

Handouts, Morality and Common Sense

By **Walter E. Williams** · Wednesday, March 9, 2011

Whether Americans realize it or not, the last decade's path of congressional spending is unsustainable. Spending must be reined in, but what spending should be cut? The Republican majority in the House of Representatives fear being booted out of office and are understandably timid. Their rule for whom to cut appears to be: Look around to see who are the politically weak handout recipients.

The problem is that those cuts won't put much of a dent in overall spending. The absolute last thing a Republican or Democrat congressman wants to do is to cut handouts to, and thereby anger, recipients who vote in large numbers. To spare myself ugly mail, I'm not going to mention that handout group, but members of Congress know of whom I speak.

More than 200 House members and 50 senators have co-sponsored a balanced budget amendment to our Constitution. A balanced budget amendment is no protection against the growth of government and the loss of our liberties. Estimated federal tax revenue for 2011 is \$2.2 trillion and federal spending is \$3.8 trillion leaving us with a \$1.6 trillion deficit. The budget could be balanced simply by taking more of our earnings, making us greater congressional serfs. True protection requires an amendment limiting congressional spending.

You say, "OK, Williams, what would be your rule for getting our fiscal house in order?" We need a rule that combines our Constitution with simple morality and plain common sense. I think it immoral for Congress to forcibly take one American's earnings and give them to another American to whom they do not belong. If a person did the same thing privately, he'd be convicted of theft and jailed. We might ask ourselves whether acts that are clearly immoral and despicable when done privately are any less so when done by Congress. Close to two-thirds of the federal budget, so-called entitlements, represent what thieves do: redistribute income.

Some people might say, "Williams, the programs that you'd cut are vital to the welfare of our nation!" When someone says that, I always ask what did we do before. For example, our nation went from 1787 to 1979 and during that interval produced some of the world's most highly educated people without a Department of Education. Since the department's creation, American primary and secondary education has become a joke among industrialized nations.

What about the Department of Energy; how much energy has it produced?

From our founding in 1787 to 1965, our nation went from a Third World status to building the world's mightiest first-class cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit and Philadelphia without the benefit of Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). After HUD was created in 1965, many of our formerly great cities are in decline. No one is saying that HUD is responsible for the decline, but neither was HUD responsible for their rise.

There is a distinct group of Americans who bear a large burden for today's runaway government. You ask, "Who are they?" It's the so-called "greatest generation." When those Americans were born, federal spending as a percentage of GDP was about 3 percent, as it was from 1787 to 1920 except during war. No one denies the sacrifices made and the true greatness of a generation of Americans who suffered through our worst depression, conquered the meanest tyrants during World War II and later managed to produce a level of wealth and prosperity heretofore unknown to mankind.

But this generation of Americans also laid the political foundation for the greatest betrayal of our nation's core founding principle: limited federal government exercising only constitutionally enumerated powers. It was on their watch that the foundation was laid for today's massive federal spending that tops 25 percent of GDP.

A good part of that generation is still alive. Before they depart, they might do their share to help us have a federal government exercising only constitutionally enumerated powers.

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