

Matt Yglesias

Today at 12:14 pm

Save \$90 Billion By Malnourishing Children

The Cato Institute's Chris Edwards wants you to know that it's [easy to reduce federal spending by ten percent](#), you just need to be willing to let kids go hungry:

10. Food Subsidies (Food Stamps and School Lunch). Low-income families often suffer from poor food choices and obesity, not a shortage of calories. **Food aid for the needy should be left to private charities. Save \$90 billion.**

It's of course true that low-income families in the United States rarely if ever suffer from a shortage of calories. But the existence of food assistance programs is a major reason why that's the case. I recall when Mark Perry from AEI [cited declining levels of pollution](#) to debunk the need for environmental regulation, when in reality it reflects the success of environmental regulation at curbing pollution. With the "left to private charities" line Edwards does crawl back toward reality in which giving food to poor people performs the useful task of preventing starvation. But leaving these matters to charity means they may or may not actually get done; I'm happy to leave the question of whether or not there's a symphony in a given city up to whether or not wealthy donors feel like supporting a symphony, but the notion that children should have adequate food rather than starving to death is a question of basic justice that shouldn't be left up to happenstance.

Ah, the good old days.

Update 38698, 40296, 37845

- [Comments](#)
- [62](#)

Filed under: [education](#), [Poverty](#), [Public Health](#)

62 Responses to “Save \$90 Billion By Malnourishing Children”

1. *DTM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:16 pm](#)

And of course charitable giving tends to follow the exact same cycles as the economy, which makes it a terrible funding source for dealing with poverty-related issues like this.

2. *NYC_Charles* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:21 pm](#)

I was reading just the other day about how the local counsel David Cameron had served on before running for MP arrived at the same sort of solution – we will cut services and charitable organizations will fill the void. Predictably, charitable organizations did not fill the void.

3. *Sahu* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:25 pm](#)

And what’s with the cryptic update numbers? Oh dear lord, abb1’s right–Matt is a Mosad/AIPAC plant and he’s sending them encoded messages about glibertarian douchebaggery!

Damnit, this is where I draw the line. They can have our military secrets, and they can drag our name through the mud, but they can’t have the goods on our smugly amoral upper-middle-class potheads, not on my watch!

4. *joe from Lowell* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:25 pm](#)

It’s of course true that low-income families in the United States rarely if ever suffer from a shortage of calories. But the existence of food assistance programs is a major reason why that’s the case. I recall when Mark Perry from AEI cited declining levels of pollution to debunk the need for environmental regulation, when in reality it reflects the success of environmental regulation at curbing pollution.

Ahem: “Social Security?!? Old people have the lowest poverty rates of any age group in America!”

5. *Adam Villani* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:27 pm](#)

Update 38698, 40296, 37845

Acknowledged. I await your further instructions.

63961, 64697, 52304

6. *PatrickM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:27 pm](#)

The fact that we already have private food bank charities in virtually every community in America, on top of federal programs like subsidized lunches and food stamps, speaks to the inadequacy of those governments programs in addressing the needs of the poor.

“Low-income families often suffer from poor food choices and obesity, not a shortage of calories.”

Amazing that even the CATO Institue can fail to recognize the blazing stupidity of this sentence.

7. *Charles Moore* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:28 pm](#)

CATO should really check with organizations like local food banks, Second Harvest, and other food charities to document just how overstretched they are right now—their charitable supply cannot keep up with existing demand for help—while 10% of the American population is currently utilizing food stamps. CATO could also survey local public school districts to check the rise in the number of pupils eligible for and using federally subsidized reduced price breakfasts and lunches. Having done this empirical research, then CATO could estimate what level of charitable nutrition giving it would take for charities to supplant public nutrition assistance. Unless and until CATO and its ilk are willing to undertake such readily available documentation and analysis, this is just inexcusable lazy ideological claptrap, which has resurfaced periodically since food stamps were made universal in 1974.

