

## THE PLAIN DEALER

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## A giant shadow

*A deficit pushed years into the future remains a deficit, and even if Bush escapes it, it will catch up with the rest of us*

It's not so much the \$400 billion-plus federal budget deficit anticipated for this year that's starting to bother the serious thinkers of both parties in Washington, although that's certainly bad enough. Nor is it the relatively piddling \$251 billion shortfall projected, all other things remaining in balance, for 2008, the last year of President George W. Bush's term.

No. It's the \$700 billion chasm that analysts say looms about 2015 that's casting the giant shadow over the president's grand ambitions, and leaving some of his usually dependable Republican supporters increasingly gloomy about his initiatives. And that unheard-of imbalance could reach much higher should the United States become involved in another Iraq-like war, or suffer another calamitous attack such as 9/11.

If the policies that Bush either has attained (see the Medicare editorial below) or now seeks — personal accounts for Social Security, a rewrite of the Alternative Minimum Tax to keep it from eating into middle-class households, making permanent the tax cuts passed in 2001 and 2003 among them — all become law, the delays built into each will deliver their costly impacts in the years right after Bush leaves office. The next occupant of the White House almost certainly will be inundated as the bills come due.

And none of this contemplates any additional spending by Congress, which is inevitable. Nor does it take into account the tactic,

now being used by the Pentagon, of pushing the billions sought in supplemental war spending forward into coming years' military budgets.

"The days of being everything to everybody are quickly coming to a close," Sen. Lindsey Graham, the South Carolina Republican, told the Washington Post. Extending the tax cuts will make it impossible to borrow the cost of the president's proposed Social Security fix, Graham said.

Among the centrist Senate Republicans unwilling to accept this mounting debt is Ohio's George V. Voinovich, who has made it clear to the White House that it "won't be around" to support extending the tax cuts in the face of mounting budget uncertainty.

When Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told Congress this week that he approves of the personal retirement accounts Bush espouses, he wrapped his blessing in a warning: "You have to do it in a cautious, gradual way," he said. The financial markets from which the government would borrow as much as \$2 trillion to seed the program might well balk at the amount. American credit no longer is open-ended.

Bush has displayed rare political courage in proposing to remake Medicare and Social Security. But true leadership demands a greater courage: telling Americans they will have to pay for the benefits he proposes. And the debt cannot be kicked on down the road. It must be paid as we go.

## Medicare on the wrong track

When a runaway train is hurtling down the track, it needs to be stopped before innocent people get hurt. Getting aboard to put the brakes on the menace requires gumption, agility and the willingness to take a serious risk.

All of which makes Congress an unlikely hero.

Speeding toward the nation's largest and most depended-upon entitlement program, Medicare, is a prescription drug add-on that has "train wreck" written all over it. Grafting this well-intended benefit on to a program ill-designed to accommodate it will in the end be too costly, too complicated and too inefficient.

Members of Congress — Republicans and Democrats — must find the will to slam the brakes on this thing before it has a chance to do real damage.

They shouldn't have any trouble finding reasons to back off the vote they took in 2003 to create the drug benefit.

They can say, with justice, that the George W. Bush administration was casual, to say the least, with the cost estimate. What the administration swore could be done for less than \$395 billion over the first 10 years of the program is now expected to cost at least \$720 billion.

They can say that throwing yet another "part" at Medicare recipients will make it even tougher to navigate an already-daubing bureaucracy. If the prescription benefit goes into effect, they will have Medicare Part D — far drugs — to manage, along with Parts A (hospitalization) and B (regular medical services), or C (the relatively new option under which seniors can leave traditional Medicare and receive a subsidy when they enroll in private managed-care plans).

What Congress should say — and should have said long ago — is that Medicare, as currently constituted, isn't doing the job the taxpayers or its recipients need it to do.

A prescription benefit certainly should be part of the federal program to help the elderly with their medical bills. The long hospital stays and invasive techniques that were the rule when Medicare came into being are the exception in medicine today. Drug treatments rule the field today.

