

## How They're Reacting to Obama's Budget Speech

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Guess what? Liberals and conservatives *do not see eye-to-eye* on the speech President Obama gave this afternoon in which he lambasted GOP congressman Paul Ryan's debt plan and offered a robust defense of an expansive federal government. Obama may have given some lip service to both sides working together to overcome this great national challenge, but the speech instantly proved incredibly divisive. [Ryan himself](#) called it "excessively partisan, dramatically inaccurate, and hopelessly inadequate to addressing our country's fiscal challenges." The Republican punditry isn't being any kinder, while meanwhile, liberals (except the ones who don't like the idea of doing debt-reduction right now to begin with) are pretty ecstatic. Here's a large smattering of opinions from both the left and the right on both politics and substance (or total lack of it) in today's big address.

[Ezra Klein](#), *Washington Post*:

My initial impression is that this looks a lot like the Simpson-Bowles report, but in a good way. It doesn't go quite as far on defense cuts, but it also doesn't implement a cap on tax or spending. It goes a lot further than Ryan's budget does in terms of actually figuring out ways to save money rather than just using caps to shift costs onto states/beneficiaries.

[Andrew Sullivan](#), *Daily Beast*:

[S]urely, after the cold shock of the Ryan plan, [Obama's] less draconian vision for the vulnerable will be popular in the middle. The least persuasive part of the GOP proposal is its refusal to ask anything from the top one percent in this crisis. Obama saw this, and went for it.

[Mark Halperin](#), *Page/Time*:

Positive: wrote and delivered a serious, principled speech that treated the American people as adults (which he likes to do) ... Negative: failed to offer a bold, paradigm-shifting budget proposal that would shock (and impress!) the country (rather than just provide the next step in the Beltway dance); inflamed (rather than calmed) the partisan waters; failed to offer enough specifics to clear the specificity bar.

[Paul Krugman](#), *Conscience of a Liberal*/*New York Times*:

The main thing, though, is the strengthened role of and target for the Independent Payment Advisory Board. This can sound like hocus-pocus — but it's not. As I understand it, it would force the board to come up with ways to put Medicare on what amounts to a budget — growing no faster than GDP + 0.5 — and would force Congress to specifically overrule those proposed savings. That's what cost-control looks like! You have people who actually know about health care and health costs setting priorities for spending, within a budget; in effect, you have an institutional setup which forces Medicare to find ways to say no..

[Jonathan Chait](#), *New Republic*:

It's impossible to overstate just how commanding a position Obama holds here with regard to public opinion. People overwhelmingly favor higher taxes on the rich. They even more overwhelmingly oppose cutting Medicare. The Republican plan to impose deep Medicare cuts in order to free up room to cut taxes for the rich is ridiculously, off-the-charts unpopular. If Republicans want to take this position, Obama has to make them pay

dearly.

[Jonathan Cohn](#), *New Republic*:

That was a clear, unambiguous, morally grounded defense of the welfare state — as strong and stirring as I've seen from this president ... The new health care reforms sound very good upon initial inspection — and, particularly when added to cost controls already in the Affordable Care Act, this is far more serious than what Paul Ryan and the Republicans have in mind. And if Obama is more serious about controlling health care costs, then he's more serious about reducing deficits overall.

[James Pethokoukis](#), *Corner/National Review*:

Did the White House A/V dude load the wrong file into Obama's teleprompter? While the president's class-warfare attack on Paul Ryan's "Path to Prosperity" would probably have earned rousing applause at a Jefferson-Jackson dinner, the speech failed to accomplish its advertised purpose: outlining Obama's long-term blueprint to avoid a debt crisis.

[Yuval Levin](#), *Corner/National Review*:

President Obama's speech really brought home how confused and disoriented liberalism is today, and how very difficult it will be for the Left to accept that the social-democratic welfare state is collapsing and something else must take its place. Yet the very fact that he felt compelled to make such a speech does offer some hope.

[Jonah Goldberg](#), *National Review*:

I listened to Obama's speech on my drive down to North Carolina for my talk tonight. I thought it was a breathtaking tour de force of dishonesty and tendentiousness for all the reasons covered around here. It was also just weird and annoying. A small gripe: he keeps saying "win the future" like it's a phrase A) everybody understands and B) everyone has a positive reaction to. Neither is the case.

[Michael Tanner](#), *National Review*:

[T]he president's speech does accomplish one thing. As he intended, it draws a clear distinction between his ideas and those of his opponents such as Paul Ryan. The president wants to spend (or as he repeatedly put it "invest") more and raise taxes to pay for it. As I wrote this morning, he envisions a smaller debt but a much bigger government. Congressman Ryan, in contrast, envisions a smaller debt as part of a smaller government that leaves both more money and more responsibility in the hands of individuals.

[hotair.com/archives/2011/04/13/obamas-solution-to-deficit-spending-obamacare-and-tax-hikes/](http://hotair.com/archives/2011/04/13/obamas-solution-to-deficit-spending-obamacare-and-tax-hikes/)">Ed Morrissey, Hot Air:

We expected Barack Obama to offer little new in his speech on the budget; I'm not sure we expected as much repetition as we got. Bookended by rhetoric on the kind of America in which he wanted to live, Obama gave a four-step plan to confront the massive and crippling deficits ahead of us that entirely relies on the kind of proposals he's already aired in the past. He gave little in the way of specifics, and made no mention at all of his deficit commission *again*. Instead of offering specifics on cuts, Obama instead offered specifics on ... *more spending*.

