



CASCADE POLICY INSTITUTE

# CASCADE COMMENTARY

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## Summary

Since Republicans won control of both the Congress and the presidency, they have not cut spending as they promised, but have joined with Democrats to embark on the biggest spending spree in American history. In his new book, *Rome Wasn't Burnt in a Day*, former Republican congressman Joe Scarborough gives a frank inside view of how this happened and why.

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***“What went wrong with the Republican revolution? After they took control of Congress in 1994, party leaders discovered that sending pork home was still one of the best ways to ensure re-election and retain political power.”***

## Who Is Bankrupting America?

by Steve Buckstein

Conventional wisdom tells us that Republicans fight for balanced budgets and smaller government. Not true, according to Joe Scarborough, a former Republican congressman and host of MSNBC's *Scarborough Country*.

Congressman Joe, as his constituents called him, helped take control of the House of Representatives when 73 “barbarians” were elected to “storm the gleaming gates of Congress” in 1994. Led by newly appointed Speaker Newt Gingrich, they pledged to balance the budget and reduce the role of government in the lives of Americans. Ten years later, and out of office for three, Scarborough blows the whistle on members of his own party in his new book, *Rome Wasn't Burnt in a Day*.

What went wrong with the Republican revolution? After they took control of Congress in 1994, party leaders discovered that sending pork home was still one of the best ways to ensure re-election and retain political power. They “began buying votes and building a patronage system by spending other people's money—specifically yours and mine.”

The book is loaded with specific examples of Republicans joining with Democrats to embark on the biggest spending spree in American history. Together they have sent the national debt skyrocketing past seven trillion dollars. Scarborough fears that, left unchallenged, this spending will bankrupt America.

Scarborough ascribes this behavior to the “male ego,” although Lord Acton's “power corrupts” adage may be closer to the mark. Republicans are not the party of Reagan anymore. Both major parties demand their candidates hold greater allegiance to their platforms than to their own principles. Government grows at the expense of citizens' wallets and personal freedoms. These and other pithy statements fill his book.

Scarborough resigned from Congress in 2001 to spend more time with his two boys back home in Florida. His first day back in the private sector was September

11, 2001. He is understandably shocked and saddened that “while New York and Washington were still burning, congressmen and senators added pork projects for their home districts onto an emergency spending bill aimed at September 11th relief needs.”

Critical of Democrats as well as Republicans, Scarborough reminds us that most Democrats never promised to cut spending. Republicans promised they would, but haven’t.

He agrees with the Cato Institute and others who have concluded that Washington would spend less if the Congress and the White House were in opposing hands. Federal spending during the Clinton years, with a GOP Congress, grew 3.4 percent annually. With George W. Bush in the White House and Republicans running Congress, spending has risen 10.4 percent annually.

While Scarborough doesn’t go so far as to advise voting “his” rascals out, he does have some strong views about what will and won’t help turn runaway spending around. He doesn’t believe the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill will solve anything. He does believe that term limits could help because the longer one is in Congress, the less likely he or she is to support spending cuts.

He supports a variation of Frank Luntz’ new “Taxpayer Bill of Rights” including a balanced budget amendment and pay-as-you-go rules requiring Congress to offset new spending programs and tax cuts with spending cuts from other programs.

Anyone interested in a frank inside view of what really goes on in Washington should read Scarborough’s book. His stories of political intrigue in the bowels of Congress paint a picture of office politics that have risen to new heights inside what is supposed to be the people’s Capitol.

In this highly charged election year, it’s refreshing to see a former partisan come out four-square for principal over party.

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*Steve Buckstein is president of Cascade Policy Institute, a Portland, Oregon think tank. Joe Scarborough will speak September 16th in Portland at a luncheon hosted by Cascade. Call (503) 242-0900 for details.*

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