



Why Do Conservatives Vote Against Their Own Interests?

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by: Robert Weiner and Jaime Ravenet, Michigan Chronicle | Op-Ed

Michigan Congressman John Conyers, Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus, raised a compelling question in a conversation the other day: “Why do conservatives vote against their own interests?” If we can answer this, we might reach the common ground to solve the country’s economic, debt, and growing income disparity issues.

Let’s get this much out of the way: conservatives do vote against their own interests. Pundits on the right may try to undermine Conyers’ question as being couched in terms that favor the Democratic Congressman’s side of the aisle, but deflecting the question means explaining away historical facts. Under Democratic presidents since 1930, who pursued agendas emphasizing people programs while pressing tax breaks for middle and lower incomes and resisting tax breaks for the wealthy, the average GDP increased by 5.4%, compared to a 1.6% average GDP increase during the presidencies of their Republican counterparts. The Republicans moved to cut taxes on the wealthiest Americans and gained support by calling them “job creators.”

This data from the Commerce Department and OMB proves that business and the economy boom under Democratic presidents, but bust under Republicans. The data counters the Republicans’ claims that the rich tax cuts ever really “trickle down” or are good for business or anyone but the very rich. By the numbers, votes for tax-cutting Republicans since 1930 actually have been votes against businesses’ financial security. “Trickle Down” has not worked since Herbert Hoover tried it and failed.

So the question stands: why do conservatives vote against themselves? Inaccurately perceived self interest seems to be the reason. People want to get money from greater tax cuts if they are already wealthy (and if they are not, they believe the Republicans’ illusion that they will become rich quicker or make a company do more business by the policy). The accurate legacy of the Republicans tax-cutting agenda is smaller paychecks for the average American. The numbers are irrefutable.

The conservatives’ campaigns, when candidates can take time away from attacking each other, boil down to little more than incessant repetition of vague promises to resurrect the American Dream with pure rhetoric, beating voters over the head with tax-cutting.

Recent studies from both at home and abroad detail a disturbing trend: it is now harder to transcend class in the U.S. than in our Western European counterparts like England, Denmark, and

Sweden. We no longer lead in our own American dream of upward mobility. We've done it to ourselves. There is an ever-growing "mobility gap" in the U.S. keeping poor people from being able to rise while keeping the wealthiest of Americans more financially secure. For the first time in generations, it is actually easier for people at the lowest income levels in those countries, which conservatives keep attacking in the debates as "socialist", to rise than it is for Americans.

While both sides of any debate assume they are working with all the facts, conservatives are more likely to point fingers at President Obama than to address the fact that their tax-cutting programs amount to corporate welfare. As Bill Clinton says in his new book, Back to Work, the outcome of three decades of conservative fiscal policies focused on cutting taxes and deregulating industry has left voters facing high unemployment while executives collect six and seven figure bonuses. The top 1% in America increased their income 18-fold over the last 30 years while the rest of the country has stayed stagnant. The U.S. Government Accounting Office reported that tax policy favoring the rich has helped cause the income disparity and the highest poverty numbers since the Great Depression.

The Koch brothers have been exposed as major funders of the "grassroots" Tea Party movement – and the money has meant advertising, a big influence in how voters vote. When conservatives cut taxes on corporate bosses and defund social programs, the very-very rich get richer and everybody else – including the overwhelming majority of conservatives-- get poorer, yet conservative politicians somehow gain from that.

Conservatives campaign on promises of restoring the American Dream, but they ignore the facts concerning whom their policies actually benefit. In the end, their policies diminish overall economic mobility. When conservatives talk about "focusing on the family", what they really mean is they want you to worry about your family to deflect the economic issues that they are not solving and in fact are making worse. If you are preoccupied with your empty wallet, you are less likely to notice their sponsors' bulging pockets. The liberty conservatives espouse should actually cause them to support more equitable taxing.

So to answer Conyers' question, conservatives must be voting to make the top 1% rich because under their policies, no one else ever gets there.

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