

President needs line veto for a balanced budget

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 it 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

Children should play in snow

If the world hands you lemons, they say, make lemonade. If it rains on your parade, get an umbrella. And, if Mother Nature drops 10 inches of powdery snow on you, go out and play in it.

It doesn't seem like kids today play outside in the snow like we used to. I think too many parents are worried they will get sick if they play out in the cold. I always remember an old doctor telling me, "You don't catch a cold from being cold."

Relax, Mom. Let 'em go outside. It'll be good for them.

Who remembers making snow forts and playing "fox and geese?" We didn't just make a snowman, we made snow families. Of course, we had real lumps of coal for the buttons and my mother sacrificed many an apron for Mrs. Snowman.

Coming home from chapel services yesterday, we saw two kids being pulled on sleds by two other kids on horseback. They had long roped tied to the saddle horns and the sleds. Once the horse got up to speed, the rider would guide it into a turn and the person on the sled would get a wild ride as the sled swung in a wide arc. Half the fun was when the centrifugal force would sling the sledder off and into a snow bank.

I wanted to be a kid again.

I don't remember ever using a horse to pull us, but I do remember my brothers taking an old car hood and pulling it behind a tractor. With



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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a car hood, you could get about four people on board at once.

Today, if a kid rode on a rusty car hood behind a tractor, some child protection agency would probably slap the parents in jail for endangerment — the same people who want to make spanking illegal.

Don't get me wrong, I don't advocate beating or hurting a child. But a well-placed "pop" on the seat of learning certainly gets a child's attention. And usually, that is enough.

This proposed legislation is saying it would be illegal to spank a child under the age of 3. I say if you wait until they're 3, you've waited too long. I'm afraid there is confusion between discipline and spanking. Some think the two are synonymous.

The mistake is made if a child is not disciplined at all. Parents don't want to hurt their child's little psyche, so they do nothing. Big mistake, huge.

You can't tell anyone else how to raise their children. And I don't

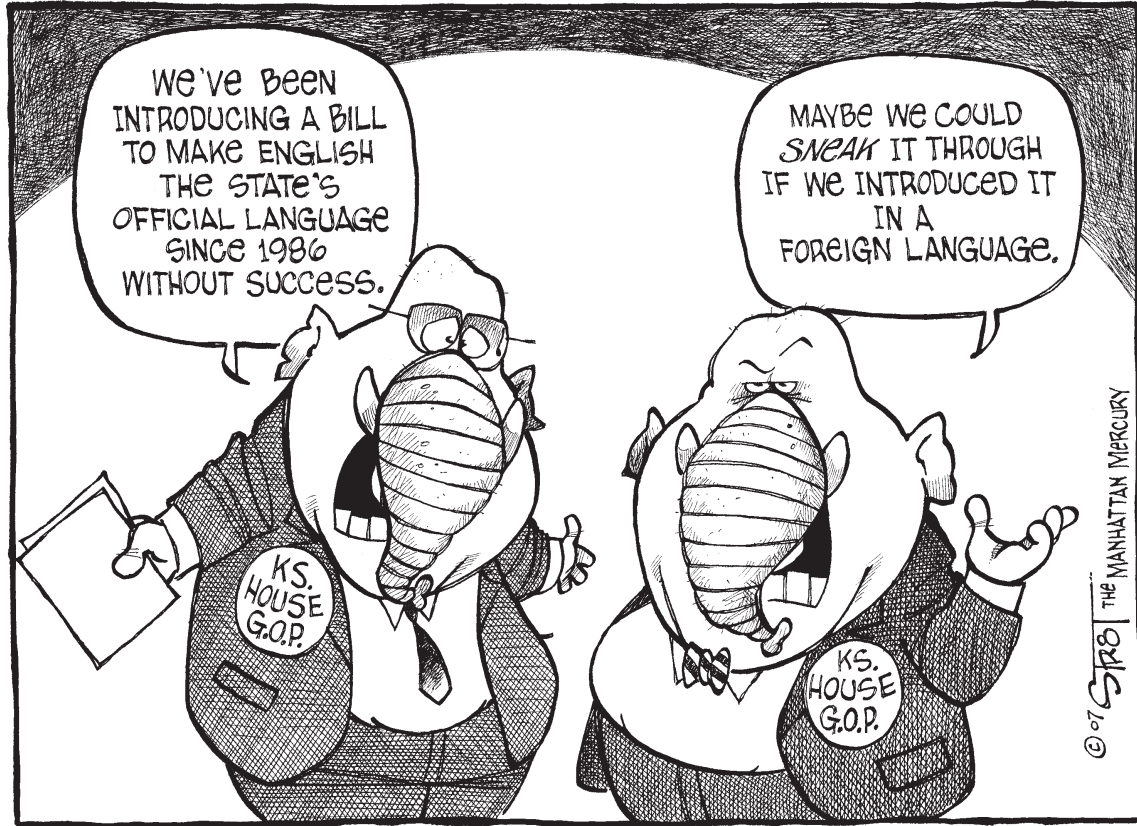
think the government should, either.

