

from our viewpoint...

## Line-item veto could cut costs

If the new Congress is serious about balancing the federal budget, the first thing it would do is give the president a line-item veto over spending bills.

Of course, Congress is not serious about balancing the budget, and the last thing it would do is give the president more power. Especially over Congress.

If the president had a line-item veto, he could pencil out the hundreds, make that thousands, of "earmarks" members slip into spending bills.

The number mushroomed while the Republicans were in power, but there's no sign the Democrats will do anything about the earmarks. Heck, Democrats like earmarks as much as Republicans.

What's an earmark, you ask?

It's a provision slipped into an appropriation bill, often unrelated to the earmark, which directs federal money to a specific project, usually in a member's state or district.

While these are easy for a congressman to get, lobbying firms offer to cinch them — for a price. The system corrupts the entire federal budget, but there's not much a president can do.

Under the Constitution, he can sign a bill or veto it, but if he signs it, he must take the whole thing. Earmarks just slide through because, usually, the bill is vital to running the government and the president can't risk a shutdown.

How easy is it to get an earmark?

A couple of years ago, Rep. Jerry Moran was talking to people in Oberlin about restoration of the old Works Progress Administration facilities at Sappa Park, just outside the town.

"What can I do to help," he asked.

Someone replied that he could get money to buy shingles to restore the old shelter house. He got an \$8,000 earmark for the shingles and remarked later that someone told him it'd have been just as easy to get \$8 million.

How bad is the problem?

In 1994, when the Republicans came to power in Congress, *National Review* reported 4,126 earmarks in 13 appropriation bills worth maybe \$10 billion. In 2004, 14,000 for nearly \$28 billion. This year's highway bill had a record 6,371.

The most famous may be the \$220 million "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska, which serves an island populated by about 50 people. We hope they appreciated it.

Earmarks pay for roads, community centers, parks, you name it. Most, doubtless, are worthy projects, but the government can't afford them. It can't afford its regular expenses, let alone all these extras.

Usually, earmarks are inserted with no debate and without anyone really knowing what happened. They're so small compared to a single appropriation bill that no one notices 99 percent of them.

Now everyone says we have to balance the budget and learn once again to live within our means. Except for the earmarks, of course.

You really think Congress is going to give up this sweet little pork barrel? They corrupt the system and drive up the deficit, but everyone who benefits loves them.

This is small change in the federal budget, but it's wrong. Let's demand that someone put a stop to it. — *Steve Haynes*



## New Year's resolution – ownership society

Here's a way for President Bush to salvage his presidency in the New Year: Promote the principles of his Ownership Society again. If more people owned things, they'd be as miserable as I am, and America would be a better place.

I had my first taste of ownership 11 years ago after buying a country house that made Herman Munster's place look like a Trump estate. Renovating it was awful enough, but all hell really broke loose when my father and I began work on the bathroom.

The bolts that secured the commode to the floor had broken. I raced to the hardware store to buy new bolts. We spent an hour installing them. We slowly lifted the commode into place and fished the bolts through the bolt holes. But the bolts were too short!

"Son of a ...," said my father.

"The idiots gave us the wrong bolts!" I said.

I raced back to the hardware store. We toiled another hour and the new bolts worked. But a second problem occurred: the wax goop that seals the commode to the sewage pipe wasn't thick enough.

"Son of a ...," said my father.

"The idiots gave us the wrong goop!" I said.

I raced back to the hardware store. With the commode finally secured and sealed, we proceeded to a higher level of suffering: reattaching the water fittings.

You see, water fittings are designed to not fit. After several attempts to make them fit, we



tom purcell

• commentary

stripped the threads. This resulted in a leak that made Niagara Falls look like a lap pool.

After several hours of this misery, my father and I completed the bathroom. I thought then that the worst of ownership was behind me, unaware it was just getting warmed up.

One day, while weeding the planter, I was attacked by ground bees. Someone told me the solution was to pour a cup of gasoline into the bee hole, then light it. I poured two cups for good measure. I wisely moved the 2.5-gallon gasoline canister 10 feet away, and then lit a match. It was then that I learned an important lesson about gasoline.

Gasoline doesn't burn. Gasoline fumes burn. They burn because they are FLAMMABLE. And they are especially flammable when you create a massive carburetor in a dirt hole in your planter.

As I neared the hole, I heard a giant "WOOOOF," the sound gasoline fumes make when they explode. A 15-foot flame shot up the side of my freshly painted house. But I was more concerned about the flame that was now coming out of the air hole on the top of the 2.5-gallon gasoline canister I wisely sat 10 feet away.

