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GOP Hypocrisy

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 20, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

President Obama came out swinging yesterday. After congressional Republicans have blocked an emergency extension of unemployment benefits for a third time, the President stopped blaming ?Washington? for the problem and placed the blame squarely where it belongs, on the GOP.

The Republicans, of course, will tell you that they have no objection to extending the unemployment benefits, they simply think the new expenditure needs to be off-set with spending cuts elsewhere in the federal budget. When pressed on what programs should be cut on Meet the Press Sunday, Congressman Jeff Sessions stumbled and hemmed and hawed. Last night, on Hardball, Congressman Mike Pence was similarly elusive on precisely what programs they think should be cut, failing to mention a single program he thought should be cut.

Of course, everyone is in favor of budget cuts in the abstract, but when it comes to specific, actual cuts, suddenly the support evaporates. Defense contractors have learned to spread out the manufacture of their military hardware among many different states and congressional districts, so that Congress regularly backs programs that the Pentagon itself says it does not need or want. For example, submarines we do not need are still built in Connecticut because Sen. Chris Dodd and Sen. Joe Lieberman have acquired an enormous amount of power, albeit from wildly different circumstances. And, of course, there is shortage of Republican congressman whose willingness to bemoan big government does not prevent them from showing up at every ribbon cutting of every federally funded project in their district.

There is a yet deeper hypocrisy in the current GOP stance and that has to do with its newness. We did not hear such concern about federal spending when they paid for the Iraq War not just with no off-sets, but by failing to put it on the books at all. We did not hear such concerns raised when they passed the Medicare Prescription Drug benefit, which was not ?paid for? with either a budgetary offset or an increase in taxes. And, the GOP argues that we cannot allow Bush tax cuts to expire at the end of the year as planned, even though when those tax cuts were originally passed, the GOP fudged the degree of fiscal irresponsibility the tax cuts entailed by explicitly stating that they would expire at this time, thus obscuring the long-term damage they caused to the fiscal health of the country.

Over at VoxNova [1], they have ably demonstrated another instance of GOP hypocrisy. While House Minority Leader John Boehner was quick to jump on the bandwagon of protest over the false charge that the new health care bill was going to be funding abortion, both the GOP and its allied organizations like the National Right-to-Life Committee made no similar protests when President George W. Bush?s Medicare Advantage program placed no restrictions on the use of federal funding for abortion whatsoever.

I can respect someone with whom I disagree. But, it is well nigh to impossible to respect politicians whose hypocrisy astounds, even by Washington standards. I grew up when the Republican Party in Congress was led by men like Senators Howard Baker and Bib Dole and Congressmen John Rhodes and Bob Michel. I did not agree with all of their positions, but I did not find myself shaking me head in disgust when I listened to them speak either. There has been a decline in leadership and a rise in hypocrisy and that does not bode well for the future of the Republican Party or for the future of the country.

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[1] http://vox-nova.com/2010/07/15/an-real-life-example-of-abortion-funding/