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Goldberg: Democrats wield dull budget scissors

Jonah Goldberg, Erie Times-News

According to earth-logic, if you got a raise of 10 percent in 2010, but this year you're only getting a raise of 8 percent, you're still getting a raise. On Planet Washington, that qualifies as an indefensible slashing.

So when the GOP actually cut \$4 billion from the proposed budget, the Democrats acted as if it was an involuntary amputation.

Now the GOP wants to cut \$61 billion of discretionary nondefense spending from the total budget of \$3.7 trillion, and Democrats are responding as if this will spell the end of Western civilization.

But given their terror of forcing a government shutdown in this tea-soaked climate, Democrats were forced to counteroffer with a cut of \$10.5 billion, or 0.28 percent of the federal budget. Imagine you have a budget of \$10,000 (about 40 percent of it borrowed on a credit card), then "slash" 28 bucks. That's what it's like to be a frugal Democrat.

"Fox News Sunday" host Chris Wallace repeatedly pressed Sen. Dick Durbin: Is \$10.5 billion in cuts "really the best the Democrats can do?" The No. 2 Senate Democrat responded, eventually: "We've pushed this to the limit." Any cuts beyond that would simply crater our economy and gut "investments" to make us competitive with China. Apparently, Durbin thinks trimming the staff at the Argonne National Laboratory will result in us all becoming busboys at a Beijing restaurant.

Meanwhile, Nancy Pelosi, the House minority leader, makes Durbin look stingier than the guy who invented copper wire by refusing to let go of a penny. Her solution to the deficit is -- wait for it -- spend a whole bunch more. In October, Pelosi said that every dollar spent on unemployment benefits and food stamps puts another \$1.79 into the economy.

If that were true, why not drop bags of cash from C-130s over the unemployed and poor?

Her latest version of teenage mutant ninja Keynesianism is to "invest" even more on education. "Nothing brings more to the treasury than investing in education," Pelosi said.

Never mind that Washington has "invested" roughly \$2 trillion in education since 1965. And forget the fact that spending on education at all levels of government has gone from \$55,000 (in 2010 dollars) for one student's complete K-12 education in 1970 to \$155,000 in 2009, according to Cato Institute scholar Andrew Coulson, while "overall achievement has stagnated or declined, depending on the subject."

Would another trillion in education spending really have a greater return than, say, allowing American companies to drill for the billions of gallons of oil under our soil and the trillions of cubic feet of natural gas?

Look at it this way. Those heartless Republicans would cut 2011 nondefense discretionary spending from 3.6 percent to 3.2 percent of GDP. Under Bill Clinton, such spending averaged 3.1 percent of GDP.

We owe \$14 trillion we don't have. Our total liabilities -- i.e., Social Security and other entitlements -- dwarf that. Obviously, we can't just cut discretionary spending alone. But if it's this hard to ask cowboy poets to cowboy up, how are we going to deal with

what everyone agrees is the much harder stuff?

JONAH GOLDBERG is a syndicated columnist (JonahsColumn@aol.com).