

The Worst of the Ryan Budgets

EDITORIAL

There's nothing wrong with President Obama speed-dating members of Congress. Meeting face to face over food and wine, as Mr. Obama has recently done with several groups of lawmakers from both parties, may ease the demonizing politics of the last four years — along with the president's well-earned reputation for aloofness. And given how little some Republicans know about his budget proposals — one senator confessed he had no idea what Mr. Obama wanted to cut before last week's dinner — the shared meals were probably overdue.

But Mr. Obama should have no illusions about the core beliefs of some of his Republican dining partners, or their willingness to accept change. That was made clear on Tuesday when the House Budget Committee chairman, Representative Paul Ryan, unveiled his 2014 spending plan: a retread of ideas that voters soundly rejected, made even worse, if possible, by sharper cuts to vital services and more dishonest tax provisions.

The budget, which will surely fly through the House, was quickly praised as “serious” and job-creating by the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, though it is neither. By cutting \$4.6 trillion from spending over the next decade, it would reverse the country's nascent economic growth, kill millions of real and potential jobs, and deprive those suffering the most of social assistance.

All the tired ideas from 2011 and 2012 are back: eliminating Medicare's guarantee to retirees by turning it into a voucher plan; dispensing with Medicaid and food stamps by turning them into block grants for states to cut freely; repealing most of the reforms to health care and Wall Street; shrinking beyond recognition the federal role in education, job training, transportation and scientific and medical research. The public opinion of these callous proposals was made clear in the fall election, but Mr. Ryan is too ideologically fervid to have learned that lesson.

The 2014 budget is even worse than that of the previous two years because it attempts to balance the budget in 10 years instead of the previous 20 or more. That would take nondefense discretionary spending down to nearly 2 percent of the economy, the lowest in modern history. And in its laziest section, it sets a goal of slashing the top tax rate for the rich to 25 percent from

39.6 percent, though naturally Mr. Ryan doesn't explain how this could happen without raising taxes on middle- and lower-income people. (Sound familiar?)

There's no need, of course, to balance the budget in 10 years or even 20; these dates are arbitrary, designed solely to impress the extreme fiscal conservatives who now compose the core of the Republican Party. That same core in the House will almost certainly reject the 2014 Democratic budget expected from the Senate on Wednesday. It will take a far more evenhanded approach, cutting spending by \$1 trillion while eliminating tax breaks for the wealthy and spending \$100 billion on job training and infrastructure.

If the Ryan budget is any indication, Mr. Obama's quest to bring reason to an unreasonable party may be doomed from the outset.
