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The Home-Front War on Taxes

With the blitzlike speed of his generals, President Bush has come out fighting for his disastrous plan for more upper-bracket tax cuts, which will only stoke the nation's record levels of deficit spending and deepening debt well beyond his incumbency. In a Rose Garden plea for his economic "growth" package yesterday, Mr. Bush artfully adapted his war-room posture to link applause lines for the Iraqi success thus far with fresh appeals to rally behind a new battle against the dividends tax.

The president made a political couplet of the two themes of patriotism and tax cuts in trumpeting his resolve to cash in his personally high poll ratings from the war for a tax cut that most Americans are wary of. Unlike Mr. Bush, they seem to be aware that continuous tax reductions at a time of heavy wartime expenses are going to reduce the chances of creating much-desired programs like prescription drug coverage for the elderly, or financing for the education initiatives that the president once seemed to think were so important. Now Mr. Bush is asking for more, please, including "at least" the \$550 billion, 10-year cut pending in Congress.

It is incredible to see a wartime president demanding a tax cut that would, in an instant, require a record \$984 billion increase in the national debt, to \$7.384 trillion, with annual deficits of \$400 billion and more under a Republican Party that once bragged of budgetary rectitude.

The president's new full-court press for tax cuts is scheduled to include dozens of Bush surrogates, fanning out across the country while Congress is in recess to argue his case. Their main target is a few principled Senate Republicans who have joined with Democrats to demand that the tax cut be limited to \$350 billion. That is hardly a bargain for taxpayers, who will still be saddled with bigger deficits, debt and program shrinkage as future bills and borrowing come due.

Still, the resistance of the G.O.P. dissenters is not acceptable in Mr. Bush's renewed detaxation mania, and those Republicans must stand fast against selling out as the White House sends a platoon of emissaries to the states to lobby for the maximum cut.

Unlike his father, President Bush is leaving no gap in turning back to the troubled economy a day after the Pentagon began pronouncing the war over. Political attention is one thing, fiscal wisdom another. The Rose Garden was filled with small-business executives, but not mainline economists like Alan Greenspan. They are warning that the Republicans' doctrine of extended deficit spending and tax cuts will crimp the economy and interest rates in a grim future in which the government must borrow more and more to stay afloat.

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