

# Grover Norquist and his Pledge of Mass Destruction

by

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**G**rover Norquist is a 55-year-old, lightly bearded, chubby-faced, bespectacled, lobbyist with a Harvard MBA and an unusually keen sense of humor. However, his control of elected officials is no laughing matter. He is the most powerful Republican in Washington D.C. He is significantly more focused, cleverer, and more dangerous than his fellow conservative lobbyists [Karl Rove](#) and [Dick Armey](#). He has labored behind the scenes for three decades to impose his own answer to Ronald Reagan's silly sound-bite: "*government is the problem.*" He is systematically crippling government until it is too feeble to interfere with his life. This year, he can push the Federal government off a fiscal cliff!

He quietly manipulates a voting majority of 238 House Republicans and a blocking minority of 39 Senate Republicans, who have signed his *Pledge to Taxpayers* (see Fig 1). They dutifully follow his orders on taxes and other issues in return for mountains of money, conservative credentials, and Hero awards.

In the budget battles of 2011, his pledge-takers in the House and Senate stonewalled reforms, and accepted a one-year, not-repeatable postponement of fiscal disaster. They increased the legal borrowing limit in exchange for budget cuts and a temporary extension of the Bush tax cuts. Earlier this year, they delivered an ultimatum to the President and to the other members of Congress: either enact their drastic budget reductions and cripple government, or they will deadlock negotiations and let the default alternatives do it for them.

We're in for a heap-of-hurt unless enough Republicans in the House and Senate repudiate their pledges, throw off Norquist's shackles, and represent their fellow citizens like responsible individuals. The prospects for wholesale revolt are dim. The November election could make things even worse by putting [pledge-taker, Mitt Romney](#), in the White House.

**This year, he can push the Federal government off a fiscal cliff...**


**You can influence the outcome; it's still a cliff-hanger.**

We will analyze the *Pledge to Taxpayers* and explore its manipulative and deceptive features. We'll present a body of evidence that it is a pledge to Grover Norquist and not to taxpayers. We will explain the inducements which persuade rational adults to sign it. We will contrast it to the Congressional Oath of Office which it corrupts. In the Part 2 of this essay, we will describe how Grover Norquist, through his pledge takers, increased the national debt by more than \$5 trillion and then maneuvered the Federal government to its fiscal cliff. We will study Grover Norquist and his objectives as described in his book "*Leave Us Alone; getting the government's hands off our money, our guns, our lives.*" Along the way you'll learn that he is an equal-opportunity anarchist crippling State governments as well. A review of historical facts will reveal his stunning and unchallenged hypocrisies about taxes and spending.

Finally, we'll discuss what you and I can do to help get our governments back to solid ground. Please consider this: you can influence the outcome, it's still a cliff-hanger.

## **The Pledge Document**

The Taxpayer Protection Pledge for House of Representatives candidates is shown in Figure 1. It was copied from the [Americans for Tax Reform](#) website. That site includes identical pledges for Senators, Presidents, Governors, and State Representatives. At first glance, it is a simple and unambiguous commitment to taxpayers. The signer will unconditionally oppose all increases in income

  
**AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM**  
United States House of Representatives candidates

## Taxpayer Protection Pledge

I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to the taxpayers of the \_\_\_\_\_ district  
of the state of \_\_\_\_\_, and to the American people that I will:

**ONE, oppose any and all efforts to increase the marginal income tax rates for individuals and/or businesses; and**  
**TWO, oppose any net reduction or elimination of deductions and credits, unless matched dollar for dollar by further reducing tax rates.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness \_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

Pledges must be signed, dated, witnessed and returned to:  
AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM  
722 12th Street, WASHINGTON, DC 20005  
PHONE: (202) 785-0266 FAX: (202) 330-5224

Figure 1. Grover Norquist's Pledge document which pledge takers fill out, sign, date, have two witnesses sign, and then mail to Grover's surrogate agency Americans for Tax Reform. Thereafter he uses it as he sees fit

taxes. We will examine what the pledge actually says and implies before we consider who owns it, how it's being used, and the rational political inducements to take it.

