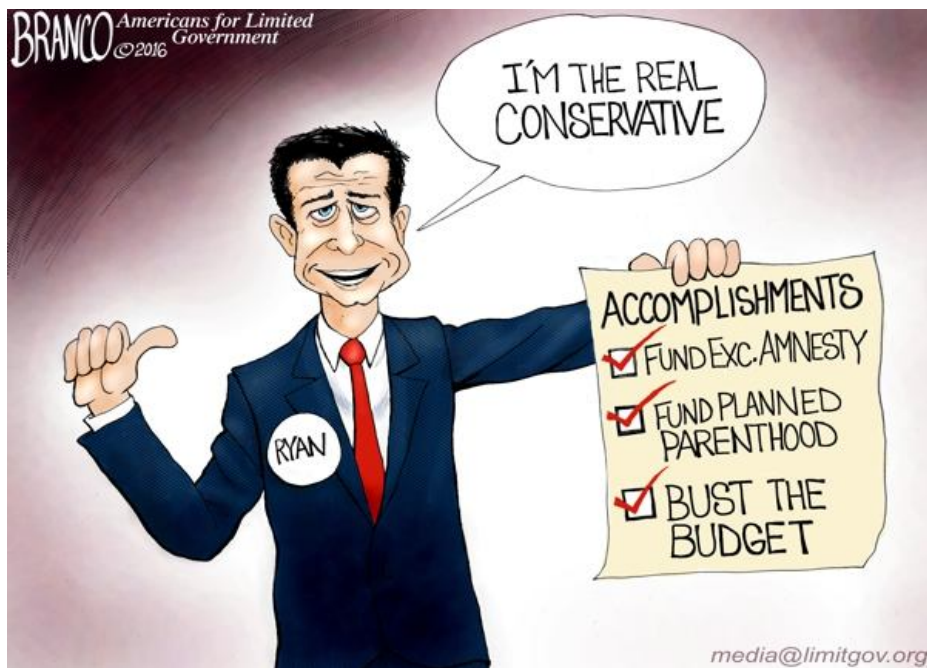


# Paul Ryan: True Conservative or Enemy of the Base?

## An analysis of the Relationship between the Tea Party and the GOP



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# Table of Content

<b>Table of Content .....</b>	<b>p. 3</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>p. 6</b>
<b>Chapter 2: The Rise of the Conservative Movement.....</b>	<b>p. 16</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>p. 16</b>
<b>Ayn Rand, William F. Buckley and Barry Goldwater:</b>	
<b>The Reinvention of Conservatism.....</b>	<b>p. 17</b>
<b>Nixon and the Silent Majority.....</b>	<b>p. 21</b>
<b>Reagan’s Conservative Coalition.....</b>	<b>p. 22</b>
<b>Post-Reagan Reaganism: The Presidency of George H.W. Bush.....</b>	<b>p. 25</b>
<b>Clinton and the Gingrich Revolutionaries.....</b>	<b>p. 28</b>
<b>Chapter 3: The Early Years of a Rising Star.....</b>	<b>p. 34</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>p. 34</b>
<b>A Moderate District Electing a True Conservative.....</b>	<b>p. 35</b>
<b>Ryan’s First Year in Congress.....</b>	<b>p. 38</b>
<b>The Rise of Compassionate Conservatism.....</b>	<b>p. 41</b>
<b>Domestic Politics under a Foreign Policy Administration.....</b>	<b>p. 45</b>
<b>The Conservative Dream of a Tax Code Overhaul.....</b>	<b>p. 46</b>
<b>Privatizing Entitlements: The Fight over Welfare Reform.....</b>	<b>p. 52</b>
<b>Leaving Office.....</b>	<b>p. 57</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Understanding the Tea Party.....</b>	<b>p. 58</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>p. 58</b>
<b>A three legged movement: Grassroots Tea Party organizations.....</b>	<b>p. 59</b>
<b>The Movement’s Deep Story.....</b>	<b>p. 60</b>

<b>The Original Origin Story.....</b>	<b>p. 63</b>
<b>Roving Billionaires.....</b>	<b>p. 65</b>
<b>Right-Wing Media Purveyors.....</b>	<b>p. 72</b>
<b>The Tea Party Was Born.....</b>	<b>p. 74</b>
<b>Chapter 5: A Conservative Dream Named Paul Ryan.....</b>	<b>p. 75</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>p. 75</b>
<b>A Roadmap for America’s Future and the Young Guns.....</b>	<b>p. 75</b>
<b>A New Kid in Town: The Tea Party in Congress.....</b>	<b>p. 81</b>
<b>The Primaries: Anyone but Romney (?)......</b>	<b>p. 84</b>
<b>The Donors and the GOP Nominee.....</b>	<b>p. 88</b>
<b>In Search for Momentum.....</b>	<b>p. 90</b>
<b>Chapter 6: A Conservative Nightmare Called Paul Ryan.....</b>	<b>p. 95</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>p. 95</b>
<b>Evaluating the Disaster.....</b>	<b>p. 96</b>
<b>Immigration Reform and the Conservative Attack.....</b>	<b>p. 99</b>
<b>Another Government Shutdown.....</b>	<b>p.106</b>
<b>Republican Obstructionism and the End of John Boehner.....</b>	<b>p.109</b>
<b>Leading the Party .....</b>	<b>p.113</b>
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>p.118</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>p.124</b>

## List of Abbreviations

<b>AFP</b>	Americans for Prosperity
<b>AMT</b>	Alternative Minimum Tax
<b>CSE</b>	Citizens for a Sound Economy
<b>DACA</b>	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
<b>DC</b>	District of Columbia
<b>DNC</b>	Democratic National Convention
<b>GOP</b>	Grand Old Party; the Republican Party
<b>Gov.</b>	Governor
<b>NRA</b>	National Rifle Association
<b>PAC</b>	Political Action Committee
<b>Rep.</b>	Representative
<b>RNC</b>	Republican National Convention
<b>Sen.</b>	Senator
<b>VP</b>	Vice President

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2009, the American political system experienced a minor revolution, when anger about the bailouts and a viral video of *CNBC* reporter Rick Santelli ranting about the subsidization of “losers”<sup>1</sup> by the Obama administration resulted in the rise of a new movement that quickly gained public appreciation as the conservative answer to President Obama. The movement aimed to take control of the Grand Old Party (GOP) and reform her from the ground up. The party had been in bad shape since 2006 and was looking for a new image. With the rise of the Tea Party, the base of the Republican Party was energized and ready to take over America’s political landscape. The following elections, the 2010 midterms, resulted in a major victory for the GOP, and many credited the Tea Party for the 63-seat gain the Republicans enjoyed in the House.

Simultaneously with the rise of the Tea Party, a young Representative (Rep.) from Wisconsin was stepping out of the shadows of the Capitol and into the spotlights as one of the GOP’s future leaders. Paul Ryan, by then 39 years old, had been a Congressman since 1999 and had spent most his time working behind the scenes in the Committee of Ways and Means, where he quickly made a name for himself as a conservative “policy wonk”. By 2010, Ryan was branded one of the GOP’s ‘young guns’, together with Eric Cantor and Kevin McCarthy. The party presented the three representatives as the new, more ideologically conservative faces of the Republican Party, and Ryan, Cantor and McCarthy served as mentors for many of the post-2010 GOP representatives.

Since 2010, Ryan’s star has continuously risen through the ranks of the GOP, with his nomination as the GOP candidate for vice-president (VP) in 2012 and his election as Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2015 - a position he holds to this day – as the highlights of his career thus far. As his ascent to the GOP leadership continued, his relationship with the Tea Party and the Republican base changed. Celebrated by many on the right in the period between 2010 and 2012, Ryan’s image among conservative quickly changed, and by 2015 he was branded a traitor of the conservative cause and an enemy of the conservative base.

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<sup>1</sup> “Rick Santelli and the ‘Rant of the year,’” *Youtube.com*, accessed August 12, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEZB4taSEoA&t=189s>.

The story of the relationship between Paul Ryan and the Tea Party is the story of a political party that has been moving further right for decades, through a process that in recent years accelerated greatly by the relentless activism of conservative outside groups pressuring representatives through campaign finance and the threat of primaries. This thesis will use the story of Paul Ryan's political career in order to understand how the movement has influenced Republican politics. The Paul Ryan - Tea Party relationship is exemplary not just of the relationship between the political leadership of the GOP and its (most) conservative base, but also explains why Washington D.C. was in such an extreme deadlock during most of the Obama presidency and how someone like Donald Trump could have risen as the new face of the conservative movement.

The relationship between the Tea Party and the GOP is highly complex. The Tea Party consists almost solely of Republican voters, but while some are GOP members, others are not. Many Tea Party members distrust the GOP leadership and consider them sellouts, therefore preferring political outsiders over the so-called RINO's (Republican In Name Only). Some Tea Party organizations have close relationships with GOP chapters, but other organizations consider themselves wholly separate from the GOP and, arguing their goal is to further their beliefs rather than to gain political power, refuse even to endorse specific candidates in GOP primaries or general elections.

Since neither the party nor the movement is a single entity, one cannot understand the relationship between the movement and the Republican Party as a whole without understanding the relationship between individual components of both. The complexity of the larger political context and the variety of conditions affecting the relationship between individual GOP representatives and the Tea Party renders a study of relationship between the movement and the party at large undesirable. It is for this reason the preferred research methodology for this thesis is a single case study design. A single case study - defined by Yin as "*an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a "case"), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*"<sup>2</sup> – provides the possibility of conducting an in-depth inquiry into the roles and responsibilities Tea Party voters

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<sup>2</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Application of Case Study Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd., 2012), 4.

expect and demand of their representatives in Washington. It also offers insights into the GOP leadership's continuous struggle to please this segment of their base, despite their eagerness to do so. The selected case for this thesis is Paul Ryan, a deliberate choice resulting from his increasing prominence within the GOP in the last decade as well as his altered relationship with the Tea Party as his star rose higher. As such, the story of the Ryan - Tea Party relationship is exemplary for the relationship between the movement and many prominent Republican politicians.

This thesis argues that Ryan lost his status as a Tea Party hero not because his or the Tea Party views changed significantly, but because his role within the party changed and because the movement's focus shifted from an economic message to a cultural/social message. When the Tea Party first emerged in 2009, Paul Ryan had the image of the GOP's conservative genius and through this role he could express an ideologically consistent story that appealed to the Tea Party, which focused largely on a combination of economic libertarianism, lower taxes, less government involvement and a balanced budget. While many economists criticized Ryan's plans as a supply-side economics fantasy and unrealistic, especially regarding the combination of debt reduction and lower taxes, Tea Party conservatives lauded Ryan's plans as the path forward to a financially stable government and more prosperous country.

After Ryan's nomination for vice-president and the disappointing 2012 election, Ryan returned in Congress as one of the most prominent figures in the Republican caucus, forcing him into an (unofficial) leadership role. As the chair of the House Budget Committee, Ryan played a key role in the budget negotiations with the Obama administration, undermining Tea Party efforts led by Ted Cruz to enforce deep cuts in government spending through a government shutdown. The budget deal forced the Obama administration to enforce significant cuts in government spending and as such was a major victory for fiscal conservatives. From the perspective of Tea Party conservatives, however, the deal allowed the federal government to function the way they so despised and therefore they perceived this deal to be typically Washington establishment and a loss for true conservatives. To them, Ryan did not enforce significant spending cuts but allowed the funding of programs they believed to be detrimental to America. From Obamacare to Planned Parenthood and refugee programs, the budget deal gave conservative forces ammunition to tie Paul



Ryan to these programs. Any form of compromise was unacceptable, because by definition compromise means cooperating with the establishment, thus abandoning the Tea Party agenda.

Simultaneously, the Tea Party and its allies began to shift their focus away from economic issues, instead emphasizing issues related to culture and identity. Opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement, the debates around symbols of the confederacy, anger about illegal immigration and the Supreme Court decision in favor of gay marriage began to highlight the identity politics component of the Tea Party. These elements of the Tea Party were not new, since one of their many grievances with Obama were his 'anti-American' apologetic statements and, as the Birther-movement showed, many doubted Obama's American nationality or his Christian faith,<sup>3</sup> frequently labelling him an Nigerian Muslim. Nonetheless, the economic crisis and the debt crisis demanded much of the public's attention during the 2010-2012 period, and allowed Ryan to play to his strengths and to highlight his most conservative viewpoints. In the period between 2012 and 2016, however, the economy was slowly but surely recovering and various events caused cultural-identity issues to take center stage in Washington. Ryan had always been a social conservative, but, echoing his mentor Jack Kemp, his views on immigration are relatively<sup>4</sup> mild and he attempted to unite the Party behind a (extremely long and difficult) path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. Similar to the budget deal, Tea Party conservatives considered his support for the immigration plan to be a betrayal to their cause rather than a thoroughly conservative compromise.

The Tea Party refused to accept any budget deal that did not repeal Obamacare or the funding for Planned Parenthood and the Tea Party refused to accept any immigration bill that included any path to citizenship. Their distrust of the federal government and their deep conviction that the country is in a downward spiral, results in the stance that any compromise with perspectives other than their own undermines their larger goals and as such accelerates the demise of America. This forces Republican representatives to repudiate any form of compromise with the Democrats and is a major contributing factor to the Washington gridlock during the Obama administration. Furthermore, the GOP establishment was quite pleased with the Tea Party extremism when it focused primarily on economic issues, allowing the party to pursue the reform

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<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, the same people who believed Obama was secretly a Muslim also believed Obama was dangerous because of his ties to the radical pastor Jeremiah Wright.

<sup>4</sup> Mild only in comparison to the Tea Party.

of most government programs as well as the enactment of major tax cuts. When the primary focus shifted to identity politics, however, the Tea Party base demanded a much harsher line than many officials were comfortable with. The GOP had no problem using racist dog whistles in their rhetoric in the past, but many feared the alienation of other voters if they fully adopted the views of Tea Party, as exemplified by the way many Republicans avoided questions on Obama's citizenship. Rather than fully supporting or denouncing the Birther-movement, most Republicans avoided to answer whether they believed Obama was American or not, instead rephrasing the question to a matter of the 'legitimacy' of the concerns of Tea Party Americans. The culturally conservative base, what would soon become the 'alt-right', was no longer pleased with Republican dog whistles and expected real change on issues like immigration. The 2016 Republican base no longer accepted Republicans with a 'moderate'<sup>5</sup> view on immigration, which made the party susceptible for a newcomer like Donald Trump, who loudly proclaimed what GOP politicians had implied for years but never said aloud, which was exactly what this segment of the party base wanted to hear.

The body of academic literature this thesis builds upon consists of two sections. The first section includes those works discussing the evolution of American conservatism since the 1950s and the end of Modern Republicanism. *Why Americans Hate Politics* (1991) and *Why the Right Went Wrong* (2016) are two enlightening works by E.J. Dionne Jr. for understanding the evolution of conservatism in post-war America. Tracing its intellectual roots to Ayn Rand and William F. Buckley (among others) and its political roots to Barry Goldwater, Dionne provides an overview of the various factions and movements that shaped the conservative ideology and rebranded the GOP into an exclusively conservative party. Kim Phillips-Fein uses the New Deal as the starting point for her work *Invisible Hands* (2009), explaining how anti-New Deal politics inspired conservatism and resulted in the Reagan Revolution. Joseph Lowndes' *From the New Deal to the New Right* (2008) examines the role of race in the decline of the New Deal Coalition and the rise of the GOP in the South. Daniel Williams' *God's Own Party* (2010) offers valuable insights into the return of Christian conservatism on the political mainstage, while Geoffrey Kabaservice's *Rule and Ruin* (2012) highlights the demise of the Republican left and center rather than the rise

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<sup>5</sup> Again, these views can only be considered moderate in comparison to the extreme views of the Tea Party base.

of the Republican right. In *What's the Matter with Kansas* (2005), Thomas Frank argues that social issues like abortion attract lower-middle class voters to candidates who are both socially and economically conservative, resulting in many middle-class Americans voting against their own economic interests. Corey Robin's *The Reactionary Mind* (2011) and Patrick Allitt's *The Conservatives* (2009) were essential for understanding the evolution of conservative ideas. Justin Vaïsse provides a detailed description of the neoconservative movement in *Neoconservatism* (2010), and Brian Doherty's *Radicals for Capitalism* as well as J. Burns' *Goddess of the Market* (2009) were valuable sources for the history of libertarianism in general and Ayn Rand in particular.

The second section are those works specifically focused on the history and sociology of the Tea Party. However, the first work that deserves special recognition here has been written almost fifty years prior to the emergence of the Tea Party. Every author on the Tea Party, at some point in their work, will reflect on Richard Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1964). First, because many aspects of the Tea Party movement are reminiscent of Hofstadter's exploration of America's paranoid mind, but also because the Tea Party is directly related to the John Birch Society, the inspiration for Hofstadter's original work. Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson wrote the standard work for understanding the movement. In *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (2013), the two authors dissect the movement into three core elements: grass-roots activists, activist media and 'roving billionaires'. Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto examine Tea Party thought in *Change They Can't Believe in* (2013) and argue that a fundamental fear drives the movement and its sympathizers: the fear of America's best years being behind us and the country only changing for the worse. Similarly, Arlie Russell Hochschild searches for the narrative that drives Tea Party activism, a narrative she captures as the movement's deep story in *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016). Although these authors all acknowledge the importance of the major donors financing both the movement and the GOP, they tend to focus on the grass-roots activists as the core of the movement. In contrast, Jane Mayer's *Dark Money* (2016) highlights the role of Charles and David Koch's network of financiers and organizations in building and supporting the movement as well as the influence they and their allies have within the GOP. Finally, though its release predates the rise of the Tea Party, Robert Greenwald's 2004 documentary *Outfoxed* is an excellent exploration of the strategies and tricks used by *Fox News* to advance its conservative ideology, of which no better

example exists than the first emergence of the Tea Party and the special role *Fox News* played in advertising the movement.

Building on this body of literature, this thesis argues that between 2012 and 2016 priorities for Republican voters shifted away from economic issues and increasingly focused around issues of identity, race and culture. Together with a natural antipathy for those within the party leadership, this shift in priorities explains why a figure like Paul Ryan could go from hero to zero within a few years. With the rise of the Tea Party many of the various forces that had shaped the party for decades began merging into one movement. Exacerbated by national conservative media like Fox News, the GOP electorate across the country became uniform and adopted the most conservative views on all issues important for conservatives. Republican officials could no longer hold moderate positions on certain issues, because the party's base no longer had moderate positions. A social conservative cannot be moderate on immigration or on social security; a fiscal conservative can no longer be in favor of abortion or gay rights. This, along with Reagan's Eleventh Commandment, has been the driving force that made Congress during the Obama presidency the least productive in post-war America.<sup>6</sup> Although conservatives regard Reagan as the symbol of true conservatism, the historical president Reagan would not have been particularly popular among them, considering the more pragmatic decisions Reagan made during his presidency.

Beyond the notion that the GOP has become extremely conservative across the board, this thesis argues that there has been growing discontent among Tea Party voters and the Republican base at large with their representatives. While economic and fiscal conservatism have always been at the core of the Republican Party's message, and even though it were financial and economic issues that sparked the rise of the Tea Party, there has been a clear shift in priorities for the Tea Party electorate during Obama's second term. Though Tea Party conservatism still builds upon the notion that they have lost the country, that America has taken a turn for the worse and that "socialists" are doing everything to undermine the country they love so much, this message has increasingly expressed through social issues rather than economic issues. During Obama's first term Obamacare, "Obamaphones" and other 'welfare programs' were seen as the primary issues undermining American greatness, while during Obama's second term issues like

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<sup>6</sup> Melissa Quinn, "Turns Out the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress Wasn't the 'Least Productive'", *The Daily Signal*, December 30, 2014.

immigration, gay rights and Black Lives Matter increasingly dominated conservative media and sparked anger among conservatives. For Republican representatives it was difficult to mirror this shift in priorities effectively, not because they were uncomfortable with the rhetoric, but because they had an unreliable record on delivering their promises on these issues. Republican representatives had courted conservatives with promises on social issues for decades, but at the federal level rarely delivered.<sup>7</sup> On immigration, the Party base has continuously moved to the right, while the party leadership had concluded in 2013 that a switch to more moderate immigration policies was necessary to appeal to an electorate large enough to win the 2016 presidential race. As a result, conservative voters do not trust their party's leadership to deliver on issues they care about deeply.

Since no academic biography exists yet about Paul Ryan, few academic sources were available to ground this research. Therefore, this thesis is grounded in a wide variety of non-academic source material, a large portion of which consists of newspaper articles and material published by conservative outlets like *Breitbart* and *Drudge Report*. Beyond news articles, the source material also includes interviews given by Paul Ryan, speeches Ryan held on the House floor as well as outside of Congress (like his acceptance speech during the 2012 Republican National Convention), and sources written by Ryan himself (*A Roadmap for America's Future; Remarks from Congressman Paul Ryan*). Newspaper articles are used because they provide insights into various events relevant for this thesis, not just in terms of outcome, but also because through newspaper coverage one can understand the process and debates leading up to those outcomes as well as the various perspectives on the events. Furthermore, newspapers tend to focus on those topics already dictating the Washington agenda, providing additional insight into which issues were dominating public debate at certain points in time. Journalistic outlets used includes *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Wisconsin State Journal*, *The Hill* and *The Capital Times*. Deeply conservative outlets like *Breitbart*, *The Blaze* and *Drudge Report* are important sources for this thesis because they provide insights into those same events from the perspective of American conservatives in general and the Tea Party in particular. How those outlets frame certain issues or events reflects the perception of those issues by Tea Party

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<sup>7</sup> On the state level, social conservatives have had considerable victories in recent years, most notably the severe restrictions on abortions in various states dominated by Republicans.

Americans. While *Breitbart* and *Drudge Report* are quite sensationalist, a more in-depth view into modern conservatism is provided by outlets like *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Review* and *Weekly Standard*. Other sources this thesis relied upon are polls conducted by various organizations, flyers and websites published by Tea Party or Tea Party affiliated organizations, media interviews with Paul Ryan and speeches by Paul Ryan in Congress or during campaign events.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses the history of conservatism since the early fifties. It starts with the objectivist philosophy of Ayn Rand, the conservative writings of William F. Buckley and the nomination of Barry Goldwater as the GOP candidate for the 1964 presidential election, and ends with the impeachment of President Clinton and the resignation of Newt Gingrich. The chapter explains how a conservative movement grew from obscurity to take over the Republican Party, pushing the party continuously to the right of the political spectrum and forcing Republicans to take over increasingly conservative talking points and to be leading the charge on a variety of conservative issues.

The second chapter will focus on the domestic policies of George W. Bush and the rise of a young Paul Ryan. During his election campaign and for the first months of his presidency, George W. Bush had prioritized domestic policy, until the attacks on 9/11 marked his presidency and shifted Washington's focus over to foreign policy. Nonetheless, conservative forces around Bush and in Congress had a very ambitious conservative agenda, successfully pushing for massive tax-cuts and attempting to reform and privatize Social Security. Still largely unknown to the American public, Paul Ryan was making a name for himself in Congress as he worked on these issues as a member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The third chapter will step away from the chronological story in order to discuss the Tea Party in more detail. Since its conception, the Tea Party has been a topic of interest for several researchers, who have written extensively about the Tea Party phenomenon with the goal to understand the history of the movement and the motivations and views of the people behind it. Building on these works, this chapter will explain the history and the rise of the Tea Party, as well as the three main components of the movement, first distinguished by Skocpol and

Williamson.<sup>8</sup> The first component is the grassroots movement, conservatives dissatisfied with developments of the last 30/40 years in economic, socio-economic and a social sense. The second component is conservative media spearheaded by Fox News, providing an explicitly conservative narrative appealing to a particular constituency and feeding them with stories that fit their worldview. The third and final component is the role of dark money and major financial interests supporting Tea Party groups (or organizations claiming to be Tea Party affiliates).

In chapter four and five, focus will shift back to Paul Ryan. With the departure of George W. Bush, Ryan assumes an increasingly prominent role in the political debate and quickly becomes one of the new faces of the GOP. Building on his reputation of being well-versed in conservative thinking and policies, Ryan is presented as a future leader of the new, ideologically even more conservative Republican Party that rose from the ashes of the Bush administration and the Tea party uprising. This reputation eventually earns him a spot on the 2012 Republican ticket as vice-president, but when the elections do not go well for the GOP, Ryan's conservative star begins to fade. The party establishment calls for the party to switch positions on certain policies, which results in a realignment of forces within the GOP. Particularly immigration reform becomes a new benchmark for someone's conservative credentials. By the time Ryan becomes Speaker of the House, few within the conservative movement still consider him truly one of them.

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<sup>8</sup> Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21-26.

## Chapter 2: The Rise of the Conservative Movement

### Introduction

In the period between the first election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the election of Richard Nixon, American politics was dominated by (economically) progressive ideology. But after World War II, conservatives started to reorganize, embracing new conservative thinkers and rallying around new political leaders. Between 1950 and 1980 political realignments and the creation or revival of conservative organizations resulted in an increasingly organized and powerful conservative alliance within the GOP, officially taking over the party when Reagan became President in 1980.

This chapter outlines the most important developments for conservatism in post-war America. The foundation of William F. Buckley's National Review, the philosophical works of Ayn Rand and Barry Goldwater's nomination as the Republican candidate for President marked the revival of conservatism in an era politically dominated by centrists and (to some extent) liberal ideas. After Barry Goldwater's nomination, the GOP continued to expand its conservative base. During the 1968 election, Nixon courted the southern, white vote by appealing to racist sentiments. During the 1970s, the reemergence of the Christian conservative movement began shaping the alliance between Christian conservatives and economic conservatives. Finally, the conservative movement made a 180 degree turn on foreign policy towards a neoconservative interventionist foreign policy. Together, these movements resulted in a new coalition that remodeled the once diverse Republican party into a strictly conservative party. This coalition remains the basis of the GOP to this day.

The election of Reagan as president of the United States is a benchmark moment for the history of American conservatism, not because of what he did during his presidency, but because of his legacy. As the face of the new alliance forged in the 60s and 70s, Reagan redefined what American conservatism and the GOP stood for, and ever since Republicans are held to the Reagan-standard: one is only a true conservative when one is consistent with the Reagan ideology, which is defined not by Reagan's actions, but by current-day interpretations of his speeches and intentions. Reagan became a new standard Republicans had to abide by and the first victim of this new standard would be his vice-president and successor George H. W. Bush.



*Ayn Rand, William F. Buckley and Barry Goldwater: The Reinvention of Conservatism*

While conservatism today is one of the most important, if not the central political philosophy dominating American politics, its dominance has been a relatively recent development. Between the 1930s and the 1960s, politics was being dominated by the New Deal coalition and conservatism was a minority ideology in both parties. During this era, F.D. Roosevelt was elected president three times, largely the result of his Keynesian New Deal response to the economic crisis of the 30's, and his successor was his own vice-president Harry S. Truman. In 1953 Republicans regained power with Eisenhower as their president, but Eisenhower was far from a hardline conservative, supposedly claiming privately that “before I end up, either this Republican Party will reflect progressivism, or I won't be with them anymore.”<sup>9</sup> States and regions now known as the heartland of American conservatism regularly voted for economically progressive candidates, of which ‘Big’ Jim Folsom, twice governor of Alabama, and Lawrence Wetherby, governor of Kentucky, are just two examples. Although there was a strong debate on the exact role of government, ranging from the extent of socio-economic programs to the regulation of, and government involvement in, specific sectors of the economy, there was a general consensus within the mainstream of both parties on notions of ‘good governance’, and government investments in fields as infrastructure and education were generally viewed favorably.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, there were more hardline conservatives during this era, but they generally failed to gain prominence in American politics. The most prominent conservative was Republican senator Robert A. Taft, who unsuccessfully attempted to become the Republican nominee for president three times, and who would eventually become Senate Majority Leader in 1953, shortly before his death. But even a prominent conservative as Taft, who often argued for limited government and whose economic and foreign policies could be described as ultimately libertarian, showed some favorability for government programs, particularly public housing and federal funding for public schools, and was internally criticized by hardline conservatives for supporting these programs.

The renaissance of American conservatism is often traced back to McCarthyism (opposed by both moderate Eisenhower and conservative Taft), the John Birch Society, and the nomination

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<sup>9</sup> E.J. Dionne Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 170.

<sup>10</sup> E.J. Dionne Jr., *Why the Right Went Wrong: Conservatism – From Goldwater to the Tea Party and Beyond* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 39.

of Barry Goldwater as the Republican candidate for the 1964 Presidential elections.<sup>11</sup> McCarthyism and the John Birch Society were the two, then contemporary, examples of (and main sources of inspiration for) Richard Hofstadter's famous notion of *the paranoid style*. Hofstadter considers these two phenomena to be part of a conspiratorial tradition in American politics, where a certain group of outsiders, or *others*, is considered to be an existential threat to the United States, because the *other* is actively attempting to infiltrate, undermine and ultimately destroy American society. These conspiratorial ideas go beyond traditional xenophobic<sup>12</sup> ideas of the *other* undermining society because their culture and values clash with American values and culture. Instead, the destruction of the United States is the *other's* ultimate goal, and they are organized, disciplined and willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve this goal.<sup>13</sup>

While placing McCarthyism and the John Birch Society within a historic tradition, Hofstadter immediately marks them as explicitly different from previous paranoid movements for two reasons. The first distinction was that the previous paranoid movements were preventing the destruction of America and protecting its traits - "fending of threats to a still established way of life"<sup>14</sup> - while the modern movements believed it was already too late. The enemy had already infiltrated every element of American society and was already busy with its destruction from the inside. The second distinction Hofstadter made was the emergence of mass media, providing ample opportunity for conspiratorial thought to spread quickly as well as identifying and personifying the enemy.

The importance of the John Birch Society and McCarthyism - and Hofstadter's analysis of these two phenomena - for understanding modern-day conservatism in general and the Tea Party in particular, is two-fold. First, there are direct and indirect links between the Tea Party and the John Birch Society. Secondly, as has been noted by Skocpol and Williamson, there are strong

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<sup>11</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Note here that while xenophobia generally refers to fear of (a particularly subset of) foreigners based on nationality, the subject of the paranoia described by Hofstadter may be a particular nationality, religion or ideology, or any other form of organizing principle used to label and distinguish people, with one example he used being the masonry.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, November (1964): 79.

<sup>14</sup> Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics", 81.

parallels between the rhetoric of these movements and Tea Party rhetoric, especially when the topic of choice of the latter is Barack Obama or Islam.<sup>15</sup>

The rise of Goldwater within the GOP was evidence of the growing conservative movement and showed that the decade generally known for its liberal revolutions was also the decade where conservatism would revive. Goldwater was a devout conservative and his win over Rockefeller for the Republican nomination proved how much momentum and influence conservatism had within the party. Young conservatives, many of whom inspired by Ayn Rand, enthusiastically supported Goldwater, and this wave of conservatives would in later years come to dominate the GOP, with Ronald Reagan as the most important Goldwater supporter of all. Goldwater's nomination marked the revival of the conservative movement, but his electoral changes were doomed from the start as he would suffer a devastating loss against Lyndon B. Johnson. The only positive result for the Republicans was Goldwater's victory in the Deep South. For the first time since Reconstruction, a Republican was capable of beating a Democrat in Southern states like Georgia and Mississippi.

