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White House wants "adult conversation", just not with you

Fri, 03/11/2011 - 2:53pm | posted by Tom Knighton

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President Obama wants to have an "adult conversation" about budget cuts. He's also said he wanted the most transparent government in history. So Jagadeesh Gokhale and David Schoenbrod of the Cato Institute decided to take the President at his word. They wanted data so they could take part in the so-called "adult conversation".

Unfortunately, here's what happened:

To acquire the information necessary for an "adult conversation" on the budget, we formally requested that OMB Director Jack Lew release the projections. The response was a letter stating that the information was "not available to the general public."

One excuse was that OMB's long-term projections were not fully "vetted." Another was that the information "could lead to unintended misrepresentations of the administration's proposals."

Well, isn't that transparent?

I understand concerns about information being used to misrepresent intentions. Unfortunately, you're not going to stop that by simply not letting the information get out. Instead, you create an environment where suspicion begins to take hold, where people make up their own data points – either through educated methods or just systematic wild assed guessing – and use them to misrepresent the proposals.

Open government, something that President Obama promised and that I sincerely prayed he would deliver, can not function without debate over the issues. That is one reason why freedom of speech is so important to a free society. However, we must also have accountability with regard to what the government is doing and thinking. Free speech isn't particularly effective when it doesn't know what it's talking about.

Gokhale and Schoenbrod go on to discuss how the Obama administration is no different than previous administrations with regard to budget issues. They also point out how important it is to have these projections they want in order to speak intelligently on budget issues...not that anyone in the White House actually cares. It's a pretty good read, and I highly recommend it.

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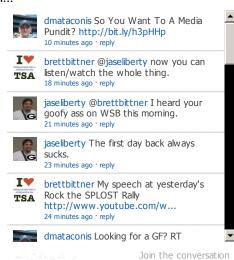


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