

Federal Budget Heading Toward Trillions in Debt

FEDERAL BUDGET

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Mr. Conrad acknowledged that the crisis is not as dire as that faced by countries such as Japan or Western Europe, yet "it is very clear that we could in very short order confront our own debt crisis and the consequences to this country would be enormous."

He proposed a "two-pronged" approach in solving the problem: one to solve the short-term issues by focusing on economic growth; and another that could stabilize the economic debt and solve the problem in the long term.

SOLUTIONS BEING DISCUSSED

"Seldom do countries actually grow their way out of their financial burdens," said Dr. Carmen Reinhart, director of the Center for International Economics at the University of Maryland, who spoke at the hearing.

Dr. Reinhart added that "this is the time to lay out a credible plan for debt reduction."

A topic of discussion at the hearing was how to address the problem of job loss and creating new jobs. Job loss is the most "critical factor" during an economic recession, since it also has the impact

of reducing federal tax revenues, according to Dr. Reinhart.

Investing in new infrastructure projects has been a typical solution to job creation, yet the concept has not always worked. A Japanese initiative to repave a road once a week was used as an example of how it has failed in the past.

It was raised that "building bridges to nowhere" is not the answer, yet large-scale funding in necessary projects is difficult to manage since there is typically the problem of excess spending. An example used was that if funding was

given for 250 projects and only 50 were completely necessary, much-needed funds will have been spent needlessly.

A second stimulus package that could fund such projects was advised against by Dr. Simon Johnson, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, D.C.

His statement that another stimulus package is not the solution appeared to receive general agreement.

Dr. Johnson added that a possible solution could be a reduction

in payroll taxes which would give the economy a lift, however the current situation does not permit it since it would increase the long-term debt.

A GLOBAL PROBLEM

According to Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala), a key problem in the Bush administration was that they ignored the possibility of a deficit, which in turn affected the global market.

"What happened was the world lost its discipline," Mr. Sessions said.

There is concern that economic

issues now faced in the international community, and particularly in Western Europe could affect the global economy. The value of the euro is declining and economic problems are spreading into Portugal and Spain, and could be making their way into Ireland and Greece, according to Dr. Johnson.

"I'm afraid a serious crisis is brewing in Western Europe," said Johnson, adding that a primary concern is that the central banks in several of the countries "cannot withstand another financial shock."

Storms Hit the East, West, and Midwest



By MARY SILVER
Epoch Times Staff

Effects from the massive snowstorm that hit the east coast late last week were still reverberating days later on Feb. 9 as the federal government stayed closed and many people were snowed in. Schools and many nonprofit organizations and businesses were also closed as the capital waited for a second wave of predicted heavy snow.

Flags flew at half staff to mark the passing of Congressman John Murtha as many Washington, D.C. residents worked on cleaning up from the historic blizzard. Trees overloaded with snow cracked and dropped branches, and some above ground Washington Metro stations were closed. Many planned meetings and events were canceled and some travelers were stranded.

According to the National Weather Service, there was a 100 percent chance of snow, possibly heavy snow, on Wednesday, with temperatures below freezing. The snowfall is predicted to span from Northern Virginia to Southern New England.

In Los Angeles, heavy rain was predicted with the potential for floods, flash floods, and mudslides. Potential mudslides in the foothills above the city sparked an evacuation order for 541 homes.

According to the Los Angeles County Fire Department, "Due to anticipated weather conditions, residents in all the burn areas of Los Angeles County are told to evacuate."

Residents were required to leave

'Residents in all the burn areas of Los Angeles County are told to evacuate.'

—Los Angeles County Fire Department

their houses by 10 a.m. on Feb. 9.

In Illinois, parts of the Fox River were flooding. A winter storm warning was issued for Chicago, with heavy snow predicted, for Wednesday, possibly as heavy as an inch per hour, according to the National Weather Service. Ice and high winds were expected to make driving dangerous, and hundreds of flights were canceled into and out of O'Hare Airport.

University of Michigan Using Buddy System to Help Vets With PTSD

By GENEVIEVE LONG
Epoch Times Staff

Some soldiers returning from war in Iraq and Afghanistan wage a different kind of battle to reintegrate into the U.S. Some suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but might not know they have it or how to deal with it.

There are over 300,000 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with PTSD.

Years into both wars, organizations are partnering with leading universities to help veterans not only find a way out of PTSD, but to integrate back into society.

In early January, the McCormick Foundation gave the University of Michigan's (UM) Depression Center and Department of Psychiatry \$350,000 toward addressing the "invisible brain injuries" among returning Iraqi and Afghanistan veterans and their family members.

"Many times people are having symptoms and they don't want to ask for help," said Jane Spinner, project officer for Strategic Initiatives at the UM Depression Center, and administrative head of the Welcome Back Veterans initiative at UM. "There's a fear of asking for help, that they might be perceived as weak, that it might jeopardize future jobs in the military."

UM's program uses a buddy-to-buddy system where a vet reaches out to other vets. A veteran calls a central number and gets matched with another veteran, who is a volunteer, who then links him or her with a resource.

They currently have 22 volunteers, both male and female, who have fought in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and the Gulf War. They are also sending buddies out to armories throughout the state of Michigan. Rather than treating or diagnosing, the buddies simply help vets make connections with resources. The program's goal is to cover the entire state

of Michigan—but for that they need more veterans.

"That connection that person serves goes a long way in helping people overcome stigma," said Ms. Spinner.

The money UM was awarded from the McCormick Foundation went toward a larger fundraising initiative dubbed Welcome Back Veterans. The initiative was created by New York Mets Chairman and CEO Fred Wilpon to give returning veterans quality evaluations, treatment, support systems, and long-term employment assistance.

