

Politicians pull reverse Robin Hood on poor

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Both Congress and President Bush have come up with their budget proposals, and both sets of figures do the same thing — cut domestic programs that would assist the poor while extending tax cuts to rich people who need them the least.

In other words, they are pulling a reverse Robin Hood by taking from the needy and giving to the greedy.

This is done under the guise that the federal government has gone on a spending spree and that domestic programs are the culprit. That might make for good propaganda, but it is far from the truth.

Overall, funding for defense, homeland security, and international affairs (which includes funding for post-war operations and reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan) rose from 3.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product in 2001 to 4.2 of GDP in 2006, an analysis by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities notes.

By contrast, funding for domestic discretionary programs shrank during this period, declining from 3.4 percent of GDP in 2002 to 3.1 percent in 2006.

Bush is taking heat, even from some moderate Republicans, for mismanaging the federal deficit.

When he took office, Bush inherited a

record \$236 billion surplus. By 2000, a \$158 billion deficit had developed and the White House estimates that this year, the figure will reach \$400 billion.

Some of the deficits can be attributed to Bush's decision to wage war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To a much lesser degree, there were, also, the unexpected federal expenditures associated with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. But a large — and avoidable — reason the federal government is sinking deeper into the hole is because Congress and the Bush administration have enacted a series of tax cuts that favor the wealthy.

The president defends the tax cuts, the first to be enacted by a U.S. president during wartime.

"American families all across this country have benefited from the tax cuts on dividends and capital gains," he said in a Jan. 6 speech to the Economic Club of Chicago. "Half of American households — that's more than 50 million households — now have some investment in the stock market."

As is often the case with politicians, it's what is not said that you'd better examine.

"What this statistic ignores, however, is



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that nearly two-fifths of this stock is held in retirement accounts, such as 401ks and IRAs," the Center on Budget and Priorities points out.

"This distinction is crucial, because capital gains and dividend income accruing inside these retirement accounts are not subject to taxation, and thus would not receive a tax benefit from the reduction in the tax rates on capital gains and dividend income."

So what's the real deal?

More than half — 54 percent — of all capital gains and dividend income go to 0.2 percent of households with annual incomes of more than \$1 million. By contrast, only 4 percent of this income reaches the 64 percent of households that have annual incomes of less than \$50,000, according to the Center. An analysis by the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center shows that tax legislation that has gone in effect since 2001 has exacerbated the gap between rich and poor.

The middle fifth of households received an average after-tax reduction of \$742 or 2.6 percent. Households with annual incomes of more than \$1 million received an average reduction of \$103,000 or 5.4 percent, more

than double the rate for middle-class families.

Yet, Bush brags that "tax cuts are working" by reinvigorating the economy.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office disagrees. It observes: "...increases [in the revenue projections] occur mainly because of a rise in projected GDP, which derives from higher prices in the economy, not real economic activity."

Finally, the wealthiest sector of the U.S. population is being showered with favoritism. "Some of the tax cuts that were enacted in 2001 are still being phased in," stated the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "These taxes are heavily tilted to those at the top of the income scale."

These tax cuts include the elimination of the tax on the nation's largest estates, as well as two tax cuts that started to take effect on January 1, 2006 and will go almost entirely to high-income households.

"The Tax Policy Center reports that 97 percent of the tax cuts from these two measures will go to people with incomes above \$200,000. As a result, the tax cuts ultimately will be even more skewed toward high-income households than they were in 2005."

As usual, that leaves poor and middle-class citizens out in the cold.

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Exxon's excess profits soar, consumers are sore

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

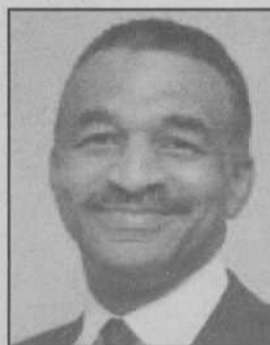
Have you ever made so much money that you were embarrassed about it? I didn't think so; and it's very unlikely you ever will. But in case you do, it will probably be called excess profit, which means surplus, additional or extra. I doubt if it will be called excessive profit, which means extreme, unwarranted, unnecessary and disproportionate. That's the kind of profit posted by Exxon Mobil so far. I would add that the other big oil companies, Dutch Shell (\$25 billion), ConocoPhillips, British Petroleum, Chevron, and the whole gang of outlaws are not so far behind Exxon. They adroitly refused to appear before a Congressional committee to explain their windfalls.

