

Matt Yglesias

Today at 8:31 am

Modes of Dissent

The most surprising thing about David Frum's apparent [parting of ways](#) with the American Enterprise Institute is the extremely mild nature of Frum's heterodoxy. What he's been doing for the past week has been to primarily offer a *tactical* critique of congressional Republicans' approach to health reform. And if you can't offer a tactical critique *in the wake of an unequivocal defeat* then what can you do? I don't really expect people to welcome sharp disagreement about matters of principle, but when you adopt an approach to blocking a piece of legislation, and then the legislation doesn't get blocked how are you *not* going to engage in some spirited disagreement about what went wrong? It's baffling.

At any rate, Julian Sanchez did a great piece on the [incentives pushing toward ideological conformity on the right](#) and the myth of the "Georgetwon Cocktail Party Circuit." I think that the same dynamic Sanchez identifies exists on the left, but it winds up having totally different results because there are actual competing sets of institutions on the left. Everywhere you go there's pressure to follow the "line" but CAP and EPI have very different lines on teacher compensation. What's striking about the right is that on domestic and economic policy issues it's formed a *comprehensive set* of ideological points from which there's no escape.

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47 Responses to "Modes of Dissent"

1. *Ted Says:*
[March 26th, 2010 at 8:45 am](#)

This isn't 100% correct. Frum's piece isn't just a tactical divergence about how to defeat the Affordable Care Act; it implies in passing that the ACA was actually rather close to Republican ideas and could have been mostly acceptable (with some tinkering).

That's a strategic difference about goals rather than a strictly tactical disagreement, though Frum does blur the issue a bit. In any case, it's precisely the apostasy that AEI had been warning against all along — as Bartlett revealed yesterday.

While we're on the topic, my sympathy for Frum was sharply reduced by an article MY tweeted yesterday: