

Roger Pilon Vice President for Legal Affairs, Cato Institute:

It's Valentine's Day and love is in the air, especially on Capitol Hill where Congress anxiously awaits the 10 a.m. arrival of the president's FY 2012 budget. It should be well shredded by noon.

And as it is, across the land we'll be hearing the cries of "Not me, please, not my sinecure" - no more plaintively than from the minions of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. How will the average Chicago Bears fan endure without the latest BBC soap - excuse me, Masterpiece Theatre production?

But if that should come to pass, woe be unto those CPB congressional supporters who survived the November shellacking, the very ones who brought us to this sorry state by failing, for the first time in our history, to pass a single spending bill. Hell hath no fury like that of an NPR patron scorned.

David Boaz Executive VP, Cato Institute:

The federal budget has risen \$2 trillion since Bill Clinton left office. Bush and the Republican Congress raised it by a trillion before the financial crisis. And it's risen by nearly another trillion in barely two and a half years. The deficit in this year's budget will be \$1.6 trillion -- and this from a president who promised in October 2008 a "net spending cut."

In that context, debates over cuts of \$32 billion or \$100 billion are comical -- or would be, if the situation weren't so serious. That's a tiny trim from the fastest-growing budgets in history.

And it isn't just bailouts and new "stimulus" programs that have increased in the past 2.5 years. Lots of individual programs have gotten huge boosts, and proposals to "slash" those programs typically just roll back the increases in the last two fiscal years. For instance, Marc Ambinder notes at National Journal, " In 2008, the government spent \$2.6 billion on LIHEAP. In 2009, the figure jumped to \$8.1 billion. So the cut from that high level restores LIHEAP to something close to where it was before Obama took office."

Both Republicans and Democrats got us to this point. All these cuts in discretionary non-defense spending are needed. But politicians have to constrain Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and Pentagon spending to get us off the path to a national debt equal to GDP.

