

Paul Ryan Is Wrong About Jack Kemp

One of Speaker Paul Ryan's chief selling points to the few conservatives not yet disgusted by his craven sellouts to Obama and the open borders crowd is that he is a "disciple" of pro-growth economic conservative icon Congressman Jack Kemp.

Kemp's optimistic pro-growth ideas found their greatest expression in the Kemp-Roth personal income tax cut passed in 1981 as part of the Reagan economic recovery plan.

Passing such a dramatic shift in policy in a mere four years—the original drafting of the bill in 1977 to passage in 1981—was accomplished at light speed according to Washington standards.

And the reason that Kemp-Roth passed at light speed was that Jack Kemp fought for it, and for his other pro-growth ideas, at every turn.

Kemp went to every Lincoln Day Dinner, Chamber of Commerce membership event and ice cream social that would have him to sell his pro-growth policies and economic ideas.

And he fought for them in D.C., too. Publicly and behind the scenes in the halls of the Capitol and in meetings with President Reagan at the White House Kemp relentlessly advocated personal income tax cuts and other pro-growth policies.

One of the early entries in Reagan's diary for 1982 illustrate Kemp's willingness to fight the battle for his ideas everywhere he found a forum:

Jan. 11: Republican House leaders came down to the W.H. *Except for Jack Kemp they are (expletive) bent on new taxes and*

cutting the defense budget. Looks like a heavy year ahead.

Indeed, Kemp's unrestrained advocacy of his pro-growth ideas even drew Reagan's ire on a number of occasions. Reagan privately referred to Kemp as being "unreasonable" when he tried to hold the president's feet to the fire on economic issues and to fan the flames of the revolution Reagan had lit.

Like some of our other conservative friends who were strong supply-siders, Kemp was focused on growing the economy, but not necessarily shrinking government and cutting spending, and this frustrated many conservative thinkers who took seriously Reagan's argument that the growth of government was undermining the Constitution and eroding liberty.

But Kemp's popularity with grass-roots conservatives was based as much or more on his willingness to fight for his ideas—to take the battle to the enemy in every theater—as it was on the substance or details of his plans.

In 1988 Jack Kemp was the choice for president of many, if not most conservative leaders, but like all too many other conservative candidates who may be personally conservative, Jack Kemp had by then surrounded himself with a lot of Big Government Republicans.

His campaign for president really never got off the ground; it was often more like a travelling policy seminar on economics than a presidential campaign.

Kemp would show up in places where he didn't have a get-out-the-vote operation and give stem winding speeches on economic opportunity that had the crowd on its feet, but no number to call to volunteer when he left.

In the 1988 primaries Jack Kemp was soundly defeated by George H.W. Bush, but he remained a favorite of movement conservatives who lobbied hard for him to be chosen as Bush's running mate.

But after watching Kemp relentlessly advocate his economic policies Jack Kemp certainly wasn't the conservative who was most congenial to George H. W. Bush and his inner circle.

Kemp had been brash enough to try to hold Reagan's feet to the fire on taxes, and as the Republican National Convention opened in New Orleans, he continued to go on television to talk about his signature issues.

As CHQ Chairman Richard Viguerie observed in his book *Takeover* that this contradicted Bush's idea of a vice president as a loyal helpmate, as he saw his role with Reagan. Bush had no intention of having Jack Kemp hold his feet to the fire on conservative principles from inside the White House, and the more Bush saw Kemp's face on TV, the lower Kemp's prospects of being Vice President fell.

Jack Kemp's fire for his conservative ideas probably cost him the vice presidency on George H.W. Bush's successful 1988 ticket.

And who knows, had Kemp been Vice President, and there to hold H.W.'s feet to the fire, maybe Bush wouldn't have gone back on his "read my lips" no new taxes pledge—and Hillary Clinton would be the obscure former First Lady of Arkansas still acting as a rainmaker at the Rose Law Firm back in Little Rock.

Paul Ryan recently refused to endorse Donald Trump, the GOP's presumptive nominee for President, and told Jake Tapper that Trump "inherits something ... that's very special to a lot of us... the party of Lincoln and Reagan and Jack Kemp."

For the purposes of contrasting Ryan and Kemp it is worth noting that in 1996 Jack Kemp took a spot on the Bob Dole ticket, even though Dole was no fan of Kemp's policies or style. Kemp did it to unify a fractured and dispirited Republican Party, and to take his conservative ideas once more to a national audience, not because he had any illusions about

Dole's ability to defeat Bill Clinton.

Paul Ryan likes to imagine himself as the inheritor of Jack Kemp's brand of pro-growth economic conservatism, but he has missed the essential element of Kemp's appeal—his willingness to fight for conservative principles, even at the cost of his standing with the Republican establishment leadership and Ronald Reagan himself.

ConservativeHQ editor **George Rasley** *first met Jack Kemp and became a supporter in 1982 when he hosted a fundraiser in Elkhart County, Ind., featuring Kemp. Rasley served as Kemp's lead advance representative during the 1996 Dole-Kemp campaign.*