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Charitable donations to the government

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The New York Times took a look at people who voluntarily send money to Washington in order to help pay down the federal debt. Last year, the Bureau of the Public Debt received \$3.1 million in such donations. Looking at the federal budget, I found a total of \$241 million in "gifts and contributions" for fiscal year 2010.

Charitable donations to the federal government are insignificant when compared to donations made to private charities. A Cato essay on welfare spending points out that Americans contribute more than \$300 billion a year to organized private charities and volunteer more than 8 billion hours a year to charitable activities, which can be valued at about \$158 billion.

Thus when given the choice, people overwhelmingly entrust their donations to private charities not the government. One can only imagine what donations to private charities would be if government at all levels didn't confiscate trillions of our dollars in taxes every year.

Warren Buffett, one of the richest men in the world, decided several years ago to leave most of his fortune to private charities. Buffett is notorious for advocating tax increases to support government spending. Yet, when he made the decision to donate his wealth, Buffet went with the private sector instead of the government.

A frustrating aspect of today's public policy debate is that many pundits seem oblivious to the fact that the private sector could take care of those people truly in need if it was allowed to retain more of its earnings from the clutches of government. The government "crowds out" all kinds of private efforts and resources. If the government were to recede, private sector efforts to aid the needy would expand.

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