

November 21, 2005 Only in Washington DC can a spending increase be called a spending cut-- but that's exactly what happened last week. Congress passed a budget bill that merely slows the rate at which some federal spending grows by a tiny percentage, and both parties acted as though a revolution had taken place. Republicans trumpeted the measure as a huge victory for fiscal conservatism, while Democrats were enraged by the supposed "slashing" of government programs. The uproar shows just how entrenched the spending culture has become on Capitol Hill-- even insignificant reductions in the rate of growth in federal spending are seen as earth-shattering. But if we're really serious about cutting federal spending, why not simply cut 10% from the 2006 budget? Remember, the same Republicans claiming victory for slowing spending next year also passed the Medicare prescription drug bill, which will add over \$50 billion to the federal budget in 2006 alone! In just one year the Medicare bill adds ten times in new spending what the budget bill purportedly cuts. So nobody who voted for the Medicare drug bill has any business talking about government spending. Neither do those who refuse to consider cutting one penny from the military and foreign aid budgets. You cannot conduct a foreign policy based on remaking whole nations using military force and pretend to operate a frugal government. The Democrats, by contrast, never want to cut spending on anything, no matter how much the federal budget grows-- and it's doubled in 15 years. A \$2.4 trillion federal budget is woefully inadequate in their eyes, and ten years from now they'll say the same thing about a \$5 trillion budget. No amount of spending will ever satisfy those who believe government should address every human problem and involve itself in every aspect of our lives.

The budget bill fails to address the root of the spending problem--this belief that Congress continually must create new federal programs and agencies. However, with the federal government's unfunded liabilities-- Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid-- projected to reach as much as \$50 trillion by the end of this year, Congress no longer can avoid serious efforts to rein in spending. Instead of a smoke-and-mirrors approach, Congress should begin the journey toward fiscal responsibility by declaring a ten percent reduction in real spending, followed by a renewed commitment to fund only those government functions that are consistent with the Constitution.