If Goldwater marked the political revival of conservatism, a decade earlier two other conservatives would symbolize the intellectual revival of conservatism: Ayn Rand and William F. Buckley. Ayn Rand, a Russian Jew who fled to America to escape from communism, was an author and philosopher whose fictional works were aimed to build a case for ultimate individualism. Her first major work *The Fountainhead* was released in 1943 and ensured Rand's rise to fame as an ardent supporter of free market economics. However, it was the release of her magnum opus *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957 which turned her from a free market activist to arguably the most influential American philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Critics - both liberal and conservative - were harsh in their judgements of the book, but its commercial success was incredible: *Atlas Shrugged* became one of the most sold books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with over eight million copies sold by 2011. In the book, Rand described a dystopic America, where collectivism and corrupt government action were leading to the destruction of America. To escape this dystopia, Rand's main character John Galt leads a group of creative individuals in retreating from American society and creating their own secret utopian society hidden in the mountains of Colorado, where they created a completely capitalistic and individualistic society in which

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<sup>15</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 78.

everybody aimed to advance their self-interest and by doing so pushed others to greater achievements as well. John Galt's society was exemplary for Rand's philosophy of *Objectivism*, in which she combined the idea that human development depended on the work of creative individuals - who should therefore have ultimate freedom to pursue their goals - with the notion that a pursuit of one's self-interest was the only rational behavior.<sup>16</sup> Rand denounced notions of societal common interest as wrong and dangerous. The notion of common interest in her view is the result of empathy for other humans, and as such is an emotional response to the struggles of weak people, resulting in collectivist behavior aimed at helping the weak and therefore limiting the individual freedom of those who would shape society's future. From Rand's perspective, ideas like common interests were destructive because they were based on emotions like sympathy and only served to strengthen the power of the state over the individual. Only if people pursued their self-interests would they be motivated to reach their maximum potential. Government action was by definition collectivist and would limit an individual's freedom to pursue its self-interest.

Rand is the philosophical founder of modern Republican conservative thought, but it was William F. Buckley who was the key figure in reviving conservative political thought. By founding the conservative magazine *National Review* in 1955, Buckley was crucial for the revival of the conservative movement, because his magazine would redefine conservatism. Largely due to the work of Frank Meyer, the *National Review* became a paper where two strains of conservatism were combined to argue for a new 'fusionist' conservatism. Ideas of traditional conservatism, which focused on virtue and hierarchy – but therefore also believed in a strong (if limited) state - were combined with libertarian ideas of freedom and individualism. One the one hand, this fusionist conservatism argued for a “belief in an objective moral order... [as] the only firm foundation of individual freedom.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the government undermined personal freedom and limited economic development. From this line of reasoning followed that while the authority of traditions was legitimate, the power of the state was not.

The *National Review* also influenced conservative ideology in another significant way. Its writers and editors had strong anticommunist views and believed the main purpose of foreign policy was to protect the West against communism, which required interventionism and a strong

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<sup>16</sup> J. Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 148.

<sup>17</sup> Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 161.

emphasis on international relations. This was a sharp turn away from the isolationist sentiments traditionally associated with conservatives.<sup>18</sup> Neoconservative ideas on international relations can therefore also be traced back to the *National Review* and its most influential writers.

### ***Nixon and the Silent Majority***

Although the *National Review* redefined conservatism and gave conservatism a voice, it failed to give it a face. The fusionist right was a rather elitist ideology, mostly supported by well-to-do urban conservatives, and opposed populist movements. This limited the appeal of the movement. In 1968, Nixon won the nomination for the Republican Party during a brokered convention, where he presented himself as a representative of neither the conservative nor the moderate Republican wing, but as a unity-candidate. In the general election, Nixon used a platform of states' rights and 'law and order' - including his introduction of the war on drugs - to appeal to Southern voters. This tactic resulted in a major realignment of America's electoral map: following Goldwater's example, Nixon turned the South Republican.<sup>19</sup>

Nixon's election also signaled another crucial development, which in the 70s significantly broadened the conservative base: the return of religious conservatism.<sup>20</sup> Evangelicals had turned their backs on politics since the 1920s, believing they should focus their time and energy on serving god, and involvement in earthly politics was nothing more than a distraction. But starting in the 1950s and intensified by the moral revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s - with sexual liberalism on the rise, the legalization of abortion and the secularization of education - Christian conservatives returned back into the public sphere, and many believed they had the obligation to prevent the moral degeneration of America. One of the early indicators for their growing influence on the Republican Party was Nixon's continuous effort to court the evangelical vote by repeatedly aligning himself with prominent evangelist Billy Graham<sup>21</sup>, which resulted in increasingly strong support by the evangelical movement: "Evangelicals basked in the attention

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 162.

<sup>19</sup> Craig R. Smith, "Ronald Reagan's Rhetorical Re-invention of Conservatism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 103, No 1-2 (2017): 39.

<sup>20</sup> Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 228-230.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.91.

that they received from the White House.”<sup>22</sup> For his reelection, Nixon relied on the works of Kevin Phillips and Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, who all had argued that a focus on the culturally conservative electorates of America would lead to “electoral dominance”<sup>23</sup> by the Republican Party. The strategy had proven itself after Nixon was reelected with 520 electoral votes. Among evangelicals, Nixon won 84 percent of the vote.

Watergate greatly hurt Nixon’s image among evangelicals, many of whom became convinced Nixon had used them for political gain. This was especially the case for Billy Graham personally, who later said he “felt like a sheep led to the slaughter”<sup>24</sup> by Nixon. But while Graham turned his back to politics, other evangelicals like Jerry Falwell continued to strengthen the alliance between the GOP and evangelicals, building on Nixon’s notion of the silent majority and his fight for ‘law and order’. During the Ford and Carter administration, social issues were taking center stage, and for evangelicals it became increasingly clear that the Democrats were not on their side. Despite Carter himself being a devout evangelical, Democrats largely supported abortion, (some) gay rights and the secularization of education, which resulted in evangelicals turning to the Republicans in droves.<sup>25</sup> Ronald Reagan was eager to reach out to them. During his campaign in 1980 Reagan told fifteen thousand conservative religious leaders that “I know you can’t endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing”.<sup>26</sup> By 1980, the influence of Christian conservatism on the GOP was of such significance, that “it was no longer weird to be born-again; it was almost essential.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***Reagan’s Conservative Coalition***

The ‘fusionist’ conservatism of the Buckleyites and the social conservatism of the Christian right, pushed for by groups as the *Moral Majority* of Reverend Jerry Falwell, both found their new leader in Ronald Reagan. In his presidency, ideas of free market, trickle-down economics –

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, 98.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, 179.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 187.

<sup>27</sup> Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 236.

where “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem”<sup>28</sup> - were combined with the social conservatism of the religious right, and created a new alliance; the alliance of social and economic conservatives that defines the Republican base to this day. Reagan rose to the political main stage in the 1960s as a speaker preaching anticommunist conservatism. His standard speech in the early 60s, titled “Encroaching Control”, contrasted capitalism and freedom with the totalitarianism of communism and framed the ideological battle as was war to the death.<sup>29</sup> In 1964 Reagan endorsed Barry Goldwater. A speech he gave in Los Angeles in October in support of Goldwater was filmed and became a nationally aired speech used by the Republican National Committee (RNC) to raise funds for the Goldwater campaign and the GOP at large. In this speech he reiterated the notion of a war between communism and capitalism, and again big government was the first step to communism. Government programs like Johnson’s war on poverty were corrupt, misguided and ineffective. During his 1966 run for the governorship of California, Reagan presented himself as an outsider whose main concerns were economic and fiscal conservatism, combined with ‘law and order’ rhetoric and the idea of compassionate conservatism.<sup>30</sup> In many ways these early speeches reflect Reagan’s policies as governor and president. But the reality of his record is of course more complex and ambiguous than presented in his public speeches. As president, Reagan left many elements of the New Deal and Johnson’s Great Society intact, raised taxes on multiple occasions and offered amnesty to undocumented immigrants.<sup>31</sup> The relationship of his administration with Christian evangelicals was largely symbolic. Meagher describes the alliance of social and economic conservatives in the Reagan administration (and after) as an unequal relationship with economic conservatives as the senior partners and social conservatives as the junior partners who have largely been appeased through “acknowledgements, promises and symbols.”<sup>32</sup>

The presidency of Ronald Reagan has had a profound influence on American politics in general and the Republican party in particular. His presidency has been a turning point in American history, with both the Republican and Democratic party moving right on the political

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<sup>28</sup> “Ronald Reagan; Inaugural Address”, *Youtube.com*, accessed September 10, 2017

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpPt7xGx4Xo>.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, “Ronald Reagan’s Rhetorical Re-invention of Conservatism,” 40-41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, 46-48.

<sup>31</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Meagher, “Death and Taxes: Issue Framing and Conservative Coalition Maintenance,” *Political Science Quarterly* 128, No. 3 (2013): 518.

spectrum during and after his presidency. For conservatives the Reagan era was the ultimate proof that deregulation and privatization were the answers to economic problems; for Republicans, it was proof that economic libertarianism and social-conservatism were a winning combination. Furthermore, the conservative base had become the nominating wing of the party, and Reagan was their ultimate leader. Today, he still is. Reagan's popularity amongst conservatives is exemplified by the never-ending comparisons whenever a new Republican politician is rising in the ranks; inevitably at some point their record and views will be compared to Ronald Reagan, and a stamp of approval is the ultimate honor for a Republican candidate. As Dionne notes: "It is a sign of Reagan's posthumous political success: everyone on the right wants to identify with him, and he thus plays a prophetic and, one might say, even a scriptural role."<sup>33</sup> But the meaning of Reagan's legacy is unsettled and ambiguous. Debates within the Republican party are often framed as various interpretations of Reagan's legacy. Jonathan Chait describes a debate between Rick Perry and Rand Paul during the 2016 primaries as such an instance of clashing interpretations of Reagan: "All sides take as settled fact the premise that Reagan revealed the truth to the world in its entirety forever and ever, and any revisions to the Party canon must make the case that rival claimants have incorrectly interpreted the Reagan writ."<sup>34</sup> The basic difference in interpretation of Reagan's legacy can be described as the difference between the conservative talk of Reagan versus his more pragmatic behavior as governor and president. Hardline conservatives prefer the ideologically conservative Reagan and are therefore opposed to almost any compromise, where more pragmatic Republicans refer to the actions of Reagan in government<sup>35</sup>. However, in a conversation with E.J. Dionne, conservative William Kristol first described this ambiguity as the result of Reagan's transition "from a leader of protest to a plausible, governing conservative", but corrected himself and redefined the ambiguity as the "contrast between the Reagan who got elected and governed, and the Barry Goldwater who lost in a landslide".<sup>36</sup>

Beyond his influence in ideological terms, Reagan's presidency was also a turning point in the ever-increasing polarization of Washington. He popularized the Republican's 'eleventh

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<sup>33</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Chait, "Rand Paul, Rick Perry Holding a Reagan-Off," *New York Magazine*, July 14, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 31-37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, 37.



commandment': "Thou shall not speak ill of any fellow Republican"<sup>37</sup>. Party loyalty became more important every year and bipartisanship became a dangerous enterprise for politicians on both sides of the isles. Agreeing with the opposing party could result in a primary challenge from hardliners within the party.

### ***Post-Reagan Reaganism: The Presidency of George H. W. Bush***

Lee Atwater, campaign manager for George H.W. Bush during the 1988 presidential election, was an early recognizer of the impact of the Reagan Presidency on the future of the Republican party. During his campaign for the presidency in 1988, Bush acknowledged the importance of both economic and social conservatives in the nominating process: he had changed his positions on social issues and became a supporter of supply-side economics, which he had discarded as "voodoo economics" in 1980. Furthermore, he presented himself as an intensely loyal supporter of Reagan, regularly using his vice-presidency under Reagan to his advantage.<sup>38</sup> This does not mean that he was strongly embraced by these bases. Although he was endorsed by Jerry Falwell, one of his strongest opponents in the primaries was televangelist Pat Robertson. Nonetheless, Bush won the primaries fairly easily, carrying 41 states and the District of Columbia (DC), and the economic and social conservatives both rallied behind him for the general election, especially after Bush picked the conservative Presbyterian Senator Dan Quayle as his running mate.<sup>39</sup> Bush defeated Dukakis with a hard line on taxes and anticommunism, an emphasis on education and the environment, and by invoking racist sentiments through continuous references to Willie Horton - a convicted killer who, through a weekend prison furlough program which Dukakis had supported, was temporarily released from prison. Willie Horton committed assault, armed robbery and rape during his release. His story tied racial sentiments to crime policies. Ultimately, Bush was successful in keeping the Reagan coalition together and "kept the movement conservatives in line, even though he never inspired them."<sup>40</sup>

Early in his presidency, Bush was starting to lose support from social conservatives. He had appointed several social liberals to his Cabinet, most notably a pro-choice doctor as his head of the Department of Health and Human Services. Bush had ignored evangelical complaints

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<sup>37</sup> David C. Wilcox, "The 'Eleventh Commandment'," *Enter Stage Right*, April 8, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 303.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party*, 221.

<sup>40</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 96-98.

when he met with gay rights activists and protected funding for the arts against repeated calls for restrictions by evangelicals. But it was Bush's first Supreme Court nominee, David Souter, who became the biggest disappointment for evangelicals. Souter was expected to be a consistent conservative, but once he was appointed Souter became a crucial vote in upholding *Roe v. Wade* in the case of *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. Also, he voted against prayer in public schools in *Lee v. Weisman*.<sup>41</sup>

However, his wavering support among evangelicals did little for his overall popularity. His successes in foreign policy, most notably the swift and successful Persian Gulf War and his actions in response to the dismantling of the Soviet Union<sup>42</sup>, were largely celebrated and resulted in approval ratings almost consistently above 60 percent, with peaks close to 90 percent, during the first three years of his presidency.<sup>43</sup> It was for this reason that several prominent Democrats decided not to run for the presidential election of 1992, which made way for the relatively unknown Governor of Arkansas Bill Clinton to win the nomination. However, during the final months of 1991 Bush started to lose popular support, with his approval rating dropping below 50 percent shortly before New Year's Eve. In 1992, his approval ratings hovered around 40 percent, with significant drops to the low thirties in the months before the election.<sup>44</sup> The reason for this drop in popularity was the economy.

Bush was faced with economic and budgetary issues that would decide his faith. Bush faced a minor economic recession, during which many American corporations reorganized. This resulted in job losses for many who believed to have secure jobs and subsequently rising unemployment rates. Although the recession only lasted until spring 1991, recovery was slow, and Bush was facing high unemployment rates throughout the remainder of his presidency.<sup>45</sup> The economic downturn resulted in an increasingly hurtful loss of support among voters, especially when the credit he gained with his foreign policy started to fade. While the economy was the core issue for the voting public, it was the budget that would hurt Bush the most among his own base.

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<sup>41</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party*, 221.

<sup>42</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 99.

<sup>43</sup> "Presidential Approval Ratings – Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends," *Gallup*, accessed August 20, 2017, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>.

<sup>44</sup> "Presidential Approval Ratings – Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends," *Gallup*, accessed August 20, 2017, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>.

<sup>45</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 99-100.

Bush had inherited a growing deficit from Reagan and as a traditional conservative, balancing the budget was a top priority, so much so that a balanced budget is worth breaking a campaign promise. Bush needed Democratic support, who controlled Congress at that time, for a budget deal and in his efforts to reach a deal, Bush broke what would become a cardinal rule for Republicans: he proposed to raise taxes. Bush thought his balanced budget would please supply-side conservatives, since he did it without any increased income or capital gains taxes and included severe cuts to programs like Medicare. However, House Republican Whip Newt Gingrich, who had been part of the negotiations, publicly turned against the budget and convinced his fellow conservatives to do the same. When the vote came, only 71 House Republicans supported the bill, and it was opposed by a majority of both parties.<sup>46</sup> Angered by the betrayal of his fellow Republicans refusal to any tax increases and determined to reach a balanced budget, Bush reached out to Democrats and ultimately agreed to more tax raises, including an increase of the top income tax rate. In November 1990, Bush succeeded his goal of reaching a budget deal, but the price was high. Only 10 House Republicans voted in favor of the bill, along with 217 Democrats. Ultimately Bush had alienated his conservative base by committing “a sin they had barely noticed when Reagan committed it because conservatives believed – no, they *knew* – that the Gipper did not have his heart in it.”<sup>47</sup> Reagan had become the face of Republican Conservatism; Gingrich had introduced the conservative “theory of permanent revolution.”<sup>48</sup> No Conservative solution could ever include an increase of the public sector, and any Republican who supported such an increase, was a traitor to the cause.

By the time Bush had to run for reelection, his overall approval rating had been badly hurt by the economic downturn, and simultaneously he was struggling to energize the Republican base of which he had alienated so many. Social conservatives felt neglected<sup>49</sup> and economic conservatives felt betrayed. Bush was faced with a primary challenge by Pat Buchanan, who ran to the right of him on both economic and social policies and was successful in gaining 38 percent

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<sup>46</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, 101-102

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, 103.

<sup>49</sup> During the general election, social conservatives remained loyal to the GOP, despite their personal grievances about Bush's candidacy. As Williams points out: “Evangelicals had become too committed to the GOP to reject a Republican president even if they had reservations about him. And Republican presidential candidates had become too beholden to the evangelical vote to be able to ignore the demands of the Christian Right, because they could not count on the support of any other demographic group.” Williams, *God's Own Party*, 232.

of the vote in the New Hampshire primary. The 1992 general election became a three-way election between Clinton, Bush and the independent Ross Perot, and Bush lost with 10 million less votes than he received in 1988 and the lowest Republican share of the vote since 1912. Conservatives falsely claimed the loss was the result of Perot entrance into the race, and since Clinton only received 43 percent of the vote, many believed his presidency to be barely legitimate, especially because of Republicans winning several races for the House, which proved to them that conservatism was still on the rise.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Clinton and the Gingrich Revolutionaries***

Clinton's election would become a turning point in opposition politics. Republicans were determined not only to oppose his ideas and proposals, but also to oppose and undermine his legitimacy as president. "From the moment he took office, Clinton faced a well-funded conservative effort to weaken or destroy his presidency by uncovering and publicizing his personal transgressions."<sup>51</sup> The degree of opposition Clinton faced was unprecedented. The Republican opposition is exemplified by William Kristol's memorandum on the opposition Clinton should (and would) face against his health care proposal. Kristol warns against any form of compromise by Republicans, by stating that "its success would signal a rebirth of centralized welfare-state policy at the very moment we have begun rolling back that idea in other areas."<sup>52</sup> If Republicans would compromise with Clinton in any way on health care, they would acknowledge the fundamental idea that government, not the free market, would offer solutions to the problems of regular Americans, which would undermine the core values of conservative ideology. Instead, Republicans should emphasize the greatness of the American health care system and deflate fears about its weaknesses, attack Clinton's reforms by pointing out how it would fundamentally change health care into a system of "rationed health care", and offer incremental changes to insurance regulation, tax credits for those without employer health care and "a simplified, uniform insurance form."<sup>53</sup> This approach to Clinton's health care plan is typical for the

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<sup>50</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 108.

<sup>51</sup> Joshua Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 431.

<sup>52</sup> William Kristol, 'Memorandum to Republican Leaders: Defeating President Clinton's Health Care Proposal', *The Project for the Republican Future* December 2, 1993.

<sup>53</sup> Kristol, 'Memorandum to Republican Leaders'.

increased polarization and partisanship of Washington and particularly the GOP. A Pivotal event for these phenomena is the 1994 midterm election.

Dionne describes the 1994 midterm election as “stuff of conservative legend” as well as the “the year when American politics was both nationalized and polarized.”<sup>54</sup> The first comment refers to the fact that Republicans made serious gains during the election, winning by a seven percent margin in the general vote count, turning both chambers of Congress Republican by gaining 54 House seats and nine Senate seats, not including the two Democratic Senators who switched their allegiance to the Republicans. Crucial for this win was the solidification of important electoral shifts. The 1994 election made clear that white males were the basis of the GOP, with 63 percent of white men voting for the GOP. Especially working class males, traditionally a demographic leaning to the Democrats, shifted allegiance and voted in majority for Republican candidates. Furthermore, the 1994 election was the conclusion of the Southern political realignment, with Southern Republican representatives outnumbering Southern Democrats for the first time since Reconstruction.<sup>55</sup> Beyond these demographic shifts, the 1994 would become the election where “congressional voting was brought into line with presidential voting; partisan allegiances were brought into a tighter relationship with how voters actually cast their ballots; and ideological sympathies and partisan sympathies came to overlap to a larger degree than ever.”<sup>56</sup> Traditional swing districts were less likely to switch allegiance in comparison to previous elections, and individual voters registered as member of either party barely voted for the other party anymore, with only eight percent of Republicans voting for Democratic candidates, compared to 23 percent in 1990. In Congress, party-unity voting had become an increasingly common phenomenon since the 1970s and support for the President’s positions by the opposition party became less and less likely.<sup>57</sup>

A further example of the nationalization of American politics was the *Contract with America*, a governing document drafted by Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey before the 1994 election and signed onto by almost every Republican candidate during the election. It consisted of two parts, with the first part promising government reforms and the second part providing ten

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<sup>54</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 116-117.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 116-117.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, 117.

<sup>57</sup> Richard S. Conley, ‘President Clinton and the Republican Congress, 1995-2000: Political and Policy Dimensions of Veto Politics in Divided Government’, *Congress & the Presidency* 31, No. 2 (2004): 135.

specific bills the GOP would push for. The majority of those bills focused on lowering various taxes for various reasons and balancing the budget; one bill promoted a tough-on-crime approach and another focused on ‘pro-family’ policies, which included restrictions on pornography and child support enforcement.<sup>58</sup> The *Contract* is important because it provided Republican candidates with uniform talking points, while simultaneously tying those same candidates to a fixed set of (conservative) ideas and its underlying ideology. To some extent, the *Contract* can be understood as the symbolic platform of the GOP to which individual candidates were subordinate and loyal.

After the 1994 election, Newt Gingrich successfully ran for Speaker of the House and his main priority became implementing his *Contract* and negotiating a budget for the next fiscal year. The budget negotiations were far from complete at the end of the fiscal year, but a government shutdown was temporarily averted when they agreed on a continuing resolution which lasted until mid-November. The Republican Congress sent Clinton a reconciliation bill, which included increased Medicare premiums, spending cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, spending cuts in education and environmental deregulation. Bill Clinton, who had threatened to veto a bill if it would hurt the young, the elderly, veterans or the environment throughout 1995<sup>59</sup>, couldn’t agree with the bill and issued a veto, while insisting he wanted to reach an agreement with the Republicans as long as it was “consistent with our fundamental values.”<sup>60</sup> After the final negotiations on November 13<sup>th</sup> failed, the stalemate resulted in a government shutdown, with 800,000 federal employees sent home. Clinton successfully framed the confrontation as the contrast between a centrist president who wanted to responsibly balance the budget, while protecting Medicare, Medicaid, education and the environment; and an activist conservative Congress using the budget crisis as an opportunity to push their agenda through.<sup>61</sup> It became clear the public supported the president, and pressure on the GOP House leadership to compromise - particularly from Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, who was running for President and saw his chances against Clinton shrink with every day the shutdown lasted longer – intensified. Gingrich and his followers tried to appoint blame to Clinton, who had vetoed four Republican appropriations bill, but on January 6, 1996, they had to acknowledge their losses and agree on a

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<sup>58</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 119-123.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Conley, ‘President Clinton and the Republican Congress’, 146.

<sup>60</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 126.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Conley, ‘President Clinton and the Republican Congress’, 146-153.

budget deal acceptable for Clinton, which meant letting go of many of the proposed spending reductions and tax cuts. The government shutdown badly hurt Newt Gingrich's reputation and his popularity was at an all-time low<sup>62</sup>.

The budget crisis, along with a booming economy, increased Clinton's popularity and hurt the GOP, resulting in an easy win for Clinton during the 1996 Presidential election. The Republican nominee Bob Dole, was a classic conservative and was not part of the Gingrich revolutionaries, but he was nonetheless successfully tied to Newt Gingrich by the Clinton's campaign. The turn to the right taken by the GOP in the years before the 1996 election was summarized by Bob Dole, who - when he visited Barry Goldwater to get his endorsement - joked that "Barry and I - we've sort of become the liberals", to which Goldwater responded: "we're the new liberals of the Republican party. Can you imagine that."<sup>63</sup> By 1996, Barry Goldwater and Bob Dole were no longer considered the right wing of the Republican Party. After his nomination for the GOP, Dole chose Jack Kemp as his running mate, mainly because Kemp was a staunch supply-side and pro-life conservative, but also because Kemp was quite liberal on issues like immigration and minority issues.

The congressional races were a lot closer than the Presidential election and the GOP successfully held on to its majority in both the House and the Senate, and Gingrich remained Speaker of the House. For a while, it seemed like the GOP and the Democrats were more willing to cooperate and reach common ground, reaching agreements on budget issues in 1997, which both sides celebrated as great successes.<sup>64</sup> It didn't take long before this all changed again. In 1997, the Supreme Court had ruled that President Clinton had to testify in a civil suit brought against him by Paula Jones, who accused Clinton of sexual assault. The following episode would result in the defining event of Clinton's presidency: his impeachment.

The idea of impeaching Bill Clinton was first introduced in June 1997 by members of the Council for National Policy, who at a secret meeting discussed whether they had enough evidence to merit impeachment. The Christian conservatives believed they did, so they drew up a resolution

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<sup>62</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 135.

<sup>63</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 134.

<sup>64</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 140-141.

of impeachment, which in November 1997 was introduced by Representative Bob Barr. This original bill was not based on Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky, which at that moment was still a secret. Instead, the reason for impeachment were alleged illegal Chinese campaign donations to Clinton's reelection campaign.<sup>65</sup> Gingrich was hesitant to support the bill until the stories about Monica Lewinsky and her sexual encounters with the president became public knowledge. Clinton had denied the charges during a deposition he gave in another case. When it became clear Clinton had lied about the affairs, Gingrich believed he could impeach the president on the basis of perjury and obstruction of justice. Throughout 1998 Washington and the media were obsessed with the scandal and Republicans continuously pushed for impeachment. Ken Starr, who was originally appointed special prosecutor to investigate the Whitewater land deal, turned his focus to the Lewinsky scandal and signed an immunity deal with Monica Lewinski. Clinton, who until then had denied the accusations, agreed to testify in front of a grand jury and on August 17, admitted to his relationship with Lewinsky. A few weeks later, Starr released his report and House Republicans were convinced it was enough for impeachment. On December 19, the House of Representatives voted for impeachment on two counts, the obstruction of justice and perjury and Clinton's presidency hinged on the mercy of the Senate. But Senate Republicans were not as keen on impeaching the President as the House was, and when it came to a vote on the Senate floor, both impeachment articles were voted down.

The impeachment procedure dominated Washington for more than a year, and Dionne describes his recollection of the event as "a reminder of how thoroughly bizarre the episode was, how reckless the president was, and the lengths to which his enemies would go in their attempts to drive him from office."<sup>66</sup> Although conservatives were convinced that the scandal was exemplary of Clinton's lacking morality and as such would greatly hurt the president's reputation, its effects were the opposite. While most Americans were appalled by the President's behavior, they were also uncomfortable about turning something perceived to be a private matter into a public issue and the relentless pushing of the issue by Republicans would result in a backlash against Republicans, and that in an election year.

In the midst of the impeachment procedure there was an election going on. Newt Gingrich was convinced the election would strengthen the GOP, predicting a gain between 10 and 40 seats

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<sup>65</sup> Williams, *God's Own Party*, 244.

<sup>66</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 143.



in the House. Instead the election would become a deception for Republicans. The Democrats gained 5 seats during the election, which made the 1998 election the first midterm since 1822 where the opposition party was unable to gain seats during a president's second term.<sup>67</sup> Gingrich, like most Republicans, was shocked by this loss. He had made the mistake of projecting the sentiment of his core supporters to the general public, and therefore believed that the more people were exposed to Clinton's behavior, the more support he would gain for his impeachment. Instead, voters were turned away from the Republicans because they concluded that the whole episode was about sex, not perjury, and for many voters this made the Republicans insincere in their efforts. Furthermore, most voters believed Clinton overall did a good job as president and "they had elected Clinton because of what they hoped he would do about these practical concerns [with regards to education, health care and the economy] that had a bearing on their own lives, not because they regarded him as a moral paragon."<sup>68</sup>

The election results ended Gingrich's House Speakership. He would get the blame for the election results, and even his own supporters believed it was time for Gingrich to step down. Conservatives Tom DeLay and Dick Armey had already attempted to get rid of Gingrich before, condemning Gingrich's moderation and believing he was not conservative enough, so when the election turned into a failure many Republicans were glad to see Gingrich go. They only had to wait three days. On November 6, 1998, Gingrich announced he would step down as Speaker of the House.

The election that resulted in the resignation of one Republican Speaker of the House, would also mark the beginning of the political career of another. Young Republican hopeful Paul Davis Ryan Jr. had recently moved back to Janesville, Wisconsin, and at the mere age of 28, Ryan decided to run for Congress as the representative of Wisconsin's 1<sup>st</sup> District.

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<sup>67</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 152.

<sup>68</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 153.

## Chapter 3: The Early Years of a Rising Star

### Introduction

Halfway through Bill Clinton's second term, a young Wisconsin conservative had gotten elected for the House of Representatives. Paul Ryan, then only 29 years old, had successfully beaten his democratic opponent with a surprisingly large margin. As a protégé of Jack Kemp, Ryan was a true supply-side conservative, who believed strongly in the free market and trickle-down economics. Two years later, he would find a conservative ally in the White house.

Building on the previous chapter, this chapter continues the story of conservatism with the compassionate conservatism George W. Bush campaigned on and the neoconservative government he became famous for. Although the Bush Jr. administration was focused largely on foreign policy, this chapter instead highlights Bush's domestic policy reforms. Bush himself much preferred domestic policy over foreign policy and when he assumed the presidency Bush hoped to drastically reform the American tax system as well as socio-economic government programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. It was only after the attacks on 9/11 that the administration's agenda was increasingly dominated by foreign policy. Nonetheless, the domestic reform attempts by George W. Bush are crucial for understanding the evolution of the GOP and American conservatism for three reasons. First, these policies exemplify evolutions in conservative thought, especially the importance of tax cuts versus balanced budgets. Second, his attempts to privatize government programs are evidence of the divergence between the priorities of conservative 'elites' and the views of the GOP electorate; many conservative thinkers and GOP representatives have argued in favor of reforming these programs for years, but most conservative voters are quite happy with Social Security and Medicare and oppose any change to the programs. Third, these policies offered a young politician the opportunity to make a name for himself within the ranks of his party. Paul Ryan worked quietly on some of Bush's domestic priorities, including the Bush tax cuts and his attempt to reform social security. As a result, Ryan was quickly marked one of the most influential thinkers within the GOP and many Republicans saw Ryan as a future party leader.

### *A Moderate District Electing a True Conservative*

Still a student of economics at Miami University in Ohio, Paul Ryan was first introduced to Washington politics when he assumed a summer internship working for Sen. Bob Kasten. Ryan had been inspired by conservative thinkers like Friedrich Hayek and Ayn Rand, which caught the attention from his libertarian professor Rich Hart. Hart had recommended Ryan as a candidate intern to Kasten and the internship was successful enough for Ryan to start working fulltime for Kasten after graduation in 1992, until Kasten lost his election a few months later.<sup>69</sup> Kasten had closely worked together with 1996 vice-presidential candidate Jack Kemp in Congress, and through this connection Ryan quickly found another job working for the conservative advocacy group Empower America as a speech writer and analyst. Kemp was one of the founders of Empower America and since Ryan and Kemp were both supply-side conservatives, they agreed on the importance of tax cuts for economic growth.<sup>70</sup> At Empower America, Ryan would mostly work on economic policy with Jack Kemp and Ryan's admiration for Kemp would quickly grow over the years, with Kemp's name surely being one of the first mentioned whenever Ryan is asked about people he admires: "Jack had a huge influence on me, his brand of inclusive conservatism, his pro-growth, happy warrior style. That was infectious to me."<sup>71</sup> After staying with Empower America for five years, Ryan worked as a staff member for Rep. Sam Brownback, before he returned to Wisconsin in 1997 to work as a consultant for the family business. He wouldn't stay in Wisconsin for long however, because even before his return to Janesville Ryan had started thinking of running for Congress.<sup>72</sup>

Wisconsin's 1<sup>st</sup> District had been a closely contested race in the years before 1998. Republican Mark W. Neumann had won the seat in the two previous elections with only a 1,000 vote difference in 1994 and a 4,000 vote difference in 1996 and after Neumann announced he would challenge Russ Feingold for his Senate seat, Democrats were hopeful that they could flip the district in their favor. Their candidate, Lydia Spottswood, had lost to Neumann with 49% of the vote in 1996 and, as a well-known local politician, Democrats believed she could use the national political climate to her advantage and beat the young and unknown Republican candidate

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<sup>69</sup> Jennifer Steinhauer et al., "Charting Ryan's Rise, from Junior Prom King to Political Star," *The Bulletin*, August 14, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Craig Gilbert, "Ryan Draws Inspiration from Family, Mentors," *The Journal Sentinel*, April 26, 2009.

