

To the battle stations

By [David Heim](#)

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Arthur

Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute, [has been writing op-eds](#) based on his new book, *The Battle: How the Fight Between Free Enterprise and Big Government Will Shape America's Future*.

His

title captures the frenzied tenor of current politics—it's an all-or-nothing battle. Either the side of "free enterprise" wins or the side of "big government" wins. The two sides represent antithetical ways of thinking, Brooks says, and he rails against what he sees as the radical "big government" programs of President Obama.

Actually,

it's almost entirely the free enterprise folks who imagine that free enterprise and big government are incompatible. As Jonathan Chait points out in a [stellar review](#) of the book, Democrats, including Obama, extol entrepreneurs and free enterprise at every opportunity. Democrats constantly defend government programs on the basis of how they will help businesses be more competitive. There is no anti-free enterprise party in America.

Furthermore,

the vast majority of free-enterprise-loving Americans are quite happy with the big government benefits of things like Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, food and drug rules, child labor laws and financial regulations.

So

where, really, is the battle—except in the fevered imaginations of people like Brooks?

Chait

suggests that the fiscal difference between Democrats and conservative Republicans comes down to this: Democrats would put government spending at about 25 percent of GDP, while conservative Republicans would peg it at 19 percent.

So

our all-or-nothing war for the soul of America comes down to the advantages and disadvantages of 6 percent of the economy? You might think we could have a civil, fact-based debate about that.