



## *To shrink government, GOP needs to reframe arguments*

By Thomas Schatz  
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President Obama has three major political liabilities. He has run up more debt than any other president, spent more than \$800 billion on a stimulus package that failed to bring unemployment down to his promised level of 6 percent, and dedicated the first two years of his presidency to pushing through a health care law that appears to be on its way to being found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. President Obama will blame George W. Bush for the debt, ask for more time and money to create jobs, and probably call for nationalized health care following the Supreme Court's decision, since he doesn't believe that free-market or consumer-oriented plans will work.

The president will also deflect his liabilities by blaming "the rich" and selling the idea that the nation just needs more and bigger government programs to solve all of our problems. He will also argue, as he has done for years, that the spending cuts being promoted by Republicans will hurt seniors, children, and everyone else in between. His campaign will bring out dozens of "real people" who may have lost health care coverage, had to go off of food stamps, or lost their jobs due to some greedy corporation that cares more about profits than people. These conceits will be copied by Democratic congressional candidates.

Republicans have always found it difficult to respond to such misinformation, and lose even more ground when they start using big numbers or talk about eliminating entire agencies. Democrats are good at making their arguments personal; Republicans need to do the same.

Polls consistently show that taxpayers believe that more than half of the money they send to Washington goes to waste, but no one wants "their program" to be eliminated. The way to achieve the goal of reducing the size and scope of government and still win the votes of people who benefit from federal spending (essentially everyone) is to promise that the government will get better, not bigger. In other words, more people can obtain

the benefits they need and deserve from the government if duplication and overlap are eliminated.

Therefore, every Republican candidate, starting at the top with Gov. Romney, should be providing easily understood examples of waste, fraud, mismanagement, and abuse on a daily basis from now until November 6. This daily “waste report” can be gleaned from a vast array of resources, including Citizens Against Government Waste’s “Prime Cuts,” the House Republican Study Committee’s “Cut, Cap and Balance” budget, Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute reports, and many other public and private organizations.

To paraphrase a theme from prior campaigns: Keep the waste simple, stupid.

While Democrats and some independents might see partisan politics at work if Republicans cite examples that come only from fiscally conservative sources, no one can pin that label on the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which is the investigative arm of Congress. There is a treasure trove of material in two GAO reports from [March 2011](#) and [February 2012](#). The first report identified 81 areas of government duplication and overlap, and the second report included 51 similar findings. The 2011 report [estimated that the annual cost](#) of the wasteful spending it identified is \$100-\$200 billion, and the 2012 report [estimated that the annual cost](#) of the programs it identified is \$300 billion. In other words, more than 10 percent of the \$3.8 trillion federal budget can be saved just by reducing the number of duplicative federal programs; there is no need to talk about wiping out entire agencies.

The GAO examples speak for themselves; but Republicans should nonetheless talk about them in a manner that will establish themselves as the best candidates to get rid of the duplication and overlap. The discussion should not be about running the government like a business; it should be about running the government in a manner that will provide better results from existing programs. Find programs that work as intended and support them; consolidate or eliminate those that are not achieving their objectives. Taxpayers will feel as if they are getting something in return for this effort.

For example: The federal government has 50 programs across 20 agencies to promote financial literacy at the same time the country is going bankrupt. Everyone should agree that if the government is going to provide such programs, one that works should be sufficient.

There are 209 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs in 13 agencies that cost more than \$3 billion each year, yet in 2009 American 15-year-olds ranked 25th among peers from 34 countries in math skills and scored in the middle in science and reading. Find the programs that have helped increase test scores and terminate those that have failed.

There are 18 food and nutrition programs that consumed a total of \$62.5 billion in 2008, but the effectiveness of 11 of those programs is unknown because no one has reviewed

their objectives and results. Start by studying the 11 programs and then find a few that work best.

There are 94 federal initiatives to encourage “green building” in the private sector, run by 11 federal agencies. While hard to justify as a federal responsibility at all, assuming that there will be some money spent on this effort, it can certainly be limited to a handful of programs.

The road to the White House and a Senate majority will be paved with potholes of propaganda about how government can solve all problems and must be larger. Republicans will have to get around these impediments and keep providing ideas that will convince enough voters that they will make the government better, not bigger.

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