



Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on September 21, 2012

## Romney, Taxes, and Dependence on Government

Mitt Romney isn't just out of touch; he's also out of sync with the movement to shrink government. In an interview clarifying his now-infamous speech to donors, captured on clandestine video, Romney said, "I think people would like to be paying taxes."

Come again? He also said, "The good news is if you are doing well enough financially that you can pay a tax."

That's good news?

Romney apparently had low-income people in mind. But if he'd rather see them working than collecting government benefits, the last thing he should want is to reduce the returns to labor — which is what income taxation does. Workers should be free to keep the full fruits of their labor.

I have an idea for the GOP presidential candidate: Test your belief that people like to pay taxes by proposing to end all penalties for nonpayment. Abolish the IRS. Make taxes voluntary. Then we'll see who would like to pay and who wouldn't. He says he's for less government. Okay, Mr. Romney, prove it.

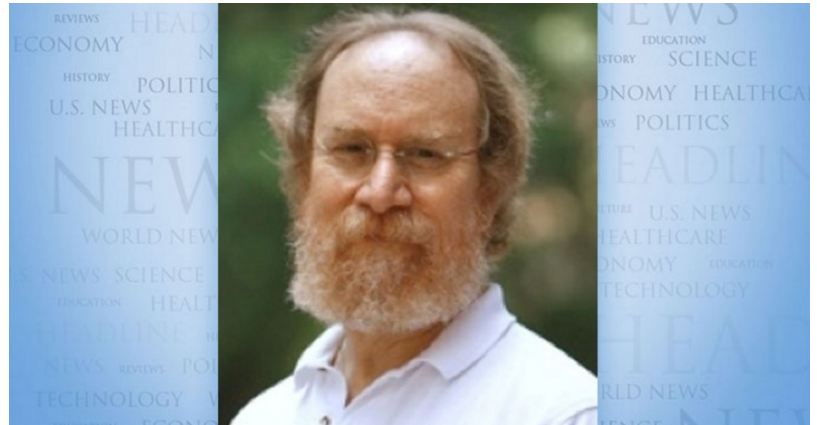
How many people does he suppose would choose to pay for the occupation of Afghanistan, or the drone attacks on Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, or the war on certain drug makers, sellers, and consumers? How many would be willing to pay for all the corporate welfare that riddles our so-called free-enterprise system?

Speaking of corporate welfare, in his speech Romney had much to say about dependence. "There are 47 percent who are ... dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you name it." He figures those folks won't be voting for him and his allegedly small-government message.

Yet the [New York Times](#) reports, "The states with the highest percentage of federal filers who do not owe income taxes tend to vote Republican in presidential elections," attributing the information to the Tax Foundation. "Research by Dean Lacy, a professor of government at Dartmouth College, has found that states that receive more in federal spending than they pay in taxes have become increasingly Republican in presidential elections."

So Romney has the 47 percent wrong. But more important, he overlooks the fact that many low-income people work hard at two or three jobs and are the victims of anti-competitive corporatist policies that build barriers to advancement.

But that inconvenient fact aside, low-income people aren't the only ones dependent on government. Another group is even more dependent: the people of the corporate world who expect government to provide bailouts, guarantees, and contracts. In the wake of the financial meltdown of 2008, it's slightly cruel to stigmatize working-class and poor people who get government benefits, while letting big business and big banks off the hook. Romney supported the financial bailout and, aside from talking vaguely about tax loopholes, does not question the pervasive system of government privilege for big business.





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The military-industrial complex is a case in point. As author [Nick Turse](#) documents, many thousands of American businesses are under contract to the military establishment, making everything from clothing to weapons. Many more invest resources looking for contracts. Private consumers are the losers. If you were to suggest to the corporate executives that they wean their companies from the government, they'd laugh. It's much easier to make your money off the taxpayers rather than take your chances with fickle consumers free to take their business elsewhere.

No one has a right to other people's money. That's a simple moral precept summed up in the words "Thou shalt not steal." It's no less stealing if the government does it for you. Invoking democracy is no help here, because if an individual has no right to steal, it is logically impossible for any group of individuals to have such a right. No matter how many zeros you add together, the sum will be zero.

Let's end all dependence on government. Doing it in one fell swoop would be ideal, but short of that, here's a workable strategy: Cut taxes from the bottom up and welfare from the top down. This will move us toward a free society and win popular support along the way.

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