

Newspapers Across the Nation Agree: Congress Must Address Spending

This sample of recent editorials from newspapers large and small across the country shows that, whatever their political leanings, the nation's editorial boards are in unanimous agreement on three points:

- 1. Congress has acted irresponsibly in running up federal spending and the deficit in recent years. Piling on more spending now without a way to pay for it would be beyond irresponsible.*
- 2. The federal budget does not allocate money based on the nation's priorities. Recent growth in pork barrel projects is especially appalling.*
- 3. Congress should prioritize federal spending, ditching or delaying low-priority items to offset the costs of emergency spending.*

The third point is especially powerful. Members who make it--from Rep. Nancy Pelosi to Rep. Mike Pence and Sen. Tom Coburn--win strong praise from their local newspapers. Those who resist get lumped in with the rest.

The *Jacksonville (North Carolina) Daily News* (10/26) [blames](#) the GOP for the run-up in “pork”:

Perhaps, after years of complaints seeming to disappear into the ether, we should be grateful. Complaints about how fast federal spending has grown under a Republican president with Republican majorities in both houses of Congress seem to have gotten under the skin of a few lawmakers. Thus, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, according to the *Washington Times*, is now circulating a memorandum "that largely blames sharp Republican spending increases on the war against terrorism." ...

Heritage's budget analyst Brian Riedl notes that only a third of the higher spending over the past five years has been spent on defense. The rest has been mostly pork.

The *Charleston Post and Courier* (10/25) [names](#) names:

Sen. Coburn, who proposed diverting nearly \$500 million in funds for the Alaskan bridges to repair and upgrade the Interstate 10 bridges over Lake Ponchartrain near New Orleans, got a rude lesson in the power of the pork barrel and of those who deal out the pork. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., the ranking minority member of the Senate transportation appropriations subcommittee, warned her colleagues their own pet projects would be at risk if they supported Sen. Coburn. According to the *Congressional Record*, she said, "When members come down to the floor to vote on this amendment, they need to know if they support stripping out this project, Sen. Bond and I are likely to be taking a long, serious look at their projects to determine whether they should be preserved during our upcoming conference negotiations." She was referring to Sen. Kit

Bond, R-Mo., the subcommittee chairman, who offered no support to Sen. Coburn.

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee that approved the proposed Alaskan bridges, angrily defended the "bridge to nowhere" as essential to the economic growth of the small Alaskan community it will serve. But his defense only served to highlight Sen. Coburn's point that I-10 serves a vastly greater number of commuters, tourists and commercial traffic in the New Orleans region. Nevertheless, the Coburn amendments lost, 86-13 and 82-15. Sens. Jim DeMint and Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republicans, and Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., were among the small number of senators who supported Sen. Coburn in refusing to pay homage to the pork barrel.

The *Sarasota (Florida) Herald-Tribune* (10/24) [argues](#) that Congress needs to do much more than put off a pay raise:

...Congress could look closer to home -- literally -- and sniff out the pork that many lawmakers arranged to bring to their home districts via the recently passed transportation and homeland-security spending packages.

Even The Wall Street Journal editorial page, normally a dependable ally of the self-described fiscal conservatives on the Hill, has called for a full-scale pork hunt.

But don't expect members of Congress to graciously give up their pet projects for the good of the country. An example of what may be in store was the bitter battle in the Senate last Thursday over an amendment that proposed to redirect funding for two Alaska bridges to an interstate bridge in New Orleans that was severely damaged by Katrina. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, ferociously defended the \$500 million worth of bridges -- one of which would connect the mainland to an island inhabited by 70 people, and the other humbly named "Don Young's Way" in honor of its champion in the House. And in the end the Senate, in an 82-15 vote, refused to shift the money.

The *Baltimore Sun* (10/24) [wonders](#) if Congress has abandoned common sense on spending issues:

Some uncommonly practical suggestions emerged in Washington last week to cushion the blow of Katrina-related spending on the nation's already deeply in-debt government.

Of course, they were quickly swatted away.

Our favorite called for transferring the \$223 million approved last summer to build Alaska's much-ridiculed "bridge to nowhere" and use the money instead to repair the storm-damaged twin span over Lake Pontchartrain - a major access route to New Orleans. Alaskans suggested this one.

