

Is there any hope to cut ballooning U.S. deficit?

How do we curb the federal deficit, clearly out of control at \$423 billion a year and climbing?

That's more than 15 percent of the \$2.7 trillion budget. Making cuts has proved difficult. As President Bush points out, every program has its backers, and when they put the pressure on, Congress has a hard time saying "no."

Nearly half the budget is tied up in so-called "entitlements," programs like Medicare for the elderly, Medicaid for the poor, welfare, Social Security and farm subsidies. Unless Congress changes the law, most of these go up and up every year.

The president proposed cutting \$40 billion in growth from these programs — not a cut-back, just less growth — over the next five years. His budget met with a howl of protest.

Congress needs to make those cuts, though, because we simply can't afford continued growth in every program. And what are the chances that Congress will do that?

You guessed it.

Democrats have called instead for repealing Mr. Bush's tax cuts. Mr. Bush counters that raising taxes could mean less revenue, not more, if the economy slows down. Besides, he said, more money would just mean more spending, not lower deficits.

"That's not the way Washington works," he

said last week. "Washington will raise your taxes and figure out new ways to spend your money. That's how it works."

"The best way to balance the budget is to keep pro-growth economic policies in place, keep the taxes low so the economy grows, which generates more revenues for the treasury, and set priorities on the people's money."

But priorities have no place in Congress, where "every program sounds worthwhile. Everybody's spending request is necessary."

If Congress needs some help with priorities, he said, they ought to give him the line-item veto, where the president could pencil out individual spending items rather than vetoing an entire, often vital, spending bill.

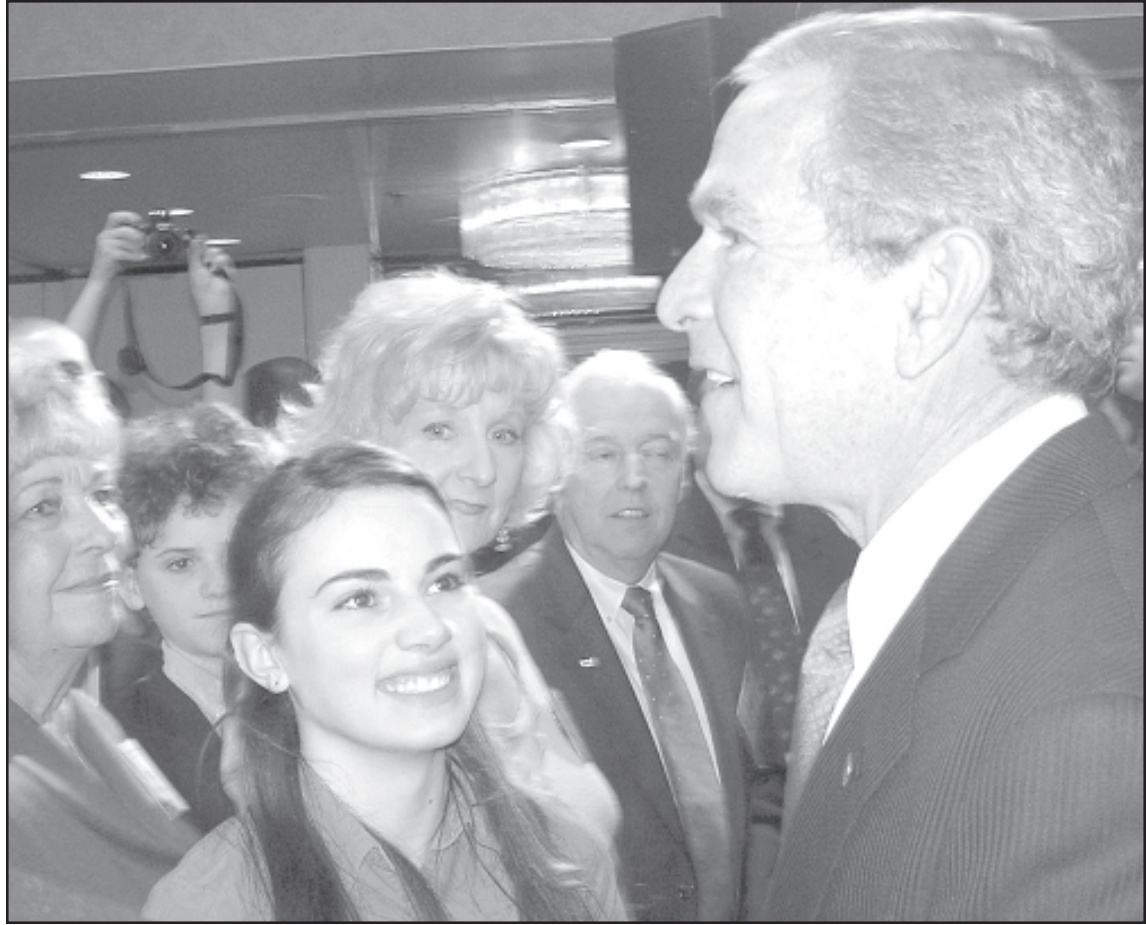
"That way we can bring budget discipline, help keep budget discipline in Washington," the president said.

