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My View: Needed: A smaller government

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— Our federal government hit the debt ceiling on May 16th this year, the 74th time since 1962 (10th since 2001), according to Congressional Research Services. It seems to be pretty much a given that the debt ceiling will be increased for the 74th time in the not-too-distant future, but maybe this time it will require some compromise with regard to corresponding spending cuts.

I think something must be wrong with how the federal government operates! Maybe it's because it continues to "invest" in what I consider an overabundance of existing federal programs. "Invest" seems to be the new, less abrasive word for spending or redistributing tax dollars the political class likes to put to us unsophisticated mere mortals.

We know the federal government takes (through taxation) resources created by the private sector economy. But the way I see it, while claiming good intentions the government too often redistributes those resources beyond the authority granted by the Constitution, resulting in unintended consequences adversely effecting economic growth and private sector job creation.

One very small example can be found in a report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) indicating there are 47 different federal employment and training programs, with substantial overlap among them. According to Cato Institute, those training programs do not fill many economic needs that private markets do not already fill. The reason I bring this up is because in a recent speech President Obama proposed yet another federal jobs training program.

But federal jobs training programs are "small potatoes" when it comes to spending in federal programs. Health and Human Services has 68,000 workers and is projected to "invest" about \$919 billion in 2011. Department of Labor has 17,000 workers and is projected to "invest" about \$148 billion in 2011. Department of Education has 4,400 workers, is projected to "invest" about \$79 billion in 2011, and operates 171 subsidy programs. Department of Energy has about 17,000 workers, directly oversees about 100,000 contract workers, is expected to "invest" about \$45 billion in 2011, and operates 37 subsidy programs.

These are just a few expensive, high spending/investment federal government departments and programs. Anyone interested in exploring this further could refer to www.downsizinggovernment.org.

Certainly reasonable taxation is necessary to provide essential federal government services recognized in the Constitution — e.g., national defense, regulate immigration, regulate commerce, coin money, etc. But I think too many of us have become complacent

to the extent we believe the federal government can/will take care of every problem, if not through taxation and redistribution, through excessive regulation — e.g. the EPA (18,000 employees), often acting without congressional approval.

We can care about something without wanting or expecting the federal government to take care of it for us. As we continue to ask the federal government to do more for us through entitlements (with money we do not have) all the federal government asks in return is a little bit more of our liberty/freedom.

I say decentralize more investment decision making to individuals, businesses, and the respective states (as the Constitution provides) so they are free to make choices based on their knowledge of what is best for them in their particular circumstances.

A society of more than 300 million people is a complex and dynamic system that federal politicians are unable to manage effectively. The great majority of Americans are good and caring people, so the poor and vulnerable among us should not be neglected in regional and local societies where liberty/freedom prevails.

The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence states, in part, "... that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

I interpret that to mean individual freedoms and rights are not gifts from the government. In my opinion the very reason government exists, and why the founders wrote the Constitution to include enumerated powers in Article I Section 8, is so Americans can live their lives as they wish.

A return to constitutional conservatism limiting the federal government in its reach, its power, and its intrusiveness might be the best (if not the only) way to preserve the American experiment.

James Madison described the powers the states delegated to the federal government in the Constitution as "few and limited." At the close of the Constitutional Convention Ben Franklin was asked what kind of government the Constitution was bringing into existence. Franklin replied, "A Republic if you can keep it."

Bob Jentges is a former teacher, coach and insurance claims superintendent and is part a team of Free Press readers invited to comment more frequently on issues of the day. He considers himself a conservative.