The right thing to do — the smart thing to do — would be to rebuild Medicare from the ground up, based on the realities of today's treatments and today's patients.

But the first thing to do is to stop this runaway train before it really gets rolling.

## Cheers & Jeers

**CHEERS** . . . to the Cleveland Indians for picking up \$250,000 to the Cleveland schools this year to deflect the budget knife away from interscholastic baseball and softball programs. The team has long been a backer of those sports within the district.

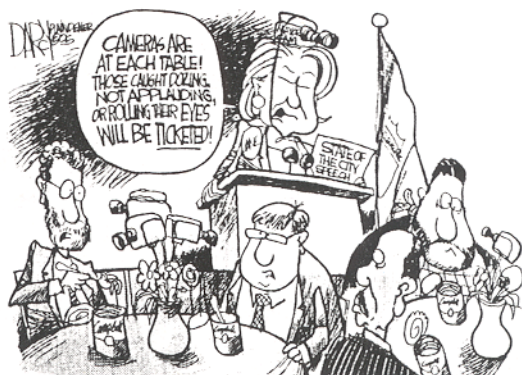
**JEERS** . . . to US Airways for its shabby treatment of Phil Barrett, a quadriplegic who was trying to get from Tampa to Cleveland last weekend for surgery that would make it possible for him to breathe without the aid of a ventilator. Barrett had tried hard to make his transit easy on the airline, even buying a ticket for a nurse to accompany him. He finally made it, through the generosity of the owners of a private jet.

**CHEERS** . . . to St. Luke's Foundation, created out of the sale of the former St. Luke's Medical Center, which is still working to serve the med-

ical needs of Cleveland residents. The foundation is giving \$1 million a year for the next decade to support programs at the MetroHealth System's Buckeye Medical Center.

**JEERS** . . . to the settlement Ohio and 22 other states recently reached with the spam and spyware barons at Alyon Technologies. Yes, \$285,000 is better than nothing, but it just seems as if a harsher example might have been made of a company caught red-handed pirating the computers and the cash of unsuspecting people.

**CHEERS** . . . to Invacare Corp. Chairman A. Malachi Mison III who, along with his wife, Barbara, has put \$3 million toward the Cleveland Institute of Music's expansion project. Fittingly, one facet of the expansion — a 250-seat recital hall — will be named in honor of the Misons, who have been key supporters of the Institute for many years.



Contact Jeff Darcy at: jdarcy@plained.com, 216-999-4445 View Darcy's cartoons on the Web at www.cleveland.com/darcy/

## LETTERS

### Solon deer kill has both sides steaming

I'm glad The Plain Dealer didn't shy from printing that picture showing a deer in mid-fall after being shot by a sharpshooter ("Deer hunt begins in Solon," Feb. 16). Some people need to be presented with a hard-to-look-at visual like that before they can even begin to comprehend (hopefully) the stunning cruelty of it all.

After the deer was downed, the sharpshooter placed a plastic garbage bag over its head, explaining that "we don't want blood residue in someone's backyard." Sir, please don't hide that blood. The visual of a giant pool of blood could speak a thousand words. That gruesome visual may help some to face the whole hard truth: These poor, hapless animals, these innocent creatures of God, are being forced to suffer

horrible deaths just so some people can have their pretty gardens. Please, people, this is nauseating. Please come up with a better plan. Spend the little bit of extra money (if that's even the case) or do whatever it takes in order to implement some kind of birth-control solution to this problem. Please don't let your lovely city be turned into a grotesque killing field.

LAUREL GRUBER  
Avon Lake

It amazes me that there are people who believe the growing deer population should be left to multiply excessively. Obviously, these people have never had a relative, friend or neighbor hurt, maimed or killed due to a deer darting into the

road and hitting a car. Is not a person's life more valuable than a deer's? The money for sharpshooters who are thinning the deer population is well spent. For those of you who purposely feed the deer in your own yard: You are doing all of us and the deer a big disservice. There are not domestic animals to be coddled and pampered. In my neighborhood alone, in the last five years, the deer sightings have gone from mil to groups of six to eight deer every day. Thanks to the selfish desires of the deer sympathizers, the odds of you or me being hit by deer are getting higher every day. This is one gamble we do not need in Northern Ohio.

