



A REVIEW OF NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS OPPOSING BUSH BUDGET PLANS

PREPARED BY: DEMOCRATIC STAFF, SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE

February 25, 2004

American Newspapers Speak Out Against President Bush's Deficit-Filled Budget - Many Oppose Additional Tax Cuts -

A Senate Budget Committee review of newspaper editorials from around the country indicates strong resistance to President Bush's budget plans. Comments ranged from mild rebuke of the President's spending policies to harsh criticism of the administration's continued insistence on more tax cuts despite record budget deficits.

The President's goal of cutting the deficit in half within five years drew considerable commentary, virtually all of it negative. Most newspapers dismissed the goal as phony and unattainable. Some accused the President of dishonest budgeting, charging that the White House purposely left out costly initiatives, such as funding for the war in Iraq.

While there was a good deal of commentary focused on the record deficits in the President's budget, a growing number of newspapers cautioned their readers about the more serious fiscal danger lurking just beyond the President's five year budget plan. The newspapers pointed out that the fiscal picture only gets worse later this decade as the baby boom generation begins retiring. The consensus seemed to be that the demands on Social Security and Medicare, coupled with the loss of revenue if the President's tax cuts are made permanent, will ensure massive and unsustainable deficits for as far as the eye can see. Their conclusion was that the nation's economic security was at risk.

In total, this document includes excerpts from 88 editorials from 41 states and the District of Columbia. This is not intended to be an all-inclusive list, as these editorials represent only those that have come to the attention of the Committee.

NATIONAL

Business Week: "Put Away The Wallet, Mr. Bush" February 2, 2004

"[T]he time has come for the U.S. to get its house in good financial order. That means the President must take steps toward balancing the budget to avoid an economic stall. Unfortunately, there are signs that he still hasn't made fiscal restraint a priority.

"In his State of the Union address on Jan. 20, Bush called on Congress to make the tax cuts enacted over the past three years permanent. While the cuts provided a valuable stimulus to the economy and smart incentives for investment, locking all of them in place indefinitely with no opportunity for trimming would make it difficult -- if not impossible -- to balance the overall budget. Another budget-buster is the President's proposal to divert a portion of Social Security taxes into personal savings accounts. The diversion would leave less tax money to pay current recipients of Social Security checks. If Bush doesn't want to default on obligations to today's seniors, he or his successors will have no choice but to siphon money from other government programs -- or borrow massive sums to keep the pay-as-you-go system from collapsing."

USA Today: "Budget avoids tough steps to deflate bloated deficit" February 3, 2004

"In spite of the flood of red ink, the administration's plan for tackling the problem is breathtakingly underwhelming. Though it promises to cut the deficit in half in five years, the administration avoids credible proposals for spending cuts or revenue increases to achieve that goal.

"No mystery surrounds how to actually put the budget back on track. The last two presidents, Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush, embraced tough spending curbs and tax increases that eliminated deficits. Those actions led to the first surpluses in more than a generation and contributed to a decade-long economic boom in the 1990s.

"The administration's plan to reduce the deficit falls short on three counts:

"Unrealistic cuts. Underestimated costs. Delayed expenses.

"The fiscal recipe for what works is well known. But as long as the administration remains unwilling to follow it, the hard answers will be left to future generations."

ALABAMA

The Birmingham News: "Fiscally Irresponsible President's Budget Drives Government Further Into Deficit" February 5, 2004

"Bush's budget, paired with his announced intention to push for yet more tax cuts,

indicates the administration has given up all but the pretense of trying to corral the government's red ink.

“This year - only three years removed from budget surpluses - the deficit is expected to reach a record \$521 billion. Next year, according to the overly optimistic Bush budget, the deficit will shrink to \$364 billion.

“But the president's budget doesn't include the cost of the continuing military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, which even the White House admits could add another \$50 billion to the deficit. Neither does it include the price of additional tax cuts. If the president has his way in Congress, the next round of tax cuts would tally \$1.1 trillion over the next decade; much of it to make permanent tax cuts set to expire over the next several years.

“[O]ne of the biggest ticket items in the budget is interest payment on the national debt - \$178 billion next year. Plus, high deficits contribute to the dollar's sagging value against foreign currencies, as well as inflation and higher interest rates.

“Bush projects the deficit will eventually decrease to \$237 billion in 2009. Yet even that is based in part on holding discretionary spending to 3.7 percent over the next five years. Based on past spending habits, that is pure pie in the sky.

“This isn't a budget the president should be proud of. In fact, it's fiscally irresponsible. A government at war and already deeply in debt simply can't simultaneously cut taxes and launch new spending programs.”

ARIZONA

The Arizona Republic (Phoenix): “Budget Buster; Our Stand: Bush Plan Adds Billions to Debt and Leaves Out Even More” February 4, 2004

“Gigantic. Unbalanced. Smoke. Mirrors.

“A lot of words come to mind when we look at President Bush's budget proposal.

“Unfortunately, ‘prudent’ is not among them.

“In the president's total budget of \$2.4 trillion, we would have to borrow more than one-fifth of the money we spend. Imagine how this would work in your household budget: You spend \$50,000, even though you only make \$40,000. Obviously, you can't keep doing this year after year.

“The massive deficit calls into question the president's insistence on additional tax cuts. The White House has constructed a potential time bomb: \$175 billion of reductions before 2009 would be followed by a whopping \$900 billion cut.

“To reach his target of halving the deficit within five years, Bush relies on a number of questionable assumptions and tactics.

“We need the president to write a budget that will solve our fiscal problems. Not add to them.”

CALIFORNIA

Alameda Times-Star: “Bush budget boasts sabers, security, domestic cuts” February 7, 2004

“President Bush presented a domestic program-unfriendly budget this week to Congress that is difficult to identify as a product of compassionate conservatism...[T]he voluminous document in principle is hard to support.

“It's hard to believe the administration expects freezes or cuts to social programs to help make a significant dent on the federal deficit...Much less credible, though, is the president's pledge to pare the deficit to \$268 billion by 2006, particularly in view of the herd of multi-billion dollar elephants standing in the White House.

“Leading the pack of super costly pachyderms is the administration's proposed \$1.1 trillion in additional tax cuts over the next decade -- \$900 billion of which would not kick in until after the end of a second Bush term -- but hustling in close behind are \$366 billion in projected increases over the next five years in spending on Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security. And, not even included in the president's budget, is the hefty matter of at least \$50 billion to maintain troops in Iraq -- even if the number of soldiers there declines by one-third.”

The Daily News of Los Angeles: “Budget by Polling; Bush's Budget Plan Tries to Do Too Much” February 4, 2004

“The president's push to go to Mars, to provide a prescription drug benefit for seniors and make the tax cut permanent are fiscally irresponsible.

“This is nothing more than budgeting by polling during an election year - give everyone whatever they want, never mind the costs or the consequences.”

Desert Sun: “Restraint needed in Bush space plan” January 20, 2004

“Moon base? Mission to Mars? Bush has his head in the clouds on this one, both figuratively and literally. In 2004, are there not more pressing issues right here on our home planet? The federal deficit is ballooning to mind-boggling proportions; the healthcare system needs a major overhaul; the poorest among us are not getting enough to eat; new jobs are desperately needed; there's still no cure for cancer; our

education system suffers under the weight of the budget-cut axe; and the Social Security is headed for dire straits when a flood of baby boomers retire in the very near future.

“These are domestic issues that need attention and funding - lots of funding. The money the president wants to earmark for space exploration could be put to better use right here on Earth. There is only so much money in the federal piggy bank. Let's make sure we have enough in the coffers to secure the well-being of future generations.

“C'mon, Mr. President. The American people are smarter than that. We need to be a little more fiscally responsible at home before we start shooting for the stars. Balanced budget first - moon base later.”

Los Angeles Times: “Bush’s Impossible Math” January 29, 2004

“The CBO says the deficit is headed for a record \$477 billion this year. Over the next 10 years, if the cuts become permanent, it projects a deficit of more than \$5 trillion. That indebtedness would reduce annual household income by about \$1,800 a year because of slowed growth. Such debt is costly to maintain, just like a chronic maximum balance on a credit card.

“President Bush claims he can tame the deficit by limiting growth in spending, excluding homeland security and defense, even while making tax cuts permanent. Considering the uncounted costs of war in Iraq and the pork-laden domestic spending spree that Congress has been on, including the pharmaceutical company bonanza of the Medicare drug benefit, there is no form of math that can do what Bush predicts.

“Federal revenue is drying up because of the tax cuts already in effect. Individual and corporate income taxes are expected to equal 8% of the economy this year -- the lowest level since 1942.”

