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## **Liberal rage won't stop the tea party's rise**

By John Samples

The tea-party contingent in Congress drove the Republican leadership to bargain harder than it otherwise would have on last week's debt-ceiling deal. Liberals have rightly concluded that the tea party is changing political outcomes. Their response has been to equate tea-party members with terrorists.

Vice President Biden recently told House Democrats that tea-party Republicans had "acted like terrorists." And a New York Times columnist claimed that "Tea Party Republicans have waged jihad on the American people." Many people on the left no doubt take their cues from the vice president and the Times, so we should expect more such venomous rhetoric castigating the movement as an enemy of America.

Ironically, the movement being portrayed this way takes its name from an iconic event in American history. The Boston Tea Party of 1773 helped establish the principle of "no taxation without representation." And the members of the current tea-party movement clearly believe in the American system of representative government. They worked to change Congress through the election of 2010, and now they expect their efforts to bear fruit in the form of new policies.

"Tea Party Patriots" - the name of one tea-party organization - is closer to the truth. Far from being enemies of America, these people believe deeply in the nation's history, promise, and Constitution.

### Differing visions

The liberal anger toward the tea party is justified in one sense. The tea-party movement's vision of America is distinct from the reality of the welfare state the country has built since 1936. So a powerful tea party is understandably disturbing to liberals - even if their recent campaign of vilification against it is reprehensible.

But is the tea-party movement really all that powerful? The budget deal, after all, hardly restrained the growth of spending over the next year, when the government will still run a deficit in excess of \$1 trillion. Even with the restraint prescribed by last week's deal over the long term, the federal government will still be spending \$4.25 trillion a year. The deal may lower federal spending, but it clearly will not bring about a substantially smaller government.

The evident rage among liberals, however, may have more to do with the battles to come than it does with the battle they've just lost (or won). We stand at the beginning of a long struggle. For the next few years - and maybe many more - our politics will be occupied by the same kind of fights over spending, deficits, and taxes.

These battles will be about more than just money. They reflect two different ideas of what the U.S. government should be. On one side is the tea party's vision. On the other is the welfare state of Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and President Obama, which taxes and spends more and more in pursuit of security and fairness for its citizens.

As recently as 2008, the big-government vision seemed poised to win the day. Then came the tea-party mobilization of 2009, which led to the election outcome of 2010.

Here to stay

That victory was remarkable but, in a way, unconvincing. After all, protest movements have emerged, affected elections, and then disappeared before. The Reform Party of Ross Perot comes to mind. Last year, it was far from certain that the tea party would be more than a memory by the summer of 2011.

Even before the election of 2010, tea-party leaders were concerned that electing fiscally responsible members of Congress would not be enough to save the nation from financial ruin. They knew they had to follow up their victory with oversight to ensure that new members would remember who had elected them and why. The recent pressure on House Speaker John Boehner from tea-party representatives reflected that strategic choice.

Political scientists tell us that to bring fundamental change to the nation, political movements must become permanent organizations. The civil rights movement accomplished such a transformation. Will the tea party also become a permanent part of our politics?

It's too soon to say, of course, but the debt-ceiling deal suggests the answer may be yes. In fact, the Republican Party might be the permanent organization the tea party becomes.

Even if their anger is understandable, liberals should be ashamed of their over-the-top anti-tea party rhetoric. The tea party could become a lasting force in American politics - one that slowly ends the long era that began with the New Deal. Though it's often criticized as rooted in the past, the tea party may be a harbinger of the future.

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