

March 28, 2011

Column: Let's get state back on track

Wisconsin has a long history of progressive ideas. Our greatest governor, Robert M. LaFollette Sr., was a progressive Republican. Our motto is "Forward."

America has had numerous progressive Republicans. Check out Lincoln, Abraham and Roosevelt, Theodore.

The progressive income tax, corporate income tax and inheritance tax were pushed by President Roosevelt. When referring to the super rich, Teddy recommended the "captains of industry" be "supervised and within reasonable limits, controlled" to address "real and grave evils."

Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned about the influence of moneyed interests in his famous farewell speech about the military-industrial complex.

Presently we have billionaires like the Koch brothers funding armies of lobbyists, funneling millions into elections, financing think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and the Reason Foundation and providing the money for groups like Americans for Prosperity and the tea party. The think tanks provide the policies, talking points and spin strategies that are then used by those they have supported financially. Did you really think Scott Walker thought this up by himself? It is no coincidence that the Republican governors across America have the same strategy.

It is ironic that the fiscal crisis we face in Wisconsin and America has two main causes, both fueled by greed. It was the super rich who pushed for financial deregulation and engaged in the financial schemes that caused the economic collapse.

It is also the super rich who have not paid their fair share of taxes. Here are some facts to consider:

In 1963 the top income tax rate was 91 percent and corporate income taxes as a fraction of gross national product were 4 percent. By 2008, when George W. Bush left office, the top income rate was 35 percent and corporate income taxes as a fraction of GNP were below 2 percent.

From 1969 to 2011, people earning less than \$290,000 had their share of the tax burden increase 80 percent, while those earning over \$290,000 saw their share cut 25 percent.

From 1950 to 1980, the average income of the lowest 90 percent of Americans grew from \$17,719 to \$30,941. From 1980 to 2008, this group saw its income rise from \$30,941 to \$31,322 -- an increase of \$303 in 28 years. While the economy grew, the wealthy got wealthier and those who provided the labor to create that wealth stagnated financially.

Finally, 400 Americans have more wealth than half of all Americans combined. Think about that. A strong middle class is the heart of a democracy.

There is hope. We can vote.

On April 5 Wisconsin elects a Supreme Court Justice. Justice David Prosser's campaign manager said Prosser would act as a "complement to both the new (Walker) administration and Legislature."

A vote for JoAnne Kloppenburg would restore the separation of powers and insure impartiality and independence.

Gary Fergot is a reader from Edgar.
