

NATIONAL REVIEW

The Bipartisan Push to Increase Spending and the National Debt

We are at a point where every additional drop of red ink counts.

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May 3, 2017

Once again, we are reminded that “bipartisan” is Washington-speak for “Hang on to your wallet.”

Democrats, Republicans, and the Trump administration have reached a bipartisan agreement to fund the government for the rest of the fiscal year. Much of the media is trumpeting the agreement as proof that “both sides can work together.” Sure they can . . . if the goal is to further fleece the taxpayer.

Republicans wanted more spending for defense. Democrats wanted more spending for domestic programs. The bipartisan answer: more spending for everything. The agreement, which could be voted on as early as today, includes a roughly \$25 billion increase in defense spending (including both the base defense budget and overseas contingency spending). That represents a 3.5 percent hike over fiscal year 2016.

The case for a big hike in defense is dubious, but even more troubling is some \$38 billion in other spending, including significant hikes in domestic discretionary spending. President Trump might have talked about defunding wasteful government agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Institutes of Health, and the Appalachian Regional Commission, but this agreement actually *increases* spending for them. The budget agreement even tosses in additional spending for “green energy” programs. There are also the usual increases in spending for national parks, disaster relief, global food aid, and so forth. Oh yes, the budget also extends subsidies to insurance companies under Obamacare. And, of course, there is no effort in this bill to reform entitlement spending.

Taken all together, the \$1.1 trillion spending agreement increases federal spending by \$63 billion over last year. Yay, bipartisanship.

That might not seem like a lot, but we are at a point where every additional drop of red ink counts. Last month, the Congressional Budget Office warned that the national debt will double as a share of the national economy by mid century. Trillion-dollar budget deficits are expected to return within the decade. Interest payments on the debt will rise from \$270 billion in 2017 to \$768 billion in 2027. Our total indebtedness, including the unfunded liabilities of programs such as Social Security and Medicare, approaches \$100 trillion.

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There will be a tendency to blame this monument to red ink on Paul Ryan and the congressional Republican leadership. They certainly deserve their share. After all, they negotiated this dog’s breakfast. They own it. Day by day, Republicans in Congress prove that they have no intention of shrinking the size or cost of government.

However, we shouldn’t let the president off the hook, either. The Trump administration was fully vested in this outcome. In fact, the president’s budget director described the budget agreement as “a solid deal.”

The administration was desperate to avoid the optics of a government shutdown, and President Trump has never cared about deficits or the level of government spending. Still, this budget deal should once and for all put an end to the narrative that President Trump is different because “he fights.” This is a president who cares much more about “winning” than about what he wins.

Inevitably, we will be told that the next budget fight will be different. Already President Trump has tweeted a threat to shut down the government if he doesn’t get his way . . . in September. Don’t count on it.

Meanwhile, he is promising to introduce his \$1 trillion plan for increased infrastructure spending within the next month. Democrats are already suggesting that that could be the sort of bipartisan proposal they could work with. Yep, more bipartisanship.

Funny, I don’t feel like celebrating.

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