



We Need More Conservatives in House

by Rep. Mike Pence
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The 109th Congress will be remembered as a time of tremendous challenge and great change for the Republican majority in the House of Representatives. Buffeted by internal conflict, scandal and external crises, House Republicans were tested again and again by an American public losing confidence in our federal government.

The American people should know that House conservatives never lost confidence in our agenda and the Republican Study Committee stood firm in the winds of change.

As the nation prepares to render judgment on this Congress, it is a good time make an account of the battles fought by House conservatives to enable voters to assess the modest, but meaningful, progress which conservatives have attained during these troubled times.

From the outset of the 109th Congress, the Republican Study Committee (RSC) embraced the principles of limited government, entitlement and spending reforms, and traditional values. The fight for these principles will always be with us, however, now is the time to review some of the meaningful battles RSC has waged during this Congress.

Fiscal Discipline and Budget Reform

At a time of rising deficits and national debt, House conservatives were determined to pass disciplined federal budgets and the reforms necessary to make them work. In this area, RSC has advanced meaningful reforms that represent an important first step toward restoring fiscal integrity to our national budget.

From the very outset of the 109th Congress, RSC took the fight for fiscal discipline and reform to the floor. In January 2005, the RSC offered six amendments to the House Rules Package for the 109th Congress, including: automatic roll call votes on expensive legislation, point of order protection, a rainy day fund, a cap on entitlements, repeal of the Gephardt rule, and the creation of "budget protection accounts" to lock-in savings for deficit reduction during the spending process. This was the first time since Republicans took control that there was a comprehensive attempt to improve the Rules Package.

While each of these amendments failed, it sent an important message to our colleagues that RSC was ready to fight for reform from day one. And it made a difference.

Budget Battle, Round One

Just two months later, RSC members took a stand for reforming the budget process and prevailed. Because of the stand taken by dozens of RSC members, we negotiated a change in the House Rules that gave members of the majority the power to enforce the budget of the majority on the House floor for the first time ever.

In exchange for RSC support of the budget, in March 2005, the RSC secured a form of “point of order protection” to ensure that Members have the procedural tools to enforce the budget during the appropriations process. It was passed in conjunction with the FY06 budget resolution.

As the drama of this internal confrontation faded away, little did House conservatives imagine that our greatest battle for fiscal discipline lay ahead in the aftermath of the worst natural disaster in American history.

Hurricane Katrina and Operation Offset

When Hurricane Katrina came ashore, it not only leveled thousands of square miles of our Gulf Coast, it also leveled plans for a deficit reduction bill that had been in the works for months. While virtually all RSC members supported the emergency spending necessary to begin the rebuilding effort, House conservatives fought to salvage deficit reduction as well.

Following Katrina, the Democrats in Congress were talking about a tax increase to pay the cost of recovery and many Republicans were talking about more deficit spending.

Into this debate, dozens of House conservatives went to the microphones at a press conference supporting “Operation Offset”. In September 2005, the RSC offered a menu of roughly \$500 billion in savings to pay for hurricane relief in the Gulf Coast after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. According to many observers, “Operation Offset” put deficit reduction back on the table and led to the enactment of the Deficit Reduction Act (P.L. 109- 171), the first reconciliation bill to reduce spending since 1997.

House conservatives also fought for fiscal discipline in the use of recovery resources. In September 2005, the RSC sent a letter to President Bush encouraging him to suspend Davis-Bacon prevailing wage requirements in the hurricane disaster areas—which the Administration did for a period of time.

In the wake of the worst disaster in American history, House conservatives stood firm showing that it is possible to confront the ravages of nature with fiscal responsibility.

Congressional Leadership Elections

With the resignation of the House Majority Leader in January, 2006, RSC moved quickly to impact the content and tone of the debate over new Republican leaders. RSC made issue resources available to members as they interviewed perspective leaders. In late January 2006, at the annual conservative members’ retreat, the candidates for elected leadership posts within the GOP Conference spoke before nearly 80 members. Many observers considered this among the most important forums during the campaign. From having a former RSC chairman in the race to promoting an environment where issues drove the campaign for Majority Leader, RSC made a difference in the conference elections in 2006.