—ob—

Bottom line: I'm glad my children are raised.

From the Bible

... it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him for it is his portion. Ecclesiastes 5: 18b



Tunisia site of the Great Mosque

TUNISIA, NORTH AFRICA — The mullah woke me with his early morning call to prayer. It must be about 5 a.m. I'm glad I'm not a Muslim.

We're in Kairouan, the religious heart of the country. In 670 A.D., the city was the capital of the area because it was on an important caravan route.

Today, it is a city of mosques, shrines and history.

We visited the Great Mosque, first built in 703 and rebuilt or renovated in 774, 1025, 1294, 1618 and, finally, 1970 for the city's 1,300 birthday.

Like mosques throughout the world, it is built around an open courtyard with a minaret or tower at one end. Tunisian pilgrims heading for Mecca leave on their journey from this courtyard. Girls present their first hand-made carpets as gifts to the mosque and hundreds of these small rugs cover the courtyard for marriage-contract ceremonies.

This also is where boys come to be circumcised when they are 5 or 6. A photo of youngsters at this ceremony shows what looks like a kindergarten class of scrubbed young faces in little suits, excited and anxiously awaiting their rite of passage.

The mosque, while one of the holiest places for Tunisia's Moslem community, is built on an early Christian site and both crosses and stars of David can be found on the columns and walls, whose stone was



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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taken from Roman and Byzantine ruins.

The six women of our party — two Moslem, three Christian and one Jewish — borrow scarves to cover our heads to go into the prayer room. Inside, men and women, facing east, stood or knelt in prayer while others like us gawked at the huge columns, rugs, chandeliers and fancy wood and plaster work and took each other's pictures.

After the mosque, we visited the shrine of Abu Jama el-Balawi, known as the Prophet's barber. The faithful believe that three hairs from Muhammad's beard are interred in the green-draped tomb with his friend and barber.

The shrine is set up like a small mosque, with a central open court surrounded by rooms for prayer, teaching and storage.

On entering the shrine, an attendant sprinkled us with orange water to purify us.

I felt, as I had in the great mosque, that we were in a holy place and I said a prayer to the Father, Yahweh,

Allah — the God of Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rebecca, Tunisia and America — to bring understanding and brotherhood to our related but different beliefs.

Was this experience so much different than my mother putting a napkin on my head when it was time for Mass and I had forgotten my hat?

What about all those visitors to St. Peter's in Rome? Most of them are there to gawk and take pictures. And, sometimes, some say a little prayer.

I believe in angels and saints, in heaven and hell and in God and the devil. I made my first communion when I was in the second grade and my class looked a lot like that picture of young boys, waiting to become part of their religious community.

I seem to find more similarities than differences in my experience at mosque and shrine. Still, when that mullah calls the faithful at 5 a.m., I burrow deeper under the covers and my prayer is to thank God that he isn't calling me.

There are exceptions to every rule

To the Editor:

I am responding to the articles regarding Rose Eskew's miniature horse, Scout.

As an animal lover with many pets of my own, I want Rose to know that I'm on her side.

To begin with, if Rose and her husband had never applied for a license, you board members wouldn't have known about Scout. And Scout wouldn't have been an issue. But they wanted to do the right thing. Where did that lead?

Scout is a miniature horse — not a full-grown horse or a cow or a pig. Scout is house-broken and is taken for walks. Scout stays at home — he's not running loose. He is loved by his family and is a house pet. He doesn't bark at people or bite them. Scout doesn't poop on other people's lawns — he's always with his owners. I know dogs that are bigger.

I believe that the board can make exceptions to the rule. If the board had heard complaints from Eskew's neighbors regarding Scout, it would be different. Her neighbors aren't complaining; the board is.

Scout is a house pet, not a barnyard animal. He's used to living in a secure, loving home with the Eskews. Scout's used to having

Letter to the Editor

them around. What you're asking Rose to do with Scout is cruel. Scout will feel abandoned. Scout only knows what he's been raised as — a house pet.

I believe Rose ought to be able to keep Scout in the family home. If I were living in Oberlin, I would sign the petition Rose had regarding Scout. In my opinion, the board has overreacted.

Concerning the chickens, while I was living in Oberlin, my neighbors had chickens. They lived in their garage and occasionally I saw them in their back yard. The chickens weren't a problem. They were a part of our neighborhood.

I had a pet ferret. My children raised pet rabbits. Did these pets require a permit?

I realize every situation is different. When I lived in Chicago, I read an article about a potbellied pig that lived in an apartment with its owners. The apartment owners made an exception to their rule.

That pig was a pet and housebroken. Their apartment didn't stink — it was clean. And the pig went for walks with a leash.

If big-city apartments are able to make exceptions, Oberlin ought to be able to.

Beckie Alquist
Zumbrot, Minn.

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