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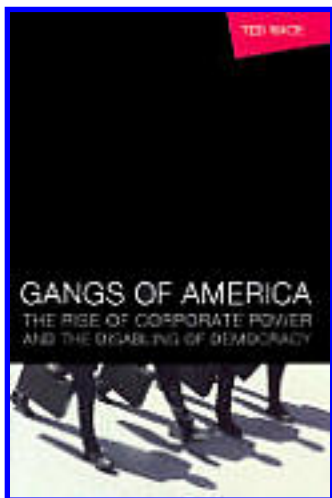
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A Budget Built on Common Sense

By [Rep. Lynn Woolsey](#), [AlterNet](#). Posted [March 8, 2006](#).

We can repair our threadbare social safety net without a single tax increase or one additional dime in federal spending.

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A decade after coming to power on the promise that they, and they alone, could put us back on the path to fiscal righteousness, Republicans have run the nation's finances into the ground.

With Congress' blessing, President Bush has turned out to be a shameless profligate, throwing fiscal caution to the wind and splattering the nation with red ink. His policies have turned a projected \$5.6 trillion surplus (over 10 years) into a projected deficit of \$3.3 trillion. That's a staggering \$8.9 trillion fiscal reversal. With every second -- every single tick of the clock -- that this administration is in office, it is responsible for adding roughly \$680 to the federal deficit. An American child born today will inherit a promissory note -- which might as well be a tax increase -- of more than \$27,000.

And yet, for all of President Bush's drunken-sailor spending, precious little of it has been invested in empowering people who desperately need a hand-up from their government to rebuild their lives. Instead, the president has fattened up the Pentagon, ladled out tax breaks for wealthy individuals and pried open the treasury for the oil, insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

It's time to rearrange our federal budget priorities, which have become completely distorted on the Republicans' watch. It's nothing short of scandalous that a nation spending trillions of dollars a year would tolerate a threadbare social safety net. Take it from a former welfare mother like me -- programs like Medicaid and school nutrition are a lifesaving last resort for millions of American families.

It's time to question the hallowed, untouchable status of some of our bigger budget items. For example, it's been an open secret for years that the Pentagon is rife with waste -- remember the \$600 toilet seats of 1980s lore? Fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the sclerotic Pentagon bureaucracy is still fighting the Cold War, still procuring weapons systems that have nothing to do with the security threats we face today.

So today, I'm joining my fellow Congressional Progressive Caucus co-chair Barbara Lee in

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introducing the [Common Sense Budget Act](#) (CSBA), which would divert \$60 billion of unnecessary Pentagon spending to underfunded domestic priorities. Among the cuts: \$7 billion from the National Missile Defense Program and \$13 billion to reduce the American nuclear arsenal to 1,000 warheads.

These obsolete Pentagon expenditures have been identified by a team of military experts led by defense scholar Lawrence Korb, whose knows a thing or two about what and how the Pentagon spends -- he was President Reagan's assistant secretary of defense for Manpower, Installation and Logistics.

The \$60 billion would be reallocated as follows:

- Children's Health Care: \$10 billion annually to provide health care coverage for the millions of uninsured American children.
- School Reconstruction: \$10 billion over 12 years to rebuild and modernize every public K-12 school in the country.
- Job Training: \$5 billion per year to retrain 250,000 Americans who have lost their jobs because of foreign trade.
- Energy Independence: \$10 billion each year to kick the imported oil habit by investing in efficient, renewable energy sources.
- Homeland Security: \$5 billion a year to make up for funding shortfalls in emergency preparedness, infrastructure upgrades and grants for first responders.
- Medical Research: \$2 billion a year to restore recent cuts to the National Institutes of Health budget.
- Global Hunger: \$13 billion a year in humanitarian assistance that allows poor nations to feed 6 million children who are at risk of dying from starvation every year.
- Deficit Reduction: \$5 billion devoted to putting a dent, however small, in the \$8.2 trillion national debt.

We can do all that, without a single tax increase or one additional dime in federal spending. And the right wing can save the demagoguery about patriotism and supporting the troops -- this legislation doesn't touch outlays for the war in Iraq or the so-called war on terrorism. Those are funded separately through a supplemental appropriations process. We're simply talking about diverting that fraction of our overall defense spending that is doing nothing to defend us.

In addition to Mr. Korb and the military advisers, we have developed this legislation in collaboration

with [Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities](#) (BLSP), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization of 650 top corporate executives from companies like Goldman Sachs, Hasbro and Phillips-Van Heusen. BLSP is behind this bill not just because they have a moral compass, but because they are businesspeople who understand that these investments in human capital will create jobs, improve the business climate and create economic opportunity.

Even when Republicans catch a case of buyer's remorse, they still manage to get it wrong, by reining in exactly the kind of spending we need most urgently.

Case in point: the debate over budget reconciliation last fall. Post-Katrina, when the government pledged billions to help rebuild the Gulf Coast, a group of Republicans pressured their leaders into debating (and eventually adopting) budget cuts to offset the Katrina spending.

