

We Can Stop the Crazy Train Before It Gets to Greece

☒ Let's face it. We're a deeply divided country. You can make a case, I guess, that it's not the American people who disagree on just about everything; it's the politicians. And there's no question that the two parties "disagree profoundly on a vision of government," as an editorial in the Wall Street Journal puts it.

But we're the ones who send gladiators to Washington to fight our battles. They're just doing what we supposedly want. And the so-called supercommittee's failure to come to an agreement on deficit reduction is just the latest piece of evidence indicating how polarized we are.

Some of us want smaller government and lower taxes. Others don't want the government to touch their entitlements and want the "rich" to pick up the tab. Some think we're on an unsustainable path to economic collapse. Others think we can pretty much go on this way forever. Each side thinks the other side is intransigent. And we don't like each other very much, either.

What to do? Well, let's imagine that Congress gets together long enough to put a referendum before the American people. And the question we'd have to vote on is this: Would you be willing to split this nation in two: a Blue State America and a Red State America; a liberal America and a conservative America; each with the ability to write its own laws and its own rules? Each side could put in place all the pieces to fit its vision of what America should be.

We could divide the country in several ways. All the land east of the Mississippi River could be Blue America; all the land to the west could be Red America. Or we could divide the

country north and south; the north could be Blue America and the south could be Red America. Think of it as the Civil War without the war.

People could move to whatever country they wanted to live in. We can work out the pesky details about selling and buying houses and finding jobs later.

Under this plan, Americans and their elected officials would no longer have profoundly different visions of what their country should be. In Blue America they could vote for all the entitlements they want and raise taxes to 40 percent, or 100 percent if that's what they want. What they do is their business. In Red America they could cut taxes along with the size of government, deep six all sorts of red tape, and let the free market do its thing.

So here's my question: After a few years (at most), which America do you think would be thriving – the one with big government and high taxes or the one with low taxes and small government? Which America would be a dynamic economic force producing a high standard of living for its citizens and which would look like Greece?

It'll never happen you say. And, of course, you're right. But we can accomplish the same goal in a more mundane way. How about we hold an election. We could do it in November 2012. About 40 percent of Americans say they're conservatives and about 20 percent say they're liberal. If they decide to vote that way for a change, we may finally stop the crazy train that, as of the moment, is speeding its way to Greece.

Entitlements – Why Fix Them When You Can Demagogue Them?

☒ Is anyone really surprised that the so-called “Super Committee” in Washington didn’t come up with a compromise to cut our national debt? After all, any serious plan would have required a change to government entitlements... and we simply can’t have that!

Entitlement reform has long been considered the *third rail* of American politics. But one would think that if there ever was a time when politicians would find the sobriety, nerve, and political support to take on the major drivers of our national debt, that time would be now. The debt has just surpassed the \$15 trillion mark, exceeding our GDP and leaving each newborn U.S. citizen with a bill of roughly \$50 thousand. The insolvency dates for programs like Social Security and Medicare continue to jump forward by years at a time, yet the message from most of Washington has been clear: *We don’t care.*

Whenever a Democratic politician is asked by an interviewer their thoughts on entitlement reform, their answer typically begins with something like, “Well, we all agree that something has to be done about entitlements, **but...**” And that’s about as detailed of a solution that you’ll hear on record from any of them. The reason is that even with the widely acknowledged, catastrophic economic conditions our country is suffering from, demagoguery of entitlement programs is a political winner. It doesn’t matter that without reform, these programs will collapse under their own weight. All that matters is that any kind of proposed tampering of the system can be too easily demagogued by the opposition into a narrative of stealing from the most vulnerable in our society.

Scaring old people has long been a successful tactic for politicians, as FOX News political commentator Bob Beckel

freely admits. Beckel, a former campaign strategist for several Democratic politicians, often speaks with pride on how he helped win elections by dishonestly convincing voters (including his own family members) that if the opposition won, they would take away government entitlements from the elderly. John Kerry used the tactic in 2004, in a last ditch effort to capture the presidency from George W. Bush, and the Democratic congress killed Bush's attempts to reform Social Security during his second term. When Congressman Paul Ryan proposed a substantive entitlement reform plan in 2010, he got the same treatment with President Obama shamelessly leading the charge.

It should be noted that certain Republicans have adopted the tactic on occasion as well, when it has been convenient to do so. Newt Gingrich, in an attempt to appeal to centrist voters at the beginning of his presidential campaign, famously undercut the Ryan plan by publicly categorizing it as "right-wing social engineering". Mitt Romney even jumped on the bandwagon when he scolded presidential primary opponent Rick Perry for likening Social Security to a "ponzi scheme". Any intellectually honest person (including Romney) realizes that Social Security, in its current form, absolutely **is** a ponzi scheme. Those who get out early benefit from the system, while those who get in late are the ones who get screwed. Yet, like any opportunistic politician, Romney saw the opening and successfully rattled the nerve of Perry, who was speaking of the subject in more honest terms than anyone else.

The AARP has become the boldest, most dishonest source of anti-reform propaganda. With their aggressive commercial campaign of downright lying about proposed changes to our entitlement programs, they're playing a substantial role in ensuring insolvency for future generations of seniors to have to cope with. Any current AARP senior citizen, with any sort of conscience about the country they're leaving to their grand kids, should consider cancelling their membership.

That brings us to the latest debacle... the failure of the Super

Committee to do anything to cut our national debt. You know there's no hope when House Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi instructs her members of the committee not to even entertain the notion of touching entitlements. They didn't need her direction. They wouldn't have considered it anyway. And afterwards, of course, we were treated to another condemnation from President Obama who chastised House Republicans for not agreeing to the *reasonable* solutions laid out by the Democrats... as if placing a band-aid on a sinking ship was somehow considered reasonable or a solution.

I would like to think that some day, there would be a consensus from Americans that the political games are no longer acceptable. I would like to think we would some day demand our elected leaders to fix the programs. But we don't do it in sufficient numbers, because so many of us cling to the false, conditioned belief that those entitlement rewards will just *always* be around, and any reform of the failed system jeopardizes that. We fear that our piece of the pie will be taken away from us before we're finished with dessert.

Sadly, I don't see that mindset changing, especially when trying to explain the details of entitlement reform in layman's terms is about as easy as me trying to explain how the internet works to my mother.

If we don't demand serious changes, they're not going to happen. Expecting our representatives to fix the problem on their own would be like counting on a drug dealer to check his customers into rehab. It just isn't going to happen, and our children are the one's paying the price for our dishonesty and cowardice.