

BUDGET POLITICS

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MAY 25, 2010 -- The politics of campaigning have crowded out or taken over governing – particularly for paying for government.

For example, Congressmen and Senators talk of balancing the budget rather than paying for government. In 2009, President Obama and Congress didn't talk of paying \$1.549 trillion for the increase in spending for the year. They talked of "balancing the budget" and "long-term plans to lower the debt." They made it appear as some unusual phenomenon – not the increase in spending that year. They never talk of borrowing \$1.549 trillion from China. It's always some economic challenge that regular public servants don't face. Every mayor, every year, pays for the city's government. Every governor, every year, pays for the state's government. But Washington officials never talk of paying for this year's increase in spending.

That's our dilemma. President Bush didn't pay for his tax cuts, prescription drugs, wars, and annual increases in spending – for eight years, adding \$5 trillion to the debt. I served for thirty-two years on the Budget Committee, and we struggled every year to pay for annual increases. Many hours were spent in conference with our House colleagues trying to find some millions or a billion dollars to pay for this year's increase in spending. We never talked of billions of dollars or trillions of dollars. In 2010

there was never mentioned that we had to pay \$1.371 trillion for government; or this year, 2011, paying \$1.6 trillion by the end of September according to the Congressional Budget Office. There is never talk of borrowing \$1.6 trillion and paying for this year's increase in spending. Of course, we are only authorized a budget for this year of \$1.279 trillion. To pay the bill, the government would have to eliminate spending. So, to be realistic, we ought not to be talking about "balancing" or "long-term plans," but talking about minimizing the spending and borrowing, and pay for what we can. Instead, we haven't paid for government in eleven years. President Bush increased the debt \$5 trillion in eight years, and President Obama will have increased the debt \$4.5 trillion in three years. To balance the budget, when it was last balanced in 2001, we would have to find \$9.5 trillion. That's ridiculous. Forget about "balancing." Forget about "long-term plans." Forget about campaigning, and start governing. Start making a substantial payment for the increase in spending this year. And the media should stop covering the campaigning or politics and instead cover what is to be paid for this year's increase in spending. Otherwise, like Tennessee Ernie Ford, "we'll be another year older and deeper in debt." That's President Obama's plan. In twelve years, he lowers the debt \$4 trillion, but borrows \$7 trillion, for an increase in the debt of \$3 trillion.

Senator Hollings of South Carolina served 38 years in the United States Senate, and for many years was Chairman of the Commerce, Space, Science & Transportation Committee. He is the author of the recently published book, [Making Government Work](#) (University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

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