

# The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

## Chairman Kasich's Budget ...

**T**HE SPENDING plan for the next seven years that the House Budget Committee approved early yesterday sounds tougher than its Senate counterpart but, in fact, is only marginally so. Broadly speaking, they're the same. Both seek to balance the budget by the year 2002 mainly by cutting Medicare, Medicaid, welfare and domestic appropriations while protecting Social Security and defense. (The House plan would actually increase the defense budget a little above the levels currently planned).

The House panel also had to accommodate the large tax cut the House improvidently passed last month. It would do so in part by running larger deficits than the Senate for most of the seven-year period, then coming to balance more rapidly at the end. The deficit would be erased in those final years in part through stepped-up Medicare and welfare cuts and in part by virtue of some heroic assumptions as to the likely behavior of interest rates. The notion is that enactment of a balanced budget might produce a dividend in the form of lower interest rates. The Senate would use that for a tax cut if it materialized. The House committee, unable to wait, assumed it would materialize, and in that sense declared its tax cut partly paid for in advance.

Though they differ somewhat in degree, both resolutions would put more pressure on the health care programs, Medicare and Medicaid, than can likely be sustained without harm to health, the health care system or both. The welfare cuts are also too large and would likely do damage. As to the rest of domestic government, it sounded as if the House was proposing to cut the most. House Budget Committee Chair-

man John Kasich said he was suggesting three departments be abolished—Commerce, Energy and Education—whereas Senate Chairman Pete Domenici had suggested Commerce only, and there was more. But, in fact, aides say the domestic appropriations ceilings in the two resolutions are about the same from year to year. The difference is more a matter of style than of substance. Mr. Kasich relishes suggesting specific cuts, while Mr. Domenici is more reserved.

A lot of the illustrative cuts on Mr. Kasich's lengthy list are good ideas. The country could get along just fine, for example, without an Energy, an Education or a Commerce department, especially as their important functions would be dealt off to other agencies and continue to be performed. It could get along just fine with lower farm price supports and without such perennials as highway demonstration projects too. On the other hand, it's probably not a good idea to cut Head Start nor maintenance funds in the national parks. The virtue of the list is that it shows without flinching how tight the Republican budget would be.

The goal of reducing the deficit is right. The problem with these resolutions is that they're confined to only part of the budget—why exempt Social Security when it is a fifth of all spending?—and perhaps try to do too much in too short a time. Sooner or later the Democrats—for the sake of the threatened programs they profess to care about, and for their own sake—lest they be left at the starting gate, are going to have to propose an alternative. Our own sense is that the longer they wait, the more they risk.