

Notes From Below the Floor

The National Debt

Abigail B. Calkin

We hear much about the national debt. For decades, Democrats and Republicans have sparred over it. Since 1929, the United States has had eight years of a budget surplus and 50 years of a budget deficit. To see the problem clearly, we must look at yearly data on standard multiply/divide charts across a long period of time.

To chart the budget receipts and outlays, the budget surplus and deficit, and the gross national product across years gives the clearest picture. Further, we know that interest grows by multiplying, not by adding. Perhaps because of what we learned as children: Put money in the bank and each month, they give a statement that shows the interest *added*--some think assets and debts grow by adding. The statement never says, however, that the interest accumulates by multiplying. And the same is true of a debt.

A Few Definitions

The United States **gross national product**, the GNP, is the value of *all* goods and services produced in the country, from socks and ceilings to surgery and social work services.

The **budget receipts** are the monies the government receives, usually through taxes. The **budget outlays** are the monies it spends on highways, disasters, education, welfare, art, health, etc.

A **budget surplus** occurs in a year when the receipts are greater than the outlays--when the money earned is greater than the money spent. A **budget deficit** occurs when the outlays are greater than the receipts--when the government spends more than it has.

Using the *World Almanac*, I charted these five items across 50 years.

A Few Observations

- ◆ The national debt in September 1992 was four trillion dollars (\$4,000,000,000,000). In June 1993 it was 4.3 trillion (\$4,300,000,000,000).
- ◆ For the last 45 years, the gross national product has grown at x1.6 per five years. On the Standard Celeration Chart, x1.0 would be maintaining; x2.0 would be doubling every five years.
- ◆ The budget receipts are now growing at x1.4 per five years, the budget outlays at x1.7 per five years. This means that we the people, through the federal government, are spending more than we earn. (As an individual or as a family, how long would we allow that to go on?)
- ◆ For the past twenty-five years, the budget surplus has maintained at zero while the budget deficit grows at x2.3 per five years--more than double.
- ◆ Our last budget surplus was in 1969. I read somewhere that President Johnson and Congress, anticipating the continuation of the Vietnam War, had budgeted for it. 1969 saw a slowing of the war and therefore an overbudgeting, or a surplus.
- ◆ The party of the president or of the congress is irrelevant to the increases and decreases of the surplus and deficit. Not surprisingly, the Great Depression and World War II are the two events with the greatest financial impact in the last 50 years.
- ◆ Most surprising and alarming, there has been little variability in the deficit since 1969, and our receipts and outlays have even less bounce. It is easier to change the behavior of a person when the behavior bounces a lot--more opportunity to reward the desired behavior and punish the undesired. The same may be true of the budget sur-

plus and deficit--the behavior of millions of people: Little variability may make this very difficult to change.

Using the yearly Standard Celeration Chart for these data, makes it clear we are in a crisis--we spend more than we earn and the difference between the two continues to increase. Meager steps, such as cutting the very small NEA budget, are laughable. Cutting a million here, a million there, will do, as the British say, damn all. It is directly analogous to a family saying, "We owe \$100,000. We better start a penny jar to pay it off." To save the financial life of this country, we must bite the bullet and take billions of dollars of cuts. Now.

In future articles, I shall look at different parts of the federal budget and at the data back to 1776.

References

The World Almanac 1992. Mahwah, NJ: World Almanac.
The World Almanac 1995. Mahwah, NJ: World Almanac.

PT Data Lands in Fiction

Abigail B. Calkin

I believe it was at an ABA meeting in Nashville, Tennessee in the mid-80's when we talked about getting Precision Teaching and Direct Instruction into more areas than behavior analysis and public education.

Carl Binder has taken fluency into private business. Hank Pennypacker founded MammaCare. A number of precision teachers have private schools (Kent Johnson, Michael Maloney, Ian & Aileen Spence, Elizabeth Haughton, and Annie Desjardins). We are beginning to publish more in the journals other than *Journal of Precision Teaching*.

In my most recent novel, *The Carolyne Letters*, the main character counts fetal movement. I used the data from my son's fetal movement chart (Calkin, 1983) with an exception. I had a cesar-

ean section two weeks early; Amelia, the mother in the story, did not. To compute the possible final seven data points I used in the novel, I compared my son's fetal movement with that from the dozen or so other fetal charts I have (including one of his cousin's). I then projected proportionately what my son's fetal movement would have been if I had not had an early, no-labor cesarean section. I used seven of these projected data points for the final ten days of Amelia's pregnancy.

I believe this is the first use of Standard Celeration Chart data in fiction.

References

Calkin, A. B. (1983). Counting fetal movement. *Journal of Precision Teaching*, 4(1), 35-40.
Calkin, A. B. (1995). *The Carolyne Letters*. Salt Lake City: Northwest Publishing Inc.