### The Commitment

This no-nonsense commitment statement— never to increase income tax rates— has its appeals. It hooks politicians who wish to make wholesale changes in government but are too lazy or cowardly to go through the Constitutional process of negotiating issue by issue. It attracts citizens who need simple certitudes in a complex world and those who have grievances against government. It catches the votes and financial support of taxpayers and business executives who want as much as they can get from government without paying for it. It satisfies anarchists, who want to weaken government by starving it of essential revenues.

However, its enticing simplicity comes from ignoring all mitigating circumstances. Government is a complex process of compromises and trade-offs, hopefully made by individuals committed to the best interests of the nation. This utterly uncompromising pledge eliminates all the negotiations and trade-offs required to keep the

government fiscally sound. It specifies a single objective as absolutely superior to everything else, including the need to fund wars or other national disasters. It brooks no exceptions and allows no personal judgments. It commits the signer to blind conformity rather than to careful deliberation. It doesn't require prudent spending or smaller government, only lower income taxes. In short, the terms of the pledge mentally castrate those who take it.

In tone and structure, the pledge is a document of distrust being imposed on a subordinate who is suspected of having no backbone. It is a "thou shalt not," legalistic oath imposed by a jealous god. Even the thou-shalt-nots of the Ten Commandments are interpreted and practiced within the positive context of the first two: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Higher or lower tax rates should be enacted in the context of the best interests of the nation.

The simplistic terms seem to leave gaping holes. It appears that nothing in them would prevent pledge takers from supporting property taxes on corporate assets, on personal property, on intellectual property or on real property. Nor do they prohibit increases in tariffs and duties, at one time

the primary source of Federal revenues. They only commit to relentlessly reducing taxes on income.

Fear not, the second clause has already been used by Grover to prohibit any net-tax increases. Should a loophole be closed (like taxing corporate assets) then rates have to be lowered elsewhere to make the change revenue neutral. If Congress once grants special tax breaks, as it did to the oil companies during the Bush years, it cannot rescind them without lowering tax rates somewhere else. Grover says so. Grover's intent is to relentlessly reduce government revenues. He makes this abundantly clear in his book: *Leave Us Alone*.

A politician's pledge to reduce tax rates is equivalent to an executive's pledge to reduce prices. Tax rates and prices determine the revenues of their respective systems.

If the CEO of Microsoft, while his company was losing money, signed a pledge to customers never to raise prices, captive customers would applaud him, but his stockholders or board of directors would throw him out. Unless he cut costs first, his pledge to maintain or cut prices would be ruinous. A competent board would replace the CEO before he destroyed the company.

If his excuse for lowering prices was that he'd make it up with increased volume, he'd have to prove that assertion with convincing evidence. Pledge-takers in Congress blithely assure the public that tax cuts will ultimately increase revenues because they will stimulate enough economic growth. The Bush tax cuts [didn't support this contention](#), yet it's still an unchallenged dogma of their movement!

Enter the era of the pledge-taking George Bush's Presidency. With the government already running at a deficit, one of the first things he did was to enact the Bush tax cuts, with the active support of Grover and the help of pledge-takers in Congress. The cuts remained in effect while the costs of government dramatically increased to pay for two wars and a benefit plan for prescription drugs. The deficit soared. When Bush left office in 2009, the economy was in a shambles. In spite of their economic malfeasance, Bush and most of Grover's pledge takers in congress were re-elected in 2004! One factor was that too many voters acted like customers instead of exercising

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their responsibilities as stockholders or the board of directors.

#### Who is the pledge made to?

The heading says: "Americans for Tax Reform," an organization Grover Norquist founded in 1985. He is still its president, 37 years later. Its undisclosed financial backers pay him an annual salary of more than \$200,000 and supply all the operating funds he needs. He produced the pledge documents in 1986 while Ronald Reagan was President. Reagan was the first President to sign one.

Grover Norquist defined and articulated the conditions that: the pledge is to be filled out, signed by the pledge-taker and two witnesses, and then sent to his business address in Washington D.C. There is no mention of what happens after that. In practice, Norquist uses it as he sees fit. One use he makes of it is to display lists of Pledge takers on his website to alert conservatives about who the good guys are. Another is to browbeat anyone who gets out of line [or tries to repudiate the pledge](#). Although the document doesn't give him permission to display the names of pledge takers or to police their compliance, he does it anyway.

