



## The Paul Ryan Problem

by Richard W. Rahn

NICE GUYS ARE NO MATCH FOR THE RUTHLESS WAYS OF THEIR OPPONENTS

It is tough to play hardball with your friends. Have you ever known someone who was exceptionally smart, very personable and highly accomplished, but was not particularly good at managing a large number of independently minded people? I have. His name is Paul Ryan.

Speaker of the House Ryan has a job that he did not seek and said he did not want. Unlike most members of Congress, Mr. Ryan is very knowledgeable about most of the issues he deals with — he is a bit of policy wonk. He has a solid understanding of economics, and especially tax economics.

Yet for all his knowledge and experience, he (and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell) has lost control of the schedule. Many times, we all heard Mr. Ryan and Mr. McConnell say if they won a majority of Republicans in the Congress and the

White House they would get things done in an orderly fashion. In particular, they said they would go back to “regular order,” which meant that the Budget Act would be complied with. The budget is supposed to be passed by a date certain in the spring, and the various appropriations chairmen and their committees are supposed to work out the spending in each of their specific areas (e.g., defense, state, treasury, etc.) by a date certain before the new fiscal year. This is in contrast to what has been happening in recent years where the budgets are not agreed to or passed late, and all of the spending bills get lumped into one huge bill or a continuing resolution. This sets up the reoccurring threat of a “government” shutdown. If each bill were passed on time and separately, individual government departments could shut down but not the whole government.

I like Paul Ryan, as most everyone who meets him does (he once told me the first time we met was when he was a 17-year-old intern for Jack Kemp). He is a genuine, nice and decent man with real principles — the type of person you would like to have as a friend or neighbor. But he now has a job where you need to be very tough with your friends, which could mean removing them from positions of power within the Congress, or taking away discretionary benefits. Lyndon Johnson understood how to use power when he was Senate majority leader. He was not particularly well-liked and not a nice man, but he got things done.

Managing largely independent people is tough, especially when you cannot fire them or cut or increase their pay. (Those of us who have tried to manage college faculty know the problem.) Mr. Ryan and Mr. McConnell made a huge mistake when they let the calendar (regular order) get away from them. Imagine if they had said to their colleagues, “We are serious about getting things done on time, and if they are not done on time, we will cancel the recesses and stay in session until they are done.” Like every family, members of Congress like to plan their vacations, reserve the hotels or resorts and lock up their airline tickets. You can well imagine what their spouses and children would say to them if they announced the family vacation was canceled because they had not done their job on time.

Paul Ryan is not the type of guy who would want to spoil anyone’s vacation, but because he gave in on one of those things within his control — the calendar — he found himself in a big pickle, with the debt limit and budget all coming together at the same time. President Trump, who is not as nice as Mr. Ryan but a get-it-done fellow, made a deal with the Democrats, which would have never been necessary if Mr. Ryan and Mr. McConnell had done their jobs on time. Students, members of the military, and workers in the private sector are usually penalized, or worse, for not meeting critical deadlines. Why should members of Congress and their leaders get a free pass?

Both Mr. Ryan and Mr. McConnell are too beholden to the traditional way of doing things, unlike their opponents. The official revenue “scoring” office in Congress has had a dismal record with Obamacare and with tax cut projections. Their models do not sufficiently account for how much people’s behavior changes over a period of years because of change in tax rates, both positive and negative. Yes, a tax cut increases the deficit in the short run, but I am willing to bet that any corporate rate cut down to 15 percent will “pay for itself” within 10 years owing to increased economic growth. Paul Ryan understands this, but at the moment appears to be holding himself hostage to the flaky numbers from the congressional tax office.

Mr. McConnell continues to defend the filibuster even though it is almost certain the Democrats will get rid of it whenever they regain control of the Senate. Mr. McConnell and Mr. Ryan may be old-school gentlemen, but their opponents are not. Draining the swamp will not come from people who don’t want to offend the Washington establishment. Will Paul Ryan decide that fulfilling promises he and other made is ultimately more important than being popular with the Washington elite?

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<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/sep/11/paul-ryan-suffers-from-being-timid/>