

HIGH NOON

The drama of our President striding down the aisle last Monday at the White House, dressed in dark colors, an ominous moment apparent when he faced a national audience and began his message aimed at those who would thwart the resolution of the 'debt crisis' ceiling and implying an economic death knell if this country defaulted on its monetary obligations.... a moment of truth not unlike Sheriff Gary Cooper as he sought confrontation with the 'bad guys' in High Noon. Frankie Laine provided the title song and made the time eerily more significant as did the rebuttal of Speaker Boehner.

Obama's message was clear: a need for balance in the debate which would require spending cuts and revenue created by higher tax on the wealthiest and no new taxes, but an elimination of the perks and benefits of the current tax code. Revenue was to be provided to education, research, public works and the creation of jobs. He drew from the balanced approach of President Reagan, tax increases by the Senior Bush Administration and the budget balancing, high GDP of the Clinton years, while placing the blame for the recession, near depression and spending frenzy of the last decade due to wars and economic overreach of his predecessor. He accepted no blame for his administration and inferred that the Speaker was perhaps on-board, but challenged by the extremist Tea Party adherents.

Boehner's rebuttal suggested the Republican proposal has long included large spending cuts, without tax increases to anyone, a balanced budget supported by a constitutional referendum, noting no real plan has surfaced for a budget, or realistic administration plan and the national debt has tripled in the Obama term, the unemployment remains high, job creation a non-entity and the threat of Armageddon by the President. There is evidence of sufficient income to pay current obligations via the CBO, and studies by economic scholars of the present debt ceiling challenges. The great problem, Boehner suggests is a President frequently changing the parameters and speaking recklessly about scare tactics and economic doom, which will negatively impact on the world economy. Balance is a misnomer as an imbalance on the side of increased spending is always there, and often hidden in the rationale of the amount to which the debt ceiling would be raised.

Brit Hume of Fox News reminds that the fabled 'Contract with America'-the Gingrich led program (1994) which led Republicans back to the majority in the House-for the first time in many years- gave them influence and common

ground with then President Clinton who threatened to veto any major changes; Speaker Gingrich countered with his own veto, a shutdown of government which history re-minds played into the hands of Clinton. Irony tells us that Clinton parlayed many of the concepts into his policy, i.e. welfare reform, others and John Kerry used them in his run for President later. Even though Obama has failed to lay out a written plan, or inspired a balanced budget, he may, like Clinton have the high ground, bully pulpit, and suggest the Republicans are the ones causing the delay, and ignoring the real economic trauma on the national and world stage, hence another threat of a governmental shutdown. It takes two to tango as they say.

In all of this resides the essence of the enduring fight over ideology: individualism and collectivism. In his classic fight (Road to Serfdom) F. Hayek argued that collectivism trumped idealism (socialism leading to a more severe ideology, communism and fascism); DeToquieville told us, “democracy extends sphere of individual freedom while socialism restricts it”; Mill and Orwell meditated on the clash between individual freedom and government authority. Even the much-maligned Herbert Hoover tried to leave laissez-faire (a competitive market) for government regulation and control- a New Deal that Roosevelt absorbed in policy and programs for his administration.

The battle is joined in another High Noon drama. Individualism and collectivism are part of the mix.