

'Affordability' Costs a Bundle

Republicans need a free-market answer to Democrats' turn toward socialism.



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Donald Trump works the McDonald's drive-through line in Feasterville-Trevose, Pa., Oct. 20, 2024. WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

In his 1968 book, "The Joys of Yiddish," Leo Rosten defines chutzpah this way: "that quality enshrined in a man who, having killed his mother and father, throws himself on the mercy of the court because he is an orphan."

Today in Washington, we have a new example. It comes in the form of Democrats who have spent years making life more expensive for Americans—and who propose "fixes" that reflect the same government-first thinking that made things unaffordable in the first place. Does anyone really believe that the answer to what ails us is more government spending or yet another government program?

This should be an opportunity for President Trump and Republicans. **They could point out that most of the time Democratic proposals to make things affordable simply shift who gets stuck with the bill.** Where were the Democrats now hollering about affordability during the four years when President Biden was spending, regulating and otherwise expanding government in ways that priced the American dream out of reach for millions?

Take one example. When Mr. Biden entered the Oval Office in 2021, the median age of first-time home buyers was 33. Today it is a record 40. For many families, that means they can't even think about buying a home until their children are grown.

As we went to press, the president was preparing to speak at the [McDonald's](#) Impact Summit Monday evening, addressing franchise owners and suppliers. It's a good venue for him, as America saw last year during the campaign when Mr. Trump worked a McDonald's drive-through. This time it's part of his response to the Democrats' affordability message.

The Democrats have an answer, but it's wrong: socialism. It wasn't that long ago that Bernie Sanders was a gadfly from Vermont. But with the Democratic Socialists of America's Zohran Mamdani's decisive election as mayor of New York City—and fellow socialist Katie Wilson triumphant in Seattle—these socialists are threatening to transform the Democratic Party in their image. On

Sunday on Fox News, a Democratic former chief counsel to the House Judiciary Committee, Julian Epstein, summed up where the party is.

The problem with the Democratic Party “is that all the energy and charisma is with the socialist left,” Mr. Epstein says. “The moderates are a dying breed. . . . Right now moderates have no leverage, they have no organizing principles, they have no ideas, and that’s why the party is going increasingly left.”

Republicans have their own challenges. For one thing, no one is going to confuse Mr. Trump with Adam Smith. What the country today needs is less government, lower taxes and lighter regulations to unleash the creative energies of the American people. But instead of so bold an agenda, Republicans offer better management, which isn’t enough.

Mr. Trump has had incredible achievements in his push to get America back to work. But he hasn’t hesitated to intervene in the economy, notably by imposing tariffs. Last week he was compelled to roll back duties on more than 200 agricultural products, including coffee and beef, because they were proving counterproductive.

It makes for a confusing message. The classic free-market approach is to recognize that government’s job is to create the conditions for Americans to better themselves. The government ensures a sound currency, the rule of law and space for people to use their talents in the marketplace. We elect Republicans (or we used to) not because they better manage the economy but because they know **it is hubris to assume that the smart people with political power can pick winners and losers and what the right price should be.**

Look at the three markets that affect American families most: education, housing and healthcare. It would be hard to find markets that have had as much government involvement as these. And what a disaster that has been—especially in the Democratic strongholds of America’s big cities.

Take ObamaCare. When Congress was considering the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Americans heard reassurances that even its most ardent defenders couldn’t believe. **Remember how ObamaCare would “bend the cost curve”—i.e., slow the rate of growth?** How about “if you like your healthcare plan, you can keep it”? How the bill wouldn’t add a dime to the deficit?

None of that turned out to be true. So here we are, 15 years later, and Congress is debating whether expanded subsidies, sold to the public as a temporary measure during Covid, should expire.

Americans are better off now than we were under [Joe Biden](#). But there lingers an unease over whether the American dream is really back. Americans aren’t going to like being told they are better off if they don’t feel it in their own families.