

Editorial

Party lines must end where Constitution begins

Ronald Reagan's attempt to push through the balanced budget amendment in the final hours of the congressional session had "an overwhelmingly political smell," according to one anti-amendment legislator.

Reagan's efforts to back the bill had not only a political smell; it had a blatantly political sound. Listen:

"Voters across America should count heads and take names," Reagan said after the House defeated the measure Friday. "In November, we must elect representatives who will support the amendment when we propose it again in the spring."

That's a pretty partisan statement for the president of the United States — a man who supposedly leaves his party ties at home when he moves into the White House.

Reagan should not be making the defeat of the balanced budget amendment a political issue. If passed, its implications would last far beyond November.

Consider:
— The president submitted a fiscal year 1983 budget that allowed for a deficit that could reach \$155 billion. If Reagan, the biggest supporter of a balanced budget,

can't come any closer to making the national income equal the outflow, how will other presidents fare?

Remember that Reagan has been criticized widely for chopping federal programs to lower the deficit, losing popular support along the way. According to the balanced budget amendment, other presidents would have to cut much more deeply — and lose much more support.

— Even if the amendment were intact, a deficit budget could be passed with two-thirds vote of the House and Senate. If in the future, a Roosevelt-like president should submit a balanced budget, heavy on social programs and light on defense, congressional conservatives could be sure to rally two-thirds of their colleagues to add more for defense, and thus "unbalance" the budget.

If, on the other hand, a Reagan-like president submitted a balanced budget heavy on military and light on social programs, the liberals in Congress could gather a two-thirds majority and vote for a deficit.

Either way, the amendment could be too easily violated. And when that happened, as it surely would, the American people would have yet another reason to lose faith in their elected officials.

— The bill that was defeated Friday was proposing a constitutional amendment. An amendment, remember, is for all time; it doesn't expire with a president's term. Thus, it should not be used as a political pawn, as the president has advocated for the upcoming elections.

A measure added to the Constitution should not be one that splits Democrats and Republicans. It should not be one where the president personally lobbies members of the party that helped elected him. It seems an addition to the Constitution should have support from members of all parties.

In theory, a balanced budget law has merit. It promotes the ideal that Americans are responsible, that they spend only what they can afford. Thus, a federal budget with an enormous deficit is seen as fiscally irresponsible — and granted the disdain we give to our overdrawn checking accounts and overdue bills.

But a balanced budget would be very difficult to draft and even harder to make stick. And as things stand now, passage of a balanced budget amendment would be an act of political revenge (the Republicans over Democrats), not a move to improve the U.S. Constitution.



Even vodka found off-limits by the politically scrupulous

My friend Burt has convinced me it's not safe to buy things anymore.

Burt is the most political person I know. If there is a cause, he is for it. If there is a petition, he has signed it. If there is a button, he has worn it.

I'm not criticizing Burt. He is a genuinely committed human being, which means he is impossible to be around.

Burt has appointed himself as my personal conscience. "Someday you'll



thank me" is his favorite line.

Years ago, he told me I couldn't eat grapes.

"The grape pickers are the most exploited of the migrant workers," he said. "To eat a grape is to starve a child." I stopped eating grapes.

Then Burt upped the ante. "Lettuce," he said one day. "No more lettuce. Eating one leaf is like snuffing out a life."

But lettuce is a lot harder to avoid than grapes. "What if I'm in a restaurant and there is already some lettuce on my club sandwich?" I asked.

"Remove it, throw it on the floor and demand to see the manager," Burt said. "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

The other day, I ran into Burt in a liquor store. He looked awful. He was standing in front of the vodka section and shaking with rage.

"It's impossible," he said. "There is

not a single bottle of vodka a decent human being can buy anymore." I didn't know what he was talking about.

"Try this one," I said, picking up a bottle. "Nobody can pronounce it, but everybody is talking about it. It's big in singles bars."

"Russian vodka?" Burt sneered. "Have you no conscience? Have you forgotten Stalin? The Berlin Wall? Afghanistan?"

"But the stuff is already on the shelves," I said. "Somebody in Russia already got paid for it, didn't they?"

