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The Next Time Some Idiot Tries to Tell You the GOP is “The Party of Business”

By Thom Hartmann

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As predictably as the sun rises, every Sunday a commentator or politician on one of the Sunday political talk shows says — without being challenged — that the Republican Party understands and supports business better than Democrats. The weekend as I’m writing this chapter, it was CNN’s turn.

All my life, the media has told us that the GOP is the “party of business.”

It may have once been true under Eisenhower when I was a very young child, but today it’s a lie — and has been so in a huge way since the neoliberal Reagan Revolution.

Republicans kill economies; Democrats rescue and build them.

Between 1933 and 2020 there were 14 American presidents, 7 Democratic and 7 Republican.

The economy during this time grew at an average rate of 4.6% under the Democratic presidents, but only an anemic 2.4% under Republican presidents.[clxxvi] For example, the economy has grown three times faster under Biden than under Trump.[clxxvii] Ten of the past 11 recessions began under Republican presidents. The last three Democratic presidents have seen over 50 million jobs created on their watch; the number for the last three Republican presidents is zero. Actually, it’s less than zero.[clxxviii]

Republican presidents have exploded the national debt, while the only balanced budgets out of the past 60 years have been presented by Democratic presidents Carter, Clinton, and Obama.[clxxix] [clxxx]

Bill Clinton left George W. Bush a \$128 billion surplus (after 4 consecutive years of budget surpluses): Bush immediately squandered it with a massive tax cut for billionaires and two criminal wars.[clxxxi]

Just in 2022, President Biden decreased federal spending by \$550 billion and reduced the deficit by \$1.4 trillion — the largest one-year deficit drop in American history — all while creating five times more jobs in 2 years than the last three Republican presidents combined.[clxxxii] [clxxxiii]

If not for the Reagan, Bush, and Trump tax cuts for billionaires and the two wars George W. Bush lied us into, our national debt could today be close to zero instead of over \$30 trillion.[clxxxiv]

To add injury to insult, Republicans destroy small businesses while propping up giant monopolies.

The core of American business and thus the livelihood of American communities before Reagan was small- and medium-sized companies.

Small- and medium-sized companies built America and brought us the American middle class, the first and largest middle class in the world. But in 1983, when Reagan ordered the DOJ, FTC, and SEC to stop enforcing anti-trust laws dating back to the Sherman Act of 1890, giant corporations began a relentless campaign to destroy locally owned companies.

Strip malls and small-town downtowns that were once mostly home to local retailers are now dominated by giant monopolistic national chains. Big Box stores, spreading across the country unconstrained since Reagan, have been wiping out small towns and rural communities.

One study found, as Reuters reported: “[T]he closer a store was to the Walmart location, the greater the likelihood it would close. Persky and his colleagues found that for every mile closer to the Walmart, 6 percent more stores closed. Close in around the store's location, between 35 and 60 percent of stores closed.”[clxxxv]

For most American businesses and the communities they serve, Republican governance has been a disaster since the Reagan 1980s.

But it’s not just business where Republicans work against the little guy; it’s also labor. Unions made America — and American business — rich but Republicans hate them and have made it nearly impossible to unionize in every Red state in America.

Republican President Dwight Eisenhower ran for re-election in the 1956 election by bragging that he’d expanded Social Security across America, and his 1952 election was mostly powered by his enthusiastic endorsement of unionization.

At a speech before the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1952, Eisenhower noted that the first national legalization of unions in America was signed by Republican President Calvin Coolidge, the 1926 Railway Labor Act.[clxxxvi]

“Only a handful of unreconstructed reactionaries harbor the ugly thought of breaking unions,” he told the union group now known as the AFL-CIO, the nation’s largest. “Only a fool would try to deprive working men and women of the right to join the union of their choice.”

Similarly, in September of 1970 President Richard Nixon hosted labor leaders from across America, praising the movement. As The New York Times noted on September 8, 1970: “When the ‘great issue’ has been whether to support the President and to meet the nation’s responsibilities ‘for defending and protecting the forces of freedom in the world,’ he said, ‘American labor has never been found wanting. It has always been the first in war and in peace.’”[clxxxvii]

As a result of combined Democratic and Republican support of unions, by Reagan’s election in 1980 about two-thirds of all American workers had a union job or its equivalent, with great pay, benefits, and retirement plans, because a third of workers were union members and that set the pay and benefits floor for the non-union employers to compete for another third of workers.