I grabbed the giant Molotov cocktail and launched it as far from the house as I could, causing an explosion that would fill an al-Qaeda trainee with envy. It took me an hour to douse all the flames and keep the neighborhood from burning down.

Since then my fortunes have improved, allowing me to buy stocks that are now worth much less than I paid for them. I own my own health insurance policy, too, and its premium is rising faster than the flames that nearly torched my house.

And I've become a landlord, one of the most pleasurable aspects of ownership a man can know. (Don't ask about the septic tank, or how I straddled it for two days with a spade shovel to dig out enough earth so that the new lid would fit.)

Ownership is a grand concept and Bush could resuscitate his presidency by promoting it. More ownership will make Americans demand simpler, lower taxes and other commonsensical reforms that make it easier to own things — reforms Republicans used to embrace. The economy will boom and Bush's approval ratings will soar.

Our assets will grow in value, too. We can sell them at great profit, retire and become Democrats — and finally enjoy life for once while everybody else takes care of us.

*Tom Purcell is a humor columnist syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons. E-mail him at TomPurcell@aol.com.*

## Running against the right Hillary

The common wisdom holds that it is all but inevitable that Hillary Clinton will be the Democratic presidential nominee in 2008, and that she'll be a formidable if not unbeatable candidate.

I don't disagree with that assumption, despite the sudden emergence of Barack Hussein Obama as the media's newest darling. I see him as nothing more than a passing fancy for the mainstream media. If it becomes evident that he poses a real threat to Sen. Hillary Clinton, he'll suddenly find himself under a withering fire of criticism and he won't have the vaguest notion where it's all coming from. Wiser heads, however, will understand that the Clinton attack machine is back in action and before it's finished, Obama will be history.

So let's accept the fact that whoever the GOP nominee is, he'll be facing Hillary Clinton. If the Republicans want to win, they will have to decide which Mrs. Clinton they plan to run against; just plain Hillary Clinton, or United States Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-NY.

If they choose to run against Hillary Clinton, they'll lose. If they choose to run against Sen. Clinton, they'll win hands down.

If we run against Hillary Clinton as the former first lady, if we run against her as the wife of Bill Clinton, if we run against the cherished darling of the media who spent eight years all but canonizing her as America's patron saint, she'll win.

Running against that Hillary is the wrong argument. If, however, you run against Sen. Hillary Clinton and her record, or her abysmal lack of one as a senator, you can win.

If you focus on her dismal record of accomplishment and not on her carefully created image as St. Hillary and her hyped-up public personality, you'll beat her hands down.

You can beat the senator; you cannot beat the cardboard saint.

Consider her record as a senator. She admits she voted for the war and now she says it was a mistake, not exactly the kind of consistency we expect from a president.

Senatorial candidate Hillary Clinton prom-



michael reagan

• making sense

ised to bring 200,000 new jobs to New York. She failed, claiming that she didn't have the benefit of a Democratic Congress to help her achieve that goal, but adding that even though there had not been the kind of environment she hoped for, there had been some progress.

The fact is that there hasn't been any progress. New York is not improving — it's getting worse. New York has lost 112,000 jobs since sending Sen. Clinton to Washington.

In contrast, consider the records of two Republicans, Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani. Both governed with Democratic majorities in their state legislatures.

Back on April 12, Massachusetts Gov. Romney signed into law an act to provide health insurance to virtually all citizens and did it without raising taxes.

Working with Democrats in the legislature and others, he developed a plan that starting next July will make mandatory health insurance for all state residents, providing a plan is available to the individual that is deemed affordable according to state standards.

### where to write

**U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; web address — roberts-senate.gov

**U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; web e-mail address — brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me

**U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; Fax (202) 225-5124 e-mail address — jerry.moran@mail.house.gov

Romneycare won in 2006, Hillarycare lost in 1993.

Romney has done much more and been credited with creating an environment that has attracted new jobs to his state, especially in the field of technology. Massachusetts added jobs, New York lost them.

Another executive facing Democratic-controlled city and state legislative bodies was Mayor Giuliani. His leadership in the nation's toughest city created jobs, brought down crime, and shepherded the city through the darkest days after 9/11.

Those are genuine records of accomplishments, and when you run candidates with such records you can win against candidates with dismal records such as Sen. Hillary Clinton's.

The point is, when you argue on the merits you can win. When you argue on personalities, you lose.

It's no wonder Sen. Clinton, who has the media in her pocketbook, wants you to attack her as Hillary Clinton and not as Sen. Clinton, who has accomplished nothing meaningful.

Matched against a Republican with a solid record for getting things done, she's a sure loser. *Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to mereagan@hotmail.com.*

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