



Promises, Lies and the Washington Way

BY RICHARD W. RAHN

AMERICANS ARE TIRED OF UNTRUSTWORTHY LEADERS

Would you vote for someone who you believe knowingly lies to you? The problem for the American people is that candidates from both parties lie on a regular basis, and so it is all too rare that a voter has a choice between someone who will honor his or her promises and someone who will not.

A substantial majority of the American people believe that Hillary Clinton is not a truth-teller — for very good reasons. The fables about Benghazi, her private email server, and the conflicts of interest with the Clinton Foundation are so transparent that only those who live in an alternative universe find her statements the least bit believable. Mrs. Clinton is only unusual among the Washington political class in that her fibs are so blatant and obvious.

More typical are the less-obvious broken promises of many Republicans. For those of you who recall the 2014 congressional election campaign, one of the major themes of Republicans as a party and many individual candidates was a promise to return to "regular order" for budgetary matters. This may seem arcane, but

the major reason for the periodic threats of a government shutdown is the failure of Congress to follow its own rules. The Congressional Budget Act establishes a specific timetable for the congressional budget process, beginning with budget resolution by April 15. All appropriation bills are to have been passed by the House and the Senate and signed into law before the beginning of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1.

In recent years, when the Democrats were in control of Congress, they did not even make a pretense of following the Budget Act rules, and all spending authorization would get lumped into one giant spending bill called a continuing resolution (CR), which continued spending on all things, no matter how absurd and wasteful, with only changes agreed on by both parties and the president in private negotiations. This is how "sequestration" came about. If Congress did not pass the level of spending the president wanted, he would threaten to veto the CR, which was supposed to cut off the funding for the operation of the government — except for "non-essentials" like the National Park Service and World War II memorial (things that the people really wanted), rather than the Housing and Urban Development bureaucracy, which could have disappeared without anyone noticing.

The Republicans had promised to end this charade by actually passing individual appropriation bills to be signed separately by the president. So-called discretionary spending (e.g., defense and transportation) is lumped into 12 giant spending bills. The so-called entitlements (Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid) follow a different set of rules. As of Sept. 1, only seven appropriation bills have passed the House, and only two have passed the Senate (one, of course, being that for the legislative branch spending). None have gone to final passage and been sent to the president for his signature. Congress now has less than a month to pass all of these spending bills and send them to the president. If they do not do this, which is a safe bet, we are back to a CR with the unnecessary fight about a "government shutdown."

What we will be seeing over the next month is a real test of those in the Republican congressional leadership and their willingness to fulfill their campaign promises. Remember

that the Constitution gives control over spending to Congress, not the president. If you do not like specific spending programs, along with the never-ending waste, fraud and abuse, it is now in the lap of the Republicans. Paul Ryan is a responsible member of the House Republican leadership. He has properly proposed cutting the U.S. contribution to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (including National Public Radio), among many other things.

The Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has turned from being an economic research organization to a lobbyist for global tax increases, which would hurt many American businesses and individuals. NPR is to a large extent a propaganda organization for the Democrats, funded by Republican taxpayers. Given that there are thousands of private radio and TV stations with programming across the entire political spectrum, why should taxpayers fund an organization with a particular political agenda? Republicans who vote to fund the OECD and NPR will be clearly voting against the wishes of most of their voters.

Will the Republicans really be so stupid as to unnecessarily set themselves up to be blamed for an Obama-inspired government shutdown? Unfortunately, the answer is likely yes. My Cato colleague, Chris Edwards, has recently written an excellent paper, "Why the Federal Government Fails," which explains much of this in more detail (it is available on the Cato.org website for free.) Real change is likely to come about only when more Republicans suffer primary campaign defeats, like Republican House Majority Eric Cantor did, and when campaign donors go on strike if their candidates continue business as usual. The polls and the primary presidential election campaigns are sending a very clear message to the Washington political establishment — stop lying to us.

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