Modesto Bee: “Bush Administration Repeatedly Fudges Facts” February 6, 2004

“[F]udging the facts is standard procedure for Team Bush...[D]eception is the central theme of the president's new budget...”

“Bush is arguing that extending the tax cuts is compatible with cutting the deficit in half by 2009. What he doesn't point out is that most of the fiscal impact of extending the tax cuts wouldn't hit until – you guessed it – 2009.

“Extending the tax cuts would put the country deeper into debt just as the baby boomers begin to reach retirement age and put enormous strains on Social Security and Medicare.

“But even the administration's low-ball estimates are a deception, failing to account for any continuing costs in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“[T]here's no excuse for hiding the facts. Whether the issue is Medicare prescription drugs or the budget or the war, a president's first obligation is to tell the truth. Only then can the country have an honest debate.

“That's a duty this president has repeatedly failed.”

Sacramento Bee: “Budget fudge; President plays ‘hide the numbers’” February 4, 2004

“Deception is the central theme of the president's new budget, which attempts to reconcile Bush's top priority - extending the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts for the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans - with the reality of the enormous budget deficits that priority has helped create.

“To that end, Bush is arguing that extending the tax cuts is compatible with cutting the deficit in half by 2009. What he doesn't point out is that most of the fiscal impact of extending the tax cuts wouldn't hit until - you guessed it - after 2009.

“It's bait and switch all over again.”

The San Francisco Chronicle: “Budget shenanigans” February 3, 2004

“The president's promise to halve the federal deficit of \$521 billion over the next five years is among his assurances deserving a skeptical look. The new defense budget...fails remarkably to include money for continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The projection of shrinking federal deficits, therefore, is based on iffy assumptions such as the flowering of peace in the Sunni Triangle, which would shrink the need for U.S. spending between now and 2009. The national economy, at the same time, has to keep growing at a vigorous pace to produce additional revenue in the face of huge tax cuts (\$1.7 trillion over 10 years) championed by Bush to the detriment of the budget surplus he inherited.”

COLORADO

Denver Post: “Deficit will force hard choices” January 23, 2004

“The sooner that politicians - and much of the public - realize that if you want government services, you have to pay for them, the better off our children and grandchildren will be.”

Rocky Mountain News (Denver): "Papering Over the Actual Deficit" February 4, 2004

"Now President Bush's 2005 budget has gone to Congress. This one too omits money for military operations that are certain to be ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Why not ask for \$64.1 billion, the average cost of military operations over the past two years?"

"The administration itself has a figure in mind: \$50 billion, reflecting the belief that the cost of fighting will taper off. So why not ask for \$50 billion and be pleasantly surprised if the need is less? Because every nickel of that \$50 billion will be borrowed, meaning that the 2005 deficit of \$364 billion would have to be carried in the budget as \$414 billion."

CONNECTICUT

Hartford Courant: "Why is the War Off Budget?" February 4, 2004

"[T]here are big holes in this document and they will not be filled merely by cutting discretionary spending, which accounts for only 17 percent of the budget.

"Mr. Bush's budget-builders have not included money to pay for America's ongoing military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq...Omitting this cost from the Pentagon budget -- which is slated to rise by 7 percent over current spending sans Iraq and Afghanistan -- masks the true cost of national defense and plays havoc with the president's plans to halve the deficit in five years."

DELAWARE

News Journal (Wilmington): "Jobs Disappearing" February 15, 2004

"Mr. Bush likes to say that his tax cuts have helped revive the economy. If that is true, it has done so in a way that has generated a new bull market on Wall Street but has failed to generate new jobs for those sent overseas by companies bolstering profit margins and stock prices through outsourcing."

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The Washington Post: "Bogus Budgeting" February 3, 2004

"The Bush administration's 2005 budget is a masterpiece of disingenuous blame-shifting, dishonest budgeting and irresponsible governing. The administration

mildly terms the \$521 billion deficit forecast this year 'a legitimate subject of concern,' but asserts that it has the problem well in hand: The deficit, it assures the country, will be cut in half by 2009. This isn't credible -- and even if it were, it wouldn't be an adequate answer to a problem far more serious than this administration acknowledges.

"Having presided over record deficits, the administration now wants to claim credit if it manages to cut the bloated number in half. Imagine someone who's been piling on extra pounds at an alarming rate. Trimming his annual weight gain from 30 pounds this year to 15 pounds five years from now still leaves him fat -- and getting fatter. The goal shouldn't be to cut the deficit in half; it should be to remedy the gap between what the government is spending and what it is taking in. To keep running up these deficits is to stick future generations with a tab they won't be able to afford.

"The biggest distortion is to present a snapshot of 2009 and stop there. Making the tax cuts permanent would cost \$132 billion in the coming five years, but \$936 billion through 2014. How Mr. Bush can adhere to this reckless course is the true 'subject of concern.'"

FLORIDA

Miami Herald: "A Federal Budget of Great Expectations" February 4, 2004

"President Bush's budget for 2004 is so far from reality that it can serve only to outline his priorities: Take from domestic programs, approve permanent tax cuts and stick future generations with the astronomical price tag.

"The price tag includes not having the resources to pay the bills when retiring baby boomers overwhelm Social Security and Medicare programs. This is irresponsibility on the level of parents living a lavish lifestyle of expensive purchases and luxury vacations then leaving their children with the bills.

"The country needs a realistic deficit-reduction plan, not an extension of tax breaks and cuts in vital services that hurt the middle class and working poor."

Orlando Sentinel: "Unbalanced; Our Position: President Bush's Budget Continues to Get Country in Deeper Trouble" February 3, 2004

"Mr. Bush's budget plan anticipates a record \$521 billion budget deficit this year, and a \$364 billion deficit next year. By 2009, when the deficit is projected at \$237 billion, the national debt will have expanded by nearly \$2 trillion.

"The payments to cover all that additional debt will crowd out spending for more

productive investments and make balancing the budget even harder in the future. The federal government will be borrowing at a time it should be saving to cover trillions of dollars in unfunded obligations for health and retirement benefits promised to the baby-boom generation.

“And the budget picture is worse than the White House is letting on, because the deficit projections after this year don't anticipate any spending for ongoing American military commitments in Iraq or Afghanistan. At the president's request, Congress has spent \$166 billion for those operations in the past year. Unless the situation in both countries radically improves, U.S. taxpayers will be on the hook for billions more in the future.

“Amid all the red ink, the president is still calling on Congress to make permanent the \$1.7 trillion in tax cuts passed since 2001. He insists the cuts will bring down deficits over time by spurring economic growth. But the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has projected that keeping the cuts would add \$2.2 trillion more to the national debt over the next decade.”

Sarasota Herald-Tribune: “Imbalanced tax policies; Costs of sustaining tax cuts are too high”
February 16, 2004

“[D]eficits do matter. Long-term deficits lead to higher interest rates. Government borrowing leaves less money for private-sector investment. Interest payments on the growing debt will near \$500 billion annually within a decade.

“Reining in the deficits is a vital task. And there is little doubt that Social Security and Medicare benefits will have to be curtailed as Baby Boomers retire by the millions.

“But cutting the benefits of middle- and low-income retirees who paid taxes their entire lives, in order to afford permanent tax cuts for the highest earners, amounts to class warfare.

“Bush's tax cuts disproportionately benefit the wealthy.

“Yes, the wealthiest Americans generally pay more in taxes than the poorest because the wealthiest make more money. But those poorest taxpayers pay a far greater percentage of their taxes to Social Security than the wealthy, since Social Security taxes are only paid on the first \$89,500 of wages.

“In effect, Greenspan is advocating a cut in earned benefits for the poorest taxpayers in order to fund a massive tax cut for the wealthy. That is fundamentally wrong.”

St. Petersburg Times: “A budget fantasy” February 4, 2004

“President Bush would have Americans believe that the budget he released this week

will fund the war against terrorism, halve the deficit and bring spending under control. The 2005 budget is, in other words, an exercise in fantasy.

“The entire document is based on a false assumption - that the current \$521-billion deficit can be tamed merely by controlling spending.

“The budget also ignores the dominant role Bush's massive tax cuts played in creating the deficit. Not only does the president fail to address that issue, he would put a greater burden on future budget-balancing efforts by making \$900-billion of those tax cuts permanent.

“If this budget is able to cast President Bush as fiscally responsible, it will be one of the great con jobs of all time.”

Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale): “We Can't Keep All Tax Cuts” February 20, 2004

“If the budget were balanced, or simply light on red ink, or if evidence of dramatic job gains from tax cuts were apparent, or if Congress significantly cut spending, then Americans could afford the luxury of keeping taxes at current rates.

“But this is not the case. Running large deficits as expensive commitments loom ahead is reckless. It risks driving debt deeper and forcing interest rates up, which could do severe damage to the economy.