Meanwhile, tight-fisted Oklahoma Republican Sen. Tom Coburn tossed some other ideas into the mix, including slicing from the housing budget \$950,000 for a museum parking lot in Omaha, \$500,000 for a sculpture park in Seattle and \$200,000 for a new animal shelter in Westerly, R.I., and spending that money instead on housing the vastly increased ranks of the homeless...

Alas, common sense does not rule in Washington. Lawmakers spend money according to their calculations of what will best enhance their chances of re-election - a highly inefficient budgeting practice at best. Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens actually threatened to resign if his bridge money was tampered with.

USA Today (10/24) [writes](#) that Congress's attitude toward spending leaves "the republic itself...in jeopardy":

Legislators are expected to fight to bring money to their districts. But Congress seems to have decided there are no limits. It funded a record number of projects this year while borrowing at hazardous levels.

Eliminating all pork from the highway law would cover only 10% of the estimated \$250 billion needed for Katrina and Rita recovery efforts. But cutting the worst excesses would be a valuable sign that legislators can put the national good over their own interests...

If Congress isn't willing to postpone pet projects that benefit only a few, can it ever get serious about solving larger problems, such as the future of Social Security and health care, that affect the nation for generations to come?

The *Washington Post* (10/23) [has harsh words](#) for Sen. Ted Stevens' spirited defense of his state's highway bill earmarks:

What's most impressive about Mr. Stevens's tantrum is his ability to summon up this degree of righteous indignation -- self-righteous might be more apt -- over the alleged mistreatment of a state that benefits enormously, and disproportionately, from federal spending.

Leave aside for the moment the matter of whether these two earmarks represent a wise use of federal dollars. Okay, we can't let it go; they don't. One, a partial payment for the now infamous "Bridge to Nowhere," would link Ketchikan (population 8,900) with its airport on Gravina Island (population 50). The other, the magnificently named "Don Young's Way" -- hint: Mr. Young, Alaska's sole House member, conveniently happens to chair the transportation committee -- would be a down payment on a billion-dollar bridge across an inlet in Anchorage to a nearly deserted port.

The *Chicago Tribune* (10/23) [wonders](#) whether the odds are better playing the lottery than waiting for Republicans in Congress to get serious about spending:

Senate Republicans are wrestling with that age-old dilemma, eyes bigger than their--oops, we mean our--wallets. Faced with budget deficits and the growing cost of everything, they've vowed to cut spending.

But they're having trouble. They tried and failed to cut back on subsidies to rich farmers. Sen. Tom Coburn's (R-Okla.) effort to slash funding for other people's pet projects--like Alaska's infamous \$223 million bridge-to-nowhere--went nowhere.

But here comes Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) with a solution. He bought \$20 worth of Powerball tickets the other day and matched five of the six numbers, winning nearly \$1 million. One more number and he would have hit the jackpot--\$340 million. So what if the other 99 senators buy Powerball tickets? The odds of a mega Senate payday may be low, but at the moment they seem higher than the odds that senators will actually cut spending.

The *Juneau Empire* (10/23) [notes](#) that the Ketchikan bridge, along with similar pork-barrel earmarks, endangers the state's and the country's higher priority projects:

Not surprisingly, Alaska's pork-barrel hubris has come back to haunt the state in a public-relations fiasco as the cash-strapped federal government pours hundreds of millions of dollars into questionable bridges. The outcry will fade, eventually, and Alaska probably will keep its goodies. But the state and its leaders now will have to learn that gobbling up federal transportation dollars to build luxuries endangers funding for more basic infrastructure needs.

Ketchikan's "bridge to nowhere" has spent the past year as taxpayer advocates' national poster project for waste. The \$223 million appropriation is derided by pundits of every political persuasion, and now is the subject of angry debate in Congress. Even a growing number of people in Ketchikan don't understand the fuss, because they know they don't need a bridge.

The *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* (10/23) [faults](#) the Senate for keeping funding in place for the Ketchikan bridge:

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, has won his fight to preserve funding for a \$230 million bridge that will serve 50 people on an island already well served by ferry service. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., reminded that a Learjet or hundreds of speedboats could be bought for each islander for the same money. But to no avail. A measure to redirect some of that pork to hurricane relief was soundly defeated. Such is the sad state of the U.S. Senate. ...

