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A Few Good Jobs

YES, THAT was Sen. Rick Santorum you saw last week with Labor Secretary Bob Reich at an outdoor Capitol Hill press conference. Base-closings make strange bedfellows. Santorum, the youngest and brashiest new member, and his Republican colleague, Sen. Arlen Specter, were making a plea for mercy for some 3,844 Pennsylvanians who will be made jobless

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by the elimination of some seven military installations.

From his speeches on the Senate floor, you might think Santorum, who seems to want to be the Newt Gingrich of the Senate, would not be caught dead with a Clinton Cabinet officer. Santorum is of the Gingrich rock-'em sock-'em school of political persuasion and given to graphics in presenting his boundless contempt for the president and all his works. He uses charts that say "Where Is Bill?" in his tirades on

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the Senate floor, and Democrats belabor him for dissing the president by calling him by his first name.

Santorum exemplifies the dilemma of budget-cutting Republicans who find themselves in desperate need of federal funding. They have to pause in their drive to redirect money back home in the form of block grants and admit there are some things that Washington can do better than the states. Job-training may be one of them.

But job-training programs are stepchildren on Capitol Hill, long since branded as wasteful and duplicative. Members are too busy voting for military programs. Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) is sponsoring a bill that would consolidate 70 federal job-training programs and

convert their financing to block grants for the states. She would eliminate emergency funding for crises caused by base-closings and the like.

Last Monday, Reich obligingly traveled to Philadelphia and gave away the last unallocated \$17 million in the present so-called "reserve account" to help the suffering Pennsylvanians. It will go to retraining Philadelphia shipyard workers who will need new skills to produce luxury crafts wanted by a German company.

Santorum, and it is not like him, says he would favor legislation that would provide emergency aid for states hit hard by unemployment.

There are two problems here: One is that Congress is living in a dreamworld in which the Cold War rages on and the need for astronomically priced weapons is unabated. The alarm clock that shatters

them awake is the base-closing. Nothing says more clearly that the days of wine and roses for the military-industrial complex are over. For legislators accustomed to proving their clout by the number of contracts and military installations they bring home, this is a traumatizing reality.

On the floor of Congress, crazy votes are taken. The B-2 bomber is voted with the help of a majority of the Black Caucus, the tribunes of the poor. The bomber was created specifically to fly over the rubble after a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. But the House decided in favor of a program to build 20 more at a cost of \$31.5 billion. The Seawolf submarine, which was meant to counter a certain class of Soviet submarine long since rusted away, is alive and well in the Senate Armed Services Committee. There is talk

of reviving Star Wars. Republicans added \$9 billion to the defense budget.

Why do they perpetuate the assembly line for Cold War relics?

Says Reich, "Congress regards defense spending as a jobs program, it is the only jobs program we have. It is irrational."

"There are two ironies," he said. "The Democrats vote for the military defense budget, and the Republicans come to me."

The Republicans' problem is especially acute, because they insisted on a "firewall" between military and civilian expenditures. Not one dime wrung out of the defense budget can be reallocated to home care for the elderly or day care for the poor.

The trouble may be deeper than scrambled priorities. It could be that the Republicans have been infected with the Reagan virus on defense spending, which is his expensive delusion that money put forth

for weapons isn't really money, that it is sanitized, even sanctified by the holy purpose for which it is intended. In his day, it was part of the crusade against communism.

Today, defense money is being used to counter joblessness, and Democrats have caught the Reagan virus.

There is no end to this particular folly in sight. The Senate Armed Services Committee went hog-wild for fantasy in its latest vote—battleships, even. Our industries are parched for diversification and retraining; they are being flooded with armaments as dead as the dinosaur. Our only hope, the only sound of sanity in the land, is coming from the commission on base-closings.

By the way, if you think that Santorum's brush with reality sobered or chastened him, forget it. He was back on the floor this week with his "Where Is Bill?" charts.