Can you guess which programs ended up on the chopping block? Of course, the ones that our most vulnerable citizens depend on -- Medicaid, Food Stamps, public housing, foster care, student loans, child support enforcement, etc. As part of the relief effort for people who've lost everything, we took from people who have virtually nothing.

We left untouched the slice of the federal pie reserved for the defense contractors and corporate welfare queens, while telling poor children who need immunizations that they really need to tighten their belts.

But why the imperative for Katrina offsets in the first place? When did the people who abandoned pay-as-you-go budgeting suddenly become interested in balancing both sides of the ledger? Where were the offsets for the billions upon billions in spending that put us in this hole in the first place?

Republicans pick the most curious moments to exercise fiscal restraint. Tax windfalls for heirs to inherited wealth? Throw down the national credit card. An unnecessary war, involving the invasion and occupation of a sovereign nation, at a cost of a cool quarter of a trillion dollars? Just send the bill to my grandchildren.

But a national emergency in which a major American city drowns? Whoa, that sounds expensive. A natural disaster that leaves hundreds of thousands of our own people homeless? In that case, don't stop pinching pennies until every last grant is paid off in full! And whatever you do, don't touch the Pentagon budget. Because what that destitute Louisiana family needs above all is a space-based shield to intercept the imminent Russian missile attack.

This is no way to run a country, no way to manage a nation's finances. A new fiscal approach is long overdue.

The Pentagon, which already consumes roughly half of all discretionary spending, can make do with 15 percent less. Cutting \$60 billion would actually bolster the national defense, because weeding out

the waste would allow the military to focus on the weapons, training and tactics that truly keep the nation safe. What better serves the cause of national security? Investment in first responders, energy independence and global nutrition ... or billions that we're still pouring into the F/A-22 Raptor, which was designed to outpace Soviet fighter jets?

The Common Sense Budget Act represents a dramatic shift in our fiscal priorities, an almost revolutionary rededication to investing in our people. The money is there, if we choose to find it, if we choose to take on the sacred cows and the entrenched interests that perpetuate them.

[Lynn Woolsey](#) represents California's Sixth Congressional District and is a member of the [Congressional Progressive Caucus](#).

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YES!

Posted by: rsaxto on Mar 8, 2006 3:10 AM [\[Report this comment\]](#)

Lynn Woolsey is such a practical, responsible and moral lady that it's a shame that the current corrupt white house hates decent people like her who want to do good instead of forever killing and maiming.

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[» RE: YES!](#) Posted by: klaus_in_ohio

Good luck

Posted by: MegOnTheMountain on Mar 8, 2006 3:42 AM [\[Report this comment\]](#)

It's an excellent idea to frame the matter this way - i.e., "trading arms for poverty". And those are all good places to spend that money.

But as a former "welfare mom", couldn't you have thrown a few dollars into that program? You must know that TANF - the last hope for many single parents trying desperately to provide a life for their children while they get back on their feet - is a cruel joke that's only going to get worse soon.

With all the other cutbacks, the new TANF regulations haven't gotten much press. But the new requirements for work participation coupled with the underfunding of child care assistance, will result in higher noncompliance and devastating financial sanctions to families already struggling in deep poverty.

It'd be nice if the few people in power who have first-hand knowledge of programs like TANF would go to bat for those who are now going through the same troubles.

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A positive view for the future is nice to see

Posted by: thoughtcriminal on Mar 8, 2006 5:47 AM [[Report this comment](#)]

One criticism that can be leveled against people who are fed up with the criminal Bush administration is that "you are all just a bunch of complainers". This article proves that to be completely false. We do have politicians who are loyal to the American people, we do have civil servants and scientists who are not corrupt, and we even have businesspeople who care about their local communities.

These ideas and plans represent a positive way forward into a difficult future - a future beset by global warming, scarcity of food, water and land for a growing human population, and increased conflict over diminishing fossil fuel reserves.

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Yeah, right

Posted by: Moonray on Mar 8, 2006 5:54 AM [[Report this comment](#)]

Where were you Democrats in early '03, when the Bushies were planning the latest military debacle? In bed with them, of course, trying to out-jingo Rush Limbaugh. And it's been Democrats who have enabled the Bush military-budget orgy that began five years ago.

Of course, the military-industrial complex rewards you all with hefty campaign donations.

Your budget-cutting ideas are good, if too modest, and Democrats need to gain a lot more seats in Congress to really wield any clout. To win those elections, how about you Dems unilaterally setting a good example by publicly pledging to refuse campaign donations from all PACS, to refuse any and all gifts, trips and jet travel, pledge not to take jobs as lobbyists EVER and refuse to meet with any lobbyists in private?

If you set that example, maybe your party could reclaim the majority in Congress and really get something done. But I'm not gonna hold my breath . . .

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deficit is intentional

Posted by: guvdrone on Mar 8, 2006 6:01 AM [[Report this comment](#)]

While I agree with Lynn's plan I just want to point out that it seems that the intention of the White House is to cripple the US's capacity to provide social programs by reducing the cash on hand to pay for them. It was never their intention to balance the books and free up funds to pay for 'progressive' policies.

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