



## Free Press Viewpoint

# Deadline ticking on Social Security

The story comes around every year, and every year we – the people, Congress, the White House – shake our heads and tut – and ignore it.

Social Security is going broke. In as little as 21 years, by sometime in 2033, the fund's \$2.7 trillion surplus will be gone, benefits will exceed tax income and, by law, will be cut.

If it gets that far, there could be riots in the street out front of nursing homes. But surely, we can fix a problem, given two decades to do it. Can't we?

Think so? Remember, the Postal Service is going broke this year, and Congress and the president have done nothing – nothing – to fix the problem.

We've known about the Social Security issue for the last 20 or 30 years. Actuaries and accountants could look at the size of the Baby Boomer generation piling up that surplus and see that the coming smaller generations could not pay enough to support them.

But did Congress or any president do anything? Of course not. Few problems are solved in Washington until the last possible moment.

But Social Security is already out of balance. Since 2010, payments have exceeded income. The huge reserve masks that fact, but it won't go away. Until the system is broke.

Administrators say it would cost something like \$3.2 trillion to start fixing the problem right now. Every year, the cost will rise and the cure will become more painful. But there's no hope Congress will move on the issue in an election year, or any coming year, for that matter.

The attitude is summed up by Sen. Bernie Sanders, a liberal independent from Vermont who heads the Senate Social Security caucus, as quoted by the Associated Press:

"Compared to other crises – the collapse of the middle class, real wages falling ..., 50 million people having no health insurance – how would I rate Social Security? Nowhere near as serious as these and many other problems."

In other words, "ignore it; maybe it'll go away."

But it won't. Instead, the problem will grow each year until it's too late. Just watch.

All this should scare the bejeebers out of anyone who believes the federal government can and should solve all our problems. While growing bigger and more bloated every year, the government also becomes more dysfunctional each year as well.

The fact is, the government can't solve our problems. It certainly can't manage the economy. Mostly, it can mess things up. Yet Americans continue to have faith that if we only do more of the same, or get better people in charge, things will change.

But that seldom works, just as ignoring a problem like Social Security never works. – Steve Haynes

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area.

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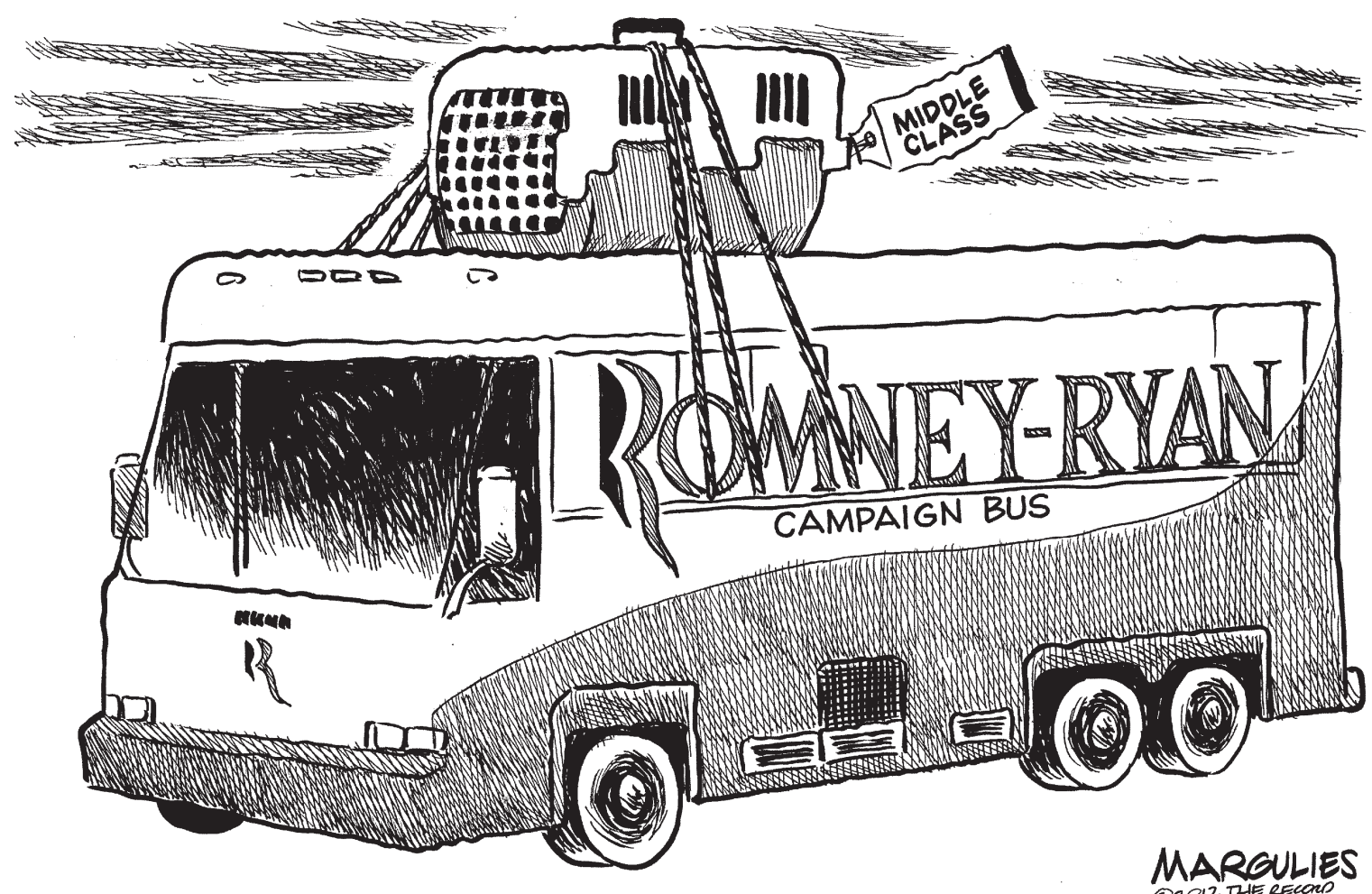
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# Caucuses choke Congress into stalemate

