

The Wanting Things Argument Is Bizarre Even by Republican Standards

One of the strangest memes to come out of the Republican Party in recent months has been their critique of Obama supporters as people who just want things, or stuff. This is an extraordinarily bizarre view of politics which lends itself to criticism in many different ways. This view, which has been [stated by Bill O'Reilly](#) and [other Republican pundits and strategists](#), reflects shoddy math as advocates of this view, including [most prominently Mitt Romney](#), throw around numbers like 47 percent as if that is both the number of people who get things from government and who voted for Obama.

Additionally, this approach indicates almost zero understanding of how government works as all of us get things from government including social security, veteran's benefits, public schools, food stamps and many other programs. Advocates of this view also seem to miss that politics is at its core largely a question of who gets what from government. The notion that some people get nothing from government is both absurd and deeply out of touch with the way modern economies and states work. One of the major reasons we have elections, legislatures and indeed government is to determine who gets what from government. An important part of this is public goods, such as roads, public safety or clean air, which we may or may not get as much as we want of, but which benefit everybody. Almost all policies benefit some people more than others and in some sense give people things.

It is hard to imagine how serious politicians or anybody who has an understanding of governance can believe this pabulum that those who vote Democratic want things while, implicitly, Republican voters are committed to higher values like god and country. It is not, however, hard to imagine why Republican strategists and apologists for the recent defeat promote this line. The notion that the only reason why people voted for Obama is because he gave them the things is pleasing to the Republican Party because it both absolves their party of any fault or failure to persuade voters that Romney was better than Obama, and allows them to continue to see themselves as morally superior and more genuinely American than their Democratic opponents.

Seeking to divide the country, even rhetorically, between those who want things from government and those who do not is uniquely inane because it is both completely divorced from reality and creates a framework for governance that further embeds everything Republican interests do in hypocrisy. One of the reasons the Republican Party lost the election is because their primary policy goal is to give things, in this case tax cuts, to the very rich. This is not lost on most voters. This Republican line is the product of the warped relationship between the sophomoric libertarian anti-government wing of the party and the hate-filled Tea Party faction. Thus programs for immigrants are things or stuff while tax cuts for the rich are viewed as economic policy. Similarly, this view seeks to distinguish between "things," like low interest loans for education or unemployment insurance, that are given to Democratic voters who implicitly do no work and have their hands out, and policies, like Medicare and Social Security, which reward hard working Americans who play by the rules and vote Republican. The American people

weren't fooled by this in November and are unlikely to be fooled by this anytime soon.

Attacking the American people for wanting things from government is part of the Republican Party's pivot away from attacking the Democratic Party's leadership as socialists to making a broader attack on a near majority of the American people. Ronald Reagan's created the concept of the welfare queen as part of his criticism of government benefits for poor people, but today's Republican Party has expanded that critique dramatically. Today, according to the Romneys, O'Reillys and other leaders of the Republican Party, we are all welfare queens guilty of wanting things from the government.

This is not a political approach for a party that wants to win an election any time soon, but perhaps more significantly it is extremely revealing of the anger which has fueled, even dominated, most of the conservative movement in recent years. After getting soundly drubbed in the election, the Republican leadership seems to have rallied around the idea that they did a fine job, but that the voters were wrong, not only wrong but greedy and lazy to boot. Clearly once the country gets a new electorate, the Republicans will be in fine shape. Until that time, however, the Republicans either have to talk themselves down from this latest fantasy they have woven or face more and probably worse electoral defeats.

Lincoln Mitchell

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