[David Frum](#), Frum Forum:

That speech was not so especially eloquent. It was, however, very effective. It frames the debate in a way that is maximally useful for Democrats. This framing was made possible by the efforts of Republicans themselves, blinded by their own hopes, misdirected by their own messaging. It's exactly like what happened on health care

reform, where Republicans persuaded themselves they had Obama on the ropes even as he succeeded in enacting the most important new entitlement since 1965. We went for all the marbles, and ended with none. Now I fear we are doing it again.

[Jonathan Capehart](#), PostPartisan/Washington Post:

I heard hard truths once again coming from Obama on the debt crisis facing this country. His was a muscular address that drew lines in the sand. How well those lines hold up will be tested in the weeks and months ahead.

[Mark Murray and Domenico Montanaro](#), First Read/MSNBC:

[M]ore than anything else, the address at George Washington University was the president's first 2012 campaign speech a week after he formally filed for re-election. And it was an effort to define the Republican Party — arguments we're sure to hear over the next year and a half ... [H]ow the math adds up to achieve those reductions remains an open question. The White House hasn't posted a plan, and the president called for creating another group, led by Vice President Biden and congressional leaders, to come up with legislation.

[Aaron Blake](#), Fix/Washington Post:

The president, ever wary of coming off as a partisan warrior, was quick to emphasize that he thinks Republicans are trying to do the right thing and appreciates them contributing to the debate. But the underlying message of the speech was clear: the Republican plan is very bad. That's a solid strategy. As we noted last week, even Republican presidential candidates have been slow to completely embrace the ambitious cuts contained in Ryan's budget proposal.

[Greg Sargent](#), Plum Line/Washington Post:

For some time now, a bunch of us have been wondering when — or whether — Obama would step up and make a strong case for an expansive vision of Democratic governance. With Republicans initiating what may be the most consequential argument over the proper role of government in decades — a debate over the legacy of the great liberal achievements of the 20th Century — we've all been wondering whether Obama would respond with a level of ambition and seriousness of purpose that he's shown when taking on other big arguments. By this standard — in rhetorical terms — it's fair to say Obama delivered.

[Jennifer Rubin](#), Right Turn/Washington Post:

As I and many others expected, Obama today gave a speech about nothing much at all — if you don't count attacking the only viable debt-reduction plan out there. He didn't endorse the Simpson-Bowles plan. He did not propose a Social Security fix. He did not provide an alternative to top-down rationing of Medicare. One wonders how the White House thinks this *helps* the president. It was rather embarrassing in what it *did* offer: negotiations with Joe Biden, more defense cuts and taxes on the rich. How utterly trite.

[Mark Thoma](#), Economist's View:

We now have three markers, this plan, the Ryan plan, and Bowles Simpson. While far, far from perfect, this plan is clearly the best of the three, but it's only a proposal. I'll withhold judgement until we see how this actually turns out. The greatest speech in the world does no good if, in the end, it is all compromised away in the name of making progress (and winning the election).

[Massimo Calabresi](#), Swampland/Time:

President Obama didn't offer a lot of specifics about how he intends to close the federal budget deficit in his speech at GW Wednesday, but he did make one thing clear: he intends to go head-to-head with Republicans

over taxes. That makes political sense. If he's going to go after \$2 trillion in spending, as his aides say he will in coming negotiations, he's going to have to give Democrats, for many of whom that spending is sacred, some red meat. That red meat is \$1 trillion in tax hikes aimed at primarily at the rich.

[Kate Pickert](#), *Swampland/Time*:

This vagueness was calculated, of course. The fewer specifics you offer, the less specific criticism you'll have to bear and the more wiggle room you leave yourself to claim you're not really proposing that thing that everyone hates. But Obama won't be able to insulate himself from criticism of his health care "ideas." In fact, a major piece of what he proposed today in fairly broad strokes is sure to generate renewed accusations that the Administration wants to "ration Medicare."

[Steve Benen](#), *Political Animal/Washington Monthly*:

[A]t this point, I'd consider this approach pretty reasonable. It's not the agenda I'd present were I president, but I could live with it if it became U.S. policy. The problem, of course, is that if the "compromise" between Obama's vision and Paul Ryan's is what we end up with, that'd be a disaster — so the White House is going to have to fight for this approach.

[Hugh Hewitt](#), *Town Hall*:

The president wants the United States to be Europe, with European tax and spending policies and European levels of government nanny-state control. The 2012 election will be a clear referendum on this choice, and until then the House GOP supported by the Senate GOP must stand in the gap and say no to all tax hikes and refuse more economy-imperiling spending and borrowing.

[Howard Kurtz](#), *Spin Cycle/Daily Beast*:

[W]hen it came to his blueprint for slashing the deficit by \$4 trillion over 12 years, Obama painted in the broadest strokes. He would cut Pentagon spending (he didn't say how), while protecting medical research, clean energy, new airports, job training and on and on. He would cut spending on prescription drugs through negotiations and slow Medicare spending through an independent commission. Good luck with that.

[Jamelle Bouie](#), *TAPPED/American Prospect*:

This is easily the most liberal speech Obama has given since entering office .... Of course, the basic premise of this speech is still a little weird. Unemployment is still high, the job market is still weak, and the economy remains sluggish. In a sane world, deficit reduction would be on the back end, as policy remains focused on restoring the economy to pre-recession levels. That said, given the hostile political environment, this was an excellent speech and a firm rebuttal to this current crop of radical Republican ideologues.

[David Corn](#), *Mother Jones*:

The message: do you want Obama the careful surgeon with a sterile scalpel or the Republican amputators with rusty meat-cleavers? Moreover, he's asking, do you buy the GOP's vision of a broke-down America that has to squeeze the poor and the elderly and neglect necessary investments in education, R&D, and infrastructure, while granting generous tax breaks to the rich, in order to move ahead toward better days?

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By: [Dan Amira](#)

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