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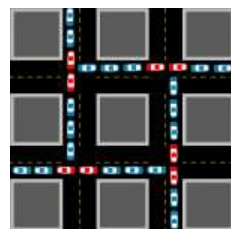
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Pro-con on government gridlock



Gridlock is our friend. Too often, political elites equate a positive political agenda with grand government programs. There is a built-in bias that government needs to "do something." When they call for an end to gridlock, they really mean more government programs. Whether coming from Democrats or Republicans, calls for more cooperation almost always tilt toward bigger, more expensive government. But history should have taught us that often, the best way government can help solve our problems is to stop doing things. Voters clearly thought so: On Election Night, 56 percent told exit pollsters that the government is doing too many things better left to business and individuals. In many ways, gridlock is the political equivalent of the Hippocratic oath — first, do no harm. "No man's life, liberty or property are safe while the legislature is in session." That quote has been variously attributed to Mark Twain, Judge Gideon Tucker and Daniel Webster. Whoever said it, it is a remarkably accurate and cogent argument for gridlock. — Michael Tanner, Cato Institute, in USA Today

Gridlock, according to its admirers, gives the private sector a sense of constancy and confidence to act. It restrains spending and borrowing by either party. And it acts as a check on liberal or conservative excess. There's an element of truth to this, but the downside of paralysis far outweighs the upside. The nation faces serious problems. And like problems with your health, finances and appliances, these aren't the kinds that get better if they're ignored. The difficult decisions confronting the United States were underscored last week by the co-chairmen of a presidential commission on the deficit. They proposed raising the Social Security retirement age, eliminating popular tax deductions, revisiting contentious health care issues, reducing the federal work force, freezing government pay and cutting a host of programs. Their plan, or something like it, is desperately needed to avert a debt crisis. But with lobbies lining up to savage it, its only chance is if both parties agree to work together. Gridlock is not synonymous with prudent behavior, limited government or even benign neglect. Rather, it is an excuse for politicians of both parties to walk away from tough choices. — USA Today

By Phillip Brownlee

Posted Saturday at 6:01 a.m. Filed under Congress

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