

Thomas Friedman's [column](#) laments that the Republican Party is no longer offering solutions to pressing national problems. It's also common to see similar laments about current conservative thinkers in contrast to an earlier generation like Milton Friedman.

It seems to me that much of the problem is that most of the tools that can actually be used to address policy issues are no longer considered acceptable by many Republicans and conservatives. If you have no tools to solve a problem, all you can do politically is to insist that the problem does not exist, is really a blessing in disguise, or will be automatically solved by the market and technological progress.

Consider the number of policy tools that are now considered unacceptable or at least very problematic by the Right:

1. **New regulations.** Not acceptable — except to control sex and reproduction; immigration; recreational drugs; and infringement of intellectual property rights.
2. **Taxes.** Completely unacceptable. Too bad for all the economists who favor emission taxes.
3. **Subsidies and tax exemptions.** Sometimes permissible but increasingly suspect, not to mention fiscally difficult today.
4. **Cap and trade.** Formerly in vogue with the Right, but now verboten.
5. **Information mandates.** Resisted because releasing information may increase pressures for regulation or embarrass businesses.
6. **Government-business collaboration.** These raise fears about favoritism or picking winners. In addition, it's hard for the government to work with business when it has nothing to bring to the table.
7. **Legal liability.** Still recommended on occasion, as in Ron Paul's approach to environmental regulation and in "free market environmentalism." But increasingly suspect: litigation involves trial lawyers, a reviled group, and gives authority to judges, which poses a risk of judicial activism.

What policy tools are left? Only tax cuts and deregulation — which is why they're touted as the solution to every social ill. If those don't work, the only remaining option is prayer.