

*The Sentinel -*

*Wednesday - April 14, 1982*

# Opinion

Sentinel Editorial

## Budget Confusion

There was another "good news - bad news" story running around Washington, D.C., this week concerning the possible deficit for the current fiscal year.

The good news was the federal deficit may be less than has been anticipated.

The bad news is that there is some question about the reliability of the information.

Some supporters of the administration's fiscal policy believe the Office of Budget and Management has been playing games with the figures used in public discussions.

There is some evidence that revenues are running slightly higher than earlier estimates and that spending has been reduced more than expected.

The net result under those circumstances could be that the deficit might be more around the \$70 billion range than the current \$100 billion figure.

There is also the possibility that the latest figures circulating in Washington may be over-optimistic and no one in authority wants to get egg over their face if the speculation should be in error.

Some conservatives have been attacking the Office of Management and Budget for playing down some positive signs in hopes of putting more pressure on the Congress and the administration for a compromise on the budget.

In statements on the record both representatives of the OMB and the Treasury Department have said that spending has been running slightly under estimates and that revenues have not been as bad as forecast, but both maintain that the total numbers do not represent a sizeable change in the final deficit figure.

We have been increasingly concerned about the use of official information regarding the economy which does not appear to be as accurate as one would prefer.

Questions have been raised about the reliability of figures used in the Consumer Price Index, the unemployment rate and other important economic indicators.

In some cases it appears that some of the long used data may not be as good as one would expect while in other cases the question arises whether someone is playing games for political purposes.

The latter possibility concerns us for we can ill afford to become victims of political statisticians. It is essential that official information be as accurate and as reliable as possible.

It is one thing to be misled by unexpected drastic changes in the economy. It is something else to feed bad information to the public.

Unfortunately, Washington is the kind of a place where information - good or bad - spreads faster than the rapid transit system.

From Capitol Hill to the executive offices, the word moves fast, especially when it touches one the sensitive state of the economy.

David Stockman didn't enhance his credibility with his famed "interviews" and while he escaped alive from the presidential wood shed he can ill afford to get involved in further challenges to his statements on the budget.

We favor the idea that the deficit could be much less than expected, but we are inclined to take a "wait and see" attitude before we jump to any conclusions about the budget. The deficit figure is important.

It not only plays a key role in determining how federal spending may affect the economy, it becomes an essential figure in dealing with next year's budget and the decisions which hinge the condition of the treasury.

It is no time to play games.