

OUTLOOK

Limit spending and cap the currency of power



George F. Will says with a carefully crafted constitutional amendment, there may be a way to constrain the budget of political self-interest.

WASHINGTON — The arguments against a constitutional amendment to require balanced budgets are various and, cumulatively, almost conclusive. Almost. The main arguments are:

The Constitution should be amended rarely and reluctantly. Constitutionalizing fiscal policy is a dubious undertaking. Unless carefully crafted, such an amendment might instead be a constant driver of tax increases. A carefully crafted amendment that minimizes this risk could not pass until Republicans have two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress, which they have not had since 1871.

Furthermore, requiring a balanced budget would incite creative bookkeeping that would make a mockery of the amendment and the Constitution. For example, New York, which like 48 other states (all but Vermont) has some sort of requirement for a balanced budget, once balanced its by selling Attica Prison to itself: A state agency established to fund urban redevelopment borrowed \$200 million in the bond market, gave the money to the state, and took title to the prison. The state recorded as income the \$200 million its agency had borrowed, declared the budget balanced, then rented the prison from the agency for a sum adequate to service the \$200 million debt.

There is, however, one sufficient argument for a balanced-budget amendment. It is: George Mason University's James Buchanan.

This Nobel laureate economist, who died last month at 93, pioneered the "public choice" school of analysis, the premise of which is in the title of his 1979 essay "Politics Without Romance." Public choice theory applies economic analysis — essentially, the study of how incentives influence behavior — to politics.

Public choice analysis began in the 1960s, when Washington's social engineers were busy as beavers building a Great Society, and confidence in government reached an apogee that prudent people hope will never be matched. Public choice theory demystified politics by puncturing the grand illusion that nourishes government growth. It is the fiction that elected politicians and government administrators are more nobly motivated, unselfish and disinterested than are persons acting in the private sector.

Buchanan extended the idea of the profit motive to the behavior of politicians and bureaucrats, two groups seeking to maximize power the way many people in the private sector maximize

monetary profits. Public-sector actors often do this by transactions with rent-seekers — private factions trying to maximize their welfare by getting government to give them benefits, such as appropriations, tax preferences and other subsidies.

Critics have dismissed as mere anti-government ideology the injection by public choice theory of realism into the analysis of collective action through politics. Such critics cling to a comforting — and, for advocates of ever-bigger government, a convenient — theory. It is that in politics and government, people, acting as voters or legislators or administrators, do not behave as people do in markets — they supposedly are not responsive to incentives for personal aggrandizement.

Actually, Buchanan's theory supplanted an ideology — the faith in government as omniscient and benevolent. It replaced it with realism about the sociology of government and the logic of collective action. The theory's explanatory and predictive power, Buchanan wrote, derives from its "presumption that persons do not readily become economic eunuchs as they shift from market to political participation."

Concerning the cold logic of power maximization, Buchanan was as unsentimental as Machiavelli, whose "The Prince," the primer on realism that announced political modernity, appeared exactly half a millennium ago, in 1513.

Six days after Buchanan died, House Republicans provided dismal (and redundant) validation of public choice theory. Rep. Mick Mulvaney, R-S.C., supported by Majority Leader Eric Cantor and Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, proposed offsetting just \$17 billion of the \$60 billion aid for victims of Superstorm Sandy, and doing so by cutting just 1.63 percent from discretionary government spending. Rep. Hal Rogers, R-Ky., chairman of the Appropriations Committee, said this would "slash and burn" important programs, and the measure failed because 71 Republicans opposed it.

The political class is incorrigible because it is composed of — let us say the worst — human beings. They respond to incentives of self-interest. Their acquisitiveness is not for money but for the currency of power, which they act to retain and enlarge. This class can be constrained, if at all, not by exhorting them to become disinterested but by binding them with a constitutional amendment.

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Burmese women should be praised for courage



Kathleen Parker says the challenges four rising female leaders face serve as reminders of ongoing obstacles to freedom and democratic reform.

WASHINGTON — When Burma's Zin Mar Aung was placed in solitary confinement for trying to organize students in 1999, Bill Clinton was president of the United States.

