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Parties' mainstream 'will gladly pay you Tuesday'

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"I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today." — Wimpy, of "Popeye" cartoon notoriety.

That was the offer presented to conservative members of Congress in a late October budget deal "negotiated" behind closed doors by the White House, lame-duck GOP House Speaker John Boehner and his Senate counterpart.

The deal's so "good" that all but one House Democrat voted for it. In fact, more Democrats than Republicans did.

A total GOP capitulation with no pretense of fiscal responsibility, the deal awarded the president nearly everything he wanted. Like its 2013 predecessor, this agreement busts budget caps. In it, Washington politicians have approved \$50 billion of additional spending for the 2016 fiscal year and \$30 billion of additional spending in the 2017 fiscal year. That sounds almost reasonable in the context of an \$18 trillion-plus national debt, but that's exactly how the debt reached \$18 trillion.

Fiscal conservatives got nothing but empty promises: GOP leadership "promised" that, in exchange for lifting spending caps today, Congress will cut spending later ("I will gladly pay you Tuesday ..."). Is there anyone — anywhere — gullible enough to buy that?

In response to the 61 percent of Americans who opposed a debt limit increase or wanted it tied to spending cuts, GOP boosters say that the budget deal doesn't raise the debt ceiling. Technically true. It actually suspends the ceiling until beyond Obama's term. To influence public opinion, big-government Republicans and Democrats have used the same dishonest scare tactics, claiming that, without a debt ceiling increase, the government will default on its debt and launch a global crisis.

In 2013, the Cato Institute's Dan Mitchell testified before the Joint Economic Committee: "There is zero chance of default. Because ... annual interest payments are about \$230 billion and annual tax collections are approaching \$3 trillion ... there's no risk of default — unless the Obama administration deliberately wants that to happen. But that's ... not a realistic possibility."

Congressional Republicans responsible for this latest outrage say that they had no choice but to "compromise" (read: "surrender"). After all, they say, Senate Democrats would filibuster a responsible bill, and the president would veto it. The same Republicans say that they must prove to America that "Republicans can govern" and "get things done."

See? It's not their fault. Republicans have no choice: They must "get things done," so the only "thing" big-government Republicans can possibly do is to enact the president's agenda. If they think a lousy two-year budget deal suspending the debt ceiling until March 2017 is "governing," then who needs Republicans? Democrats are happy to "govern" by themselves. In fact, they are. GOP leadership's moral abdication allowed minority Democrats to increase spending and debt.

Even conservatives who expect very little from congressional Republicans were disappointed by this latest failure.

The Senate followed, and the president signed the agreement on Nov. 2.

There simply aren't enough responsible, courageous, principled, math-qualified members of Congress in either party to head off these phony crises or prevent the existential fiscal threats they create.