Budget Battle, Round Two

Seizing on the opportunity with new leaders to set a new fiscal direction for the House, RSC members threw themselves headlong into the next battle for fiscal restraint, the Budget for FY07.

In March 2006, under the leadership of our Budget Action leader Congressman Jeb Hensarling (R.-Tex.), the RSC unveiled The Contract with America Renewed, its alternative budget for FY07. The Contract with America Renewed was an updated version of the budget that passed the House soon after the Republicans took control of Congress in 1995. This RSC budget achieved balance through budget

cuts in five years, funded the Global War on Terror, and protected the Bush tax cuts.

In addition to proposing a conservative budget, RSC members stood firm for a disciplined federal budget and insisted on real and meaningful budget process reform.

While many in the House were calling for more spending and less reform, in March 2006, the RSC secured a commitment from the new House Leadership to pass comprehensive earmark reform, the Legislative Line Item Veto, a rainy day fund to budget for emergencies, and a sunset commission. The rainy day fund is in effect under the House-passed budget, and both earmark reform and Line Item Veto have passed the House. Passage of the sunset commission bill is still pending.

Even in the midst of changes in leadership, RSC stood firm for fiscal discipline and reform.

Other Taxpayer Savings

Apart from high profile battles, RSC members were also responsible for saving taxpayers billions of dollars by defending the budget and opposing new government spending.

In October 2005, the RSC ensured that a sizable fund to provide affordable housing within Federal Housing Finance Reform Act (GSE reform) could not be used to fund nongovernmental, liberal advocacy groups that promote expanding the size and scope of the federal government.

In May 2006, the RSC took to the House floor to ensure that Congress did not raid a \$50 billion reserve fund for the Global War on Terror in order to fund roughly \$507 million in unrequested pork projects.

In June 2006, the RSC ensured that Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act (the OCS drilling bill) did not violate the budget, ensuring that the House passed both sound energy policy and budget policy. This saved roughly \$12 billion over ten years.

Using Rule 28 of the Conference Rules, which prohibits legislation creating new federal programs from being added to the expedited Suspensions Calendar, RSC quietly succeeded in stopping nearly 15 new government programs saving taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

In a word, through natural disaster and political upheaval within the Congress, RSC stood firm for budget discipline and reform.

Battling for Our Values

In partnership with the Values Action Team, under the leadership of Congressman Joe Pitts, the RSC stood in the gap during the 109th Congress to defend the right to life, the sanctity of marriage, the innocence of our children, and many other critical moral values.

Terry Schiavo

The 109th Congress was not just a battleground on budget issues. The halls of this Congress echoed with debates over the value of embryonic human life and the life of a brain damaged woman in Florida. And it all started around Palm Sunday, 2005.

In March of 2005, the world was enthralled with the story of a brain damaged woman named Terry Schiavo and the effort to deny her food and water by the state courts in Florida.

With RSC support, Congress took decisive action give the family of Terry Schiavo access to the federal courts. State courts in Florida had repeatedly denied appeals of a judges order that her feeding tube be removed and House conservatives felt compelled to act.

The Palm Sunday Compromise, more properly known as the Act for the relief of the parents of Theresa Marie Schiavo, was passed on March 21, 2005, to allow the case of Terri Schiavo to be moved into a federal court. Despite intervention by the other branches, the courts continued to hold that Schiavo was in a Persistent Vegetative State. Her feeding tube was removed for the final time on March 18, 2005. She died thirteen days later on March 31, 2005 at the age of 41.

The Schiavo case showed the nation that House conservatives were willing to withstand the withering assault of the national media to defend the unalienable right to life and due process of a single, vulnerable American. RSC stood firm for life in the midst of our changing cultural times.

