

... and the Debt Clock goes round and round

THE ISSUE | Our \$10 trillion national debt.

OUR OPINION | The National Debt Clock may be working but the deficit will continue to grow until what comes in exceeds what goes out in Washington.

Our national debt went off the charts this week, literally. The debt has grown at such a rapid rate that it exceeded the capacity of the National Debt Clock that has kept track of the deficit since 1989. It happened when the nation's debt reached the \$10 trillion mark, thanks to Congress' \$700 billion economic rescue package.

But not to worry. The clock, which hangs outside a Sixth Avenue building in New York City, was modified with a 1 added next to the dollar sign.

Of course we can all worry about this enormous debt the nation has accumulated in the eight years President Bush has been in office. It seems unfathomable that less than a decade ago this country actually had a budget surplus. But then a whole series of events — some that Bush could control and others he couldn't — sucked the federal government's finances into a black hole.

First there was the downturn in the tech industry which was followed by 9/11. The financial impact caused by the terrorist attacks was staggering and the military response to it simply compounded it.

No one can argue going into Afghanistan to find Bin Laden and his al-Qaida followers was the right thing to do. Escalating the war on terror into Iraq, however, has since proven to be a very unwise and an extremely expensive decision by the administration. The premise for war was flawed, if not manufactured, and the strategies used to both invade, secure and exit Iraq were either inadequate or didn't exist.

Now in its sixth year, the Iraq war has killed more than 4,100 American soldiers — 3,385 in combat as of

Thursday afternoon. Since the invasion in March, 2003, more than 1.2 million Iraqis have been killed.

In dollars and cents, the Iraq war is costing us around \$720 million a day, according to an average of several estimates.

While all that goes on, the American economy is tanking. Borrowing necessary to fund the war has greatly devalued the dollar, homeowners who fell for exotic mortgages are losing their homes, financial institutions and banks that overextended themselves are going broke and the entire lending cycle has come to a screeching halt.

To prevent the entire economic system from collapsing, the federal government has adopted a massive rescue plan — that may or may not work — that will ultimately leave taxpayers to foot some or all of the bill.

Besides fixing the clock that records all of this debt, Americans need to make sure they put people in office who are committed to getting a handle on it. Cutting spending and annually balancing the federal budget are good starts, but bringing in more revenue must also be part of the equation. That could mean more taxes for the rich or biting into the subsidies for those fat cat oil companies.

Any candidate who says government simply needs to hand out more tax cuts to fix the situation is out of touch with reality and willing to say anything to get elected. They also are willing to further mortgage our children's and grandchildren's future with antiquated political views just to get in office.

The fact is that for a very long time, the federal government will have to bring in more money than it hands out for the debt to go away.

NATIONAL VIEW | PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Lipstick on a pig part II

Given America's two wars and the continued economic meltdown — as evidenced by another stock-market nose-dive Monday — you would think John McCain and Sarah Palin have enough serious topics to discuss with voters.

Instead, they're offering "Lipstick On a Pig: The Sequel." And it's as bad as the original.

McCain is slumping in polls, largely because of his uneven response to the financial crisis. But running mate Palin has hit on a way to change the subject: by smearing Barack Obama for his loose association with Bill Ayers, a founder of the 1960s radical group Weather Underground.

Obama is "palling around with terrorists who would

target their own country," Palin said. She didn't mention that Obama was 8 years old when the group carried out bombings, nor that Obama has denounced Ayers' activities. It's enough, in her misguided view, that Ayers hosted a small political gathering for Obama in 1995, and that they serve on a charity board together.

This misdirection is reminiscent of the feigned outrage that poured out of the McCain campaign over Obama's "lipstick on a pig" remark a few weeks ago.

Instead of giving voters substance, they're providing silly diversions. And Palin told an audience in Florida yesterday that there's lots more negative campaigning ahead. "Hang on to your hats, because from now until Election Day, it may get kind of rough," she said.