The *Austin (Texas) American-Statesman* (10/22) [thinks](#) so little of Congress that it describes Sen. Tom Coburn's winning 13 votes to kill a notorious pork project as a "miracle":

Oklahoma Sen. Tom Coburn, a first-term Republican, did the unthinkable this week -- he tried to kill some of his colleagues' pork projects. Coburn had the temerity to suggest that hurricane relief might be more important than a sculpture

garden in Washington state or Alaska's now-famous bridge to nowhere, and suggested those funds be directed to relief efforts. According to the Wall Street Journal, \$223 million will be spent so 50 individuals will no longer have to take a seven-minute ferry ride to the mainland.

Needless to say, Coburn's effort went nowhere and probably made him plenty of enemies in the Senate chamber. The first vote went against Coburn 86-13. As the Journal editorialized Friday, "The miracle is he got 13."

The *Ventura County (California) Star* (10/22) [berates](#) the Senate for pursuing gimmicks while neglecting real cuts:

Forgoing a pay raise might seem the politically expedient thing to do, but federal lawmakers need to do much more... They could weed out the pork they keep inserting in legislation, such as the \$24 billion in pet projects they added to the transportation measure signed by President Bush in August.

We probably should be grateful for this small favor legislators feel they are doing for the American taxpayer.

But, as the budget bleeds red ink, as billions are spent for hurricane cleanup and for military action in Iraq and Afghanistan, as lawmakers feed their constituents a steady diet of pork projects, forgoing this slight pay raise seems more public-relations gimmick than actual savings.

Investor's Business Daily (10/21) [finds](#) an appalling lack of fiscal discipline in recent votes:

Katrina is said to have brought fiscal discipline into fashion in the Republican Congress, yet none of Coburn's sound ideas seem likely to be enacted.

What's more, House GOP leaders have delayed until next week a vote on cutting \$50 billion in spending, with Democrats in lockstep against the measure and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi calling it "immoral and financially irresponsible."

Coburn has allies on the left. The popular Daily Kos blog, for instance, called his amendment "one of those once-in-a-decade moments where we can forge a left-right alliance on a policy issue."

Unfortunately, it would be taking on the oldest and strongest left-right coalition in Washington: the pork-barrel alliance.

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (10/21) [wonders](#) why no members of the Nevada delegation have signed onto the Katrina no-pork pledge:

The pledge urges House members and senators to support only hurricane relief spending directly related to the impact of Katrina. So far, however, only two

senators (including John McCain) and 15 representatives -- all Republicans -- have signed.

As for the Nevada delegation, we wouldn't expect Sen. Harry Reid or Rep. Shelley Berkley to jump on board. But where are Sen. John Ensign and Reps. Jim Gibbons and Jon Porter? And where are the rest of the congressional Republicans?

The answer might help explain why a GOP-controlled Congress and White House have overseen record spending growth.

The *La Crosse (Wisconsin) Tribune* (10/21) [pines](#) for a “Ross Perot figure” to bring some fiscal sanity to Washington:

It’s surprising that there is no comparable Ross Perot figure now, because the federal deficit and the rising debt seem even more out of control than they did in 1992....

[F]ederal energy and transportation bills are loaded with pork for specific areas. Both parties do this. There does not seem to be a political party that cares about rising debt.

It’s like putting government expenses on a credit card while we seek to limit how much in taxes we pay. Sure, that makes sense. We’ll just burden our children and grandchildren with crippling debt. It makes no sense.

The *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* (10/18) [draws the line](#) at “reckless congressional bipartisan spending”:

Congressional spendthrifts must stop pork-barrel spending innocuously called "earmarks" that attach to other bills like parasites to a host. The recent highway bill had more than 6,000 pieces of pork -- trails for pedestrians, bikes and horses, trolley cars, parking garages and a \$220 million bridge for a 50-person village in Alaska -- costing \$25 billion.

Congress also must call a halt to gross overspending "add-ons" for entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare that only should be for the truly needy.

