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November 28, 2010

Still Ahead: A Confrontation Over the Budget

To the Editor:

Re “[There Will Be Blood](#),” by Paul Krugman (column, Nov. 22):

It’s not often that a president can mark the next crisis on his calendar and prepare for it, but that’s what President Obama can do, with the national debt limit due to be reached in April. The president had better learn to fight between now and then.

This is going to be an epochal fight — truly one that could determine whether we return to the difficult realities of governance and fiscal discipline, and thereby preserve the hope of remaining a great nation, or continue with partisanship and avoidance of vital issues, which will lead to economic breakdown.

This is the test of the president’s ability to lead. This is the moment when “change” either happens or fails to happen.

Ron Meyers

New York, Nov. 22, 2010

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To the Editor:

Neither the Bush nor the Obama administration has dealt with the gross income inequality in this country — the worst in a century — coupled with crippling unemployment.

The actions that would actually get us back to a more fair and equal society are not surprising:

¶Social Security and Medicare taxes should be levied on all income.

¶Hedge fund income should be treated and taxed as ordinary income, not capital gains.

¶Very high salaries should be taxed at a rate of 50 percent or more, which would discourage extravagant pay for chief executives.

¶Our troops should be pulled out of Iraq and Afghanistan.

And, of course, extending Medicare to everyone would save even more money.

These measures would balance the budget, extend the solvency of Social Security and return military spending to a more reasonable portion of the budget.

We would also put money into the pockets of working men and women, leading to greater consumer demand and fuller employment far more rapidly than cutting taxes on the wealthy.

These options are not part of Representative Paul Ryan's "roadmap," nor Erskine B. Bowles and Alan K. Simpson's draft proposal as deficit commission co-chairmen, nor The Times's Nov. 14 online [budget balancing exercise](#).

James J. Diamond

Portland, Ore., Nov. 15, 2010

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To the Editor:

We have a big problem in this country, and it looks as if the co-chairmen of President Obama's fiscal commission are ready to face it. For decades we have wasted the money we should have been spending on kids and the environment by buying overpriced weapons that don't work and staffing cold-war-era military bases around the world. Now it seems that those bad ideas are on the chopping block to the tune of \$100 billion in defense cuts.

Groups as diverse as USAction, the Center for Defense Information, leaders of the Cato Institute as well as many Tea Party members all agree. These cuts don't need to be a partisan issue.

Many of the Republicans elected to the new Congress have pledged to put Pentagon spending under a microscope, and I know many Democrats would rather spend our tax dollars on essential things like education, health care and jobs.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle should welcome a real debate on Pentagon spending. Every weapon system, every proposal to increase the size of the force, every plan for deploying our military abroad or expanding current operations must be scrutinized.

Ben Cohen

Williston, Vt., Nov. 16, 2010

The writer, a co-founder of Ben & Jerry's ice cream, is the founder of TrueMajority, an advocacy group that promotes more spending on domestic needs rather than defense.