



Stand With Rand!

By: Peter Roff - March 8, 2013

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., leaves the floor of the Senate after his filibuster of the nomination of John Brennan to be CIA director on Capitol Hill in Washington, early Thursday, March 7, 2013.

Republican Sen. Rand Paul vaulted into the ranks of bona fide national conservative leaders Thursday by taking on the president in a 13-hour filibuster of the nomination of John Brennan to be the next director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Paul, he was clear enough from the Senate floor, had no particular complaint about Brennan; he just wanted to force the Obama administration to answer some uncomfortable questions about its policy of using drones—especially where the idea of using them to attack U.S. citizens on U.S. soil was concerned.

Ultimately, Paul ceded the floor and Brennan was confirmed. But not before the junior senator from Kentucky had forced the Department of Justice to at least pretend to answer the questions he was posing. He also, said Senate GOP insiders, helped to raise the morale of his GOP colleagues whom, of late, have had little if any success in holding back the Obama agenda. At the same time, House Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor were being pilloried by conservatives for allowing a Continuing Resolution to move through the House that failed to completely defund Obamacare.

The latter move was denounced as something akin to folding, forestalling as it did the promise made by the House GOP back when it was still in the minority to "repeal and replace" Obamacare with something that worked, made health insurance more affordable, and did not bust the federal budget.

It's an interesting illustration of how, in politics, one can lose by winning and win by losing. Conservatives in particular are hungry for leaders who will take strong stands against the Obama agenda regardless of the political costs. The calculation over whether it is worth ensuring a government shut down over the funding for Obamacare is being made by people who have to actually produce something. They have the responsibility for, excuse the use of a dirty word, "governing." Republican senators, because they are in the minority, are freed from the same constraints. They can register their objections and move on because, in truth, no one really expects them to win. Taking a principled stand, giving no quarter, is alone enough.

The House Republicans did in fact manage to rein Obamacare in just a bit in the Continuing Resolution. As Politico reported, the "House Republicans' spending plan up for vote Wednesday would chip at the healthcare law by withholding funds from several federal agencies charged with setting the law in motion." Besides holding back from the Department of Health and

Human Services \$949 million in funding it had requested to pay for the federal insurance exchanges, whose existence Michael Cannon of the Cato Institute and others have pointed out is constitutionally questionable, it also left out an extra \$360 million the Internal Revenue Service had asked for to put the law's tax provisions in place.

It may seem that congressional conservatives and organizations are a bit schizophrenic right now, not really sure of where they stand or what they are trying to do. It is important to remember, however, that they are not operating from a position of strength. Obama is still president and the Democrats still control the Senate by a margin not easily overcome. Still, on most of the big issues, the GOP continues to show considerable progress. One critical example of this idea in practice is that most of the Bush-era tax rates have been made permanent. Those that went up were on incomes far greater than the \$250,000 per couple Obama demanded before and during the presidential campaign. The progress of Obamacare's implementation is being slowed, though by not nearly as much as many people would like. And the president's nominees are receiving the kind of grilling that has most conservatives cheering, even if none of the appointments have been blocked or defeated thus far.

At the same time, Obama's liberal allies are being shamed by the way in which he has continued or expanded President George W. Bush's policies in the national security arena, something Paul's filibuster made clear. The Democrats would never have allowed Bush to employ drones in the way Obama has and seeks to, at least not without having to incur a significant political cost to do so. The demoralization on the left in this regard is obvious.

Ronald Reagan it seems was able to accomplish far more between 1981 and 1987 with an identical division—one party in control of the White House and the Senate and the other with a more substantial majority in the House than the GOP currently has—than Barack Obama has been able to. In fact Obama is repeatedly falling back on the idea that he will run the government the way he wants with the powers he has, or assumes for himself, rather than have to bother with Congress—the dinners he is having with congressional leaders notwithstanding.

Things, while not as rosy as many conservatives would like, are also not nearly as bleak as many of them seem to fear.