“The administration must act responsibly by restraining spending and reviewing the tax cuts, looking for those taxes that can be phased back in.”

Tampa Tribune: “Bush's Election-Year Budget Ignores Looming Crisis” February 4, 2004

“Bush estimates the overall deficit for the next fiscal year will be \$521 billion. At about 4.5 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, the shortfall is affordable if it decreases in years ahead, as Bush predicts. What is most troubling is that it is about 70 percent higher than Bush estimated last year.

“Last year's forecasting mistake casts suspicion on optimistic economic assumptions for years ahead. Bush isn't even talking about paying for the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan until after the election. Those costs will probably be about 10 times the cost of all the programs he wants to cut.

“Before Bush can face the serious sacrifices needed to improve Social Security and Medicare, to say nothing of achieving fundamental tax reform, he and Republican congressional leaders must demonstrate a fiscal discipline that so far is missing this election year.”

GEORGIA

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution: "Free-spending budget fails to address greatest needs"
February 9, 2004

"In the name of fighting terrorism and preserving home security, the budget deepens an already gaping budget deficit. At the same time, the Bush budget proposes to make tax cuts permanent, while leaving unattended desperate needs in education, the environment and health care.

"The most offensive aspect of the budget is the deficit that will outlast this president and saddle our children and grandchildren with the nation's gargantuan debt. Since 2001, the Bush administration has turned a projected 10-year \$5 trillion surplus into an annual deficit that rises by 50 percent this year.

"Cutting the budget deficit in half over the next five years is a tall tale, derived in large part by omitting from the budget any mention of the costs of the occupation in Afghanistan or Iraq.

"The president insists that the cuts must be made because of the nation's growing military needs. But it is his stubborn insistence on making tax cuts permanent that has set the nation afloat in red ink."

HAWAII

The Honolulu Advertiser: "Reckless U.S. budget is our biggest danger" February 5, 2004

"It no longer is farfetched to argue that the greatest threat to America is not in Iraq or Afghanistan but in Washington, given the new federal budget released this week.

"It's hard to imagine a more dishonest document, given that it fails to include the cost of our continued military and reconstruction effort in Iraq and Afghanistan, and leaves out the cost of announced initiatives like Social Security privatization and space travel to Mars.

"[T]he White House says the problem is spending on poor people, through entitlements like welfare and Medicaid, when the real problem is huge tax cuts for rich people and lax tax collection from corporations.

"But even taken at face value, this budget is alarming...The national debt has just passed \$7 trillion and is on course to reach \$5 trillion more in the next 10 years.

"What a legacy for our children and grandchildren!

“The International Monetary Fund warns that the U.S. budget and trade deficits are a threat to the global economy.”

IDAHO

The Idaho Statesman: “Questions for Bush” January 22, 2004

“Bush praised Congress for helping him pass tax cuts -- saying the cuts put money in consumers' hands when it was most needed.

“Now Bush wants permanent cuts. He can't have it both ways. He can't trumpet the rebounding economy (when some indicators are up but job growth is at best anemic) and argue that permanent tax cuts are needed to create jobs.

“Then there is the question of the \$500 billion deficit, and whether America can afford permanent cuts.”

ILLINOIS

Chicago Tribune: “The budget disaster” February 1, 2004

“The president is expected to say the nation can cut the deficit in half in five years. But half of \$500 billion is still a dangerous deficit. And though Bush may say the right words about restraining spending, he has so far shown little inclination--make that none--to back those words with action.

“Bush still wants his temporary tax cuts made permanent, at a potential cost of doubling the nation's debt in a decade. He crosses his fingers that growth will resolve the deficit, but the nation will not grow its way out of chronic deficit spending. If the CBO's estimates are right, the U.S. will dig itself into an ever-deeper hole.

“Bush's new budget needs to show that he's not just mouthing the words on fiscal restraint and spending cuts. It needs to show he's going to reverse the trend lines and move the federal government toward a balanced budget.

“Given the Medicare bait-and-switch and the spending spree of the last two years, it's going to be hard to believe the president's budget numbers, no matter what they are.”

Peoria Journal Star: “Debt today may bury kids tomorrow” February 4, 2004

“Not to worry, the president says, he has things under control, and America can grow

its way out of this red ink. Unfortunately, this White House hasn't scored too many credibility points in the crystal ball department, either. It badly underestimated a 2004 budget deficit that, now climbing toward \$521 billion, obliterates the previous high.

“Uncle Sam will borrow some 22 percent of everything he spends this year. Nearly \$1 trillion has been added to the national debt in little more than two years. The Bush budget sets aside \$178 billion next year just for interest payments on that debt, a 14 percent jump over the previous year and nearly as much as it recommends spending on agriculture, transportation and education combined. Many budget watchers agree that chronic deficit-spending ultimately will drive up interest rates, discouraging private investment and stifling economic growth.

“The president may be sincere about not wanting to leave any child behind. But if he and the Congress aren't careful, the bills they're piling up today are going to bury that child tomorrow.”

INDIANA

Fort Wayne News Sentinel: “The tide of red rises...” January 28, 2004

“The news from the Congressional Budget Office could hardly be worse: It projects a budget deficit of \$477 billion this fiscal year and \$2.4 trillion in deficits over the next decade. Worse yet, President George W. Bush appears unconcerned. His administration claims to be working on a budget sequence that will halve -- not close -- the deficit by 2009.

“What a stunning failure of governance. Only three years ago, the CBO projected a \$5.6 trillion surplus through 2011.”

Indianapolis Star: “After spending spree, a dose of discipline” February 11, 2004

“Since Bush came into office three years ago, discretionary spending has increased 27 percent...Also factor in recent sluggish economic growth and large tax cuts. The result has been a return to gaping federal budget deficits.

“In 2000, the federal government recorded a surplus of \$236.4 billion. The deficit this year is expected to reach \$520 billion.

“The deficits aren't by accident. Bush took a calculated risk early in his presidency by pushing through income tax cuts at the same time federal revenues were slipping because of a national recession.

“The nation's economy has been steadily gaining strength, but the deficit could sap it

of any sustainable energy.”

IOWA

Des Moines Register: “Reject an irrational budget; Congress should be fiscally responsible and better balance priorities” February 4, 2004

“The plan is fiscally irresponsible. Congress should declare it dead on arrival.

“Bush's desire to continue to reduce taxes comes as the United States faces a \$521 billion deficit forecast this year. Tax cuts this year account for a \$272 billion loss in revenue. The president's plan defies the basics of running a household budget: If you're deep into your credit cards, the last thing you want to do is run up another charge account.

“It's a disingenuous budget that hurts America. Congress, charged with working for all Americans, should reject it.”

KANSAS

The Wichita Eagle: “Don't believe Bush deficit claims” February 4, 2004

“The Bush administration's new budget blueprint claims that it will halve this year's projected \$521 billion budget deficit in five years. Don't believe it.

“The budget forecast also is misleading in that some big costs explode in future years. For example, Mr. Bush's tax-cut proposal is expected to cost about \$175 billion during the next five years, but will cost about \$950 billion in the five years after that.

“Also keep in mind that excess Social Security revenue masks the real size of the budget deficits. Even with Mr. Bush's rosy budget projections, the deficit would be \$501 billion in 2009, if Social Security weren't included.”

KENTUCKY

The Courier Journal (Louisville): “A delusional budget” February 4, 2004

“President Bush has come forward with a proposed federal budget that should not be inflicted upon anyone who has moved beyond the third grade.

“Indeed, the very young are the appropriate audience for Mr. Bush's plans for the 2005

fiscal year. In part, of course, that's because the President's delusional vows to tame the exploding deficit and build a stronger economy through reckless tax cuts may appeal to those who still believe in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny.

“But a more serious reason would be that America's children, and perhaps even generations unborn, will have to pay for the President's dishonest and incompetent stewardship of federal finances.

“[T]he administration's strategy rests on misleading budgetary numbers, wholly unrealistic calls for fiscal austerity and a narrow focus that ignores the long-range consequences of the President's tax cuts.

“Finally, what really ought to worry Americans about the size of the Bush tax cuts - targeted, as everyone knows by now, toward the richest citizens and biggest Republican corporate backers - is what the administration is hiding.

“By emphasizing the next five years, the White House reduces the size of the numbers it has to acknowledge. For example, the tax cuts account for \$272 billion of this year's deficit, a little more than half.

“But bigger tax cuts are to come, and the President demands that Congress make them permanent. That step alone will cost the Treasury almost \$1 trillion by 2014.

“The White House doesn't want to look that far ahead. But voters should, and they should ask themselves: How will their children cope with such crushing debt?”

