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2012 candidates...



## Join the Debate

Feb. 28, 2011

**Driving the Conversation:**

**Arena Ref:** [David Mark](#)

### Boehner: 'Better start praying' on budget?

### And who should replace Robert Gates?

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#### Roger Pilon

Vice President for Legal Affairs, Cato Institute :

Of course the budget and national debt are moral issues, and for believers whose religious views are consistent with reason-based morality, it's a religious issue too. The federal budget concerns how "we" spend "our" money, and the debt (plus taxes) with how we acquire that money. But those issues don't arise and play out in a moral vacuum. They do so under our Constitution -- or at least they're supposed to -- and that document rests on fundamental moral principles about the rights of individuals and the powers of government.

In barest outline, the Declaration of Independence says we have a natural (moral) right to be free, and to create government to secure that freedom. The Constitution institutionalized that vision, giving only limited powers to the federal government to secure our liberty, including a limited power to tax and borrow for that end. Thus, it authorizes only a limited, focused public sector, enabling a vast private sector of liberty. And no amendments have since changed that balance.

But with the Progressive Era, the balance began to be destroyed, deliberately -- by politics, not law. Today, the federal government exercises vast powers never granted, restricting liberties never surrendered. Bad enough that in doing so it indulges the majoritarian

redistributive tyranny that is modern taxation; when the limits of that course are reached, political forces impose the cost of satisfying their appetites on our children through boundless borrowing. There's a good English word for all of that: it's "theft" -- and it's immoral.

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