

Our reckless spending spree

Democratic hopefuls want more federal outlays — and Trump is already doing it



William F.B. O'Reilly

It's hard to tell who's being less serious, the 2020 presidential candidates or the voters who will put one of them in the Oval Office.

Neither seem to care a lick about the single greatest threat to America's future — the generational debt bomb ticking away at \$23 trillion. Indeed, the candidates and a majority of Americans alike would rather exacerbate the looming crisis by spending money we don't have than take steps necessary to deal with it. It leaves one genuinely wondering whether our nation is in need of a proper psychiatrist.

A March Pew Research Center survey of 1,503 U.S. adults — they presumably didn't check with their kids before answering — shows that most Americans want to increase or maintain spending levels on 13 key federal programs. Seventy-two percent of Americans want more spending on education and veteran services, 62 percent want to shell out more on highways, and 55

percent support spending increases for both Medicare and environmental programs. These are all laudable notions, but what is it about credit cards that don't we understand at this point? Or have we succumbed to being a nation of looters, determined to get ours before the store is shut down and the windows are boarded up?

Democratic candidates aren't even trying: Sen. Elizabeth Warren promises to wave a magic wand and absolve millions of Americans of student loan debt. Sen. Bernie Sanders will give everyone free education and health care. Heck, most Democratic candidates promise some variation of that. Sens. Cory Booker, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar — as well as Sanders and Warren — have signed on to New York Rep. Andrea Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal resolution, which would cost Americans \$93 trillion in the first 10 years, according to one estimate. For reference, the current annual federal budget is around \$4.1 trillion. And we effectively borrowed \$779 billion of that.

President Donald Trump is



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hardly better. His proposed \$4.746 trillion budget for next year would assume more than a trillion dollars of new debt. As the late Sen. John McCain used to quip, Trump and his Republican cohorts in Congress have been spending like drunken sailors, with apologies to drunken sailors for the compar-

son. Hopefully, Trump's lone Republican challenger, former Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, will have plenty to say about that.

Speaking of magic wands, Democrats have a new answer to cling to when questioned about fiscal responsibility. It's called — get this — Modern

Monetary Theory, and it posits, conveniently, that the old laws of economic gravity no longer apply. One can spend and borrow virtually without limit simply by calling expenditures “investments.” Inflation will magically remain at bay. That's some heavy voodoo.

How do they know this? Inflation has remained flat while the United States nearly quadrupled its debt over the past three presidencies, so the years of data preceding this spending spree can be discarded.

Wonderful news, really.

Meanwhile, what do young Americans care about? If you ask the Institute of Politics at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, the answer is more spending. The institute's 2018 survey of 18- to 29-year-olds showed that young Americans are increasingly left-leaning, strongly supporting programs like a federal jobs guarantee (56 percent); free college tuition for families making up to \$125,000 (also 56 percent) and single-payer health care (55 percent).

What they're going to get instead is a big fat bill. God help the rest of us for saddling them with it.

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FROM THE POINT

Measles bill still awaits Albany action



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Depending on whom you ask, a bill that would end New York's religious exemption for vaccines is either stuck in the State Assembly's health committee, with little chance of passage, or close to having enough votes to move on for a vote by all members.

In the State Senate, however, the situation seems more definitive. A Senate source told The Point Thursday that there could be a vote as early as next week — and the bill is expected to pass.

The debate comes as New York grapples with a measles outbreak. There have been more than 600 measles cases confirmed statewide, concentrated in Brooklyn and Rockland County. Nationally, the total is more than 700 cases, a 25-year high, in 22 states.

The bill's Assembly sponsor, Jeffrey Dinowitz (D-Bronx), said on Thursday that he is “trying to round up the votes” in the committee. He needs 14. Committee chair Assemb. Richard Gottfried (D-Manhattan) told The Point that he would put the bill on the committee agenda when Dinowitz says he has the votes.

“I'm close, but I'm not there yet,” Dinowitz said, although

he wouldn't say exactly how many definite yes votes he has. “I'm hoping, if I can line up the last votes, I think we can get it.”

But Assemb. Michaelle Solages (D-Elmont), a committee member, wasn't as hopeful.

“Currently, it doesn't seem like there are enough votes to get this piece of legislation passed,” Solages said. “From what I'm hearing, it's being stalled.”

Assemb. Andrew Raia (R-East Northport), a health committee member, voiced similar doubts.

“I think it's going to be a problem,” he said of the bill, noting that the only way that could change is if Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo comes out with more definitive support of the bill.

Cuomo's tune on the legisla-

tion has begun to shift. “I don't think the religious exemption in this case with measles trumps the public health concern,” he said earlier this week.

Some state lawmakers have concerns over the legality of ending the exemption. Others have questions about the safety of the vaccines themselves. And then there's the anti-vax movement, which has pummeled legislators with calls and emails.

Solages, who said her office has received more than 200 calls from vaccination opponents in just over a week, said that if the bill does come up for a vote, she will support it. But she has questions about whether it would face a legal challenge. Raia, meanwhile, said he's “soul searching,”

but added, “My job is to weigh both sides and then make a judgment and err on the side of public health.”

At least one Assembly member wondered whether it would take a tragedy — a death from measles, for instance — for lawmakers to push the bill forward. But Dinowitz hopes the current outbreak is bad enough to get their attention.

“We've got to do it,” Dinowitz said. “There's an emergency going on.”

Randi F. Marshall is a member of Newsday's editorial board. This originally appeared in The Point, the daily email newsletter of the editorial board.