LOUISIANA

The Advocate (Baton Rouge): “Fiscal restraint AWOL in D.C.” January 30, 2004

“The nation's credit card bill today has a \$7 trillion-plus debt balance. Yes, that's trillion, with a ‘t.’ Make that a capital ‘T.’

“For the decade ending in 2013, the CBO projects cumulative deficits totaling \$2.38 trillion, almost \$1 trillion more than was estimated in August and \$3.7 trillion more than was projected a year ago.

“Bush also pressed Congress to make permanent the tax cuts passed during his administration, saying that failure to do so would result in tax increases for the American people.

“‘Unless you act,’ Bush told Congress, ‘Americans face a tax increase.’

“In truth, there is good reason to believe Americans already face inevitable tax increases to deal with the devastating deficits and soaring national debt. A disastrous

combination of colossal tax cuts and unbridled spending have turned Clinton-era budget surpluses into a red-ink tide in the three years since Bush and the GOP Congress came to power.

“Continuing the tax-cut-and-spend philosophy will only worsen the budgetary bleeding.

“Now Vice President Dick Cheney and others in the GOP, which supposedly prides itself on fiscal conservatism and damns Democrats as big spenders, excuse their own wastrel ways by declaring that deficits don't matter.

“We beg to differ. DEFICITS DO MATTER. Just ask any family that has overextended itself with crushing credit card debt.

“The president and Congress are in serious need of some credit counseling...”

The News-Star (Monroe): “President’s plan would drain river” February 20, 2004

“The commercial future of the Ouachita River hangs in the balance of President Bush's 2005 budget proposal. In it, he calls for cutting the Army Corps of Engineers budget for the river infrastructure by more than 80 percent.

“The president touts economic development and jobs, yet he tosses out a fiscal plan that undercuts a main cog of economic development for an entire region. That's talking out of both sides of his mouth.

“The administration's explanation for cuts to river systems, including the Ouachita, is a need to address the record deficits and the cost of the war on terrorism. True, but blatant cuts that will cripple an entire region are not the answer.”

MAINE

Portland Press Herald: “Bush budget doesn’t address growing debt” February 4, 2004

“If President Bush says in the fall campaign that he created a plan to reduce the federal deficit by half in five years, he would be lying.

“If Bush wants credibility on the deficit issue, he should submit a budget with honest numbers.

“No one should believe this budget will cut the deficit in half, and the president would be wise to drop that claim.”

MARYLAND

The Baltimore Sun: "Taxes and the beast" February 4, 2004

"[L]et's not forget how this gusher sprang from a Treasury that had been running a surplus - to a great degree not so much because of excess spending but because in Mr. Bush's first three years he handed out billions of dollars in tax cuts disproportionately benefiting the top 5 percent of households, those making more than \$145,000 a year. These cuts account for almost \$300 billion of the projected 2005 budget deficit of more than \$500 billion.

"The real choice before Americans isn't so much between guns and butter. It's between starving domestic programs or ending tax cuts that would give the top 1 percent of all taxpayers 90 times more savings than those received by the middle 20 percent."

MASSACHUSETTS

The Boston Globe: "President Spendthrift" February 3, 2004

"When it comes to budget deficits, President Bush is like a husband who gambles away the grocery money and then blames his wife for serving leftovers. His \$2.4 trillion budget, released yesterday, accompanies a record deficit of \$521 billion - not including whatever is spent on Afghanistan and Iraq. But Bush shrugs off responsibility for the deficits he fueled with his trillion-dollar tax cuts, and instead tries to shift the blame to Congress.

"Bush showed the flag for fiscal discipline in his weekly radio address Saturday, proposing to reduce the deficit by requiring that every dollar Congress wants to spend is matched by a dollar cut elsewhere. Surprise: Tax cuts would be exempt from this measure. Nowhere does Bush acknowledge the effect of this spending on the deficit, even as he implores Congress to make the tax cuts permanent. Bush has become both enabler of the spending addiction and enforcer in the party's 12-step program to control it.

"For a leader who makes so much of personal responsibility, Bush is remarkably untroubled about the bill coming due. But why not? He's got other people to pay for his spending and tax-cutting binge: America's children."

MICHIGAN

Detroit Free Press: "Deficit Deception" January 22, 2004

"Even if the nation can successfully trim back deficits during the next five years – and

that's a big if – the momentum will quickly reverse and deficit spending will escalate dramatically in the decade following Bush's five-year projection.

“Against this backdrop, Bush's request that Congress make all his tax cuts permanent is simply reckless. The country needs a thorough re-evaluation of the entire tax code to prepare for the boomers' retirement, not slogan-driven policy. In an era of global threats, America cannot allow an uncontrolled national debt to sap its strength.”

MINNESOTA

Star Tribune (Minneapolis): “It doesn't add up” February 3, 2004

“[T]he actual budget document is so full of holes and misrepresentations that it suggests the White House simply hasn't come to grips with the nation's pressing economic problems.

“The president bragged on Monday that his plan will cut the federal deficit in half by 2009. What he didn't say is that the deficit will drop by about half during that time even if he and Congress do nothing at all.

“Now the president is asking Congress for additional tax cuts, arguing that they will stimulate the economy and help the nation grow its way out of deficits. But Congress has passed three tax cuts in three years, including two since the recession ended, and the budget picture has gotten worse and worse each year. Why should voters still believe in this failed strategy?”

MISSISSIPPI

The Clarion-Ledger (Jackson): “Bush budget: Conservative orientation lacking” February 4, 2004

“Bush makes a stab at cutting spending, targeting 128 programs that he claims will go toward cutting a record \$521 billion deficit in five years.

“But his ‘cuts’ are only a slowing of the growth in spending, not actual cuts. Without increasing revenue, or letting his tax cuts expire, raging deficits will continue (\$100 billion in this budget alone).

“The war and a new Medicare prescription drug program are costly. Coupled with tax cuts, it's flowing red ink.”

MISSOURI

St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "Unwelcome Message" February 5, 2004

"Foreigners are now buying more than half of new Treasury debt. We'll be shipping our money abroad in interest payments. And if foreigners should suddenly panic and dump their U.S. assets, the whole economy could shiver. 'It would be something similar to what we've seen in Argentina,' said Brookings Institution economist Isabel Sawhill.

"In other words, this is a recipe for deep trouble.

"We can avoid this mess by adopting self-discipline today. [T]he Bush tax cuts... were a minor help in lifting America out of recession. But with the economy growing nicely, it's time to slowly phase them out.

"Mr. Bush...wants to make them permanent. That could raise the national debt by nearly a third over the next decade.

"The Bush tax cuts were a lovely gift to the wealthiest Americans. The bulk of the tax cuts go to people who don't need them.

"We also should immediately restore the estate tax, the fairest tax of all. It affects only the heirs of millionaires who reap windfalls purely through luck of birth."

MONTANA

Great Falls Tribune: "History's biggest issues on table in top race" February 16, 2004

"The federal budget usually is not a make-or-break issue on voters' radar screens, but it may be this time.

"After three decades of continual deficit spending, Congress and President Clinton - with an assist from a soaring stock market - finally were able to wrestle the budget into balance in 1998 for the first time since 1969.

"The surpluses that year and the next were the first back-to-back black ink at the federal level since the Eisenhower administration, 1956-57, and citizens were, if not exactly happy, relieved to see it.

"Since President Bush's election, his tax cuts have combined with war expenses and - surprising to some - agency spending hikes across the board to produce the biggest deficits in history. The record red ink is estimated at \$521 billion this year, more than \$991,000 a minute."

NEBRASKA

Omaha World Herald: "The Democrats' nominee and President Bush will have a lot to talk about in months ahead" February 5, 2004

"[T]here are some serious matters worth homing in on.

"One is the war in Iraq...Another is the economy, in the context of President Bush's proposed budget. Serious conservatives are decrying it as - sorry for the recycled terminology - voodoo economics.

"[T]he president has promised to cut the sizable budget deficit that is building, but he has offered no specifics."

NEVADA

Reno-Gazette-Journal: "What's happened to deficit hawks?" January 30, 2004

"[T]he current trend toward a flood of red ink...should concern even those who believe that a little deficit spending is a good thing, especially in times of economic troubles.

"A budget spinning wildly out of control will have an impact on U.S. society. Eventually it will lead to an increase in interest rates. It will stick our grandchildren with a heavy debt. And it certainly will add to the American taxpayers' unfortunate belief that it is possible to get something for nothing."

NEW JERSEY

Courier News (Bridgewater): "Tax cuts don't mix with cutting big deficit" February 3, 2004

"[T]he Bush administration, which unveiled its \$2.4 trillion election-year budget plan Monday, stubbornly refuses to accept that it can't have everything it wants.

