



Which Party Is the Party of Big Government?

By John C. Goodman

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The Democratic Party is supposed to be the party of government. That idea was reinforced at the Democratic convention this week in a [video](#) that had this memorable line: "The government is the only thing we all belong to." But there is another saying worth remembering: "Actions speak louder than words."

With that in mind, here is something that may surprise you: Federal entitlement spending over the past 50 years has grown significantly more under Republican presidents than under Democratic presidents.

I'll come back to that below. But, first things first. The reason we have big government is because of the growth of entitlements: Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, disability insurance, etc. Entitlements are nothing more than taking from Peter and giving to Paul. They are consuming an ever increasing share of federal spending and they are the principal reason for one of two nightmares in our future: (1) ever-increasing deficits for as far as the eye can see or (2) an ever-increasing tax burden.

As [Nicholas Eberstadt](#) wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* the other day, entitlement spending in 2010 at all levels of government totaled \$2.2 trillion in 2010. That equals \$7,200 for every man, woman and child in the country. It approaches a staggering \$29,000 for a family of four.

Get ready for things to get worse. The Census Bureau tells us that [one out of every two households](#) is now receiving benefits under at least one entitlement program. As the population ages the costs of these programs will grow much faster than our ability to pay for them (our national income).

[The Congressional Budget Office](#) has projected how bad things are likely to be. Without any new legislation, taxes will claim two-thirds of the income of middle income families by midcentury if we are to keep all the promises we have made. Taxes on higher income folks will claim more than 90 percent of all that they earn.

So who is to blame for this state of affairs? Lyndon Johnson, of course, gave us Medicare, Medicaid and the rest of the Great Society. But when Johnson left office, these programs were relatively small. The main expansion came under Republican presidents Richard Nixon and

Gerald Ford. Not only that, the expansions were largely the result of executive orders! That is, they didn't have to happen.

The growth of the entitlement state moderated somewhat under presidents Carter, Reagan, and George H.W. Bush. Because of welfare reform under Bill Clinton, there was actually the prospect of some contraction. But during the presidency of George W. Bush, Republicans pushed for a new drug benefit under Medicare with a huge unfunded liability — greater in fact than the unfunded liability under Social Security.

Eberstadt summarizes the past 50 years this way:

From a purely statistical standpoint, the growth of entitlement spending over the past half-century has been distinctly greater under Republican administrations than Democratic ones. Between 1960 and 2010, the growth of entitlement spending was exponential, but in any given year, it was on the whole roughly 8% higher if the president happened to be a Republican rather than a Democrat.

Of course, the past may not repeat itself. We may have entered a new era. Barack Obama is the first Democratic president since Lyndon Johnson to call for a larger entitlement state — especially with the enactment of ObamaCare. Further, Republican nominee Mitt Romney has pledged to repeal ObamaCare as soon as he is elected.

Still, it's worth remembering past deeds in addition to words. If Republicans succeed in electing the Romney/Ryan ticket, let's hope they don't suffer buyer's remorse.