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"Pledge to America" is Fraudulent

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Distinctly Catholic

The Republicans' "Pledge to America" is a fraudulent document. As an electioneering tool it may be effective, heavily emphasizing efforts to control the growth of government. As a blueprint for governance, none of the proposals included add up to a coherent, plausible attempt to achieve what its authors claim they want, a vibrant economy with a smaller government footprint.

Their pledges to cap government spending read like they were devised by a peculiarly ill-informed focus group. Cutting Congress' own budget will not make much of a dent in the size of the federal government. "Reviewing" government programs to cut waste is an old slogan not a real proposal. The idea of a government hiring freeze is new, but when unemployment is at 9.6 percent, this is an odd time to suggest it. That said, Obama should contemplate embracing the freeze once unemployment drops to, say, 6 percent, and keeping it in place for three years, the idea being that government should learn to live within its reduced means, the way most American families have learned the past two years.

The proposal to repeal the health care reform and replace with a grab bag of ineffective solutions is especially dishonest. Republicans seem to think that allowing individuals to purchase insurance across state lines is the key to reducing costs. It is true that this might reduce costs, because everyone's employer would end up purchasing flimsy health insurance in a state with minimal regulation like Mississippi. Talk about a race to the bottom! The Obama health care reforms will not drastically reduce costs, but it will bend the curve of costs and that is what is important. We have a current health care system that does not make sense, but it is what it is, and rather than uproot the entire system, the Obama plan tried to re-direct it in ways that will both provide universal coverage and bend the cost-curve. The Republican plan will not really alter it all except to make the problems with the current system worse.

Social issues merit one line in the programmatic section of the document. The Republicans plan to codify

the Hyde Amendment. That is fine with me, although it also seems unnecessary since Hyde has been approved every year, by Congresses under the control of both parties, since 1977. A lot of things have changed since the first year of Jimmy Carter's presidency, but not Hyde. Still, if they can pass it, I am all for that. The only other mention of social issues is a throwaway line about traditional marriage in the preamble to the document. These two sentences, one in the intro and one in the body of the document, were evidently added at the last minute to appease social conservatives. What to say? If social conservatives are satisfied with lip service, that is no surprise. Making a phone call to the Right-to-Life March was enough for Reagan, Bush pere and Bush fils to be considered 'pro-life' so lip-service is nothing new to the GOP.

The Republicans have spent much of the past two years spreading misinformation. Many Americans still believe there are 'death panels' in the health care overhaul, a tribute to the influence of Ms. Palin's Twitter account. This 'Pledge to America' is more misinformation, proposing inadequate solutions to the nation's challenges, and claiming they will do the trick. The Republicans have not shed their status as the 'Party of No,' they have merely gift-wrapped their head-in-the-sand approach. It is shameful, but that doesn't mean it won't work.

There is, finally, one aspect of this document that is the most disturbing. By suggesting these faux solutions are real solutions, Republicans achieve their ultimate purpose of convincing Americans that government is broken. They know these proposals will not be adopted or, if adopted, won't work. They have to know that. This cynicism only feeds the distrust for government that is at the root of so much of the Tea Party anger. Later today, at Q & A, I will post comments from the communications director of the Delaware Tea Party that highlight the contempt he has for the GOP as well as for the Democrats. Nothing in this 'Pledge to America' will assuage that contempt. When these proposals come to naught, that anger will be turned on the GOP as it is currently turned on Obama. The GOP needs to stop playing with the electorate and propose real solutions. But, they are unlikely to do so anytime soon, certainly not before November.

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