

Power Line Blog: John Hinderaker, Scott Johnson, Paul Mirengoff

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ONE-THIRD OF A FRENCH FRY SHORT OF A BIG MAC MEAL

March 18, 2011 Posted by John at 12:32 PM

How can we put the current debate over the federal budget into a tangible perspective that anyone can understand? This morning I read a post by [Dan Mitchell of the Cato Institute](#) in which he criticized the Washington Post's characterization of the \$6 billion cut in the most recent continuing resolution as "slashing" the federal budget:

Federal spending has soared by more than \$2,000,000,000,000 during the Bush-Obama years, pushing the burden of government up to \$3,800,000,000,000, yet the reporters who put together this story said that an agreement to trim a trivially tiny slice of 2011 spending would "slash the budget."

As Charlie Brown would say, good grief. This is the budgetary equivalent of going on a diet by leaving a couple of french fries in the bottom of the bag after bingeing on three Big Mac meals at McDonald's.

That struck me as a pretty good analogy. I wondered: if you do the math, what part of a Big Mac Extra Value Meal would a \$6 billion budget cut represent?



The arithmetic is pretty simple, due to the extensive nutrition information that McDonalds makes available online. A Big Mac Extra Value Meal has three components: a Big Mac, a large order of

french fries, and a medium soda. The McDonalds site tells us that a Big Mac has 540 calories, a large fries has 570 and a medium Coke has 210, for a total of 1,320 calories.

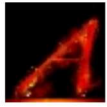
Meanwhile, the federal budget is currently around \$3.8 trillion, which means that a \$6 billion cut represents one 633rd of the total. What would be an equivalent cut in a Big Mac Extra Value Meal?

One variable is not readily available online; that is, how many french fries are there in a large order? To answer that question, I went to a nearby McDonalds at lunch time, paid for a large order of fries, and counted them. There were 87. (I counted fries regardless of size, but did not count the hard bits in the bottom of the container.)

This allows us to complete the calculation. If there are 570 calories in a large order of fries, and 87 fries per order, each french fry, on the average, contains 6.5 calories. One 633rd of the total calorie content of a Big Mac Extra Value Meal is $1,320/633$, or 2.1 calories. That equals almost exactly one-third of an average sized french fry.

So, consider: if you were to go on what the Democrats consider a starvation diet, and "slash" your calorie intake to exactly the same degree that the Republicans' \$6 billion cut has "slashed" the federal budget, you would do the following. Go to McDonalds and order a Big Mac Extra Value meal. Eat the Big Mac. Drink the Coke. Eat 86 of the 87 french fries. Carefully take the last fry and bite off two-thirds of it. Put the remaining one-third of one fry back in the bag.

If you seriously think that you have just "slashed" your diet, you are a Democrat. Most likely, an overweight Democrat.

 Post to FacebookPosting as [Jeremy Kolassa](#) (log out)**Comment****Irene A. LeClaire** · Windham, Maine

Thanks for the story. The new mantra of Democrats is that we would have to cut all the discretionary funding to even approach real budget cuts. I say it's time to redefineprnon discretionary funding and restore the federal government to its proper functions. Nullify now.

8 · Like · Reply · Saturday at 7:36am

**Bill Snider** · Texas Tech and UT law school

Good example. Something that helps me get my head around our budget and deficit is the fact that one trillions seconds is 31,688 years. Putting down \$1 per second, it would take 31,688 years to get to one trillion.

6 · Like · Reply · Saturday at 8:57am

**Paul Alan Johnson** · Richmond, Virginia

Finally - the budget mess put in a perspective that people can understand.

6 · Like · Reply · Saturday at 8:33am

**Susan Roschke** · Cincinnati, Ohio

perfect

Like · Reply · Saturday at 10:16am

**Bruno Behrend** · Chicago, Illinois

There is YouTube of a table full of stacked pennies representing the entire US budget. The guy in the video takes a metal shear and slices 1/4 of a penny off, to indicate some small cut relative to the entire budget.

That video, and others like it, needs to become the foundation of the entire conservative movement's campaign against spending.

If we never persuade the soccer mom that her babies' entire future is at risk under this tax and entitlement regime, we won't win the upcoming debate.

Republicans and conservatives need to go straight at Medicare , Medicaid, and social security...and WIN.

If they punt, they will lose. We no longer have the luxury of pretending growth will suffice. The whole of government needs to get massive haircut, and if we can't make the case we won't win the people.

4 · Like · Reply · Saturday at 9:36am

**Ray Herber**

Shortly after being elected, Obama said the time to act on the debt is now. "What we have done is kicked the can down the road," he told The Washington Post. "We are now at the end of the road and are not in a position to kick it any further."

4 · Like · Reply · Saturday at 10:14am

**David Englehart**

As a math guy, I believe this may represent my favorite Powerline post of all time. No small feat, since I've been reading since Hewitt first mentioned you back in the old days before the awards, fame and luchre started piling up. Keep up the great work...you folks are the only thing keeping my blood pressure from triple digits.

4 · Like · Reply · Friday at 5:12pm

**John Hinderaker** · ★ Top Commenter · Friends with [George Scoville](#)

Thanks!

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**Dave Kuraguntla**