The program works in partnership with Major League Baseball Charities and the McCormick Foundation through a network of university hospitals to address the mental health needs of our veterans and their families. The three core Centers for Veterans Mental Health are within the Department of Psychiatry at Weill-Cornell Medical College of Cornell University, the University of Michigan Depression Center and Department of Psychiatry, and the Stanford University Department of Psychiatry.

The goal of the programs is to serve as replicable models for other civilian medical centers around the U.S., and the three centers talk on a monthly basis to share best practices.

"Our faculty had expertise in peer to peer programs and doing different kinds of outreach—there was already experience in developing this kind of program," said Ms. Spinner.

Stanford and Cornell have set up clinics, while Michigan is looking at outreach to "overcome the stigma barrier to get people into treatment."

Resources online:

U-M Depression Center: www.depressioncenter.org
Buddy-to-Buddy program: www.buddytobuddy.org
Real Warriors Campaign and DCoE: www.realwarriors.net
Welcome Back Veterans: www.welcomebackveterans.org

Solar Electric System



Tim Bugh ANGEL ZHOU/EPOCH TIMES

By ANGEL ZHOU
Epoch Times Staff

The effect of production and use of fossil fuels, coal, oil and natural gas on the environment is widely known. The rise in energy prices, greenhouse effect and environmental pollution are making daily news headlines and what's worse is the reserves are being depleted much faster than new ones are being formed. As our technology advances more homeowners and small business owners are finding solar energy systems are the solution to fight high electric bill with zero-emissions.

Texans have the advantage of using the solar energy power systems in their homes, since Texas is located at the south central US with mostly sunny and warm climate throughout the year and the state

with plenty of sunlight. To provide our readers a better understanding of the solar power energy, we have interviewed Mr. Tim Bugh, an energy efficiency consultant with Standard Renewable Energy (SRE).

SRE is based in Houston, Texas and is the nation's largest Distributed Energy Services Company, with several local offices across the nation. According to Tim Bugh from SRE's Austin location, there are two primary components to the residential solar power system. First the solar panel installed on the roof converts sunlight into electricity and next the inverter is required to convert the DC (Direct Current) into AC (Alternating Current) power that can be used in your home.

Solar systems have proven to be very durable, able to withstand severe weather conditions. "Our clients in Galveston, Texas reported no damage after Hurricane Ike," Tim Bugh says. He recommends that adding batteries can be useful in the case of a power outage because it stores the excess energy created by the solar power system sufficient to provide electricity to basic appliances.

FAQ

1. What types of roof are best suited for installing Solar Power Panel?

While a standard composite shingle roof provides the easiest install conditions, they can be installed on just about any type of roofing material. The most ideal is south facing, at a 20 to 30 degree angle. East facing and west facing will also work, though they receive less hours of sunlight. A flat roof will also work because the solar panels can be installed at an angle. The roof should be clear of any shading, while a small amount of shade from trees is tolerable.

2. How long will the solar panel last?

The Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) reports that panels have a life expectancy of 30 years. Most manufactures provide a 25 year warranty, and most inverters have a 10 year warranty. Standard Renewable Energy provides a 10 year

parts and labor warranty. You can keep generating your own home-made solar power for decades.

3. What is the hidden cost, such as maintenance?

Almost none. You can wash the solar panels with water a few times a year. But normally rain will do the job pretty well for you.

4. Can solar power system increase property value?

Sure. Real estate studies indicate that an annual savings of \$1000 from solar power equates to a \$20,000 increase in property value. This increase in value is exempt from property taxes

5. How many square feet are required to install the solar panels?

Each solar panel is about 3'x5', or 15 sq. ft. Thus, a typical 20 panel system will require about 300 sq. ft. of roof space. A 3.5 kilowatt system could generate almost 5,000 kWh of electricity a year, about a third of most homes' needs. Factor in the rising costs of electricity your utility company may charge you, and solar power starts looking like a pretty good investment.

Recently, the federal government encouraged residents to use safe non-polluting renewable energy by offering incentives that lower the cost of installing solar power in homes; homeowners can get 30% tax credit for going solar. By combining federal incentives and local utility rebates, up to 70% of the system cost can be paid for. A homeowner could have a net cost of just \$5,700 to \$9,000 for a \$19,000 system. For more information please visit www.dsireusa.org, the Database of State Incentives for Renewable Energy (DSIRE), which offers comprehensive information on state, local, utility, and selected federal incentives that promote renewable energy.

Tim Bugh also mentions that Standard Renewable Energy helps homeowners of Texas maximize their available incentives to become more energy efficient and to use the power of our natural resources with renewable energy systems. Please contact SRE for a free quote for your home and find out which system is right for you.

New Tax Law Gives College Students Credit for Textbooks

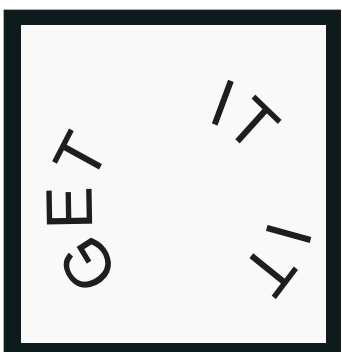
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According to the IRS, under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), more parents and students will qualify over the next two years for the credit. The purpose of the American Opportunity Credit is to pay for college expenses.

To help students understand the tax credit, the National Association of College Stores (NACS) has launched a Web site developed in cooperation with the Internal Revenue Service, (www.textbookaid.org).

For more detailed information about the American Opportunity Tax Credit visit www.irs.gov/recovery.

4 PUZZLES IN PEACE

Guess the hidden saying, phrase or word(s) suggested by the graphic below



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SOLUTION ON A3