

Give Grover Norquist a break

By John Kennedy

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Lately it has become fashionable to belittle Grover Norquist, the American political advocate who opposes tax increases and serves as president of Americans for Tax Reform, in part because Gov. Jindal seeks Norquist's guidance on the subject of state revenue. This criticism, in my estimation, has been overdone.

You may not like Grover Norquist. Fair enough. You're equally entitled to disagree with his anti-tax Taxpayer Protection Pledge. But many of those who criticize Mr. Norquist are missing the larger point. That larger point is simply this: Excessive taxes are bad for the economy and bad for America, for several reasons.

First, the money that government spends belongs to us as taxpayers. We may voluntarily (more or less) give a portion to our government in exchange for certain goods and services that we have all agreed government should provide, but in a free and democratic society, the money is still ours because we are the government.

Second, in most cases, the private sector — private citizens and private businesses — can employ capital (money) more efficiently than local, state or the federal government. I don't know about you, but I would buy stock in FedEx before I would buy stock in the U.S. Postal Service.

Third, excessive taxes discourage work, investment, productivity and economic growth and undermine the quintessential American belief that our future can be better than our present or our past. Clearly, there is some point beyond which higher taxes lead to lower revenue and less prosperity, because people work and invest less.

Fourth, perhaps it wasn't always this way, but today every penny taxpayers give to a legislative body at any level of government will be spent. I'm not suggesting that legislators aren't well-intentioned, but 100 years ago doctors also used to bleed their patients with the best of intentions. The point is that those who believe in limiting the growth of government, as I do, understand that giving too much money to government will inevitably lead to its expansion, in addition to hurting the economy.

For others reasons and a further explanation of these, see Commentary, David Boaz, Feb. 28, 2001, the Cato Institute (a libertarian think-tank), at cato.org.

I don't really know Mr. Norquist. I met him once, and he wouldn't remember me. I remember him, however, because I was impressed with his understanding of why excessive taxes are anathema to the American way of life.