

CHAPTER 6

REPUBLICAN HYPOCRITES

Republicans usually go around saying they want “less government.” That kind of sounds like Libertarians, right?

Would Republicans end the war on drugs, end mandatory Social Security and Medicare, repeal the Patriot Act, bring our troops home from around the world, and slash the military budget?

Of course they wouldn't. (But Libertarians would.)

What's even more amazing is how often Republicans work to massively expand government.

Let's look at a few examples: Mitt Romney, John McCain, George Bushes I and II, those new Tea Party Republicans, and that conservative icon: President Ronald Reagan.

Read my lips: “Ronald Reagan grew government much more than Bill Clinton.” That's not what you hear every day, but it's true. Do the research yourself if you don't believe me, and if you're a Republican, feel free to come up with all kinds of excuses. If you can't handle the truth, I can't make you. Some conservatives will admit that Presidents George Bush (I and II) grew government, but they hold up Reagan as a government-cutting ideal.

WES BENEDICT

In real life, Ronald Reagan signed one gigantic spending bill after another. During his administration, military spending grew a ton, but nothing else got cut, so overall spending went way up. Reagan boosted import tariffs and trade restrictions. Reagan cut marginal income tax rates—but he also raised Social Security taxes. Reagan increased farm subsidies. Federal spending under Reagan grew from \$678 billion to \$1.14 trillion.

And here's the amazing thing: when you measure federal spending as a percentage of GDP, the Reagan administration had the *highest spending in American history*. I'm not making that up. The Obama administration is likely to beat him though. (If you're a Reagan lover, maybe you can brag about that.)

Have I offended you yet by accusing Ronald Reagan of growing the government?

I used to worry about offending people. Back when I was executive director of the Libertarian Party, whenever I pointed out Reagan's government growth, quite a few people would complain to me. They'd tell me not to attack Reagan because he was so popular. Finally I set up a poll and asked Libertarian readers this question: "How should Libertarians deal with the myth that Ronald Reagan reduced government?" Sixty percent said, "Libertarians should point out that Reagan grew government." Only eight percent said, "Don't bring it up, to avoid offending his fans."

I'm not just pointing out that Reagan grew government for the shock value. If Reagan and other Republicans actually had a track record of cutting government, that could hurt the case for having a Libertarian Party. But the fact remains, Republicans almost always have grown government, and often even faster than Democrats.

I don't know what it is that lets people so readily ignore reality. But I admit, it happened to me as well! Before I was a Libertarian, I hated Bill Clinton's guts, and I loved Ronald Reagan. In fact, I don't think I was able to admit that Reagan grew government faster than

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY

Clinton until ten years *after* becoming a Libertarian.

Now I think President Bill Clinton may have been the best president in my lifetime! (I was born at the end of Lyndon B. Johnson's term.) That doesn't mean I think he was a good president. I just don't think he achieved as much bad stuff as the others—maybe he was too embroiled in scandals to get as much done.

Let's give some more recent examples of Republicans growing government, and then go backwards in time to the founding of the Libertarian Party in 1971.

The 2012 Republican nominee for president, Mitt Romney, started a healthcare program known as RomneyCare while he was Massachusetts Governor. It became the framework for Obamacare.

Remember the Tea Party? The huge Tea Party protests of 2009 were in response to the bailouts offered by Republican President George W. Bush, and passed with the help of Republicans. In fact, the 2008 Republican presidential nominee, John McCain, is famous for suspending his campaign so he could rush back to Washington to vote for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) bailout bills.

The Tea Party helped kick out some incumbent Republicans in 2010, and replaced them with new Tea Party Republicans. But when it came around to the budget fights in 2011, most of the "Tea Party Congressmen" voted for deals that increased federal spending once again. Of course, those Tea Party Republicans made all kinds of excuses for going along with spending increases. With only a few exceptions, that's what Republicans in Congress do.

The 2012 Republican vice presidential nominee, Paul Ryan, was held up as a "budget hawk." Perhaps by Republican standards he's a budget hawk, but in reality he has a horrible voting record. Ryan voted for the TARP bailouts, the Chrysler and GM bailouts, "No Child Left Behind," the 2003 prescription drug Medicare expansion, and ethanol subsidies. In fact, Paul Ryan's budgets always kept federal spending higher than it was under Clinton! (I'm talking

percentage of GDP.)

A lot of Republicans complained about President Obama's 2009 stimulus plans, but President Bush had his own 2008 stimulus plan, mailing \$300 and \$600 "rebate" checks to individuals and families throughout the U.S., and Republicans supported it.

I think President George W. Bush's worst offenses were the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which will cost trillions of dollars when all is said and done. He also supported the Patriot Act, which not only cost money, but also gave the government more power to violate our rights.

Back in the 1990s, I was excited by Newt Gingrich and the "Contract with America." But Republicans never actually supported eliminating any federal departments. Newt later became sort of famous for presenting wacky new ideas for government programs.

Of course, perhaps the most classic failure was the senior President George H. W. Bush. "Read my lips: no new taxes." I don't have to remind you that Bush reneged on his promise and signed new taxes into law. (I voted for Ross Perot in 1992. That was before I knew about the Libertarian Party. Not that Ross Perot was a libertarian.)

You can find plenty of examples at the state and local levels of Republicans growing government. For one thing, many states have Republican governors and Republican-controlled legislatures, but their budgets always go up faster than inflation plus population growth.

Texas is a good example, and I have more familiarity with Texas politics than other states. Republican Governor Rick Perry and the Republican legislature instituted a new tax on business revenue in 2006. Rick Perry also secured a \$300 million dollar business handout slush fund that he and the two leaders of the legislature could dole out to whomever they chose. That's corporate welfare, a recipe for corruption, and it's as bad as the TARP bailouts. In fact, Rick Perry

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY

gave \$20 million dollars to Countrywide Financial—which later went bankrupt.

Texas Republicans supported creating a new \$3 billion Texas taxpayer-funded medical research center.

Rick Perry signed an executive order hoping to force young Texas schoolgirls to get the HPV vaccine even if it was against their parents' will—meanwhile, his former chief of staff was a lobbyist for Merck, which made the vaccine.

You can find examples of Republicans growing government throughout the U.S. at the state and local levels. An easy way to prove it to yourself is to pick any county that has been controlled by Republicans for the last four years. Look at the county budget today versus four years ago. Feel free to factor in inflation and population growth. Did spending grow? I bet it did!

I also want to mention Republican President Richard Nixon, because he helped inspire the Libertarian Party.

Back in 1971, the American economy was looking weak, and Nixon had a great idea: institute wage and price controls! (How “free market”!) And as a bonus, he decided to take the U.S. dollar completely off the gold standard. Those actions made some free market-loving activists so mad, they decided to found the Libertarian Party.

Going back to 1971, I can't think of one significant government program that Republicans have gotten rid of—not one.

I know that some Republicans reading this chapter will just refuse to believe that Republicans don't want to cut government. Well, I can't do much more than state the facts. I guess some people will just believe what they want to.

Since Republicans don't want to cut government, why do they pretend so much? I'm not totally sure. I think it's mostly to make themselves sound different from Democrats. (It's important to create the illusion of a huge battle between two opposite sides who don't

WES BENEDICT

agree on anything.)

It might also be because many Republican voters have the same attitude—they want to cut government in their imaginations, but not in real life.