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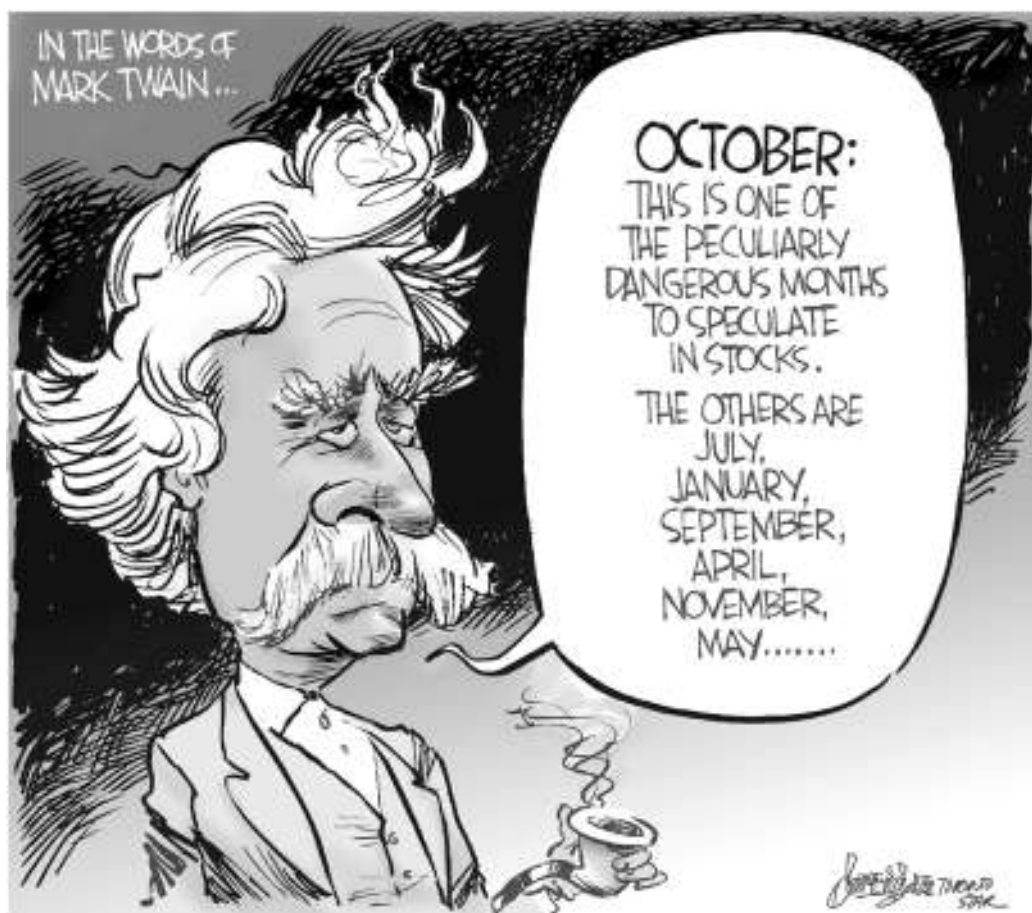
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ARTIST'S VIEW



COMMENTARY | LEWIS W. DIUGUID

Tilt to right eroded underpinnings

The continuing fall of the U.S. economy clearly shows how this country has lost its financial, political, social and ethical balance.

It didn't happen overnight. The footing started to slip under Ronald Reagan's presidency. During the Reagan administration taxes, government services and government workers were depicted as bad for "free enterprise."

In that period lawmakers also started to dismantle Depression-era regulations meant to prevent the financial collapse we're witnessing now.

Greed ruled, and unbridled capitalism was revered. Progressive-era policies and thinking were derisively labeled "liberal." Those in control tore out the pylons of democracy and good government and marched the economy and the nation to the right.

Poor and homeless people were seen as pariahs as the right and far right gained strength and power. Reagan started the sneer.

It picked up under the presidencies of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. President George W. Bush set Social Darwinism in stone, condemning the have-nots, weakening the middle class

and enlarging his base — the have-mores.

Never before has the nation had so many millionaires and billionaires and so many people who are poor and suffering.

The tilt to the right is obvious in the military buildup. It rocketed to new levels under Reagan who promoted it.

President Bush has made the military industrial complex a permanent fixture even though President Dwight Eisenhower warned of its danger years ago. The right and the far right have the media's ear, promoting conservative dogma as mainstream, tilting America off balance and more to the far right.

It's not an accident that people were convinced to follow Bush's 2003 directive of war with Iraq. Questioning whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction was unpatriotic and out of step with the conservative slant.

Minorities and women, who had made great gains since the civil rights movement have lost ground financially, in education, jobs and justice. Children of middle-class minorities today are less likely to attain the same economic status as their parents compared with white kids who still can do better.