"With so many factors driving the deficit higher, Bush's massive tax cuts already enacted in 2001 and 2003 should not be made permanent. The estimated cost to the budget is more than \$900 billion over 10 years, yet the president continues to push for permanence, saying the expanded reductions are necessary to continue fueling economic recovery.

"That is irresponsible planning at a time of extreme financial pressure on the federal government.

“It would require a truly blind - and foolish - leap of faith on the idea that the larger the tax cut, the better off the economy will be.

“It is also discouraging that Bush's plan to reduce the deficit sounds like little more than a vow to tighten the government's spending belt and an assumption of future economic growth.

“The tax cuts will play a big role in the debate. Making them permanent now would be a big mistake.”

The Record (Bergen County): “State of denial; Bush's speech leaves out the bad news”
January 22, 2004

“On the economy, the president took credit for the beginnings of a recovery that he attributed to his massive tax cuts, which will be targeted more and more to wealthy Americans in the coming years. But he left out the long-term damage those trillions of dollars of tax cuts will do to the nation in the form of an unprecedented federal deficit - that America's children will have to pay off. Even his description of the economic recovery was incomplete. He did not mention the fact that job creation is falling short of his goals, that 8 million people are out of work, and that a record 44 million people have no health insurance.

“He did glancingly acknowledge the rising costs of health care and urged Congress to act. But his suggestions were limited to small steps such as tax credits, which will do almost nothing to help the working poor and other struggling families.”

NEW YORK

Buffalo News: “The Federal Budget: Americans Will Begin to Feel the Costs of Tax Cuts”
February 4, 2004

“This administration's reckless fiscal policy continues unabated.

“Overall, it's a budget put in a straitjacket by tax cuts that benefit the affluent disproportionately. Meanwhile, no one knows when the deficits will begin to cause real harm to this country, but if this trend continues, it's only a matter of time.”

Daily News: “George W. Bush's Voodoo Economics” January 31, 2004

“Homeland security and the war in Iraq have contributed to the deficits. But far more important were Bush's \$1.7 trillion in tax cuts, most favoring the wealthy, and a 20% increase in U.S. spending between 2000 and 2003. And Bush isn't done yet. He's proposing to make the tax cuts permanent.

“Around the White House, it's an article of faith that cutting taxes will stimulate the economy, stimulating the economy will create jobs, the resulting prosperity will boost tax revenues - and, voila, the deficit will disappear. Or at least stop mattering.

“It's not working out that way. While the economy has begun to grow, it's not expanding fast enough to produce jobs. Meanwhile, Bush and his fellow Republicans have not lived up in the slightest to the GOP's reputation for fiscal discipline.

“Sooner or later, the sustained deficits will take a severe economic toll...get used to red ink for as far as the eye can see.”

The Journal News (Westchester County): “Tax (cut) and spend” January 28, 2004

“Republicans blame the deficit on the recession and necessary spending increases for defense, homeland security, the war in Iraq and rebuilding Afghanistan.

“There is also \$2 trillion in Bush tax cuts, beginning with the \$1.35 trillion cut in 2001 that Congress approved without requiring that it be paid for.

“The Wall Street investment firm of Goldman Sachs warned in its weekly newsletter last December: ‘The U.S. budget is out of control.’ It still is, and it's gotten worse.

“The president and Congress need to reimpose spending restraints that were allowed to expire last year. These include requirements that new spending be offset by other revenue or spending reductions and putting annual caps on program budgets. President Bush needs to do more than cut taxes and increase spending. He needs to cut up the credit card.”

Newsday (New York): “Pay As You Go; Don't mistake President Bush's offset proposal for real pay-as-you-go budget discipline” February 7, 2004

“With a budget wildly out of whack, Washington could use a dose of pay-as-you-go discipline. That simple concept, given the force of law in 1990, helped turn decades of red ink to black for the four years before George W. Bush became president.

“But the pay-as-you-go schemes that Bush proposed this week differ in key ways from those that worked in the past. Bush's rules would starve domestic programs and put a vise-grip on Social Security and Medicare spending, while exempting tax cuts for high rollers from the calculation. They're geared more to advancing the president's political agenda than imposing fiscal discipline.

“[T]ax cuts would not have to be offset by spending cuts, although tax cuts such as those Bush is pushing to make permanent would explode the deficit as surely as new spending. That's tax-cut fever dressed up as fiscal restraint.”

The New York Times: "The Pinocchio Budget" February 3, 2004

"The president's new budget proposal is an exercise in election-year cynicism. It calls for cuts in programs President Bush knows Congress will protect and future tax cuts he knows the nation cannot afford. Meanwhile, vital domestic programs, like environmental protection and housing for the poor, wind up as the sacrificial victims.

"[W]hen specifics pop to the surface, people will discover that a great deal is lacking -- including fiscal responsibility.

"The central fiction in the budget is that it constitutes the first step in halving the record \$521 billion deficit over the next five years. Mr. Bush accomplished that feat on paper, in part by pretending that there would be no additional costs for the military in Iraq and Afghanistan this year -- a supplemental request for an additional \$50 billion or so will presumably arrive safely after Election Day. He also ignores the long-term effects of his proposal to make permanent most of the administration's \$1.7 trillion in temporary tax cuts.

"Polls are beginning to show that the Republicans are losing their reputation with voters for fiscal integrity. The president's latest proposal will only feed their new image as budget buccaneers."

The Rochester Democrat and Chronicle: "V.A. and the tax cuts" February 16, 2004

"[U]nless President Bush and Congress drive more revenue into their budget by repealing tax cuts that benefit mostly the wealthy, the Canandaigua V.A., and places like it, have only a reprieve from the locked door.

"Veterans, and all Americans, simply can't have it both ways - major tax cuts and unaltered government services.

"The president and the Republican controlled Congress have squandered budget flexibility by pushing permanent tax cuts and pumping up military and national security spending to the detriment of other needs.

"In that climate of want, promises will come crashing. Bush pledged great things for the No Child Left Behind legislation. But his proposed 2005 budget undermines his own pledges on education, veterans affairs and other social programs.

"Take back the worst of the tax cuts and the picture improves. Until then, upstate V.A. facilities face a very unsteady future."

The Times Union (Albany): "A budget daydream; President Bush omits some heavy costs even as he predicts a shrinking deficit" February 4, 2004

"[T]he budget plan is a patchwork of missing numbers, rosy forecasts and unrealistic expectations. Congress has to take a stand. It can't continue to spend like a drunken sailor...Instead, lawmakers must demand a more complete and candid accounting from the White House...

"[B]y putting off hard choices himself, he must bear much of the blame for engaging in fiscal gamesmanship the nation simply cannot afford."

NORTH CAROLINA

The Asheville Citizen-Times: "Bush has no political cover for failing to staunch the nation's flow of red ink" February 2, 2004

"Bush has no political cover for failing to staunch the nation's flow of red ink.

"The administration of President George W. Bush is a walking fiscal disaster.

"He inherited an enviable situation where years of budget deficits had turned into, apparently, years of budget surpluses. Yet without even a full term under his belt he's already set two consecutive record budget deficits.

"Worse, the ceiling is nowhere in sight.

"Yes, we all felt great when we got those rebate checks in the mail the last couple of years for \$300 or \$600. But the fact is this administration was busy borrowing \$1,000 or \$2,000 in our name, sending us a cut and keeping the rest.

"Make no mistake, we will be billed later. Deficit spending is a tax increase that someone else gets blamed for later.

"The president, justifiably, talks a lot about national security. Fiscal sanity is national security, too. A bankrupt, debt-riddled country is not a secure one."

Charlotte Observer: "Fiscal Folly; What Ever Happened to Budget-Conscious Republicans?" January 23, 2004

"The government is gorging on money it doesn't have, and making commitments for future spending that in a few years will require either excruciating program cuts or massive tax increases.

"The problem is that President Bush and Congress have found that a tax-less, spend-more policy is a great way to make voters happy. They increased federal spending while pushing through massive tax cuts tilted toward the well-to-do. The result is predictable and scary: The federal government ran a deficit of \$374 billion in

the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30 and is anticipating a \$500 billion deficit in the current fiscal year.

“A deficit isn't necessarily a bad thing for a nation pulling out of recession. What's unsettling is that President Bush and GOP congressional leaders seem unconcerned about deficits - a dangerous state of denial for a nation on a collision course with fiscal reality. In 2011, the first wave of the 74 million post-World War II baby boomers will hit 65, and the demand on Social Security funds will skyrocket.

“The Bush tax cuts were too big and tilted too much toward the top of the income scale. Making them permanent, as deficits soar, would be folly.”