When she was released, Barack Obama was in the Oval Office.

Zin Mar Aung says she had never heard of George W. Bush or his wife, Laura, who used her own bully pulpit to push for liberation of Burma's most famous political prisoner, democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, then under house arrest.

Suu Kyi is well-known to many now because of the largely unacknowledged work of the Bushes, as well as Hillary Rodham Clinton and John McCain. Since her release, Suu Kyi has risen to public office, accepted her Nobel Peace Prize and been the subject of a movie ("The Lady").

Less well-known are four rising female leaders with whom I met, including Zin Mar Aung, who are visiting the U.S. this month for leadership training. Their delegation is sponsored by Goldman Sachs' "10,000 Women" program, in partnership with the George W. Bush Institute, the McCain Institute and the Meridian International Center.

What does all this mean?

Start here: Imagine living under a military dictatorship where free speech is punishable by incarceration, torture or worse. Imagine sitting in an 8-by-8-foot cell alone for 11 years with nothing but a small water jug, a "sink" for waste, and a 15-minute daily break for a cold bath in a communal tub. Throw in a lack of any amenities (shoes) or even necessities, such as sanitary napkins.

This was Zin Mar Aung's life for 11 years in Burma, also known as Myanmar. How did she hang on to her sanity, I asked? She says she accepted that her existence consisted of those 64 square feet and wishing otherwise would do her no good.

Meditate on that, while keeping in mind that her crime was publicly reading and distributing a collection of revolutionary poems she and her fellow students had written. Zin Mar Aung says she focused on those poems to get her through more than 4,000 days.

Then one day, she was free.

What does one do next? How does one navigate freedom in a nation relatively new to democratic reform and find the voice to speak when one has been silenced? Second and third thoughts further crowd the spirit in a country where, despite admiration for The Lady (as

everyone refers to Suu Kyi), women are not universally embraced in the political process.

It takes courage to put one foot in front of the other, much less to become an activist, as Zin Mar Aung and her colleagues have done.

For her part, Zin Mar Aung picked up where she left off, earning a degree in botany, and now pursuing an international law degree. In the meantime, she established the Yangon School of Political Science and co-founded Rainfall, an organization focused on women's empowerment.

The accomplishments of the four also include helping political prisoners, providing education and training to underserved girls and young women vulnerable to trafficking, and advocating for victims of domestic violence. The name of one of the organizations they help suggests the urgency and breadth of their challenges: "Stop Sexual Harassment on the Bus Now."

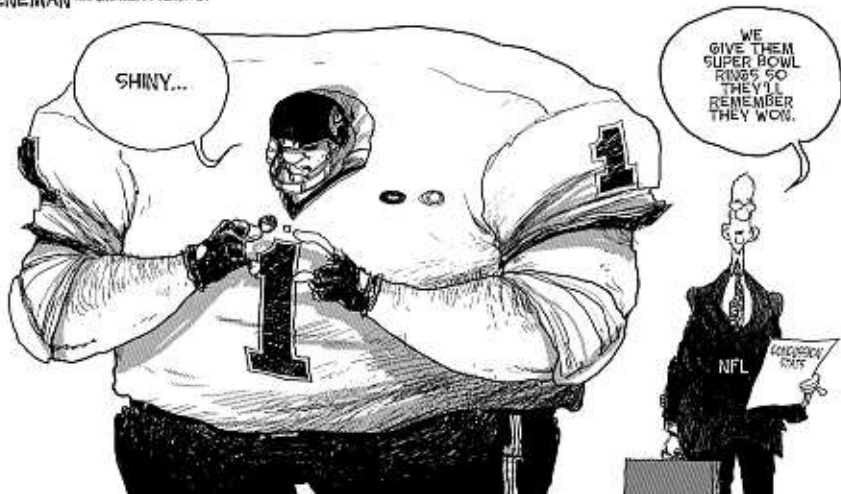
The three other women are: Hla Hla Yee, a mother, attorney and former political prisoner who counsels marginalized women and provides paralegal training in orphanages and elsewhere; Shunn Lei Swe Yee, who mobilizes young people to work for a more civil society; and Ma Nilar OO, who worked for the International Red Cross for 18 years, advocated for political prisoners and personally provided some of those aforementioned necessities to Zin Mar Aung and Hla Hla Yee when they were imprisoned. More recently, she has been training and finding jobs for at-risk girls and young women (ages 13 to 35). She recently lost two teens from her program when their parents sold them each for \$100. They were of high value, apparently, because they were virgins, the sundering of whom is crudely termed in Burma "to open a new envelope."

