



Do We Deserve Our Fate?

The latest Social Security Trustees Report tells us that the program will be insolvent by the year 2037. The combined unfunded liability of Social Security and Medicare has reached nearly \$107 trillion in today's dollars. That is about seven times the size of the U.S. economy and 10 times the size of the national debt. Those entitlement programs, along with others, account for nearly 60 percent of federal spending. They are what Congress calls non-discretionary spending. About half of discretionary spending is for national defense. Each year, non-discretionary spending consumes a higher and higher percentage of the federal budget.



The language Congress uses to describe their spending is corrupt beyond redemption. Think about the term entitlement. If one American is entitled to something he didn't earn, where in the world does Congress get the money? It's not Santa or the Tooth Fairy. The only way Congress can give one American a dollar is to first take it from another American. Therefore, an entitlement is a congressionally given right for one American to live at the expense of another. In other words, Congress forcibly uses one American to serve the purposes of another American. As such, it differs in degree, but not kind, from that uglier part of our history where black people were forcibly used to serve the purposes of their slave masters.

What about the terms discretionary versus non-discretionary congressional spending? Non-discretionary refers to uncontrollable things like sunsets and sunrises, low tides and high tides, and laws of thermodynamics. By contrast, all congressional spending is discretionary and controllable. For political expedience, Congress has written laws to shield certain spending from annual budget scrutiny by calling it non-discretionary.

The level of congressional spending is unsustainable, but how willing are Americans to do anything about it? A courageous member of Congress, Paul Ryan, R-Wis., chairman of the House Budget Committee, has put forth a budget plan that would trim the deficit by \$4.4 trillion over 10 years by reforming Medicare and Medicaid, making defense cuts, and imposing hard spending caps on domestic spending.

Ryan's plan was immediately attacked as trying to balance the budget on the backs of the poor. In the wake of this attack, even some of his Republican backers, including House Speaker John Boehner, have become lukewarm in support.

The president and his supporters call for tax increases as a means to cover the deficit, but higher tax revenues cannot eliminate the deficit. Controlling for inflation, federal tax revenue today is 23 times greater than it was in 1960, but congressional spending is 42 times greater. During the last half-century, except for five years, the nation has faced a federal budget deficit. It's just simple math. If tax



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revenues soar, but congressional spending soars more, budget deficits cannot be avoided.

People ask what can be done to save our nation from decline. To ask that represents a misunderstanding of history and possibly a bit of arrogance. After all, how different are Americans from the Romans, Spaniards, French and the English? These were once mighty nations standing at the top of civilization. At the height of these nation's prosperity, no one would have predicted that they'd become third-rate nations, especially England. If during Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 had a person suggested that England would become a third-rate nation and later challenged on the high seas by a sixth-rate nation (Argentina), he would have been declared insane.

One chief causal factor for the decline of these former great nations is what has been described as "bread and circuses," where government spends money for the shallow and immediate wants of the population, and civic virtue all but disappears. For the past half-century, our nation has been doing precisely what brought down other great nations. We might have now reached the point of no return. If so, do we deserve it?

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