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Oink In Orbit

THE SURPRISE hit film of the summer is one called "Babe." It's about a pig who wants to be a border collie. Washington has in real life and living color a much graver identity crisis that is also about pork: Congress wants to be the Pentagon.

The folklore, of course, is that the House is the source of the current meltdown of reason and that the Senate will correct it. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Senate is swaggering about, strewing billions in its path, warning about new dangers and hawking old remedies, usurping the duties of Defense Secretary William Perry, who doesn't want or need the gadgets the macho Republicans are pressing on him.

Mars is in the ascendant, and Senate Republicans seem determined to draw a caricature of themselves as protectors of the strong and predators of the weak. They befriend bacteria and bombs. They talk tanks, trucks, blimps. They cut everything but tax breaks for the rich. They wage war on hungry school kids, seniors who need help with their fuel bills and college students looking for loans.

Now they have gone over the edge. At the height of the heat wave, they voted to bring back Star Wars. They wanted to win one for the Gipper. They want to bring back Reaganomics, bring back the carefree '80s, when they spent themselves silly and,

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Mary McGrory is a Washington Post columnist.

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by doing just what they are doing now, ran up the national debt to almost \$5 trillion.

There's more: On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the first atomic bomb explosion, the Senate voted to resume testing nuclear weapons. With proliferating lunacies, hardly anybody noticed, except the French, who are taking heat for new tests, and the Russians who probably won't understand why they shouldn't test if we do.

In the movie, the striving porker has guidance from a sage sheep dog and a wise old sheep. Alas, the Senate has no such good counsel. Republican leader Bob Dole, who knows better, has curbed his reflex to do the right thing. To conservatives, Star Wars is a talisman, and as a presidential candidate, Dole lives to make the right happy.

During the debate, Strom Thurmond, the 92-year-old hawk who is chairman of the Armed Services Committee, solemnly declared the threat to the United States to be "significant and growing." Republican Whip Trent Lott called the \$48-billion undertaking (which, by the way, would violate the ABM treaty) "a good sense approach."

Sam Nunn, the Democrats' guru on defense who once made a notable series of speeches in defense of the ABM, voted for the Reaganite fantasy. He busied himself with the sort of arcane, nuance-slicing considerations that often preoccupy a man with an

unjustified reputation for sagacity and a tendency to vote for every weapon that comes his way. Sen. William Cohen of Maine, a leading "moderate" Republican, who makes excellent speeches against armored follies and usually votes

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for them, went along silently with the mad majority.

Apparently, with the Soviet Union gone, Republicans are relying on North Korea, Libya and Iraq to take up the devil slack.

Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) noted that nuclear terror was more likely to come to the country in a little suitcase than a ballistic missile offensive. He introduced an amendment to remove \$300 million in Republican add-ons. It was a hopeless task. To his colleagues, the bill was a huge, new trough, and it was a duty to stick their snouts in.

Dorgan is unfair to hypocrites. He votes as he talks. When the lunatic railway for the MX missile was

proposed with big bucks aimed at Grand Forks, N.D., site of the first antiballistic missile system, he voted against it on the grounds of sanity. Star Wars revived would undoubtedly bring jobs to his state. But, as he told the Senate on Aug. 3, "I do not think it makes sense to support a defense initiative of this type, especially at this time in our country's history. If you measure it with the yardstick of a jobs program, yes, this might include some jobs in North Dakota, but it also will include the commitment and the prospect of taking \$40 billion from the American taxpayers to build a project we do not need with money we do not have."

Thinking beyond the trough or beyond the borders of one's own state is considered bad form in the disturbed ward that the Senate chamber is these days. The fact that the world would think the Senate has lost its collective mind, and that the United States is willing to do anything for jobs and for pork, well, that's its problem.

It is no wonder that Kevin Phillips, GOP pundit, calls the current congressional follies "a blueprint for the resurrection of Bill Clinton" or that in the same article for The Washington Post, he called the present course an "outbreak of ideological rabies." Republicans, in their hubris over the 1994 returns, have forgotten everything about the Reaganomics they are so ardently reviving. They forgot Hiroshima and Moscow and the Cold War. The song of the Senate today is oink, oink.