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Stopping the Descent

By Howard Rich
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At long last there are finally signs that the American Republic's breakneck descent into full-blown socialist madness – which was fast approaching terminal velocity prior to November's elections – could be leveling out.

Does this mean our newly-elected leaders can pull America out of its precipitous fiscal nose dive before it's too late? That remains to be seen – but last week's lame duck developments in our nation's capital do offer a small measure of hope.

Backed by an aggressive push from the Tea Party movement, a handful of fiscally conservative U.S. Senators staged a successful revolt against a $1.2 trillion omnibus spending bill. This 1,924-page monstrosity contained more than 6,700 earmarks – or pork barrel spending items inserted by lawmakers.

Supported by Republicans and Democrats alike, this massive spending bill represented everything that America's voters overwhelmingly rejected last month. Not only was its price tag irresponsibly reckless, but the back-slapping breadth of its unnecessary add-ons and the sheer arrogance associated with its presumed passage was the very definition of "business as usual" in Congress. Like dozens of omnibus bills before it, this lavish spending legislation was an unholy amalgamation of unnecessary special interest-driven pork. It was also something that everyone was going to vote for – because everyone had something in it.

Fortunately, the same network of limited government advocates that helped mobilize a taxpayer revolution at the polls last month joined together to rally voters once again. And these voters – leveraging the power of talk radio, the internet and good old fashioned shoe leather in the halls of Congress – made their voices heard.

"The resulting protests convinced GOPers –even the big spenders from the Appropriations Committee – that they could no longer play the old game of swapping earmarks for campaign cash," wrote Daniel J. Mitchell, a senior fellow at The Cato Institute. "This is a remarkable development and a huge victory for the Tea Party movement."[1] U.S. Senate leader Harry Reid was forced to withdraw this massive spending bill without a vote – choosing instead to offer up a continuing resolution that funds the federal government at existing levels.

Obviously reducing these exorbitant "existing levels" of spending is what the next Congress must focus on when it convenes in January. And accompanying that budgetary effort must be a push for comprehensive tax relief – not just a temporary extension of previous tax cuts. Having witnessed the costly failure of government-driven "stimuli," the next Congress must make a conscious decision to abandon this Keynesian approach and invest in the American taxpayer for a change. In other words, limited government advocates should not be content with a pair of "do no harm" quick fixes on taxes and spending – because "do no harm" legislation is not what the situation calls for. What is required? Immediate cuts – and a steady, sustained reduction in the size and scope of the federal government.

On the first count, politicians could shave a trillion dollars off of the next federal budget by simply limiting spending to its pre-recession levels. Assuming you believe that government should have never been growing at a time when Americans' income levels were shrinking, then these cuts should not be particularly controversial.

And remember – even before Washington politicians decided to add $4 trillion to the national debt over the last three years, the federal government was already expanding far beyond the ability of taxpayers to sustain its growth. In fact, in the six years leading up to the recession the federal deficit was growing by an average of more than $520 billion each year.

Correcting this unsustainable expansion is not "austerity," it is simply reducing rampant excess. It has been said that mindless growth is the ideology of the cancer cell. Now that America has been "fiscally diagnosed," let's hope a new crop of leaders has the courage to pursue a cure – not merely treat the symptoms of the disease.

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