[Grover Norquist pontificating response](#) to Jeff Fortenberry, and to other sadder, but wiser politicians is: "In the Taxpayer Protection Pledge, candidates and incumbents solemnly bind themselves to oppose any and all tax increases. While ATR has the role of promoting and monitoring the Pledge, the Taxpayer Protection Pledge is actually made to a candidate's constituents, who are entitled to know where candidates stand before sending them to the capitol. **Since the Pledge is a prerequisite for many voters, it is considered binding as long as an individual holds the office for which he or she signed the Pledge.**" (The emphasis is mine.) In other words; *Tough*

*luck sucker, you can't change your mind unless I say so. You voluntarily signed the pledge which makes you mine.*

While he ruthlessly monitors compliance, he cleverly assures one and all that it is a pledge to taxpayers, and he is merely a concerned citizen performing a public service. Those who toe the line receive political and financial support from his financial backers and others like them. If signers also conform to his larger agenda with more than 85% of their votes, they receive his Hero awards. I always thought that heroes were people who took personal risks for the good of others; like Medal of Honor winners. Who would have thought that the right-wing would label craven conformists as its Heroes? Governor Mitt Romney garnered his Hero award in 2003!

If his pledge was a vow to all taxpayers, then why hasn't my Congressman, Greg Walden (R-OR), proudly and widely displayed it? It isn't on his [web site](#), nor have I seen it in any of his emails or published materials. That seems odd for a pledge he made long ago to the voters of his district. He's been my Congressman for six years and I didn't even know he took the pledge until last year when I found his name on Grover's list. Walden does have one oblique reference to the pledge on his web site. It is a news article about his [Hero award in 2006](#) for conforming to Grover's greater political agenda 93% of the time over a six-year period! The pledge's absence from his web site is ironic because Greg Walden is a champion of [transparency in Congress](#); at least when it doesn't involve him.

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Curious about whether or not Walden's bashfulness was unique, I checked the list of House pledge-takers in California, a State in which I lived for 40 years. I searched the web sites of the first 5 Representatives on it: Wally Herger, Tom McClintock, Dan Lungren, Jerry Lewis and Jeff Denham. None of them mention taking the pledge. It suggests that they aren't particularly proud of it and don't want most voters to know about it. You'd think that they

**Why would you take this juvenile pledge and submit yourself to the ministrations of Grover Norquist?**

would proudly display and clearly explain any heartfelt pledge to their constituents.

Feel free to peruse Grover's lists for candidates near you and check their web sites and campaign literature to discover how many prominently display or even mention their Pledges. Let me know if you find any. I haven't got time to look for needles in a haystack.

The preceding evidence testifies to Grover Norquist's ownership of the pledge and to his control of pledge-takers. More evidence follows.

#### **Why do politicians take this pledge?**

Think about it for a minute. You are a rational politician who favors lowering taxes and reducing the size of government, whenever doing so is prudent. Why would you take this juvenile pledge and submit yourself to the ministrations of Grover Norquist? Why not make your own pledge, in your own words, with appropriate contexts, and proclaim it to your constituents, like a mature adult? There have to be substantial and immediate benefits for signing this particular document and sending it in to Grover. There are.

By taking this specific pledge a politician:

1. Immediately acquires conservative credentials from Grover and automatic backing by the Republican Party and the Tea Party...essential to win Republican primaries.
2. Receives a mountain of campaign money and attack ads on opponents from the wealthy individuals and corporate CEO's who believe that they will prosper by lowering their own taxes or by crippling Federal and State governments. Campaign funds are even more critical since the [Citizens United decision](#) of 2010 made election campaigns much more expensive.

