

Poor Economy Could Drain Social Security

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The sour economy and President Bush's tax cut will force the government to tap \$9 billion in Social Security reserves this year, congressional analysts concluded in a report Monday, igniting a bitter political fight over the dwindling surplus.

"Houston, we've got a problem," said Rep. John Spratt, D-S.C., ranking Democrat on the House Budget Committee. He used the famous Apollo 13 line to underscore the pessimistic projections from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. "What we've got here is the hard job of adjusting the budget to reflect reality."

The CBO report was scheduled for release Tuesday. It was obtained Monday by The Associated Press from congressional sources.

Democrats said the CBO update, coming less than a week after a sunnier White House budget forecast, would severely crimp the ability of the president and Congress to fund their priorities: increasing defense and education spending, providing a Medicare prescription drug benefit and extending popular expiring tax breaks.

House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, D-Mo., said the 10-year, \$1.35 trillion tax cut is causing an "alarming fiscal crisis," draining away

the surplus cushion just as the economic downturn is hitting home.

The CBO provides the budget numbers Congress is required to use. "The numbers don't lie," Gephardt said.

The new report was released even as Republican party leaders began attacking Democrats for their criticism about the dwindling budget surplus.

"If Democrats stay on the attack ... and finally resort to paid advertising to mislead the people of the United States, ... we can't allow that to go unanswered," said Jim Gilmore, chairman of the Republican National Committee.

The Democrats responded with the argument that their comments about the argument that their comments about the dwindling surplus are the truth and used Congress' nonpartisan financial watchdog office as proof.

"We owe it to the American public to let them know truly what the Bush administration is doing to our economy," Democratic national Chairman Terry McAuliffe said.

Gilmore, the Virginia governor, said Democratic leaders are "tone-deaf" and hypocritical about the budget.

Republicans began airing 30-second television commercials Monday that said Bush "is sending money back to taxpayers to get our economy growing again. He's protecting every penny of Medicare and Social Security and still left the second biggest surplus in history."

Powell to Skip U.N. Racism Summit

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ending months of deliberation, Secretary of State Colin Powell has decided not to attend the U.N. conference on racism because of Arab-backed "offensive language" accusing Israel of racist policies against Palestinians, the State Department said Monday.

Spokesman Richard Boucher said no decision has been made on whether the United States will send a delegation to the conference or boycott it altogether. The eight-day conference convenes Friday in Durban, South Africa.

While negotiations continue over the wording of a conference document to be approved by delegates, Boucher said the administration could wait no longer in announcing whether Powell would attend.

Shortly before Boucher spoke, U.N. Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson noted the formulation "Zionism equals racism" had been deleted from conference documents. Similar

language still exists in the draft documents, including a reference to "the Zionist movement, which is based on racial superiority."

Boucher said he did not have up-to-the minute information on the negotiations over the documents. He added that the United States wants to work with others who are trying to rectify the situation.

Speaking in Johannesburg, Robinson said she was encouraged by the constructive attitudes of delegates attempting to reach a compromise.

But, she said, it would take "the participation of all countries at the highest level possible" to demonstrate determination to fight racism.

Boucher said the administration is disturbed by the focus that many countries want to place on Israel.

"It's the only country that seems to be singled out," he said.

He added that Powell's attendance was not deemed to be imperative because, while many countries plan to be represented by their head of state or

foreign minister, many others will send lower level delegations.

A senior State Department official expressed skepticism about the willingness of some countries to back off on their criticism of Israel. The official said conciliatory language accepted at this stage can be scrapped and replaced by tendentious wording once the conference begins.

Given the brief period before the conference starts, the official said a decision on sending an official delegation from Washington would have to be made in the next day or so. Another option, the official said, was to have the United States represented by officials already stationed in southern Africa.

Rep. Tom Lantos, D-Calif., praised Powell's decision. As a world leader in the fight against racism, "the United States must not dignify this anti-Israel lynching with its high-level participation," said Lantos, a member of the House International Relations Committee.

The decision also was praised by the pro-Israel Anti-Defamation League.

Glen A. Tobias, ADL national chairman, and Abraham H. Foxman, its national director, said the decision sends a clear message that "the United States will not legitimize the attempts to resurrect unfounded anti-Israel and anti-Jewish canards" at the U.N. conference.