This is the first year since I became old enough to vote in presidential elections that I feel no matter which way I vote, nothing will change. I say this because I think our partisan government has reached a stalemate.

I recently read a book titled, "A Letter to America," by David Boren, a Rhodes scholar and a former U.S. senator. He was the longest-serving chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. He was governor of Oklahoma and has served as president of the University of Oklahoma for the past 13 years. Like many of us, he feels our government is broken.

One of the many things Boren talks about in his book is party caucuses. Caucuses are meetings held by political parties in which the party members get together supposedly to discuss various bills being presented in Congress.

"Party caucuses did not meet very regularly until the 1970s," he writes. "Earlier, senators of the same party met alone together only a few times each year. Then the meetings became monthly. By the time I arrived in Washington, the meetings were weekly."

"Each week all of the Republicans met in a separate room together and had lunch and a three-hour discussion. The Democrats did the same. Nearly always, the topic was how we could force the members of the opposing party to vote on a proposal that would make them look like they were against education, or family values, or national defense."

"Almost none of the caucus luncheon dis-



**Marj Brown**

## • Marj's Snippets

cussions had to do with serving the national interest. The talk was all about positioning to win the next election. Dissenters who wanted to seek a bipartisan agreement with the other party were subjected to peer pressure to be more loyal to the party. In the House of Representatives, there was even greater pressure, and committee assignments on chairmanships were put at risk if the party line was not followed.

"No equivalent institution existed to encourage bipartisanship. No regular bipartisan caucuses met in which moderates of both parties could work together to fashion an American approach to issues."

I know this is also true on the state level, because my sister, Shirley (Williams) Hankins, served in the Washington state legislature for many years. It finally came to the point where she had to get up and walk out of her party's caucus because she just could not go along with the way they wanted her to vote. She was ostracized by some other members of her party. Now that she's retired, she is registered as

an independent.

Wouldn't it be great if those congressmen who wanted to be bipartisan could get together and form their own party and select their own nominee for president?

Boren said a hard-line communist, the wife of the Soviet ambassador, once made this comment to him at a dinner party in Washington: "Your government is no more democratic than ours.... Whoever has the most money always wins the elections. You're all bought and paid for."

His book was published in 2008, so some of his comments are a little outdated, but most are still true today. For instance, he said, "It would not be surprising during the current election cycle to see presidential candidates spend more on their campaigns than the National Cancer Institute will spend in 2007 to fight the four most deadly forms of that disease." How true, and what a shame that is.

