

NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER

Deroy Murdock: GOP spending bonanza screams for budget reforms

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HERE'S PLENTY to hate about last week's GOP surrender on the federal budget. According to Citizens Against Government Waste, this nearly \$300 billion extravaganza is "a 14 percent annual spending increase over current levels." This exceeds 2017's 2.1 percent inflation rate nearly seven-fold.

Even worse, this spend-o-rama avoids structural reforms to limit, or even reverse, the damage from this midnight raid on the Treasury. Among the items that Congress should have included:

- **The Penny Plan.** This would reduce total federal spending by 1 percent every year for eight years. Washington would spend \$1 in 2018, 99 cents in 2019, etc. Most programs could spare a penny annually. Urgent outlays (e.g. killing terrorists and deadly microbes) could be protected, or even increased, by shrinking other programs (federal arts funding, PBS) by more than a penny — or scrapping them. By 2026, the budget should balance as federal outlays stabilize at 18 percent of GDP. This is the smoothest and least painful path to long-term fiscal sanity.
- **Zero-based budgeting.** Rather than ladle fresh gravy atop each federal program, agency chiefs would have to justify each year's expenditures from the first dollar. If they cannot, then budgets should be slashed or zeroed out accordingly.
- **Audit everything.** Contract with Ernst & Young, KPMG, and other major accountancies to audit every program, from attic to basement. Those found profligate, duplicative, or corrupt should be shrunk or dumped.
- **You're fired!** A new law should allow immediate dismissals across the leviathan, like the 1,500 incompetents and crooks booted from the Veterans Administration since President Trump signed the VA Accountability Act. A much broader statute would let federal managers sack rotten employees, rather than let them enjoy plush, Lois Lerner-style paid leave (i.e., paid vacation) followed by cushy retirements and gilded benefits. Corrupt feds should be jailed.
- **Dispose of Davis-Bacon.** This pricey, racist New Deal relic requires that federally funded infrastructure projects pay union-level "prevailing wages." The Cato Institute's Chris Edwards and Gabriel Roth calculate that "these rules increase the wage costs on highway projects by an

average of 22 percent, while also slowing projects and piling paperwork on contractors.”

- Modernize federal pensions. Existing federal workers should be freed to convert their defined-benefit plans into defined-contribution accounts. New employees should go directly into such arrangements. This would save taxpayers a little money now and much more later.
- Kill more of Obamacare. The budget deal mercifully erases Obamacare’s Independent Payments Advisory Board (the original “Death Panel”). But if not fully repealed, this monster certainly could be dismembered even further. A ban on future insurance-industry bailouts, for one, would shield taxpayers from such an outrage.
- Auction off federal enterprises. New Jersey conservative activist Ted Pomeroy reminded me that the Tennessee Valley Authority runs 73 power stations, including three atomic-energy plants, 15 solar facilities, and 29 hydroelectric dams. Washington should privatize these assets and extricate Uncle Sam from these and many other businesses.

Any four or five of these ideas might have made last week’s delivery of Purina Swamp Chow easier to swallow. Instead, taxpayers and fiscal conservatives are gagging in disgust. The good news is that it’s never too late for Republicans to burn their white flags, return to battle, and do the Right thing.