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Blog

Astronomical Debt

Posted by admin on October 16, 2012

Along the campaign trail the candidates express concern about burdening our children's children. So how astronomical is our national debt?

President Obama has suggested we can wrap our heads around such decimal places when he said, "It's math; it's arithmetic." Governor Romney later implied one's math should or can readily add up.

Astronomy used to be the provenance of really big numbers, but purveyors of and spin masters of debt have encroached on that domain. Nonetheless, let's put sixteen trillion dollars in perspective, and then ask the candidates for their vision of the future not of *four* years, but of 104 years, literally--the era of our children's children.

Step through this astronomical analogy. Imagine you drive coast to coast in a Made-in-USA vehicle at 186 miles per hour. As you zip along the interstate, every mile you throw a dollar bill out the window.

Now ramp up to 186 *thousand* miles per hour, still throwing currency out the window every mile at that speed. In less than 8 minutes you circumnavigate the equator, leaving a dollar in your wake every mile of the way.

Finally, travel at the speed of light--186,000 miles *per second*. At this speed you feverishly throw \$186,000 out the window every second. The first quarter million miles to the moon would take fewer than 2 seconds. Your destination is Proxima, one of the Alpha Centauri stars nearest Earth.

After two years at this unachievable pace, in your rear view mirror is a debris trail of dollar bills, which, added up, would not yet equal our national debt! You're only about halfway to Proxima, but a very long way from leaving our children's children debt free.

I ask candidates for office and other leaders to share their [vision of the future](#). What is the role of science and the value of observation in shaping our future? The [Transit of Venus Time Keg](#) will be sealed in Pittsburgh, PA, by October 26, 2012. It will be opened by our children's children when the 2117 alignment of Sun-Venus-Earth approaches, over a century hence.

You talk *about* them--now talk *to* them. What's your vision? [Put it in writing](#) in the Time Keg for them.

And thanks to Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels for participating with a sealed letter, not to be opened for over a century.

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Posted by Dayle Brown on Oct 17th, 2012

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Since my interest in astronomy is more aesthetic and mythological, I thought it was just my own non-mathematical mind that kept me from understanding the math. I don't believe that either candidate can pull us out of this mess. Thank you for making it clear that we, and especially our children's children, are in a horrible fix. I wish that the candidates would accept your challenge and let us know their plans.

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