The *Chicago Daily Herald* (10/18) [calls](#) measures to cut pork “overdue”:

Just as it seemed that no one would apply the brakes on runaway federal spending, fiscally conservative Republicans are successfully pressuring their party leaders to enact spending cuts of up to \$50 billion....

[T]he coalition suggests cutting earmarked portions, totaling \$24 billion, of the recently passed federal transportation bill, including the widely ridiculed "bridge to nowhere" in Alaska. Among the coalition's equally sound ideas is to scale back the absurdly costly Medicare prescription benefits instead of targeting Medicaid

benefits alone. As the coalition notes, the prescription benefits - which never should have been passed in their current form - would not be missed because they're not scheduled to go into effect until next year. The coalition also proposes applying a common-sense "pay-as-you-go" tax cuts, in which any cuts would need to be offset by revenue gains or adjustments elsewhere.

No matter what form they take, the final cuts will not please everyone. The fiscal conservatives nonetheless deserve credit for finally forcing a modicum of spending discipline that has been sorely lacking.

The *Charleston (South Carolina) Post & Courier* (10/17) [praises](#) Coburn's efforts and calls highway bill pork "indefensible":

Rep. Don Young's "Bridge to Nowhere" has become synonymous with the pork-barrel excesses of Congress and exemplifies the failure of the Republican leadership to pay more than lip service to fiscal conservatism. The \$223 million boondoggle has achieved greater notoriety with the disastrous failure of levees in New Orleans, which were overdue for more federal support....

It is heartening, however, that some town residents question the massive federal expenditure and are circulating a petition urging that money for the "Bridge to Nowhere" be diverted to help pay for disaster relief to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. In doing so, they are showing the common sense and compassion that Americans should expect from their free-spending and self-serving representatives.

While it favors tax hikes, per usual, even the *New York Times* (10/13) [argues](#) that there's plenty of wasteful spending that Congress should cut:

Once again, the nation must hope that Republican moderates and Democrats in the Senate take a stand, but not for another split-the-difference budget. There's plenty of egregious pork protected by Congress in highway and Pentagon spending bills, like the bridge to nowhere and the inoperable antimissile shield. Dozens of comparable revenue wasters have been identified. The independent Center on Budget and Policy Priorities points to the timely warning from Congress's Medicare advisory commission that billions will be wasted under the new drug subsidy program unless Congress fixes the windfall formulas for managed care companies.

The *Chicago Tribune* (10/12) [wonders](#) whether the GOP is still the party of small government:

Conservative Republicans grew increasingly appalled at the party's free-spending ways and they pushed back. Finally, somebody in the GOP leadership sobered up and realized that this years-long party is over....

Here's where it gets hard. Mastering the law of holes isn't enough. Hastert is getting heat in the House. Members on the right are resisting cuts in defense spending and those on the left are resisting cuts in domestic spending.

Senate Republicans are resisting Hastert's call to reopen the budget. They, too, insist they are scouring the budget for additional savings, but last week's acrimonious debate over farm subsidies sure sent the wrong message....

Remember when the Republicans used to say they were the party of smaller government and sounded like they meant it? It's time for them to deliver.

The (Riverside, CA) *Press Enterprise* (10/12) [celebrates](#) Rep. Tom DeLay's ouster from GOP leadership in the hope that it may return Republicans to fiscal sanity:

... those who have tired of watching a conservative "revolution" morph into a complacent, spend-happy majority have reason to hope for saner days ahead.

DeLay was House majority whip from 1994 until January 2003, when he became majority leader. Before resigning that post Sept. 29, he presided over a years-long spending spree that would redden the cheeks of Clinton-era Democrats of the go-go '90s.

Non-defense "discretionary" spending has jumped an average of 8.4 percent in each of the past five years, according to the Congressional Budget Office, and the federal debt is now nearly \$ 8 trillion.

The latest splurge was the \$ 286.4 billion highway bill that President Bush signed in August, stuffed with more than 6,000 pieces of pork for pet congressional projects. Last month, DeLay said that there was no fat to cut in that bill or others to offset the hundreds of billions of dollars needed for hurricane relief on the Gulf Coast. That is plainly absurd.

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (10/10) [wonders](#) whether the GOP brand has come to stand for irresponsible, big-spending ways:

Amazingly, the GOP has been forced to sit silently as Democrats now paint themselves as the party of fiscal responsibility and portray Republicans as eager spendthrifts intent on running up massive federal deficits.