That'll be the day.

Still, with the national debt at \$8.3 trillion and soon to top \$9 trillion, something has to give. Even Mr. Bush expects only to cut the deficit in half by 2009 — and that only if Congress goes along.

Yes, programs will have to die. Others will be cut. Some will be the programs we want. Some will be important. But the country simply can't afford to keep spending as it is.

— Steve Haynes



AFTER SPEAKING TO EDITORS, President George Bush worked the crowd at a National Newspaper Association meeting last week in Washington. He spent a little time talking with Savannah Cochran, 15, of Colorado. —Photo by Harrison Cochran, The Aurora Sentinel

Bush about to fulfill his vision?

It wasn't a message you hear every day.

"When you are with George Bush this week," the source said, "remember that you are in the presence of greatness."

That about a president who had been reviled as a liar, fool, warmonger and charlatan.

But our guest, a well-placed diplomatic source, a European with three decades of experience in America, may be in a position to judge.

"People complain that American presidents come into office with no vision for foreign affairs," he continued. "George Bush has a vision."

And, he added, cautioning that his words were on "deep background," meaning "I was never here," that vision is well on its way to being fulfilled.

Despite the talk of civil war and the demonstrations on the Iraq war's third birthday, he said, things are going well for the American side. As we pull out, the Iraqis will push foreign fighters from their land and claim peace.

The Bush strategy has not failed, he said; it's working.

Moreover, the administration's overall vision for the Mideast is about to fall into place. This vision, he said, was laid out in papers published by Bush's "neocon" stalwarts, including Vice President Dick Cheney, even before the election that brought them to power.

By toppling Saddam Hussein, the administration began the process of destabilizing the Ba'athist regimes that had dominated the region. The government of Syria will fall, he predicted, brought down by the aftermath of the assassination of a former Lebanese premier.

The government of Iran is dysfunctional and near implosion, despite the nuclear threats of its terrorist president and hard-line clerics. The president speaks, and a low-level bureaucrat contradicts him.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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Moderate voices are starting to be heard.

The Egyptian government, too, is in danger of collapse. When all is said and done, American's friends — Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates — will be left standing and our enemies laid low. The Mideast will be a very different — and better — place when George Bush leaves office than it was when he entered.

Is he right?

The next couple of years will tell.

Later that week, President Bush launched his own offensive, defending his policies from Iraq to Iran, from Social Security to No Child Left Behind.

Mr. Bush, talking to editors from the National Newspaper Association, appeared relaxed, at ease. He was strong in his defense of his record, touting a growing economy and plugging for extension of his tax cuts to keep it that way.

In what turned out to be the opening salvo of a week-long offensive, the President arrived with top aides, including political guru Karl Rove, in tow.

He got passionate over a question about a teacher who criticized him in Colorado.

It's OK, he said, because this is America:

"I think people should be allowed to criticize me all they want," he said, pausing for effect. "And they do."

"Now, what are you all laughing at over there?" he kidded. "Don't

cheer them on.

"Look, I think that's the great thing about (this country) — look, there are some certain basic freedoms that we've got to protect. The freedom of people to express themselves must be protected. The freedom of people to be able to worship freely, that freedom is valuable."

That led to rather eloquent ad lib on the principles of publishers and presidents:

"You make decisions," Mr. Bush said. "You know, you have to make a lot of decisions. And you don't put your finger in the air to figure out how to make a decision. And neither should the president of the United States."

"And you have to know what you believe. Good decision-making rests on certain basic principles."

"I believe in the universality of freedom. I believe democracies lead to peace. I believe people ought to worship freely. I do believe there's an almighty God that has spread freedom, making freedom available for everybody."

"I believe in private enterprise. I believe in free enterprise. I believe in high standards in education. These are basic beliefs that I'm not going to change...."

"And I understand some of the things I've done are unpopular. But that's what comes with the territory. If you're afraid to make decisions and you are only worried about, you know, whether or not people in the classroom are going to say nice things about you, you're not leading."

Another family out of slums

Mission accomplished. House No. 15 is in the record books. Another Mexican family now has decent shelter.

