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Democrats Spoofed by Tea Party

It is becoming increasingly clear that President Obama and Democrats need pressure from within the party to force them to stand their ground against the Tea Party insurrection in Congress. As was evident in the recent debt ceiling fiasco, conservative House Republicans have gravitated even farther to the right because of pressure from the Tea Party movement. Democrats are being towed along kicking and screaming. Well, screaming. That's why there is an urgent need to form a Hot Chocolate Party to force Democrats to start acting like Democrats.

Democrats control the White House and the Senate but they don't act like the party in control. And that's because they rarely control anything, including their own party members. The public agenda is being driven by the Tea Party, a small sect that has become so powerful that its members forced an embarrassed House Speaker John Boehner to withdraw his debt ceiling bill from the floor.

To his credit, Boehner was smart enough to regroup and give the Tea Party what it wanted. To their discredit, President Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid agreed to give the Tea Party zealots nearly everything they asked for. In the end, that still wasn't enough to satisfy them.

How did Democrats lose their way?

President Obama, the titular head of the party, has usually adopted sensible public policy

THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry



stances on such issues as the public option in health care and letting the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy expire. In the face of withering Republican opposition, however, Obama has usually capitulated.

For example, candidate Obama campaigned for universal health

This was the beginning of the end.

Last December, Republicans pretended to oppose extending long-term unemployment benefits, a major goal of Democrats. But the quid pro quo was that Republicans would go along with the extension if Obama would agree to a 2-year extension of all Bush tax cuts. That was another time I wanted President Obama to call the GOP bluff, but apparently fighting is not in his DNA.

With high unemployment in his native Ohio, Boehner could not afford to look into the eyes of jobless voters back home and tell them unemployment benefits

deficit showdown was perhaps the worst example of Democrats being impotent.

An angry Barack Obama acknowledged how bad the deal was after Boehner walked out of their deficit reduction talks and refused to return his telephone calls.

Listen again to why Obama was angry: “Essentially, what we had offered Speaker Boehner was over a trillion dollars in cuts to discretionary spending, both domestic and defense,” Obama said in a July 22 news conference. “We then offered an additional \$650 billion in cuts to entitlement programs – Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security.”

Here's the part that proved that the president was willing to give up too much: “We were offering a deal that called for as much discretionary savings as the Gang of Six [a panel Democratic and Republican lawmakers]. We were calling for taxes that were less than what the Gang of Six had proposed.”

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was equally pathetic in trying to advance his deficit proposal. He said his bill did not require any new taxes, something he hoped would satisfy Republicans. It didn't.

Enough of these wimpy Democrats. When challenged by Republicans, they roll over early and often. Democrats roll over so easily that they should be renamed the Roth IRA Party.

Democrats control the White House and the Senate but they don't act like the party in control

care. At the time, the U.S. was the only industrialized country in the world that did not provide universal health care. Many progressives wanted a single-payer plan similar to the one in Canada. With such a powerful health care lobby in Washington, there was little chance of achieving that goal. So they agreed to go along with the public option, a government health insurance agency that competes with private insurance companies.

Thanks to a president eager to strike a deal with the Party of No, the public option was removed as an option before the legislation was passed and signed into law.

should not be extended. But a deal was struck giving Obama the unemployment extension and allowing Boehner and his GOP comrades to protect the super rich.

If the Hot Chocolate Party were in place, it could have insisted that the Bush tax cuts expire, something that would have cut the federal deficit by half. It also could have curtailed the practice U.S. companies hiding most of their assets overseas to keep from paying corporate taxes and ending the public subsidizing vacation homes, private jets and boats for the upper class.

As bad as past deals were, this

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Zero Tolerance Discipline: A Failing Idea

Many school children in America are on summer break right now, but here's a pop quiz about discipline policies in our nation's schools that's just for grownups:

Would you suspend a student from school for four months for sharpening his pencil without permission and giving the teacher a “threatening” look when asked to sit down?

Would you expel a student from school for the rest of a school year for poking another student with a ballpoint pen during an exam?

Would you expel a student from school permanently because her possession of an antibiotic violated your school's zero-tolerance drug policy?

Would you call the police, handcuff, and then expel a student who started a snowball fight on school grounds?

If you answered ‘no’ to any of these questions because they sounded too unfair to be the result of an actual policy, give yourself a failing grade. All four are real examples of zero tolerance school discipline policies in Massachusetts—and there are thousands of stories like these throughout that state and across the country. Suspended and expelled students are at greater risk of dropping out of school and dropping into the prison pipeline, and using automatic suspensions

CHILD WATCH

Marian Wright Edelman



and expulsions for minor infractions often has a major negative effect on a child's entire future.

New research analyzing the data from the 2009 – 2010 school year

truancy. (I've never understood why you suspend or expel children for not coming to school rather than finding out why!) Of the approximately 30,000 “unassigned offenses,” two-thirds received out of school suspension, resulting in 57,000 lost days of school. What's more, because Massachusetts schools aren't currently required to report “unassigned offenses” resulting in exclusions of 10 days or less for regular education students, the estimated actual number of disciplinary exclusions is likely at least two to three times the 60,000

gram. Her final report, “Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline: Analyzing Zero Tolerance School Discipline Policies and Identifying Strategic Opportunities for Intervention,” received an award from the school's faculty and sheds new light on the need to address these harmful policies.

Added together, the tens of thousands of suspensions—many for minor infractions—have an enormous negative impact. As Wilka explains, “Children start down the path to prison in both jarring and subtle ways. It's not just the teenager who ends up behind bars; it's also the child who is suspended for disruptive behavior, misses a few days of school, and begins to feel disconnected. The more disconnected he becomes, the more he acts out in class. This cycle repeats. National research suggests that this child is three times more likely to drop out of school by 10th grade than a student who has never been suspended; and dropping out triples the likelihood this child will end up incarcerated later in life.”

This report bolsters the work Massachusetts community leaders and advocates are already doing to take action against harsh one-size-fits-all policies and call for more balanced approaches.

Suspended and expelled students are at greater risk of dropping out of school and dropping into the prison pipeline, and using automatic suspensions and expulsions for minor infractions often has a major negative effect on a child's entire future

in Massachusetts found nearly 60,000 school expulsions and suspensions. Just over half of them were for “unassigned offenses” – nonviolent, noncriminal offenses, which can include behavioral issues such as swearing, talking back to a teacher, and

reported.

Jen Vorse Wilka, a student at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, found these startling statistics when she studied zero tolerance discipline policies in Massachusetts as part of her master's degree pro-

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