And the fact is, the latter half of that observation is hard to dismiss.

Spending under President Bush and the Republican Congress is out of control. Yes, the GOP has pushed tax cuts -- though not as aggressively or extensively as it should have -- but the supposed party of smaller government has fallen prey to the perks of power by embracing virtually any spending program that might preserve its vote total.

The *Mankato (Minnesota) Free Press* (10/9) [argues](#) that fiscal pain is coming and Congress must start prioritizing and cutting now:

Economists say continued spending given the rising costs of the wars and disasters will push our federal deficit to \$400 billion as early as next year, a level that can choke off economic growth by pushing up interest rates... Some Republicans are heeding the call. Rep. Gil Gutknecht, 1st District, is part of a group of conservative Republicans who proposed last week a series of budget offsets...

That's at least a starting point of the discussion. Delaying the prescription drug program will certainly not be a politically popular thing to do. Highway and transportation spending will be even more politically problematic because most of the expensive projects went to districts of powerful and influential members of Congress....

Budget pain is coming, but we can mitigate that pain by making good business decisions about cuts instead of political decisions.

The (Westchester County, New York) *Journal News* (10/7) faults the President and Congress for the recent explosion in federal spending:

The hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused a supposed reawakening in the White House about the ravages of poverty, a nationwide epiphany about unsustainable energy consumption, and a great national gnashing of teeth about the cost of rebuilding the Gulf Coast and Iraq. What it hasn't done, as far as can be discerned, is convince lawmakers to become more concerned about cutting pork than they are about getting re-elected. Pork is more alive than ever and shows every sign of weathering any immediate crisis of Washington conscience, if any.

The president, a conservative but hardly the fiscal conservative, had threatened to veto the transportation bill if it topped \$256 billion. When his lips stopped moving, the compromise bill stood at \$296 billion. The president - whose office is supposed to serve as a check on lawmakers' profligate spending - has never vetoed a spending bill in nearly five years in office. He is the first chief executive since John Quincy Adams to have served a full term without exercising the veto. Has Congress gotten that much smarter about spending in 175 years?

The *Fredericksburg (Virginia) Free-Lance Star* (10/6) [writes](#) that "The GOP's gobs make Bill Clinton look like a pinchpenny":

With Republicans controlling both chambers of the national legislature since 1994 and the White House since 2000, fiscal restraint has been the single most unrealized result. Indeed, the current federal deficit is at least \$422 billion. Discretionary spending on the Bush watch has risen to a record high \$840 billion in 2005, after averaging between \$600 billion and \$700 billion during most of the Clinton years, according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The Bush prescription-drug program, to single out a budgetary blockbuster, threatens to explode entitlement outlays even as the president has evidently thrown up his hands on Social Security reform. Originally put at \$395 billion over 10 years, the Medicare plan estimate has ballooned to more than \$500

billion--and even that gargantuan figure may be low given the graying baby-boom population.

The (San Diego, California) *North County Times* (10/5) [praises](#) Rep. Darrell Issa for his part in the House Republican Study Committee's "Operation Offset" effort and faults other Republicans for not taking a stand:

A group of conservative House Republicans, including Vista's Darrell Issa, have made a good start in suggesting a raft of spending cuts to pay for the nation's response to the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Now it's time for Issa and the rest of the Republicans who run Washington to get serious about good government, and even make room for suggestions from Democrats...

While not every item on the caucus's list deserves elimination, it's good to see how much Issa and his fellow conservative travelers are willing to consider...

Republicans control both houses of Congress and the White House. With their record deficit spending, this profligate crew long ago blew any claim to fiscal conservatism. But now, as the nation reels from war, natural disaster and record energy prices, it desperately needs a return to sanity in the governing majority.

The *Chicago Tribune* (10/5) [worries](#) that a "Category 5" fiscal storm may be approaching:

The U.S. government faced spending constraints, a war to fund, pressure to roll back tax cuts and a \$330 billion annual deficit--and that was before Hurricane Katrina shredded the nation's fiscal forecast...

