

The GOP's Debt Ceiling War is Not about Debt but About Obama

Written by Earl Ofari Hutchinson
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In September, the National Review Online made public the blueprint of the House GOPs war plan to stonewall the debt ceiling raise. The plan of attack included many of the same demands the GOP has repeatedly made to stall, eliminate, or delay every program and initiative President Obama has put forth. The GOP's price for approving the debt ceiling increase is for Obama to agree to cut, cut, and cut some more spending on virtually everything from Head Start to food nutrition programs that directly aid the poor and low income workers. The issue of whether America can pay its bills or not, or reneges on its financial obligations, which would be the catastrophe that results from failing to raise the ceiling, is secondary to the GOP's cynical political ploy. Despite the GOP's pious declarations that the debt ceiling battle is solely about fiscal responsibility and reining in America's debt, it's not.

The debt ceiling debate can't be separated from the GOP's never-ending hunt for any issue that can taint, embarrass, and ultimately weaken the Obama presidency and at the same time re-impose its agenda on Congress and the nation. The GOP's goal has altered only slightly since Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's oft repeated, and failed, vow to make Obama a one term president. The GOP's slight course correction is to still to crush Obamacare, gut tax increases on the rich, scrap or water down to the point of irrelevancy financial industry regulations, a revamp of the tax code to further boost the rich, and coerce Obama to put Medicare and Social Security even deeper on the chopping block.

That's only the start. The GOP's take no prisoner's stance on the debt ceiling is also aimed at firing up its sometimes doubting, critical and lackluster conservative base, create dissension among Democrats, and make Obama appear to be an inept, bumbling and deceitful president. If the plan works, it would sour a significant number of independents on Obama and by extension the Democrats, whip GOP establishment leaders into towing the Tea Party line, solidify the image of the GOP as the guardian of the taxpayer's purse against supposedly rapacious big government, and tighten its grip on the House, and maybe, just maybe, grab back the Senate in 2014. This would effectively politically neuter Obama for the remaining two years of his term, and make Hillary think twice about tossing her hat in the presidential rink in 2016.

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During George W. Bush's White House tenure, the debt ceiling was an absolute non-issue. It was routinely raised in those years with barely a peep that the U.S. was in mortal danger of a fiscal crash and burn under the great weight of debt. This debt was incurred almost exclusively by Bush's two wildly costly and wasteful wars, his two behemoth tax cut giveaways to the rich, a relentless savage of regulations that made banks and corporation's tax liability fall to historic low levels, and then capped by a taxpayer giveaway to Wall Street banks and financial houses. But the GOP didn't acquiesce in turning the debt into a non-issue solely to appease a GOP president. The debt ceiling has been raised 74 times since March 1962 that includes 18 times under Ronald Reagan, eight times under Bill Clinton, seven times under Bush, and three times under Obama. The ceiling was raised even in election years without any public fanfare.

Yet when polls showed that a majority of Americans were concerned about mounting debt, and that a sizeable number of Americans wanted to rein in spending, the debt ceiling instantly became a fresh weapon for the GOP to barrage Obama. The GOP's ploy in that regard played out to predictable perfection. The GOP has one more ace up its sleeve to embarrass Obama and subtly shift public anger over the shutdown and the looming debt ceiling battle away from blaming the GOP to blaming Obama. It put several piecemeal spending measures on the table as its plan for ending the budget stalemate knowing full well that the administration would reject them all. But the feint would be enough to allow the GOP to scream that it was acting responsibly to resolve the crisis (one it manufactured) and the party was being stonewalled by an intransigent, politically vindictive White House

House speaker John Boehner played this ploy further by not only blasting the White House for stalling a deal, but then assuring the public that the GOP will act prudently and not permit a government debt payment default. GOP leaders will eventually approve a deal on the budget and this will include raising the debt ceiling for the 75th time. But the GOP won't cut the deal without another blitz attack on Obama and spinning out new cynical ploys in an attempt to taint and embarrass him. That's because the GOP's debt ceiling war is not about debt but about Obama.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and political analyst. He is a frequent MSNBC contributor, associate editor of New America Media. He is a weekly co-host of the Al Sharpton Show on American Urban Radio Network. He is the host of the weekly Hutchinson Report on KTYM 1460 AM Radio Los Angeles and KPFK-Radio and the Pacifica Network. Follow Earl Ofari Hutchinson on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/earlhutchinson>