Embryonic Stem Cell Research Funding

House conservatives would have about a one month reprieve from the cultural debate before House leaders cleared the Castle-DeGette bill for floor consideration. Castle-DeGette was designed to overturn the president's policy which prohibited the use of federal tax dollars to fund destructive embryonic stem cell research. House conservatives sprang into action.

RSC issued numerous briefings for members and the media regarding the realities of destructive embryonic stem cell research and the potential of adult stem cell research. RSC member led the effort to move ethical adult stem cell research funding. When the legislation came to the floor, RSC members led the debate.

While the bill passed the House of Representatives, RSC members considered passage a 'successful failure' since there was more than enough 'no' votes to sustain the expected presidential veto. That vote came on the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (H.R. 810) in July 2006 when the House sustained the President's veto of the embryonic stem cell research bill by a vote of 235-193. Again, the RSC stood firm and led the successful effort to prevent to use of taxpayer dollars to fund research that destroys nascent human life.

Other Values Victories

In addition to these titanic battles over the sanctity of life, RSC was engaged in the battle over traditional moral values in a whole range of issues. RSC led the way toward expanded House support of the Marriage Protection Amendment. RSC fought to reauthorize funding for abstinence education which many observers credit with a reduction in teen pregnancy and birth rates. RSC successfully fended off efforts to provide taxpayer funding for abortions overseas and at U.S. Military bases in the DoD Authorization bill (H.R. 5122). RSC helped lead the effort to pass historic legislation protecting children in the Adam Walsh Child Protection Act (H.R. 4472). RSC was also instrumental in passage of an internet gambling ban that had failed in previous sessions and moved legislation protecting the pledge and the flag.

In sum, House conservatives stood firm for life, for the unborn, for the vulnerable, for marriage and for our kids. RSC led the effort in the 109th Congress to advance the cause of traditional moral values in the law of the land.

Social Security Reform

It was the RSC that made up the bulk of support for President Bush's vision to reform and modernize

Social Security. RSC stood firm on reform that included big personal retirement accounts, no tax increase and no net increase in entitlement spending. RSC members led the effort in the Republican conference to promote reform in public forums and floor speeches during 2005. President Bush acknowledged the central role RSC was playing in the debate by inviting the senior members of RSC to the White House to discuss Social Security reform in the summer of 2005, a first for the conservative caucus in the House.

Despite the fact that reform faltered, the American people should know that House conservatives stood firm with the President. We remain dedicated to making this New Deal program a 'better deal' for younger Americans by introducing personal retirement accounts in the future. A reform Democrats adamantly oppose.

Other Battles

Beyond the RSC's long-standing goals of limited government, entitlement and spending reform, and support for traditional values, there were countless other skirmishes, small and large, where RSC stood in the gap.

House conservatives have been the bulwark of support for the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan. House conservatives championed the reauthorization of the Patriot Act as a centerpiece of our Homeland Security, while guarding the civil liberties of American citizens. House conservatives led the effort to pass border security legislation and reject the Senate amnesty bill in the debate over immigration reform.

The Conclusion: We Need More Conservative Republicans

The only conclusion one can reach from reading this abbreviated history of the RSC in the 109th Congress is clear: conservatives have been at work but we need more conservative Republicans in Congress.

The progress of House conservatives in the 109th Congress has been meaningful but modest. On issue after issue, spending discipline, entitlement reform and values, the men and women of the RSC have made a difference but, too often, fall short of real change.

Government is still too big and it still spends too much. Our taxes and entitlements cry out for reform. Abortion is still legal and euthanasia is gaining acceptance. There is much work to be done.

For Americans frustrated with the expansion of government and the erosion of values, even under Republican control, House conservatives have one suggestion: send us reinforcements!

While a few conservative voters think the answer lies in handing the reigns of Congress over to the other side, we must fight that message of defeatism and state with conviction; not more of them, more of us!

House conservatives have stood firm in the winds of change that have buffeted our Congress these past two years but we need more honest men and women, willing to do freedom's work on the front lines of the Republican revolution.

We don't need more liberal Democrats. We need more conservative Republicans.

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