



Looking for Real Budget Cuts

By Tad DeHaven

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The House passed a bill last week eliminating the Presidential Election Campaign Fund, which the Tax Foundation calls a “[voluntary tax that stirs little enthusiasm](#).” It would also save a whopping \$14 million by eliminating the [Election Action Committee](#) and transferring certain functions to other federal agencies.

The Republican-sponsored bill passed on a straight party-line vote with the exception of Rep. Walter Jones’ (R-NC) no vote. Eliminating the fund would result in the transfer of \$200 million to the U.S. Treasury for deficit reduction. From a fiscal standpoint, \$200 million in deficit reduction isn’t even worthy of a yawn.

And based on press reports, floor debate centered on whether Republicans were really just trying to disenfranchise Democratic voters. Seriously, didn’t the GOP leadership have anything more substantial to bring to the floor?

I went looking for bills introduced in the House that would eliminate programs. The conservative Republican Study Committee’s Sunset Caucus has a list of bills sponsored by their members that would cut spending (see [here](#)). Although there are some worthy bills that the GOP leadership ought to at least get to the floor, I wasn’t overwhelmed by the offerings.

One that did look particularly good is a bill from Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) that would “[eliminate ineffective and unnecessary federal education programs](#).” I’d say that describes the entire Department of Education.

However, as soon as I saw the bill’s title – The Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act – I immediately knew that it would be a joke. Sure enough, the [Congressional Budget Office’s scoring](#) of the bill shows that I was, unfortunately, correct:

H.R. 1891 would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education act of 1965 to eliminate more than 40 discretionary grant programs. For 2011, the Department of Education allocated \$413 million in funding from amounts appropriated in the Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 (P.L. 112-10) to programs that would be eliminated by H.R. 1891. Under current law, however, the funds allocated to those programs may be used for other grant programs that would not be eliminated by the bill.

Because annual appropriations to the Department of Education can be used for other programs, enacting the bill would not have a significant effect on spending from the appropriation provided for 2011. Furthermore, the authorizations for all of the programs specified in the bill have expired, so CBO estimates the bill would have no impact on such authorization levels. However, savings would accrue – as compared to 2011 appropriations levels – if the total amounts provided in 2012 and subsequent years are lower than the current-year funding for the department.

Note to Duncan Hunter: Why bother?