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Time to get serious about cutting spending

By Alex Cortes February 4, 2013

For the last several years, Washington Democrats have been demanding a “balanced” approach to deficit reduction that consists of spending cuts and more revenue from tax increases. With the president’s re-election in November and the Democrats picking up additional Senate and House seats, they feel the wind at their backs and are now claiming an electoral mandate for balanced debt reduction. Today, three months after the election, how have they done so far in implementing this alleged mandate?

In just three months, we have seen a “fiscal cliff” deal that increased spending by \$330 billion and raised taxes by \$600 billion, a \$50 billion Hurricane Sandy relief bill that included billions of pork that was completely unrelated to Sandy, and a debt ceiling deal that empowers the federal government to take on an unlimited amount of new debt for almost four months without any new spending restraint.

In conclusion: In three months, more debt, more spending, and more taxes. Democrats have delivered on their promise of more taxes, but have not delivered on their promise of less spending. There’s no “balance” at all. Is it realistic to expect them to ever bring balance?

Have the Democrats ever shown a willingness to cut spending on their own volition?

Unfortunately not, and by the Democrats intentionally choosing not to cut spending in regular legislative order, they are willfully choosing for Republicans blunt instruments like the appropriations bills that fund the government and the debt ceiling to use as leverage for spending cuts. We wish the Democrats wouldn’t choose these blunt instruments.

Given that they have, what will be the specific response by House Republicans? It is unclear so far with the GOP leadership not yet publicly presenting one and the clock ticking to build public support for any demand.

Yet the GOP leadership has privately told conservative members, in a move to earn their support for the recent four month suspension of the debt ceiling, that they will not just introduce a budget that balances in ten years, but actually achieve in law reforms that put us on a path to balance in ten years before increasing the debt ceiling again.

This would be a significant achievement if leadership sticks by their promise. But what is the plan to get there?

Democrats certainly have had an easy time dispensing with calls to reform to our entitlement programs that are the driver of our deficits and even have had an easy enough time of shutting down demands as meager as the “Boehner Rule” of one dollar of spending cuts for every dollar debt ceiling increase.

Republicans need a demand that is new, imaginative, simple, can capture the public mind, and is so common-sense that it will be extremely difficult for Democrats to oppose. So here’s a simple proposal: commit to spend just one dollar less each year.

Yes, just one dollar less each year. Can they do it?

At present, it sadly appears not. For all the talk you hear about “Draconian” spending cuts, there are no real spending cuts, only cuts from the growth in spending. Total government spending is still projected to be a whole \$2.1 trillion higher ten years from now according to the Cato Institute.

Now, would any American family say that they had cut their spending because they originally planned to spend \$10,000 more this year, but then cut it back to only spend \$5,000 more? Of course not, but we keep letting Washington politicians get away with this tomfoolery.

One dollar less ends the tomfoolery by changing the debate from one about mythical spending cuts to actually spending less and exposes those who oppose spending one dollar less each year as inhabitants of la-la land.

Americans families have reduced their spending far more than one dollar in recent years. House Republicans should demand that Washington at least do this much each year.

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