only a fiscal conservative for about two years. Then he became the opposite. As [the Cato Institute put it](#): "George Pataki started out as a tax-cutting, small-government governor. He ended up as a big spender seemingly hell-bent on overturning anything good he had done in his first term."

Again, from Cato, [the specifics](#):

During his tenure as governor, fiscal years 1997-2007, New York general fund spending increased 67 percent, according to data from the National Association of State Budget Officers. That was almost double New York's population growth and inflation during those years.

[The City Journal in 2000 wrote](#): "The governor ran as a tax-and-spending cutter. Now he's as profligate as any liberal Democrat," adding: "Where does Pataki spend this mountain of taxpayers' money? On old-fashioned legislative pork, for starters."

Even better from The City Journal:

Pataki has OKed vast expenditures on corporate welfare, including a host of business subsidies, a \$63 million renovation for the Buffalo Bills' Rich Stadium and \$14 million for a minor league baseball park for Suffolk County.

So, in what way is George Pataki a "fiscal conservative?"

Here's your translation: "Fiscal conservative, social moderate," has nothing to do with fiscal conservatism. It simply means "Republican who favors legal abortion."

Almost every Republican who runs as a "fiscal conservative, social moderate" follows the Pataki path and becomes a big spender and probably a big taxer. (Pataki cut taxes but increased fees). A few do the opposite — Pat Toomey kept his fiscal conservatism and became pro-life.

I wrote about this [when Jim DeMint was retiring](#):

The best fiscal conservatives in politics are all social conservatives. Look at the Club for Growth scorecard again. All the most fiscally conservative senators are pro-life. You have to go down to No. 27 in the Club's rankings — Mark Kirk — to find a pro-choicer.

Now, some of my libertarian friends hopefully point to Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker as an example of a fiscal conservative who's socially liberal. Perhaps he'll pan out, perhaps not. But Pataki surely didn't live up to the term "fiscal conservative" — unless you're using the political definition of it, which is simply pro-choice on abortion.