<sup>71</sup> "Rep. Paul Ryan, Politics in America Profile," *Roll Call*, August 11, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Steinhauer et al, "Charting Ryan's Rise, from Junior Prom King to Political Star".

Paul Ryan. Both Democrats and Republicans considered the Wisconsin races as key indicators for the outcome of the 1998 election overall. Republican spokeswoman Mary Crawford mentioned Wisconsin as the most important state to look at, while Democrat Dan Sallick believed the two open Wisconsin seats would be crucial for the outcome of the election: "If we win both, we may be heading toward picking up anywhere from four to 12 or 13 seats. If we win one, it probably means we still may be picking up seats, but maybe not enough to win back the House."<sup>73</sup> His prediction would prove to be right.

The race between Spottswood and Ryan became a race of national importance and both parties treated it as such. The Democrats send First Lady Hillary Clinton and Congressmen like Rep. Patrick Kennedy and Rep. John Conyers to campaign for Spottswood, while Ryan's campaign received support from Gov. Tommy Thompson, Rep. John Linder and of course Ryan's former mentors Bob Kasten and Jack Kemp. Despite the high profile of the campaign, and despite the negativity of previous campaigns – the 1996 race between Neumann and Spottswood had been "marred by bitter negative spots and venomous personal attacks"<sup>74</sup> - the race between Ryan and Spottswood remained a clean campaign. The debates were described as polite and there was a clear focus from both sides on policy over personality. Both candidates distanced themselves from the impeachment debate that dominated Washington throughout the year, preferring a focus on traditional issues like social security and health care. Ryan presented himself as an economic and social conservative in the tradition of Reagan and Kemp. Whether the issue was health care, education or unemployment, Ryan argued for lower taxes and decentralization as the main tools for fixing the problem. Education funds should be diverted from the Department of Education to the local boards of education with as little regulation and federal demands attached to the funds as possible.<sup>75</sup> In the debate on health care, Ryan argued for tax free health care savings accounts and opposed the 'managed reform' proposed by Clinton and supported by Spottswood, who tried

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<sup>73</sup> Linda Feldmann, "Democrats' Ground Zero in '98 Wisconsin District Offers a Window on the Efforts of Democrats to Gain Control of the House in November," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 23, 1998.

<sup>74</sup> Walter Shapiro, "Impeachment: Voters Don't Ask, Candidates Don't Tell," *USA Today*, October 9, 1998.

<sup>75</sup> Phil McDade, "1<sup>st</sup> District Candidates Focus on Education," *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 21, 1998.

to make health care the central issue of the election. But for Ryan, health care was no central issue in the campaign: [I don't] hear that much about health care on the doorstep."<sup>76</sup>

A notable exception on Ryan's lower taxes position was his view on Social Security. House Republicans had been pushing for tax cuts funded by the Social Security surplus, but Ryan opposed to this form of funding. He did agree with Republican ideas of privatizing social security and was propagating the policy, but he also argued that the Social Security funds belonged to the tax payer already, and using the funds for tax cuts would not be a real tax cut.<sup>77</sup> Another issue Ryan opposed the majority of his own party was campaign finance reform. Ryan argued in favor of campaign finance reform, although he remained in general terms and did not offer specifics.<sup>78</sup>

On November 4, Democratic hopes of turning Wisconsin's first district blue had proven futile; Paul Ryan won the election. Where Neumann won his elections in '94 and '96 with margins of only 1000 to 4000 votes, Ryan was elected with 57 percent of the vote, or 26,645 more votes than his Democratic opponent. The election was a major blow for Democrats who wanted to flip the House of Representatives because they had believed this district to be one of their best chances to do so and losing by such a large margin meant that the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress remained in Republican hands. The 1998 election would also mark the end of competitive campaigns for the 1<sup>st</sup> district House seat. After his first election, Paul Ryan would win every subsequent election with a larger margin than the first, with the exception of the 2012 election, when Ryan was also running for vice-president and garnered 'only' 54.9 percent of the vote for his House seat.<sup>79</sup> Ryan had learned an important lesson from one of his predecessor's running the district. As explained by associate editor of the *Wisconsin State Journal* Thomas Still, the first district of Wisconsin is a district where the relationship with the voters is as important as one's political viewpoints.<sup>80</sup> Still explains that his close relationship with the voters of the district was the main reason for the ten

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<sup>76</sup> Terry M. Neal and Caroline Daniel, "In Kenosha, Most Voters have an HMO Story; Health Care Concerns Expressed in a Wisconsin District Buttress National Poll Findings," *The Washington Post*, July 19, 1998.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph A. Scolaro, "Spottswood, Ryan Trade Jobs at Candidates' Debate," *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 9, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Scolaro, "Spottswood, Ryan Trade Jobs at Candidates' Debate".

<sup>79</sup> While his share of the vote was smaller than in any other election, Ryan did win by a larger total vote count. Redistricting had significantly increased the number of voters in his district, and the total number of votes Ryan received was 42,009 higher than his Democratic opponent Rob Zerban.

<sup>80</sup> In 1998, the district was known as a Democratic leaning district, since it had voted for Clinton twice and had been represented by a Democrat continuously from 1971 until 1995.

reelections of Democrat Les Aspin between 1972 and 1993, while his Democratic successor Peter Bacca only served one term because he failed miserably in maintaining a close relationship with the voters.<sup>81</sup> One of the first things Ryan did after his election was to set up a mobile congressional office driving throughout the district, to provide all citizens with the opportunity to communicate with Ryan as well as to provide the services his constituents requested.<sup>82</sup>

Immediately after his election Ryan was confronted with Newt Gingrich's resignation as Speaker of the House. Although Ryan had been mindful in discussing the Clinton impeachment during the campaign, he expressed surprise in response to the resignation. In a conversation with *Associated Press* journalist Andrew Blasko, Ryan told Gingrich had called him and asked support for him staying on as speaker. "I got the sense that he was doing a head count. Looks like he didn't get enough votes."<sup>83</sup> But as a new member of the House, Ryan was not that interested in the fight over the House leadership. His main objective was getting a committee assignment that would give him influence on the topics he was most interested in: social security and taxes.<sup>84</sup> He therefore had his eye on the Banking -, the Budget -,the Commerce -, or the Ways and Means committee. But as he himself expressed, Commerce or the Ways and Means Committee were longshots considering his lack of political experience, and he was quite pleased with his assignments to the Banking and Financial Service Committee, the Budget Committee, and the Government Reform Committee, as well as his membership of the Majority Leader's Advisory Board.<sup>85</sup>

### ***Ryan's First Year in Congress***

In Congress, Ryan quickly makes a name for himself as "a party loyalist and fiscal conservative to the core"<sup>86</sup> as he showed with his vote on the allocation of school funds<sup>87</sup>, his vote on the National Rifle Association (NRA) 'Ten Commandments' bill loosening gun show sales

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<sup>81</sup> "Freshman Works to Keep Hold on Marginal District," *Congress Daily*, August 12, 1999.

<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth Hurt, "Freshmen Land in D.C.: With Bagfuls of Optimism Baldwin, Ryan and Geen Await Committee Assignments," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 22, 1998.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Blasko, "Wisconsin Politicians React to Gingrich's Plan to Resign," *Associated Press*, November 8, 1998.

<sup>84</sup> Hurt, "Freshmen Land in D.C."

<sup>85</sup> Stephen Goode, "Defending the Individual Against Leviathan," *Insight Magazine*, May 24, 1999.

<sup>86</sup> Stacey Zolt, "House Freshmen Learning the Ropes Quickly; Of 42 New Members, Many Rely on Their Past Political Experiences," *Roll Call*, September 13, 1999.

<sup>87</sup> "How They Voted on Schools," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1999.

restrictions<sup>88</sup>, his vote on 'NAFTA for Africa'<sup>89</sup>, and his vote on campaign finance reform<sup>90</sup>. While most of these votes are consistent with his campaign as a fiscal and social conservative, Ryan's nay vote on campaign finance went directly against his campaign promise to fight for campaign reform. Unlike 54 other GOP House Representatives, Ryan supported the Republican leadership in their fight against the Shays-Meehan bill, the House version of McCain-Feingold. In 1998 Ryan had already proven himself to be very skilled in obtaining campaign donations, raising \$1.2 million for his campaign as an unknown young candidate. In the first half of 1999 Ryan had already raised \$383,925 for his 2000 campaign, more than any other House incumbent in Wisconsin<sup>91</sup>, with almost half of that money (\$188,824) being donated by political action committees (PACs) "linked to developers, banks, insurance companies"<sup>92</sup> or by the NRA<sup>93</sup>. For the first time, Ryan was being painted by critics as a representative of special interests rather than his voters; an accusation that would follow him throughout his career. In October 1999, Ryan was fined \$6,000 by the FEC when they uncovered \$36,500 in undisclosed campaign donations, of which \$27,500 came from 13 PACs representing corporations like Chrysler Corp., Bell Atlantic Corp. and John Deere & Co.<sup>94</sup>

Ryan was not that concerned with campaign finance as an issue. The main issue Ryan wanted to be associated with was clear from the start: Social Security. Just days after being sworn in as a representative Ryan told journalist Heather Kinzinger his priorities were "diverting payroll taxes to finance Social Security rather than other government programs, lowering taxes and giving local districts more control of schools."<sup>95</sup> Within a month Ryan announced he was working on legislation to "preserve the nation's Social Security programme (sic), provide real tax relief, and address a host of other important issues as we head into the new millennium."<sup>96</sup> Ryan ensured that benefits will not change for current or 'soon-to-be retirees', "no matter what other

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<sup>88</sup> "Republicans for, Democrats Against Ten Commandments Bill," *Associated Press*, June 18, 1999.

<sup>89</sup> "House Vote #307 in 1999; H.R. 434 (106<sup>th</sup>): Trade and Development Act of 2000," *Govtrack*, July 16, 1999.

<sup>90</sup> Bill Kaplan, 'Partisan Standoff Poses Real Danger', *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 13 (1999).

<sup>91</sup> "Freshman Works to Keep Hold on Marginal District".

<sup>92</sup> Jeff Mayers, "Ryan, Baldwin Raising Big Bucks for Re-election Races," *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 6, 1999.

<sup>93</sup> John Nichols, "Ryan, Green Fail Campaign Finance Reform Test," *The Capital Times*, September 29, 1999.

<sup>94</sup> "Ryan Fined \$6000 Over Large Donations," *The Capital Times*, March 13, 2000.

<sup>95</sup> Heather Kinzinger, "Ryan Has Spark, If Not Spotlight," *The Capital Times*, January 7, 1999.

<sup>96</sup> "Republicans Vow to Guard Social Security Benefits," *Reuters News*, February 6, 1999.

reforms need to be made to make the programme (sic) solvent in the future”<sup>97</sup>. In May 1999, Ryan gives more insight into his proposal during an interview with Stephen Goode:

That’s why I[’m] putting together a resolution to make sure we pay down the debt with Social Security surpluses. These surpluses will go somewhere: I don’t want them to go to a tax cut; I don’t want them to go to new spending; you can’t stuff them in a mattress. So we’re going to buy down debt so that when the baby boomers begin to retire and you have those IOUs that are immediately cashed in, you’re cashing them in on top of a very small debt.<sup>98</sup>

By focusing his efforts on Social Security, Ryan positioned himself to be part of one of the mostly hotly debated issues during the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress. During the ’90s the economy was booming and subsequently the projected Federal budget contained significant surpluses for most of the foreseeable future. In 1998 the Clinton Administration had decided the majority of those surpluses should be used to strengthen Social Security and proposed to use 62 percent of the surplus over the next decade to shore up Social Security, with an additional 15 percent of the surplus to fund Medicare and “12 percent to ‘fund universal savings accounts’ to help people save for retirement.”<sup>99</sup> The Clinton Administration had already used much of the excess Social Security revenues to reduce the national debt in the years 1997 and 1998, using the same argument as Ryan had expressed. The buy-back of national debt itself was not very controversial, but the debate on social security took an ideological turn. The Clinton Administration proposed to use a significant portion of the budget surplus not for buying Treasury securities, but to allow the Social Security trust fund to invest part of the funds in stocks and bonds.<sup>100</sup> The Republican leadership, many of whom fundamentally opposed a public social security system, argued the surplus should be used to create individual private investment accounts. Such a reform would amount to a massive overhaul of the social security system into a mostly privatized system where,

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<sup>97</sup> “Republicans Vow to Guard Social Security Benefits”.

<sup>98</sup> Stephen Goode, “Defending the Individual Against Leviathan”.

<sup>99</sup> “Republicans Vow to Guard Social Security Benefits”.

<sup>100</sup> Kenneth N. Gilpin, “Market Insight; How Stocks Could Work For Social Security,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 1999.



instead of using the social security pay roll taxes to pay current beneficiaries, “a portion of their Social Security retirement taxes went into personal retirement accounts that they own.”<sup>101</sup>

Because the Social Security debate had been tied to budget surpluses, the debate got entangled with larger debates on the budget and taxes. The Republican Congress had passed major tax cuts, totaling \$792 billion over 10 years<sup>102</sup>, for which they planned to use the majority of the \$1 trillion left over from the budget surplus after reducing the \$1.9 trillion designated to go to Social Security. Clinton preferred those funds would get used for debt reduction and vetoed the tax cuts.<sup>103</sup>

Ultimately, both the Social Security debate and the debate on tax-cuts went nowhere. The Clinton Administration and the Republican Congress could not agree on Social Security reforms or on the tax cuts and the stalemate resulted in no reforms on either issue. But a year later, the political landscape would shift significantly and under new leadership the Republicans would revisit their proposed ideas.

### ***The Rise of Compassionate Conservatism***

The departure of Newt Gingrich made way for other Republicans to become the new leader of the GOP. The 2000 presidential election would offer Republicans a chance to regain the White House and Republicans eager to run for the presidency attempted to catch the spotlight as the new face of the Party. One of the contenders was George Walker Bush. The son of former President George H.W. Bush was making name for himself as the Governor of Texas. With his message of ‘compassionate conservatism’<sup>104</sup>, Bush appealed to both moderate and conservative voters. Bush used his deeply evangelical beliefs and message to call for seriously conservative

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<sup>101</sup> David John, “The Wrong Social Security Debate: It Is Not About Trust Funds,” *The Heritage Foundation*, April 2, 1999.

<sup>102</sup> Richard W. Stevenson, “Government Plan to Buy Back Bonds and Save Interest,” *The New York Times*, August 5, 1999.

<sup>103</sup> Eric Pianin and Charles Babington, “Clinton Vetoes GOP Tax Cut Bill,” *Washington Post*, September 24, 1999.

<sup>104</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 171.

policies, while speaking about the need to care for the poor and needy. His believes offered Bush a message of compassion where religions institutions play a key role, underplaying the role of government. “My guiding principle”, Bush said, “is government if necessary, but not necessarily government.”<sup>105</sup> He combined a message of personal responsibility and limited government with a message of love and caring. Among the conservative representatives from Texas in particular, Bush’s message looked relatively moderate, but his supply-side business friendly policies and the religiosity in his message appealed to both the evangelical and libertarian conservatives. In an interview with E.J. Dionne Jr. Bush explained the Republican Party had failed to “put a compassionate face on our conservative philosophy.”<sup>106</sup> As Dionne himself also notes, Bush does not decry the conservative message itself, but argues the GOP failed to frame the conservative message as a loving ideology.

Karl Rove was the man behind the Bush campaign. An advisor to Bush since his first run for the Texas governorship in 1994, he played a central role in the political career of Bush from the very beginning. Rove understood the weaknesses in the public perception of the GOP as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the Clinton presidency. The Bush campaign subtly reminded voters of the Lewinsky affair while distancing themselves from the impeachment process. The message of “restor[ing] honor and dignity to the White House”<sup>107</sup> appealed to Christian Conservatives and made it easier for Bush to downgrade the issue of abortion, which Rove feared would hurt Bush’s popularity among suburban women. Rove also pushed for a message of unity, an aspect of the he had borrowed from Clinton. Bush often repeated in his speeches that he was a “uniter not a divider”.<sup>108</sup> An issue Bush actively campaigned on to strengthen his message for unity and compassion was immigration reform. Supported by the pro-business right, Bush argued for the benefits of immigration and lauded the hard work of immigrants, which would eventually earn him 40 percent of the Latino vote in the general election.

The Bush campaign for 2000 was the campaign of a candidate who at times appeared to be moderate, but was conservative at heart. An analysis of the campaign efforts by Dan Balz notes this dichotomy already in 1999, shortly after Bush opposed the GOP’s proposal on

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<sup>105</sup> Ibidem, 176.

<sup>106</sup> Ibidem, 172.

<sup>107</sup> Ibidem, 182.

<sup>108</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 181.

reforming and cutting the Earned Income Tax Credit, calling it a way to “balance the budget on the back of the poor.”<sup>109</sup> While these comments resulted in backlash from the right of the GOP, with his opponents in the presidential primaries branding Bush as “Clinton-Gore Lite”<sup>110</sup>, it was difficult to attack the Texas Governor for not being conservative enough. By attacking congressional Republicans for not caring about the poor, Bush created a new path for the Republican party, where conservatives could argue for a limited role for government in collaborating with charitable institutions in helping the needy. Balz cites one Bush adviser saying: “The goal is not to compromise conservative principles, but to apply those principles to the job of helping real human beings.”<sup>111</sup> Bush attacked the pessimistic views of Conservatives like Robert H. Bork, but only because it failed to point to the successes of Conservatism in dealing with issues like welfare and teen pregnancies.

Balz main argument was that the Bush campaign borrowed Clinton’s technique of “triangulation” by opposing the “most extreme forces within his party” in order to appear moderate and reasonable, while simultaneously remaining truly conservative in his views. “The reality is that Bush has not strayed dramatically from conservative orthodoxy -- from abortion to guns to tax cuts to school vouchers.”<sup>112</sup> Grover Norquist, the staunchly anti-tax conservative activist, noted that seemingly moderate remarks made by Bush were not even discussed during his weekly meetings because of Bush’s reliably conservative record, which resulted in “his competitors hav[ing] so much trouble getting traction by saying: 'Don't vote for him, I'm more conservative.' They're not, particularly.”<sup>113</sup>

The main opposition to Bush during the primaries would not come from Gingrich conservatives like Gary Bauer or Steve Forbes, but from John McCain, who was seen as the more moderate Republican. In order to beat McCain, Bush ran his campaign mostly as an unapologetic conservative, painting John McCain as “the closet liberal, or at least unreliably conservative”.<sup>114</sup> Especially in South Carolina the campaign had become vicious, with Bush supporters attacking McCain in every way imaginable. In the home state of Lee Atwater, Bush had seen a 50-point

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<sup>109</sup> Dan Balz, “Bush Shows a Shadow of Clintonism,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 1999.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>114</sup> R.W. Apple Jr., “Bush Redefined McCain and Retained the Right,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2000.

lead in South Carolina polls go up in smoke after McCain had beaten him in the New Hampshire primary, and the campaign had decided it was time to go in full attack mode. In collaboration with Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition, the Bush campaign started an “underground campaign”<sup>115</sup>, using the evangelical community to spread all kinds of rumors about McCain. A professor at the fundamentalist Bob Jones University wrote an e-mail that went viral about McCain having an illegitimate black child with a New York prostitute, while another rumor portrayed McCain’s wife Cindy as a drug addict. McCain had even been attacked for his imprisonment and torture during the Vietnam War, with people questioning his mental stability or his loyalty to the United States and branding him a Manchurian Candidate.<sup>116</sup> The attacks would prove to be successful. Bush won the South Carolina primary and would go on to defeat McCain on Super Tuesday after which McCain conceded and Bush became the Republican candidate in the 2000 election.

After the primaries were over, Karl Rove wanted to turn Bush back into a moderate, and he was very pleased when people were describing Bush as a nonideologue.<sup>117</sup> The campaign returned to its more moderate messages, putting compassionate conservatism front and center in the campaign and emphasizing his views on immigration reform and education. It would prove enough to ensure Bush the election, although the outcome is contested to this day. The election result dependent on the outcome in Florida, where the voting margins were razor thin and various issues with the votes and the counting process resulted in a court battle between the two campaigns. Ultimately, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that the partial recount Gore demanded and was awarded by the Florida Supreme Court was unwarranted, effectively making Bush’s 537 vote margin final. A recount organized by major news organizations, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Associated Press* and *CNN*, showed that the partial recount demanded by Al Gore would likely have resulted in the same outcome, but the same study also showed that a full recount of the Florida ballots would likely have resulted in a victory for the Democrats.<sup>118</sup> More fundamentally, the Supreme Court overruled the state’s right to recount the votes. “It’s not so much that the Supreme Court picked

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<sup>115</sup> Richard Gooding, “The Trashing of John McCain,” *Vanity Fair*, November, 2004.

<sup>116</sup> Richard Gooding, “The Trashing of John McCain”.

<sup>117</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 170.

<sup>118</sup> “Who Won the Election? Who Cares?” *Fair*, January 1, 2002.

the wrong candidate to be president, but that the Court chose any candidate rather than allowing the vote-counting process to proceed.”<sup>119</sup> It was an often heard criticism.

### ***Domestic Politics under a Foreign Policy Administration***

Few presidencies have been marked by a single event as much as the Bush presidency. The attack on 9/11 would change the United States and would have sweeping consequences for the priorities of the Bush White House. The Bush presidency will forever be remembered as an exemplary neoconservative government focused on foreign policies - with fighting the War on Terror, invading Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Guantanamo Bay prison as iconic features of Bush’s eight years as president. But initially Bush wanted to focus on domestic policies. Of his thirty paragraph inaugural address, Bush spend only two paragraphs talking about foreign policy in generic and vague terms.<sup>120</sup>

The inaugural address of George W. Bush was a celebration of the American ideal. Bush discussed protecting American values and traditions, and with keywords like ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’, ‘compassion’ and ‘opportunity’ Bush wanted to frame his presidency as one focused on prosperity through opportunity, aimed at uplifting the poor and disadvantaged through education and private initiatives. Bush had made education one of his main campaign issues, and it was the first issue he addressed during the inauguration, condemning failing schools as limiting “the ambitions of some Americans”.<sup>121</sup> When Bush offers a more complete picture of his policy priorities, he again starts with education, but then quickly moves on to his economic policy.

Together, we will reclaim America's schools, before ignorance and apathy claim more young lives. We will reform Social Security and Medicare, sparing our children from struggles we have the power to prevent. And we will reduce taxes, to recover the momentum of our economy and reward the effort and enterprise of working Americans.<sup>122</sup>

Bush also emphasizes the role of private institutions in nation building and society at large.

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<sup>119</sup> “Who Won the Election? Who Cares?”

<sup>120</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 188-189.

<sup>121</sup> George W. Bush, ‘Bush Inaugural Address’, *CNN*, January 20, 2001.

<sup>122</sup> George W. Bush, January 20, 2001.

Government has great responsibilities for public safety and public health, for civil rights and common schools. Yet compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government. And some needs and hurts are so deep they will only respond to a mentor's touch or a pastor's prayer. Church and charity, synagogue and mosque lend our communities their humanity, and they will have an honored place in our plans and in our laws.<sup>123</sup>

The inaugural address was supposed to be a blue print for the Bush presidency, and whenever his administration's attention was not occupied by foreign policy, the White House worked to implement the agenda he laid out on this first day.

For Ryan, Bush's domestic program provided an opportunity to increase his reputation and gain prominence in the House of Representatives. With the installation of the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress Ryan won appointment to the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means, where he made his way into the subcommittee dealing with Social Security<sup>124</sup>, a remarkable feat for a young, sophomore Representative. This appointment gave Ryan an important say in issues both he and President Bush cared about: taxes and domestic welfare programs.

### ***The Conservative Dream of a Tax Code Overhaul***

Cutting taxes was Bush's first priority, and within weeks his administration and Congress were busy drafting tax reforms. The Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 passed the House on May 16 and it passed the Senate on May 23. Bush signed the act on June 7, 2001, less than five months after his installation as President. The bill cut all tax brackets with three percent or more, with the top income tax bracket being cut from 39.6 percent to 35 percent. Furthermore, the estate tax would get cut incrementally until a complete repeal would get triggered in 2010. The tax cut was controversial because of its major impact on the revenue of the

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<sup>123</sup> George W. Bush, January 20, 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Paul A. Gigot, "How to Enforce a Tax Cut," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 2001.

federal government, which was then estimated at \$1,35 trillion over a 10 year period.<sup>125</sup> Supporters of the bill argued the additional economic growth triggered by the tax cut would lead to increased tax revenue and combined with the budget surplus left behind by Clinton, it would not lead to significant deficits. Opponents however, argued the promised economic growth would not occur and the tax cut would result in a significant deficit, resulting in a raid into the Social Security funds. Richard Gephardt, a Missouri Democrat, opposed the tax cuts arguing that “[t]he Bush tax cut has wiped out the surplus, invaded Medicare and stayed out of Social Security only by employing a ridiculous accounting gimmick.”<sup>126</sup> The gimmick Gephardt referred to was the ‘sunset’ provision, which ended the tax cut automatically on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Budgetary rules limited the maximum amount a bill could add to the deficit after the first decade after the enactment of the bill, and by adding the ‘sunset’ provision Republicans ensured a much larger tax cut than otherwise would have been possible. Ten years later, this sunset provision would result in one of the major clashes between President Obama and the GOP.

The tax debate was an opportunity for Ryan to make a name for himself as a supply-side economics “policy wonk”, as many will call him during his career. As a junior member of the committee and a relatively inexperienced politician, Ryan was not on the forefront of the tax debate. However, at the request of committee chairman Bill Thomas, Ryan also joined the subcommittee focusing on select taxes and revenue issue.<sup>127</sup> Ryan quietly worked on the Bush tax cut proposal, which Thomas eventually introduced in the House. But while he supported the tax cuts and even helped design the bill, Ryan publicly made name for himself as a critic of the sunset provision. Together with Rep. Kenny Hulshof, Ryan co-sponsored a bill to eliminate the sunset provision. In response to critics who questioned the need for making the tax cuts permanent, Ryan told NPR that

We're pushing it now so those who are planning their estates, who are planning their investments for their small businesses can get on with life and can do that. And most

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<sup>125</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 189.

<sup>126</sup> Frank Bruni, “Bush Defends Size of Surplus and Tax Cuts,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 2001.

<sup>127</sup> “Ways and Means Seat Puts Ryan in Key Spot,” *The Capital Times*, January 10, 2001.

importantly, we want to make sure we don't send our economy and our families into a brink of disaster on January the 1st, 2011.<sup>128</sup>

The tax debate was not over after Bush signed the 2001 tax cut, because shortly thereafter the White House announced the administration's ambition for overhauling the entire federal tax code, although they admitted it was not on "the top of President's Bush's agenda for at least a year or two."<sup>129</sup> Two years later, taxes were back on top of the administration's agenda, but not for a complete overhaul.

Bush started the year 2003 with a budget proposal that included sweeping cuts in taxes on dividends. A proposal was expected and many had speculated about the breadth of the cuts, but neither Democrats nor Republicans had expected a plan that included the complete elimination of taxes on (most) stock dividends.<sup>130</sup> The plan also included the installation of \$3,000 "re-employment accounts" and increased the child tax credit from \$600 to \$1,000.<sup>131</sup> The plan was immediately criticized by liberals as a giveaway to the wealthy on the back of the poor, but Republicans were very enthusiastic about the "bold proposal" and the House Ways and Means Committee began drafting the *Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003*, which was introduced by the committee chair Bill Thomas on February 27<sup>th</sup> that year.

A fundamental difference between the 2001 and the 2003 tax proposal was the economic situation of the time. In 2001, the government was running a surplus and Conservatives argued the tax cuts were money being given back to the people after the government had taken care of all necessities. In 2003, the government was no longer running a budget surplus, the economy had seen a major downfall after 9/11 and recovery had been sluggish. Some Republicans argued that the tax cuts would spur the economy and the economic growth would result in more tax revenue on the long run. On the short run however, there was no doubt that the tax plan resulted in an

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<sup>128</sup> "Profile: House Republicans Attempting to Make Tax Cuts Permanent," *NPR: Morning Edition*, April 18, 2002.

<sup>129</sup> Richard W. Stevenson, "Bush, After Gaining Tax Cut, Is Taking Aim at Tax Code," *The New York Times*, July 16, 2001.

<sup>130</sup> Edmund L. Andrews, "Bush and the Economy: The Overview; White House Aides Launch a Defense of Bush Tax Plan," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2003.

<sup>131</sup> Edmund L. Andrews, January 7, 2003.



increase of the deficit. Historically, this would have been antipathetic to everything the GOP stood for, but Republicans would show they had an altered mentality towards balancing the budget.

The budget proposal by Bush was preceded by a major shakeup of his economic team. On December 6, 2002, two ranking members of Bush's economic team were forced to resign. Secretary of the Treasury, Paul O'Neill, and Lawrence Lindsey, Bush's top economic adviser and head of the White House National Economic Council, both announced their resignation. Their resignation was not unexpected, as both Lindsey and O'Neill were not very popular among Congressional Republicans, lobbyists and Wall Street executives. They had both a reputation for being blunt and outspoken, and as such had made several enemies on all sides of the political spectrum. Their lack of political sensitivity was considered problematic, especially for O'Neill, who as Secretary of the Treasury "is supposed to be somebody who's very discreet."<sup>132</sup> The White House insisted their resignation was not a signal of significant policy changes, but the resignation was a sign of an important shift in budgetary policies.<sup>133</sup> Both Lindsey and O'Neill were known to be fiscally conservative. Lindsey had been responsible for formulating Bush's economic policies during the campaign and was one of the main composers of the 2001 tax cuts, while O'Neill was known as a strong opponent of the American tax code, who argued for a complete overhaul and simplification of the tax code.<sup>134</sup> However, they were also two budgetary conservatives who strongly believed in maintaining a balanced budget and argued for a strong dollar. Therefore, both Lindsey and O'Neill were internally critical of the administration's planned budget proposal, believing running up the deficit would hurt the economy on the long run. They were not opposed to the tax cuts themselves, but they both demanded the cuts would be offset by spending cuts to maintain a balanced budget. O'Neill had been openly critical of the supply-side argument that the lower tax rate would spur economic growth resulting in equally high tax revenues and maintaining a balanced budget<sup>135</sup>, while Lindsey had publicly commented

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<sup>132</sup> Andrew Tully, "U.S.: Economists Say Bush Wants to Show Determination to Fix Economy," *Radio Free Europe*, December 9, 2002.

<sup>133</sup> O'Neill had also pushed for harsher corporate crime policies, which spurred a lot of opposition among Wall Street executives and within the Bush administration. This was likely an additional reason for the administration to force O'Neill to retire.

<sup>134</sup> "Treasury Sec. O'Neill, President's Economic Adviser Lindsey Resign," *PBS Newshour*, December 6, 2002.