This year I am not voting for anyone unless I know them personally or have investigated them enough to know that they really care about what is best for this country. Much of my ballot will not have the boxes marked, but I don't care. I can't vote for candidates I'm not sure about.

*Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.*

# We've spent 1,200 days in the wilderness

Aug. 11 marked 1,200 days since the U.S. Senate last passed a budget. 1,200 days.

A family business or corporation could not operate even 30 days – let alone 1,200 – without a plan for how it would spend and borrow money. Even a household cannot function without some semblance of an idea about where money goes.

Yet, somehow, the U.S. Senate believes America can operate responsibly without a budget.

Without a budget, it is little wonder that the federal government borrows \$4 billion a day, resulting in trillion-dollar annual deficits and a \$16 trillion mountain of debt.

Without a budget, it is little wonder that the last time the federal government actually cut spending was before Elvis Presley released his debut album – that's 1955.

Without a budget, it is little wonder that the "solution" favored by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and President Obama is to just find a way to get more money – without having to cut spending. They would rather allow all the Bush-Obama tax relief to expire than produce a budget.

If only Washington could behave more like American businesses and families. When they



**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**

## • Capitol Notes

face hard times, rarely is there the option to find new money; no, the only choice is to rein in spending. But, instead, Washington just continues to spend more than it takes in.

According to Congressional Budget Office data aggregated by the Heritage Foundation, spending as a share of the nation's economy averaged 20.2 percent between 1960 and 2008. Revenue averaged 18.1 percent. Yet, in 2012, spending is projected to account for 23.3 percent and revenue for 16.1 percent. So much for a balanced approach!

Certainly a poor-performing economy is the chief reason that Washington has less revenue. The formula is easy: the less economic activity, the lower the tax revenue. But, rather than address the reasons why our economy is in a shambles, too many in Washington – including Harry Reid and President Obama – would

rather just spend more money we do not have and raise taxes.

Without a plan for spending, Washington will continue to spend more than it takes in. And, Washington will continue to send a message of uncertainty to businesses and consumers – the very entities and individuals we need to engage in commerce (and, thus, spur increased revenue as a result of more economic activity).

Not only would a budget fix Washington's spending woes, but so too would comprehensive tax reform. While the House has passed a one-year extension of all the major Bush-Obama tax cuts, we have also advanced a bill paving the path for full, comprehensive reform in 2013. Perhaps Sen. Reid and President Obama could take a little time off the campaign trail to tackle this issue, too.

America cannot afford to wait another 1,200 days for a budget or for an overhaul of our outdated, ineffective and punitive tax code.

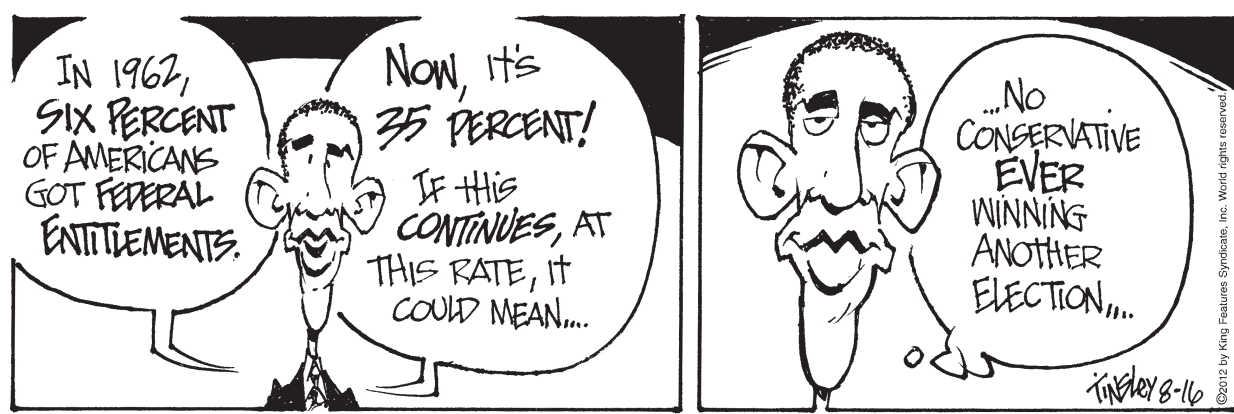
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