Charles Moore

8. *LaFollette Progressive* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:28 pm](#)

Not to mention that school lunches follow basic nutritional guidelines, and are in some cases the only access children have to food choices that are *not* empty calories.

All Dickensian references and moral hand-wringing aside... what's most striking about Edwards' post is that it's thoroughly moronic from top to bottom. There is literally nothing there except flippant assertions that local governments and charities are better equipped to handle functions that the federal government took over many years ago *because local governments and charities were demonstrably ill-equipped to handle them.*

Libertarian ideology is eating the part of this man's brain responsible for critical thinking like metastatic cancer.

9. *Richard* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:29 pm](#)

Please, do tell us what the cryptic numbers are. This isn't the first time I've seen them in an update.

10. *ET* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:31 pm](#)

Sigh. Same ole same ole.

Private charities rely on people giving them money. In a bad economy what happens, many people stop giving or cut back on their giving. Ergo less money private charities and less people getting fed.

Basically I have come to think that Cato and a lot of Republicans just want these people to die – or at least go away, shut up, and accept their fate to be the unfortunate casualties of their political dogma. After all, deserving people don't have these problems so only the undeserving (and expendable) will be adversely affected. And since some/many of these don't vote (and most importantly don't give money) the can be ignored.

11. *pritesh* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:33 pm](#)

Do you think this asshole has ever gone hungry one second in his life?

12. *Scott Lange* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:33 pm](#)

Unknown; Louisville, KY; Petros, TN

13. *Elvis Elvisberg* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:35 pm](#)

No fire codes or child labor laws back then, either! Then the government seized power from the people for no reason. It was truly the time to be alive.

14. *Led* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:36 pm](#)

The cryptic numbers appear to relate to subject matter tags, and are presumably some kind of short hand code for the tags. I've noticed the pattern where first the cryptic numbers show up and then are replaced with the subject tags.

15. *The Tragically Flip* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:38 pm](#)

“Low-income families often suffer from poor food choices and obesity, not a shortage of calories.”

It's one thing for your average libertarian to be this stupid/parochial/short sighted, but a “think tank” like CATO might be aware of the major issues facing poor people around access to healthy foods, namely the frequent lack of grocery stores in walking distance, the added expense of fresh fruits and vegetables and just the sheer exhaustion of working multiple menial jobs to survive.

Poor people don't eat badly because they're dumb and like junk food, they often don't have a lot of other options given the variety of challenges they face.

Fuck libertarians. Anyone who hopes to swap them out with conservatives is just suffering grass is greener

envy. A libertarian government would be as disastrous as conservative ones have been. Tens of thousands of poor children starving to death is a high price to pay for legalizing pot and prostitution.

16. *The Tragically Flip* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:41 pm](#)

Honestly though, as much as I enjoy bashing their stupid ideas and foolish quasi-religious devotion to the free market ideal, libertarians are such a tiny sliver of the population that they don't even show up in ideological polling. We (liberals) shouldn't spend any more time debating them than we do communists, communitarians, Maoists or monarchists.

They're loud and annoying on the internet, but no one should really take them seriously.

17. *Al* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:43 pm](#)

The Cato Institute's Chris Edwards wants you to know that it's easy to reduce federal spending by ten percent, you just need to be willing to let kids go hungry

Hmmmm, a post taking apart a bunch of views Matthew attributes to Chris Edwards, absolutely none of which Chris Edwards holds.

How surprising!

Matthew of course cites absolutely no evidence whatsoever that private charities would "be willing to let kids go hungry" or would "malnourish children". (As we know, children are *already* malnourished even with government food aid – mostly because government food aid provides calories, not good food (as Edwards notes)).

It's hilarious to see Matthew get all huffy when he believes someone else attributes to him views he doesn't hold, when Matthew himself does *the exact same thing* all the time.

18. *howard* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:47 pm](#)

if charity were sufficient to feed the poor and hungry, then food stamps wouldn't have had to come into existence in the first place.

the food stamp program, in fact, is one of the greatest public programs ever.

