Photo: NY Times

It slipped under the radar screen due to all the furor over the impending government shutdown, but the *NY Times* ran an important article two weeks ago about the debt ceiling. The Republican plan is apparently to condition their agreement to raise the debt ceiling and save the country from default on a massive regulatory rollback. This effort, if successful, would mark a huge power shift from the Senate and the President to the House of Representatives. Here are just some of the House GOP's demands:

1. Construction of the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

2. Offshore oil and gas production and more permitting of energy exploration on federal lands.

3. Rolling back regulations on coal ash.

4. Blocking new EPA regulations on greenhouse gas production.

There is also a roster of non-environmental measures dealing with financial regulation, health care reform, medical malpractice lawsuits, and Medicare. If this gambit succeeds, the bill to raise the debt ceiling will be the most important single piece of legislation in decades.

It's not unprecedented for one branch of a legislature to grab the power over government for itself. Starting around 1700, the British House of Commons started using its control over spending and taxes to eliminate the power of the House of Lords and of the King. Ultimately, the King became a figurehead, with the executive branch totally under the control of the Commons, and the House of Lords faded into insignificance. Could something like that happen today? Perhaps so, if the House succeeds in its current effort to leverage the vote on the debt ceiling into a broad legislative program.

If the House can override the rest of the government by threatening the country's financial standing, that just might be a step toward a parliamentary system of government by the

House of Representatives. After all, if you can lose the White House but use a majority in the House to enact the losing candidate's platform, the rest of the government could become something of a sideshow.