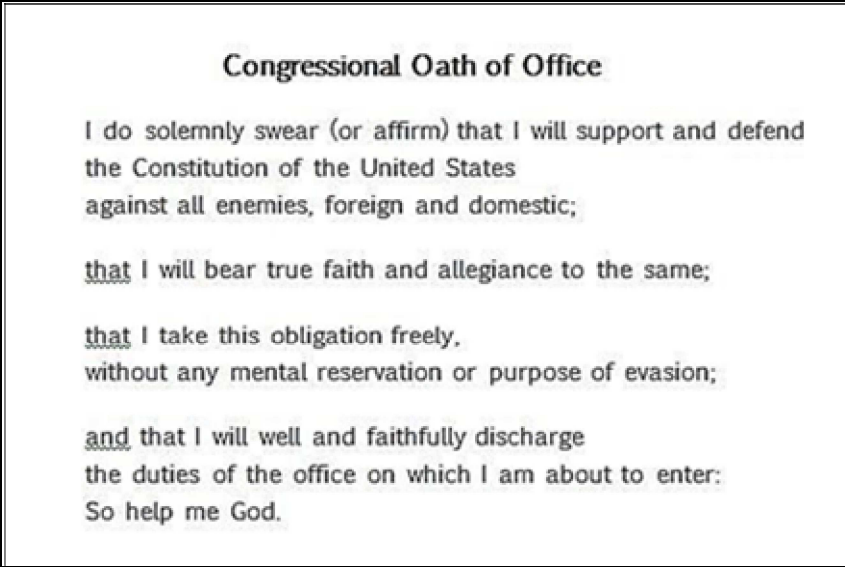


Figure 2. The Oath of Office as given since 1884. It is taken by raising one's right hand and reciting the Oath. Prior to 1884, the Oath consisted of only the the first eighteen words.

3. Receives votes from a significant minority of independents and Democrats who, without considering any nuances, [prefer politicians who take a no-tax increase pledge](#).
4. Becomes part of a winning, cohesive group which provides a sense of belonging and relieves him of personal responsibility for his words and actions. All speak with a single voice orchestrated by Grover.
5. Gets to treat everyone outside the group as devils that must be defeated and never compromised with. Does not have to respect them as fellow citizens, consider their priorities, or develop working relationships with them.
6. Might get a "Hero" award and other atta-boys from Grover Norquist.

According to Eric Hoffer, in his classic study of extremists "The True Believer," items 4 and 5 are the primary attractions for followers who enlist in mass movements. A devil to hate is the group's primary unifying force, and group membership relieves the individual of personal responsibility for all dirty tricks and dastardly deeds done to the devil. Hitler's devils were the Jews and all those who co-operated with them. Grover's devils are governments and all those who try to preserve them.

**Why do they hide their pledges?**

1. To minimize the odds of looking like a fool or an extremist to independent voters. Very few outside the conservative movement ever visit Grover's website to see who is on his lists.
2. They are somewhat embarrassed at having made a Faustian bargain in which they sold out their independence and personal integrity for money and political power.
3. They sent their only copy to Grover!

**The Congressional Oath of Office**

The Congressional Oath of Office, shown in Figure 2, is a simple, raise-your-right hand, verbal, oath taken by each Representative and Senator at the start of each term. It is an affirmative oath [to protect and defend the Constitution](#). It is an ennobling oath from trusting citizens who presume that everyone who takes it is a rational adult and will act honorably.

It is a self-monitored oath. There are no enforcement mechanisms in Congress or elsewhere. Those who violate it by voting in favor of special interests to the detriment of the Constitution are neither chastised nor punished. In short, it is in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution which presumes that informed, honorable citizens will

govern themselves without specifying how they will vote. It encourages individuals to work in the best interests of the nation, as they understand them. It is like the first two Commandments.

Many have dishonored this Oath of Office in the past, many dishonor it today, and many more will dishonor it in the future. And yet, it has no self-appointed vigilantes to punish transgressors. Our democracy has functioned successfully for more than 200 years because most Representatives, Senators and Presidents have adequately honored their Oaths of Office and put nation ahead of self or political party to the best of their abilities.

I submit to you, from the evidence presented, that the Norquist oath dishonors and corrupts the Oath of Office. It imposes mental reservations about defending and

protecting the Constitution. For those Norquist pledge-takers who develop some qualms of conscience, let me suggest that they boldly proclaim this modified Oath of Office when next they take it:

*“ I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, **with only one** mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter **unless that support or defense requires any increase in taxes as defined by Grover Norquist: So help me Grover.**”*

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**(To be continued)**

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