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The Real Paul Ryan

His budget promotes exorbitant defense spending and cuts programs for the poor

In the past week it's become utterly clear that the candidates' positions on foreign policy and national security may well play a central role alongside the economy in the presidential campaign.

On the campaign trail, Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan is trying to have it both ways by portraying himself as both a serious budget-cutter and a strong supporter of the Pentagon.

In reality, Ryan is only serious about cutting the budgets for programs that aid middle- and low-income Americans while he lavishes cash on the Pentagon.

Indeed, Ryan's vote for the Iraq war, and the \$853 billion needed to wage it, has helped to create the national debt that Ryan allegedly wants to address in his draconian budget proposal.

Ryan's unstinting support for a bloated defense budget has helped to undermine the debt-cutting deal approved by President Obama and members of both parties in Congress—including Ryan—in the wake of last summer's debt-ceiling crisis orchestrated by House Republicans.

Taken together, Ryan's ballooning defense budget shows that he is not really serious about tackling government spending and addressing the nation's long-term fiscal health.

But Ryan is deadly serious about attacking programs for low- and moderate-income families. About 42% of Ryan's "savings" come from programs that help struggling Americans, according to an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP).

Ryan doesn't close a single tax loophole, the CBPP reports in its research. In fact, his budget offers \$4.5 trillion in new tax cuts for the

wealthy over the next decade. Those making less than \$30,000 would see a tax increase, however.

Ryan Goes Against Pentagon's Wishes

Ryan's budget plan, which was approved by the Republican-led House of Representatives this year, would cut overall federal spending by \$6 trillion over the next decade and cut domestic spending by half. But Ryan would raise defense spending over the current base line by an additional \$400 billion over 10 years, according to Christopher Preble at the Cato Institute.

Ryan's budget is so out of whack with what the Pentagon wants that he and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, got into it earlier this year.

Ryan said in March, "We don't think the generals are giving us their true advice," and, "I think there is a lot of budget smoke and mirrors in the Pentagon budget, which is not really a true, honest and accurate budget."

Ryan was forced to apologize after Gen. Dempsey said Ryan was "calling us, collectively, liars."

Small-government advocates, who should be Ryan's natural allies, are also questioning Ryan's defense spending.

"By pledging to increase the military's budget above the rate of inflation, Ryan's basic argument is that the Pentagon's budget should remain near historic highs in real, inflation-adjusted terms," Preble wrote on the Libertarian-leaning Cato Institute website. "That would mean spending more than we did during much of the Cold War, and much more than we did in the 1990s."

And as much as Ryan is attached to increasing defense spending, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney is calling for even greater military spending.

Ryan Blows Up Debt Agreement

Ryan's attachment to a bloated defense budget also threatens to blow up last summer's deficit-reduction agreement, the Budget Control Act (BCA), which he supported but is now criticizing in recent interviews.

Last year, House Republicans refused to support raising the debt ceiling, a typically routine vote that allows the government to pay its bills. Indeed, the debt-ceiling vote is so routine that Congress raised it 18 times during the Reagan administration and seven times during the George W. Bush administration without controversy. Ryan's own budget plan calls for raising the debt ceiling by \$5.5 trillion through 2022, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center.

But, setting that reality aside, House Republicans wanted a political showdown over spending and refused to raise the debt ceiling.

Ultimately, Ryan and his Republican colleagues ended their stalemate and agreed to the Budget Control Act (BCA), which would lift the debt ceiling in exchange for setting up a bipartisan supercommittee that would devise \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts over a 10-year period. If the supercommittee couldn't come up with a plan—and it hasn't yet—then \$109 billion in "sequestered" cuts would automatically kick in at the beginning of 2013, with the rest of the \$1 trillion phasing in through 2021. Roughly half of the cuts would be allocated to defense and half to domestic programs.

But after voting for the bipartisan Budget Control Act and applauding the deal, Ryan had a change of heart.

Ryan's House-approved federal budget plan and two of his budget committee bills would blow up the bipartisan debt deal and protect the Pentagon from the looming Budget Control Act cuts.

The Budget Control Act calls for \$499 billion in defense spending in 2013, while Ryan's plan calls for \$554 billion. That's over 11% more in defense spending and more than the Pentagon is asking for. Over the next 10 years, belying his image as a serious budget hawk, Ryan would spend \$710 billion more on defense than the BCA's caps, according to an analysis by the Bipartisan Policy Center.

But Ryan isn't so generous when it comes to domestic spending. His plan would mean cuts in Medicaid, Medicare, veterans' health, biomedical research, food stamps, school meals, the Child Tax Credit, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other vital programs.

Robert Greenstein and Richard Kogan, writing for CBPP, noted that Ryan's cuts aren't the only option available to serious debt-cutters.

“Policy-makers could cancel sequestration and offset the lost savings in other ways, including balanced approaches that raise revenues—especially by closing unwarranted tax breaks—and secure entitlement savings in ways that don’t increase poverty and hardship,” Greenstein and Kogan wrote. “The House legislation, however, charts the opposite path.”