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Dems' Dull Budget Scissors

Nancy Pelosi demands more while President Obama refuses to lead.

According to earthly logic, if you got a raise of 10 percent last year, but this year you got a raise of only 8 percent, you still got a raise. On Planet Washington, that qualifies as an indefensible slashing.

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

Now the GOP wants to cut \$61 billion of discretionary non-defense 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 — to spend a whole bunch more. In October, Pelosi said that every dollar spent on unemployment benefits and food stamps puts another \$1.79 into economy. “It is the biggest bang for the buck when you do food stamps and unemployment insurance.”

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 K–12 student 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? Don’t ask Pelosi. Like Bluto in *Animal House* talking about the Germans bombing Pearl Harbor, she’s on a roll.

Why am I talking about Durbin and Pelosi? Well, Obama is in a fetal crouch under the Oval Office desk, muttering something about the need for courage and bipartisanship while quietly proposing \$6.5 billion in cuts, which the Congressional Budget Office said is really only \$4.7 billion. (That’s about \$700 million more than the U.S. spends in borrowed money every day. Imagine someone in obscene debt going a little more than 24 hours without using his credit card. Problem solved!)

Oh, and Senate majority leader Harry Reid seems determined to keep talking until the men in the white coats escort him off the Senate floor. He was last heard saying the GOP has gone crazy because it had cut funding to a cowboy-poetry festival in Nevada. No, really. Stop laughing.

In 2007, the budget was 19.6 percent of the GDP. In 2009, it went up to 25 percent of GDP. That’s where the Democrats would like it to stay.

What happened? The financial crisis, of course. But as many of us suggested at the time, one of the Democrats’ real motives behind the stimulus was to inflate the “baseline” budget so that huge increases would never be reversed thanks to the D.C. logic that a cut in growth is a cut.

Now, Democrats greet any attempt to restore the size of government to its pre-crisis size — when we were still living way above our means — as if America would be plunged into the Stone Age.

Look at it this way. Those heartless Republican bastards would cut 2011 non-defense

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 rough-rider poets to cowboy up, how are we going to deal with what everyone agrees is the much harder stuff?

— *Jonah Goldberg is editor-at-large of NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE and a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. © 2011 Tribune Media Services, Inc.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article has been amended since its original posting.*