<sup>135</sup> Tully.

on the War in Iraq as an significant cost for the administration.<sup>136</sup> The resignation of the two leading figures in Bush's economic team marked a shift in Republican thinking on the budget and tax cuts. It was in a conversation with Paul O'Neill that Dick Cheney depicted this new line of thinking with one of his most famous quotes: "You know, Paul, Reagan proved deficits don't matter."<sup>137</sup>

The resignation of O'Neill and Lindsey was final prove that Republicans favored tax cuts over a balanced budget. Furthermore, it signified a shift in Republican thinking on how to cut government spending. For many anti-government conservatives, an increased deficit would ultimately force the administration to cut spending. As a result, the notion to cut taxes without immediately cutting spending was no longer problematic, because the increased deficit would force the government to cut spending in the long run anyway (as long as the government by then would decide to balance the budget through spending cuts and not by raising tax rates). The 'Starve the Beast' strategy was originally designed and adopted by Republicans in the late 70's/early 80's, but even Reagan, who openly supported the Starve the Beast strategy, was fearful of running up the deficit too much and occasionally supported tax increases throughout his administration. It was under W. that the strategy came to full fruition.<sup>138</sup>

Exemplary for this approach of the GOP are comments made by Rep. Sue Myrick, chairwoman of the Republican Study Committee. In 1996 she had won the "deficit hawk" award of the Concord Coalition, but in 2003 she commented that "Anything that will help us stop spending money, I'm in favor of...And we've tried to say, hey, we don't have to spend so much of it. And if there's a deficit, that may help us."<sup>139</sup> Another example was House Majority leader Tom DeLay, who in 1997 had attacked supply-side Republican Jack Kemp on exactly this issue: "Jack Kemp worships at the altar of tax cuts. Jack has always said that deficits don't matter. We think that deficits do matter."<sup>140</sup> In 2003, DeLay had switched positions and supported the budget proposed by Bush. Supply-siders like Paul Ryan were very pleased with the budget and the

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<sup>136</sup> Todd S. Purdum, "Upheaval in the Treasury: The Team; Two Casualties as Bush Seeks Economic Fix," *The New York Times*, December 8, 2002.

<sup>137</sup> "Dick Cheney on Budget & Economy", *OnTheIssues*, accessed July 28, 2017, [http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Dick\\_Cheney\\_Budget\\_+\\_Economy.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Dick_Cheney_Budget_+_Economy.htm).

<sup>138</sup> Bruce Bartlett, "Tax Cuts and 'Starving the Beast'," *Forbes Magazine*, May 7, 2010.

<sup>139</sup> David Firestone, "Washington Talk; Conservatives Now See Deficits as a Tool to Fight Spending," *The New York Times*, February 11, 2003.

<sup>140</sup> Firestone, "Washington Talk; Conservatives Now See Deficits as a Tool to Fight Spending,"

influence of supply-side conservatives on this administration, and Ryan warned his less ideological colleagues in the Senate that “we’re not playing games here. We are going to have an impact on this budget.”<sup>141</sup>

In the House, the Ways and Means Committee went to work with the budget proposal and on May 9, 2003, the House passed their version of the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003. Unlike the president’s proposal, the House bill would not eliminate the tax on stock dividends, but would lower the tax rate on both dividends and capital gains to 15 percent, which would amount to an even larger tax cut for those making over \$1 million, since the average investor makes more money with capital gains than through dividends. An analysis by the Brookings Institution and the Tax Policy Center at the Urban Institute, showed that the House bill would result in an average tax cut of \$105,636 for those making over \$ 1 million, while Bush’s proposal would ‘only’ amount to an average cut of \$89,509 for the same category.<sup>142</sup>

Similar to the 2001 tax bill, the 2003 bill includes several sunset provisions on different parts of the bill, to ensure the bill would not exceed budgetary limits on lost revenue. The provisions of the bill that would get affected by the sunset, which was set to expire in 2005, were exactly those tax cuts that would help most Americans, and middle-income Americans in particular, like the child credit, the marriage bonus and the expansion of the 10 percent tax bracket, as well as the increased write-offs for small businesses.<sup>143</sup> By picking the most popular provisions in the bill for the sunset provision, Ways and Means chair Thomas ensured the extension of those provisions, and he expressed hope that the provisions would become permanent before they expire.<sup>144</sup>

The Senate passed an Amended version of the bill 6 days later, with a 51-49 majority, but after the conference committee agreed upon an identical proposal, Democrat Evan Bayh had switched his position and Vice-President Dick Cheney had to break the tie in the Senate to ensure

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<sup>141</sup> Firestone.

<sup>142</sup> David E. Rosenbaum, “House G.O.P. Tax Cuts Outdo Bush Plan in Favoring Wealthy,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 2003.

<sup>143</sup> Constantine Angyridis and Michael Jolly, “Fiscal Implications of the 2001 and 2003 Bush Tax Cuts,” *The Journal of Economic Asymmetries* 7, No. 1 (2010): 73-75.

<sup>144</sup> Rosenbaum, “House G.O.P. Tax Cuts Outdo Bush Plan in Favoring Wealthy”.

passage of the bill. Notably, three Republican senators voted against the bill: John McCain, Olympia Snow and now-Democrat Lincoln Chafee.<sup>145</sup> The final version was signed by Bush on May 28, 2003.

### ***Privatizing Entitlements: The Fight over Welfare Reform***

Although the Bush Administration failed to enact the tax overhaul they had hoped for, the Bush Administration was quite successful in implementing their tax policies. In contrast, the administration had a lot more trouble with the welfare reform they envisioned. When Ryan became part of the Ways and Means subcommittee on Social Security in 2001, both the Bush administration and Congressional Republicans had planned to introduce legislation to privatize Social Security. Ryan himself had actively lobbied for Social Security reforms where Americans could invest parts of their Social Security taxes into the stock market since his first campaign for Congress in 1998, and was made part of this subcommittee to help design the privatization bill. In May 2001, Bush announced the appointment of the Commission for Social Security Reform, which he filled with many proponents of private saving accounts, and which was tasked with reform recommendations to improve Social Security's solvency.<sup>146</sup> However, the stock market's decline that started in April 2000 lowered enthusiasm for private investments into the stock market and when the 9/11 attacks resulted in a "dramatic plunge in the stock market", Ryan admitted that talks of privatizing Social Security had "been relegated to the back burner".<sup>147</sup> When Bush's Commission reported their findings in December, "Mr. Bush largely walked away from [their] recommendations."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> "H.R. 2 (108<sup>th</sup>): Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003," *Govtrack*, accessed November 11, 2017, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/108-2003/s196>.

<sup>146</sup> Susan Dentzer, "President Bush's Commission for Social Security Reform," *PBS Newshour*, May 2, 2001.

<sup>147</sup> Mike Ivey, "Social Security Privatization Off Fast Track," *The Capital Times*, October 31, 2001.

<sup>148</sup> Jackie Calmes, "Benefit Politics: Bush Puts Overhaul of Social Security Back on Agenda – Convention Speech Will Seek Private-Account Option, But Avoid Difficult Details – A 'Big Idea' for Second Term," *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, September 2, 2004.

In a 2003 interview with Fred Barnes and Mort Kondracke of Fox News' *The Beltway Boys*, Ryan was asked about Bush's plans to reform Social Security. Barnes noted that Bush had remained silent on Social Security and questioned whether Bush was willing to push for reform. In response, Ryan announced that he was working on a proposal on Social Security himself, but noted that "unfortunately, this is probably going to be a 2005 issue, not a 2004 issue."<sup>149</sup> He argued that the 51-49 majority of Republicans in the Senate made it extremely difficult to proceed with controversial reforms and expressed hope that the administration would proceed with Social Security reform after the 2004 election.

Ryan's prediction was right. Bush had made the solvency of Social Security one of the center pieces of his 2004 reelection bid. Ryan himself had other plans however. As said on *The Beltway Boys*, Ryan had been working on his own proposal for a while and on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Ryan introduced the *Social Security Personal Savings Guarantee and Prosperity Act of 2004*<sup>150</sup> together with Sen. John Sununu, policy advisor Peter Ferrara – who, as a college student in the 70's, was the first to write about "the craziest idea in the world"<sup>151</sup> - and Ryan's mentor, former Representative Jack Kemp.<sup>152</sup> In the press release, Ryan was highly optimistic about the effects of the proposal, claiming it "would give all workers access to a more prosperous retirement, while maintaining a strong safety net, achieving full and permanent solvency for Social Security, and reducing debt and payroll taxes over the long term."<sup>153</sup>

The plan, which Ryan claimed would not amount to any benefit cuts or tax hikes, would give tax payers the option to voluntarily invest a significant part of their payroll taxes into a tax-free personal savings account, 12.4 percent of the payroll taxes on the first \$10,000 of wages, and 5 percent of their payroll taxes on the wages above. On average, workers could dedicate 6.4 percent of their payroll tax to the savings account. Ryan also claimed his plan would guarantee benefits on the same level as under the old Social Security law, for those who decided to stay in the traditional system, as well as those who opened up a private savings account, which meant the

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<sup>149</sup> Fred Barnes and Mort Kondracke, "Interview with Paul Ryan," *Fox News: The Beltway Boys*, November 8, 2003.

<sup>150</sup> "Rep. Ryan Introduces Bill to Save Social Security, Guarantee Benefits, Promote Prosperity," *U.S. Fed News*, July 20, 2004.

<sup>151</sup> Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, "Private-Account Concept Grew from Obscure Roots," *The Washington Post*, February 22, 2005.

<sup>152</sup> "Rep. Paul Ryan to Unveil Social Security Fix Tuesday," *U.S. Newswire*, July 16, 2004.

<sup>153</sup> "Rep. Paul Ryan to Unveil Social Security Fix Tuesday".

government would back potential losses if the losses resulted in lower benefits than they would have been under the old system.<sup>154</sup> What Ryan failed to mention in his press release is how to pay for the transition to a partly privatized system. An average of 6.4 percent of payroll taxes getting diverted to private accounts would result in a significant downfall in raised revenue for Social Security, but Ryan guaranteed the same benefits and promised to not raise taxes in any way to bridge the gap. Jackie Calmes explains that Ryan based his plan on Peter Ferrara's approach, who suggested the Treasury should borrow the money necessary to pay for the transition.<sup>155</sup> Although Ryan never publicly stated it, his proposal was an extension of the 'Starve the Beast' strategy. In an interview with *CNBC's Kudlow & Cramer*, Ryan claimed his plan would largely pay for the transition costs by capping the growth of federal spending to 3.6 percent a year<sup>156</sup>, but since this was more than 1 percent below the projected growth of federal spending, this could only be achieved through significant cuts in federal programs. With regards to the long-term solvency issue, Ryan simply argued that since private investment would amount to higher returns than would be possible in the public system, the private accounts would create significant surpluses to offset any shortage in the public system.<sup>157</sup>

Considering he introduced his bill 4 months before the election, it was unlikely that Ryan's plan would gain real traction or result in a serious effort to reform Social Security before the election. However, Ryan did achieve something else with his proposal. When, after the election, Bush did start pushing for Social Security reform, Ryan had become one of the leading Republican authorities on this issue within the House. It was another building block for his rising star within the G.O.P. and a reaffirmation of his reputation as a 'policy wonk'.

Bush started to push hard for Social Security reform immediately after his reelection in 2004. He considered his reelection a mandate for his plans on Social Security (as well as making his tax cuts permanent) and within days he stated that he had "earned capital in this campaign, political

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<sup>154</sup> "Rep. Paul Ryan to Unveil Social Security Fix Tuesday".

<sup>155</sup> Calmes, "Benefit Politics".

<sup>156</sup> "Interview: Representatives Paul Ryan and Harold Ford Discuss the War in Iraq, Equipment Problems and Social Security Reform," *CNBC: Kudlow & Cramer*, December 27, 2004.

<sup>157</sup> Edmund L. Andrews, "Most G.O.P. Plans to Remake Social Security Involve Deep Cuts to Tomorrow's Retirees," *The New York Times*, December 14, 2004.

capital, and now I intend to spend it.”<sup>158</sup> In his 2005 inaugural address, Bush called for the extension of the American ideal of freedom by “reforming great institutions to serve needs of our time”. Bush paints the picture of an American “ownership society”, in which Americans have more “ownership of homes and businesses, retirement savings, and health insurance”, which would ultimately result in a society where “every citizen [is] an agent of his or her own destiny”.<sup>159</sup> Two weeks later, Bush had made Social Security reform the centerpiece of his State of the Union address, calling it “a great moral success of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” but “headed toward bankruptcy.”<sup>160</sup> He immediately noted that nothing would change for those older than 55, but argued that long-term solvency could not be achieved without major reform for those younger than 55. He called for “an open, candid review of the options”, cleverly referring to several reform proposals presented by Democrats, but then continued with explaining his own plan, for which the basis was formed by voluntary personal retirement accounts. While the plan outlined in the State of the Union address was not as extensive as Ryan’s proposal, its basic features were the same. Younger employees could divert a portion of their payroll taxes to private accounts (in Bush’s proposal up to 4 percent), which they could privately invest in bonds and stock funds. Bush does point to some safeguards in his plan – like protecting the accounts from hidden Wall Street fees and protecting the investments from sudden market swings – but he neither explains how he would ensure those protections, nor how he would pay for the transition or how he would ensure long-term solvency.<sup>161</sup>

In the meantime, Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman were directing a massive effort to mobilize public opinion and build public support for reform.<sup>162</sup> However, their efforts to mobilize public support had the adverse effect: it brought attention to the fact that Republicans wanted to privatize Social Security. And people liked Social Security. The AARP was strongly opposed to the efforts of the White House, and would lead the campaign against personal accounts, informing the public on the potential impact of the reforms. About three months after the plans had been made public, Pew Research Center concluded that “the more people learn about the

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<sup>158</sup> William A. Galston, “Why the 2005 Social Security Initiative Failed, and What It Means for the Future,” *The Brookings Institution*, September 21, 2007.

<sup>159</sup> George W. Bush, “Inaugural Address,” *The American Presidency Project*, January 20, 2005.

<sup>160</sup> George W. Bush, “Text of President Bush’s 2005 State of the Union Address,” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2005.

<sup>161</sup> George W. Bush, February 2, 2005.

<sup>162</sup> William A. Galston, “Why the 2005 Social Security Initiative Failed”.

Bush plan, the more they oppose it.”<sup>163</sup> Although the efforts were successful in convincing Americans that Social Security was a problem that needed some solution, the majority of Americans believed the White House solutions were only making matters worse. At that point, Bush was still willing to fight for his reform, with White House spokesman Trent Duffy stating that the President “is just getting started, and he's going to keep traveling, pushing and explaining to people of all ages why Social Security needs to be fixed permanently and why it's best that personal accounts be part of the solution.”<sup>164</sup>

Republican Congressmen were becoming less enthusiastic however. The AARP had begun a drive to get as many of its members as possible to send postcards to their congressman, and faced with the sheer amount of opposition to the bill among the electorate, Republicans became “reluctant to temper with a program that has proved to be broadly popular in its 70-year history”.<sup>165</sup> In the summer of 2005, House Republicans seemed to be moving forward on the issue, with the House leadership embracing a much less ambitious bill, where only the Social Security surplus could be used for private accounts. Speaker J. Dennis Hastert referred to the proposal as “a great start” and House Majority Whip Roy Blunt called it “an excellent first step.”<sup>166</sup> Paul Ryan, who had been lobbying hard for Bush’s proposals in the House, celebrated the proposal for “unmasking the debt”<sup>167</sup> of the federal government by eliminating the use of the Social Security surplus to finance general government spending. The leadership even promised the bill would come up for a vote during the summer. But the projected consensus on this new proposal was fake and the bill was never brought to the floor for a vote. Republicans remained hesitant about touching social security at all. In an internal e-mail, Roy Blunt listed the GOP leadership’s priorities for the remainder of the year, and while the list included things like reform of the postal offices or the Central America Free Trade Agreement, Social Security reform was notably absent.<sup>168</sup> When over the summer New Orleans was hit by hurricane Katrina and Bush fumbled the response to the disaster, he had usurped the remainder of his political capital and could no longer muster the support for his reform effort. By October 2005, George W. Bush had

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<sup>163</sup> Jim VandeHei and Mike Allen, “Bush Rejects Delay, Prepares Escalated Social Security Push,” *Washington Post*, March 3, 2005.

<sup>164</sup> Jonathan Weisman, “Skepticism of Bush Social Security Plan Is Growing,” *Washington Post*, March 15, 2005.

<sup>165</sup> Michael A. Fletcher, “Bush Touts Social Security Plan,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 2005.

<sup>166</sup> Mike Allen and Jonathan Weisman, “House GOP Offers Plan for Social Security,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 2005.

<sup>167</sup> Mike Allen and Jonathan Weisman, “House GOP Offers Plan for Social Security”.

<sup>168</sup> Patrick O’Connor, “Social Security in Limbo,” *The Hill*, June 1, 2005.



to admit his efforts on Social Security had failed and he had to give up on his centerpiece legislation.<sup>169</sup>

### *Leaving Office*

Prior to assuming the presidency, George W. Bush was the compassionate conservative who planned on imposing sweeping reforms on socio-economic issues, but during his presidency achieved little of what he set out to do with his agenda. The Bush tax cuts were massive and from the perspective of a supply-side politician a major success, but he failed to overhaul the tax code, which was his ultimate goal.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, while he originally wanted to privatize welfare programs like social security, Bush faced significant backlash when he attempted to actually do so. In fact, Bush's biggest achievement in socio-economic policy fields was not an overhaul of any government program, but rather the expansion of Medicare with Medicare Part D, the drug coverage program that was added to the welfare program in 2003 and went into effect in 2006.

For Ryan, the Bush years served as a time where he could quietly build his credentials and make a name for himself. During this period, Ryan was among the most conservative members of Congress, and it was his proposal on Social Security that would serve as the blueprint for the Bush plans. By the time Bush left office, Ryan was well-known among his Republican colleagues as an ideologically consistent Republican who was willing to make the unpopular case for what they perceived to be necessary reforms. Furthermore, being young and charismatic, Republicans began to realize the potential Paul Ryan had for the future leadership of the Party.

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<sup>169</sup> William A. Galston, "Why the 2005 Social Security Initiative Failed".

<sup>170</sup> Scott Greenberg, "The Bush Tax Reform Panel, Ten Years Later," *Tax Foundation*, November 2, 2015.

## **Chapter 4: Understanding the Tea Party**

### **Introduction**

When Obama was elected by a landslide on November 4, 2008, many believed a new era of progressivism was about to begin. But after less than two months after Obama assumed the Oval Office, conservative activists were successfully organizing rallies throughout the nation and within months millions of voters identified themselves as sympathetic to this new movement. In the following years, the Tea Party movement - both a reference to the original Boston Tea Party and an abbreviation for Taxed Enough Already - would dominate headlines. When Republicans regained control of the House of Representatives after the midterm elections of 2010, many credited the Tea Party for this victory.

Stepping away from the chronological narrative structuring the other chapters of this thesis, this chapter examines the Tea Party from a sociological perspective. Exploring the movement's origins and history, this chapter outlines the three core components of the movement. First, it discusses the grassroots movement, the motivations of the activists and the ideas informing in shaping their worldviews, in order to understand why these (mostly) older, white (upper-) middle-class men have lost all faith in the federal government and are therefore so deeply opposed to government regulations. Second, it discusses the financial powerhouses behind the movement, including their motivations and their influence on both the movement and the GOP at large. This section focuses primarily on Charles and David Koch, two of the wealthiest men in America, who have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on promoting the Tea Party and on campaigns for conservative politicians. Because the political activism of the Koch brothers goes back to at least the 1970s and is related to, this section will also begin by explaining how they had gotten politically involved, before discussing their role in the Tea Party movement. In the third part of the chapter, the role of conservative media will be highlighted, with an emphasis on Fox News and Glenn Beck. Conservative media have played a vital role both in advancing the movement during its early stages - by advertising the movement and strengthening its base among conservatives - and later on in maintaining the movement's momentum, by continuously reporting on various Tea Party protests and Tea Party events.

### *A three legged movement: Grassroots Tea Party organizations*

The Tea Party consists of three distinct components. Skocpol and Williamson were among the first to discuss the different components of the Tea Party, although their research focused primarily on the first component: grassroots organizations. For Skocpol and Williamson, the core constituency of the Tea Party is not the voting public that identifies itself as a strong Tea Party supporter, which in 2011 was about one-fifth of all voting-age Americans, but the estimated 200,000 members of various local Tea Party organizations, most of whom were older, white, male Republicans, most of whom were small-business owner with a somewhat above average income.<sup>171</sup> When the Tea Party just came to being, reports often portrayed the Tea Party as a politically diverse group, consisting of liberals, conservatives and moderates alike, all of whom were supposedly fed up with the political establishment and many of whom would supposedly have no prior experience in politics, but Skocpol and Williamson showed that this is a wholly false depiction of the movement. In fact, nearly all Tea Party members were extremely conservative Republicans and many had prior experience as political activists. Their distrust of the GOP followed their views that the establishment was corrupted and sold out its conservative ideals.<sup>172</sup>

The political viewpoints are deeply conservative. Skocpol and Williamson argue Tea Party conservatism is “the latest iteration of long-standing, hardcore conservatism in American politics.”<sup>173</sup> The political views expressed by Tea Party members are reminiscent of Barry Goldwater and the John Birch Society, and while most within the Tea Party revere Ronald Reagan (and many consider him to be the greatest president in American history), it is an white-washed version of his most conservative rhetoric rather than an actual account of his presidency with all of its complexities, that they present when discussing Reagan. In fact, the uncompromising nature of the Tea party’s conservative ideology and their strong distrust of anyone who compromises on any aspect of the conservative agenda, shows the difficulty for politicians in gaining and maintaining support from Tea Party politicians. One example is the disappointment of many Tea Partiers in the presidency of Bush Jr. - arguably the most conservative presidencies in post-war America - because he was not conservative enough. Tea

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<sup>171</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 21-26.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibidem*, 34-40.

<sup>173</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 40.

Partiers argued that Bush's dismal approval ratings when he left office were the result of his failure to adhere strictly to conservative principles, which in their eyes also explained the economic collapse of 2008 and the subsequent slow recovery.

However, while the Tea Party agenda is uncompromisingly conservative, it is also ambiguous, sometimes self-contradictory, and in many ways the Tea Party agenda has little basis in reality. "Even if we leave aside the off-the-wall paranoid projections, the detailed policy claims made by Tea Partiers are, to put it politely, often not in touch with factual reality."<sup>174</sup> One such example are the contradictory positions on government spending and government programs. On the one hand, Tea Party conservatives are overwhelmingly in favor of deep cuts in government spending and greatly reduced tax rates. At the same time however, government programs like Social Security, the VA and Medicare are highly popular, and any cut in those programs can count on strong opposition from the Tea Party. While these two positions may seem contradictory however, to Tea Party members, they are not. In their interviews with Skocpol and Williamson, several Tea Party members explained that Social Security and Medicare, two of the benefits many Tea Partiers enjoy, are good programs for the deserving, hard-working people who had paid taxes their whole life and were now enjoying the fruits of their labor. The cuts in government spending should be made in those programs, or elements of programs, that have been put in place to support undeserving beneficiaries. When discussing most, if not all, issues, Tea Party members draw a sharp distinction between honest, hardworking and patriotic Americans and 'others'.<sup>175</sup> The identity of the 'other' greatly differs depending on the topic discussed, but includes groups like the young, the poor, demographic and religious minorities and the LGBT community.

### ***The Movement's Deep Story***

A more detailed examination of the distinction between 'patriotic Americans' and 'others' can be found in the work of Arlie Russell Hochschild. In her 2016 book *Strangers in Their Own Land*

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<sup>174</sup> Ibidem, 199.

<sup>175</sup> Ibidem, 60.

Hochschild aims to understand “how life feels like to people on the right.”<sup>176</sup> Hochschild’s key to understanding members of the Tea Party, is their collective *deep story*: an explanation of “the *subjective prism* through which the party on the other side sees the world”.<sup>177</sup> The deep story provides a metaphor for the way Tea Partiers see the world, and in particular how they understand the “relationships between different social groups within our national borders.”<sup>178</sup>

The Tea Party’s deep story starts with the idea of people standing in line to reach the American dream. Surrounded by their fellow white, older, Christian, mostly male Americans, these Tea Party members are patiently waiting for their turn to get a taste of what they have been promised would eventually reach them. They have endured much, from lay-offs and economic hardship to health problems and changes in their environment, but they haven’t been complaining, since they knew what lay ahead. But the line seems to barely be moving. On the contrary, they seem to get pushed back. Salaries for many people have dropped rather than risen and the availability of well-paying jobs has become less and less. At the same time, the things they take pride and have embraced throughout their life, including (but not limited to) Christian morality, have been labelled by liberals as being old-fashioned, but more hurtful, as being sexist, and homophobic.<sup>179</sup>

And then they notice something. While they’re waiting in line, not getting any closer to the American dream, they see the people behind them being moved up and cutting in line in front of them. Blacks, Latino’s, women, or immigrants, affirmative action seems to help everyone except them.<sup>180</sup> It provides opportunities they have never had, paid for with their taxes. Even animals seem to be cutting in line ahead of them. Protected by the EPA and other environmental organizations, the government seems to care more about the animal’s future than theirs. And while this all happens, they are asked to be sympathetic to those cutting in line ahead because otherwise they are discriminatory, racist or sexist. It all *feels* very unfair. Because why would these others deserve this special treatment?

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<sup>176</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land; Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016), IX.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibidem*, 135.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibidem*, 135.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibidem*, 137.

<sup>180</sup> Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 137.

But the story doesn't end there. Because in the White House, one of these line cutters had been elected president: Barack Hussein Obama. Because how else would he be able to get all the opportunities he has gotten? He must have gotten help from the federal government, or worse. And while he has gotten all these opportunities that have helped him become president, he is helping others to cut in line as well, while lamenting about those who are unsympathetic to his efforts. Furthermore, he is critical of America, apologetic about its history, and thus he is attacking another source of pride, a core part of the Tea Partiers identity. He was not *their* president, he was the president of *the other*.<sup>181</sup>

What Hochschild identifies is a dualistic response towards identity politics. On the one hand, Tea Party supporters are staunch believers in the American Dream, rejecting the importance of a person's heritage and socio-economic background for their chance of achieving the American dream. They reject the notions of victimhood, and consider circumstances to be something one simply has to accept and deal with, turning the suffering itself into an American virtue.<sup>182</sup> The reality that most people in line behind them are non-white, non-evangelical and often female, is unfortunate for those people, but means they simply have to work harder to overcome the obstacles holding them back. From this perspective, identity politics is undermining the American Dream and American virtues, since they attempt to change the circumstances for certain people, giving those *others* an unfair advantage (especially since those people are often *undeserving*, abusing the system and "being lazy"). Furthermore, Tea Partiers are especially aggrieved by notions of identity politics, since they feel as if they are the ones who are blamed for those circumstances, even though "*we* didn't do those bad things."<sup>183</sup> And while 'liberals' are lamenting the Tea Partiers culture, heritage and morals, they are simultaneously trying to force certain *feeling rules* onto society, arguing that everyone should sympathize with LGBT members, and with women, and with minorities, and with refugee's, and so on.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibidem, 230.

<sup>182</sup> As is the case with Hochschild's own key issue. The pollution resulting from the petrochemical industry in south-west Louisiana is something most Tea Partiers accept as an unfortunate reality. Undergoing and accepting these negative circumstances, rather than attempting to change the circumstances, is what they view as the virtuous and honorable thing to do.

<sup>183</sup> Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 213.

On the other hand, the Tea Partiers themselves show a certain victimhood mentality. They consider themselves to be “strangers in their own land.”<sup>184</sup> With stagnant wages and little job security, work is no longer a source of pride. But their race is no longer a sense of pride either. Neither is their gender, nor their sexuality, nor their regional history and culture, nor their age, nor their religion. *They* are the victims of ‘liberal policies’. *They* are the ones negatively impacted by affirmative action, *their* (often Southern) heritage is questioned and portrayed in a negative way, *they* are the victims of immigrants taking *their* jobs. They are being told that they should sympathize with the *other*, while those demanding sympathy for the *other* fail to sympathize with them. And, as the victims of ‘liberal America’, they have to protect their own rights and find a candidate who is on *their* side and not representing the *other*. As Hochschild points out, these anti-identity politics Tea Partiers have been searching for, ironically, an “identity politics candidate for white men”.<sup>185</sup>

### ***The Original Origin Story***

The rise of the Tea Party movement is often traced back to February 19, 2009, when CNBC reporter Rick Santelli deplored the Obama administration, not even a month in office, for his nascent foreclosure relief plan:

The government is promoting bad behavior...see if we really want to subsidize the loser’s mortgages or would we like to, at least, buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road and reward people that could carry the water, instead of drink the water.<sup>186</sup>

Santelli continues to shout at those present on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange: “This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbors mortgage, that has an extra bathroom and can’t pay their bills?!”<sup>187</sup> Santelli calls for a ‘Chicago Tea Party’ and invites

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<sup>184</sup> Ibidem, 144.

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem, 230.

<sup>186</sup> “Rick Santelli and the ‘Rant of the year’”.

<sup>187</sup> “Rick Santelli and the ‘Rant of the year’”.

'capitalists' to join. One of the CNBC hosts jokingly congratulates Santelli for his "coronation as revolutionary leader,"<sup>188</sup> but he was not wrong.

The rant of Santelli immediately went viral. The video was re-televised on every network, *Drudge Report* had made it their headline story, and right-wing radio hosts, bloggers and conservative campaign operatives saw the potential power of this rant. Taking up the rallying cry for a new 'Tea Party', conservative operatives started to organize rallies and radio hosts and bloggers started circulating information on those rallies to reach a wider audience. The first protests, organized on February 27<sup>th</sup> drew relatively small crowds, but in March *Fox News* began openly supporting the Tea Party protests and soon after, on Tax Day 2009, hundreds of thousands conservative Americans took to the streets in protest against the Obama administration.<sup>189</sup> Local Tea Party organizations popped up throughout the country and the movement was buzzing with energy and spirit. These conservatives were ready to reclaim the country and to do so, they had to reclaim the GOP. The local organizations rallied behind the most conservative Republicans, and any Republican who was too moderate for their taste would see himself getting primaried. Building on the new and energetic organizations, Tea Party candidates had a strong ground game and a wide reach among those likely to vote in Republican primaries.

The rant of Santelli and the uproar it created ensured the Tea Party had an origin story that gave the movement the image of a spontaneous uprising organized by ordinary people who were fed up with the government. But although the "reports of spontaneous political combustion weren't entirely wrong...they were far from the whole story."<sup>190</sup> First, Jane Mayer and others have pointed out that the idea of a radically conservative movement is not new and that "similarly reactionary forces had attacked virtually every Democratic President since Franklin Roosevelt."<sup>191</sup> More importantly, 'experienced political elites' had been busy funding and organizing rallies and meetings from the start, while conservative media like *Fox News* - which had been pushing similar talking points for years - quickly took up the banner as the unofficial

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<sup>188</sup> "Rick Santelli and the 'Rant of the year'".

<sup>189</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 8.

<sup>190</sup> Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016), 167.

<sup>191</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 167.



outlet for the movement. Rather than a civil uprising, the rise of the Tea Party was the culmination of three distinct forces, which Skocpol and Williamson dubbed: “grassroots activists, roving billionaire activists, and right-wing media purveyors.”<sup>192</sup>

### ***Roving Billionaires***

The ‘roving billionaire activists’, as Skocpol and Williamson call them, consists of a group of conservative billionaires and millionaires who have increasingly organized themselves to lobby their conservative agenda. Mayer, who has written extensively about the role of money for the Tea Party movement, start her history of the radical right with the family history of one of America’s wealthiest and most powerful families: The Koch family. Fred Koch, the patriarch, had built his business on developing a new method for extracting gasoline from crude oil and after American oil manufacturers had sued him for copyright infringement, Fred Koch sold his expertise to the Soviet Union and Nazi-Germany.<sup>193</sup> In 1958, Fred Koch became one of the founding members of the John Birch Society, ironically aiming to purge the American government from Soviet agents. Fred Koch believed that communists had infiltrated all aspects of American life, from the political parties and the government, to the schools and churches. Furthermore, Fred Koch opposed the civil rights movement and believed that welfare was a secret plan to lure blacks to the cities which would result in “a vicious race war”.<sup>194</sup> In 1964 Fred Koch supported the Barry Goldwater campaign, as did many Birchers. But the following election neither party had a sufficiently conservative candidate, thus Koch floated the idea of fellow Bircher Ezra Taft Benson running for president, with South Carolina senator and notorious segregationist Strom Thurmond as a running mate, on a platform of segregation and the abolishment of all income taxes.<sup>195</sup> However, shortly after this proposal, and before George Wallace had announced his candidature, Fred Koch passed away.

His four sons were raised with military-style discipline and with strongly anti-government views. Fred Koch did not shy away from heavy corporal punishment, and he wanted to instill a strong work ethic and a competitive attitude. From an early age, the Koch children had to work

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<sup>192</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 13.

