



Why The Left Smears Conservatives Instead Of Engaging Their Ideas

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May 8, 2019

The left routinely distorts conservative ideas, but it is not always clear whether their misrepresentations are deliberate or simply due to unfamiliarity with conservative thought.

Consider, for example, the left's characterization of supply-side economics as "trickle-down economics" or "tax cuts for the rich." Despite having been shown to utterly defy the facts, politicians and media continue arming themselves against these caricatures with invincible ignorance.

Indeed, never has a major marginal income tax rate reduction over the last 100 years slashed tax burdens for merely "the rich." Every major tax cut—whether during the 1920s, the 1960s, the 1980s, the 2000s, or most recently under President Trump—has benefited *all income groups*. Furthermore, these cuts have made the tax code *more* progressive.

Following the tax cuts of the 1920s, for instance, historian John Steele Gordon writes that: "The distribution of the tax burden became *radically* more progressive, not less. In 1921 those earning less than \$10,000 had paid \$155 million in taxes, 21 percent of person income tax revenues. In 1926 they paid only \$33 million, or 5 percent. Mellon himself boasted in 1928 that a bachelor with a \$4,000 income in 1920—enough to make him comfortably middle class—would have paid \$120 in tax that year, but in 1928 would owe only \$5.63."

NBC News has concluded that the same pattern followed the cuts of the 1960s, 80s and 2000s:

The income tax burden is being carried to a greater extent today by upper-income people than it was 30 years ago, according to an analysis by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office which tracks data going back to 1979.

In 1979, the top 10 percent of households, as measured by income, paid 40.6 percent of all federal taxes; other ninety percent paid 59.4 percent.

But by 2005, the top 10 percent accounted for nearly 55 percent of all federal tax revenues, while the rest of the population paid about 45 percent.

Part of the reason for the increased burden at the top is that many lower- and middle-income groups have been removed from the tax rolls entirely. So, how does the left justify its "tax cuts for the rich" canard? Here's how.

Imagine that under a supply-side tax cut proposal \$500,000 earners have their tax burden cut by 10 percent and that \$100,000 earners have their tax burden lowered by 20 percent. While the larger cut in fact applies to lower earners, those on the left typically choose to ignore that, twist language, and frame tax cuts in raw dollar terms.

First, the left describes tax cuts as “giving” or “redistributing” money—as if income first belongs to government rather than the income earner. Second, they disregard the steeper percentage cut for lower earners and instead hype that \$50,000 is “given” to high earners (10 percent of \$500,000). According to this rationale, since less money is “given” to middle-income earners (20 percent of \$100,000, or \$20,000), tax cuts are for “the rich.”

That this may be the most superficially reasoned argument since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. First, describing tax cuts as “giving money” is an abuse of language. Income first belongs to the income earner, not government. Tax cuts therefore “give” nothing, but merely allow people to keep more of their *own* earnings.

Second, a smaller tax cut on higher incomes tends to yield more dollars than a larger tax cut on lower incomes, even though lower earners are in fact benefiting from a deeper cut. Under President George W. Bush, for example, the top income tax rate was lowered from 39.6 percent to 35 percent—a 13 percent reduction—while the lowest rate was reduced from 15 percent to 10 percent—a 33 percent reduction.

Even though a *smaller* tax cut translated into more dollars for those with higher incomes and tax burdens, in fact the *steepest cuts applied to the lowest earners*. But to acknowledge these facts would mean confronting supply-side policy on its own terms, not demonizing straw men for political gain.

The same misrepresentation applies to the left’s usual depiction of entitlement reform. One distinguished left-wing politician thundered that conservatives want to “take an axe to public assistance, Medicare and Social Security. We can’t let them get away with this blatant theft from working families,” she railed. Influential left-wing websites have also bemoaned the right’s alleged desire to “gut entitlements,” while House Speaker Nancy Pelosi peevishly warned of the right’s “devastating cuts.”

Here again these characterizations have no basis in reality. No major right-leaning entitlement reform proposal has called for cuts to entitlements, much less for “gutting” them. Reforms put forth from Paul Ryan, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, and others called for cutting not a single dollar, but for *slowing their rate of growth*.

But that didn’t prevent *New York Times* writer Paul Krugman from demagogically writing that “the usual suspects like Paul Ryan were talking about the need for ‘entitlement reform’ — *meaning cuts in Medicare and Medicaid* — to reduce deficits” (emphasis added). How could a supposedly well-informed commentator at arguably the most influential left-wing outlet in the country get away with such deceit?

The answer may be provided by Krugman himself, who admitted he doesn’t read conservatives:

Some have asked if there aren’t conservative sites I read regularly. Well, no. I will read anything I’ve been informed about that’s either interesting or revealing; but I don’t know of any

economics or politics sites on that side that regularly provide analysis or information I need to take seriously.

When those paid to be well-informed are uninformed, small wonder mischaracterizations of conservative ideas pervade public discourse. But perhaps nowhere is distortion of conservative thought more pronounced than with regard to social issues, where conservatives are routinely disparaged as bigoted, hateful, racist, or otherwise morally repugnant human beings.

Take, for instance, the left's caricature of a rule President Trump recently passed, which empowers the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to protect health care providers from being forced to perform services that may violate their religious convictions, such as abortion or transgender surgery. The Democratic National Committee maligned supporters of the rule as "want[ing] to allow health care workers to discriminate and rip away access to medical care."

A local left-wing politician fulminated that "this is hateful," adding that the "rule would protect a doctor who refused to treat a trans person in the ER for appendicitis or a broken leg simply because the patient is trans." Not to be outdone, Slate depicted it as an "insidious form of bigotry."

These charges, however, are unsubstantiated by the facts. According to HHS, "Conscience protections apply to health care providers who refuse to perform, accommodate, or assist with *certain health care services* on religious or moral grounds" (emphasis added). Nowhere does language allow for doctors to refuse to treat "appendicitis" or a "broken leg," or for health care workers to arbitrarily "discriminate."

Rather, the issue concerns whether medical professionals who have objections to performing *optional* procedures like abortions or transgender surgeries must be *forced* to do so, as they have been in the past. This rule protects their choice to opt out. But to recognize that fact requires reading and engaging conservative ideas.

The left, however, seems to prefer demonizing the right to confronting the facts. That may be because, as Margaret Thatcher once famously observed, the facts of life are conservative. Little wonder the left is loathe to point them out.