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By *The Examiner*

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You may have heard about the devastating cuts that Republicans are imposing on the federal budget. Those hard-hearted Republicans are actually seeking to slash \$61 billion from this year's \$3.46 trillion federal budget. That would reduce federal spending this year by 1.7 percent.

To put that in perspective, if you spent \$2,000 per month, this would be the equivalent of reducing your spending by \$34. Or looked at another way, those massive GOP cuts would reduce this year's \$1.65 trillion budget deficit by roughly 3.5 percent. In fact, those cuts are about a quarter of what the federal government borrowed last month.

Clearly, cuts of that size are intolerable. A million people will be thrown out of work, Democrats warned. Children will starve. Schools will close. Grandma will be left eating cat food in the street. Post-tsunami Japan is just a taste of what will happen if the federal government cuts spending by 1.7 percent.

After all, just look at the most recent continuing resolution that extended government funding to April 8. Republicans pushed through \$6 billion in cuts. Among them:

The 2010 census. What's that you say? Its 2011? The 2010 census was done last year, and there won't be another one until 2020? Clearly you don't understand how the federal government works.

The emergency steel loan program. This program last gave out a loan in 2003. But, hey, you never know when there might be another emergency.

The National Park Service's Save America's Treasures Program. This program was established in 1999 as a two-year program to restore park buildings as part of the year 2000 millennium celebrations. Apparently two years has lasted a bit longer than expected.

The Commerce Department's program to convert televisions to digital reception. Even if one ever believed that it was the federal government's job to make sure we all received digital TV, the conversion was completed in 2009.

The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. The commission actually no longer exists, which didn't prevent Congress from appropriating funds for it.

Thank goodness that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was able to save the cowboy poetry festival.

Is it any surprise Americans don't believe that Washington is serious about cutting spending? If cutting these programs causes such agony, how will Congress ever tackle the type of spending cuts and budget reforms that are needed to truly bring our fiscal house in order?

Our country is about to run up against the \$14.3 trillion national debt limit. And, that's just the debt that's on the books. If you include our implicit debt, the unfunded liabilities of Social Security and Medicare for instance, our real debt tops \$119.5 trillion. Our fiscal future looks more and more like Greece.

We can't deal with that level of debt by eliminating the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. To actually bring the budget into balance will require much larger cuts that go far beyond the search for the elusive and supposedly painless "fraud, waste, and abuse."

Congress is going to have to be prepared to cut programs that are actually popular, to inflict real rather than just Harry Reid-style pain.

And the cuts are going to have to go beyond domestic discretionary spending. In fact, if we eliminated every penny of such spending -- abolished everything from the FBI to the FDA, from the Department of Education to the Department of Commerce -- we would still face a budget deficit this year of just under \$680 billion.

That means serious budget balancing will have to include defense cuts. And Congress will finally have to tackle the looming shortfalls in Social Security and Medicare.

If they do that, then we'll know they are serious. Cowboy poets might even write about it.

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