

# Budget Fix Needn't Be Cruel

BY SEN. ERIC GRIEGO  
*Democrat, Albuquerque*

Voters in New York state last Tuesday, and around the country in opinion polls, have given the thumbs down to the Republican plan to balance the federal budget by ending Medicare as we know it.

Polls also show that the public does not want to cut Social Security or Medicaid for children, the disabled and nursing home care.

Does this mean the public will not accept any reasonable solution to the long-term federal debt problem?

Of course not.

A number of prominent national organizations have put reasonable budget proposals on the table. They reduce federal deficits to a manageable level within the next several years and then eliminate deficits altogether sometime after 2020. If you want to read them, the best are on the websites of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, the Center for American Progress and the Bipartisan Policy Center,

where the Debt Reduction Task Force is co-chaired by our own former Sen. Pete Domenici.

The secret to all these proposals is that they take a balanced approach. They combine reasonable long-term spending restraints, especially in the health care arena, with reasonable tax reform measures that largely affect only the richest 5 percent of Americans. Those taxpayers have seen their incomes go up by astronomical amounts in the last 20 years, while the incomes for almost everyone else have stagnated or even declined. Not only that, but the top tax rates have been cut and cut again, so that the after-tax incomes of these top groups (especially the richest 1 percent) have gone up even more.

This growing unfair distribution of income and unequal tax system is threatening the position of the middle class in this country as the bedrock of the economy.

Besides the recession, the Bush tax cuts are the major reason for our deficits.

Almost all of the benefit of those cuts went to taxpayers in the highest 10 percent of income, and the very biggest benefits, of course, went to the richest 1 percent.

Looking at these facts, independent national organizations have understandably concluded that deficit reduction should include reasonable tax increases targeted to those who have continued to reap the largest rewards. Just by eliminating the Bush tax cuts, we could get our deficits under reasonable control for the next 10 years.

But Republicans in Congress refuse to consider any tax increases, even those that would affect only the richest 1 percent of Americans. By taking this rigid position, they are throwing away a major tool that could get the country back on the right fiscal track without decimating programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security that most Americans support.

For the long run, controlling deficits means adopting a more equitable tax structure,

including asking the richest Americans and corporations to step up to the plate and pay their fair share. These steps alone would deal with most of the problem.

The bottom line is there is no reason to panic or slash important programs that we all depend on for security and progress.

Read a summary of any one of the plans mentioned above and you will see that Congress can take a balanced approach that includes both tax reforms and reasonable cost controls to get deficits under control and let the country move forward again.

Asking children, the elderly, the poor and the disabled to bear the brunt of getting our fiscal house in order goes against our basic values as Americans. We can and should do better.

---

Eric Griego is a candidate for the Democratic nomination to run for U.S. Congress in New Mexico's First Congressional District. He is also the executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children.