And the government's long-range obligations are downright frightful. Even before the looming retirement of the Baby Boom generation further strains the federal budget, entitlement spending and interest on the national debt today account for \$3 of every \$5 spent. Yet that massive mandatory spending isn't even on the table...

First, cut spending now. Delay (better yet, repeal) the Medicare drug benefit. Slash the energy and highway bills with an ax, not a scalpel. The highway bill alone contains \$24 billion in pet projects. They could all be delayed--including Illinois' \$1.3 billion in goodies--and the country would survive.

The *Watertown (NY) Daily Times* (10/5) praises communities' efforts to give back their highway bill pork and direct the savings to hurricane relief:

In the aftermath of Katrina, some critics suggested that pork-barrel spending for nonessential projects could be better used where it was really needed—in New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast that endured Katrina's wrath...

[T]he sentiment is a noble one. After seeing the Gulf Coast's devastation, many Americans have become aware of what they can give to hurricane victims and what they can do without.

The *Vero Beach (Florida) Press Journal* (10/4) [calls](#) the GOP “the party of big spenders”:

To a political novice, the record growth in government, federal spending and deficits, not to mention creation of the largest entitlement program since the Great Society, under conservative Republicans would seem a contradiction to — perhaps more accurately, a flat-out repudiation of — fundamental conservative GOP principles....

One way to pay for the cleanup is to offset the costs elsewhere in the budget, but ousted House Republican leader Tom DeLay said no one had come up with any offsets. Actually, someone had — the more than 100 members, mostly young backbenchers, of the House Republican Study Committee. They came up with hundreds of billions of dollars worth of offsets.

Party elders summarily summoned the head of the study committee, Rep. Mike Pence of Indiana, to a closed-door thrashing that columnist Robert Novak compared to the Inquisition's treatment of heretics. Pence has been silent about offsets since.

The *Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch* (10/4) praises Alaskans who are willing to give up the state’s “Bridge to Nowhere” highway bill boondoggle:

The conventional wisdom is this: When the federal gravy train tosses cash to your state or city, don't throw it back.

But Alaskans tend to be a bit unconventional. Some of them don't want a \$454 million project dubbed by critics "the bridges to nowhere."...

Congress is incapable of frugality, so the people will need to lead the way. Residents of Bozeman, Mont., want to give up \$4 million in federal funds for a parking garage and direct it to hurricane relief.

A Web site, americagivesback.org, provides a form so visitors can write their Congress members, asking them to give up transportation projects to help victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. If the entire nation adopts this unselfish attitude, devastated areas could be helped without breaking the federal budget.

The *Ventura County (California) Star* (10/3) [accuses](#) Republicans of losing their way on spending:

To a political novice, the record growth in government, federal spending and deficits, not to mention creation of the largest entitlement program since the Great Society, under conservative Republicans, would seem a contradiction to -- perhaps more accurately, a flat-out repudiation of -- fundamental conservative GOP principles....

To a political amateur, this would seem like a failure in governance.

Au contraire, said former House Republican leader Tom DeLay of Texas... The federal budget is in good shape, he says, because, "After 11 years of Republican majority we pared it down pretty good."

This is close to delusional.

The *Washington Post* (10/2) [blames](#) record pork-barrel spending on Congress and the President:

Who should be held responsible for runaway government spending? Mr. DeLay is certainly a good place to start. His governing principle was not to stand on principle but rather to rain taxpayers' money on every lobby that could return the favor with campaign contributions. But the biggest responsibility lies not with any member of the legislature but with Mr. Bush. Unlike senators and House members, the president represents the whole nation; he is supposed to defend the general interest against particularist claims. Moreover, he has the power to do so. If Congress serves up wasteful bills, the president can veto them.

Mr. Bush has been too cowardly to do that. He is the first president since John Quincy Adams to have served a full term without once exercising his veto, and his second term has so far been no different. This summer Mr. Bush promised to veto the transportation bill if it cost more than \$256 billion. His threat brought the bill's size down quite a bit, but in the end he caved and signed a package that cost \$295 billion. Why did he blink? Doesn't his administration pride itself on defending the power and prerogatives of the presidency? Mr. Bush's father had the courage to veto 44 bills in four years, and President Ronald Reagan once vetoed a transportation bill because it contained about 150 pork projects. But the bill that Mr. Bush just signed contained at least 6,000 pork projects.

