

Budget Talks

By John Cospers

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A long table is center. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson sit in the middle, facing the audience. The Announcer steps on stage.

ANNOUNCER: Some people out there don't think the United States Congress is doing a good job managing our money. To prove them wrong, we've set up a little experiment. Say hello to the Wilsons.

WILSONS: Hello!

The Congressmen and woman enter.

ANNOUNCER: We asked the Wilsons to let a panel of Congressmen --

Texas clears her throat.

ANNOUNCER: And women, to help them budget their money for the coming year. Let's see how they do.

The announcer exits.

MAINE: Well, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, we've crunched the numbers for this coming year. Your anticipated annual income looks to be about \$80,000, correct?

MR. WILSON: That is correct.

MAINE: Household expenses are projected as follows: healthcare, \$3000. Utilities and phone, \$8000. Mortgage payments, \$20,000. Car payments on two vehicles, plus insurance, \$7,000. Maintenance on home and autos, \$3000. Groceries, \$6,000. Clothing, school supplies, and incidentals, \$4000. Cable TV, season tickets to baseball and the opera, and one subscription to Entertainment Weekly, \$3000. And of course, Uncle Sam's bite comes in this year at around \$15,000.

The Congressmen giggle.

MAINE: All told, we're looking at expenses of \$69,000, leaving us with a surplus of \$11,000.

MR. WILSON: Are you kidding? That's great.

MRS. WILSON: We can put the rest in savings for the kids' college.

MR. WILSON: Or put half in savings and spend half on that trip to Disney World.

MRS. WILSON: Jim!

MR. WILSON: Come on, we've been waiting for years. The kids are old enough. And

we've got more than enough money. Right?

MAINE: Umm, well, that would be true, but in order to approve the budget, we need to tag on a few addendums.

MR. WILSON: What sort of addendums?

MAINE: Well, the Congressman from Nebraska has a picnic shelter in need of repairs in his district. Since we are running a surplus, we thought that...

MR. WILSON: Wait, you want us to pay for his roof?

MAINE: Well, look at it from his side. He wants to get re-elected. And to do that, he has to show the people back home he's looking out for them, not just you.

NEBRASKA: It's only gonna be about \$5000.

TEXAS: \$5000?? That's outrageous!

MRS. WILSON: Thank you.

TEXAS: I need that \$5000 for the renovations at the Sam Houston State Technical College's student union.

IDAHO: Hold on just a minute! If you expect me to vote for your pork barrel projects when I've been begging for just \$3000 to repair that side street in my district--

NEBRASKA: Oh here we go again.

IDAHO: My people have just as much right to this money as yours!

NEBRASKA: You only want that money because your grandma lives on that street.

IDAHO: She can't drive her hoveround to the mailbox any more for all the potholes!

TEXAS: Your 90 year old grandma does not trump the needs of the students at Sam Houston who deserve that new slushie machine!

IDAHO: Don't think you scare me with your guns and ammo mentality.

TEXAS: Don't you mess with Texas!

MR. WILSON: I want to go to Disney World!

MAINE: Gentlemen, ladies, please. Everyone. We can work this out. Look, we have \$11,000 to spare. Let's take care of that leaky roof.

TEXAS: But!!

MAINE: And the slushie machine.

TEXAS: Thank you.

IDAHO: But what about my grandma?

TEXAS: Your grandma doesn't trump the needs of my students!

IDAHO: No. But does this guy really need season tickets to baseball?

MR. WILSON: Hey!

MAINE: That's a good point. If we cut the baseball tickets, that leaves us \$3000 to spend. Looks like grandma's gonna get her street repair after all.

IDAHO: Thanks!

MR. WILSON: Wait just a minute! I've had season tickets to those games for years. You can't just cut them out of the budget!

TEXAS: You want season tickets? Go get a credit card!

NEBRASKA: That's not a bad idea. In fact, if we put the season tickets, the ballet, and Entertainment Weekly on a credit card, You free another \$1000 up!

MAINE: Perfect. We need a new statue in central park.

NEBRASKA: Hey, that's my money!

MAINE: But I didn't get anything in the first round of allocations! I need to get something out of this budget.

NEBRASKA: But come on, a statue?

IDAHO: If he gets a statue, I get a statue!

TEXAS: I get three statues!

MRS. WILSON: None of you get any statues! My husband and I work very hard for this money, and we want it for ourselves.

Long pause, then laughter from the Congressmen.

NEBRASKA: Wow, that's a good one.

IDAHO: I like her.

MAINE: Look, there's a simple solution we're overlooking. We just need a second mortgage.

TEXAS: I was just about to say that.

MAINE: Let's see.. their house appraised at \$200,000 last year. Figure we take out the new mortgage for \$160,000, split it four ways--

TEXAS: But I--

MAINE: Four ways is more than fair. That's \$40,000 each. We'll just earmark that for special projects. Call it the Jim and Connie Wilson Restore America Fund.

IDAHO: Brilliant!

NEBRASKA: I love it.

MAINE: Well, Jim, Connie, what do you think?

MR. WILSON: I think you all deserve to get fired.

TEXAS: Of course we do.

NEBRASKA: Too bad you're not in our districts.

The Congressmen laugh as the Wilsons exit.