

Deficit issue needs new approach

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The current discussion of the federal debt and deficit has centered on the social safety net programs we added in this country in response to the grinding poverty experienced during the Great Depression. While some reform of these programs is worthwhile, the wholesale abandonment of our citizens' hard-earned social insurance safety net is not a reasonable option.

I propose two complementing approaches to begin the meaningful discussion of deficit elimination. The first part of this approach results from an understanding of the last address given by President Dwight Eisenhower, under whose administration we last paid down some of our national debt. If we, as Americans, want to eliminate our debt entirely, his warning should be a guide.

In his farewell address, President Eisenhower spoke about the dangers of what he called the "military-industrial-complex." This complex is basically the close relationship between politicians, corporations and the armed forces. The most sinister form of this happens when the corporations that manufacture military hardware influence politicians to declare war, and to allocate funding for that war, resulting in wartime profiteering. This sort of "war-for-profit" has been a consistent criticism of several military engagements since the Eisenhower administration.

The current situation has many leaders asking if the United States is suffering under the burden of such a military-industrial-complex. In fact, some patriots have spoken publicly about the problem. At a speech given in 2010 at the Eisenhower Library, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates asked several enlightening questions about America's insatiable appetite for military spending. He inquired, "Does the number of warships we have, and are building, really put America at risk, when the U.S. battle fleet is larger than the next 13 navies combined; 11 of which are our partners and allies?" He also asked, "Is it a dire threat that by 2020, the United States will have only 20 times more advanced stealth fighters than China?" This is our own secretary of defense, not some uber-liberal think-tank policy wonk.

Therefore, the first source of deficit elimination must be a serious discussion of our current expenditures on military engagements overseas.

The second approach that we must address is corporate welfare. While the stereotype of the "welfare queen" persists in South Carolina, aided by Republican talking points, the most persistent welfare queens in this country are big multinational corporations such as Xerox, IBM, Motorola, Dow Chemical and General Electric. The Cato Institute, a libertarian think-tank commonly quoted by Republicans, places the cost of these corporate welfare payments at \$92 billion in fiscal 2006 and about \$125 billion per year in recent budgets.

Why do Republican politicians wail about "welfare queens" and extol the virtues of social Darwinism and "free" markets, but then turn around and pay billions of dollars to these corporations?

Let us be specific. Revenue bills originate in the U.S. House of Representatives. This means that every member of Congress is morally culpable for a failure of leadership

if he supports the passage of any budget or continuing resolution that grows the military industrial complex to the detriment of his constituents.

If all Congress does is repeat the talking points of the fringe, while perpetuating this growth, then Congress will be condoning corporate profiteering on the backs of honest, hardworking taxpayers.

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