Plan Obama: Pass the check

by Debra_J_Saunders

Twenty-five years after 1984, Doublespeak lives. Last week, President Obama released "A New Era of Responsibility: Renewing America's Promise" â€” a 10-year, $3.55 trillion spending plan that represented anything but fiscal maturity. The plan lamented the World Before Obama as "an era of profound irresponsibility" â€” with deficit spending and unfunded tax cuts. Then it offered more deficit spending and unfunded tax cuts.

Oh yes, and after years of Democrats trashing President George W. Bush for cutting taxes while America is at war, the New Responsibility Democrat wants his proposed tax cut for 95 percent of working families â€” while America is at war in Iraq and Afghanistan â€” to be permanent.

It's not that cutting taxes in itself is bad, but it is hardly responsible to tell Americans that they can benefit from more than $1 trillion in new government spending (when you add his stimulus and recent budgets) â€” and the best part is, only other people will pay for it.

Last year, Tax Foundation President Scott A. Hodge estimated that under current law, 47 million federal tax filers â€” or 33 percent of filing households â€” would owe zero on their federal income taxes in 2009. Under Plan Obama, he calculated, 63 million filers â€” or 44 percent â€” would pay zero in federal income taxes â€” although, they would contribute to Social Security and may pay sales tax. (Republican John McCain's plan was not substantially different: Hodge estimated that under Plan McCain, 43 percent of filers would pay no income tax.)

The 44 percent estimate did not include the 15 million individuals and families that simply did not file taxes in 2006. Add them with the zero-income tax filers and the ratio of American households paying no federal income taxes is about half.

Without taking a position, the Tax Foundation's Matt Moon noted that there are people who wonder if it is a problem in a democracy to have "a swath (of voters) that demands more services and a swath that pays for it."

Count me among that group. But in Obamaland, all bounty is free. Take the 10-year, $630 billion Obama health plan â€” which aims at universal access to health care for all Americans â€” with, again, only the rich explicitly paying. Obama plans to fund half his package with "savings" (read: spending cuts), which magically only promote efficiency or improve the quality of care. Then Obama funds the other half by capping itemized tax deductions for families earning more than $250,000 â€” and that's on top of a proposed income tax hike for those families.

Be it noted, all income groups might have to contribute at some point â€” details to follow: Page 27 of the O-plan observes that "others have proposed different ideas to finance expanded health coverage," including a value-added tax. But there are no specifics on a VAT, only a quick nod to the fact that the $630 billion that Plan Obama sets aside for health care reform "is not sufficient to fully fund comprehensive reform."

The question that has baffled me: If President Obama wanted to stimulate the economy and to make health care available to all Americans, why didn't he, in concert with efforts to stabilize credit markets, make universal health care the lynchpin of his stimulus package? In one measure, Obama could have removed an obstacle to some families' financial stability, created a chain of community health clinics, and presented job and educational opportunities for would-be health care workers. And Republicans would have had a much harder time voting against it.

Instead, Obama opted for a pork-rich $787 billion monster â€” with something for everyone, and only a small group asked to bankroll the free-for-all. The New Era of Responsibility has a new motto: The administration will talk about the need to live within one's means, and will continue to pass the check.

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