

## US radicals have dealt a serious blow to the struggle for small government

By Dr. John C. Hulsman

*“A compass I learned when I was surveying will point you true north from where you are standing. But its got no advice about how to get around the swamps and deserts and chasms that you’ll encounter along the way. If in pursuit of your destination you plunge ahead, heedless of obstacles and achieve nothing more than to sink in a swamp, what’s the use of having true north?”*

--Abraham Lincoln to Thaddeus Stevens, in Stephen Spielberg’s, *Lincoln*.

This scene in the curiously underrated *Lincoln* came to me while watching the Republican surrender over the debt ceiling yesterday. It is almost unmatched as a universal dialogue between the all the world’s radicals, and men who hope to get things done in the real world.

Here a peerless Day-Lewis as Lincoln—in the president’s typically shrewd if folksy way—effortlessly conveys to the entertaining Jones, portraying radical Thaddeus Stevens, his misgivings about an agenda not founded on reality. While Lincoln admires Stevens unswerving understanding of both what is right and the overall direction America should be moving in regarding the evil of slavery, he has deep concerns about how Stevens plans to get there. Lincoln rightly believes that ignoring life’s practical realities is not a sign of deeper devotion to a cause; instead it is a hallmark of almost certain failure.

I wish our best and wisest president had recently been caucusing with the present radical faction of his own party. For the fiscal crisis has disastrously wounded the Republican Party.

**Far worse still, there is little doubt in my mind that the Tea Party radicals are entirely correct about policy here; they know where true north lies. This is true both in terms the baleful consequences of Obamacare and the generally suicidal efforts of the Democrats to turn American into just another failed experiment in big state European social democracy. But by sinking knee deep in the entirely avoidable swamp of the just concluded fiscal crisis, Republicans stand in danger of discrediting their small state message, even as later events will prove it to be on the money. This is where the recent drama moves from farce to tragedy.**

**The surrender terms, embodied in the Reid-McConnell deal brokered by the Senate leaders, can be dealt with in swift order. The government is to be reopened until January 15, 2014. The debt ceiling is lifted until February 7, 2014. A bicameral conference committee of the Congress will be convened to try to secure a larger budget agreement, having until December 13, 2013 to finalize a comprehensive deal (fat chance). The Treasury Department retains the ability to put off the February deadline if another deadlock erupts by use of extraordinary measures. Finally, in what amounts to an almost laughably negligible fig leaf, those eligible for Obamacare subsidies will be required to provide income verification to receive them. It's hard to remember a case of when such trivial concessions were achieved following such Promethean struggles.**

**For let's not kid ourselves; the Republicans are the overwhelming loser here, brought low by their own radical, utopian tendencies in a way the canny Lincoln would well recognize. In the Obamacare health care plan, the President's admitted signature achievement, Republicans happened upon a gold mine, a deeply unpopular piece of law that had organically ignited grass-roots indignation all over the country. Lincoln would have used this gift (with the recent hapless rollout of the plan furthering his cause) as a never-ending populist weapon to bludgeon the Democrats in 2014 and especially 2016. Then with both Houses of Congress and the White House secure, repeal of the hated measure would be easy.**

**Instead, impatient with history as radicals always are, the Tea Party stupidly managed to turn the greatest populist issue in a generation into a series of obscure parliamentary procedures, looking grossly irresponsible by calling into question the creditworthiness of the most powerful nation on earth. The Republican brand, until recently seen by a majority of Americans as the party of responsibility, has been badly damaged. As ever, the tragedy of callow radicals is that they damage good causes, and the hopes of people who share their ultimate goals, if not their methods in achieving them. More particularly, by their tactical gormlessness, by failing to understand how the world works, radicals have significantly set back the precious cause of the benefits of small government, which for a time will be associated with serial irresponsibility and partisanship. If only Lincoln were here.**