News & Record (Greensboro): “Bush's \$2.4 Trillion Budget Requires Some Remodeling...”
February 4, 2004

“Significantly, the president wants his \$1.7 billion tax cuts to remain intact. It is reckless economics to spend more, tax less, at a time when the economy is producing less revenue. Cuts that benefit the rich should expire; those that help middle- and lower-income families should be extended.

“Bush, along with Congress, thought America could have it all. It cannot. Fortunately, the president's \$2.4 trillion budget is not the final product. If American families followed the government's example, no household in the country could make ends meet.

“Congress should behave responsibly and retool the president's unwieldy pay-as-you-go plan.”

The News & Observer (Raleigh): “Funny Money” February 4, 2004

“The document President Bush sent Congress on Monday purports to be a budget. Yet it contains too many unknown quantities to be a budget in the usual sense, that is, a well-ordered -- perhaps even balanced -- set of expenses and revenues. It's more like a storybook full of wishes meant to end happily with Bush's re-election. The trouble is the book contains too many outrageous chapters for Congress to let it survive in its present form.

“The biggest wish of all in the president's budget proposal may be for the country to believe that he can cut taxes again and still reduce the federal deficit by half within five years. This budget does nothing about shrinking tax revenue but make it worse. And one thing the White House and congressional budget experts agree on is that revenue declines, due to tax cuts and other factors, are responsible for three-quarters of the fiscal deterioration since 2000.

“A deficit that continued to spiral out of control would be a dead weight on America's prosperity.”

Star News (Wilmington): "A budget we can't afford" February 4, 2004

"Somebody take away the president's American Excess card.

"He's spending like there's no tomorrow and sending the bills to our children, local taxpayers and anyone reckless enough to retire.

"He not only wants to perpetuate his tax cuts for the best off, but to cut their taxes even more.

"He wants to spend 22 percent more than the government takes in next year. To pay the interest charges on our revolving debt, he will shell out \$178 billion. And like a shopping addict with a pocket full of maxed-out cards, he's vowing to halve the debt in five years.

"As for the cataract of cash that's supposed to pour out of the treasury when baby boomers start retiring, Mr. Bush isn't talking about it.

"What he's talking about is giving 9.7 percent more to the Department of Homeland Security. That sounds reassuring, but he also wants to cut funding for those on the front lines - local police, firefighters and public health workers.

"That switcheroo is typical of the shell games in this budget."

Winston-Salem Journal: "Wanted: Budget Sanity" February 3, 2004

"Some federal spending increases are justified - education comes to mind. The problem is that the nation cannot afford the programs it desperately needs so long as Bush's ill-advised tax cuts remain in place."

NORTH DAKOTA

The Forum (Fargo): "Bush gone when bill comes due" February 8, 2004

"No traditional, fiscally responsible conservative can be pleased by the red-ink budget President Bush presented to Congress last week.

"It's a fraud -- a house of economic cards that can stand only by accepting the fictions the president and his advisers are using to prop it up. It is, by the president's own admission, incomplete. It does not take into account massive spending that the Bush administration has said it will ask for during the new budget cycle.

"The president does not want to talk about the fact that in order for his numbers to

click, he must use every cent of the Social Security surplus. The surplus gets sucked up because of the revenue-draining effects of tax cuts proposed by the president and passed by the conservative Republican Congress.

“More? Messing with Social Security is risky because in a few years (when President Bush is out of office and enjoying a comfortable retirement at the ranch in Texas) baby boomers will begin retiring. By 2014 they will be tapping into the benefits they expect. The president’s budget makes no provision for that economic and political time bomb.

“[I]t’s the dishonesty of the total budget package. It’s the attempt by the administration to pass this budget off as conservative and fiscally responsible.

“It’s not. It delays the inevitable. It transfers the burden of paying the bills from today to tomorrow. It misrepresents the components and size of future deficits. It sows the seeds of future interest rate hikes.

“[I]t’s a borrow-and-spend blueprint with the next generation being saddled with impossibly huge loan payments.”

Turtle Mountain Star (Rolla): “The GOP is in a bad place” February 16, 2004

“[T]he president is trying to rationalize a case for making tax cuts permanent in the face of historic deficit and little or no increase in spending on domestic programs.

“That’s just irresponsible and unrealistic.”

OHIO

Cleveland Plain Dealer: “A hat full of rabbits” January 22, 2004

“Bush, who during his first three years declined to veto any of the outlandish spending bills that crossed his desk, appears on one hand to have undergone an election-year conversion to some version of fiscal probity. But on the other, he can’t resist spreading the federal treasury over yet broader horizons. The conservatives in his party, their eyes on a deficit at \$500 billion and growing, are loudly questioning the depth of his grasp of financial reality.

“No president can simultaneously enact broader tax cuts, spend billions more, and bring the deficit under control. To many voters, that growing hole in the national purse speaks more directly to the state of this union than did all the president’s fine phrases.”

Columbus Dispatch: “Bush shows little concern for nation’s perilous finances” January 21, 2004

“Equally troubling was the president’s call for Congress to make permanent the tax cuts enacted since he assumed.

“Tax cuts without spending restraint result in deficits and a mounting federal debt. In this fiscal year, the federal deficit is expected to hit \$500 billion, the highest in the nation’s history. Long before 9/11, The Dispatch warned that the president’s tax-cut plan was reckless because it was based on optimistic projections showing federal budget surpluses for years to come. These projections ignored the possibility of an economic downturn or a costly war that could drive the nation into debt.

“To demand that Congress make the tax cuts permanent under present circumstances is fiscal insanity.

“In short, last night’s speech touched on every kind of security except the kind that makes all the others possible: fiscal security.”

Dayton Daily News: “Bush Playing Games On Budget Plan” February 9, 2004

“Mr. Bush is still proposing more cuts in future government revenues, via extensions of tax cuts that have been passed on his watch.

“He is not concerned, apparently, that the Congressional Budget Office has projected monumental deficits into the future even if those extensions are not made.

“He is reminiscent of Ronald Reagan, who promoted tax cuts and a defense buildup that, predictably, quadrupled the deficit, even as he supported a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget. To some people, that combination of policies actually made sense.

“The current president continues to do whatever he really wants. Besides cutting taxes, he proposes to increase defense spending.

”The president is insisting that his policies will cut the deficit in half over five years. He created it from a surplus in only three.

“Absent some exceptional luck, he is irresponsibly saddling the nation with a monumental budget problem which will only increase as his generation reaches Social Security age.”

OREGON

The Oregonian (Portland): “The Missing-Numbers Budget” February 3, 2004

“The Bush administration argues, rightly, that there are times for governments to run deficits, such as recessions and wars. But its argument that it will cut this deficit in half in five years, and the country will proceed on painlessly to a successful future, is undercut by realities that the budget largely ignores.

“Most unnervingly, by limiting its projections to five years out -- and using Social Security surpluses to keep the deficit down to its present nosebleed level -- the administration's budget thinking ignores the massive expenses set to begin piling up around 2010, when the baby boomers start to land on Social Security and Medicare.

“[W]e need to begin debating the economic future of this country -- and we need to do it with real numbers.”

PENNSYLVANIA

Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster): “Upsetting his base” February 16, 2004

“Bush's ‘plan’ to halve the deficit by 2009 works only if a number of significant costs are left out of the equation. At the current rate, budget deficits will remain around \$500 billion till the end of the decade. At that point, the Titanic of retiring baby boomers will collide with the iceberg of Social Security and Medicare and drown everyone in red ink.

“Bush is a fiscal liberal, aided by a Republican Congress on a high-pork diet.”

Morning Call (Allentown): “Flawed federal budget will be a political challenge for Congress; The Federal Budget” February 8, 2004

“[T]he White House . . . must deal with two big flaws. First, this budget is not a meaningful step toward the President's stated objective of halving the federal deficit within five years. Second, President Bush did not include funds for military and anti-terror efforts overseas in his \$2.4 trillion budget.

“[H]e is not factoring in the future cost of making his \$1.7 trillion in tax cuts permanent, as he has asked Congress to do. He also is counting on using future surpluses in federal retirement accounts toward the general budget; the opposite of the ‘lock box’ idea that both parties talked about not so long ago.

“This budget raises as many questions as it answers.”

Philadelphia Inquirer: “Adrift on the Red Sea” February 4, 2004

“Vice President Cheney is quoted in a recent book as saying budget deficits don't

matter. In that case, the Bush administration's new budget for the federal government sets a record for not mattering.

"[T]his budget document is a fantasy worthy of J.R.R. Tolkien or J.K. Rowling. The actual deficits are likely to be worse, er, to not matter on an even grander scale. And that's a tale our children are going to hate to read when they grow up.

"The vice president's cavalier assessment aside, this budget shows that deficits do matter. Owing to a combination of Bush's tax cuts and unrestrained spending, the deficits already are limiting what challenges the government can take on.

