

David Hadley: What I learned in a visit to Occupy Los Angeles

By David Hadley Beach Cities Republican Club

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This past weekend, I took a self-guided tour of Occupy Los Angeles. I put on my grungiest Red Sox T-shirt, parked a safe distance from City Hall and headed over.

For those paying bills rather than paying attention, Occupy Wall Street began in mid-September in New York. The movement has since spread to dozens of cities around the nation. Last weekend, Occupy L.A. totaled a few hundred tents and at least a couple of hundred people.

This is how I would summarize what I learned:

Motivations seemed as much social as political. Occupiers are undoubtedly motivated by their political demands. But for many, participating in the (counter) culture of protest also seemed like fun. Young people were flirting. At noon Sunday several were still asleep. People were walking back from Starbucks with their favorite beverages. I sat through a pretty bad course on basic economics, where we were interrupted by a guy looking to borrow a truck so he could drive to a farmers market for that evening's foodstuffs.

The L.A. occupiers are not as single-issue as the media have reported. Yes, there are plenty of signs vilifying banks and the rich, or calling to end corporate greed and get money out of politics. But these signs are swimming in a larger sea of grievances. Ban GMOs (genetically modified organisms) in food. Legalize marijuana and end the drug war. Advocate for LGBT rights. There were "pro-life" signs, but if you read the fine print they were advocating animal rights, not opposing abortion.

To the extent the protesters' demands are political, they are mostly seeking to suspend the law of scarce resources. Eliminate school debts. Make health care a right. Jobs for all. Improve pay for public school teachers and first responders. In the hundreds of signs I saw, I did not see a single mention of our \$15 trillion federal debt or our unsustainable federal, state and city budget deficits. It felt like a house party, without the house.

The occupiers' partisan sympathies are with the Democrats. There were multiple jabs at the "do nothing" Congress, echoing President Barack Obama's conviction that "we can't wait" to pass his jobs bill. Of course, we were able to wait until stimulus, ObamaCare and the financial legislation

passed, until Congress took a run at cap-and-trade and until the president got back from Martha's Vineyard this September.

The occupiers are not leaving anytime soon. For the protesters, what's not to like? I counted seven port-o-potties and I even saw a Sparkletts water cooler with multiple 5-gallon jugs on hand. I don't know the financial condition of Occupy L.A., but reports are that Occupy Wall Street is sitting on \$500,000. And at least in L.A., there will be no snowstorms. As long as the money, the free love and the sunscreen hold out, and as long as the activists who dominate L.A. city government smile upon them, this could run for a while.

This ain't no Tea Party. The similarities between Occupy L.A. and the Tea Parties are approximately zero - and I have been to both. The Tea Parties are political, conservative, specific and tactical. Their political goals are to reduce U.S. government spending and deficits before it is too late to change course and to restore limited government under the Constitution. Their tactical approach has been to work within the Republican Party to avoid splitting the moderate-conservative vote, but to retain an identity and a culture that enable the Tea Parties to exert continuing influence within the GOP. The Occupy movement is vague in its left-wing goals and proud of its lack of a plan.

The biggest contrast between the Tea Parties and the Occupiers is how they see the U.S. The occupiers appear to see the U.S. as fundamentally unjust. Some occupiers call for revolution and believe they are developing a consensus-driven "direct democracy" that is superior to representative government. Tea Partiers recognize the morality, success and progress of the U.S., and have worked aggressively within our political system to effect change.

If I had to make a prediction, future historians will give the Tea Parties some credit for being our first large-scale grassroots effort to fight the looming bankruptcy of the U.S. government, while the Occupy movement will not be remembered at all - except perhaps as a sign of left-wing frustration near the end of Barack Obama's one-term presidency.

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