

American

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2011 U.S. Budget Would Increase Security and Development Aid

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — When President Obama foreshadowed his budget priorities for the 2011 fiscal year, which begins in October, he stressed the importance of U.S. domestic concerns such as job creation, but he also said there would not be cuts to national security programs. The \$52.8 billion budget request for the State Department unveiled February 1 reflects a \$4.6 billion increase from fiscal year 2010 levels, with an emphasis on ongoing programs in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, as well as global development programs to provide humanitarian, health and economic assistance around the world.

In a February 1 budget request to the U.S. Congress, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the total request “breaks down to \$16.4 billion for State [Department] operations and \$36.4 billion for foreign assistance.”

The Obama administration’s total proposed budget for fiscal year 2011, which begins October 1, reflecting spending for the domestic economy, defense operations, and all other programs, including the State Department, comes to just more than \$3.8 trillion.

For the State Department, “the majority of our proposed increase is dedicated to the critical front-line states of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which demand significant and costly attention,” Clinton said.

In Iraq, the U.S. mission is shifting from a military effort run by the Defense Department to civilian-run programs overseen by State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Clinton said. Likewise, Afghanistan and Pakistan are seeing an increase in civilian personnel. In all three countries, Clinton asked for the budget to fund the strengthening of democratic institutions and rule of law, as well as development and infrastructure projects. These efforts, along with improving the quality of life, are also designed to combat the despair that can lead to violent extremism.

The second tier of State Department priorities is to meet global challenges such as disasters, poverty, disease and the effects of climate change.

Clinton said the State Department budget request “does not include additional funding that will be required to address the devastating impact of the earthquake in Haiti,” whose long-term requirements are still being assessed.

Clinton proposed targeted investments in food security, democracy promotion and health, including an expansion of the president’s global health initiative, which addresses challenges such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, maternal and child health and tuberculosis.

Rather than deliver aid services exclusively on its own, she said, the United States “will help countries build their own capacity to deliver services through strong, transparent, accountable institutions.”

The empowerment of women stands at the core of these efforts, she said. “Women are critical to advancing social, economic and political progress. They are also a terrific return on investment: numerous studies have shown that when women receive schooling or the boost of a small loan, they flourish, their children flourish and so does the greater community.”

Deputy Secretary of State Jacob Lew told reporters February 1 that, overall, the proposed budget has remained the same in many areas and has seen reductions in some sections.

“The reality is that international spending has been underfunded for so long that holding the line is in and of itself ... a difficult thing to do,” he said. “I think the real story is that from our perspective, we’ve targeted the investment increases in very strategic areas.”

Along with the increases directed to Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, “we’ve targeted toward the initiatives which we think are key to ... restoring the United States’ role in the world so we can play the kind of constructive leadership role that the president has articulated, and to rebuilding our core capacity.”

Where there have been reductions, such as in counternarcotics operations like the Merida Initiative in Mexico and Central America, as well as Plan Colombia, which helps that nation fight narcotics trafficking and promotes development, “the reason the number’s coming down is that things are better,” Lew said.

Both programs, he said, have graduated from a stage where more funding was needed to purchase heavy equipment.

“We’ve just completed the purchase of helicopters in Mexico. All the helicopters have been paid for. They’re being delivered. We’re now moving to a different stage of the program. Merida II is a program that’s designed to get at what people do, as opposed to what they use to do the job,” he said. “We’re at a similar point in Plan Colombia.”

Lew said the proposed increase for the global health initiative will help connect various U.S. health programs

such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), maternal and child health care and malaria treatment and prevention. The goal is to build a sustainable health care infrastructure, Lew said.

"We're focusing on connecting the programs, so if a woman comes in to a ... clinic that is there because of PEPFAR funding, we can also provide maternal care and care to a newborn child," he said. With broader staff training and health facilities that can be used for multiple purposes, Lew projected that approximately 300,000 pregnancy-related deaths and 3 million early childhood deaths can be prevented.

"This is a whole different way of doing business," Lew said. "We see it as a way to both extend the lifesaving and disease reduction capacity of our federal assistance but also to leave behind a much more stable system."

Twitter Contest Challenges the World to Define Democracy

More than 1,400 contestants give personal definitions to "Democracy is...."

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Can you define democracy in just 140 characters?

More than 1,400 people worldwide took up that challenge in a unique contest sponsored by the U.S. Department of State using Twitter. They were required to tweet their personal definitions of what democracy is using the hash symbol: #democracyis.

The tweet with the most re-tweets was submitted by @zuola from China and said, "民主就是独立的个体和独立的组织在文明社会中使用除暴力外的透明手段争取利益最大化的过程中逐渐完善的游戏规则。" ("Democracy is a set of game rules that, in their gradual process toward perfection, independent individuals and organizations in a civil society seek to maximize their interests by using transparent and nonviolent means.") The award is a Flip Video HD Camcorder.

Lasting just two weeks, the "Democracy is..." Twitter Contest generated personal definitions of democracy in eight languages from more than 30 countries representing all regions of the world. A similar contest is planned for the future.

The global contest expands on the international conversation on democracy initiated by the Democracy Video Challenge contest. Both contests seek to encourage young people around the world to use new media to break down cultural and geographic borders and share their thoughts about issues of global importance. To date,

the Democracy Video Challenge maintains an active online community of more than 30,000 friends, fans and followers.

