

Republicans Advance ‘Entitlement’ Lies

Even after the White House and Congress stagger to reach a last-minute deal to avert yet another budget crisis, there is a fundamental difference in approach between the Obama administration and House Republicans. And those two stark approaches to governing goes to the type of society we want to be: one that protects the needy or one that protects the greedy.

Surprisingly, the Republicans’ position is crystal clear: they favor extending special favors to the wealthy at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society.

“Republicans say that from here on, we should do only spending cuts, focusing on entitlement programs. But their approach to entitlements is highly selective — they seek to cut the entitlement programs on the spending side of the budget, whose benefits go overwhelmingly to middle-class and poor families. But they want no deficit reduction to come from the most wasteful and inefficient of entitlements — those embedded in the tax code,” observed Robert Greenstein, director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Republican leaders say they will not budge on cutting tax expenditures, a term for tax deductions, exclusions, credits, and other tax preferences that disproportionately benefit the wealthy.

“Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell proclaimed in an op-ed ... ‘I have news for [President Obama]: the moment that he and virtually every other elected Democrat in Washington signed



THE CURRY REPORT

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off on the terms of the current arrangement, it was the last word on taxes. That debate is over,” Greenstein wrote. “Similarly, House Speaker John Boehner’s staff declared, ‘As far as we’re concerned, the tax issue is off the table.’ This, despite the fact that Boehner proposed several hundred billion dollars of additional revenues during his negotiations with President Obama only a few weeks ago.”

What is it that Republicans are so adamant about protecting?

As Greenstein notes, “Tax expenditures cost about \$1.1 trillion a year, far more than Social Security or than Medicare and Medicaid combined and nearly two-thirds more than the total cost of all non-defense discretionary programs.”

It is such a logical – and fair – place to cut that Martin Feldstein, former chair of President Reagan’s Council of Economic Advisers, said that “cutting tax expenditures is really the best way to reduce government spending.”

The Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center esti-

mates that for tax year 2011, the top fifth of the population will receive 66 percent of the \$1.1 trillion in individual tax-expenditure benefits (the top 1 percent alone will receive 23.9 percent of the benefits), the middle 60 percent of the population will receive slightly more than 31 percent of the benefits, and the bottom 20 percent of the population will receive only 2.8 percent.

The headline of another CBPP report says it all: “Contrary to ‘Entitlement Society’ Rhetoric, Over Nine-Tenths of Entitlement Benefits Go to Elderly, Disabled,

was arguing the opposite position in a surreptitiously recorded video that contributed to his defeat against President Obama.

“In Obama’s ‘entitlement society,’ everyone receives the same or similar rewards, regardless of education, effort and willingness to take risk,” Romney charged. “Once we thought ‘entitlement’ meant that Americans were entitled to the privilege of trying to succeed in the greatest country in the world. Americans fought and died to earn and protect that entitlement. But today the new entitlement battle is over the size of the

of working households. People who are neither elderly nor disabled – and do not live in a working household – received only 9 percent of the benefits.”

Moreover, the study found, “the vast bulk of that 9 percent goes for medical care, unemployment insurance benefits (which individuals must have a significant work history to receive), Social Security survivor benefits for the children and spouses of deceased workers, and Social Security benefits for retirees between ages 62 and 64. Seven out of the 9 percentage points go for one of these four purposes.”

Contrary to public perception, it is Whites who benefits disproportionately from entitlements.

“Also, contrary to what a substantial share of Americans may assume, non-Hispanic whites receive slightly more than their proportionate share of entitlement benefits,” the CBPP study found. “Non-Hispanic whites accounted for 64 percent of the population in 2010 and received 69 percent of the entitlement benefits.”

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or Working Households.”

According to the study issued last year: “...More than 90 percent of the benefit dollars that entitlement and other mandatory programs spend go to assist people who are elderly, seriously disabled, or members of working households – not to able-bodied, working-age Americans who choose not to work.”

Mitt Romney

check you get from Washington.”

That was a callous lie. In fact, the CBPP study notes, “Federal budget and Census data show that, in 2010, 91 percent of the benefit dollars from entitlement and other mandatory programs went to the elderly (people 65 and over), the seriously disabled, and members

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