

commentary

from other pens...

Tax rebate is a loan from incoming funds

The Topeka Capital-Journal on tax rebate: Remember that big, ballyhooed tax rebate? Seems it wasn't really a rebate after all.

Even the IRS answering machine refers to it as an "advance payment." That's because the \$300 check a lot of taxpayers are getting is not exactly returned tax money that the government didn't need. In reality, it's coming out of this year's tax liability. ...

Essentially, Congress and the president are letting you borrow your own money at no interest.

What a deal!
What a fraud. ...

Suddenly, the non-Social Security surplus has shrunk to \$1 billion this year, according to White House budget estimates released last week.

When talk of a \$1 trillion-plus tax cut first surfaced, and the economy was still chugging fairly along, we advised Washington leaders to be cautious in cutting taxes — based on the Kansas experience. ...

This past year, those heady days ended with a thud. Budgets became tighter, departments were asked to come up with contingency cuts, and the talk was of tax increases rather than reductions. ...

The result: It's likely the civil discourse that George W. Bush pined for will vanish with the bulky surpluses. There will be partisan finger-pointing, and new arguments will have to be made over what our restructured priorities must be.

Enjoy that \$300 while you can.

The Hutchinson News on Doles:

Salisbury, N.C., doesn't know how lucky it is. Elizabeth Dole notified the Russell County clerk ... that she was ending her voter registration in Russell. A day later, she registered at her mother's address in Salisbury.

... If Elizabeth plans to run for the seat Sen. Jesse Helms plans to leave after the 2002 elections, she had no choice — she needed to establish residency in North Carolina. Pundits consider her an early front-runner.

This change in residency creates a dilemma for her husband. Bob Dole grew up in Russell. He went there to heal after he was grievously wounded in World War II.

People there consider him one of their own, and despite a long career in Washington, he refuses to break his ties with the small, scrappy little town. Unfortunately, that sense of loyalty could keep Dole from voting for his wife next year.

Bob Dole devoted his life to Kansas — to defending its liberty in World War II and to representing it in Congress. Now it's time for Kansas to pay him back.

If Bob Dole wants to register in North Carolina so he can vote for Elizabeth in 2002 — and support her political aspirations the way she supported his — Kansans will understand.

He'll always be a Jayhawker at heart. And a model citizen. Just ask the people of Russell.

where to write

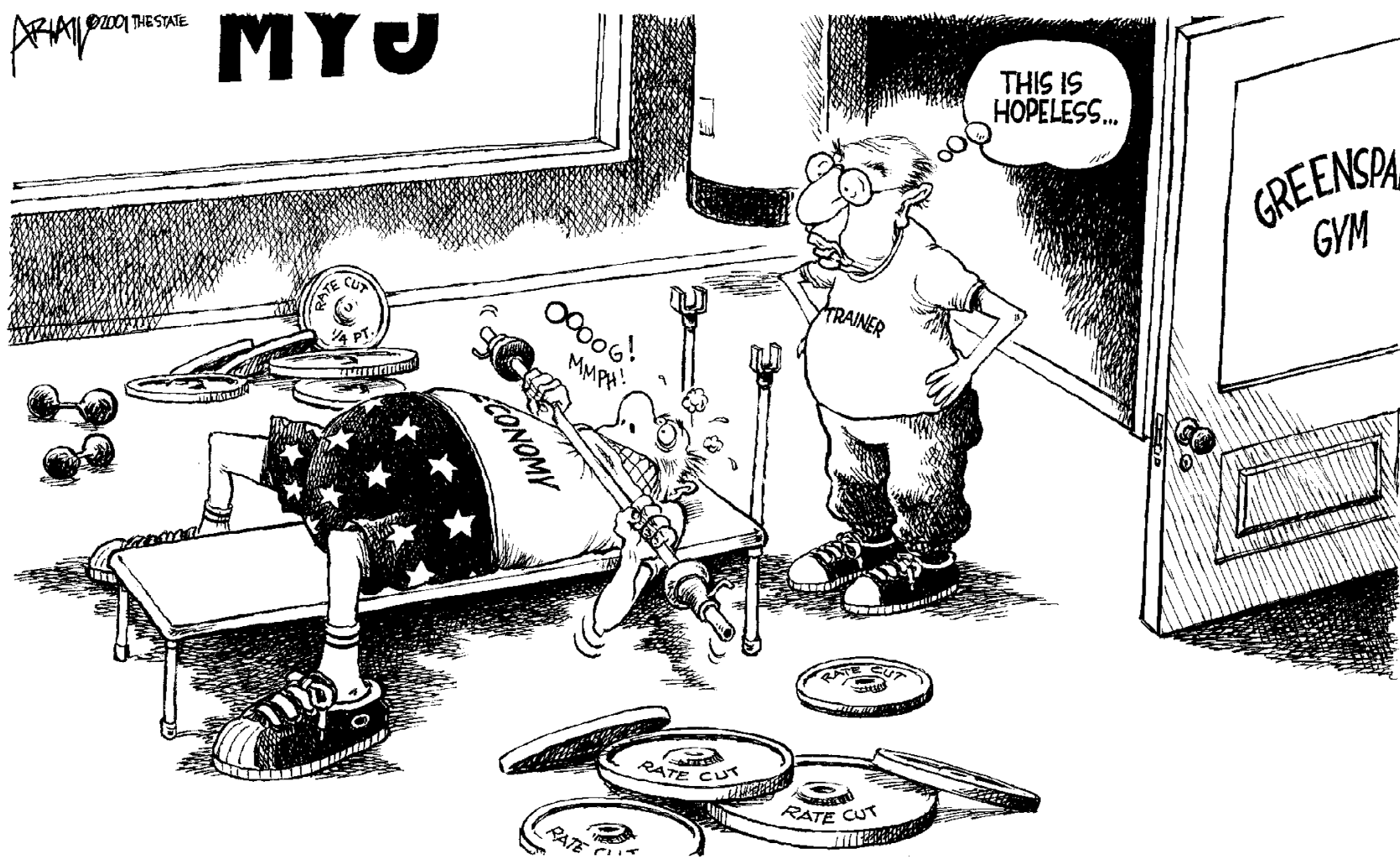
U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676