The Democracy Video Challenge is made possible by a public-private partnership that includes: the Center for International Private Enterprise, the International Republican Institute, the International Youth Foundation, the Motion Picture Association of America, NBC Universal, the Recording Industry Association of America, the National Democratic Institute, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, TakingITGlobal, the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism, the U.S. Department of State and YouTube.

The U.S. government has strongly supported the use of new media for the free exchange of ideas.

Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" Celebrates Its 75th Anniversary

Beloved, once-controversial opera showcases America's rich musical heritage

By Lauren Monsen
Staff Writer

Washington — The opera *Porgy and Bess* is now recognized as an American masterpiece, but when it was first performed in Boston and New York in 1935, it generated both controversy and acclaim.

Composed by George Gershwin — a white, Jewish New Yorker with Russian immigrant roots — *Porgy and Bess* is part of the international operatic repertoire. Several of its songs, particularly "Summertime," have become classics. Yet since its premiere 75 years ago, the opera has been viewed by some critics as perpetuating racial stereotypes.

Set in a vibrant African-American community in Charleston, South Carolina, called Catfish Row, *Porgy and Bess* tells the story of a crippled beggar and the woman he loves. Their lives are touched by poverty, violence and, in Bess' case, drugs. The work "was introduced as a folk opera, occupying a midway point between opera and Broadway musical," according to John Edward Hasse, curator of American music at the Smithsonian Institution.

At the time of its debut, the subject matter of *Porgy and Bess* was considered daring, Hasse said. During the era of racial segregation, U.S. audiences were unaccustomed to music that gave serious artistic expression to the lives of African Americans. Also, the principal roles were sung by black performers instead of white performers in black roles, the common practice then.

Gershwin (whose brother Ira wrote the opera's lyrics) considered *Porgy* his finest work. As it happened, the

public enthusiastically embraced *Porgy*, while music critics were divided. The New York press, for the most part, disliked Gershwin's unconventional approach, especially his incorporation of distinctly American musical elements (jazz, blues, traditional spirituals) into an operatic framework. However, *The Christian Science Monitor* proclaimed *Porgy and Bess* "Gershwin's most important contribution to music," and *The Boston Transcript* said, "Gershwin must now be accepted as a serious composer."

MIXED FEELINGS IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

African Americans often were ambivalent about *Porgy and Bess*. Some felt it was demeaning and promoted racial stereotypes, but others defended it as a work of surpassing beauty and tremendous emotional power. Classically trained African-American singers have wrestled with the question of whether to accept a role in the opera, and even now, "I think there's still some sensitivity around it," said Hasse.

Duke Ellington, the legendary jazz musician and composer, complained that *Porgy and Bess* lacked social commentary, "and I think he also had some issues about its authenticity," Hasse said. Harry Belafonte declined to play *Porgy* in the 1959 film version, and mezzo-soprano Grace Bumbry expressed reservations about singing the role of Bess.

When Gershwin decided to adapt the 1924 novel *Porgy* (by Southern writer DuBose Heyward) into an opera, he traveled to Charleston and spent a great deal of time absorbing and transcribing African-American music. He wanted to faithfully capture the feel of that music in *Porgy and Bess*, but his own background raised doubts in some quarters about his ability to convey the essence of African-American life in the Deep South.

Among the opera's admirers was the late William Warfield, an African-American bass-baritone considered one of the foremost interpreters of the role of *Porgy*. Warfield, who appeared in the 1952 revival of *Porgy and Bess* that toured internationally under the U.S. State Department's sponsorship, told critic John Ardoin that *Porgy and Bess* never was intended as a social statement and should not be faulted for not being one.

"To me, *Porgy* is mainly a beautiful and good story," he said. "You don't see *Porgy* and think 'this is wrong' or 'this is right.' You are touched by the tale of a cripple who falls in love with a wayward woman and tries to save her with his love. I do think, however, audiences today see *Porgy* in a different way than they did in the 1930s," because the social landscape has been transformed.

"Americans have produced many fine things when it comes to opera – [such as] Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* and Samuel Barber's *Vanessa*," said Warfield. "But to me, *Porgy* towers over all of them."

With its references to jazz, blues and spirituals, "this piece of music could only have been produced by an American," Hasse observed.

"*Porgy and Bess* is not supposed to be a pure sampling of the music that African-Americans created" in the 1920s, "any more than [Georges Bizet's opera] *Carmen* is a sampling of Spanish Gypsy music," he said. Rather, "it's a new creation that interprets the music of African Americans through the lens of a white, Jewish, big-city composer who is well versed in ragtime, jazz and popular song, and well trained in classical music."

Hasse said *Porgy's* recognition as an operatic masterpiece was prompted by several decades of dramatic change in U.S. society, especially the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. When the Houston Grand Opera unveiled its production in 1976, the verdict was nearly unanimous: Gershwin's most ambitious work was a magnificent achievement that could hold its own in any opera hall. The Houston production was followed by an equally triumphant staging at New York's Metropolitan Opera in 1985.

If he were addressing people who are seeing *Porgy and Bess* for the first time, Hasse said, he would offer this advice: "Open your ears, heart and soul to the melodies – at times haunting, at times soaring, and at almost all times memorable."

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