



On Election Day, November 2, 2010, more than eight million Americans voted for congressional candidates who claimed to represent the Tea Party and its grassroots insurgency against the federal government. Most of the Tea Party candidates won. Their victory marked a sea change in American government.

Even before the winners were sworn in, reporters began to refer to the 112th Congress as “the Tea Party Congress.” On the day of the swearing-in, the prominent Tea Party backer David Koch likened the electoral success of the Tea Party to the American Revolution. “It’s probably the best grassroots uprising since 1776 in my opinion,” he said.

The proposals of the new Congress had little in common with the revolutionary slogans of 1776, but many of them would be familiar to activists who had participated in the grassroots uprisings on behalf of the rich in the twentieth century.

On January 5, for example, House Republicans introduced a “balanced budget amendment” that was really a tax limitation amendment—modeled on the precedents that the National Taxpayers Union and the National Tax Limitation Committee had furnished in the 1970s. A flurry of other balanced budget amendment bills followed. On January 23, Senate Republicans, led by Orrin Hatch, introduced a tax limitation/balanced budget amendment bill of their own that was even more restrictive.

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