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AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Entitled

WE'RE LEARNING a lot from this federal government shutdown. For example, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) instructs us that there is good reason to keep paying members of Congress while a couple of hundred thousand federal employees are being furloughed. It's not that members of Congress want the money. It's a constitutional matter. "I am not a federal employee," he explained. "I'm a constitutional officer. My job is in the Constitution of the United States." Thanks to Constitutional Officer DeLay, we now know to blame James Madison first.

And with all this talk about cutting entitlements, we now know that some of them are sacrosanct. We refer to news that the Federal Election Commission distributed more than \$22 million in campaign funds to the 1996 presidential candidates. Senate Leader Bob Dole got the most, \$5.6 million, followed by President Clinton at \$5.4 million. We assume the two leaders got the news in the breaks in their negotiations. No, there is nothing wrong with the federal system of matching campaign contributions. But we'd suggest that while so much of the federal government is shut down, the least these presidential candidates can do is to furlough their own take from the Treasury. They might even lend out some of the largess to federal workers having trouble with mortgage payments or food bills.

Now the critics of this mean-spirited proposal might suggest that we just aren't looking at its collateral damage. All the political consultants

would be put in the position of those federal contractors who aren't getting paid or of those business people who face bankruptcy because they depend on the winter trade near the national parks. Can't have that. And how could you put an idealistic young campaign worker in Iowa in the position of an idealistic young State Department employee in some foreign land? Those campaign lawyers certainly deserve a better break than attorneys for the Justice Department. And the production of all those important television commercials would surely fall behind at a crucial moment. It's not fair to compare the urgency of television commercials with, say, cleaning up toxic waste sites or inspecting workplaces for adherence to safety rules.

Besides, these presidential candidates would insist that they are *entitled* to this money. It's in the law. They worked very hard at fund-raising all during 1995. And such a measure would really hurt the poorer, truly needy campaigns that have often borrowed money against the expectation these federal funds would come in. The workers for these unfortunately situated candidates might not get paid and—gosh—might not be able to meet their mortgage payments. How could we suggest such a thing?

Faced with such arguments, we are forced to admit that our campaign furlough makes no more sense than, say, furloughing a big chunk of the federal government. And that's why we are for it.