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# OPINIONS

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Sunday, August 28, 2011 THE NEW MEXICAN B-3

MY VIEW: JOHN F. ANDREWS

# Economic contraction is tailor-made for GOP

Shortly after he announced his candidacy for president, Texas Gov. Rick Perry said that if Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke does anything between now and November 2012 to make financial resources more accessible, he deserves to be punished as a traitor.

What Perry was asserting is that any action the Fed takes to help businesses prosper, get America's jobless back to work and elevate consumer confidence should be regarded as treasonous. And why? Because if voters feel more upbeat by this time next year, a White House occupant that Perry has portrayed as illegitimate and insufficiently patriotic is more likely to win re-election.

In a recent column for the *Washington Post*, Ezra Klein endorsed a proposal by Harvard economist Kenneth Rogoff that we dub today's downturn

"the 'Great Contraction' in order to distinguish it from more normal recessions." One of the virtues of Rogoff's phrasing is that it can be applied not only to our current plight but to a diminished presidency and to a party so dispirited that some have suggested that its name be altered to "Dimocrat."

But one thing that hasn't received adequate attention is that what we're now experiencing is in many ways a designer contraction. One of its principal architects is Grover Norquist, and as Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick pointed out in a June 30 *Washington Post* article, his ultimate purpose is to eviscerate, if not completely eliminate, services like Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security by depriving them of the money they need to function. To that end Norquist's "strategy is to drive America to the brink of fiscal ruin and

then argue that the only way out is to cut spending for the powerless."

Thanks to their well-coordinated legions, and thanks to a GOP leadership that seems hell-bent on seizing total control of our body politic in 2012, we can be certain that any measures that might improve our nation's well-being in the interim (including payroll tax breaks for those who need them most) will be adamantly resisted.

So yes, let's quit viewing what is happening to us as a conventional recession. But let's also quit mincing words and start calling it what it really is: a Great Repression, cynically perpetuated by disciplined extortionists who are doing everything they can to shred our social and regulatory safety nets, block any initiatives that might address unemployment and other ills, and pin the blame for all our woes on a

White House that has been bullied into "compromises" that severely limit any remedies that might alleviate the pain.

Now for the question of the hour: Is there any way that Norquist, Perry and their formidable allies can be denied? Yes, but only if a significant number of today's Republicans can be persuaded that it is in their interest to do so.

In 1990, two years after he uttered the vow that Norquist has now hubristically reinvoked, George H. W. Bush implicitly acknowledged that the supply-side philosophy he had once derided as "voodoo economics" was indeed the fraud he'd identified as reckless folly a decade earlier when it was being espoused by Ronald Reagan. To his credit, a reluctant chief executive then took a responsible but politically risky step and broke his famous pledge.

Acceding to revenue increases that

arrested a precipitous decline, he courageously prepared the way for a vigorous recovery under a successor who restored tax rates to sustainable levels and presided over several years of healthy growth, balanced budgets and the first surpluses the U.S. had enjoyed since the Eisenhower administration.

Is it conceivable that "The Party of No" could be moved to emulate a president who obeyed his conscience and put "Country First"? Let's hope so, or we may be forced into another Great Depression to prove yet again that the GOP's twice-discredited trickle-down dogma is nothing less than a recipe for global disaster.

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