19. *howard* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:48 pm](#)

i see al the moron slimeball who calls john lewis a lying a racist has crawled in to pollute yet another thread.

20. *lance* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:56 pm](#)

Classic editorial from WaPo a few years ago.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/16/AR2007111601213_pf.html

The overall futility of the effort became evident to me one summer day in 2003 when I observed a food bank truck pull up to a low-income housing project in Hartford. The residents had known when and where the truck would arrive, and they were already lined up at the edge of the parking lot to receive handouts. Staff members and volunteers set up folding tables and proceeded to stack them with produce, boxed cereal and other food items. People stood quietly in line until it was their turn to receive a bag of pre-selected food.

No one made any attempt to determine whether the recipients actually needed the food, nor to encourage the recipients to seek other forms of assistance, such as food stamps. The food distribution was an unequivocal act of faith based on generally accepted knowledge that this was a known area of need. The recipients seemed reasonably grateful, but the staff members and volunteers seemed even happier, having been fortified by the belief that their act of benevolence was at least mildly appreciated.

As word spread, the lines got longer until finally the truck was empty. The following week, it returned at the same time, and once again the people were waiting. Only this time there were more of them. It may have been that a donor-recipient co-dependency had developed. Both parties were trapped in an ever-expanding web of immediate gratification that offered the recipients no long-term hope of eventually achieving independence and self-reliance. As the food bank's director told me later, "The more you provide, the more demand there is."

21. *ferd* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:56 pm](#)

Thousand Points of Light:

YOU! feed and house the poor, if you're worried about them. Me, I'm buying up the economy, funding politicians, and going golfing. You will soon call me boss. And your children will fight my wars.

22. *Shooter242* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 12:58 pm](#)

Tens of thousands of poor children starving to death is a high price to pay...

"Women and children hardest hit!"

Greenwald has somehow rubbed off on Yglesias. Take a hypothetical, find the most egregious aspect of said hypothetical, change an aspect of said egregious hypothetical, and attribute that egregious hypothetical aspect as a characteristic of a larger group.

Ergo there is a move afoot to starve little children that **MUST** be stopped. Yikes!.

Yeah, keep up the good work.

23. *DTM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:01 pm](#)

By the way, among Republicans, Independents, and Democrats, Republicans have the **least** favorable

view of libertarians according to [this Pew poll](#).

More than four-in-ten independents (44%) react positively to the word “libertarian,” while 32% have a negative reaction. Democrats are nearly evenly divided (39% positive, 37% negative). However, Republicans on balance have a negative impression of this term (44% negative, 31% positive).

That is what your loyalty to the GOP has gotten you, libertarians: wars, an erosion of civil liberties, exploding government spending and deficits, and the contempt of the very political party you have been supporting.

24. *firefall* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:02 pm](#)

Sigh. More illconsidered rubbish from the festering tip of the American right.

Oh, and:

whether or not wealthy donors feel like supporting a symphony,

A symphony is a piece of music, you presumably mean an orchestra – this just sounds moronic

25. *DTM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:08 pm](#)

Matthew of course cites absolutely no evidence whatsoever that private charities would “be willing to let kids go hungry” or would “malnourish children”.

He also cites absolutely no evidence whatsoever that flying unicorns would not swoop down out of the skies to carry poor children to the Land of Milk and Cookies.

26. *The Tragically Flip* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:09 pm](#)

The stereotypical libertarian agrees with the Democrats on social issues and the Republicans on economic issues. He (he is a man of course) as a rule votes Republican, which tells you what libertarians are really about. They really hate the GOP for its views on drugs and religion and the pointless wars, but they love tax cuts too much to do anything about it.

27. *Midland* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:13 pm](#)

We (liberals) shouldn't spend any more time debating them than we do communists, communitarians, Maoists or monarchists . . . They're loud and annoying on the internet, but no one should really take them seriously.