<sup>193</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 27.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibidem*, 39.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibidem*, 41.

on the ranch, were taken on big-game hunting trips and were encouraged to compete with one another in activities as fencing and boxing, which resulted in a sense of sibling rivalry between the brothers, an attitude that would only strengthen once the Koch brothers reached adulthood.<sup>196</sup>

It became clear at an early age that Charles was the most dominant of the four children and that David was increasingly attaching himself to his older brother. More than the other brothers, Charles and David were drawn towards their father's extremist ideology and both joined the John Birch Society. It is likely that the brothers did not actually believe their father's conspiracy theories, but became members to please their father. Shortly after the death of Fred Koch, Charles left the Society over its support for the Vietnam War. However, through the Birchers, Charles became familiar with antigovernment economic writers, which was much more appealing to Charles than the Birchers' anticommunist theories. In 1964, Charles was introduced to the Robert LeFevre, the founder of the Freedom School. LeFevre was as much opposed to the American government as he was opposed to communism and favored the complete abolition of the state.

The school taught a revisionist version of American history in which the robber barons were heroes, not villains, and the Gilded Age was the country's golden era. Taxes were denigrated as a form of theft, and the Progressive movement, Roosevelt's New Deal, and Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty...were ruinous turns toward socialism. The weak and poor, the school taught, should be cared for by private charity, not government...[The Civil War] shouldn't have been fought; instead, the South should have been allowed to secede. Slavery was a lesser evil than military conscription...because human beings should be allowed to sell themselves into slavery if they wished.<sup>197</sup>

The school opposed public policing, public fire departments, even national defense. It argued against antipoverty programs and opposed the government-sponsored integration of schools. Charles Koch was extremely enthusiastic about the Freedom School, where he became familiar with the works of Von Mises and Hayek, and persuaded his brothers to join as well. When his brother Frederick denounced the school's teachings, Charles threatened to beat his brother.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 33-34.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibidem*, 44.

<sup>198</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 45.

It was the Freedom School that first persuaded Charles to use his wealth for the dissemination of his ideology. He became one of the main funders of the school and had plans to turn it into an accredited graduate school and eventually an undergraduate college specialized in libertarian philosophy. The school eventually went under due to mismanagement, and many of its backers were disgruntled, but Charles remained supportive of LeFevre and the school. In a speech thirty years later, Charles recollected the school as being the place “where I began developing a passionate commitment to liberty as the form of social organization most in harmony with reality and man’s nature.”<sup>199</sup> Clayton Coppin suggests Charles Koch’s libertarian views were the result of his problematic relationship with authority ever since his childhood, which made fringe libertarian groups much more appealing to Charles than the traditional mainstream organizations pushing free-market economic policies. From an early age, Charles “was driven by some deeper urge to smash the one thing left in the world that could discipline him: the government.”<sup>200</sup> According to Coppin, Charles “was not going to be satisfied with being the Engels or even the Marx of the libertarian revolution. He wanted to be the Lenin.”<sup>201</sup> And for this revolution, Charles needed the masses.

In 1978, Charles Koch wrote an article for the *Libertarian Review*, aimed at his ‘fellow businessmen’, in which he calls for a new strategy in their pursuit of liberty. First, Charles argued businessmen should start “practicing what they preach”<sup>202</sup> and thus oppose any form of regulation and taxation, even if it is beneficiary for their business. They should stop applying for subsidies and oppose *public-private partnerships*. Secondly, business should stop financing universities and foundations “who make free enterprise noises, but have failed to produce competent graduates dedicated to establishing the free enterprise system.”<sup>203</sup> Koch lamented the shortage of talent for the failed projects he had set up for “reestablishing our free society”<sup>204</sup>, and argued business should focus their efforts on the few institutions effectively producing libertarian thinkers. He also argued for a new advertising strategy. The strategy aimed to portray the free

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<sup>199</sup> Ibidem, 46.

<sup>200</sup> Ibidem, 54.

<sup>201</sup> Ibidem, 54.

<sup>202</sup> Charles G. Koch, “The Business Community: Resisting Regulation,” *Libertarian Review* 7, No. 7 (1978): 32.

<sup>203</sup> Ibidem, 32.

<sup>204</sup> Ibidem, 32.

market not just as the most efficient system, but also as the “*only moral* system in history.”<sup>205</sup> In contrast, interventionism should be stigmatized as inherently unjust.

What is most notable about Charles’ article is his call for active participation in politics by businessmen, and more importantly, the uncompromising nature their political activism should entail. Charles argues that businessmen should “discard [the] lesser-of-evils approach to politics.”<sup>206</sup> The article calls for the business community to put its support behind the libertarian movement and the Libertarian Party. First, because Charles believed the GOP to be “the party of ‘business’ *in the worst sense*.”<sup>207</sup> In his view, the GOP was the party of special interests, the party supportive “of high protective tariffs, cartelization, of subsidies, of special privileges to business”<sup>208</sup>, and to attempt to change the GOP into a truly libertarian party Charles believed to be a futile enterprise. Secondly, Charles argued that their main efforts should focus on strengthening support for their ideas rather than supporting a political party: “But ideas do not spread by themselves; they spread only through *people*. Which means we need to build a *movement*. Only with a movement can we build an effective force for social changes...Such a movement already exists, the *libertarian movement*.”<sup>209</sup> In his view the libertarian movement could enforce radical social change without gaining seats in government, as long as their voice would be heard loudly.

A year after Charles wrote the article, he persuaded his younger brother David to become the running mate for Ed Clark, the nominee for the Libertarian Party in the 1980 presidential election. More than a real ambition to run for office, David’s nomination as running mate was mostly a legal way to avoid campaign finance regulations. As a candidate, David could use as much of his fortune on the campaign as he wished, without being limited by the donation cap for campaign financing.<sup>210</sup> The brothers considered the election their chance to convince a wide audience of their views, and were therefore deeply disappointed when the party receive only one percent of the vote in the general election. The brothers drew two lessons from the election. First, they learned that simply building their argument would not move the electorate away from the two

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<sup>205</sup> Koch, “The Business Community”, 33.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibidem*, 34.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibidem*, 34.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibidem*, 34.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibidem*, 34.

<sup>210</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 57.

main parties. Second, they became convinced that politicians were no more than “actors playing out a script”<sup>211</sup> and that to affect policy they had to become the ones writing the scripts. Therefore, they should invest their time and money in those “areas where policy ideas percolate from: academia and thinktanks.”<sup>212</sup> For the next three decades, the brothers largely receded from the public arena, but quietly contributed well over \$100 million to organizations aimed at advancing libertarian policies. Out of the sight of the larger public, the brothers were building what would become the ‘Kochtopus’: a myriad of thinktanks, front groups and academic institutions working for the libertarian ideology.<sup>213</sup>

The Koch brothers were far from the only wealthy conservatives aiming to advance a radically conservative ideology. Others, like Richard Mellon Scaife and John Olin, also used their considerable fortunes to push their conservative agenda. Conservative thinktanks like the Heritage Foundation largely relied on extremely wealthy sponsors for revenue, and several extremely wealthy conservatives created their own organizations or sponsored conservative projects. Olin for example created the Olin Foundation, which was established for the purpose of implementing conservative curricula at American universities. At first the foundation’s efforts focused on supporting small, conservative universities, but later the foundation shifted its attention to the Ivy League universities for more impact.<sup>214</sup> Another example is Scaife’s Arkansas Project, a team of private detectives investigating President Clinton with the aim to dig up as much dirt on the president as possible, which ultimately lead to the Clinton impeachment procedures.<sup>215</sup> What made the Koch brothers involvement in politics special “was not just [their] willingness to flout the rules but also the way that... [they] merged all form of political spending – campaign, lobbying, and philanthropic – into one investment aimed at paying huge future dividends to the donors.”<sup>216</sup> The Koch’s had built a machine where they personally funded political campaigns and party committees, where their business funded Political Action Committees (PAC) and financed lobbying efforts, and where they founded numerous nonprofit organizations which they could finance through ‘philanthropic’ donations. And slowly but surely,

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<sup>211</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 58.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibidem*, 58.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibidem*, 58.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibidem*, 102.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibidem*, 85.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibidem*, 146.

other wealthy donors were starting to rally around the Koch brothers, to join forces in their fight for less government regulation and lower taxes.

By 2008, the machine the Koch brothers and other billionaires had built was in full operation. Operatives all over the country were tied directly or indirectly to organization's funded by the Koch brothers, many Republican politicians had their campaigns financed by the brothers, and several of them had a history working for one of the Koch funded organizations. By the 1990s, the brother had switched their allegiance and had begun supporting and financing the GOP. In 1996, David Koch even became the vice-president of Bob Dole's campaign for the presidency.<sup>217</sup> Organizations like the *Heritage Foundation*, the *Cato Institute* and the *Mercatus Center* were constantly working on conservative policy proposals, and conservative politicians were eager to pay attention to their ideas. But the machine still lacked what Charles Koch had argued in 1978 would be crucial: a grassroots movement fighting for the libertarian ideal.

There had been several attempts to build such a movement. In the late 70's and early 80's, The Koch brothers wanted to build such a movement around the Libertarian Party, but the disappointing result of the 1980 Presidential Election had ended that ambition. In 1984 *Citizens for a Sound Economy* (CSE) was created<sup>218</sup>, which was set up to look like an authentic grassroots political organization, and since in main purpose was 'education', contributions were largely hidden. In reality, it was one of the first 'Astroturf' organizations: organizations funded by a small group of large donors, disguising itself as a grassroots organization. In 2004, the organization would split into two new organizations: *FreedomWorks*, with Dick Armey as its president; and *Americans For Prosperity* (AFP), led by conservative operative Tim Philips. Groups like CSE had attempted to build grassroots movements, but despite some individual successes like CSE's opposition against Clinton's energy tax plan in 1993 - for which they ran advertisements, staged media events and organized anti-tax rallies – these early attempts to build grassroots movements had proven largely futile.<sup>219</sup> What is notable however, is the recurring theme of the Boston Tea Party as a symbol for these attempted anti-tax movements. In 1991, CSE

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<sup>217</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 143.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibidem*, 160.

<sup>219</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 168.

promoted a protest against tax increases as a “re-enactment of the Boston Tea Party”, and in 2007 Americans For Prosperity again used the Tea Party theme for a protest in Texas.<sup>220</sup>

When Obama was elected president, the Koch brothers and their allies immediately turned to opposing the President. Obama would face a permanent campaign against his presidency, funded by outside donors. Within the GOP, new faces were presenting themselves as the future leadership of the party. Paul Ryan, Eric Cantor and Kevin McCarthy had presented themselves as the Republican ‘Young Guns’ and they argued for uncompromising opposition to the president’s agenda. The mainstream view among Republicans with regards to the devastating loss in the 2008 election quickly became that they lost because the party was not conservative enough. The first order of business, Obama’s stimulus package, was immediately labeled ‘Porkulus’, a term introduced by Rush Limbaugh, and AFP soon started organizing rallies decrying the ‘corrupt’ public spending plan. It also sponsored media events with Jim DeMint as its main star, hosted a website and collected signatures for a petition to say no to the stimulus. The rallies were poorly attended, but gave valuable insights into the organization of such events. Similarly, Eric Odom - a libertarian activist who worked for the Sam Adams Alliance, another organization founded by a Koch ally named Howard Rich - had been experimenting with the use of social media, and Twitter in particular, to discover their potential for outreach and organizing. By the time Santelli was ranting on CNBC, the conservative operatives working at all these organizations were not only well aware of the need of grassroots support, but they were well-versed in organizing events and using the internet for outreach.

Immediately after Santelli’s rant had been aired the, video went viral and operatives were quick to recognize its potential. Within hours after *Drudge Report* posted the rant as one of its headlines, Eric Odom had registered and aired the website TaxDayTeaParty.com. Soon after, Americans for Prosperity launched another website called TaxPayerTeaParty.com. Odom had used the contact list he maintained during his experiments with social media to reorganize the ten-thousand conservatives on his list. He also created the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition in collaboration with other activists, including members of both FreedomWorks and AFP. The activists quickly agreed on organizing new Tea Party rallies and the first protests were organized on February 27. These first protests were immediately claimed to be a major success, but sources

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<sup>220</sup> *Ibidem*, 168-169.

vary widely on the actual number of protesters. The second set of rallies however, were without a doubt a major success. On April 15, 2009, about 300.000 people were gathered at rallies throughout the country. Most rallies were organized by the Koch-funded operatives, and speakers, talking points press releases, even transportation was provided by organizations like the Heritage Foundation and AFP.<sup>221</sup> After April 15, 2009, the Koch brothers finally had what they wished for: a grassroots movement.

### ***Right-Wing Media Purveyors***

If the ‘Kochtopus’ was responsible for the organization of the Tea Party protests, conservative media were responsible for its advertisement. Conservative media, whether on TV, on the radio, or online, had a collective public reaching into millions. Rush Limbaugh, who in 2009 was dubbed the de facto leader of the GOP by *CBS*<sup>222</sup>, reportedly reached 15 million listeners a day. Fox News reached more viewers than their main competitors had combined, and *Drudge Report* reached three million unique viewers a day. Online media were the first to support the Tea Party movement. As mentioned, *Drudge Report* immediately made the Santelli rant their main headline. Another website doing so was *Breitbart*. But more than calling the rant a political turning point, they immediately began promoting Tea Party events, linking to information and organizations where people could sign up to support the movement.<sup>223</sup> Radio hosts quickly followed, with conservative talk shows throughout the country discussing the significance of Santelli’s rant and calling on their listeners to actively support the Tea Party protests. Sean Hannity began talking about his support for the Tea Party not on *Fox News*, but on his radio show. As explained by Skocpol and Williamson, conservative talk radio played a vital role, because it allows conservative media to test which stories stick with the audience, and once a story has gained traction, the hosts keep the conversation going not just through their shows, but also during other public events they participate in.<sup>224</sup>

It wasn’t long before *Fox News* joined the celebration of this new ‘patriotic’ movement. Most vocal in their support for the movement were conservative hosts Sean Hannity and Glenn

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<sup>221</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 180.

<sup>222</sup> “Rush Limbaugh: Republican Party Leader?” *CBS News*, March 19, 2009.

<sup>223</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 128.

<sup>224</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 128.



Beck, but the entire network had embraced the movement and a concerted effort to strengthen and support the movement was dictating their coverage. The network offered information on local rallies and in contrast with most media, whose attention for Tea Party events peaked during and immediately after significant events, did *Fox News* cover the Tea Party continuously throughout its programming, anticipating on upcoming events and ensuring the movement remained in the spotlights.

Fox served as a kind of social movement orchestrator, during what is always a dicey early period for any new protest effort – the period when potential participants have to hear about the effort and decide that it is likely to prove powerful. For weeks in advance of each early set of rallies, as the Tea Party grew from infancy to adolescence Fox was pointing the way and cheering.<sup>225</sup>

While the billionaires' efforts to organize the Tea Party and the media's efforts to advertise the Tea Party are often viewed as separate powers both adding to the movement's success, it is important to understand the close ties between these two forces. Rush Limbaugh was paid \$2 million a year by the Heritage Foundation to push their line on certain policies. Similarly, Glenn Beck received \$1 million a year from FreedomWorks to read "embedded content written by the FreedomWorks staff."<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, Glenn Beck, who arguably had more influence on building and shaping the Tea Party than any other media personality, worked together with FreedomWorks in creating the '9/12 Project', a rally on the Mall in D.C., where tens of thousands of activists gathered during the first national Tea Party event.<sup>227</sup> Both Limbaugh and Beck are evidence of the close ties between the 'Kochtopus' and major conservative outlets. Another example is Karl Rove, who simultaneously worked together with the Koch brothers as a political operative, and functioned as a guest contributor on Fox<sup>228</sup>.

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<sup>225</sup> Ibidem, 132.

<sup>226</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 172-183.

<sup>227</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 134.

<sup>228</sup> It is important to note here that Rove himself was not an active supporter of the Tea Party and during the 2010 election he more than once openly argued that Tea Party victories in the primaries may result in in GOP losses during the general election. Nonetheless, his double role as both a Fox News contributor and a political organizer working with the wealthiest conservative donors shows the linkages between various components of the conservative echo chamber.

### ***The Tea Party Was Born***

When the 2010 midterm elections were under way, the Tea Party had been well-established with hundreds of Tea Party affiliated organizations throughout the country. Both conservative media and conservative organizations continued their support for Tea Party rallies and Tea Party candidates. And while the influence of the Tea Party on the GOP victory in 2010 is debated<sup>229</sup>, which was a major success with 63 additional House Republicans, six new Republican Senators and a 700 seat gain in state legislatures, it is clear that the rise of the Tea Party revived the GOP after its devastating losses in 2006 and 2008. After the 2010 election, the Tea Party was a power to reckon with.

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<sup>229</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 158.

## Chapter 5: A Conservative Dream Named Paul Ryan

### Introduction

The rise of the Tea Party significantly altered the GOP and the power dynamics within the party. After the 2008 election, many thought conservatism was nearly dead and various GOP leaders believed the party had to become more moderate to remain relevant. The Tea Party movement quickly made clear that was not the case. Especially during the Republican primaries it was absolutely necessary for representatives to present themselves as being as conservative as possible, because the Tea Party was eager to challenge anyone who was not sufficiently loyal to the conservative ideology. This was perfect for Paul Ryan, who had been working on his image as a truly conservative thinker for a decade.

With the departure of Bush, Paul Ryan had decided it was time for himself to assume a larger role within the GOP. Had he quietly been working in the background on policy proposals during the Bush administration to advance his agenda, by 2008 Ryan began to maintain a more public role. Together with fellow House members Eric Cantor and Kevin McCarthy, Ryan began to present himself as the future leadership of the party, a new generation of conservatives ready to take over the party. Before long Ryan was seen as the ideological leader of the Party.

The next chapter discusses the role of Ryan in the GOP and his relationship with the Tea Party during the 2010-2012 era. Starting with the 2010 midterms and ending with the 2012 election loss, this chapter highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the new movement, and explores how Ryan became an ideological leader for his party, ultimately leading to his nomination for vice-president.

### *A Roadmap for America's Future and the Young Guns*<sup>230</sup>

Ryan's first move into the spotlight was based on what he saw as his strength: policy. On May 21, 2008, Ryan presented *A Roadmap for America's Future*, a plan to address what Ryan believed to be "the greatest threat to our nation's long-term prosperity: the looming entitlement crisis."<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 172

<sup>231</sup> Paul D. Ryan, *A Roadmap for America's Future; Remarks from Congressman Paul Ryan*, May 21, 2008.

Ryan's plan included massive reforms in health care and social security as well as major tax reforms. With regards to social security Ryan polished his former proposal, the *Social Security Personal Savings Guarantee and Prosperity Act of 2004*, promising a (partial) privatization of Social Security through personal retirement accounts. The proposed reforms of Medicare and Medicaid include similar privatization schemes, where Medicaid would get largely defederalized and handed over to the individual states, while the current Medicare program would slowly be replaced by a voucher program, where recipients receive a maximum of \$9,500 to help pay for private insurance coverage.<sup>232</sup> For those Americans not covered through Medicare or Medicaid, Ryan offered few solutions other than tax credits with a maximum of \$5,000 for health care coverage, although he argued that tax reforms and less government involvement would lead to affordable private health care plans. With regards to revenues, Ryan proposed sweeping tax cuts, including the elimination of the AMT, taxes on capital gains and dividend, and the estate tax. His tax proposal also included a simplified individual tax code with a 10% rate for income up to \$100,000 and a 25% rate for income above that. Ryan also argued for replacing corporate taxes with a business consumption tax of 8.5%.<sup>233</sup>

To promote his plan, Ryan wrote an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal* and which was published on the day of presentation. His proposals quickly gained traction, with Adam Putnam, Chairman of the House Republican Conference, praising Ryan's efforts to present "a thought-provoking proposal to address the looming entitlement crisis" and thanking Ryan "for his leadership on entitlement reform".<sup>234</sup> National media also started to pay attention to Ryan's proposals, and by the time of the 2008 election, Ryan had made a name for himself. Both former presidential candidate Steve Forbes and Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner called Ryan a rising star<sup>235</sup>, and Ryan himself was invited for a long interview with Brit Hume on *Fox News* during the election coverage of 2008. In the interview Ryan blamed the Republican establishment for failing to fight for their principles. He called for "a house cleaning in our party" and argued the party should embrace bold proposals, putting his own *Roadmap* forward as an example. When asked about personnel changes in the Republican leadership, Ryan responds: "I don't want to get into personality issues about leadership. What I want to do is get into ideas. We cannot be afraid of

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<sup>232</sup> Paul D. Ryan, "How to Tackle the Entitlement Crisis," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2008.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>234</sup> *U.S. Fed News*, "Rep. Putnam Praises Rep. Ryan's 'Roadmap for America's Future,'" May 21, 2008.

<sup>235</sup> Frank Schultz, "Rep. Ryan May be a Key Player for Republicans," *The Janesville Gazette*, November 7, 2008.

our principles anymore. We can't be afraid of taking political risks anymore."<sup>236</sup> After the election, it was rumored that several Republicans had asked Ryan to assume the position of House minority leader. Ryan himself denied the rumors and announced he would not assume a role in the House leadership, stating his ambitions focused "on policy, not leadership."<sup>237</sup> Behind the scenes however, Ryan was building an alliance to challenge the party leadership.

Ryan, McCarthy and Cantor, three younger Republicans all known as uncompromising conservatives, created the GOP's *Young Gun* program: "a model for candidates who shared their values that explained the steps that they could take to run for office."<sup>238</sup> The three men created their alliance in 2007 and started to build their program as well as their collective identity. They created a website, wrote a book together, and an aide of Cantor founded the YG Action Fund, a PAC to finance the campaigns of newly recruited representatives. The three representatives presented themselves as a triad with Cantor as the leader, McCarthy as the strategist and Ryan as the thinker, and nearly every publication writing on the Young Guns would allocate these characteristics to the three men.<sup>239</sup> The allocation of these characteristics also fitted their positions within the GOP, with Cantor being the House Minority Whip and McCarthy the House Republican Chief Deputy Whip, while Ryan focused on policy through his committee memberships. Through the program, Ryan and his partners were searching for candidates supportive of their agenda, an agenda described by Calmes as "the face of a Republican Party that has moved ever-rightward as the base of the party moved South and West."<sup>240</sup>

Within Washington, the Young Guns were seen as challengers to the leadership of John Boehner, although both Boehner and Cantor denied attempts to take over the GOP.<sup>241</sup> However, only six weeks before the 2010 election, Cantor stated that "the Republican Party lost its way"<sup>242</sup>, attacking Republican spending during the Bush presidency. Denying any attempt to uproot the leadership Cantor presented the *Young Guns* as an opportunity for the party to break with its past and move forward as a more principally conservative party. Similar to Cantor, McCarthy denies that they aim to challenge the leadership, but he states that "the leaders of the Republican Party

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<sup>236</sup> "Election Coverage," *Fox News*, November 4, 2008.

<sup>237</sup> Frank Schultz, "Rep. Ryan May be a Key Player for Republicans".

<sup>238</sup> Sarah Childress, "Meet the GOP's 'Young Guns'," *PBS Frontline*, February 12, 2013.

<sup>239</sup> See for example Sarah Childress or Nichols et al.

<sup>240</sup> Sarah Childress, "Meet the GOP's 'Young Guns'."

<sup>241</sup> Andrea Seabrook, "Ambitious 'Young Guns' Shake Up GOP," *NPR*, September 20, 2010.

<sup>242</sup> Andrea Seabrook, "Ambitious 'Young Guns' Shake Up GOP."

are going to be the ideas of the party”<sup>243</sup>, while simultaneously presenting himself and his allies as the defenders of those same ideas.

Ryan, Cantor and McCarthy first present their vision in their book *Young Guns: A New Generation of Conservative Leaders*, but the book is short of actual ideas. Politico describes the book as “a 224-page marketing tool for the men who hope to run the House. It critiques the problems of the White House and congressional Democratic governance, while offering limited prescriptions for change.”<sup>244</sup> A week after the release of the book, McCarthy presents a more short-term plan for Republican governance, and his fellow House member quickly embraced McCarthy’s *Pledge to America*. The pledge included the repeal of Obamacare, a spending freeze on most domestic programs, making the Bush tax-cuts permanent, and a ban on trials on U.S. soil for Guantanamo Bay detainees.<sup>245</sup> The *Pledge to America* - which was presented as a blueprint for governance once the GOP gained the majority in the House similar to, but less concrete than, Gingrich’s *Contract with America*<sup>246</sup> - received endorsements from many prominent conservatives like Karl Rove and Rush Limbaugh, but was also criticized for lacking specifics. Erick Erickson wrote a scathing article on the pledge called *Perhaps The Most Ridiculous Thing To Come Out Of Washington Since George McClellan*.<sup>247</sup> In the piece Erickson writes

The entirety of this promise is laughable. Why? It is an illusion that fixates on stuff the GOP already *should be doing*, while not daring to touch on stuff that will have any meaningful longterm effect on the size and scope of the federal government. This document proves the GOP is more focused on the acquisition of power than the advocacy of long term sound public policy.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Andrea Seabrook, “Ambitious ‘Young Guns’ Shake Up GOP”.

<sup>244</sup> Jonathan Allen, Jake Sherman and Richard E. Cohen, “‘Young Guns’ Offers GOP Blueprint’,” *Politico*, August 30, 2010.

<sup>245</sup> “Highlights of House Republicans’ ‘Pledge to America’,” *Washington Post*, September 22 (2010).

<sup>246</sup> Frank Luntz, “Is the ‘Pledge to America’ a Worthy Successor of the ‘Contract with America’?” *Washington Post*, September 26, 2010.

<sup>247</sup> Erick Erickson, “Perhaps the Most Ridiculous Thing to Come Out of Washington Since George McClellan,” *Redstate*, September 22, 2010.

<sup>248</sup> Erick Erickson, “The Most Ridiculous Thing”.

David Frum largely agreed with Erickson's analysis of the pledge, calling it a "pledge to do nothing".<sup>249</sup> But in his response to the pledge, David Frum noted something else. He noted that the 'Pledge to America' was therefore a repudiation "of the central, foundational idea behind the Tea Party."<sup>250</sup> He argued the pledge failed to address the Tea Party's wish for a "radically more limited government."<sup>251</sup> This analysis of the pledge called into question the relationship the Young Guns had been building with the Tea Party. The common view was that Cantor, Ryan and McCarthy were the House members Tea Party freshman could and should look to for guidance and leadership. The Young Guns had been actively searching for representatives supportive of their 'uncompromisingly conservative' agenda, and the Tea Party offered them not only an array of potential candidates, but also gave their conservative agenda momentum. The three men had realized the potential power of the Tea Party anger and wanted the GOP to embrace the movement. Kevin McCarthy convinced Boehner to join him on a visit to a Tea Party event in April 2010 "to show him the power the movement had gathered".<sup>252</sup> Through the Young Gun program, they supported around 90 campaigns of freshmen House candidates, 62 of whom got elected.<sup>253</sup> Their involvement in those campaigns went well beyond financial support. Cantor, McCarthy and Ryan would regularly visit and give the candidates advice on running a campaign. Cantor would call the candidates on an almost daily basis to check if everything was going to plan and if the candidates were doing well.<sup>254</sup> After the elections, many of the candidates felt they owed the three men for their support.

Through this relationship with these freshmen in Congress, the triad had strengthened their position in Congress. When Boehner assumed his position as Speaker of the House, he endorsed the budget Paul Ryan had proposed and Ryan became Chair of the House Budget Committee. It was Ryan who had the most natural appeal to the Tea Party. "If the Tea Party really is all about debts, deficits, spending and taxes—as opposed to the witchcraft, immigrant-bashing, birther fantasies and generalized Obama-hatred that forms its caricature—then Paul

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<sup>249</sup> David Frum, "A GOP Pledge to Do Nothing," *FrumForum*, September 22, 2010.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>252</sup> John Nichols, Ari Berman and Sasha Abramsky, "Meet the GOP's Young Guns: Paul Ryan, Eric Cantor and Kevin McCarthy," *The Nation*, December 6, 2010.

<sup>253</sup> "About the Young Guns Program," *Young Guns*, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.gopyoungguns.com/about/>.

<sup>254</sup> Sarah Childress "Meet the GOP's 'Young Guns'".

Ryan is the movement's Congressman.”<sup>255</sup> Ryan's reliably conservative record and his involvement in the design of major conservative policy proposals gave him the air of being an intellectual leader to the movement. McCarthy, who was most active in maintaining a close relationship with the Tea Party members, organized 'listening sessions' where the freshmen could come to ask questions or discuss issues. During these session, Ryan would teach the freshmen representatives about his budget.<sup>256</sup> As a result, majority whip McCarthy was well aware of their voting behavior, and more able to steer the voting behavior of the Republican House.

The efforts of the triad to build a close relationship with the Tea Party House members gave them the aura of being close to the movement as a whole. In reality, the relationship was less clear cut than it appears. First, while they embrace the movement to some extent, they do not denounce the GOP leadership, mainly because both McCarthy and Cantor already hold leadership positions. Particularly Cantor, who did not have a truly conservative record throughout his career, was never fully embraced by Tea Party activists. As Dave Weigel reported from a Virginia Tea Party convention in 2010, "I have yet to meet a Tea Party activist here who adores Rep. Eric Cantor".<sup>257</sup> In the summer of 2010, Cantor openly opposed the creation of a Tea Party caucus, and in the election for the Republican House Conference, Cantor voted for Jeb Hensarling to become the chair over Michelle Bachmann. These clashes with the Tea Party made Cantor vulnerable for accusations of protecting the old boy's network.<sup>258</sup> Similarly, McCarthy had the image of being an "inside player who lived and breathed politics for decades"<sup>259</sup> and a true GOP loyalist who cared deeply about the well-being of the party. He was known as someone who was more interested in the political game than in policy, who was very capable in organizing campaigns and very apt in collecting campaign donations. He applied these skills to support Tea Party candidates and was therefore an ally of many Tea Party politicians, but the skills were far from appealing to Tea Party voters, who hated the notion of party over principles.

Ryan did not have these issues. Ryan had a reliably conservative record and had easily won reelection in a district that voted for Obama in 2008. Furthermore, Ryan was known as a strong supporter of Ayn Rand's philosophy and free market economics. He made his entire staff

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<sup>255</sup> Nichols, Berman and Abramsky, "Meet the GOP's Young Guns".

<sup>256</sup> Sarah Childress, "Meet the GOP's 'Young Guns'".

<sup>257</sup> Nichols, Berman and Abramsky, "Meet the GOP's Young Guns".

<sup>258</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>259</sup> Ibidem.



read *Atlas Shrugged* and regularly referred to free market economists Friedman and Von Hayek, all authors Glenn Beck had advertised as foundational thinkers for the Tea Party movement.<sup>260</sup> This made Ryan a popular figure among tea Party activists. During the summer of 2010, Ryan appeared at several Tea Party events as a star speaker, campaigned for fellow candidates and appeared as a guest on Glenn Beck's radio show and on Fox News.<sup>261</sup>

### *A New Kid in Town: The Tea Party in Congress*

Once the 112<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress was in session, it became clear the hold of Cantor, McCarthy and Ryan over the new members was not as strong as they may have hoped. Although the freshmen were thankful for the support of the Young Guns, they also believed they were chosen to represent a new movement and complete their mission of undoing Obama's progressive initiatives and to significantly reduce the size and scope of government. In a conversation with Robert Draper, Arkansas Rep. Tim Griffin noted that "a lot of us feel that we're here on a mission, and the mission is now, and we're not that concerned about the political consequences."<sup>262</sup> McCarthy and Ryan had the ear of all freshmen Republicans, but that did not mean they would listen. The first major proposal, Ryan's budget *The Path to Prosperity*, received widespread support from the new representatives. It included severe cuts in government spending, would reform Medicare into a voucher system, diverted the cost of Medicaid to the individual states and it would preserve all of the Bush tax cuts. While senior Republicans were weary of particularly the Medicare provision, fearing it would go too far, the Tea Party members were cheerful of the efforts, or even questioned whether they went far enough.<sup>263</sup> When the House voted on the proposal, all but four Republicans supported Ryan's budget, which was eventually voted down by the Senate.<sup>264</sup> After the vote however, it quickly became clear the public did not like the proposal, with various polls showing 70 percent of the public opposing to cuts in Medicare<sup>265</sup>. Particularly the Medicare section of the proposal came under heavy scrutiny and senior Republicans started to back away from the Ryan budget. David Camp, chair of the Ways

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<sup>260</sup> Skocpol and Williamson, *the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 133.

