

Republican US Congressman Allen West (Florida) recently proclaimed himself a "modern-day Harriet Tubman," dedicated to freeing voters from the Democrats' "plantation" of dependence on government.

His remarks followed on the comments by Democrat Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) activist and frequent spokesperson, that focused on the "unconscionable" high unemployment rate among African-Americans, almost 16%, as compared with the also painfully high national rate of 9.1%, and said, "our people are hurting."

Waters is a reliable supporter for every increase in taxes and social spending that has crossed her desk since she was first elected to Congress in 1990. Her take on the debt ceiling deal was a lament that the rich were not required to pay more taxes, but relief that entitlement spending was not touched. Much of her rhetoric is set in racial terms, often referring to "her people," and demonizing the "rich" or some other group she finds offensive in relation to her ideal of ever larger government. And she is hardly alone in this approach: her views are widely shared not only among the CBC members, but also by the leadership of today's Democrat Party.

We can all agree that the unemployment rate is unacceptably high, and that unemployment devastates families and communities. The fact of higher unemployment rates among black Americans is of course deeply troubling. But the infusion of the factor of race into the already complex and turbulent discussion about how to address America's unemployment problem raises the specter that a discussion that should be about color-blind economic policy and principles could too easily disintegrate into a battle infused with racial undertones and suspicions.

The problem is that liberal politicians never see, or at least never acknowledge, the connection between increased social spending (paid for by higher taxes) and the high unemployment rates in their communities. That the social spending on entitlement programs, food stamps, subsidized housing, and expanded and extended unemployment insurance payments does not alleviate poverty, but instead creates, expands and perpetuates it, is no longer an open question.

Leaving aside the job-killing impact of higher taxes, the other side of the equation is equally devastating: spending on ever-expanding social programs weakens and enfeebles recipients,

rendering them more dependent on government, and less and less able to be, or inspired to be, responsible for their own wellbeing.

And that is the economic 'plantation' West was referring to—the enslavement of the individual who no longer believes in himself, who no longer views himself as able to care and provide for himself, who defaults into the worldview too many leaders in the black community present-- that the problem is some "other" group that is holding them down, whether that other group is another racial group, wealthier people, big business, or a political enemy.

America is a compassionate nation, and we will always care for those truly physically or mentally unable to care for themselves. And no one is advocating elimination of all social spending—but when nearly one in seven Americans is on food stamps, no reasonable person can argue that our society is on track.

America needs Allen West and other brave leaders like him to replicate Harriet Tubman's role by leading a color-blind freedom trail movement that exposes that much of the unemployment and impoverishment in America, for people of all racial backgrounds, has its source in massive social programs that smother the natural human yearning for self-reliance, achievement and success. Those yearnings have been slowly diluted over decades of well intentioned but ineffective social spending. Leading Americans of all backgrounds out of the swamp of weakness and dependence and back to the freedom of self-reliance is a battle in the arena of ideas, not a battle about race. It is not a problem for 'my people' or 'her people'; it is a problem for 'we the people'.

Harriet Tubman was helping free black slaves who knew, along with many of their white fellow-Americans, that slavery was wrong. The slaves wanted freedom from the laws that made them slaves.

Today's "slaves" are kept in poverty by social spending 'laws' that create and reinforce their dependence/slavery, and the question is whether the voters as well as the recipients of this misguided and destructive largesse can be convinced that the social spending programs are the problem.

The upcoming battle in 2012 and beyond is over how to shift the thinking of Americans away

from the sense that more government is the only answer, to the freedom-inspired confidence that they can find sustained well-being through self-sufficiency.

Uniting around right ideas is the only basis for genuine and sustained unity. Dividing America by race, and pitting Americans against each other is inherently and intentionally divisive. And this is an increasingly important distinction between the two major political parties in America.

Ultimately, the Race for America is the race, the battle, to fulfill the promise of America's founding, that we are and will be a nation dedicated to the protection of our God-given rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that were given equally to all citizens by our Creator, and that our government is limited, and designed to protect, not infringe upon, those truths. The free market system that produced the most prosperous nation on earth, and inspired Americans of every background for generations to embrace self-reliance, and to pursue and realize their dreams, grew out of those founding ideals.

Allen West's offer to be the Harriet Tubman of today, to help lead Americans away from the economic plantation of subservience to and reliance on government, is a noble effort to take up one of the greatest needs our country faces as we go forward in these economically challenging times. It is imperative to turn our country and economy back onto the path of prosperity and economic stability that naturally flow from ending the US government's economic plantation, and inspiring self-reliance in Americans of every background.

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