Plastic Jesus on the Capitol steps

Washington, DC, is America's mecca for tourists, particularly in spring and summertime. Swarms of Legionnaires, Scouts, and students磅er the Potomac River, and are ferried to and from the bus loads and busses or by the ultra-modern subway system. They strive to see as many sights as in as short a time as possible, recording it all as snapshots with Mom and the kids in the foreground.

Their routes are predictable: they visit the Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln Memorials, the Smithsonian Museum, the White House, and the Supreme Court. Inevitably, they climb the stairs that lead to the Capitol.

In addition to the thousands of pleasure-seekers swathed in polyester and the Supreme Court, a group of small-town gospel-banging evangelists: not content simply to announce their beliefs, in commerce equipped with people in life-size, plastic statues of a bearded Jesus Christ stood on the steps, not alone, but with a trusty vinyl disciple by his side. (Christ wore his light blue cloak Tuesday. One previous visitor to the same site had wore a crimson velvet cloak instead. Why had he changed his clothes? The crimson was much more photogenic.) Next to Jesus and his follower were two plastic lambs, instead. Why had he changed his clothes? The crimson was much more photogenic. (For some, the crimson was much more photogenic.)

Most bystanders appeared unconvinced. Christ did not comment, his features frozen forever in synthetic splendor.

While Christ and his charges quietly observed, two men bellowed into a portable public address system. One brandished a sign describing the evils of American civilization - abortion, drugs, feminism, lawlessness, lack of prayer in public schools - while another proclaimed in the rhythmical cadence of a square dance caller how to redeem lost souls. If America abolished abortion, drugs, feminism, and lawlessness - he did not say how - prayed in schools and accepted his particular religious beliefs, all would be saved forever and the United States would rule the world again.

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Earlier this month, with the full support of President Reagan, the United States Senate voted 69 to 31 in favor of a Constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget. If this astonishing act of political courage is matched by two thirds of the House of Representatives, then state legislatures across the country the debate will have the opportunity to enshrine in our Constitution the absolute core for all of our economic woes: a mandate for a balanced federal budget.

What is singularly striking about this wonderful amendment is its simplicity - just imagine - if this amendment were part of our Constitution today, we would not have the projected deficits of 500 billion dollars over the next three years. We would make the difficult political choices necessary to reduce deficits. We would have a balanced budget!

Now that the Senate has put our governmental deficit on the way toward solving our budgetary dilemma, let us set our sights on finding constitutional remedies for the other difficult problems we now face.

Take unemployment, for example. Last month, the unemployment rate reached 9.8 percent, its highest level since 1941. Some politicians have tried to deal with this important problem by designing policies to stimulate investment, increase productivity, and improve our ability to compete in international markets. Others, including President Reagan, have tried to cut unemployment benefits and to blame the media for exaggerating the significance of this issue. But these approaches overlook the obvious solution: we must adopt a Constitutional amendment requiring that every American be given a job. It would work the same way as does the balanced budget amendment, and its advantages should be evident to every politician up for re-election.

But there is no need to stop with a full-employment amendment. This country has a number of difficult problems that need quick, sensible solutions. For years, Americans have been terrorized by an ever-increasing wave of crime. We need to fix this problem. We need to fix it now.

We need a Constitutional amendment prohibiting crime. By adopting such an amendment, we could avoid all the tough questions about prisons, the insanity defense, the death penalty, and gun control. (Of course, it may be necessary to exempt certain groups, such as Congressmen, from this amendment to gain the support needed for passage.) Similarly, to counter the growing Soviet military threat, we could adopt a Constitutional amendment mandating US military superiority. There would be no more need to worry about Soviet expansionism. We would ensure peace through strength!

Clearly, the possibilities are seemingly endless. It is a shame we did not figure this out sooner. To build a better America, we must design, propose, and ratify Constitutional amendments, and we should start by ratifying an amendment that requires a balanced federal budget.


Unhappy? So amend!