The right and far right have pushed their own sense of the ends justifies the means. Ethics and what's moral just don't matter. Toxic toys and deadly baby food were OK until too many people started to die. Subprime loans were OK until they started to pull down the global economy.

Bankruptcy doors were closed to the little people by laws that the big-money guys on the right and far right pushed through. No one seemed to care as long as only the little people cried, and their silent suffering went unrecorded.

But the tilt to the right went too far, crumbling the foundation of the country's social, political, military, ethical and financial infrastructure. The architects of the fiasco now scream for help.

People may feel righteous about not bailing them out. But letting the makers of this trouble sink isn't an option when we are all in the same boat.

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NATIONAL VIEW | MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Debate? What debate?

They said it couldn't be done with a town hall format. But the two presidential candidates still managed to get in their digs in their debate Tuesday. Mostly, they got in their talking points.

Barack Obama is a liberal big-spending tax lover, said John McCain. McCain is a deregulating Bush clone who wants to lower taxes only for the wealthy, said Obama.

Great. Glad they got that out of their systems. At least until their next campaign stops.

Yet, within their rhetoric there were enough items that careful listeners could measure against their own views.

On taxes: Despite what McCain claimed, credible tax experts have said Obama's plan will cut taxes for most Americans.

On health care: There is a

big difference between a mandate for health care for children, what Obama proposes, and McCain's plan, a tax credit for workers to buy their own plans, taxing employer-provided benefits at the same time.

McCain, answering a question from moderator Tom Brokaw, said health care is a "responsibility." But for whom? Obama said health care should be a "right." If health care is your issue, vote accordingly. Judgment in time of war? McCain was for the surge in Iraq, which many experts agree has reduced violence there.

Obama was against the invasion in the first place, an invasion that occurred in the absence of the weapons of mass destruction that the administration said existed and in the absence of substantive links between Iraq and al-Qaida. Both displayed the prop-

er empathy for Americans slammed by the current financial crisis. But, yes, there were differences. Unfortunately, the campaign has lately been sullied by sameness.

McCain's campaign has gone even more negative, with running mate Sarah Palin alleging that Obama "pals around with terrorists." Obama was 8 when the apparently rehabilitated William Ayers was active in the Weather Underground.

Obama's campaign has responded with reminders of McCain's role in the Keating Five scandal, though the Arizona senator has done penance by creating campaign finance law.

But digs and talking points aren't the stuff good debates are made of. And needless negativity down the stretch isn't what marks useful campaigns.

Glad for Kuhl lag; not sure about Massa

Who's going to win in the 29th Congressional District?

The latest poll shows Democrat Eric Massa leading Republican incumbent Randy Kuhl 51-44 percent.

THE INSIDER



Bob Rolfe

Since The Insider has been anti-Kuhl for the past four years, that should make me happy, right? It's a sign that voters in the district are sick and tired of Kuhl and his almost constant tromping down the Bush-McCain trail.

Yet I've suddenly developed misgivings when it comes to his opponent.

The whole situation goes back to the original House vote on the rescue of the economy.

Kuhl, you will recall, temporarily abandoned the president's line and voted against the package. Massa also said he was opposed.

Kuhl, for once, found himself on the side of the economic angels, since no package could mean the collapse of the whole economy. I pointed out, however, that his vote merely reflected widespread suspicion of the whole plan among his constituents and was but another ploy to boost his chances for re-election.

Since Massa had no vote, I made no comment at the time, but I was worried.

Then the Senate approved a revised version and the House, a week ago today, followed through with its approval.

But Randy had changed positions once again. This time he did as the Bushies demanded, and voted "yes." By so doing, he became the only member of the New York state delegation to switch positions from one vote to the other.

But Massa remained opposed and issued a press release to let the world know of his stance.

But Eric, I thought, the House approved the plan this time because a sizable number of members finally realized the awful consequences of letting the economy collapse.

I'd respected Massa up until that point, but his position on such a awesome issue makes me very concerned.

Concerned enough that I just might sit out the congressional vote this year. That means I'd vote for neither man.

Massa's political sins in no way match Kuhl's self-justifying record, but on this vital issue, Eric has made me very, very afraid.

The last thing we need is another Randy Kuhl, no matter what the justification might be.

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