<sup>261</sup> Nichols, Berman and Abramsky, "Meet the GOP's Young Guns".

<sup>262</sup> Robert Draper, "There Is No 'I' In 'Tea'," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2011.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>265</sup> Cenk Uygur, "GOP Backs Off Ryan Medicare Plan," *The Young Turks*, May 5, 2011.

and Means committee, announced he had no plans to bring the Medicare plan to a vote in the committee, while Eric Cantor started to point to possible opposition in the Senate as a reason for the committee not to continue with the plan.<sup>266</sup> Newt Gingrich, who had just announced the creation of an exploratory committee for the 2012 Presidential election, called the Medicare reform in Ryan's budget proposal "radical change" and "right-wing social engineering."<sup>267</sup>

The debate on Ryan's budget ultimately went nowhere, but it was the start of negotiations on government spending that lasted throughout June and July. The Republicans

In the summer of 2011, the debt ceiling became the center of attention in Washington and Tea Party members were keen to oppose raising the debt limit. This would put particularly McCarthy into a bind. The GOP leadership was well aware of the consequences of failing to raise the debt limit, and they knew they had to convince the Tea Party to vote yes on raising the debt limit. As the Majority Whip, Washington was looking at McCarthy to ensure enough yes votes. But most Tea Party Republicans had no intention to vote yes. McCarthy attempted to convince the Tea Party representatives to vote yes under certain conditions, which made them realize they could use the debt ceiling as leverage to push for change.<sup>268</sup> They would demand the repeal of Obamacare, a constitutional amendment demanding a balanced budget or a mandatory cap on all nondefense spending. The GOP leadership proceeded to use these demands as leverage in their negotiations with the Democrats. Republicans started to demand \$2 trillion in spending cuts in order to raise the debt ceiling. At first Democrats demanded a clean vote on the debt ceiling, as it usually happened, but slowly the Democrats began moving towards the Republicans. The Democrats next proposal included \$1 billion in spending cuts, accompanied by new taxes to raise more revenue. Republicans responded by stating they would never agree to tax increases and they continued to demand \$2 trillion in spending cuts, eventually raising their demands to \$2.4 and even \$2.7 trillion in spending cuts.<sup>269</sup> At the end of July 2011, Obama and the GOP leadership agreed on a deal that included two rounds of cuts. The first was a \$1 trillion in immediate cuts after the deal would get signed. The second part however, was a \$1.5 trillion cuts that would get

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<sup>266</sup> Cenk Uygur, "GOP Backs Off Ryan Medicare Plan".

<sup>267</sup> "Meet the Press; Transcript for May 15, 2011," *MSNBC*, May 15, 2011.

<sup>268</sup> Robert Draper, "There Is No 'I' In 'Tea'".

<sup>269</sup> Cenk Uygur, "Disastrous Budget Deal Coming in June," *The Young Turks*, June 14, 2011.

enacted at the end of 2011, if a newly composed “Super Congress” could not design a new plan.<sup>270</sup> After the deal, Boehner proudly proclaimed he received 98 percent of what he had wished for.<sup>271</sup> But in cutting a deal with the Democrats, some conservatives felt the GOP leadership had betrayed the conservative cause. Sixty-six Republican representatives refused to raise the debt limit altogether and voted against the deal.<sup>272</sup>

The sequester that had been built into the original deal meant the budget negotiations would last throughout 2011. The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, or *Supercommittee*, had twelve members - six Representatives and six Senators equally divided among the parties – and was tasked with a bipartisan deficit reduction plan, for which they had a deadline on November 23, 2011. A Democrat proposal with an estimated \$3 trillion deficit reduction was voted down because it included \$1.3 trillion in new revenue, after which the Republicans proposed a \$1.2 trillion reduction plan, which include a significant tax reduction of the top marginal tax rates<sup>273</sup>. On November 21, 2011, the Supercommittee announced it had failed to agree on a deficit reduction agreement.<sup>274</sup> With the sequestration not going into effect until January 2013, the failure of the Supercommittee to bring forward a bipartisan agreement had no immediate impact. With the looming Presidential election, debates on the budget and government spending were temporarily halted.

### ***The Primaries: Anyone but Romney(?)***

The 2012 elections were different for two reasons. First, it was the first Presidential election after the rise of the Tea Party. Second, it was the first election since the Supreme Court decision in *Citizen’s United v. Federal Election Committee*, the landmark ruling where the Supreme Court abolished any limit on ‘independent campaign expenditures’, since it would ultimately be a limit

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<sup>270</sup> Nate Silver, “The Fine Print on the Debt Deal,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2011.

<sup>271</sup> Daniel Strauss, “Boehner: I Got ‘98 percent’ of What I Wanted in Debt Deal,” *The Hill*, August 2, 2011.

<sup>272</sup> Russell Berman, “House Approves Bill to Raise Debt Limit,” *The Hill*, August 1, 2011.

<sup>273</sup> “US ‘Super-Committee’ Fails to Reach Deficit Deal,” *BBC*, November 22, 2011.

<sup>274</sup> Jeb Hensarling and Patty Murray, *Statement from Co-Chairs of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction*, November 21, 2011.

on free speech. Furthermore, the Court concluded that the right extended not just to individual expenditures, but to corporate expenditures as well, therefore accepting the notion that corporations had the same right to free speech as people did.<sup>275</sup>

As soon as campaigns started early 2011, it was clear former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney was the favorite to become the Republican nominee. It was also clear Tea Party activists did not like this very much. Romney was a Republican governor from a liberal state, and his most famous achievement was Romneycare, which served as a model for Obamacare, the one thing the Tea Party hated more about Obama than anything else. Other Republicans saw an opportunity to present themselves as the leader of the conservative movement and the primaries were increasingly framed as a battle between the Mitt Romney wing of the party and the conservative wing of the party. Every few weeks a new Tea Party favorite would surge in the polls, generally after the previous Tea Party candidate had made some major errors.

Before the campaigns had really started Sarah Palin, Donald Trump, Mike Huckabee and Michelle Bachmann were mentioned as possible Tea Party candidates, but Rick Perry was the first GOP candidate other than Mitt Romney to structurally lead the polls for a while. After his announcement to join the race on August 11, 2011, Perry surged in the polls and led in consecutive polls from amongst others Fox News, Gallup, Public Policy Polling, NBC/Wall Street Journal and Rasmussen Reports.<sup>276</sup> As a Texas governor, Perry was often compared to George Bush and described as a tougher and more conservative version of the former president. But Perry's lead in the early polls didn't last long. As a front-runner, all eyes were on Perry during the early debates and he performed weakly. He failed to properly explain his vision on immigration and during the September 22 debate, he fumbled an attack on Romney for flip-flopping.<sup>277</sup> Afterwards, his performance was described as "only occasionally coherent", "a train wreck" and "weak". MSNBC's Joe Scarborough said "Rick Perry looked as uncomfortable as a chimp opening a suitcase", and Fox News' Brit Hume noted that "Perry is about one half a step

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<sup>275</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 227.

<sup>276</sup> See for example: *Rasmussen Reports*, August 15, 2011; *Gallup*, August 17-21, 2011; *Fox News*, August 29-31, 2011.

<sup>277</sup> Ben Mankiewicz, Michael Shure and David Pakman, "Uninformed Voters Love Perry," *The Young Turks*, September 23, 2011.

away from almost total collapse as a candidate”.<sup>278</sup> In the days following the debate Perry started to drop in the polls, and while Romney had shortly taken the lead again, soon a new Tea Party favorite rose to the top .

Herman Cain surged to the top of the polls in October. In a NBC/WSJ poll, Cain was the favorite candidate for 27 percent of Republican primary voters. Particularly Tea Party supporters and ‘very conservative’ voters preferred Herman Cain, among these demographics, Cain had 69 percent and 72 percent favorability ratings.<sup>279</sup> As a business man with no prior record in public office, he was appealing as an outsider candidate. His main selling point was his ‘9-9-9 plan’,<sup>280</sup> in which he would replace all taxes with a 9 percent income tax, a 9 percent sales tax, and a 9 percent corporate tax.<sup>281</sup> Herman Cain’s surge in the polls only lasted for a brief period however, mainly due to a series of mistakes and gaffes related to foreign policy. Prior to the poll, Cain had already responded to a question about possible attacks on his foreign policy expertise by saying he would readily admit that he did not know the president of “U-becki- becki- becki- becki-stanstan”.<sup>282</sup> This response had not hurt his popularity among conservatives, but after he made a major gaffe in response to a question about Libya - in which Cain clearly demonstrated a lack of knowledge on foreign policy in general and the 2011 intervention in Libya in particular<sup>283</sup> - his support began to fade. When Cain was simultaneously hit by sexual harassment claims<sup>284</sup>, he lost most of his support, especially with women, and was surpassed by Romney again.

The next candidate to challenge Romney was Newt Gingrich. In national polls, Gingrich was leading comfortably throughout December<sup>285</sup>, reaching 38 percent in a Rasmussen national poll, and Gingrich was already declaring himself winner of the primaries.<sup>286</sup> However, with the Iowa caucus coming ever closer, campaigns were focusing all their attention on Iowa, and

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<sup>278</sup> Ben Mankiewicz and Michael Shure, “Rick Perry Ripped by Fox News Hosts,” *The Young Turks*, September 26, 2011.

<sup>279</sup> Mark Murray, “NBC/WSJ Poll: Cain Now Leads GOP Pack,” *NBC News*, October 13, 2011.

<sup>280</sup> “Herman Cain’s 999 Plan,” *Herman Cain for President*, September 26, 2011.

<sup>281</sup> A top adviser for Herman Cain who helped design the 9-9-9 plan was Rich Lowrie, who had previously held a position on the advisory board of Americans for Prosperity for 3 years. Cenk Uygur, “Herman Cain Lead Presidential Candidate – Poll,” *The Young Turks*, October 13, 2011.

<sup>282</sup> Cenk Uygur, “Herman Cain: I’m Moses,” *The Young Turks*, October 10, 2011.

<sup>283</sup> Toby Harnden, “Herman Cain Suffers Poll Blow After Foreign Policy Gaffe,” *The Telegraph*, November 15, 2011.

<sup>284</sup> Cenk Uygur, “Herman Cain Hurt in Polls by Sex Accusations,” *The Young Turks*, November 11, 2011.

<sup>285</sup> See for example: *Gallup*, December 2-6, 2011; *Fox News*, December 5-7, 2011; *ABC News/Washington Post*, December 15-18, 2011; *Gallup*, December 20-26, 2011.

<sup>286</sup> Cenk Uygur, “Newt Gingrich to Win 2012 Republican Presidential Primary?” *The Young Turks*, December 2, 2011.

Gingrich was being attacked by all other candidates. Particularly Ron Paul, who had a lower profile campaign that relied heavily on his loyal base of supporters, was strongly attacking Gingrich. In one campaign ad, Paul attacked Gingrich for flip-flopping on bailouts, global warming and the individual health care mandate, for his condemnation of Ryan's budget, for his lobbying jobs for Fanny Mae and Freddie Mac as well as for the health care industry, for his ties to Nancy Pelosi and painted an overall picture of Gingrich being a Washington insider and a hypocrite.<sup>287</sup> Other attacks against Gingrich focused on his three marriages and Gingrich's infidelity. Gingrich was haunted by his checkered past (and a soundbite of him saying "serial hypocrite") and the attacks against his character were effective. A *Public Policy Polling* Iowa poll showed Gingrich dropping to third place with only 14 percent of the vote and a favorability rating that dropped from +31 to -1 in a matter of weeks.<sup>288</sup> The new leader in that poll was Ron Paul, but by that time, journalists and commentators had realized how volatile the field had become. A telling response to this poll came from *The Young Turks'* Cenk Uygur:

If you were Ron Paul and somebody told you two weeks before the election, the Iowa Caucus, that you were sitting in number one, you would feel great, right? And you would probably feel great now. Except, this thing is spinning so fast, that I think like, maybe two weeks is too long.<sup>289</sup>

Uygur continues by half-jokingly noting that Rick Santorum, who thus far had not played any role in the election, had risen to ten percent and could become the next one to lead the polls, "just when you thought it wasn't possible".<sup>290</sup>

This half-joke/half-prediction would prove correct. Similar to Ron Paul, Santorum had remained under the radar during the lead-up to the Iowa Caucus, but was very actively campaigning in the state and as a devout Christian, Santorum appealed to the conservative base in Iowa. The downfall of Gingrich and the other conservative alternatives to Mitt Romney gave the Santorum campaign a push at exactly the right time and when the Iowa caucus was held on January 3, 2012,

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<sup>287</sup> Tommy Christopher, "Ron Paul Campaign Releases Brutal Newt Gingrich Attack Ad," *Mediaite*, November 30, 2011.

<sup>288</sup> "Paul Leads in Iowa", *Public Policy Polling*, December 18, 2011.

<sup>289</sup> Cenk Uygur, "Ron Paul Beats Gingrich in Iowa Poll," *The Young Turks*, December 19, 2011.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibidem*.

Santorum had become the new favorite among GOP's most conservative voters. At first, the vote counts showed that Rick Santorum had narrowly been beaten by Romney with an 8 vote difference, but after verification of the votes, Santorum was declared the winner of the Iowa Caucus.<sup>291</sup> After Iowa, Romney won New Hampshire easily, since very conservative and Tea Party voters had much less influence in the North-East. These first two primaries resulted in a several candidates dropping out of the race, and after New Hampshire, the race was down to four candidates: Mitt Romney as the establishment candidate, and Santorum, Gingrich and Paul who were fighting over the conservative vote.

Gingrich revived his campaign after he surprisingly won the next primary in South Carolina. The rise of Santorum and the revival of Gingrich made the political establishment start to doubt Mitt Romney's position as the front-runner, but Mitt Romney won all but three of the next ten primaries, coming in second behind Santorum in Colorado and Missouri, and third behind Santorum and Paul in Minnesota, while he won Florida, Arizona and Washington amongst others. These results made Romney's lead slightly more comfortable, but Santorum had high hopes for Super Tuesday.<sup>292</sup> Gingrich had been slipping in the polls and tried to revive his campaign again by focusing all his efforts on Georgia.<sup>293</sup> The results of Super Tuesday were decent for Romney, winning six out of the ten states and over half the delegates, but his supporters and the leadership were not very impressed. Gingrich had carried Georgia, while Santorum had beaten Romney in North Dakota, Oklahoma and Tennessee, as well as the majority of delegates in Ohio. Romney's campaign lacked clear enthusiasm and momentum.<sup>294</sup> For Santorum, Super Tuesday ensured his image as the main challenger of Romney, and with several conservative states following in March, things were looking well for Santorum. After Super Tuesday Santorum won Kansas, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, while Romney only won Illinois, Hawaii and a couple of the territories.

But while these results at first glance look to support the idea that Santorum's campaign was on the rise, things had started to look dire. Mitt Romney received major endorsements from the G.O.P. leadership at the end of March, including Paul Ryan, George W. Bush and Marco

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<sup>291</sup> "Santorum Hails Delayed Iowa Victory as 'Huge Upset'," *CNN*, January 20, 2012.

<sup>292</sup> Michael D. Shear, "G.O.P. Fight Moves to Super Tuesday Battlegrounds," *The New York Times*, February 29, 2012.

<sup>293</sup> Trip Gabriel, "Gingrich Narrows Focus to Georgia for Super Tuesday," *The New York Times*, March 1, 2012.

<sup>294</sup> Jeff Zeleny and Jim Rutenberg, "Romney Team Ponders How to Rise Above the Fray," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2012.

Rubio.<sup>295</sup> Furthermore, Texas had notified the candidates that the delegates would be divided proportionally among the candidates, and Santorum was dropping in Pennsylvania polls.<sup>296</sup> This made a winner-takes-all delegate seep in a major state highly unlikely for Santorum, and it became increasingly clear that winning a majority of the delegates was no longer possible for Santorum. After Romney won the states of Maryland and Wisconsin as well as the District of Columbia and with campaign funds running low, Santorum no longer saw a path to victory, and on April 10, 2012, Santorum officially announced the suspension of his campaign.<sup>297</sup> Santorum dropping out was effectively the end of the primaries, although Gingrich remained in the race until May.<sup>298</sup> From now on, Romney had to build a campaign that rallied the Republican base.

### *The Donors and the GOP Nominee*

Ryan was an absolute favorite of the Koch brothers and their allies, but some feared his radical ideas scared the public. Sean Noble, a political consultant of the Koch brothers, had been pushing the donors hard to embrace Ryan, because he believed they could push the GOP further to the right through Ryan.<sup>299</sup> Early in 2011, when Ryan was planning to propose his budget, Noble convinced the donors to pay for polling and market testing to fine-tune Ryan's message. With the support of Ed Goeas, Ryan learned to avoid to use the word 'cut' when discussing major social programs, instead referring to effective and efficient reforms.<sup>300</sup> Later, when Ryan unveiled his proposal, various Koch-funded groups began advertising the budget as a truly conservative alternative for the Obama administration, a message that was quickly embraced by conservative writers and mainstream media.<sup>301</sup>

To the Koch brothers, few things mattered more than winning the 2012, and in their eyes Ryan would have been a perfect candidate. Young, energetic, pushed for policies the donors strongly supported and had already made a name for himself as a conservative alternative for Obama through the budget fight. Sean Noble, who had earlier convinced the Koch brothers to

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<sup>295</sup> Michael Falcone and Amy Walter, "The Beginning of the End," *ABC News*, March 29, 2012.

<sup>296</sup> Cenk Uygur and Michael Shure, "Rick Santorum Drops 2012 Presidential Bid," *The Young Turks*, April 10, 2012.

<sup>297</sup> Jim Rutenberg, "The Caucus; Santorum Says Finances Forced Him Out," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2012.

<sup>298</sup> Ginger Gibson, "Gingrich: 'Truly Wild Ride Is Over'," *Politico*, May 2, 2012.

<sup>299</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 286.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibidem*, 287.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibidem*, 295.



back Ryan's budget, now tried to convince Ryan to run for president. Ryan declined however, mostly because he disliked the prospect of a full year campaigning. Instead, he proposed the idea of him running as the vice-presidential candidate, "because then it's only, like, two months".<sup>302</sup>

After Ryan, the big donors were unsure who to support, and each had a preferred candidate. David Koch believed in Chris Christie, while Charles preferred Mike Pence<sup>303</sup>, but neither of them joined the race. Eventually most donors settled on Romney as their preferred candidate, but some major donors went rogue and supported their own candidate. Sheldon Adelson had chosen Newt Gingrich as his preferred candidate, and was almost solely responsible for funding the campaign of Newt Gingrich.<sup>304</sup> Foster Friess, in the meantime, chose Santorum as his favorite and spend \$2.1 million of the Romney's main challenger.<sup>305</sup>

But for the circle of donors, the primaries were of secondary importance. Exemplary was a pledge of the Koch brothers and their supporters to spend \$100 million to support whichever candidate would win the GOP nomination.<sup>306</sup> Romney was nonetheless eager to please the donors in order to curry their favor. He had reversed his position on climate change in order to please the Koch brothers, and was arguing favorably of budget proposals similar to Ryan's.<sup>307</sup>

### ***In Search for Momentum***

The primary campaigns had been rough and Romney had come out bruised. He had more difficulty beating his opponents than many had expected, and had been hit hard. Particularly Gingrich, who had continuously framed Romney as a heartless, corporate predator, had greatly hurt his image, while Romney was simultaneously struggling to position himself as a real conservative. This made the search for his Vice President (VP) even more important. As John Brabender, Rick Santorum's chief strategist, described it:

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<sup>302</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 302.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibidem*, 206.

<sup>304</sup> Zach Carter and Ryan Grim, "Newt Gingrich Patron Sheldon Adelson Makes \$3.3. Million an Hour," *Huffington Post*, February 8, 2012.

<sup>305</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 320.

<sup>306</sup> Amanda Terkel and Ryan Grim, "Koch Brothers, Allies Pledge \$100 Million at Private Meeting to Beat Obama," *Huffington Post*, February 3, 2012.

<sup>307</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 314-316.

The conservative base of the party is so concerned about Obama and his approach to government that they are going to vote for Romney. The question is, are they going to make 10 phone calls to their friends and relatives because they care so passionately? That's going to be somewhat of a challenge.<sup>308</sup>

The choice for a running mate of any presidential candidate had always been a completely non-transparent affair. No formal process precedes the decision and before the decision is formally announced, campaigns remain very secretive about the prospective candidates. Therefore, prior to any announcement, the media are continually involved in "the running mate guessing game"<sup>309</sup>, as *The New York Times'* journalist Michael Shear dubbed it. For Romney, supposed prospective candidates for his running mate included Marco Rubio, Rob Portland and Tim Pawlenty<sup>310</sup>, while others speculated that Romney searched for a female running mate.<sup>311</sup> Most names circulating in Washington were fairly moderate. But with the GOP convention drawing closer, speculation about who the candidate would be was replaced by an open campaign by conservatives in support of Paul Ryan as Romney's VP.

On August 9, both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Weekly Standard* openly supported the candidacy of Paul Ryan as VP. The *Wall Street Journal* described Ryan as a candidate who "best exemplifies the nature and stakes of this election"<sup>312</sup>, and Stephen Hayes and William Kristol argued that if Romney were to embrace the Ryan budget, why not have Ryan help defend it as Romney's VP?<sup>313</sup> In private, Ryan had been on the shortlist for a longer period of time, with conservatives lobbying in favor of Ryan as early as Jun. In a meeting prior to a fundraiser in July, David Koch and his wife had urged Romney to pick Ryan as his VP.<sup>314</sup> Within the Romney campaign, Stuart Stevens strongly opposed the choice for Ryan, considering him a liability and a risk because his budget was too harsh for most voters. Romney was hesitant to pick Ryan as his

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<sup>308</sup> Michael D. Shear, "The Running Mate Guessing Game," *The New York Times*, June 21, 2012.

<sup>309</sup> Ibidem

<sup>310</sup> Michael D. Shear and Trip Gabriel, "Romney Faces Pressure from Right to Put Ryan on Ticket," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2012.

<sup>311</sup> Nate Silver, "In Search for Female Running Mate, a Shortlist for Romney," *The New York Times*, July 13, 2012.

<sup>312</sup> "Editorial: Why Not Paul Ryan," *Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2012.

<sup>313</sup> Stephen F. Hayes and William Kristol, "It's the Romney-Ryan Plan; Why Not Romney-Ryan Ticket?" *The Weekly Standard*, August 8, 2012.

<sup>314</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 316.

running mate, but the public pressure ensured the Koch brothers their preferred VP. Two days after the *Wall Street Journal* editorial, Romney officially announced Ryan to be his running mate for the general election.<sup>315</sup>

Ryan's addition to the Romney ticket was generally considered a major win for the Tea Party. Michael Shear describes Ryan as "unquestionably the face of the Tea Party caucus", which he named "indisputably at the core of the modern Republican Party."<sup>316</sup> Ryan's selection as running mate also received endorsements from many Tea Party affiliated persons and organizations, including Tea Party Express' Amy Kremer and Tea Party Rep. Kevin Brady. South Carolina Tea Party activist Allen Olson argued "there were only two people that could've saved Romney and bought him credibility with the tea party and the grass roots, and that was either Paul Ryan or Marco Rubio."<sup>317</sup>

If most media portrayed Ryan as the near perfect Tea Party candidate, some questioned this assertion. First, Ryan never directly affiliated himself to the Tea Party. He didn't run as a Tea Party candidate in 2010, nor was he a member of the Tea Party caucus. And among Tea Party activists, opinions on Ryan were much more divided than the media portrayed. While some activists were exuberant about Paul Ryan, others were much more skeptical. Richard Viguerie described Ryan as "a nice guy, [but] he is not Tea Party."<sup>318</sup> For Viguerie, the problem with Ryan was not his willingness to impose deep cuts in major government programs, but because Ryan's proposal would not balance the budget for 28 years. Other opponents point to Ryan's vote on the Patriot Act, his vote on Medicare Part D, his support for TARP or his moderate position on immigration as reasons to doubt his Tea Party credentials.<sup>319</sup>

Ryan's nomination for VP at first had a positive impact on the Romney campaign. On August 9, the day of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial, national polling averages showed the largest gap in

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<sup>315</sup> Michael D. Shear, "Ryan Brings the Tea Party to the Ticket," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2012.

<sup>316</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>317</sup> Patrik Jönsen, "Tea Party Claims 'Seat at the Table' With Romney's Paul Ryan Pick for VP," *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 11, 2012.

<sup>318</sup> Shear and Gabriel, "Romney Faces Pressure from Right to Put Ryan on Ticket".

<sup>319</sup> Jack Craver, "Is Paul Ryan the Tea Party's Dream Candidate?" *The Capital Time & Wisconsin State Journal*, August 22, 2012.

favor of Obama (+4.7) since March.<sup>320</sup> After Ryan's nomination, the Republican ticket continuously rose in the polls, and when the Democratic National Convention (DNC) convened, the gap had been completely closed to a virtual tie.<sup>321</sup> But in the meantime, the GOP had also had their own National Convention, which meant two key moments presidential candidates generally use to boost their campaign and create momentum, had already occurred prior to the DNC.

Immediately after the DNC, the gap began to widen again in favor of Obama, which was exacerbated by the release of the "47 percent" video by *Mother Jones* on September 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>322</sup> By late September, some commentators already started to call the election for Obama.<sup>323</sup> Romney's final chance to change the outcome of the election appeared to be the debates. And the first went well for Romney. The common view of the first debate was that Obama looked weak and unprepared and that Romney had won.<sup>324</sup> The debate at first glance appeared to have boosted the Romney campaign. For the first time in a year of polling, Romney was leading in national polls, a lead he would maintain throughout most of October, until super storm Sandy hit New Jersey.<sup>325</sup> As a result, most commentators considered the election a toss-up. On October 31, *Politico* ran a story in which they cited several commentators who argued the election outcome was completely unclear and unpredictable: "From Fox News to MSNBC to The Wall Street Journal to The New York Times, all but those aligned or associated with the campaigns – and even some who are – admit to being deeply uncertain about Tuesday's outcome"<sup>326</sup> the article then explains why the media was so confused. The first reason, which is reiterated several times in the article, is the conviction on both sides that they were ahead and on the winning side. "The key is that no one on anyone's own side is calling it"<sup>327</sup>, the article cites New York Post columnist John Podhoretz. The article also noted the tight poll numbers on a national level and the volatility of presidential elections in the final days. Similarly, Joe Scarborough attacked Nate Silver because Nate Silver had consistently projected that Obama was very likely to win. "New York Times polling blogger Nate Silver says there's a 73.6 percent chance that the president's going to win. Anybody that

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<sup>320</sup> "General Election: Romney vs. Obama," *Real Clear Politics*, N.D., 2017.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>322</sup> David Corn, "The Story Behind the 47 Percent Video," *Mother Jones*, December 31, 2012.

<sup>323</sup> Cenk Uygur, "Prediction: Obama Will Defeat Romney," *The Young Turks*, September 27, 2012.

<sup>324</sup> Jim Rutenberg and Peter Baker, "Campaign Gains a New Intensity in Debate's Wake," *The New York Times*, October 4, 2012.

<sup>325</sup> "General Election: Romney vs. Obama," *Real Clear Politics*, N.D., 2017.

<sup>326</sup> Dylan Byers and McKenzie Weinger, "Media Stumped by 2012 Outcome," *Politico*, October 31, 2012.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibidem*.

thinks this race is anything but a tossup right now is such an ideologue they should be kept away from typewriters...because their jokes.” Conservative commentators all predicted wins for Romney in the days prior to the election. Charles Krauthammer predicted a tight election with Mitt Romney narrowly winning, but Newt Gingrich predicted a six-point gap in the voting result and over 300 electoral votes, Dick Morris projected a five- to ten-point gap in the popular vote and George Will predicted 321 electoral votes for Romney.<sup>328</sup> When asked about the basis of their predictions, these commentators all pointed to their experience and impressions from the ground game. Newt Gingrich made such a point by saying “I base that on just years and years of experience.”<sup>329</sup>

The election results proved something very clear. Nate Silver’s predictions, which most commentators dismissed, were right and most pundits were wrong.<sup>330</sup> Obama won the popular vote with an almost 3.5 million vote margin and the electoral college with 332 votes against 206.<sup>331</sup> The projections by Nate Silver’s *FiveThirtyEight* had consistently shown Obama was likely to win, and his election day projection showed Obama had a 90 percent chance to win and correctly predicted the outcome for all fifty states.<sup>332</sup> Silver’s confidence in his projections was based on the fact that the polls in the swing states were much more consistent than most pundits said they were. Of all major polls conducted in the crucial state Ohio in the final three months prior to the election, only six had Mitt Romney leading in the state, with another eight projecting a virtual tie. During that same period, 47 polls projected Obama leading, with margins ranging from 1 to 10 points.<sup>333</sup> In Wisconsin, only three polls projected a Romney lead in that same time frame, and in Pennsylvania all polls projected an Obama victory, sometimes with margins up to 12 points.<sup>334</sup> Similar patterns can be found for states like Michigan, Virginia, Colorado and Nevada. State by state polling had indicated for weeks that Obama was very likely to win, because he had been leading consistently in most swing states.

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<sup>328</sup> Cenk Uygur, “Clownish Republican Election Predictions,” *TYT Shows*, November 6, 2012.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>330</sup> Eric Pfanner, “The Rise of the Quants in Political Prognostication,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2012.

<sup>331</sup> “Election 2012; President Map,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 2012.

<sup>332</sup> Eric Pfanner, “The Rise of the Quants in Political Prognostication”.

<sup>333</sup> “Ohio: Romney vs. Obama,” *Real Clear Politics*, N.D., 2015.

<sup>334</sup> “Pennsylvania: Romney vs. Obama,” *Real Clear Politics*, N.D., 2015; “Wisconsin: Romney vs. Obama,” *Real Clear Politics*, N.D., 2015.

Nonetheless, the GOP establishment was in disbelief. Karl Rove, who appeared as an analyst during *Fox News*' election coverage, refused to believe the networks own projection of Ohio going for Obama, called it "premature" and forced Megyn Kelly live on television to visit the network's 'Decision Desk', where the vote counters expressed clear confidence in their Ohio call for Obama.<sup>335</sup> Romney and his team were equally in disbelief. On senior Romney adviser told *CBS* that "I don't think there was one person who saw it coming"<sup>336</sup>, and seeing Rove's argument on *Fox News* strengthened their belief that maybe it was not over yet. But with Florida and Colorado also being called for Obama, they had to admit what no one had expected: there was no path to victory. Another adviser described this realization as "a sucker punch", stating "there's nothing worse than when you think you're going to win and you don't."<sup>337</sup> Romney himself was described as "shell-shocked", and since he had not even prepared a concession speech, he was forced to quickly write something in the heat of the moment.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> "Karl Rove's Election Night Melt-Down over Ohio Results on Fox News," *Youtube.com*, accessed September 10, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TwuR0jCavk>.

<sup>336</sup> Jan Crawford, "Adviser: Romney 'Shell-shocked' by Loss," *CBS News*, November 8, 2012.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibidem*.

## **Chapter 6: A Conservative Nightmare Called Paul Ryan**

### **Introduction**

If the previous chapter discusses Paul Ryan's rise to power, the following chapter discusses his (partial) downfall. In the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, Ryan had presented himself as the leader of the Party's conservative wing, most notably through the budget proposals he introduced, in which he argued for deep cuts in government spending as well as significantly lower tax rates. As a result, Ryan was nominated for vice-president. But, similar to 2008, the 2012 elections were seen as a serious blow for the conservative movement and various GOP leaders argued the party had to rethink its positions, particularly on immigration, an argument that caused much anger among the party's electorate.