It must be nice for a company to make the most money ever in one quarter, \$11 billion, with a total of \$36 billion in one year, all in the face of disaster, grief, oh yeah, and death, along the Gulf Coast. That happens to be where U.S. oil is turned into gasoline and sent on its way to a pump near you. I wonder what it feels like to be able to announce such excessive profits and then thumb your nose at

Congress — (I told you we should get rid of Congress) — because of your disrespect for that august body or because you are simply embarrassed to discuss the topic before the public.

I'll cut right to the chase. We have seen all sorts of Gas Out days, Gas Out Weeks, and other campaigns to deal with these oil thieves, the ones who met with the 'vice' president and wrote the nation's energy policy, the ones who named an oil tanker after Condoleezza Rice, and the ones who lie to us on their way to the bank. None of those tactics has worked. So, what can we do besides complaining about the high prices at the pump and the excessive profits of the oil barons? Probably nothing that will cause them to hurt at all, so let's just have some fun.

From this day forward, let's stop patronizing Exxon Mobil gas stations. Let's stop patronizing all stations that purchase their gas from Exxon Mobil. I'm sure they'll get a kick out of our meager, insignificant, silly little



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Davidian plan to bring Goliath to his knees. They'll probably sit back a laugh their heads off at us, just like the Philistine did. After all, we're just lowly consumers, millions of customers who need what they're selling. What could we possibly do to hurt them?

Maybe the reality of the situation is that we cannot hurt them, but let's just keep our money away from them anyway, and spend it elsewhere. Watch your gas tank and buy some gas, not when it's nearly empty, but when you see a gas station that is not Exxon Mobil; buy a few dollars worth.

I know the other gas companies are ripping us off too, but we have to start somewhere. Unless you are willing to give up your expeditionin', escaladin', hummin', and navigatin' ways, and drive something a little smaller and easier on gas, you will be buying gas from one of these crooks — just don't let Exxon be your gas of choice.

It is shameful that some companies, such as pharmaceutical, banking, tobacco, energy,

health insurance and others are so greedy, excessive and dishonest in their business practices that it would lead their executives to do some of the things we have witnessed in the recent past. A few have gone to jail, but many more are still walking the streets and sitting in the boardrooms not having paid a price for their mistreatment of their consumers — not yet, at least.

Remember: When oil execs did testify in 2005, the Senate Commerce Chairman Ted Stevens — (The guy from Alaska with the bridge to nowhere. Don't they also have some oil up there under the frozen tundra too?) — rejected calls by some Democrats to have the executives sworn in, saying the law already required them to tell the truth. Are you kidding me? Since when did the law have anything to do with these crooks and what they do? But let's concentrate on Exxon for now. We cannot continue to complain about their billions in excessive profits without doing something, whatever we can do, to reflect our outrage.

I know they have no conscience; I know they have no compassion; I know they are

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sons down to a layperson's level. Her teaching method was very simple, nothing complex at all.

The commission held a national conference on the 30th anniversary of the March on Washington. The conference included training for youth. Our local Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Committee took 30 youth to Washington, D.C., to participate in the national event.

That's where I worked with her for a third time, in 1991, when I went to the King Center in Atlanta as president of the Las Vegas

committee and had the pleasure of being under her tutelage and attended her nonviolent workshops. It was a humbling gift for me, to be once again blessed to shadow Coretta for the entire day. Last, but not least among her tireless works, she also spearheaded the move, which is still being pursued, to have a monument to her husband placed in Washington, D.C., on the National Mall.

There is an old saying, "Beside every great man there is a great woman," and no statement has proven to be truer than that one when applied to Dr. and Mrs. King.

She graduated as valedictorian of her high

school class and attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. She received a B.A. in music and education and then studied concert singing at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Mass. She got a degree in voice and violin. But more importantly, when she met Martin, they shared the same ideas and philosophies; they both believed so strongly in nonviolent social change that he was willing to lay down his life for it, and she was willing to sacrifice, not only her husband, but her freedom. She and three of her children were arrested in 1985 while protesting apartheid at the South African Em-

bassy in Washington, D.C.

Mrs. King was much more to us than Martin's wife. She was a staunch freedom fighter who spoke out on behalf of racial and economic justice, women and children's rights, religious freedom, the needs of the poor and homeless, full employment, and many other issues.

As stated before, "Beside every great man there is a great woman," standing side-by-side together, and Mrs. King was truly the epitome of a great woman.

Coretta, it's been 38 years. Now, once again, you can see Martin face to face.