



Testing for Turncoats

By Richard W. Rahn

REPUBLICANS WHO FIGHT BUDGET CUTS HAVE ABANDONED THEIR PRINCIPLES

Do you think the federal government spends too much? Taxes too much? And should reduce the deficit? Most Americans agree except when it comes to specific spending programs they like. The people “hire” members of Congress to make these difficult choices. Much of what the federal government does is not authorized by the Constitution or justified by proper cost-benefit analysis, so is without merit.

President Trump released his “short budget” this past week, which is a general statement of his priorities and changes he wishes to make in the “discretionary” portion of the budget, while setting aside any recommendations for changes to the Social Security and medical entitlements (which account for more than 50 percent of all spending), until the presentation of the full budget in a couple of months. Predictably, the special interests immediately sent out their press releases and videos explaining that if the program they are wedded to is cut or eliminated, it will mean the end of civilization as we know it, and worse.

Most every government program does some good for a few individuals, if only by accident, even though the entire program stinks and is a clear negative. There are many programs and spending projects that have something about protecting us from climate change in their title or mission statement. Nothing the federal government has done to date, as shown by their own data,

has protected us from climate change, despite the expenditure of hundreds of billions of dollars and millions of lost jobs.

The Trump administration has just proposed eliminating the subsidy to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, including the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR), and the subsidy to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). PBS and NPR are well endowed and obtain major private-sector support; and given that many of their programs have substantial audiences, they would have no trouble attracting all of the private advertising dollars they need — particularly given its high-income audience. NPR is notorious for its leftist bias, and anyone who is at all aware can usually pick up the bias in the news programming in just a few minutes.

Up to the end of this last year, Diane Rehm had a morning talk show on NPR for several decades. She would invariably pick three guests representing the Democrat-liberal-statist point of view and one guest representing the Republican, libertarian or free-market point of view (as I and many of my free-market colleagues experienced firsthand). MSNBC and CNN engage in a somewhat similar bias in their selection of guests, while Fox tends to select more guests who are conservatives, Republicans or libertarians. MSNBC, CNN, Fox and all the rest, except for PBS and NPR, are privately owned and not beholden to taxpayer subsidies, so they are free to choose any point of view they wish — with the size of their audiences being the judge of the program strategies (note: on the basis of ratings, the Fox strategy seems to be winning).

PBS and NPR fund themselves, in part, through taxpayer coercion — that is, taxpayers who disagree with their editorial positions and bias are still forced to pay under the threat of fines or even jail. This is not only offensive and immoral but goes against the ideals of the American Founders and the Constitution. The original rationale for PBS and NPR was to give Americans more diversity in point of view and to present “higher level programming” (meaning programming that appeals to the liberal elitist —

such as opera — rather than programming that appeals to most Americans — football). In an age where there is almost infinite programming available to every possible taste, any rationale for continued subsidies to NPR and PBS has long since passed.

Several decades ago, the OECD was a rather benign international organization that promoted trade among its members (the rich democracies) and produced useful statistics. But then the European high-tax states, with their tax-free salaries, gradually gained control of the organization and turned it into a lobby for higher taxes on others, and against global tax competition, under the guise of “tax harmonization” and tax information-sharing among countries, no matter how corrupt they may be. It has undermined national sovereignty by pressuring jurisdictions to give up their financial privacy protections and the ability to choose their own tax policies. Cato Institute economist Dan Mitchell, an expert of the OECD, has argued “that per dollar spent, OECD subsidies may be the most destructively wasteful part of the federal budget.”

The only real constituencies for the OECD are the State Department bureaucrats who get to travel and dine at the Paris headquarters of the OECD, the political lackeys they bring along and, of course, those who believe in less liberty and global government.

Republicans are supposed to be against higher taxes and government-controlled speech, so those who vote to override the administration’s defunding requests for PBS, NPR and the OECD are lacking both in political principle and failing in their fiduciary responsibility to the American people. There will be turncoats, but there will also be those who let the voters know who the turncoats are.

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