

December 6, 2007

EDITORIAL

The President's Cynical Budget War

President Bush's lame-duck attempt to repair the Republican Party's threadbare fiscal reputation is an increasingly reckless game. In the latest exercise of irresponsibility for political gain, Mr. Bush reportedly wants to slash counterterrorism funding for front-line police and firefighters.

The administration's own Homeland Security agency requested \$3.2 billion for this first responder aid to high-risk cities and states in the 2009 budget — the one that Mr. Bush's successor will inherit. The White House is considering cutting that request by more than half to \$1.4 billion by eliminating grants for port and public transit security, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

While Mr. Bush wrestles with more responsible members of his own administration, his larger and more immediate game is to portray the narrow Democratic majority in Congress as feckless overspenders.

In October, he vetoed a sensible bill that would have provided health insurance for millions of uninsured children. In the name of faux fiscal discipline, he is threatening to veto budget measures that the nation needs for effective government.

Mr. Bush is clearly hoping that the public will somehow forget that he is the one who spent the last seven years running up huge deficits and debt with his off-the-books war in Iraq and serial tax cuts customized for his affluent political base. Mr. Bush's Republican allies on Capitol Hill are also hoping that the voters will forget how they abetted the president through all those years. Those fiscal turncoats are now scrambling to pose once more as budget hawks to survive in next year's watershed election.

The differences between the Democrats' spending bills and Mr. Bush's budget are not that large. And the Democrats are offering to split the difference. But Mr. Bush isn't interested in compromise.

He's decided the real political traction comes with manufactured standoffs and blame-the-Congress gridlock. And he clearly doesn't care who suffers — the nation's vulnerable cities or vulnerable children without health insurance.

As the White House plays out its cynical scenario, loyalists are flinching.

"This isn't a bridge to nowhere. We're talking about life and death," Representative Peter King of New York, the top Republican on the House's Homeland Security Committee, warned of first-responder cuts. Having played along so far with the grand Bush strategy, Mr. King is alarmed now and threatening to vote against sustaining future vetoes.

Republicans sweating political survival beyond Mr. Bush's desperate endgame would be wise to follow Mr. King's lead, not the president's.

[Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
