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Where is the Fiscal Responsibility? by Senator Larry Craig

Leading up to the 2006 elections, all we heard from Democrats was the battle cry that they would restore fiscal responsibility to Congress. I found that a tough one to swallow, having witnessed first-hand a Democrat-controlled Congress's appetite for tax-and-spend policies for more than 14 years.

Soon after the elections it became apparent that my Democrat colleagues have a different definition of what it means to be fiscally responsible. Republicans, myself included, define fiscal responsibility as keeping taxes low and managing the growth of government spending. Democrats define it as raising taxes to increase spending.

While many Americans contend there isn't a difference between the parties' philosophies, I disagree. One of the most profound differences is in how we approach solving problems. Democrats ask, "How can the government help?" Republicans ask, "How can we empower individuals to help themselves?" This fundamental difference between the parties is embodied in fiscal policies. A typical Democrat approach is to create new government programs for every social ill. And of course, that means hiking our taxes to pay for them – well, at least part of the cost. Deficits cover the rest.

Despite tens of billions of dollars in new taxes plus their refusal to extend the Bush tax cuts (thereby burdening taxpayers with a \$900 billion tax increase – the largest in American history), they still aren't coming close to raising enough money to pay for all of their new programs. During their short 6 month reign, they have proposed \$90 billion in new programs that are not paid for either by a reduction in spending or by raising taxes.

Just recently we have seen the most egregious example to date. Both the House and Senate have been debating expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), a relatively small, but vital program. Democrats are proposing a massive expansion of the program. For more on that mission creep, see my editorial entitled "Losing Focus." The House just approved a \$47 billion expansion, while the Senate's "pared-down" proposal is coming in closer to \$35 billion in new spending.

It doesn't end there. In order to fulfill their pledge to America to be "fiscally responsible," the Democrats are also relying on budget gimmicks. For instance, in logic only the government could muster, a multi-year proposal projected to cost \$16 billion in 2012 is assumed to cost \$3.5 billion the following year because the program is sunset and rolled back to 2000 coverages. Who are we kidding? The fact is, if we follow the norm in Congress of assuming that entitlement programs, such as SCHIP, will last 75 years, this program will cost taxpayers between \$2 trillion and \$3 trillion dollars.

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This is not the only example of recent gaming by the Democrats. In fact, according to Senator Judd Gregg, the senior Republican on the Budget Committee, Democrats have either waived or maneuvered around their self-imposed pay-go rules, which mandate paying for new programs with either a reduction in spending or an increase in taxes, at least 12 times in the last six months to the tune of \$90 billion.

Where is the fiscal discipline? Even under the misguided philosophy of creating new programs and raising taxes to pay for them, the Democrats don't achieve what they claim.

Instead of the gimmickry, unsound policy, and empty promises, Democrats could build a record of achievement by working with Republicans to enact truly fiscally responsible programs that restrain government, lower taxes, and capitalize on the remarkable abilities of Americans to make their own choices – principles we should all be able to embrace.