The *San Antonio Express News* (10/2) [wonders](#) why local pork projects cannot be sacrificed for the greater good:

When deficit hawks recently called on Congress to trim some pork out of the federal budget to compensate for the extraordinary costs of storm recovery, then-House Majority Leader Tom DeLay had a simple retort: If lawmakers want to cut discretionary spending, they have to put their own projects on the chopping block.

Predictably, DeLay's charge hasn't led to a profusion of spending sacrifice. Some members of Congress would rather eat their young than eliminate funding for home-district, pork-barrel projects....

It would be hard to believe nowhere in Texas is there funding for hiking and biking trails that might not be better allocated, at least temporarily, for rebuilding the infrastructure of the storm-ravaged region.

Investor's Business Daily's (9/30) conservative editorial board [speaks](#) in praise of Rep. Nancy Pelosi on spending and hopes that other Members will follow her lead, on pork and entitlement spending:

Give Nancy Pelosi credit for offering to give up \$70 million in pork in her district to offset Katrina relief costs. If every member of Congress did the same, Washington would save \$37.5 billion.

It's healthy to give up the other white meat of politics. And we'll have to say we were surprised it was the House Democratic leader from California who stepped out so boldly. More members of Congress should find it in their hearts to follow her lead.

There is one entitlement, however, that Americans haven't gotten their claws into because it's not scheduled to start until Jan. 1: the Medicare prescription drug benefit.

To offset the spending on Hurricane Katrina relief and reconstruction, the Republican Study Committee is proposing cuts that will save nearly \$103 billion in 2006, \$370 billion over five years and \$950 billion over 10. Part of Operation Offset's savings just happens to come from delaying by one year the start of the prescription drug benefit.

Not a bad start. Here's a great finish: Kill the program before it becomes entrenched and begins to metastasize.

The *Richmond Times Dispatch* (9/29) [calls](#) the highway bill a "betrayal" of fiscal conservatism:

When asked if Congress should pay for reconstruction of the Gulf by repealing the pork-laden highway bill, Tom DeLay said no -- and explained: "The bill creates hundreds of jobs. It's an economic engine."

As The Wall Street Journal remarked in an editorial assailing GOP profligacy, "By that logic we could end joblessness in America by building even more bike paths and bridges to nowhere."

Many of those who welcomed the GOP's 1994 congressional sweep consider DeLay's stand a betrayal of what long ago had been known as the conservative movement. The words could have been said -- and in different circumstances no doubt were said -- by Tip O'Neill, Dan Rostenkowski, George Washington Plunkett, Boss Tweed, and other legendary logrollers, trenchermen, and backroom boys.

The *Richmond (Indiana) Palladium-Item* (9/27) [praises](#) Rep. Pence for standing up and proposing offsets to hurricane-related spending:

Fortunately, there are a few deficit hawks --the lonely voices for fiscal restraint -- still out there. One of them is our own Rep. Mike Pence (R-6th District). Pence

and some colleagues are offering suggestions for cuts that would restore some budgetary sanity while taking care of the pressing needs of those people and coastal areas devastated by natural disasters....

Our own hope is that hurricane relief and rebuilding efforts be paid for by some combination of the following: scaling back some of the more flagrant, conspicuous pork in the recently passed \$286 billion highway bill; postponing the massive entitlement known as the prescription-drug benefit; reducing or postponing the president's upper-income tax cuts; and generally refraining from any new federal spending unless offset by cuts elsewhere in the budget or paid for by identified sources of federal revenue.

The Daily Oklahoman (10/27) [praises](#) Sen. Tom Coburn for seeking offsets: Specifically, Coburn thinks Congress and the president should take another look at certain projects in the recently passed highway bill. The legislation contains about \$26 billion in "earmarks" or local projects requested by legislators.

Certainly the bill includes funds for important projects like the aging Interstate 40 in Oklahoma City, a route of national importance. But there are other items of less urgency, less value, that should be reconsidered in light of Katrina's price tag.

The same logic really should be applied across the board. Federal money must be spent wisely in affected areas, but as many "offsets" as possible should be found to reduce the amount the government has to borrow.