

## Hey, Big Spender

By David Baumann

Just days before he will submit his FY05 budget to Congress, President Bush already is getting blasted out of the water for his spending plans. But it's not his enemies on the left who are most vocal about what Bush wants to do. No, it's his supposed friends on the right who contend that Bush is spending like ... God forbid ... a Democrat. Or even worse.

"Federal spending has grown twice as fast under President Bush than under President Clinton," Brian Riedl, a fellow in federal budgetary affairs at the Heritage Foundation, wrote last month, in urging Congress and Bush to rewrite the recently passed FY04 omnibus spending bill.

Problems between the right and Bush have been growing over the past year. House conservatives were unhappy with the omnibus bill and began making it clear that they expected more (or was it less?) from Bush. Bush has said he will keep federal spending under the rate of inflation in the budget to be released next week.

But just in case, budget analysts on the right have been working extra hard to build a case that spending is out of control. Riedl argues that this fiscal year is the third year in a row that Congress and Bush agreed to "massive discretionary spending growth."

How can this be, when appropriators and others contend that discretionary spending grew only 3 percent? It's that old pesky difference between budget authority and outlays. Congress and the president assigned spending that actually will occur in FY04 to the FY03 spending column, Riedl said. For instance, in March 2003, Congress approved a \$79.2 billion FY03 supplemental spending bill for the war in Iraq. Congress counted that as FY03 spending, but much of the money is not going to be spent until this year. Congress, with Bush's agreement, also is reclassifying about \$2.2 billion in FY04 education money as FY03 spending. Riedl called such bookkeeping "sleight-of-hand" that has gone on for years.

Now, Bush has argued that spending on defense and homeland security is responsible for the big spending boosts. Not so fast, Riedl argued. Spending outside defense and Sept. 11 expenses grew 11 percent from 2001 to 2003, he said. "Lawmakers have made no serious attempt to balance new spending with savings elsewhere in the budget," Riedl contended, while citing a variety of programs he believes could be and should be cut.

The righties at the Cato Institute aren't any easier on Bush. "Although defense spending has increased in response to the war on terrorism, President Bush has made little attempt to restrain nondefense spending to

help offset the higher Pentagon budget," Veronique de Rugy, a fiscal policy analyst at Cato, wrote earlier this month. Sparing Bush nothing, she contended that "after only three years in office, President Bush may be headed to the record books as one of the biggest spending presidents," adding that real nondefense discretionary spending has increased during Bush's first three years in office.

She called on Republicans to "rediscover the reforming spirit that they brought to Washington after the landmark 1994 congressional elections." She reminded Republicans that they control the White House and both houses of Congress and that they are responsible for the current budget mess.

Cato also kept tabs on Bush's State of the Union speech and said that the president proposed 31 new or expanded initiatives in the address, up from 20 last year. "The most striking hypocrisy during the evening was members of Congress giving a standing ovation when Bush called for limiting federal spending and cutting wasteful spending," Cato Executive Vice President David Boaz said after the speech.

Following the speech, **House Appropriations Chairman Young** said the Appropriations Committee

will consider many of the president's initiatives this year. But the House conservatives who are members of the Republican Study Committee threw down the gauntlet. "Conservatives believe that the entire cost of new initiatives ought to be offset with other reductions in spending," said **Rep. Sue Myrick, R-N.C.**, the chairwoman of the RSC. "Certainly there are old and obsolete things that the government does that we could stop."

Of course, all of these analyses fail to take into account the political realities. Even if House Republicans wanted to slash spending, the partisan margin is small enough that finding a consensus about what to cut is nearly impossible. And even if such cuts could get through the House, Republicans control the Senate by only one vote. Traditionally, senators like to spend more than their House colleagues, a trend that shows no signs of stopping.

In addition, since this is an election year, members of Congress will be looking for ways to demonstrate their effectiveness to the folks back home — so the number of so-called pork projects is likely to increase, no matter who fights against them.

Nonetheless, heading into the FY05 budget cycle, it is clear that Bush not only has to be looking over his left shoulder, wondering where the shots will come from, but also must be watching over his right shoulder, where his so-called friends already are firing.

— Contact: [dbaumann@nationaljournal.com](mailto:dbaumann@nationaljournal.com)

**Even if House Republicans wanted to slash spending, the partisan margin is small enough that finding a consensus about what to cut is nearly impossible.**