Some of these struggles sound familiar, even in our advanced democracy. What is different for these women is the absence of democratic traditions in their country and a lack of familiarity with the instruments of freedom. Everything — from how to build a feminist movement to how to create a political party — has to be invented from scratch. What is the message? What is public opinion? How does a person get elected?

Imagine that. And then meditate about — or pray for — the safety and success of these four brave women.

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SHEENEMAN THRU THE MEDIA SERVICES



Eventual immigration reform details will determine success

Economic benefits should be focus of proposed legislation

Dr. Tony Payan

The bipartisan proposal to overhaul U.S. immigration laws unveiled by eight U.S. senators in late January is an excellent first step toward fixing a broken system. The principles outlined in the framework are, for the most part, correct and the result of a rude electoral awakening by both the Republicans in Congress and the Democrats at the White House. The devil of this proposal, however, will be in details of the law, all of which will be worked out over the next few months.

One of the principles agreed upon is a path to citizenship for the undocumented resident population. That is, in fact, the core of the proposal, although it remains controversial among certain political actors. But this point correctly points to the fact that our immigration system after 9/11 focused almost exclusively on law enforcement at the expense of everything else. This approach sepa-

rated hundreds of thousands of families, placed thousands of U.S. children in foster care, and added to the budget deficit by filling courts, detention centers, and prisons with hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants.

A potential problem with the proposal's path to citizenship is that it requires all undocumented workers to first become "probationary immigrants" — an immigrant class that could mean a protracted state of limbo for millions as bureaucrats decide who obtains a green card and who must leave the country. This could create an economic and political underclass, highly vulnerable to the times and unable to defend itself because it would still live under the constant threat of deportation.

Another pillar of the senators' proposal, a flexible visa system that administratively increases or decreases the number of visas as the economy expands and contracts, is a common sense step, especially when accompanied by an effective system to verify the employability of workers within the United States. A danger with this particular part of the proposal, however, is that currently most undocumented workers are in service jobs for which there is no specifically

designated work visa — construction, landscaping, cleaning services, and the restaurant industry, among others. The key to a successful and flexible visa system is not only to increase and decrease the number of visas available and index it to economic performance but to correctly classify the kinds of jobs and create visas for them.

Perhaps the most misguided part of the proposal is its emphasis on border security. Border security is important, of course, but the moral panic around it does not reflect the reality on the ground. The border is rather safe. There is no substantial spillover violence from cartel infighting. Drug trafficking is only vaguely related to the problem of undocumented immigration.

Instead of spending more on border security, including the Border Patrol and the deployment of drones, the additional investments should go to modernize border infrastructure, introduce new technologies to detect contraband of all kinds, and pay for more customs agents and personnel to process vehicles and traffic crossings. This is especially true if the U.S. intends to inspect entries and exits, mostly to enforce the law on those who overstay their visas. A more mili-

tarized border strategy will choke the U.S. economy at its ports of entry and add billions in unproductive spending to our strained budgets. It is the most ill-advised part of the proposal and should be rethought to address the needs of the border and to manage its economic integration instead of making it an area that Americans needlessly fear.

The details of the bipartisan proposal will eventually emerge and we will have a clearer picture of how the law embodies the principles announced this week. Let us ensure that our elected leaders think the details through and that they avoid introducing social, economic and political distortions simply because they want to be "tough." The era of tough has come and gone. It did not work.

We must now do the right thing, to acknowledge that the North American economies are integrating at a pace that exceeds our legal and political framework. The foundational principle behind immigration should be the economy and its increasing dependence on a well-managed system of goods, services, and labor flows.

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