



Are You Getting Your Money's Worth from Washington?

By Daniel J. Mitchell

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Last year, I conducted an informal poll at a conference in Paris.

I explained to the audience that the public sector consumed about 57 percent of the French economy and I asked them whether they got more services and better government than the people of Germany (where government consumed 44 pct of GDP), Canada (41 pct), or Switzerland (34 pct).

Unsurprisingly, not a single hand went up.

But maybe we should ask the same question in America. Are we getting the government we want?

That's the message of this clever video.

I have a couple of editorial comments.

1. The video made a very good point about health insurance not being real insurance in a world of government intervention.
2. I also agree that much of the federal government is illegitimate, but that point is irrelevant since we have Justices on the Supreme Court who don't care that the federal government is supposed to be limited to those functions listed in Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution.
3. The system is based on coercion. If you don't pay taxes, you go to jail. If you resist, they shoot you. Only in Washington is that type of system known as "voluntary compliance."
4. The video is absolutely correct that the nation did just fine for most of our nation's history with no income tax.

But enough of my commentary. Let's think for a few minutes of what would happen if we could use our tax returns to allocate our tax dollars. How many people would voluntarily finance the

waste at places such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development or Department of Agriculture?

But even the legitimate parts of government are riddled with waste. I believe in national defense, for instance, but that doesn't mean I want to pay for stupid statues, subsidize green fuel, or prop up Europe's welfare states by keeping outmoded military alliances.

That's why I'm not surprised to see that Americans think, according to a new Reason-Rupe poll, that 50 cents out of every tax dollar is wasted.

My leftist friends, when confronted with this type of polling data, are generally dismissive. They say ordinary people are misinformed and stupid because fraud rates for government programs (as shown in the P.S. of this post) tend to be far lower than 50 percent.

But their definition of "waste" is far too narrow. I don't care if every single dollar of food stamps goes to people who are "eligible" or if the rules are followed for every mass transit subsidy. Those are not legitimate and proper functions of Washington.

When government is taking money from some people and using those funds to buy votes from other people, every penny is being wasted.

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