I guess we look at mission work like the little boy who was throwing starfish back into the ocean after a storm had washed thousands of the little creatures ashore. Someone said to him, "Why bother? There are thousands and thousands of them. What difference will it make?"

As the little boy threw one more starfish back into the water, he said, "Well, it made a difference to that one."

You can go through life not knowing for sure if you made a difference.

Or, you can do something for someone who can't do it for themselves and know you made a difference in their life. Which, in turn, makes a difference in your life.

I don't care what you do. Just do something.

—ob—

Sure glad we got home when we



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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did. With this snowstorm, I wouldn't want to be out on the roads today. Jim just came inside and said he heard the highways were about to be closed. That settles it — we're not going anywhere.

Except maybe to the cafe. We just read in the town newsletter that they're serving liver and onions for lunch. Maybe I'll put on my boots and we'll slog our way over to Main Street. Boy, do we love liver and onions.

—ob—

Our daughter Jennifer's timing was good. She went to San Antonio

for Alexandria's spring break and they left Friday. How perfect is that? Leave before the weather gets bad and return when it's all over. The snow will probably be gone before they come home.

—ob—

This is the kind of day I should get some long-postponed project finished. Like that scrapbook page I've been working on; the pair of pajamas I've had cut out for our granddaughter, Taylor; or this year's income taxes. Lots of things I should do, but a nice, long nap still sounds like my best option.

Woman praises nation's social workers

To the Editor:

For the last 108 years, social workers have been improving the lives of people affected by poverty, discrimination, abuse, addiction, unemployment, disabilities and mental illness. Social workers have helped build caring organizations that make a difference. They have brought the light of hope to those suffering from social injustices and have brought dignity and respect to the disadvantaged in our society.

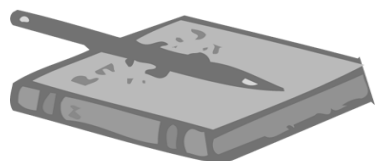
March is the month when we celebrate the achievements of all those who labor in the social work field. This year they will be recognized by the theme "Life's Journey. Help Starts Here."

As a licensed social worker and vice president of the St. Francis Academy, which currently employs over 100 social workers, I am honored to be a part of this significant profession. I celebrate every day the difference social workers make in the lives of children and families.

Please join me in recognizing and applauding those who work in this profession and who have given their lives to make a difference in the lives of others. If you know a social worker, offer them thanks and a

warm hug. If you need help, please seek out a social worker. "Life's Journey. Help Starts Here." is a message of hope for everyone, thanks to the dedication of caring social workers.

Sharon Ringler, vice president
St. Francis Academy Inc.
Salina



Letter to the Editor

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Strange cats infiltrate house

We were gone for two weeks and the cats took over.

Not just our cats — every cat in the neighborhood dropped by and made themselves to home.

We got back on a Sunday. That night as we were having supper in the dining room, Steve looked into the kitchen in time to see a grey, white and yellow cat meander through.

"Who are you?" he asked.

She looked totally surprised to find a human in the place and skedaddled down the basement stairs before I could get a look at her.

I believed him, however. It's just the sort of thing that happens around here.

I got a real good look at her the next night as I took some spare clothing to store in youngest daughter's room.

Youngest daughter hasn't used that room in 10 years, but our cats like to curl up in the bed under the covers. In fact, they regularly un-



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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make the bed so that every week or so I have to remake it.

The grey, white and yellow cat was sleeping on the bed. At least she was sleeping until I walked into the room and closed the door. At that point she was up and ready to go, but the exit was blocked.

I grabbed her and checked her out.

She was well fed — probably on my cat food. She seemed to be in good health and was, if not friendly, not actively hostile. She just didn't trust me and wanted out.

So, I let her go and told Steve I was thinking of naming her Patches.

He winced.

Two days later he spotted a part-Siamese cat walking up the stairs.

While I haven't seen this feline in the domicile, I've spotted him heading into several neighbors' yards.

I don't know if we're a feeding station, a stop on the underground cat railroad or just time-sharing pets with our neighbors.

One thing I am sure of, Steve is getting tired of the extras. He has the silly notion that one or two cats are enough for any family and he's not crazy that we seem to have four at this point. He's definitely not in favor of adding every stray in the county.

Too bad. The newcomers are kinda fun. I wonder who will show up in the house next?

Did someone switch printer?

To the Editor:

Can you believe we cannot go to McCook on a Sunday night without someone coming into our home? Sept. 24, someone did just that.

I came home to find that someone had changed printers. They left an older one that did not work as good. Both printers were Lexmark brand. Our home was locked and secure.

Letter to the editor

Some local police seem to think it needs to be shown they actually break in my home.
Elsie Walters, Oberlin

From the Bible

Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

III John: 11