

Sen Dems Wrong on Taxes

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 28, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

The Senate Democrats have decided not to take up the issue of whether or not to extend the Bush tax cuts before November midterm elections. This is a mistake. Here's why.

I learned a long time ago that the reasons Democrats do not like to discuss taxes when they get close to an election has nothing to do with the merits of the issue. Indeed, on this issue, polls show that Americans overwhelmingly support the Democratic position which is to extend the tax cuts for the middle class and let them expire for the wealthiest two percent of Americans. But, the problem is this: When voters enter the voting booth feeling like a taxpayer, they lean Republican. When they enter the voting booth feeling like a worker, they lean Democrat.

But these are not just any tax cuts, these are the 'Bush' tax cuts. The former president has been singularly low-key since leaving office. Voter surveys show most people still blame him and his Wall Street buddies for the economic mess we are now in. So, while I understand that talking about taxes has a downside for Dems, talking about Bush has a clear upside. After all, the Republicans ran against Jimmy Carter for 12 years.

It is also the case that neither party can change the electorate's perceptions of how the party stands on an issue unless the party engages that issue. So, Democrats need to find an intelligent way to discuss taxes if they ever hope to alter people's perceptions of them as big taxers, just as the GOP needs to find a way to talk about workers that helps build confidence for them on that issue. But, both parties listen to their pollsters and shy away. It is a shame, especially now, when the Democrats have a real opportunity to inject a little economic populism into the mix, that the Senate Democrats are declining to do so.

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