

Will Obamacare Be the New Panama Canal for Conservatives?

The establishment media and Washington's permanent political class continue to try to sell the idea that taking the fight over defunding Obamacare to the point that it has caused a partial **government shutdown** is a losing proposition for Republicans because 17 years ago, the polls showed that the public held the GOP more responsible than Democrats for such inconveniences as the closure of the national parks and the national aquarium.

Conservatives must continue to think strategically and look beyond this week's news cycle at what is really at stake in the **Obamacare** battle. And it isn't who "wins" or "loses" in the short-term according to the vote count on the next continuing resolution; it is which side comes out of the fight having educated the voters, energized and enlarged its base, and branded its opponents as dangerously wrong on **health care**.

In that respect, the lessons that conservatives should take away are not those learned in the budget battles with President Clinton in the 1990s but the battle conservatives fought over the Panama Canal treaty with President Jimmy Carter—and the **Republican** establishment—in the 1970s.

Unsophisticated establishment critics will argue that conservatives lost the Panama Canal treaty fight.

But the truth is, while conservatives lost the Senate vote to save the Panama Canal, 70 percent of the American people agreed with us. And over the next two elections (1978 and 1980), 21 senators who voted on the Panama Canal treaty lost in a primary or general election. Of those 21 senators, 20 voted with Jimmy Carter and against the conservatives. Many

old-time liberals in the Senate, such as George McGovern, Frank Church, Tom McIntyre, Dick Clark and liberal Republican Clifford Case (in a primary) were defeated.

We were and are interested in building a movement and getting grass-roots Americans engaged in that movement. The Panama Canal treaty battle grew the New Right movement in the 1970s, and the fight over **defunding Obamacare** is growing the limited government, constitutional conservative movement today.

In the fall of 2013, dozens of conservative organizations are mailing tens of millions of postal letters and even more emails to educate voters and enlarge their supporter base—all pointing toward 2014.

Know of any Democrat or establishment Republican groups doing anything similar? I didn't think so.

It is fair to say that the 1980 Republican takeover of the Senate and Ronald Reagan's landslide presidential election were set in motion, and in large measure defined by, the grass-roots reaction to the Panama Canal treaty vote.

The Viguerie Co., in the late 1970s, mailed to tens of millions of Americans letters explaining that national Democrats, by giving away the Panama Canal, had a dangerously weak foreign policy.

Tuesday's vote on defunding Obamacare is similarly defining.

Sens. Ted Cruz, Mike Lee, Rand Paul and dozens of Tea Party-backed House members understand that this strategy is not for today's news cycle. The battle is focused on bringing constitutional conservatives to power by 2017.

And they also understand that the Republican establishment is as great—or greater—an adversary in this fight than are President Obama and the Democrats in Congress. So expect conservatives to redouble their efforts to defeat

establishment, big-government Republicans in the primaries next year, including John Cornyn, Lamar Alexander and Mitch McConnell, as well as establishment House Republicans.

Sens. Lee and Cruz have, through their principled opposition to funding Obamacare, re-energized millions of grass-roots conservative voters who were turned off by the Republican establishment's content-free technocratic campaign in 2012.

While it was liberals who invented single-issue politics in the 1960s, in the 1970s conservatives became a national political force by adopting the tactic and organizing millions of Americans around single hot-button issues.

Opposition to Obamacare is the hottest of hot-button issues among conservatives today. So it is past time for limited government, constitutional conservatives to recognize that by returning to single issue politics, they can dominate the 2014 and 2016 elections—and govern America in 2017.

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