"Not the point," Burt sniffed. "It's the trickle-down effect. If we don't buy it..."

"Russia will eventually go bankrupt and free their enslaved millions?" I asked.

"Precisely," he said. "Pick another."

"All right, here's some Polish vodka. They're the victims, not the oppressors. You've got to like Polish vodka."

He shook his head. "You are so naive," he said. "The vodka factories are owned by the government of Poland. Not the people of Poland. Every time you buy this stuff, it is like spitting on Solidarity."

I tried again. "Finland," I said, grabbing a bottle. "What could be better? Neutral spirits from a neutral country."

"Neutral?" Burt laughed. "Don't be taken in. They live in fear of the Russians. They are much too cozy with them. Try again."

I went for a sure thing. "Britain!" I yelled. "Hands across the sea. The Beatles. Fish and chips. Princess Di. Pip, pip and all that."

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Columnist angry that society forces people to live in fear

Some people call my part of town a ghetto. Actually, I prefer to think of it as a culturally diverse neighborhood. Why, there hasn't been a major crime committed here in months. I haven't had to step over any winos on the sidewalk for three days, now.

Even so, I know I should be more careful. Sometimes I forget to lock my car at night, even though the most expensive thing I keep in it is my tire gauge.



And sometimes I'll leave the front door unlocked when I'm home and I'm expecting someone to come over, which is the one thing my boyfriend is sure to lecture me about. He came in one afternoon while I was typing and glared at me until I stopped.

"O'Gara," he said (he never calls me by my first name), "why isn't your door locked?"

"Well, I knew you were coming over so I left it open."

"Need I remind you," he continued, "that this neighborhood is full of creeps and weirdos, and that an unlocked door is an open invitation to crime? Why can't you be more careful?"

"I am careful," I retorted. "And besides," I said in my most defiant feminist voice, "I refuse to be intimidated by the riffraff."

"That's very noble of you," he observed. "Stupid, but noble."

Actually, he's got a point. Single women living alone in ghettos, er, I mean, working-class neighborhoods like mine, can't be too careful.

A stranger came to my door the other night carrying a briefcase. He looked harmless enough — not much taller than me, kind of skinny. I figured I could handle him if he tried anything funny. He told me he was taking a survey and wanted to know if he could come in and ask me a few questions. I told him I preferred that he stay on the other side of the screen door, thank you.

He asked me if I was aware of the latest national statistics on the incidence of rape and sexual assault. "Of course I am," I thought. "I've probably forgotten more statistics than you've ever known, you idiot." Instead, I just said "yes." He asked me if I lived alone and if I had any weapons in my possession. I told him he was crazy if he thought I'd give that kind of information to a stranger.

He asked me if I knew about the woman who was attacked in the alley just across the street from my apartment. I shifted nervously from one foot to the other. "Yes," I said, "I know about that." He asked me if I knew what I would do if I was attacked. Would I fight back? Would I submit?

I started feeling a little sick. How did I know this guy wasn't some loony? I loosened my death grip on the doorknob and took a deep breath — all I needed was one good shot at him.

Lucky for him, though, I didn't have to punch his lights out. He turned out to be just another door-to-door salesman, but the product he was selling was far from harmless.

He picked up his briefcase and pulled out a rather simple looking device — a can of chemical spray "designed to ward off would-be attackers."

"Quite a few gals in this neighborhood have already bought one," he said, "especially those who go out alone at night."

I don't go out alone at night, I thought to myself. In fact, I don't go anywhere at night if I can possibly avoid it. I didn't hear the rest of his sales pitch. I was thinking about how angry I was — not at him, but at the kind of society that forces its citizens to live in fear behind locked doors and barred windows.

This guy really knew his market — single women living alone — and he knew how to exploit their fear to sell his product. Not that I blame him for trying to make a few bucks. What I object to is the fact that his product, along with burglar alarms and dead-bolt locks, have become necessities of life just like groceries.

I didn't buy his product, but I thanked him for the information and took one of his cards. Maybe I was overreacting, I thought. Maybe I was just being silly.

"I refuse to be intimidated," I said to no one in particular. But just to make sure, I went out to lock my car. And my front door. And my windows.

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