

## Interstate – 1.47

We know there is no money in the budget, they say. We know we have an out-of-control marauding deficit, they quietly gulp. Hey, no matter – let's build a new Interstate Highway.

That is the very public position of elected officials in Arizona and Nevada as they make a push to build Interstate 11, to link Las Vegas with Phoenix and, in their dreams, from the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona into Oregon.

No money has been identified for the project, estimated to cost billions of dollars. Of course, there is always the federal government to cover the cost – through job stimulus programs, transportation funds or some earmarked appropriation that finds its way into a catch-all appropriations bill like the one expected in the upcoming lame duck session of Congress.

This desired Interstate is just one of dozens of new routes sought by politicians whose purposes are sketchy and whose funding is absent. While its designation is "Interstate 11" a better moniker would be "Interstate 1.47" – a number marking today's \$1.47 trillion federal deficit that will certainly rise paying for this and the other Interstate wannabes now idling on the federal funding on ramp.

As the November election draws closer, everybody says they are against spending more and that we will have to seriously begin to reduce the deficit. Then they go out and promise the opposite. "The problem is we're seeing an explosion in spending," Andrew Moylan, director of government affairs for the National Taxpayers Union, told reporters recently. That is absolutely correct.

Two combined forces create a strong formula for endless deficits. First, politicians want to keep their jobs, so they continue to bring home goodies for constituents. That means choosing spending over spending reductions. And to help make sure they keep their jobs, politicians always promise not to raise taxes. The result is systemic deficits.

Politicians will never own up to the crisis of the burgeoning deficit nor take the steps needed to stop the spending and get us heading back to the black. The longer we wait to make changes and reforms, the less effective the solution will be -- and the more drastic and haphazard the changes will unfold.

We now hear that the recession is officially over and with that will come talk of more spending to stimulate the economy. Yet it is spending cuts that will drive the recovery - not government spending. More stimulus spending would be a second round of something that has not worked.

Proponents of Interstate 11 tout it as an economic development tool and a way to help with the possible – note the word POSSIBLE – increase in truck traffic that would come from a PROPOSED new Pacific Ocean port in northwest Mexico.

Mexico, as in another nation. “If we’re not moving commercial vehicles, if we’re not moving freight, then we’re not creating jobs (and) we’re not moving the economy forward,” argued Bob Hazlett, a planning engineer for the Maricopa (Arizona) Association of Governments.

We have heard this before. In August the western twang was replaced by a southern accent, declaring how Interstate 3 just had to be built from Savannah, Georgia, to Knoxville, Tenn. Regardless of the dialect, the reasoning sounded identical. “With the deepening of the port of Savannah, we must improve our infrastructure so we can move goods from ships fast and efficiently to other parts of the state and throughout the Southeast,” one politician said. “We have the opportunity to bring in significantly more cargo, and we need to be ready so ships don’t go farther up the coast to another state.”

This is a use of federal money that we do not have?

You actually can pick the regional accent you want to hear the plea stated. There are about 15 new Interstate highways proposed all over the country – some competing for the same number designation, all competing for the same non-existent dollars. Add to those dozens of proposed spurs and links proponents want included in the system

Does this make sense to anyone? Our national spending is unsustainable. It is time we demand responsible government now – on Capitol Hill, in Arizona and Nevada, in South Carolina and Tennessee and in every state.

Yet Uncle Sugar continues to feed the spending addictions of states. Federal grant spending in constant dollars increased from \$285 billion in fiscal year 2000 to \$493 billion in fiscal year 2010 -- a 73 percent increase, according to a study by the Mercatus Center at George Mason University.

In its research the Mercatus Center also concluded something obvious to many: when decisions are made and paid for by the people who benefit from them, they tend to be better decisions and less wasteful. However, decisions made and paid for by Washington are less accountable and more wasteful.

The rising debt levels have likely caused interest rates to rise, because worried investors demand greater returns on federal bonds, while the massive interest payments required

to service all that debt divert money away from other important government programs and other federal functions.

Congress already plans an after-election lame-duck session. The chief task then is enacting gigantic catch-all spending bills with the goal to stimulate the economy. One thing is clear – those bills, approved by House and Senate members who no longer fear voter wrath, will add to the deficit.

It is often said that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. The proposed Interstates to Las Vegas, to Knoxville and elsewhere are not; they are paved instead with deficit dollars that, like Lucifer's promises, cause you doom in the end. You can't spend what you don't have and if you do, you are in trouble. We need responsible government now.

