

# The Washington Post

## Come to think of it, Jim DeMint and the Heritage Foundation make sense

By: Dana Milbank - December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012

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At first blush, there is something delightfully dada about Jim DeMint being named president of the Heritage Foundation.

The senator, a tea party hero from South Carolina, is a smart guy and a good politician. But running a think tank? It is the scholarly equivalent of appointing Michael Moore to head the Brookings Institution, or Ted Nugent to the Cato Institute, or Roseanne Barr to the Council on Foreign Relations, or perhaps Donald Trump to the American Enterprise Institute.

But think about it some more and the choice of DeMint begins to look brilliant. He is, arguably, the perfect candidate to run a post-thought think tank.

There is less thinking going on in much of the Washington think-tank world these days: Following the trend in politics generally, these idea factories have turned away from idea production in favor of promoting well-worn policy prescriptions. The task is less to come up with new solutions than to win the argument with epithets, labels and caricatures.

The trend goes beyond Heritage. The Family Research Council has joined the shift from wonks to gladiators. The liberal Center for American Progress was created as a conscious imitation of Heritage — more political and aggressive, less bookish. Indeed, researchers there have done extensive opposition research into . . . Jim DeMint.

Now Heritage appears ready to shed that veneer and dedicate itself to ideological and partisan warfare. And there's no better warrior than Jim DeMint.

Consider, for example, how he would enhance Heritage's Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom. DeMint's own view of freedom, based on his considerable research? "Freedom is dissolving!" and "America is teetering towards tyranny!"

Education policy? DeMint likened the Chicago schools strike to Middle East violence, calling Chicago "a distant place where thugs had put 400,000 children out in the streets."

Health policy? Trying to block Obamacare, DeMint once said: "If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him."

Economic policy? DeMint said of the stimulus legislation: “It is a mugging. It is a fraud.”

Capital markets? The senator said of his effort to block an increase in the debt limit: “We’re at the point where there would have to be some serious disruptions in order not to raise it. I’m willing to do that.”

The presidency? DeMint says of Obama: “Just because you are good on TV doesn’t mean you can sell socialism to freedom-loving Americans.” He likened Obama’s practices to those in George Orwell’s “1984”: “He is presenting a complete redefinition of words and ideas.”

National security? DeMint accused Obama of siding with America’s enemies, saying, “I am hopeful that as President Obama grows in office, he will eventually turn away from despots like Ahmadinejad, Chavez, Castro.”

European history? DeMint opined that America is “about where Germany was before World War II where they became a social democracy. You still had votes but the votes were just power grabs.”

Civil society? The lawmaker says Democrats are seeking “a retreat of the failed and discredited socialist policies that have been the enemy of freedom for centuries all over the world. . . . The battle is between the American people and the Democrats, and I like those odds.”

Gender studies? DeMint defended Todd Akin after the Missouri Senate candidate said women’s bodies could avoid pregnancy in cases of “legitimate rape.” His political action committee said: “We support Todd Akin and hope freedom-loving Americans in Missouri and around the country will join us.”

Human rights? DeMint offered his view that if “someone is openly homosexual, they shouldn’t be teaching in the classroom,” and that “an unmarried woman who’s sleeping with her boyfriend — she shouldn’t be in the classroom.”

DeMint is entitled to his views. And the people of South Carolina returned him to office despite — or perhaps because of — his views.

But it’s difficult to see how these views, and DeMint’s crude expression of them, fit with Heritage’s mission as “a research and educational institution” dedicated to finding “solutions to contemporary problems from the ideas, principles and traditions that make America great.”

Such as: keeping gay men and unmarried women from being teachers; throwing around words such as “tyranny” and “socialism”; attempting to “break” an American president and accusing the other party of a Nazi-style “power grab.”

If DeMint is the right man to be running this prestigious policy shop, perhaps the resident scholars at Heritage should be researching this question: Is thought dead?