But, following Nixon putting Lewis Powell on the Supreme Court in 1971, the GOP began to adopt the positions in the Powell Memo, which included gutting labor unions so the morbidly rich could become even richer.

Their rationale was that giving workers a say in the workplace had “destabilized” America, a point first made in 1951 by Russell Kirk in his book *The Conservative Mind* that I detailed in my book *The Hidden History of American Oligarchy*. [clxxxviii]

President Reagan, however, declared war on organized labor with his attack on the PATCO union. Ever since, the GOP has been fighting efforts to expand unionization. Combined with Reagan’s massive tax cuts for billionaires and giant corporations, this loss of union representation has led to a \$50 trillion transfer of wealth from the homes and retirement accounts of working-class people straight into the money bins of the morbidly rich.

Instead of two-thirds of Americans having a middle-class lifestyle like in 1980, today that number is down to around 45 percent of us. As a result, both poverty and homelessness have exploded across the land. And poor and homeless people can’t afford to support a strong economy — and thus American business — the way a prosperous middle class can.

To make things even worse, Republicans fight regulations that save American lives and protect business.

Dwight Eisenhower created the Small Business Administration to “aid, counsel, assist, and protect insofar as is possible the interests of small-business concerns.”[clxxxix]

He signed a massive expansion of Social Security to take the pension/retirement onus off small- and medium-sized employers, increased the minimum wage so a prospering working class could purchase the products of American manufacturers, and built low-income housing across the nation to end the homeless “hobo” problem left over from the Republican Great Depression.[cxc]

Eisenhower created from scratch the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to build a healthy and well-educated workforce, while Richard Nixon signed the Environmental Protection Agency into law to protect American workers being poisoned by toxic pesticides and other chemicals (the agency’s creation was provoked by Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*).[cxci]

Today’s GOP opposes all of these programs and agencies. They only support the largest American companies and the richest citizens.

When Trump was president, he rolled back regulation of toxic pesticides known to cause brain damage to children, and one of his first official acts in office was to end the prohibition on coal mines dumping their toxic waste and tailings into America’s rivers, polluting downstream water supplies with cancer-causing chemicals. His administration also dismantled more than 100 other rules intended to safeguard our air, water and wildlife.[cxcii]

Republicans keep business costs absurdly high to advantage giant companies over the little guy.

Healthcare is one clear example. Arguably, the best policy possible for American businesses of all sizes is the Medicare For All program promoted for decades by progressive Democrats.

Back in 2004, Toyota announced they’d be opening a new factory in North America. Three southern US states offered them billions in tax advantages and free land, and the Republican governor of Alabama openly bragged about how cheaply his citizens would work for the company.

But in the end, in 2005, Toyota announced they’d be building the factory in Ontario, Canada because US healthcare costs are nearly twice those of Canada, which has had a successful Medicare For All system in place for more than a half-century (as I lay out in *The Hidden History of American Healthcare: Why Sickness Bankrupts You and Makes Others Insanely Rich*).[cxci]

Since then, as Republicans (and a few bought-off Democrats) continue to fight any effort to establish a national healthcare or health insurance system, the company has built two more North American factories in Canada.[cxciv]

If it wasn't for Republican obstruction, the factories would've been built in the U.S. and the jobs would be here.

The simple reality is that Republicans have no coherent plans for the American economy beyond more tax cuts for their morbidly rich donors and more deregulation of the very largest and most polluting corporations.

To compensate for this deficiency, they push hate against queer people, public school teachers, women, and dark-skinned immigrants. Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis went so far as to attack Disney, Florida's largest employer and source of tax revenues, in retaliation for the company's support of LGBTQ rights.

Republicans have banned thousands of books from public schools and libraries, saturated our towns and cities with weapons of war, banned women's access to reproductive healthcare, and packed our courts with judges who are tight with the American Nazi movement, the Federalist Society, and/or the John Birch Society. Not only are these policies and positions bad for America, they're also destructive of most American businesses.

So, the next time some idiot tries to tell you that the GOP is "the party of business," let them know the real facts.

The only businesses Republicans actually support are gun sellers, megachurches, corrupt defense contractors, and giant monopolies. And none of those are good for average Americans, locally owned businesses, or the US economy.

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