OF COURSE, CONGRESS CAN CUT FEDERAL SPENDING!

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Last November's election was a mandate to cut federal spending - not just a desire for Balanced Budget Amendment promises, but a mandate to wield the ax. The American voters have finally awakened to the fact that Big Government can't solve our problems, and it's not only too costly, but is counterproductive to let the bureaucrats try.

All the special interest groups that have been feeding at the public trough for so long are circling the wagons to prevent spending cuts. Not only are they playing the currently trendy role of victims, but they can do their lobbying on taxpayers' money, while those of us who seek budget cuts have to raise our own funds.

The biggest ruckus so far has been kicked up by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which receives annual funding of $285.6 million to help support the Public Broadcasting Service, National Public Radio and their member stations. PBS commissioned a public opinion poll (dubbed by critics a "poll for hire") that purports to show that 84 percent of Americans want federal funding for public television maintained or even increased.

Ads and tag lines running across TV screens aired by PBS affiliates have generated hundreds of phone calls to Congressional offices urging continued funding of PBS. One such tag line says, "If you like Big Bird and if you want to preserve this program, please call [Congressman] Bob Livingston."

The truth is that Big Bird isn't in the slightest danger of having his wings clipped. Children's Television Workshop, Inc., the producer of Sesame Street, makes almost a billion dollars a year in merchandising and related revenues, and pays its top executives over a half-million dollars a year.

According to Laurence Jarvik of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture, "The Three Tenors, Big Bird, Barney, Bill Moyers, and ['Civil War' and 'Baseball' producer] Ken Burns all make millions," and "many PBS stations garner an annual surplus which would be called profit anywhere else." Senator Bob Dole has called for an investigation of "Barneygate," since Barney is the third richest entertainer in the United States, netting *$50* million a year.

The Public Broadcasting System gets only 14 percent of its financial support from the taxpayers, which could easily be offset by royalties from its profitable programs and sales of related merchandise, improved efficiency, selling commercial air time, and eliminating low-priority programming and grant activities. Whatever rationale ever existed for taxpayer support of an educational television channel has now long since disappeared in the face of the variety of channels that thrive without taxpayer subsidies, including the Arts & Entertainment Network, the Discovery Channel, the Learning

Channel, and the new History Channel.

The second plaything of the cultural elite that should fall on the chopping block is the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Just when we thought we were beyond being shocked by the NEA's funding of obscenities, more travesties come to light.

Just closing at the Hirshhorn Museum in our nation's capital is Bruce Nauman and his touring torture chamber featuring homoerotic clowns, four-letter profanity in neon, and gruesome images designed to shock. The National Endowment for the Arts is credited as one of the sponsors for this exhibit, which the press describes as "nihilism and cultural destruction."

Meanwhile, an NBA-subsidized performing arts venue in New York City called P.S. 122 featured Ron Athey in "Four Acts," which includes intense and bloody sadomasochism, blasphemy, and a disgusting mocking of Holy Communion. A videotape of this "performance art" (the euphemism for well-paid sexually perverse strip shows) has been circulating in Washington, and, we hope, will put the final nail in the coffin of the NEA.

The third "cultural" item that should be zeroed out by the Appropriations Committee is the National Endowment for the Humanities. It has disgraced itself by spending the taxpayers' money to develop public school "standards" that have been roundly condemned on all sides as an outrageous attempt to replace history with Politically Correct propaganda.

Congress should abolish the Legal Services Corporation, which costs us all $400 million a year. It has forfeited our support because of the way taxpayers' money provided to help the indigent so often ends up providing personnel to push liberal political causes.

Congress should abolish all handouts to private interest groups such as the National Council of Senior Citizens (which receives 96 percent of its budget from federal grants, yet endorsed Senator Chuck Robb (D-VA) in his reelection campaign), and Planned Parenthood (which receives 36 percent of its budget from federal grants). Congress should repeal the Violence Against Women section in the last year's Omnibus Crime Act, under which $1.8 billion of pork will flow directly to radical feminist groups.

We are running out of space in this column, but there is no end to the ways that the new Republican majority in the House can cut federal spending. This should be an interesting year!