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Washington's War on Youth

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By Evan Feinberg
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Washington is always declaring war on something: Iraq, drugs, privacy, poverty, crime. Our government exists in a constant struggle with someone or something. Yet for some strange reason, its most costly war never gets any headlines.

My generation should know. It's the War on Youth.

Politicians and bureaucrats in Washington have been waging this war for decades. It's that rare issue that transcends our country's partisan divide. Democrats and Republicans both have gone to great lengths to ensure that members of my generation—and each one after—will spend our entire lives paying for their mistakes.

Our generation knows it. Millennials are more distrustful of government than at any point in American history, according to a recent poll by the Harvard Institute of Politics. No wonder: The War on Youth is a total war that has many fronts.

Health care. Nothing hurts my generation like being forced to pay for something we can't afford. Yet under Obamacare, millennials are hit harder than anyone else. Our premiums increased by an average of nearly 50 percent last year alone—by far the highest jump for any demographic, according to a Manhattan Institute analysis. In some states, we're paying over 250 percent more, according to the same study. And making matters worse, some of us will see our health care costs double next year. This from a law that has "affordable" in its name.

It's no surprise that many of us don't want to participate in this farce. Unfortunately, our only other option is to pay Obamacare's tax—or as Washington calls it, the "shared responsibility fee."

Student loans. Why don't we want to pay more for things like health care? Many of us are facing record levels of student-loan debt. Loan totals rose by 511 percent from 1999 to 2011, and we have more student-loan debt than the rest of America has credit-card debt. Roughly 70 percent of students who graduated in 2012 have student-loan debt, averaging \$29,400 per person.

Much of the blame for this crisis can be laid at the feet of politicians. By promising near-limitless student loans, they actually drove up tuition costs, a 2005 Cato Institute analysis found. When demand is high for a good or service and access to credit is unlimited, costs will soar. We learned this lesson in Econ 101—a class many of us are going to spend over a decade paying off.

Unemployment. Once a month, Americans either freak out or breathe a sigh of relief when the previous month's unemployment numbers are released. But my generation only gets to freak out. We have struggled with double-digit unemployment for more than five years. This month, for instance, overall unemployment fell to 6.1 percent. However, teenagers have faced a record 66 straight months of more than 20 percent unemployment. Just as problematic, the unemployment rate for 18-29-year-olds is at 15.1 percent when you factor in labor-force participation, which is at record lows.

As with so many other issues, a swarm of government policies has contributed to our plight. Obamacare caused many businesses that hire entry-level employees to either cut hours or cut jobs. Ditto for the minimum-wage hikes that constantly pop up around the country, sometimes at the state level and other times in Washington. According to a recent study published by Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, the job losses caused by minimum-wage hikes disproportionately harm workers between 16 and 24. A wage hike doesn't help us when we no longer have a job.

Tech freedom. Ever heard of Uber? We have. In fact, our generation has turned this ride-sharing app into one of America's great success stories—investors recently valued it at more than \$18 billion dollars. Yet politicians in most major cities are now doing everything they can to kill the company. Whether they're banning it entirely, forcing it to jack up its prices, or simply wrapping it in regulation after regulation, the powers that be are trying to stifle a unique and innovative company that uses the most up-to-date tech.

This is only one example of how regulations kill millennials' natural economic creativity. Our generation can use our tech savvy to transform every sector of the economy with 21st century solutions. However, we can't do that when the government is stuck in the 19th century.

Cronyism. When the government isn't preventing modern innovation with overregulation, it's actively killing our generation's entrepreneurial spirit by propping up monopolies with any number of crony tactics. The list is almost endless.

Consider the case of beer brewing. There probably isn't a millennial in this country who wouldn't open a brewery if given the chance. Then again, federal, state, and local governments are doing their best to prevent that chance from ever arising. At the

brewing industry's request, legislators have built a complicated system of distribution and brewing rules that no start-up could ever afford to navigate.

Looks like we're stuck drinking the usual mass-produced swill.

National debt. Here's the worst news for millennials: What we face now pales in comparison to what's in our future. While we've been struggling to find a job and pay the bills, Washington's been spending like there's no tomorrow. Right now, every 18-year-old's share of the national debt is approximately \$800,000. We'll eventually have to pay this bill—and that means higher taxes and massive cuts to Social Security and other promised benefits.

These are only a few examples of Washington's War on Youth—there are hundreds, if not thousands, more. That's why it's no surprise that a recent Harvard poll shows that millennials don't believe our elected officials work for us. Only 20 percent of us believe that Washington "does the right thing." And whether it's Congress, the courts, the president, or even our state-level elected officials, our trust in government has dramatically declined in recent years.

No wonder: Washington is screwing us over with almost everything it does. But sooner or later, we're going to tell Washington we've had enough. My generation has too much to offer our economy and our country. We need a policy agenda that encourages our creativity and entrepreneurship rather than stifles us and keeps us on the sidelines.

This won't happen unless politicians start putting the next generation before the next election. That's what my organization, Generation Opportunity, is fighting for. It's time our generation had a voice in Washington.

We're sick of losing the War on Youth.