



## 'Deadline' reality

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The origination of the word “deadline,” you might be interested to know, came during the American Civil War. Union troops at one point took so many Confederate prisoners that they didn't have the time to build prisons. So the captives were warned there was a “deadline” around them, and that any who crossed that line would be shot on sight. Thus, “deadline.”

The real question is, will the GOP stay true to form and fold when the deadline to raise the national debt limit arrives — currently August 2— or finally gain some real concessions for agreeing to once again unleash spending? If the deadline is violated, in other words, will Republicans or Democrats be shot on sight, figuratively speaking.

And will it be the voters who do the shooting?

We are cautiously optimistic that the GOP stands firm. This time around, there's some hope that will happen, given the make-up of the House majority, stiffened as it has been by the addition of financial conservatives sent to Congress by the Tea Party uprising in 2010.

As Congress haggles over the debt ceiling, it needs to look behind the figures. Overall numbers are staggering. The U.S. government has run up so much debt that it soon will surpass the current legal debt limit of \$14.3 trillion. That's \$14,300,000,000,000.00. The budget deficit for the 2011 fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, is projected to be \$1.5 trillion.

It's worth remembering that President Bill Clinton, a liberal Democrat, left office with federal spending amounting to 19 percent of U.S. GDP — and the budget was producing a surplus. Today, the percentage is nearly 25 percent of GDP, run up by too much spending first by Republican President George Bush, then by Democratic President Barack Obama.

As we said, the Republican majority in the House, given backbone by the fiscal conservatives, is insisting on major cuts in the deficit and debt before they approve a higher debt ceiling. But they “should be focused less on a specific dollar amount of cuts than reforms of entitlements,” Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, notes. He's pessimistic, remembering that Republicans promised \$61 billion in cuts in a continuing resolution to the budget earlier this year, but the amount turned out to be just \$8 billion.

Republicans still rightly honor President Ronald Reagan. They should take up his unfulfilled plan to wind down both the Energy (does the U.S. even have a coherent energy policy?) and Education departments, the latter of which doubled in cost under Mr. Bush and centralized education guidance and testing in areas that clearly should be left to state and local entities.

But back to Mr. Tanner, who said that, if spending were cut back to the level of the Clinton presidency — 19 percent of GDP — the budget would be balanced by 2020. Congress had better do it now; if it doesn't, the future looks bleak indeed. The “deadline” is nigh, but in this case if Congress doesn't cross it, no one will need to shoot us; we'll already be buried.

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