



Is There a Way Out?

According to a recent Fox News poll, 73 percent of Americans are dissatisfied with the direction of the country, up 20 points from 2012. Americans sense that there's a lot going wrong in our nation, but most don't have a clue about the true nature of our problem. If they had a clue, most would have little stomach for what would be necessary to arrest our national decline. Let's look at it.



Between two-thirds and three-quarters of federal spending, in contravention of the U.S. Constitution, can be described as Congress taking the earnings or property of one American to give to another, to whom it does not belong. You say, "Williams, what do you mean?" Congress has no resources of its very own. Moreover, there's no Santa Claus or tooth fairy who gives it resources. The fact that Congress has no resources of its very own forces us to recognize that the only way Congress can give one American one dollar is to first — through intimidation, threats and coercion — confiscate that dollar from some other American through the tax code.

If any American did privately what Congress does publicly, he'd be condemned as an ordinary thief. Taking what belongs to one American to give to another is theft, and the receiver is a recipient of stolen property. Most Americans would suffer considerable anguish and cognitive dissonance seeing themselves as recipients of stolen property, so congressional theft has to be euphemized and given a respectable name. That respectable name is "entitlement." Merriam-Webster defines entitlement as "the condition of having a right to have, do, or get something." For example, I am entitled to walk into the house that I own. I am entitled to drive the car that I own. The challenging question is whether I am also entitled to what you or some other American owns.

Let's look at a few of these entitlements. More than 40 percent of federal spending is for entitlements for the elderly in the forms of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, housing and other assistance programs. The Office of Management and Budget calculates that total entitlement spending comes to about 62 percent of federal spending. Military spending totals 19 percent of federal spending. By the way, putting those two figures into historical perspective demonstrates the success we've had becoming a handout nation. In 1962, military expenditures were almost 50 percent of the federal budget, and entitlement spending was a mere 31 percent. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that entitlement spending will consume all federal tax revenue by 2048.



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on October 31, 2013

Entitlement spending is not the only form of legalized theft. The Department of Agriculture gives billions of dollars to farmers. The departments of Energy and Commerce give billions of dollars and subsidized loans to corporations. In fact, every Cabinet-level department in Washington is in charge of handing out at least one kind of subsidy or special privilege. Most federal non-defense “discretionary spending” by Congress is for handouts.

Despite the fact that today’s increasing levels of federal government spending are unsustainable, there is little evidence that Americans have the willingness to do anything about it. Any politician who’d even talk about significantly reining in unsustainable entitlement spending would be run out of town. Any politician telling the American people they must pay higher taxes to support handout spending, instead of concealing spending through deficits and running up the national debt and inflation, would also be run out of town. Can you imagine what the American people would do to a presidential candidate who’d declare, as James Madison did in a 1794 speech to the House of Representatives, “Charity is no part of the legislative duty of the government”?

If we are to be able to avoid ultimate collapse, it’s going to take a moral reawakening and renewed constitutional respect — not by politicians but by the American people. The prospect of that happening may be whistlin’ “Dixie.”

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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