But Gerald LeMelle, a top official of Amnesty International USA, said Powell's decision not to go was very disappointing.

"There has been no serious thought as to the role the United States could play," LeMelle said. "Who is going to start leading us away from racial strife in Rwanda, Burundi, Kosovo, Cincinnati?"

"Race was at the core of all of these issues. Who is going to show leadership? It's not going to be the Chinese or the Russians. It has to be the U.S. They don't seem to be seizing the moment."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, who is flying to Durban Tuesday to join other U.S. civil rights activists at the conference, said in a telephone interview that Powell's decision not to attend the conference represents "a huge step backward toward isolationism."

ZOOM CULTURE

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"People say what goes on in Jamaica stays in Jamaica, but we got it all," said Marty Lasferty, president and CEO of Zoom Culture. "We were incredibly fortunate to capture the stories we did."

The company releases the fruits of its labor, aptly titled "Spring Break," at 7 p.m. tonight at the Lumina Theater. A premiere party is scheduled at Top of the Hill following the screening, and the film's \$3 admission also fronts one drink at the after-party.

Filming the trials of several Spring Breakers, "Spring Break" is part of Zoom Culture's ongoing "Digital Diaries" series, Lasferty said. The diaries are meant to chronicle youth's various stages and rites of passage, and Lasferty added that "Spring Break" is a logical

extension of that series.

And due to the nature of this particular rite of passage, Lasferty said the film, currently not rated, will receive an R for several adult themes that are present in the film.

"(The R rating is) for numerous incarnations of the ultimate pursuit of hedonistic pleasure," Lasferty said. "It doesn't disappoint in terms of that aspect of it."

Although the rating will not be applied at the time of tonight's showing, audiences only over age 18 are permitted to see tonight's screening.

UNC graduate student Jennifer Grossman, who was affiliated with Zoom Culture during its days as a Carboro-based Internet company, was filmed by the Zoom Culture crew in Cancun last March.

The experience of having her Spring Break filmed both amuses Grossman and makes her a bit nervous. She said

she is concerned how the documentary will depict her but nevertheless looks forward to the film's release.

"I have been on Spring Break three times, so I was familiar with the antics, but being with Zoom Culture wasn't what I expected," she said. "Reality TV can be a lot more stressful than I thought. 'I'm really not as looney as I might appear.'"

Lasferty said all who participated in the project signed waivers allowing Zoom Culture to use footage at its discretion and added that, despite its antics, the film has a moral about the consequences of things going too far.

Grossman echoed this statement and encouraged anyone on Spring Break — or on reality-based TV — to be careful while relishing the revelry.

And while the film might embarrass her, Grossman said she's looking forward to seeing the finished product. "I'm excited and extremely wary of how I'm going to be packaged — I'll be covering my eyes and laughing at the same time."

FLAT RATE

From Page 3

Durham, she said. "The HUD formula will not allow families to move out of public housing. We are looking at what is needed to move more people forward into home ownership."

The residents' council also submitted a recommendation to the town council with the resolution passed Monday that called for a series of rental rates ranging from \$300 to \$600 per month.

Despite the residents' council's concerns, Tina Vaughn, director of the Chapel Hill Housing Department, said the rates established by the town using the HUD formula will not negatively impact families living in public housing.

"You have to remember that (families) still have the option to have rent based on their income," she said. "Because they still have that choice, (the flat rental rates) won't hurt them. The rates set forth by the consultant are in accordance with HUD regulations and I believe are reasonable."

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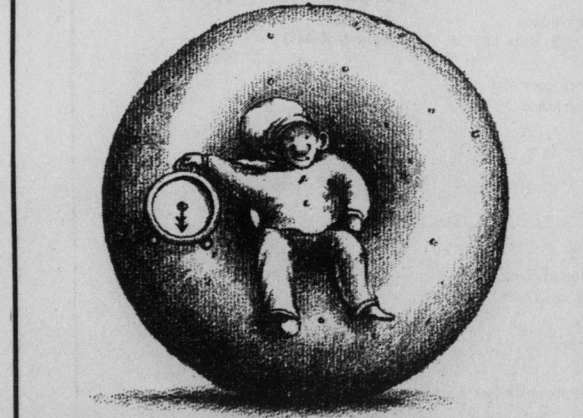
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