

# TIMES RECORD

## Commentary: No-Tax Pledge Impacts Next Generation

By: Steve Brawner - December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012

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Some congressional Republicans are beginning to back off that “Taxpayer Protection Pledge” they signed. That’s a hopeful sign, because they never should have signed such a pledge at all, and if they were determined to do so, they signed the wrong one.

The pledge, made by all four of Arkansas’ Republican members of Congress as well as the newly elected one, Tom Cotton, states that signers will “oppose any and all efforts to increase the marginal income tax rate for individuals and business” and “oppose any net reduction or elimination of deductions and credits, unless matched dollar for dollar by further reducing tax rates.”

In other words, if Congress does away with any loopholes, it has to cut rates so that the government collects not a penny more.

The group that created it, Americans for Tax Reform, and its leader, Grover Norquist, play hardball, but Arkansas’ congressional representatives lately have been indicating a willingness to bend, especially as the fiscal cliff nears.

The pledge was a bad idea in the first place. Changing events require changing responses, not rigid inflexibility. For example, when a nation goes to war with two distant countries at the same time, it should figure out a way to pay for it all. Plus, democracy is based on consensus. No one gets everything they want in a two-person marriage. They surely can’t do so in a 535-member Congress.

It’s not just the Republicans, by the way. The Democrats have their own pledge — not to touch Social Security. Outgoing Rep. Mike Ross signed that one.

Do you see where this leads us? The Republicans pledge never to raise income taxes. The Democrats pledge not to cut spending on one of the government’s biggest programs. But nobody is pledging to STOP SPENDING MONEY WE DON’T HAVE. And since members of Congress have made these competing blood oaths, they can just say they have no choice but to keep piling this debt onto our children’s shoulders.

That’s not leadership.

Members of Congress should make no pledge but the Pledge of Allegiance. But if another one has to be made, then how about a “No Deficit Pledge” instead? Or maybe a “No More

Spending Pledge.” They could promise not to let government spending rise beyond a certain percentage of the gross domestic product. If the spending would stop increasing, there would be no reason to raise taxes.

You might be thinking, “Steve, I don’t want to pay more taxes, period. Cut taxes, and that will force the government to spend less money.”

That’s called the “starve the beast” theory, and history has shown it doesn’t work.

William Niskanen, chairman of the pro-small government Cato Institute, proved a few years back that irresponsibly cutting taxes actually grows government. When you cut taxes first but leave spending alone, government feels cheaper. It’s painless. Americans get more programs, more weapons systems, more everything without paying extra, so we just keep buying more and charging it to the nation’s credit card.

I’d like to lower taxes, but unfortunately, we’ve got this huge government that a lot of people seem to like even though they say they don’t. Until the American people are willing to go on a government diet, we owe it to our kids to pay for what we’re buying. In fact, as Niskanen proved, we’ll never go on that diet until we truly understand what this binging is costing us — by paying for it all ourselves.

These pledges arose for a very good reason: Previous candidates did not keep their word. People got tired of that.

But eventually, this \$16 trillion bill will come due. By increasing spending while cutting taxes, members of Congress – Republicans and Democrats – essentially have promised to increase taxes for future generations.

And that means the most important pledge of all is being violated: The one to pass on a better country to our children than the one that was given to us.

Previous generations made that pledge and kept their word. We haven’t. Can’t we pledge to change that?