



BY DAVID BOAZ

“President Obama promised to end the war in Iraq and to cut federal spending on net.”

## Editorial

# Stop the War, Stop the Spending

President Obama is keeping the wrong promises. He's working very hard to keep his promises to tax more, spend more, and regulate more.

But he also promised to end the war in Iraq and to cut federal spending on net, and those promises were left behind when they closed the campaign headquarters.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans turned out on April 15 to protest the bailouts, the \$787 billion stimulus package, and Obama's budget. Maybe some day soon antiwar activists will realize that the war is still going on and will hold some rallies too.

Obama's broken promises give libertarians a chance to get out in front with a "Stop the War, Stop the Spending" movement.

Take the war in Iraq. Barack Obama rose to prominence as a vigorous opponent of the war. His antiwar speech in Chicago in October 2002 was the keystone of his campaign. With most of his Democratic opponents having voted for the war as senators, Obama campaigned as the only true antiwar candidate. In the thick of the primaries, he declared, "I opposed this war in 2002. I will bring this war to an end in 2009. It is time to bring our troops home." That's how he drew the support of the Democratic left and then a broader audience of Americans who had turned against the floundering war.

But later in the campaign, after the primaries, he backed away from his commitment to end the war in his first year. He said he would "redeploy our combat brigades at a pace that would remove them in 16 months."

Soon after taking office, he essentially reaffirmed that plan. But it turned out that after about 18 more months of combat, until the end of summer 2010, the president intends to keep some 50,000 troops in Iraq until at least 2012. That's a far cry from "I will bring this war to an end in 2009. It is time to bring our troops home."

As for spending, during the campaign Obama pandered to interest groups with promises of taxpayer dollars—money for college loans, "green energy," national health insurance, higher teacher pay, more Medicaid, subsidies for homeowners, and so on. During the campaign Hillary Clinton said, "I have a million ideas. The country can't afford them all." So did Obama, and it's not clear that he understood that latter point.

But he also promised to crack down on earmarks and pork-barrel spending. He promised that he would "reinstate pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) budget rules, so that new spending or tax cuts are paid for by spending cuts or new revenue elsewhere." And most significant-

ly, in the third presidential debate, when those last few undecided voters were watching intently, Obama declared, "We've been living beyond our means and we're going to have to make some adjustments. Now, what I've done throughout this campaign is to propose a net spending cut."

That's right. He promised a net spending cut.

And what did taxpayers get? Right out of the box, a \$787 billion kitchen-sink "stimulus" spending bill—on top of a federal budget that had increased by a trillion dollars under George W. Bush even before the bailout bonanzas of late 2008. A \$1.8 trillion deficit in 2009, larger than the entire budget in President Clinton's last year. The national debt skyrocketing to 67 percent of GDP. A permanent 25 percent increase in the size of nondefense spending as a percentage of GDP. And all of these figures are based on the dubious assumptions that "temporary" spending programs will actually expire, that discretionary spending growth will be much lower after 2012 than it is now, that national health care won't cost more than expected, and so on. No wonder taxpayers turned out on April 15.

Now some critics say, "Where were these spending opponents during the spendthrift years?" And they have a point. Too many conservatives and Republicans went along with the Bush-Lott-Hastert-DeLay spendathon. Not the Cato Institute, of course, which produced a steady stream of books, reports, seminars, and op-eds deploring the GOP spending record and calling for cuts. But the fact is that while Bush was the biggest spender since Lyndon Johnson, Obama is leaving him in the dust. Bush almost doubled the national debt, to \$10 trillion. Obama's budget proposes a national debt of \$17 trillion by 2013 and \$23 trillion in 10 years.

We should also note that as bad as our current spending is, the real budget problem is the looming cost of entitlements programs. As the Social Security trustees reported in May, the total unfunded indebtedness of Social Security and Medicare comes to \$106.4 trillion. Paying that off would require an 81 percent increase in everyone's income taxes in perpetuity. Until we're willing to confront those long-term promises that we can't keep, we're not really dealing with the spending problem.

Millions of Americans are tired of the war and worried about soaring federal spending. Somebody should give them a rallying point: Stop the War, Stop the Spending.