BETTY DIMOND  
North Olmsted

### Chagrin Falls conducts its business in the open

The Feb. 14 editorial "Real cause for Chagrin" unfairly implied that the Village of Chagrin Falls is run in secret, with no public input. This is not true.

When developer Vincent Marotta approached us with plans for an office building, he requested that we keep the information confidential until he finalized his plans. We extended the same courtesy to him as we would to others, with full realization

that any official action by the village would be done in public, with full public debate and in accordance with the laws of the state of Ohio and the ordinance adopted by Council on Dec. 13, 2004. No decisions have been made on the merits of Marotta's proposal, either privately or publicly. As for the tax abatement he requested, it is a recognized development tool used by many other communities, as referenced in The Plain Dealer article by

Tom Blir published Dec. 5, 2004. I have been an elected official in the Village of Chagrin Falls for 16 years. I value the votes of confidence I have received during those years. I have never, nor would I ever, violate the public trust.

LYDIA F. CHAMPLIN  
Chagrin Falls

Champlin is the mayor of the Village of Chagrin Falls.

### Pope's vision is not affront to democracy

John Cornwell ("The pope's moral vision vs. democracy," Forum, Feb. 11) would have us believe that Pope John Paul II's criticism of Western hedonism is antidemocratic. He would also have us believe that Vatican II introduced a pluralism that meant that Christians would no longer seek to influence public policy as every other group does. Unfortunately, neither of those claims is true.

The pope's moral vision is based, as it always has been, on the intrinsic moral worth of each human life, be it in the womb or in a prison cell. The real problem for Cornwell is not that the pope's moral vision is too narrow, but rather that it is too inclusive. He would have the pope and Catholic citizens not address certain topics where his views differ from theirs.

JAMES A. JAKOS  
Shaker Heights

### Protect poor from used-car sales abuses

I am pleased that Ohio Attorney General Jim Petro used his powers under the Consumer Sales Practices Act to at-

tack the sales, financing and collection abuses of JD Byrider.

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland represents many low-income clients in lawsuits involving the purchase and financing of used automobiles. We have quite a number of clients who have been victimized by the unfair, deceptive and unconscionable practices of JD Byrider.

Unfortunately, the types of abuses engaged by JD Byrider are not unique; they are rampant in the used-car business. Used-car dealers too often take unfair advantage of poor people who desperately need transportation but who lack bargaining power because of insufficient cash, bad credit and limited education.

GAIL WHITE  
Cleveland

White is an attorney in the consumer unit of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

### Much to be proud of at Fuchs Mizrahi

I was delighted to read Bill Lubinger's Feb. 10 article about the Fuchs Mizrahi basketball team, under the esteemed tutelage of Coach Walter Killian. As an FMS parent, I am thrilled that Coach Killian chose the school to fulfill a personal challenge that he "could coach

anyone, anywhere." The mutual respect and admiration between coach and students transcends cultural and religious gaps.

I'm certain that Coach Killian would agree that what this team may lack in athleticism is more than made up with good, old-fashioned "heart." We parents are extremely proud of how our students balance a rigorous religious and secular curriculum and a strenuous sports schedule with the utmost tenacity.

SHELLY ZEMELMAN  
Beachwood

CLEVELAND.COM

### Will city profit from red-light special?

Cleveland.com's question of the moment: Are red-light traffic cameras the answer to Cleveland's budget woes?

The best responses — they must be by e-mail — will be found on Cleveland.com. And the best of the best will appear with the letters to the Editor on Saturdays. To respond, log on to [www.cleveland.com/livelines](http://www.cleveland.com/livelines) or send e-mail directly to [livelines@cleveland.com](mailto:livelines@cleveland.com)

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