After the 2012 election, Ryan had become one of the GOP figureheads and he could no longer push for his conservative dream budgets from the sidelines during political debates. This new position forced Ryan to lead budget negotiations with the Obama administration and to argue in favor of the outcomes of these negotiations, which made Ryan vulnerable for criticism. Slowly but surely, Tea Party voters began to see Ryan as part of the Washington elites and as a sell-out who cared more about power and his own position than about advancing the conservative cause. Since Tea Party voters believed compromise to be akin to treason to the conservative cause, Ryan's popularity began to slip and he quickly lost his imago as the leader of the conservative movement.

Simultaneously with Ryan's changing role, the priorities of the conservative electorate were shifting. Conservatives were increasingly fixated on social and cultural issues like immigration, abortion and the confederate heritage. While Ryan was reliably conservative on social issues like abortion and gay marriage, his record on immigration was much weaker. Furthermore, Tea Party conservatives often tied these issues to budget negotiations, demanding their representatives to vote against any budget that failed defund all programs related to these issues, and since Ryan was one of the key figures during budget negotiations, he was to blame for keeping organizations like Planned Parenthood funded. The result was an increasing wedge between Ryan and the conservative voters who supported him only a few years prior. By the time Ryan reluctantly assumed the House Speakership, many among the GOP's Tea Party base

considered Ryan a false prophet and traitor, rather than the conservative policy genius they believed him to be when they called for his nomination for VP.

### *Evaluating the Disaster*

The outcome of the election was an absolute disaster and a shock for the GOP. Not only had they lost the presidential election, but the Democrats gained eight seats in the House and two Senate seats. Furthermore, various ballot initiatives on issues like marijuana legalization and gay marriage were successful.<sup>339</sup> For the Tea Party, things were even worse. Prominent Tea Party favorite Allen West lost his seat in Florida; Tea Party candidate Richard Mourdock, who had beaten six-term Sen. Dick Lugar in the Indiana primary, lost his race against Democratic challenger Joe Donnelly; and Todd Akin failed to defeat Sen. Claire McCaskill, after making national headlines due to comments about how female bodies would naturally “shut the whole thing down”<sup>340</sup> to prevent unwanted pregnancies after rape.<sup>341</sup>

The 2012 election showed the GOP had major problems with demographics. Romney had tried to appeal to the conservative base with anti-immigration policies. During the primaries, Romney had proposed “self-deportation” through economic hardship for illegal immigrants.<sup>342</sup> As a result, Romney received only 27 percent of the Latino vote. Romney’s appeals to the Tea Party also cost him dearly with Asian-Americans, with Obama increasing his share of the Asian-American vote by 11 points compared to 2008.<sup>343</sup> The 2012 elections showed that while the Tea Party was potentially appealing to (mainly white) majorities in certain counties across the country, it had trouble appealing to enough people to gain a majority in state-wide or national elections.

But more than anything, Romney lost because of his economic message. Exit polls showed the majority of Americans believed Romney’s economic policies favored the rich, while Obama’s policies were generally perceived as favorable for the middle class and/or the poor. Simultaneously, most Americans (55 percent) also believed the system was already unfair and

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<sup>339</sup> Michael Shure and Cenk Uygur, “Post-Election Recap,” *TwenTYTwelve*, November 12, 2012.

<sup>340</sup> John Eligon and Michael Schwartz, “Senate Candidate Provokes Ire with ‘Legitimate Rape’ Comment,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 2012.

<sup>341</sup> Elspeth Reeve, “The Tea Party’s National Ambitions Are Finished,” *The Atlantic*, November 7, 2012.

<sup>342</sup> Lucy Madison, “Romney on Immigration: I’m for Self-Deportation,” *CBS News*, January 24, 2012.

<sup>343</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 380.



skewed in favor of the wealthy.<sup>344</sup> Almost three-quarters of those who believed the system was unfair voted for Obama. Even Karl Rove pointed out that 81 percent of the Americans attributed the characteristic “cares about me” to Obama over Romney.<sup>345</sup> Romney had never been able to shed himself of the image his primary opponents had already given him: the out-of-touch, ruthless billionaire who cared more about making money than the well-being of ordinary citizens. His ‘47 percent’ comments proved to many Americans that he didn’t care about the little guy.

After the election, conservatives began debating how it was possible they had lost to Obama. Many pointed to Hurricane Sandy as breaking Romney’s momentum and costing them the election. And reading the numbers, most acknowledged their problems in terms of demographics and their strategic decisions. Romney himself explained his loss by extending his ‘47 percent’ argument to the outcome of the election. In a call with his major donors, Romney blamed Obama for bribing his base, specifically mentioning the Obamacare provision ensuring children can stay on their parents’ health care plan until the age of 27, his college debt forgiveness plans, and contraceptive coverage for women as “gifts” to some of his core constituencies.<sup>346</sup> Romney also considered the role of the black vote as vital. In his concession call to Obama, Romney implied that it was the black vote that got Obama the victory. According to David Axelrod, Romney said Obama “really did a great job of getting out the vote in places like Cleveland and Milwaukee”.<sup>347</sup>

For other Republicans the question was whether the campaign had been too conservative, or not conservative enough. David Frum argued the party had been “increasingly isolated and estranged from modern America”, and stated that fighting more vigorously for tax cuts, the destruction of welfare programs, or an even harsher stance on abortion and gay marriage would drive the American public further away from his party. In essence, Frum blamed the Tea Party for turning Romney from a “competent, managerial, pragmatic” candidate into someone of whom “nobody knew really what he was”.<sup>348</sup> Several others took the opposite view and argued that it was Romney’s moderate nature that made him a flip-flopper and ineffective as a proponent of the

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<sup>344</sup> Ibidem, 381.

<sup>345</sup> Cenk Uygur, “Karl Rove’s Reaction to Obama’s Win,” *TYT Shows*, November 8, 2012.

<sup>346</sup> Ashley Parker, “Romney Blames Loss on Obama’s ‘Gifts’ to Minorities and Young Voters,” *The New York Times*, November 14, 2012.

<sup>347</sup> Kendall Breitman, “Axelrod: Romney ‘12 Concession Call ‘Irritated’ Obama,” *Politico*, February 4, 2015.

<sup>348</sup> David Frum, “How the GOP Got Stuck in the Past,” *Newsweek*, November 11, 2012.

conservative case. *Fox News's* Laura Ingraham tweeted: "JUST A THOUGHT...Next time, GOP might want to think about nominating a conservative."<sup>349</sup> Breitbart, where just days before the election John Nolte argued that pollsters were wrong because "Republicans can't wait to vote...[and] polls show Republicans will turn out in record numbers"<sup>350</sup>, completely changed its message after the election. Romney's campaign "never learned the most valuable and simplest lesson from Bush's 2004 operation: in a so-called 'base' election, the candidate who galvanizes and energizes his base the most wins"<sup>351</sup>, Tony Lee wrote. He pointed to the 2004 Bush campaign as an example of energizing the base with a strongly conservative message, while winning over considerable amounts of minority voters. In contrast, the 2012 campaign "had to make up for a lack of enthusiasm for Romney's candidacy with technological gimmicks".<sup>352</sup> It was an early defense against those within the party who believed it was Romney's immigration policies that cost Republicans the election. In a different article Lee warned for 'radical' Latino's "threatening lawmakers that they will keep an immigration reform 'report card'".<sup>353</sup> Breitbart immediately went to work on dismissing the notion that the GOP should switch positions on immigration reform, because it knew many others would argue that with a different stance on immigration, the GOP could appeal to the Latino vote with their socially and economically conservative message and expand its potential base. It was exactly the conclusion party officials would draw.

In March 2013, the GOP released the 97-page *Growth and Opportunity Project* report, an internal analysis of the election, and the conclusions in the report were harsh, stating that the party had 'marginalized'<sup>354</sup> itself. To broaden the party's appeal, the report offered three radical recommendations. The first was the aforementioned switch on immigration reform: "We must embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform." The report also argued the party had stop pushing their view on gay marriage and should speak out against corporate welfare.<sup>355</sup> The authors of the report however, were all members of the party establishment, and followed the line

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<sup>349</sup> Elspeth Reeve.

<sup>350</sup> John Nolte, "Eight Reasons Polls Showing Obama Winning Are Dead Wrong," *Breitbart*, November 1, 2012.

<sup>351</sup> Tony Lee, "Historic Black Turnout Gave Obama Ohio Victory," *Breitbart*, November 12, 2012.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>353</sup> Tony Lee, "Latino Groups: Immigration Reform Will Happen 'Over the Political Bodies of Congress'," *Breitbart*, December 18, 2012.

<sup>354</sup> Thomas B. Edsall, "The Republican Autopsy Report," *The New York Times*, March 20, 2013.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibidem*.

that Karl Rove pushed for with his Conservative Victory Project: to eliminate the candidates that are appealing to the base of the party but scare away undecided voters with their unrelenting conservatism.<sup>356</sup>

Although the goal is to eliminate the fringe candidates, the report barely addresses the underlying issue of the party's conservative base. Instead, the report focuses on the role of outside groups and campaign finance laws on the party: "The current campaign finance environment has led to a handful of friends and allied groups dominating our side's efforts. This is not healthy. A lot of centralized authority in the hands of a few people at these outside organizations is dangerous for our Party."<sup>357</sup> The solution they offered was not the elimination of outside expenditures, but rather the elimination of McCain-Feingold, which prohibited the flow of 'soft money' donations directly into the party, and therefore strengthened the outside groups that were allowed to take unlimited donations. If only the party itself could get more campaign donations, then the party had more control over campaign expenditures and could more easily control the outcome of their primaries to prevent "candidates who were suboptimal, not necessarily Tea Party candidates, but undisciplined, lacking fund-raising ability and substandard generally."<sup>358</sup>

### ***Immigration Reform and the Conservative Attack***

More control over the nominating process for the Party establishment, giving up on gay marriage and abortion, and switching positions on immigration; the GOP report made conservatives livid and they started attacking the establishment. Nineteen conservatives - including Tony Perkins, Richard Viguerie and David Bossie - attacked Rove in a letter they send directly to American Crossroads donors, in which they argued that the 'centrist' candidates supported by the Rove's organizations did much worse than truly conservative candidates like Jeff Flake, Deb Fischer and Ted Cruz, and that Rove's failures were inexcusable.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>357</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>358</sup> Edsall, "The Republican Autopsy Report".

<sup>359</sup> Ibidem.

Other conservative analysts made fun of the establishment's conclusions on the Party's positions and message. *Washington Examiner* writer Timothy P. Carney noted that people should "take it with a grain of salt when the Republican leadership puts out a document saying that the GOP should change only its rhetoric on economic issues but change its substance on social issues".<sup>360</sup> Similarly, *National Review*'s Ramesh Ponnuru stated that Republican elites are more inclined than the party's base to support gay marriage and immigration reform anyway, so switching on these issues is not a serious problem for them. But to change their economic message in terms of substance remained unthinkable. "They don't, however, tend to have any major problems with the Republican economic agenda and do not believe it need to be rethought in any serious way."<sup>361</sup> For Ponnuru and Carney, this was the world upside down. They did not see any advantage in switching positions on issues conservatives like themselves really cared about, but they saw plenty wrong with the GOP's economic message. In another article, Carney wrote:

So, this is just about 'blowing the whistle' and 'speaking out'? Is this explicitly a call for empty rhetoric? If so, too bad, because I can think of some real policies that the GOP could push in order to 'attack corporate welfare' in more than just rhetoric. Break up big banks, abolish the Export-Import Bank, replace corporate tax carveouts with across-the-board cuts, unwind Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, oppose all future bailouts, end the sugar program, end the ethanol mandate, kill oil subsidies...just to name a few.<sup>362</sup>

The clash between the GOP establishment and conservatives also marked a clash between the working class base of the party and the donor's. For the donor's, the GOP's economic message was the main reason behind their support for the party. The government bailouts after the 2008 crash saved the fortune of various donors, all major donors made generous use of tax loopholes and had no intention of seeing them getting closed, and to break up the big banks was akin to socialism. Furthermore, while the Koch brothers publicly attacked corporate subsidies, their

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<sup>360</sup> Timothy P. Carney, "RNC Leadership Idea: Let's Make Party More Like RNC Leadership, Less Like its Base," *Washington Examiner*, March 18, 2013.

<sup>361</sup> Ramesh Ponnuru, "The Republican Elites' Vision of Reform," *National Review*, March 18, 2013.

<sup>362</sup> Timothy P. Carney, "RNC's Free-Market Populist Rhetoric," *Washington Examiner*, March 18, 2013.

company received over \$166 million in government subsidies to the oil industry.<sup>363</sup> And in order, to pay for all that, the government should cut welfare programs like social security. On immigration, most donors held much more moderate views, if only because many businesses relied on immigrants for cheap labor.<sup>364</sup>

The Party's base held very different views. Yes, they believed in the free market and supported supply-side economic policies and government spending cuts. But the spending cuts should only come from those government programs that favored the undeserving 'others' that Hochschild discussed (minorities and immigrants) rather than from social security or Medicare, and those programs favoring the undeserving also included the unfair subsidies and other form of 'corporate welfare' that rigged the economy in favor of the wealthy.<sup>365</sup> With regards to immigration reform, the conservative base was very much opposed to any deal. As *Breitbart's* Joel Pollak wrote in a 2016 article on the 'amnesty' debate within the party:

What the Republican establishment underestimated was how deeply Americans – including key Democratic constituencies, and even legal immigrants – resented amnesty. For some, it was a matter of economic competition. For others, it was a matter of the rule of law. And for others, it was a matter of cultural coherence.<sup>366</sup>

Pollak stretched his argument by applying it to much larger portion of the electorate than the conservative wing of the GOP in order to explain Trump's appeal to the 2016 electorate, but his conclusion was certainly true for many within the Tea Party. Whether they feared immigrants stealing their jobs, whether they objected to the juridical consequences of an amnesty bill, or whether they were racists who want America to remain a predominantly white nation, Tea Party conservatives were almost unilaterally opposed to immigration reform.

In Congress, Senate Republicans followed up on the report's advice and began negotiating on immigration reform. Four Democrats and four Republicans joined forces as the 'Gang of Eight'

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<sup>363</sup> David Sirota, "Charles Koch Blasts Subsidies & Tax Credits, But His Firm Has Taken \$195 Million Worth of Them," *International Business Times*, August 2, 2015.

<sup>364</sup> Julia Preston, "The Big Money Behind the Push for an Immigration Overhaul," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2014.

<sup>365</sup> Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 216.

<sup>366</sup> Joel B. Pollak, "RNC's 2012 'Autopsy' Said Amnesty Was Only Path to Victory," *Breitbart*, November 9, 2016.

to come up with a comprehensive immigration reform bill. The ‘Gang’ included Tea Party Republicans Jeff Flake and Marco Rubio, who had been elected in 2010 over sitting Republican Governor Charlie Christ because of his harsh stance on immigration<sup>367</sup>, as well as John McCain and Lindsey Graham. In April 2013, the ‘Gang of eight’ introduced their *Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013* which, after much debate and several amendments, was passed by the Senate 68-32 on June 27, 2013. The bill had a \$50 billion price tag, most of which was destined for border security enhancement. The number of U.S. Border Patrol agents on the southern border would get doubled and an additional 700 miles of fences would get build along the border. Furthermore, the border would get tracked with radar and unmanned aerial drones, while the Department of Homeland Security was tasked with installing a biometric tracking system at the thirty largest U.S airports. Finally, employers were required to do a background check when hiring new employees by using the new E-Verify employment verification system.<sup>368</sup>

In return for all these additional investments in border security, the Republicans agreed to a 13-year minimum pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants. It allowed immigrants to apply for the status of Registered Provisional Immigrant (RPI), if they had not been convicted of a felony or three or more misdemeanors, if they agreed to paying assessed taxes, if they passed background checks and if they paid application fees as well as a \$1.000 penalty. With RPI status, people would not be eligible for public benefits like Medicaid or social security, and they had to ensure continuous employment with maximum 60-day gaps - or otherwise prove they had an annual income of 100 percent of the poverty line<sup>369</sup> or higher - in order to apply for a renewal of their status after six years. After ten years, RPI status allowed a person to apply for a green card, but even then the applicant had to go to the back of the line, which meant their application would get processed only once all other applications had been processed. All-in-all, an applicant had to pass three background checks, had to pay for various application fees three times, as well as two \$1.000 penalties, had been continuously employed for a period of ten years, and had passed an

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<sup>367</sup> John Hawkins, “The Ugly Truth About Marco Rubio and His Gang-of-Eight Amnesty Bill,” *Townhall*, December 19, 2015.

<sup>368</sup> “A Guide to S.744: Understanding the 2013 Senate Immigration Bill,” *American Immigration Council*, July 10, 2013.

<sup>369</sup> The poverty line for a family of four was \$23.550 in 2013. The bill did include some exemptions, like an exemption for those enrolled in school fulltime and an exemption for people with mental or physical disabilities. “A Guide to S.744: Understanding the 2013 Senate Immigration Bill”.

English proficiency test before he or she received permanent residency.<sup>370</sup> On top of the path to citizenship, the bill also increased the number of available visas for high-skilled workers, construction workers and those working in ‘hospitality industries. For immigrant farmworkers, the bill created a temporary guest-worker program.

For the GOP establishment, this bill looked like the type of tough but compassionate bill that could possibly please both Latino voters who wanted to see comprehensive immigration reform, and all but the most ardent opponents of immigration reform. But most conservatives did not view this bill as tough at all. To them, the bill amounted to ‘amnesty’. Even before the Senate had passed their version, it was clear the House felt very differently about the bill. House GOP Deputy Whip Peter Roskam called the bill “a pipe dream”, stating that the Senate bill would never reach the House floor for a vote<sup>371</sup>, and Speaker Boehner vowed he would not allow the bill to come up for a vote unless a majority of the House Republicans supported it,<sup>372</sup> knowing that a majority of Republicans were opposed to the bill.

Those in favor of the bill were frantically looking for a conservative to champion the bill in the House, and they turned to Ryan for help. Grover Norquist argued that Ryan’s work on budget issues had not only given him credibility among conservatives, but also meant he “has had more face time with each member than anyone else in the caucus”<sup>373</sup>. Whit Ayres hailed Ryan as “one of the most effective messengers the Republican Party has in the House.”<sup>374</sup> And all of a sudden, the vice-presidential candidate for a campaign that described its immigration policy as ‘self-deportation’, was portrayed as a champion for immigration reform in the tradition of his mentor Jack Kemp. Jack Kemp had been outspoken in favor for immigration reform. He believed reform was the decent thing to do, but he also believed it was good for the American economy. As his speech writer, Ryan worked on Kemp’s 1996 vice-presidential acceptance speech, in which Kemp said America should “close the backdoor of illegal immigration so that we can keep open the front door of legal immigration.”<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> “A Guide to S.744: Understanding the 2013 Senate Immigration Bill”.

<sup>371</sup> Aaron Blake, “House GOP Deputy Whip: Senate Immigration Bill a ‘Pipe Dream’,” *Washington Post*, June 27, 2013.

<sup>372</sup> Ed O’Keefe, “Senate Approves Comprehensive Immigration Bill,” *Washington Post*, June 27, 2013.

<sup>373</sup> Caren Bohan, “Can Paul Ryan Sell Immigration Reform to Conservatives?” *Reuters*, June 26, 2013.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>375</sup> Robert Costa, “Paul Ryan’s Immigration Play,” *National Review*, April 24, 2013.

As a Congressman, Paul Ryan had mixed record on immigration issues. In 2005, Ryan co-sponsored an immigration reform bill that never made it to the House floor, but was a precursor for the failed 2007 McCain-Kennedy immigration reform bill.<sup>376</sup> In 2006, Ryan voted in favor of a bill that barred the U.S. border patrol from sharing information with Mexican authorities on the armed volunteer militia known as the Minutemen. He also voted for a \$7 billion fence stretching 700-miles along the Mexican border.<sup>377</sup> In 2010, Ryan also voted against the House version of the Dream Act.<sup>378</sup>

In 2013, Ryan had seemingly drawn the same conclusion as the RNC on immigration reform being the path to a possibly victory in 2016. In February, Ryan appeared on NBC's *Meet the Press* where he expressed his support for immigration reform that included a path to citizenship.<sup>379</sup> In April, Ryan appeared at the Chicago City Club with his personal friend and strong supporter of comprehensive immigration reform, Democratic Rep. Luis Gutierrez. At the event, Ryan praised the 'Gang of Eight' and defended various sections of the bill, stating "we have to offer people a path to earned legalization"<sup>380</sup>, and echoing his mentor's argument that immigration reform would benefit the economy. In an interview with *Reuters*, Ryan cited the budget deficit and the coming retirement of baby boomers as making immigrants a necessity for American prosperity.<sup>381</sup> He also defended 'earned' paths to citizenship, stating he would debate anyone who equated it with 'amnesty'.<sup>382</sup>

Publicly presenting himself as 'bridge builder' between the conservatives, the GOP leadership and the Democrats, Ryan was rumored to have been working on winning over conservatives by meeting with Idaho Rep. Raul Labrador, who was a member of the House working group on immigration. Ryan had several meetings to discuss the concerns with the bill and searching for ways to make the bill acceptable for the House.<sup>383</sup> But Ryan also told *Breitbart*

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<sup>376</sup> Janell Ross, 'Paul Ryan's Achilles Heel with Conservatives Could be Immigration. And it's Complicated', *Washington Post*, October 21 (2015).

<sup>377</sup> Ross, 'Paul Ryan's Achilles Heel with Conservatives Could be Immigration. And it's Complicated'.

<sup>378</sup> Costa, "Paul Ryan's Immigration Play".

<sup>379</sup> Ross, 'Paul Ryan's Achilles Heel with Conservatives Could be Immigration. And it's Complicated'.

<sup>380</sup> Costa, "Paul Ryan's Immigration Play".

<sup>381</sup> Bohan, "Can Paul Ryan Sell Immigration Reform to Conservatives?"

<sup>382</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>383</sup> Costa, "Paul Ryan's Immigration Play".



he didn't "worry about moving too quickly, because this has to be a very methodical process to begin with"<sup>384</sup>

During the summer of 2013, it became increasingly clear the House Republicans were unwilling to move forward on immigration reform, with John Boehner refusing to allow the bill to come up for a floor vote. Ryan began to pull back from the proposal. In *Face the Nation*, Ryan disagreed with Lindsey Graham that immigration reform was necessary for the political future of the GOP. In his rebuttal, Ryan argued the House has "been listening to the American people. So what we're going to do is take a step-by-step approach to get immigration right, not a big massive bill."<sup>385</sup> Ryan was not the only supporter of the bill who started to back away from it. Marco Rubio, who was a member of the 'Gang of Eight', flipped his position and announced his opposition to the bill he helped write. Alex Conant, a spokesman for Rubio sent an email in October 2013 to *Breitbart*, in which he wrote that "the most realistic way to make progress on immigration would be through a series of individual bills"<sup>386</sup> and stating further that Rubio opposed a conference committee on any comprehensive immigration bill. The excuse used by the Rubio campaign was that the comprehensive bill blocked any chance of the House agreeing to smaller immigration bills, because House conservatives feared a smaller House bill would allow for the conference to negotiate on the Senate bill and move forward with a much larger bill than the House originally intended.<sup>387</sup> What Rubio left out however, was the reality that if it came up for a vote, only a handful of Republicans would have to vote in favor of the bill, since most, if not all, Democrats would vote in favor of it.

Rubio, Ryan and other Republicans had underestimated the backlash they received for their move on immigration. Once they realized the opposition they would face within their own party, they decided to back away from the bill and return to the obstructionism they employed throughout the Obama presidency. For the Tea Party base, Ryan, Rubio and their allies were no longer part of the movement. Two year later, this would almost cost Ryan the House speakership.

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<sup>384</sup> Costa, "Paul Ryan's Immigration Play".

<sup>385</sup> Ross, 'Paul Ryan's Achilles Heel with Conservatives Could be Immigration. And it's Complicated'.

<sup>386</sup> Matthew Boyle, "Exclusive – Rubio Now Opposes Going to Conference With Senate Immigration Bill," *Breitbart*, October 26, 2013.

<sup>387</sup> Arlette Saenz, "Marco Rubio's Flip-Flop on Comprehensive Immigration Reform Explained," *ABC News*, October 28, 2013.

### *Another Government Shutdown*

The conservative wing of the GOP had successfully taken over power within the party, forcing them ever more rightward. In the fall of 2013, Tea Party Senator Ted Cruz led the Republicans into a government shutdown, after demanding that a repeal of Obamacare would get tied to a funding appropriations bill. The idea, which was first proposed by Tea Party Rep. Mark Meadows<sup>388</sup>, consisted of the Republicans refusing to pass a bill to fund the government, as long as Obama would not agree to repealing or postponing Obamacare. Obama refused to cave in and on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 800,000 government employees were furloughed and various government offices closed down. The impasse lasted for 14 days, before Harry Reid and Mitch McConnell agreed on a bill temporarily funding the government until January 15, 2014, and suspending the debt limit until February 7, 2014. The bill, which went to the Senate floor on October 16, was passed 81 to 18, with 27 Republicans voting in favor of the bill. Because the passage occurred mere hours before the debt limit would get reached, the GOP House leadership was forced to move ahead with the bill. Boehner had repeatedly tried to offer a bill the majority of the Republicans could agree to, but he failed twice and after the Senate passed their version of the bill, Boehner had to admit defeat: “We fought the good fight. We just didn’t win.”<sup>389</sup> In violation of informal GOP rules, Boehner brought the bill forward despite majority opposition within his own caucus, and the House passed the Senate bill 285-144 with 87 Republicans voting in favor, including John Boehner, Kevin McCarthy and Eric Cantor.<sup>390</sup> Paul Ryan voted with the majority of his own party and opposed the bill.

But Ryan’s vote against the bill was more symbolic than anything. Boehner already had enough votes to pass the bill, and Ryan needed his conservative credits later that year. In collaboration with Democratic Senator Patty Murray, Ryan negotiated a bipartisan budget deal to fund the government throughout 2014 and 2015. On December 10, Ryan and Murray announced they had reached an agreement. The bill mostly dealt with the cuts that would get triggered by sequestration in 2014 and 2015, replacing about half of them in 2014, and a quarter in 2015 with

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<sup>388</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money*, 348.

<sup>389</sup> Jonathan Weisman and Ashley Parker, “Republicans Back Down, Ending Crisis over Shutdown and Debt Limit,” *The New York Times*, October 16, 2013.

<sup>390</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 396.

different cuts, including a 1.3 percent cut on the wages of new government employees and a one percent cut on the cost-of-living adjustments for military retirement payments for those under the age of 62, while they also slightly increasing revenue through additional airline fees.<sup>391</sup> Conservative House Republicans opposed the bill, but memories of the government shutdown were still fresh in people's minds, and the deal passed both the House and the Senate with relative ease. 163 Democrats and 169 Republicans voted in favor of the deal in the House, and 9 Republican Senators joined their Democratic colleagues to pass the bill in the Senate 64-36.

If conservatives disliked the bill, they did not blame Ryan at the time. Rep. Mick Mulvaney argued he opposed the bill, but he understood that there were too few conservatives to push for "true deficit reduction"<sup>392</sup> Rep. Cynthia Lummis, who had not decided whether she would vote for the bill, stated: "The only reason that I am undecided is my complete regard for Paul Ryan".<sup>393</sup> Ryan had tarnished his reputation as a conservative because of his immigration push, but on the budget, conservatives trusted him more than anyone else.

The 2014 elections were different for Republicans from the previous two elections, because a new balance had seemingly been found between the GOP establishment and the Tea Party conservatives. There was one major exception. A shockwave ran through Washington when it became clear that Eric Cantor had been beaten in a GOP primary by Tea Party candidate David Brat. Never before had a House majority leader lost a primary. The general consensus on this surprising result was that Cantor lost due to Brat's relentlessly attacking Cantor for being a "leader on amnesty"<sup>394</sup>. While immigration certainly was a factor for some opposition to Cantor, it only partly explained his loss since 70 percent of the Republicans in Cantor's district supported immigration-reform. However, David Brat also relentlessly attacked Cantor for his relationship with lobbyists and special interest. When asked about his run against Cantor, Brat replied: "I am running against Cantor because he does not represent the citizens of the 7<sup>th</sup> District, but rather large corporations seeking insider deals, crony bailout a constant supply of low-wage

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<sup>391</sup> Ezra Klein, "Here's What's in Paul Ryan and Patty Murray's Mini-Budget Deal," *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2013.

<sup>392</sup> Erik Wasson, "Conservatives: Ryan Not Tarnished by 'Bad' Deal," *The Hill*, December 11, 2013.

<sup>393</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>394</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 403.

workers”.<sup>395</sup> Richmond Tea Party executive director Larry Nordvig told the *New York Times* that the national Tea Party groups, who largely stayed clear of this election, were unaware of the activity on the grassroots level and underestimated the strength of the anybody-but-Cantor mentality.<sup>396</sup> “There are some very angry people upset with the status quo”, said Virginia Republican Thomas M. Davis III, “and Eric became part of that”.<sup>397</sup>

But as shocking as Cantor’s loss was for Washington, it was generally seen as an anomaly in a year where the GOP establishment and the Tea Party were seemingly closer than they had been in previous election years.<sup>398</sup> In the *National Review*, Lowry and Ponnuru coin the new term ‘Establishment Tea’, arguing that the quarrels between the establishment - who according to Tea Party Republicans never stood for anything - and the Tea Party - who in the establishment eyes failed to provide qualified candidates – were over.

In most of these races, the “establishment and “tea party” factions have been rather loosely defined. It appears that at the center of the Republican electorate are many voters who are not hostile to either group. They do not think of tea partiers as a bunch of crazies, or the Republican hierarchy as a group of quislings. Their reflex is to support the most effective conservative, regardless of label.<sup>399</sup>

Republicans used Cantor’s loss as a reason to ‘reconsider’ their stance on immigration reform. In reality, Boehner had already promised the right wing he would not move forward on immigration reform before Cantor had even lost his primary.<sup>400</sup> On May 27, two weeks before Cantor lost his primary, *Fusion* reporter Jorge Ramos pressures Boehner on the issue of immigration reform, Boehner avoids the question answering that Obama bears the responsibility, because since Obama “ignores Obamacare, his own law, he reduces the confidence of the American people in

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<sup>395</sup> Cenk Uygur, “Eric Cantor Loses – Should the Corrupt Be Scared,” *The Young Turks*, June 11, 2015.

<sup>396</sup> Jonathan Martin, “Eric Cantor Defeated by David Brat, Tea Party Challenger, in GOP Primary Upset,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 2014.

<sup>397</sup> Jonathan Martin, June 10, 2014.

<sup>398</sup> Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong*, 403.

<sup>399</sup> Rich Lowry and Ramesh Ponnuru, “Establishment Tea,” *National Review*, July 7, 2014.

<sup>400</sup> Ben Mankiewicz, “Reporter Jorge Ramos Practices REAL Journalism with John Boehner,” *The Young Turks*, May 27, 2014.

his willingness to implement an immigration law the way we would pass it.”<sup>401</sup> When Ramos continued to question why Boehner did not just bring the Senate bill to the House floor, Boehner said he had already answered why and then sarcastically thanked Ramos for his opinion.<sup>402</sup>

The party had cleansed itself from most moderate Republicans, and those who now made up the establishment were sufficiently conservative to gain support from large swaths of conservatives. Mitch McConnell won a majority of Tea Party voters in his primary in Kentucky. James Lankford, who in 2010 was himself elected as a Tea Party candidate, won a large chunk of the Tea Party vote in his primary despite his vote to reopen the government in October 2013. North Carolina establishment candidate Thom Tillis won his primary against two Tea Party candidates partly because he received significant Tea party support himself.<sup>403</sup> By 2014, most Republicans were to some extent Tea Party Republicans, preaching the most conservative values, pushing for the most conservative policies and despising any form of compromise with Democrats.

