



Now Playing: Budget Brawl 2013

By Tad DeHaven
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The current budget showdown in Washington has become so painful to watch that, were it a movie script, even M. Night Shyamalan would pass it up. Alas, it's my job to comment on the latest budget mess just as it's a film critic's job to review the latest stinker served up by Hollywood (I'm looking at you Man of Steel).

Let's start with a quick summary. The Democrats control the White House. The Democrats control the Senate. Republicans control the House of Representatives – although it isn't exactly clear who is in charge. That's been the power arrangement since 2010. On several occasions, Speaker Boehner has had to rely on Democratic votes to get key legislation passed. That's because the House GOP leadership has often had trouble corralling votes from less-than-satisfied conservatives.

The House leadership now finds itself, once again, in the same pickle. Congress, once again, did not complete a budget for the upcoming fiscal year. That means a continuing resolution (CR) will be necessary to keep the government open on October 1st, the beginning of fiscal year 2014. In exchange for supporting a CR that keeps the government open, a number of conservatives are insisting that the legislation contain no funds for Obamacare (or at least a delay of its implementation, which is also scheduled for October). The Republican leadership in the House believes – correctly, in my opinion – that there's virtually no chance the Senate will pass, and the president will sign, legislation that defunds Obamacare.

The only scenario in which that happens would be for the House to allow the government to shut down until Senate Democrats and the president agreed to defund Obamacare. The House leadership believes – also correctly, in my opinion – that the public would blame Republicans for the shutdown and thus the GOP would suffer a heavy blow. For those readers who think that I'm wrong, consider that the mainstream media's histrionics over sequestration would be a soft kiss

compared to the wailing and gnashing of teeth over a government shutdown. The unfortunate reality is that the mainstream media has already determined that the GOP will lose if it tries to shut the government down over Obamacare. Therefore, I would agree with my colleague Michael Tanner that getting a CR passed that simply maintains the reduced spending levels under sequestration is about as good as it's going to get for Republicans.

There's also the not-so-tiny issue of the government reaching the statutory debt limit at some point in October or November. I'll get back to readers on my thoughts on the wisdom of the GOP attempting to trade an increase in the debt limit in exchange for a defunding or delaying of Obamacare. I suspect, however, that my analysis won't be much different.

Now that's my take as a budget analyst. So readers who think that I'm being a squish should put down their pitchforks. My libertarian budget analyst take remains the same: both parties are in the bag for big government and thus big government isn't going anywhere anytime soon. I'll continue to work to change that and, hey, maybe a disastrous Obamacare implementation will help get the ship turned around. Anyhow, it's time to refill my popcorn bowl.