

Opinion: Obama is obstructionist to compromise

By Eric Cantor

For three years, Congress and the White House have been building to this moment. Not the debt limit or Obamacare specifically, but this clarifying moment of Washington dysfunction. President Obama has led us here by continually thwarting the will of Congress and dismissing its role in our constitutional republic. This must end.

The president not only has refused to negotiate on issues of debt and spending but also has mocked the very idea of engaging with Congress. President Obama has repeatedly made clear that he feels it is beneath the office of the presidency to work in a bipartisan way with the legislative branch.



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The Constitution gives Congress the power of the purse and the power to borrow. The president was given the power to veto measures, including those related to spending and borrowing. These separate powers created checks and balances but also forced the executive and legislative branches to work together.

As James Madison wrote in Federalist No. 48, "It is equally evident, that none of [the branches of the federal government] ought to possess, directly or indirectly, an overruling

influence over the others, in the administration of their respective powers.”

In the 224 years of our nation’s history, one party has controlled the House, Senate and White House for 130 years. President Obama enjoyed two of those years, and it’s no surprise he wishes that were still the case. Yet while 28 of 44 U.S. presidents have found a way to lead in divided government, this president has not.

In 2006, then-Sen. Obama said: “Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better. I therefore intend to oppose the effort to increase America’s debt limit.”

Seven years later, and after the nation’s debt had doubled, President Obama refuses to even sit at the same table as Republicans and work to solve the “debt problem” he correctly identified as a senator. That is a much larger failure of leadership.

This has, unfortunately, been the case since 2011. President Obama has often chosen to unilaterally circumvent the law under the guise of executive authority. Most recently, that was demonstrated in July with his delay of Obamacare mandates for corporations, but it has been a hallmark of this presidency.

Courts have held that President Obama violated the Constitution with certain “recess” appointments, ignoring the required consent of Congress. He has abused executive-branch “rule making” rather than working with Congress to pass laws. He has ignored the letter of the law when it comes to religious liberty and work requirements for welfare.

President Obama has used executive orders to unilaterally change U.S. immigration laws. His administration has used waivers to change laws such as No Child Left Behind to compel

states to adopt new policies.

In some of these instances, the president attempted to garner statutory authority, failed to do so and then acted in defiance of that. In other instances, he never bothered to find consensus and ignored Congress from the outset, usually contending that he simply had no choice. This is no way to govern, and it cripples the system of checks and balances that our Founding Fathers envisioned.

Working in divided government is not new. As recently as 1995, President Bill Clinton worked overtime with House Speaker Newt Gingrich to reach bipartisan compromise over the debt ceiling and to end a government shutdown.

Neither Clinton nor congressional Republicans got everything they wanted from those negotiations. They found consensus, and that consensus moved the country forward; they managed to balance the budget because they worked together.

Just two years ago, President Obama and House Republicans came to an agreement to raise the debt ceiling and implement much-needed reductions in spending. It wasn't a perfect agreement, but it, too, moved the nation forward. For the first time since the Korean War, the United States will have two consecutive years of reduced nominal spending.

After that agreement, the American people re-elected a divided government. They expect us to work together just as it was done in 2011, 1996, 1995 and years before – and they will not accept one party simply refusing to negotiate. Mr. President, let's sit down and talk. Let's reach consensus and end the "my way or the highway" attitude once and for all.

Eric Cantor, R-Va., is the House majority leader.