State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 128-S, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399



Janet vs. Jeb - under the bigtop

WASHINGTON — This game gets the biggest crowd at the carnival: Your ball hits the target, and the big shot falls into the water.

Next November, the most enticing target in the United States will be Jeb Bush, governor of Florida. Nail him hard next November, and his littler, older brother — that's the president! — will be left splashing in the icy tub.

This week, Janet Reno took a prominent place in the "Throw At Jeb!" line.

But, by the very act of declaring her candidacy, the former attorney general erected a new attraction on the American midway: "Throw at Janet." Beat her, and you will have struck a blow against the FBI, the BATF, the federal government, the Clinton cotillion, the gun control crowd, and Fidel Castro to boot.

Is this opportunity good for the Democrats? Before Janet, it was a simple matter of rounding up all Floridians with a beef and herding them to the polls. Before Janet, the campaign had a simple theme: deliverance.

Knock off Jeb, and every newspaper from here to Jakarta would sound the death knell for the Bush dynasty.

Bounce Bush, and the 2002 vote becomes a final verdict on 2000: Those Bush boys stole the election. Somebody had to pay. This time it was Jeb. Next time, it will be George W.

But with Reno in the race, those seeking revenge on the Bushes will have to compete with those seeking revenge on her.



chris matthews

• commentary

Men first. They hate her. A Mason-Dixon poll has the match-up this way:

ALL VOTERS: Bush is favored by 54 percent, and Reno by 39 percent.

MEN: Bush is preferred by 59 percent over Reno's 35 percent.

WOMEN: Bush leads 49 percent to Reno's 43 percent.

That 6-point lead among women is hardly noteworthy. The 24-point edge with male voters stands as the giant detail.

Blame it on guns or male insecurity; wallow in psychobabble. The extraordinary fact is that the only way for Reno to reach the governor's office is by changing male hearts. As long as they loathe her in such numbers, she won't have enough female strength to overcome them.

Fortunately for Reno, gender and guns are not the only factors in this race. Throw in geography. Florida.

It's not just the name of a state anymore. It's a fighting word, especially among what Democratic professionals call "the base" — African-Americans.

Roadblocks, wrong names on lists of felons, faulty voting machines, you name it.

It's a matter of near-religious belief that blacks were the target of a "vote suppression" scheme last November and that it was run out of Tallahassee.

This conviction explains why 84 percent of African-Americans say they will vote for Janet Reno against Jeb Bush.

If you like passion in your politics, this campaign in Florida is the one for you. Reno says it's going to be "no holds barred," and no one is debating the point.

Kids will stream to Florida from across the country for this one. Al Sharpton will come, and so will Jesse Jackson.

Democratic activists will arrive by the busload. There'll be Texas money for Jeb and plenty of New York loot for Janet.

The NRA will be out in force. So will NOW. So will everybody.

For those who hated last year's Pillsbury bake-off between a cowboy trying to act compassionate and a nerd trying to act cool, this is a political circus you're going to love.

Remember how Newsweek morphed the pictures of Gore and Bush to show how similar they were? Nobody's going to do that Janet Reno and Jeb Bush.

Chris Matthews, a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, is host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels. The 1999 edition of "Hardball" was published by Touchstone Books.

Are new census date off the mark?

By Ben Wattenberg

The unfortunate headline on the Department of Commerce press release asserts "Census Bureau Projects Doubling of Nation's Population by 2100." The accompanying story states that "middle-level assumptions" indicate that the number of Americans will grow from 273 million in 1999 to 571 million in the year 2100.

I bet that won't happen, but it's fine if it does.

Statistics often take on a life of their own, particularly when they come with the imprimatur of the Census Bureau, a federal agency that is highly respected, and deservedly so. This one can be seen as the keystone number in the official American demographic edifice. Sooner or later it will be used by school boards, sewer districts, zoning boards, federal agencies and businesses. Most volubly, it is the statistic that will be babbled upon by leading cause group activists of right and left. In this case, alas, you may rest assured that anti-immigration megaphones will broadcast the data as "proof" that immigration should be cut back, or cut off. Environmentalists will tell you that more people cause more pollution and we're getting more people. Yuck! It's Pat Buchanan dressed as the Jolly Green Giant!