"Deficits equal massive government borrowing. That eventually causes interest rates to rise and limits foreign investment.

"It has taken the nation only three years to fall from giddy surpluses into a dark budget hole. The way out will be full of painful decisions. But it ought to begin with a realistic accounting of the problem and the choices. On that front, this budget matters very little."

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: "Stalling on Paying" February 12, 2004

"When President Bush sent his fiscal 2005 budget to Congress earlier this month, he did not include the cost of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The reasons for omitting the money were transparently political: Including the money, estimated at \$50 billion, would further inflate the size of the deficit, and Congress would normally approve the money in September, drawing attention to the war's costs at the outset of the fall election campaigns.

"Instead, the White House said, it would ask for the money in a separate request -- in November, after the election.

"Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the military could cover the gap by taking money from other military programs. This seems unnecessarily sloppy and disruptive.

"The White House has played fast and loose with the numbers in the 2005 budget, and this looks like one more example of that. We're going to be paying for the war one way or another. Why not when the military needs it?"

TENNESSEE

Chattanooga Times Free Press: "Mr. Bush's runaway deficits" January 31, 2004

“President Bush can do more tax cuts, big spending and runaway deficits with their burgeoning interest costs, or he can straighten up his budget mess and run as a prudent fiscal steward who is looking out for future generations as well as the next election. But he can't do both.

“The fiscal path Mr. Bush has put the nation on is simply unsustainable and cannot credibly be sold as self-healing, economic pump-priming.

“At a minimum, it seems, Mr. Bush would add another \$3 trillion to the national debt in the next 10 years, in addition to the trillion or so he's already added.

“Question: When will the Bush administration, and ordinary citizens, say, ‘Good grief! We can't afford to keep building debt like this!’?”

“Indeed, if his tax cuts are made permanent -- a deficit pill that even the Republican-controlled Congress may have a hard time swallowing -- the federal budget deficits will run at least \$300 billion annually for the next decade, the CBO reports. And that's with the CBO using the Bush administration's optimistic promises of new restraint on federal spending and economic growth forecasts that private market analysts find exceedingly rosy.

“Suffice it to say that the outlook for the annual budget deficits and the cumulative debt being built by the Bush administration, the highest in inflation-adjusted terms since the Great Depression, is mind-boggling.

“We've been here before. The debt bulge forebodes precisely the sort of disastrous fiscal cycle set off by the Reagan-Bush I deficit-debt-borrowing cycle and recession that short-circuited the first Bush presidency.

“To finance these huge annual deficits, the Treasury will have to borrow so much money on national and international markets that it will be forced to jack up interest rates to keep attracting ever-warier purchasers. Its borrowing binge will soak up capital that otherwise would have been available to fuel private investment and economic growth. The dollar will fall further, spurring still-higher interest rates, and the competition for capital will further squeeze out private industry borrowing and growth until Washington confronts the deficit-debt spiral. Small wonder the International Monetary Fund reported two weeks ago that Mr. Bush's fiscal policies and looming borrowing binge threaten to plunge the world into recession in just a few years.

“That the Bush administration continues to lead the country in this direction, and robbing it of the revenue needed to finance essential health care, Social Security and infrastructure investments, is fiscal lunacy. Mr. Bush, however, appears politically stuck on his message that his big tax cuts -- which mostly benefit big business and very wealthy individuals -- are responsible for the jobless recovery -- a recovery which has mainly served to raise corporate profits even as the administration has pushed through rules eliminating overtime pay requirements for a large class of workers.

“Still, no one can say that the country has not been warned. The CBO's debt projections and fiscal forecast provides ample warning for all those who care to contemplate what Mr. Bush has wrought.”

The Commercial Appeal (Memphis): “The Frugal Presidency” February 7, 2004

“Now that the Bush White House has belatedly discovered the threat of deficits, it has also belatedly discovered the virtues of congressional spending caps.

“The budget act expired in 2002 without a peep of protest from the White House, perhaps because the President couldn't have gotten his big spending increases and sweeping tax cuts through with PAYGO in place.

“The deficit this fiscal year is estimated at \$521 billion, and now the Bush White House is proposing that Congress enact new spending caps and offset provisions, including extending PAYGO to certain mandatory spending. He would, however, exempt tax cuts from any offsetting requirements.

“[S]ome form of spending caps and offsets, including offsets for tax cuts, should be passed.”

TEXAS

Austin American-Statesman: “View Bush's budget plan with an eye to the future” February 4, 2004

“President Bush proposed a \$2.4 trillion federal budget -- that's \$2,400 billion -- for 2005. Even if the economy continues to recover, the Bush administration says it wouldn't take in that much money in revenue, so it would have to borrow \$364 billion to make up the difference. That's after borrowing \$521 billion to close a revenue shortfall this fiscal year. Someday, of course, it all has to be repaid.

“[T]he federal government cannot keep running such huge deficits without eventually hurting the U.S. economy.”

The Dallas Morning News: “Budget Priorities: We can't have everything” February 3, 2004

“The White House may want guns and tax cuts, but it can't have both. Not if the administration wants to control the \$521 billion deficit our children and grandchildren will inherit.

“But in a budget where people must make choices, it makes no sense to decide as early as this year that the Bush tax reductions of 2001 and 2003 should extend

beyond their 2009 expiration. For one thing, those cuts are 'an exploding cigar,' as the Concord Coalition's Bob Bixby describes them. The laws of math are such that they will snowball into a \$2 trillion cost after 2009. Congress should postpone this decision until 2009, when it will have a better handle on the cuts' economic impact. And if we want to keep the deficit from becoming a nightmare for younger and future taxpayers, we shouldn't be afraid to make those choices. That means asking questions about how we make the world safe and worrying more about our children inheriting our debts."

Fort Worth Star Telegram: "Undisciplined federal borrowing and spending bode ill for America..." February 4, 2004

"Talk of making the tax cuts permanent is ludicrous. More than half of the projected \$521 billion shortfall for the current fiscal year is projected to result from the cuts.

"Federal tax revenues now constitute a lower percentage of the national economy than at any time since the early 1950s, some analysts note.

"When, pray tell, will the president and Congress come to their senses and start taking a principled stance in favor of fiscal sanity?

"As Bush took office, the Congressional Budget Office was projecting a \$5.6 trillion in budget surpluses over 10 years. Those surpluses represented 'the people's money,' and a substantial chunk of that money should be returned to them via tax cuts, Bush argued.

"But the surpluses never materialized. They have been replaced by record deficits. The 'people's money' is becoming 'the people's debt' -- and that debt is mounting each year.

"Eventually, mounting federal deficits foster higher interest rates that raise borrowing costs for businesses and consumers; inflation that erodes Americans' take-home pay and savings; and more of the federal budget being devoted merely to making debt payments -- thereby leaving less money for highways, veterans' health care and national parks.

"If the deficits continue unabated, the most jolting economic body blow could come to future generations -- in the form of large tax increases."

The Houston Chronicle: "Bush's Budget; Partial blueprint for digging a deep financial hole" February 5, 2004

"The president takes credit for proposing to cut the annual federal deficit in half over five years. But a deficit of \$237 billion in 2009 is unacceptable. As baby boomers near retirement, the United States needs to pile up surpluses in its Social Security and

Medicare accounts, not run up the national debt.

“What the president is not saying is that under his scenario, the deficits would not remain flat or shrink further after 2009 but would explode again. Bush wants Congress to make permanent the tax cuts passed during his administration, adding trillions more to the deficits.

“The president's budget is a blueprint for a financial hole so deep it would take generations for the country to dig itself out.”

San Antonio Express-News: “Budget to require some hard choices; Bush and Congress must prioritize spending, cut pork and not make the tax cuts permanent” February 6, 2004

“Congress should not make permanent the tax cuts enacted over the past three years. The failure to deal with the growth of entitlements coupled with a permanent loss of tax revenue is a prescription for future economic disaster.

“In addition, the international situation, notably supplemental spending to stabilize and pacify Iraq and Afghanistan, presents too many unknowns with potentially significant costs.

“Putting the nation back on a sound fiscal and economic footing requires making difficult decisions. For the good of future generations, it's time for Bush and Congress to make them.”

UTAH

Deseret Morning News (Salt Lake City): “Stop the runaway deficit” February 2, 2004

“[I]t makes little sense to continue expanding government while deliberately reducing revenues.

“[C]ommon sense dictates that governments can't continue spending beyond their means without eventually encountering harsh consequences.

“[S]omeone needs to step forward and champion a movement toward greater fiscal responsibility.

“[S]urpluses likely won't return unless enough politicians realize that wishes cost real money.”

