



FORMAT FOR  
PRINTING  
sponsored by



September 28, 2005

## COMMENTARY

# The Year of Spending Dangerously

By **JEFF FLAKE**  
*September 28, 2005; Page A16*

*Traipsing down a flower-strewn path unpricked by the thorns of reason.* Perhaps no adage more accurately describes Congress right now. In the midst of a national debate on how to pay for hundreds of billions of dollars to rebuild hurricane ravaged communities, it has blithely authorized \$2 billion for H.R. 250, "A bill to establish an interagency committee to coordinate federal manufacturing research."

There is virtue in getting back to "business as usual" after a tragedy -- if it is a business you ought to be in. But lavish spending on questionable programs should have been out of step with Republican principles *before* these two hurricanes struck. From any vantage point outside the Washington Beltway, it now looks even more out of place.

How did we get here? Is this the same party that just 10 years ago insisted on dollar-for-dollar spending offsets for its \$15 billion response to the Northridge, Calif., earthquake -- with the California Republican delegation leading the charge? Where did we go wrong? And how do we convince the voters in the midterm elections that two more years of Republican control will produce anything more than bigger government and growing deficits?


Is it enough to reflect on the halcyon days prior to 9/11 when we delivered an impressive package of tax cuts? "What have you done for us lately?" the voters might ask. Simple: We have spent so profligately since then that it is becoming politically difficult to fully implement the tax cuts.

When we refuse, in the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, to consider postponing a universal prescription drug benefit that we could ill-afford prior to the devastation, and reject out of hand a national consensus that we reopen the infamous Highway Bill and finance the rebuilding of the bridge over Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana by canceling the Bridge to Nowhere in Alaska, we can hardly blame the voters for questioning our fiscal bona fides.

In the end, it probably won't matter much at the polls. Owing to the limited number of competitive seats nationwide, a shift large enough to jeopardize the Republican majority is unlikely. Furthermore, endemic Democratic ineptitude makes Republicans more attractive when graded on a curve. An understanding of this reality may explain the GOP's reluctance to assume its traditional limited-government mantle.

But there is much more at stake here than ballot victory or defeat. In the ashes of 9/11, we set a

### DOW JONES REPRINTS

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit: [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).

- [See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)
- [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

dangerous precedent that any victim of a terrorist act would be made whole, economically and otherwise, by the federal government. In the wake of Katrina/Rita, we risk setting an even more unsustainable precedent that it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that victims of natural disasters are made whole as well.

After the next tornado in Kansas or wildfire in Arizona, these communities will assert similar claims on the nation's Treasury, and a compassionate Congress will have no right to ignore their petition. And then?

Whether we want to admit it or not, the Republican Congress's failure to discipline itself is sending us all down a flower-strewn path to financial insolvency. That the Democrats would get us there faster should be of little consolation to anyone.

*Mr. Flake is a Republican representative from Arizona.*

**URL for this article:**

<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB112787725249954279,00.html>

**Copyright 2005 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved**

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).