### ***Republican Obstructionism and the End of John Boehner***

After the 2014 election, Obama gave up on the idea of reaching a compromise on immigration with the Republicans, and announced new executive actions to ensure immigration reform. Obama had done so before when he created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012, which allowed illegal immigrants who arrived in the United States as children to apply for a renewable two-year status, granting them deferred action from deportation and eligibility for a work-permit.<sup>404</sup> The conditions the children had to comply with were similar to those included in the 2013 Senate bill on immigration, and included a criminal background check and payment of fines and fees.

On November 20, 2014, Obama announced an expansion of DACA and the creation of DAPA, the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans, which allowed the parents of American citizens and legal permanent residents to apply for the same status as DACA recipients. In his

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<sup>401</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>402</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>403</sup> Rich Lowry and Ramesh Ponnuru, “Establishment Tea”.

<sup>404</sup> Julia Preston and John H. Cushman Jr., “Obama to Permit Young Migrants to Remain in U.S.,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 2012.

announcement, Obama stressed the fact that the status was temporary and that no path to citizenship was included in his actions.<sup>405</sup> Nonetheless, Republicans were furious. From Senator Jeff Sessions to Speaker Boehner to all conservative commentators on TV or on the radio, they all framed Obama's actions as an unprecedented, dictatorial executive power grab and accused Obama of granting amnesty to illegals.<sup>406</sup>

The fight over immigration turned into another budget crisis, when the conservatives refused to pass an appropriations bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security without additional provisions to end Obama's executive orders on immigration.<sup>407</sup> In January 2015, the House had passed a bill to fund the department, but this bill included provisions to end the legal status Obama had created through his executive orders and Senate Democrats had blocked the bill from going forward. Democrats refused to back down on the issue, forcing the Republicans into a showdown on the matter in March. With the shutdown of the Homeland Security in sight, criticism of the Republicans, even from within their own ranks, grew. Boehner was faced with the decision to either allow the House a clean vote on the funding of the department, or getting the blame for the potentially dangerous prospect of a (partial) shutdown of Homeland Security. Boehner caved and on March 3, the House passed a clean version of the appropriations bill with just 75 Republican votes.<sup>408</sup>

Immediately after the vote, rumors started to spread about Boehner's position as Speaker being questioned by the conservative wing of the GOP. The newly-formed Freedom Caucus - which was loosely affiliated with the Tea Party and included about forty of the most conservative members of the Republican Caucus - was increasingly irritated by Boehner's inability to block and reverse Obama's policies. Fifteen members of the caucus had already voted against Boehner when he ran for reelection as Speaker, and all of them had reservations with his leadership.<sup>409</sup> In

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<sup>405</sup> John Iadarola, Dave Rubin, Jimmy Dore and Ben Mankiewicz, "Obama Goes It Alone On Immigration Reform," *The Young Turks*, November 21, 2014.

<sup>406</sup> John Iadarola, Dave Rubin, Jimmy Dore and Ben Mankiewicz, "Conservatives Explain How Obama's Immigration Policy Is Just Like Hitler," *The Young Turks*, November 21, 2014.

<sup>407</sup> Ashley Parker, "House Approves Homeland Security Budget, Without Strings," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2015.

<sup>408</sup> Ashley Parker, March 3, 2015.

<sup>409</sup> Carl Bialik and Aaron Bycoffe, "The Hard-Line Republicans Who Pushed John Boehner Out," *FiveThirtyEight*, September 25, 2015.

their views, Boehner had failed to repeal Obamacare, had failed to block the Iran deal, and had failed to block Obama's immigration policies.<sup>410</sup> In the summer, the Freedom Caucus and the conservative allies again attempted to hold another budget bill hostage, and this time it would mean the end of John Boehner's Speakership.

In the summer of 2015, the fight between Obama and the House had shifted onto a new policy field: abortion. The Freedom Caucus had chosen Planned Parenthood as their new target, after anti-abortion activists had discredited the organization with fabricated videos in which Planned Parenthood employees appeared to be selling fetal tissue for profit<sup>411</sup>, and vowed to block a continuing resolution for temporarily funding the government until \$500 million designated for Planned Parenthood would get scrapped from the budget.<sup>412</sup> Boehner knew there was no chance of such a bill passing in the Senate or getting signed off by President Obama, and he was again faced with an impossible choice. Either he would have to let the government shutdown again, or he had to turn to the Democrats for help, which would inevitably have led to his Speakership getting challenged by the right.<sup>413</sup> On September 25, Boehner made clear he was unwilling to do either. During a Friday morning press conference, where Boehner walked in singing and smiling, he announced he would resign from the House Speakership and give up his seat in the House on October 30, 2015.<sup>414</sup>

Immediately, Republican voices were calling for Ryan to take over the Speakership, but he announced he did not want the job,<sup>415</sup> which made Kevin McCarthy the favorite for the job. During his press conference Boehner himself endorsed McCarthy, and in response to a question on McCarthy, a senior House GOP told *Time* that "the right flank likes McCarthy. He has done a lot of work to reach out to them and, fairly or unfairly, they feel he listens more to them than Boehner does."<sup>416</sup> McCarthy announced he would run for Speaker, but his rise to the Speakership did not go as smoothly as expected. As Republican Deputy Whip and later Republican Whip, McCarthy had built relationships with everyone in the Republican conference and he generally

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<sup>410</sup> Jay Newton-Small, "House Speaker John Boehner Calls It Quits," *Time*, September 25, 2015.

<sup>411</sup> Richard Pérez-Peña, "Anti-Abortion Activists Charged in Planned Parenthood Video Case," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2017.

<sup>412</sup> "The Prospect of a Shutdown; the Madness Resumes," *The Economist*, September 26, 2015.

<sup>413</sup> "The Prospect of a Shutdown; the Madness Resumes".

<sup>414</sup> Jennifer Steinhauer, "John Boehner, House Speaker, Will Resign From Congress," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2015.

<sup>415</sup> Steinhauer, September 25, 2015.

<sup>416</sup> Jay Newton-Small, "House Speaker John Boehner Calls It Quits," *Time*, September 25, 2015.

got along well with the conservative wing of the party. But McCarthy himself was seen as a relative moderate, and those who had just forced Boehner to resign, were not keen on seeing a moderate and Boehner's second-in-command to assume the Speakership.<sup>417</sup> On October 8, Kevin McCarthy withdrew his bid to run for Speaker, a move that surprised most in Washington. Why exactly McCarthy left has never been unveiled, but McCarthy himself did note that "I don't want to go to the floor and win with 220 votes. I think the best thing for our party right now is that you have 247 votes on the floor".<sup>418</sup> The Freedom Caucus had announced they would support Daniel Webster's bid for Speaker, while McCarthy had already been under fire for comments he had made about the Benghazi hearings. McCarthy had admitted the main reason behind all the hearings on Benghazi was to discredit Hillary Clinton<sup>419</sup>, which led to heavy criticism. But while the mainstream was focusing on McCarthy's statements, conservatives were concerned with another rumor, that to them was much more relevant and important. Rumors were going around that McCarthy had been having an affair, and two days before McCarthy withdrew his bid, Rep. Walter Jones had sent a letter in which he called upon any candidate to "withdraw himself from the leadership election if there are any misdeeds he has committed since joining Congress that will embarrass himself, the Republican Conference and the House of Representatives if they become public".<sup>420</sup> Whether his rumored affair, the Benghazi gaffe or his lack of conservative credentials ultimately led him to retract his bid will remain an open question, but the act itself meant the House was officially in turmoil. With McCarthy's withdrawal and Paul Ryan's refusal to run, there was no clear candidate to take over the House leadership. The Freedom Caucus was pushing the relatively unknown Florida Rep. Webster, while other names that floated around were Utah Rep. Jason Chaffetz and Oklahoma Rep. Tom Cole. Some conservatives suggested Texan Jeb Hensarling, while some even called for a non-house member as the new speaker.<sup>421</sup>

In the meantime, the Freedom Caucus had released a document in which they listed their demands for a prospective speaker to gain their support. In the document, the caucus asks

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<sup>417</sup> Mike DeBonis, Robert Costa and Rosalind S. Helderman, "House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy Drops Out of Race for Speaker," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 2015.

<sup>418</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>419</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>420</sup> Sophia Tesfaye, "The Kevin McCarthy Plot Thickens: The Bizarre Rumors and Conspiracy Theories Surrounding His Sudden Exit," *Salon*, October 9, 2015; Cenk Uygur, John Iadarola, Ben Mankiewicz and Jimmy Dore, "Real Reason Kevin McCarthy Dropped Out of House Speakership Race," *The Young Turks*, October 9, 2015.

<sup>421</sup> DeBonis, Costa and Helderman; Ana Kasparian and Cenk Uygur, "Republicans Getting Desperate for New House Speaker," *The Young Turks*, October 13, 2015.



prospective speakers whether they are willing to allow an increase in the debt ceiling only if they are tied to significant cuts in entitlement programs as well as whether they are willing to tie the appropriations process to the defunding of Planned Parenthood, the rollback of Obama's immigration orders, a repeal of Obamacare *and* the ending of the Iran deal.<sup>422</sup> Their demands were so extreme, that when McCarthy was asked whether he believed the House was governable, he responded with "I don't know. Sometimes you have to hit rock bottom."<sup>423</sup>

### *Leading the Party*

Desperately searching for someone who would be able to control the entire Republican conference, GOP leaders turned again to Ryan. Ryan had released a statement announcing he would not be a candidate within 20 minutes after McCarthy announced his withdrawal<sup>424</sup>, but after repeated calls from Boehner, McCarthy and others, Ryan reconsidered and announced he would run for the speakership, if the Republican conference was willing to agree to his demands. Calling himself a 'unity' candidate, Ryan demanded support from all factions of the GOP before he would officially announce his bid for Speaker. He therefore required the Freedom Caucus to endorse his candidacy, which meant at least 80 percent support among Caucus-members, while refusing to commit himself to any of the demands of the Freedom Caucus<sup>425</sup>. Finally, Ryan demanded changes to the House rules, vastly limiting the power of the House to remove the Speaker, by eliminating the option for House members to bring forward a motion to 'vacate the Chair'.<sup>426</sup>

Although the Freedom Caucus eventually promised Ryan significant support for his bid<sup>427</sup>, the Caucus responded coolly to his demands. Raul Labrador called Ryan's condition about the

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<sup>422</sup> Judd Legum, "This Document Reveals Why the House of Representatives Is in Complete Chaos," *ThinkProgress*, October 9, 2015.

<sup>423</sup> Rich Lowry, "Sometimes You Have to Hit Rock Bottom," *National Review*, October 8, 2015.

<sup>424</sup> Amita Kelly, "Finding Sings of Unity, Paul Ryan Officially Enters House Speaker Race," *NPR*, October 22, 2015.

<sup>425</sup> Laura Wagner, "Paul Ryan Will Run for Speaker of the House, Under Several Conditions," *NPR*, October 20, 2015.

<sup>426</sup> Judd Legum, "Potential Speaker Paul Ryan Just Issued a List of Demands to Republicans. The Right Wing Isn't Happy," *ThinkProgress*, October 21, 2015.

<sup>427</sup> A 70 percent majority of the Freedom Caucus pledged to vote for Ryan, although he did not reach the 80 percent threshold required for the Freedom Caucus to endorse him officially. Manu Raju, Deirdre Walsh, Tal Kopan and Dana Bash, "After Caucus Vote, Paul Ryan Is Pushing Ahead with Speaker Bid," *CNN*, October 22, 2015.

motion “a non-starter”<sup>428</sup>, adding he did not see one-fifth of the Freedom Caucus voting in favor of Ryan. Rep. Jones stated that Ryan “is not what we need. We need someone that can represent the American people and not special interests”.<sup>429</sup> Rep. Mo Brooks attacked Ryan on a different issue, questioning his record on immigration and calling his views the “amnesty and open borders immigration position”.<sup>430</sup> The Freedom Caucus was not the only group responding coolly to Ryan as the new Speaker. On October 9, *Breitbart* had already run an article attacking Ryan for his stance on immigration, pointing to the endorsement for Ryan by Luis Guterrez, “the most extreme open-borders advocate in Congress”, as evidence of Ryan being an amnesty candidate. Three days after the *Breitbart* article, Mark Krikorian also chimes in on the issue, writing that while he considered it unlikely comprehensive immigration reform would get passed as long as Obama was president, he was almost certain Ryan would eventually “bring an amnesty/immigration-surge bill to the House floor, which would pass with monolithic Democratic support plus enough Gutierrez Republicans to get to 218”.<sup>431</sup> Krikorian finished his article by stating “both [Ryan] and the country would be better served if he remained as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, where he can do the most good, and the least harm.”<sup>432</sup> But while immigration was the main cause for concern among conservatives, all of a sudden they started to question his credentials on other issues as well, pointing to Ryan’s vote for the 2008 bank bailout and his bipartisan deal with Patty Murray in 2013, as well as Ryan’s pro free trade positions, as examples of Ryan being insufficiently conservative.<sup>433</sup> *Breitbart*’s Matthew Boyle described Ryan as “universally despise[d]” among conservatives due to his stance on immigration, but then continued by stating that

most actual conservatives in the House know that Ryan isn’t a conservative...[He] has really been a champion of big government. In addition to helping Boehner retaliate against conservatives, he’s helped push through President Obama’s Obamatrade<sup>434</sup> agenda,

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<sup>428</sup> Legum, October 21, 2015.

<sup>429</sup> Legum, October 21, 2015.

<sup>430</sup> Legum, October 21, 2015.

<sup>431</sup> Mark Krikorian, “Would a Speaker Ryan Push Through Amnesty?” *Center for Immigration Studies*, October 12, 2015.

<sup>432</sup> Krikorian, “Would a Speaker Ryan Push Through Amnesty?”

<sup>433</sup> Seung Min Kim, “Conservatives Sharpen Knives over Ryan’s Immigration Past,” *Politico*, October 15, 2015.

<sup>434</sup> Obamatrade refers to a variety of international trade deals, including the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

he pushed through a budget deal with Sen. Patty Murray...He's done all of that and more by misleading conservatives in the House.<sup>435</sup>

In another *Breitbart*-article, Daniel Horowitz elaborated on what else was wrong with Ryan. Not only had Ryan "sabotaged" Republicans in their budget fights and was he the most "fanatically dedicated [Republican] to the cause of open borders", but Horowitz associated Ryan with "liberal values" and the "sexual identity agenda" through a vote of Ryan in favor of a non-discrimination bill.<sup>436</sup>

By the time Ryan had announced his demands in return for his bid, you would almost believe Ryan to be a closet Democrat. *Drudge Report* announced Ryan's demands with the headline: "King Paul: Pledge Your Allegiance to Me; Dem Favorite; Obama's New Partner".<sup>437</sup> But if the right was unhappy with his nomination, few in Congress actually dared to oppose his bid. On October 29, 2015, Ryan was officially chosen as the new Speaker of the House, with only nine Republicans voting for Rep. Daniel Webster over Ryan. In return, Ryan had promised to shake up the committee structures and give rank-and-file members more say in the writing of new legislation.<sup>438</sup> Nonetheless, his nomination for Speaker was met with as much opposition among conservatives as his nomination as VP was hailed by those same conservatives. As Eric Boehlert pointed out in an article for *Salon*, Laura Ingraham was just one among many who called Ryan "possibly the worst [Speaker] choice", while in 2012 celebrating Ryan for being a true conservative, for having courage and for being a clear thinker.<sup>439</sup>

Ryan immediately followed through on his promises about reforming House procedures. "Mr. Ryan has for the most part pushed the privilege of crafting legislation...out of the leadership offices and back into the hands of members"<sup>440</sup>, Jennifer Steinhauer wrote about one month after Ryan had assumed the Speakership. Ryan had weekly meetings and dinners with various

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<sup>435</sup> Matthew Boyle, "More Republicans Join Speakership Race as Paul Ryan's Nascent Campaign Fall Apart on the Runway," *Breitbart*, October 15 (2015).

<sup>436</sup> Daniel Horowitz, "Paul Ryan Is the Absolute Worst Choice for Speaker," *Breitbart*, October 9, 2015.

<sup>437</sup> Legum, October 21, 2015.

<sup>438</sup> Russell Berman, "Can Paul Ryan Fix the 'Broken' U.S. House of Representatives?" *The Atlantic*, October 29, 2015.

<sup>439</sup> Eric Boehlert, "The Right Turns on Paul Ryan: Yesterday's Conservative Savior is Today's Moderate Wimp," *Salon*, October 31, 2015.

<sup>440</sup> Jennifer Steinhauer, "Paul Ryan Brings Sharply Different Leadership Style to the House," *New York Times*, December 7, 2015.

members of the GOP conference and he would inform the Republicans prior to his meetings with Nancy Pelosi for the newest round of budget negotiations.<sup>441</sup> For many Republicans, one of the main reasons they opposed Boehner was because of his secrecy and backroom dealings, so these changes were appreciated by many. But while these things mattered to Washington insiders, the conservative base cared only about results, not House procedures. And if they had doubts about Ryan when he assumed the Speakership, they quickly made up their minds, after the final clash between the GOP and Obama in 2015.

The end of 2015 was marked by yet another fight over the budget, and it again concerned the same issues as all prior battles. Republicans were angry over Obama's agenda, and Conservatives were unwilling to agree with a spending bill unless various programs would get defunded. Government funding was about to expire again, and on December 15, 2015, Ryan announced a deal with the Democrats on a \$1.15 trillion omnibus-bill that included a hold on a health care tax that would provide critical funding for Obamacare, lifted a 40-year ban on the export of crude oil, and an extension for a variety of tax breaks.<sup>442</sup> And, as had happened with Boehner, conservative media were furious at Ryan for compromising with the Democrats. The day after Ryan's announcement, *Breitbart's* headline read: "Paul Ryan Betrays America: \$1.1 Trillion, 2,000-page omnibus bill bunds 'fundamental transformation of America'".<sup>443</sup> Other conservatives were equally angry. Ann Coulter called for a primary against Ryan on twitter, while Laura Ingraham said Ryan was a "declared enemy of the Base".<sup>444</sup> On the radio, conservative shows also attacked Ryan, with Mark Levin calling the deal "already a disaster" and Rush Limbaugh decrying how the country was going "down the river".<sup>445</sup>

Stephen Bannon and Julia Hahn list why they believed the bill was transforming America. Of the ten points they listed, nine were related to immigration, including: the funding of DACA; the funding of Sanctuary Cities; the funding of refugee programs; the extension of H-2B visas; and the lack of funding for a border fence with Mexico. The only other point on their list was the

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<sup>441</sup> Steinhauer, December 7, 2015.

<sup>442</sup> Scott Wong, Mike Lillis and Alexander Bolton, "Ryan Unveils Sweeping \$1.8T Deal on Government Funding, Taxes," *The Hill*, December 15, 2015.

<sup>443</sup> Stephen K. Bannon & Julia Hahn, "Paul Ryan Betrays America: \$1.1 Trillion, 2,000-page omnibus bill bunds 'fundamental transformation of America'," *Breitbart*, December 16, 2015.

<sup>444</sup> Scott Wong, "Fury of the Right Falls on Ryan," *The Hill*, December 26, 2015.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibidem*.

lock-in of “huge spending increases”.<sup>446</sup> Others were also angry at Ryan for not defunding Planned Parenthood, but the bulk of the anger was the result of Ryan not defunding the refugee program for Syrian refugees<sup>447</sup>, which Bannon and Hahn had described as “Mideast immigration programs that have been exploited by terrorists in recent years”.<sup>448</sup> The Freedom Caucus was less harsh for Ryan, arguing that Ryan was forced into this deal because Boehner handed it over to him last minute, but that in 2016 Ryan had to push for defunding Obamacare and Planned Parenthood if he wanted to keep their support in 2016.<sup>449</sup> Within two months after being elected the third most powerful man in America, Ryan had lost the support of the conservative base and was close to losing the support of the GOP’s right wing in Congress.

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<sup>446</sup> Bannon and Hahn, “Paul Ryan Betrays America.”

<sup>447</sup> Wong, “Fury of the Right Falls on Ryan”.

<sup>448</sup> Bannon and Hahn, “Paul Ryan Betrays America”.

<sup>449</sup> Cenk Uygur, “Conservatives Attack Paul Ryan’s ‘Muslim Beard’,” *The Young Turks*, December 28, 2015.

## Conclusion

The changing image of Paul Ryan as well as the changing relationship between Paul Ryan and the conservative/Tea Party base of the Republican Party shows the trajectory of the GOP in recent years. When Ryan assumed office, he was a young, unknown conservative, who used the first ten years in office to carefully create a public persona for himself. His work in Congress gave him the reputation of a staunch conservative and a clear thinker, who argued for the privatization of government programs and was a loyal supporter of the Bush presidency. The only issue he was considered remotely moderate was the issue of immigration reform, on which he had similar views as President Bush and various prominent conservatives.

When Paul Ryan came more to the forefront and became one of the main faces of his party to defend their policies, conservatism was making its comeback through the Tea Party, and Ryan was well-suited to present himself as a leader for this movement. Tea Party conservatives were weary of the GOP –establishment, but Ryan had the perfect credentials for becoming the face of such a movement. He was young and although he had already spent 12 years in Congress could present himself as a new face and in contrast to most of his colleagues, Ryan's time in Congress actually served as an advantage. Because he was branded as one of the most conservative members of Congress, Ryan could welcome the Tea Party as a much-needed change for the Party that had been holding back the conservative ideals he had tried to fight for in those early years.

Two other aspects were equally crucial for Ryan's image as a leader of this new movement. First, the AstroTurf organizations had been very supportive of Ryan from the start. Since his early days in office, Ryan had been very apt in obtaining campaign finance, gathering support among many in the business community and building strong relationships with many of the political operatives who played a vital role when the Tea Party first rose to power. Organizations like *FreedomWorks* and *Americans for Prosperity* immediately presented Ryan as one of them, framing him in the manner most preferable to the movement. Second, no one really knew who the Tea Party was or what a Tea Party politician was supposed to look like. There was, and is, no single authority that defines the Tea Party agenda or appoints Tea Party candidates. The Tea Party is no more than a network of loosely related organizations - some grassroots, some AstroTurf - that believe in roughly the same ideals and fight for roughly the same policies. Some

organizations do endorse certain candidates; others refuse to do so out of principle. This makes identifying a politician as a Tea Party politician largely a matter of framing, especially during those first years of the movement. Most Tea Party politicians earned the title because they were new candidates who primaried RHINO's or because they were endorsed by one or more Tea Party organizations. But others, like Paul Ryan or Tea Party favorite Michele Bachmann, received the Tea Party label even though they had been in office well before the Tea Party came into existence, and in the case of Ryan, despite the fact that he himself never declared loyalty to the Tea Party.

Building on his conservative credentials, Ryan used the new movement to push for the policies he so preferred. His 2011 budget was popular among Tea Party conservatives, as well among major GOP financiers like the Koch brothers, and because it framed him as a 'serious alternative' to the Obama administration, it further increased Ryan's clout as the intellectual in Congress who could eloquently make the case for conservative policies. Most Tea Party conservatives accepted this framed picture of Paul Ryan, and many were enthused when Mitt Romney announced Paul Ryan would become his running mate.

But Tea Party conservatism and the conservatism of Paul Ryan are not the same, and after the 2012 election turned into a disaster for the GOP, conservatives began to evaluate their own party and their own priorities, resulting in a realignment of alliances among conservatives. Being tough on immigration, which had always been the majority view among Republicans, was no longer enough to apply for the conservative label. While the Party leadership concluded that immigration reform was necessary for the future of the party, conservatives decided that any immigration bill that even resembled what they believed to be 'amnesty' was akin to treason and should be voted down immediately. But it did not end with 'amnesty'. even the slightest form of asylum for Middle Eastern refugees received opposition, since terrorists could potentially use those asylum programs to infiltrate America.

Immigration was far from the only issue driving a wedge between Ryan and the Tea Party. In a surprising twist, Ryan's economic policy record became one of his weaknesses. Was he first celebrated as a true conservative because of his free market, supply-side economic views, by 2015 this was turned against him. The conservative base still embraced much of the privatization

ideology, but their economic views had become increasingly nationalistic, and Ryan believed in free trade. His support for international free trade agreements was seen by the Tea Party base as selling the American economy to foreign investors and allowing companies to move 'American jobs' overseas. Furthermore, Ryan's record on the deficit and the national debt during the Bush administration, when the GOP had almost unanimously decided that deficits don't matter when tax cuts are on the table, had begun to catch up with him. The base no longer trusted Ryan on issues like the budget, were opposed to much of his economic agenda and believed he was a traitor due to his stance on immigration reform.

The Republicans had begun to use the debt ceiling as a tool to pressure Obama to agree with more budget cuts and to get better deals for the GOP, but by 2015 this tactic had also caught up with them. By attaching specific issues to budget negotiations and the debt ceiling, a mentality was created among those on the right. In their mind, policies were no longer detached from one another. Immigrant reform or abortion or Obamacare no longer are issues separate from the budget, but are interlinked with the budget. Therefore, getting an agreement with Democrats on the budget automatically means agreeing with Democrats on those issues as well. Their argument basically goes that as long as the budget includes any form of spending they disagree with; they oppose the budget.

But the increasingly problematic relationship between Paul Ryan and the conservative base did not resemble his relationship with that other component of the Tea Party: the donors. In contrast to the base, the donors had no issue with Ryan preferring tax cuts over a balanced budget or with his support of immigration reform. The Bush tax cuts went mainly to the wealthiest 1 percent, and immigration reform would make it far easier for companies to find cheap labor. America's wealthy and large corporations are those who benefit most from free trade agreements, and although they like taking the budget hostage to push for more conservative policies, few would actually want to see the government default on its debt, since the ramifications of such an event would have potentially catastrophic effects on their wealth. In 2015, the relationship between Ryan and organizations like *FreedomWorks* was as close as ever. For his 2016 reelection, Ryan raised close to the \$24 million, almost eight times the average raised by House members.



These conclusions also explain two closely related phenomena that this thesis has ignored so far: the rise of the alt-right and the election of Donald Trump. The 2016 elections reshaped the dynamics of American politics and redefined the Republican Party.<sup>450</sup> Donald Trump appealed to the conservative base precisely because he differentiated himself from other candidates and the GOP-establishment on those issues conservatives hated about Ryan. Donald Trump was openly opposed to immigration in an unprecedented manner and had no problem using racist sentiments against Latino's and Muslims to fire up his supporters. Prior to Trump, mainstream Republicans often appealed to those same sentiments using dog whistles about crime or 'foreigners stealing American jobs', but Donald Trump openly called the majority of Latino's criminals and rapists, and called for a complete ban 'of Muslims entering the country' to show his aversion to the Islam and to use the voters' fear for terrorism in order to increase his base.

Often credited for the rise of Donald Trump is his base of alt-right supporters, and not the Tea Party. Partly this is because Tea Party activists did not embrace Trump early on the way the conservative voters did. Many Tea Party activists distrusted Trump because he had been a Democrat and because he had praised national health care systems when he was younger.<sup>451</sup> As a result, Trump's base of alt-right conservatives is generally portrayed as a new form of conservatism that was born online on fora like 4Chan, which mainly uses social media to spread their message and has *Breitbart* as its prime news medium. In contrast to other conservatives, their priorities are not economic, but mainly related to issues of identity and nationalism. The alt-right, is opposed to any form of immigration reform, despises international treaties including trade agreements, and embraces symbols like the confederate flag as sources of pride and part of their heritage. But is the alt-right truly a new movement? *Breitbart* was prior to the 2016 election seen as a Tea Party medium and many Tea Party members expressed views similar to the alt-right well before the alt-right became part of the public debate. Even the idea of Donald Trump as a potential president originated with the Tea Party. Various polls asking Tea Party activists which candidates they preferred to become the Republican nominee for 2012, showed Donald Trump to be among the top contenders. This had little to do with his economic views (although his 'success as a businessman' was often considered a contributing factor), but rather because Donald Trump

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<sup>450</sup> A deeper discussion about Donald Trump and the 2016 election is beyond the scope of this paper and his relationship with conservatives is complex and

<sup>451</sup> Elizabeth A. Yates, 'How the Tea Party Learned to Love Donald Trump', *Washington Post*, December 1 (2016).

became the face of the Birther-issue, questioning Obama's legitimacy as president because he was supposedly born in Kenya and raised as a Muslim in Indonesia. Even in 2011, Donald Trump's popularity as a candidate resulted mainly from matters related to the American 'identity' and had little to do with the economic issues on which the movement was originally built.

As argued by Hochschild, Tea Party members vote based on their emotional self-interest rather than their economic self-interest.<sup>452</sup> They support candidates who attempt to provide answers to the problems they perceive as the result of their *deep story*. Even if their *deep story* is flawed and even though the candidate provides no actual solutions to their problems or has no plans to actually improve their lives, these voters relate to Donald Trump because he understands how they view the world and thus appeal to their insecurities and fears.

The rise of the alt-right is not the rise of a new movement, but rather the rebranding of the voting base of the Tea Party, who've gotten increasingly detached from the economic agenda it once so fervently supported. This is also evidence of the growing divide between the Tea Party base, and the national AstroTurf organizations behind the Tea Party. Those organizations are funded to push for the economic interests of large corporations and a select group of wealthy businessmen, which means that unlike the conservative base, those organizations still support free trade and still prioritize lowering taxes and gutting government spending. Closing borders for immigrants and refugees would not only make the search for cheap labor more difficult, but it could also significantly affect economic relations with foreign governments, hurt overseas investments and hinder global trade.

This growing divide between two of the main components of the Tea Party calls into question whether the Tea Party really still exists as a powerful force in American politics. Without a doubt, there are still various Tea Party organizations with thousands of conservative activists. But the activists are increasingly wary of the national AstroTurf organizations, and their priorities increasingly differ. Was the Tea Party a crucial factor in the nominating process for 2012, by 2016 they were barely mentioned as a contributing factor to Donald Trump's success. Partly this is because Tea Party activists did not enthusiastically embrace Donald Trump, but partly this is also because the Tea Party was starting to lose its cohesiveness, and the broad conservative base that embraced the Tea Party in the 2010-2012 period was no longer clearly

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<sup>452</sup> Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 216.

attached to the activist organizations; they were now branded as the alt-right. The media was no longer focused on the opinions of the Tea Party on particular candidates or their support for particular candidates, and therefore the movement no longer dominated the headlines.

Within the grand story of American conservatism, the rise of the Tea Party resembles a shift in political tactics to new forms of absolutism and political obstructionism. Since the 1950's, conservatism in America had been growing steadily and was continuously increasing its grip on the GOP and American politics at large. When the Tea Party came into existence, the GOP had already become an almost exclusively conservative party, but prior to the movement, GOP politicians still believed in compromise as a necessary part of governance and still had some sense of governing as a source for good. After 2010, Tea Party activism was forcing the GOP to embrace conservatism to such an extent, that any form of compromise was deemed unacceptable. But even this aspect was not entirely new. George H. W. Bush was hated by conservatives, because he had prioritized a balanced budget over low taxes. But in the early 1990's, this absolutist view of governing was limited mostly to the issues of taxes. Newt Gingrich may have introduced the idea of 'perpetual revolution', he nonetheless negotiated regularly with President Clinton and on more than one occasion Clinton and the Republicans agreed on important issue like the budget or deregulating the financial markets. By 2012, Republicans could barely divert from conservative orthodoxy on any issue. Even raising the debt limit, which until Obama became president was little more than standard procedure, had become so toxic that voting in favor of raising the limit made a Republican vulnerable for being labeled pro- 'big government' or even pro-abortion. If a Republican simply uttered the words climate change he/she risked getting primaried, and no candidate for the presidency was taken seriously if he/she would not at least propose to eliminate one department of the federal government, with the IRS and the EPA as crowd favorites. This absolutist view of right and wrong in politics resulted in the obstructionist tactics America has seen the Republicans employ throughout Obama's presidency. With Trump in office, it remains to be seen whether this obstructionism remains a trade mark of American conservatism or whether it was a temporary tactic used by Republicans to block Obama's agenda. But more than any specific issue or policy, the tactic of obstructionism exemplifies the profound influence the Tea Party has had on the GOP.

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