Salt Lake Tribune: “Smoke and mirrors” February 4, 2004

“The federal budget proposed Monday by the administration of compassionate conservative George W. Bush is neither compassionate nor conservative. It takes the smoke-and-mirrors approach often used in such documents to new depths of humbug and threatens future generations with crippling deficits.

“Also shoved off to a future day of reckoning are the pernicious effects of the tax cuts that are the primary reason for the black hole of the federal deficit. The president's ludicrous demand that the tax cuts be made permanent is giving his fellow Republicans a richly deserved case of heartburn, as they try to reconcile their infatuation for tax cuts with their true love of balanced budgets.

“Compared to the hemorrhage caused by the tax cuts, supposed savings that would result from, say, slashing Environmental Protection Agency research and water treatment programs are just mean-spirited stunts that allow the administration to pretend fiscal restraint while running up a gigantic national debt.

“The president's budget deservedly has few friends on Capitol Hill. If Congress is able to come up with a reasonable spending plan that neither cripples our national needs nor impoverishes future generations, it will be in spite of the administration, not because of it.”

VERMONT

The Burlington Free Press: “Losing numbers game” February 6, 2004

“Pick a number, almost any federal budget number, and it adds up to a potential financial disaster for America's younger generation.

“Try \$44 trillion -- that's the gap between anticipated funds and the cost of Medicare, Social Security and other benefit programs once the baby boomers retire.

“Or maybe \$7 trillion -- that's roughly the total of the U.S. national debt, which works out to about \$24,000 for every person in the country. Toss in future Medicare and Social Security commitments, and the debt figure passes \$100,000 per American.

“Bush wants to make his tax cuts permanent -- a cost of \$272 billion this year and \$183 billion in 2009 -- and he failed to include long-term spending for Iraq, Afghanistan and other defense needs. In an obvious accounting trick, Bush included \$501 billion in surplus federal retirement funds as part of his four-year balanced budget plan.”

VIRGINIA

Richmond Times Dispatch: “A Spendthrift Budget” February 5, 2004

“Here's what President Bush's budget proposal boils down to: record deficit projections that do not take into account obligations in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with program cuts that Congress probably will reject. If anything, the administration is lowballing the shortfall.

“[T]he administration is running up debt and hoping economic growth will save the day. That's the fiscal equivalent of taking out a second mortgage in the hope you get a big raise. It's also one good definition of recklessness.”

Roanoke Times & World News: “Don't Swallow This Budget Bilge” February 4, 2004

“Bush unveiled a \$2.4 trillion budget Monday that is less a fiscal blueprint than a campaign platform, and a deceptive one.

“The deficit-reduction numbers alone expose it as re-election snake oil.

“Worse than that sleight of hand, though, is his five-year window, through which he might escape and slip out of town before the marks realize they've been had. He proposes more than \$1.1 trillion in additional tax cuts over the next 10 years, not five, almost \$900 billion of which would take effect after the end of a second term.

“And while all eyes are riveted on this wondrous elixir that allows more spending on national security and huge tax cuts, the electorate is to pay no attention to costs the president ignores - like \$50 billion to keep troops in Iraq and Afghanistan next year alone. Or the more than \$400 billion over 10 years it will take to reform the alternative minimum tax.”

The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk): “A Deficit of Candor on the Budget Deficit” February 4, 2004

“This week, the president submitted a \$2.4 trillion budget to Congress, accompanied by a pledge to cut the ballooning deficit to \$237 billion by 2009.

“But given the borrow-and-spend nature of our current Congress and president, it's hard to be confident in the numbers they peddle to the public. Just last week, administration officials were forced to admit that the Medicare program will now cost one-third more than advertised by the White House and Congress, \$534 billion. Voters are right to doubt the president's commitment to the financial security of the nation.”

WASHINGTON

The News Tribune (Tacoma): “Bush spending plan isn't grounded in economic reality: Huge debt will be passed to future generations” February 4, 2004

“President Bush's proposed \$2.4 trillion budget for 2005 is anything but a blueprint for sound fiscal management. It's another fairy-tale spending plan where deficits don't really matter because available credit can solve all problems.

“The administration continues to propose spending far more money than the federal government takes in.

“The Bush budget also masks how much new debt the nation would actually incur. It doesn't include the costs of military and nation-building campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The staggering deficits would have concerned most presidents, but not Bush. He is betting that the nation's economic recovery will eventually be strong enough to reduce the deficit. He's playing with fire.

“The problem with out-of-control deficits is that they force the federal government to borrow huge sums of money just to keep daily operations going.

“Government borrowing at record levels could reduce available capital and eventually drive up interest rates and stop the recovery in its tracks. The higher cost of borrowing money could dampen consumer spending...

“The worst part is that big deficits mean passing today's debt on to future generations. It means cheating our children and grandchildren.”

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer: “Bush Budget is Blank Check”

“In order to pay for war, tax cuts and previous Bush budgets, the president is stripping money from programs we care about in the Northwest. Here are three: a reduction of 7.2 percent at the Environmental Protection Agency, the elimination of Head Start's \$247 million literacy program (as well as substantial trims in other reading programs) and generally less money for mass transit and highways.

“This so-called thrifty budget is required because war is so expensive, right?”

“Well, sort of, but the war itself is really not in this budget. Money for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan will come later when ‘the costs are known.’

“We see. The White House likes blank checks.”

Seattle Times: “The candidates and the deficit headache” January 29, 2004

“The government's deficits are almost too large to think about: \$477 billion this year. That is 4 cents on every dollar of goods or services produced in the United States.

“Of each dollar Americans earn, the federal government takes an average 16 cents. It has been spending 20. The 4 cents borrowed amount to \$1,700 this year for every man, woman and child in the country.

“The excuse for the deficit was the recession – an excuse that begins to fade. The new forecast by the Congressional Budget Office assumes that with a solid recovery, federal revenue will come up to 18 cents on the dollar by 2010.

“We should be done with deficits by then, but we will be only half-done. Only if the entire Bush tax cut is allowed to expire on Dec. 31, 2010, or the growth rate of spending is significantly cut, will the budget balance in 2012. Seriously, who is talking of that? No one.”

WEST VIRGINIA

Charleston Gazette: “Bush budget; Call them irresponsible...” February 4, 2004

“What can you say about a plan that relies on revenues that are lower, as a percentage of the country's GDP, than at any time since 1950, and puts the burden of fiscal discipline on the shoulders of the poor and the middle class?

“The yawning 2004 deficit, which the White House now estimates at \$521 billion, is largely created by the tax cuts the president has awarded to the wealthy.

“The Bush administration makes its priorities clear: Squeeze ordinary Americans; let the wealthy evade their responsibilities; and pour more money into an ill-advised war.

“What it tries to mask is the cost of these priorities, claiming falsely that these measures will cut the deficit in half. This is the same White House that claimed in 2001 that the deficit this year would be only \$14 billion.”

WISCONSIN

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: “An Act of Fiscal Malpractice” February 4, 2004

“The spending items that got most of the attention in President Bush's controversial new budget were the substantial increases in defense and homeland security and the sharp reduction in the growth of other discretionary outlays. But one of the most significant expenditures -- and there is nothing discretionary about it -- is net interest on the national debt: nearly \$180 billion budgeted for fiscal year 2005, an increase of 13.9 percent over the previous year.

“That is money that serves no useful purpose. It doesn't help to educate children

or build highways or support the national parks or aid farmers or fund medical research or pay the salaries of American fighting men and women. And there is more of that money to come -- an important reason why the Bush budget plan ought to be dead on arrival in Congress, or at least in need of radical surgery.

“[A]lthough the deficit projections in the budget only go through 2009, there is every expectation that the dollar amount of deficits would rise starting in 2010.

“[D]eficits will soar just about the time baby boomers begin to draw Social Security checks and use the Medicare program.

“Bush and his Republican allies in Congress refuse to accept that proposition, and it's likely the president will get his way on permanent tax cuts. That will only make it tougher when the issue is revisited later in this decade.”

Wisconsin State Journal (Madison): “Bush, Lawmakers Must Curb Spending...” January 28, 2004

“Eventually, high federal budget deficits will leave the U.S. economy with nowhere to go but down. Your paycheck, your investments and your future might go with it.

“The president plans to cut the deficit in half in five years. But that would leave the country with an annual deficit of more than a \$200 billion -- still far too high. Part of the problem is the president's ill-timed plan to make permanent the tax cuts installed to boost the economy out of recession.

“The stakes are high. Deficit reduction is important for economic growth. If the government must maintain a high level of borrowing to finance the deficit, it will compete with growing businesses for long-term loans. The competition will drive up long-term interest rates, and the higher rates could plunge the nation back into a downturn.”