First, not to worry. In 1900, the American population was 76 million. By 2000, the population almost quadrupled. At the same time, America became the most prosperous and most influential country in the world, its people living in ever-larger (i.e., less-crowded) residential spaces, with pollution rates headed downward, in a nation still among the most sparsely populated in the world. And now there are projections of a doubling over the next full century, not a quadrupling. If the Bureau is correct, America will grow at half its recent speed.

But the projections deserve further explanation and, I think, adjustment. The new Census data are clear, well structured and user-friendly. But projections are only as good as the assumptions that go into them. This set has at least two warrant skeptical scrutiny: fertility and immigration.

The current total fertility rate of Americans of Hispanic origin is 2.9 children per woman. The current rate of non-Hispanic whites (so-called Anglos) is about 1.8. Under the theory of demographic convergence, the projections assume that Latino rates will be heading downward toward 2.1 children per woman by 2100, while Anglo rates will be heading upward toward 2.1.

That is likely only half-right. Latino rates will come down; they already are down among second- and third-generation Latino families. But there is no convincing reason to think that Anglo rates will go up 13 percent, as the projections indicate. The



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Bureau says survey data of "birth expectations" portend such a rise. But that's nothing more than polling data, which have been unreliable. In fact, Anglo fertility has been at about 1.8 or below for a quarter of a century. The seemingly minuscule difference of about three-tenths of a child could mean somewhere around 70 million fewer Americans than projected for 2100.

The immigration projections are also strained. From about 1.03 million per year in 2010, the numbers rise to 1.45 million in 2030 and stay there to 2100. Why so? Census demographers believe that immigration is mostly "demand-driven." Thus, as greater proportions of Americans reach age 65 and beyond in future decades, there will be a demand for more worker bees from other countries. Perhaps such a demand will develop. But where will supply come from?

Because of catastrophically low fertility rates in recent decades, Europe will hit the age-dependency problem long before America does. If taking in more immigrants is the answer, Europe will soak up immigrants first. Meanwhile, fertility rates are in free-fall in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs), as those nations modernize and urbanize. Mexican rates, for example, have dropped from 6.8 to 2.5 since 1965, and they're still falling. There are already about 25 LDCs with fertility below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman. The calculations are tricky, but the 0.4 million annual immigration difference between 2010 and 2030 onward could well add up to between 50 million

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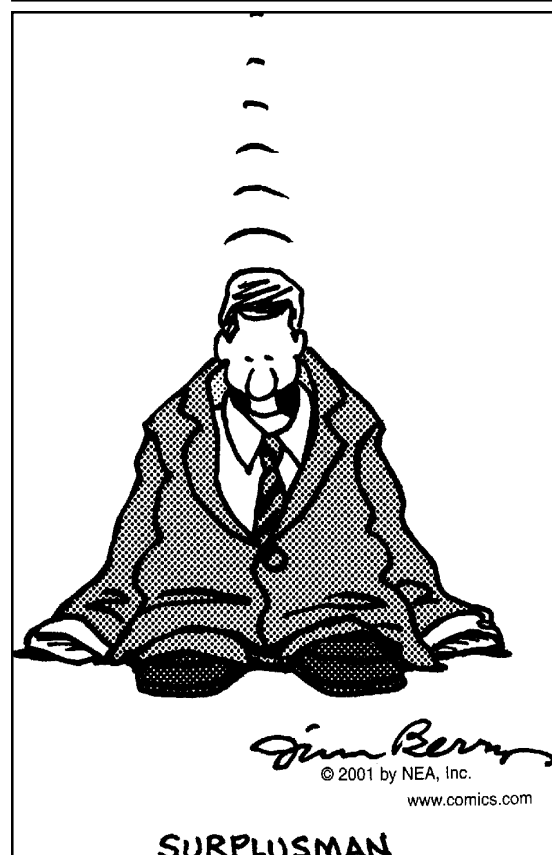
and 100 million Americans, counting offspring.

Now, all these calculations, upside and downside, are quite speculative. In fact, as is sound Census Bureau practice, the middle-level assumptions are bracketed by "high" and "low" ones, which range from 1.2 billion and climbing in 2100, to 283 million and shrinking. With such broad ranges in play, it would seem prudent to call the fertility and immigration rates that are now prevalent "middle," or "medium," or "most likely." On future immigration and fertility, the new Census projections do not do this.

And so, school boards, sewer commissions, corporations, boards of education, federal agencies and businesses will start planning for eventualities that likely will never eventuate. And so, the caterwaulers of right and left will increase the volume of their caterwauls — to what effect remains to be seen.

Ben Wattenberg, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, is the host-essayist of the PBS special "The First Measured Century" and co-author of a new book of the same title. He is the host of the weekly public television program "Think Tank." You may send comments to him via e-mail: Watmail@aol.com.

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e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com

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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services (nbetz@nwkansas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansas.com)

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