Alas, those other groups you mention don't get quoted on national news programs every day, don't have the ear of half the politicians and pundits in Washington, and don't have a mass of supporters among our business and media elite.

Really, the two biggest sources of “experts” for the allegedly neutral National Public Radio network are the American Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute. They are at the top of the Beltway social dungheap.

Of course, a real Libertarian would shun a public-owned radio network, but these aren’t real libertarians. A lot of them think they are, but they are basically just shills for the corporatists and social darwinists.

28. *Brendan* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:21 pm](#)

24 – your critique is pointless and incorrect. Many performing arts organizations are called “symphonies”
<http://www.nashvillesymphony.org/>

29. *N* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:42 pm](#)

After a few years of that ‘compassionate conservatism’ crap, I’m actually kind of glad to see a return to good old fashioned heartless douchebag conservatism.

The over-privileged, overpaid, under-worked pretentious nimrods who work at ‘think tanks’ like CATO really should be left to the mercy of the marketplace. No one should get paid to write this kind of crap, much less paid well.

30. *PatrickM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:45 pm](#)

@28,

Correct. See also:

<http://www.seattlesymphony.org/symphony/>

31. *Rich in PA* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:45 pm](#)

I think Cato misunderstands the origins and purpose of the Food Stamp program. It’s a massive giveaway to producers and processors, and because it’s hard to give that money to them directly (on top of what producers explicitly get to produce nothing, or to produce less), it’s laundered through deserving poor people.

32. *woodrow* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:53 pm](#)

Get your black-hearted libertarian hands off my progressive subsidies.

33. *Jaxevad* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 1:55 pm](#)

@28,

Strictly speaking, they're referred to as "symphony orchestras". Furthermore, many orchestras don't have the title of "symphony" in their names at all, such as Philharmonic Orchestras* or Chamber Orchestras.

Note: there's strictly no difference between a Symphony Orchestra and a Philharmonic Orchestra at all, except for the name, which is critical in that a city may have two orchestras each using one of the two names. There **is** a difference if an orchestra is a Chamber Orchestra; it's smaller than others.

So basically, it's understandable to refer to orchestras as "symphonies" as a shorthand, but it doesn't quite sound right, and it'd be factually incorrect if one is intending to include chamber orchestras too.

34. *matt w* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:03 pm](#)

I have a modest proposal: We can easily solve poor kids' nutritional needs by feeding them sausages made up of ground-up wingnut think-tankers. Both production and consumption provide a social benefit!

35. *scathew* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:05 pm](#)

It's been tried before – kids starved, hence why we are where we are.

You'd think they put these programs in for the fun of it. They forget that we tried the shtick of "private funding" for the needy for thousands of years and it didn't work.

I suspect Chris Edwards is at no risk of having to resort to "charity"...

36. *PatrickM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:07 pm](#)

@20 lance:

"It may have been that a donor-recipient co-dependency had developed. Both parties were trapped in an ever-expanding web of immediate gratification that offered the recipients no long-term hope of eventually achieving independence and self-reliance."

Yeah sure. Sort of like the "co-dependence" that the population of heart surgeons creates for patients in need of heart surgery. I suppose if there were no heart surgeons, the number of people needing surgery would drop to zero, because the patients would then become more self-reliant.

Circumstances can and often do interfere with one's ability to achieve complete self-reliance. Need for assistance is not the consequence of availability of assistance.

Your analysis of why someone might line up for a small box of groceries in order to help feed his or her family is shameful.

37. *matt w* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:08 pm](#)

On a more serious note, I go hungry one day a year (for religious reasons), and it completely destroys my concentration. I can't imagine what it would be like for a six-year-old kid to try to learn while

undernourished.

But Cato's Chris Edwards thinks it's OK if that six-year-old's nutritional needs are left to the whims of private donors. This really gives the lie to any libertarian rhetoric about "equality of opportunity, not equality of results" or "personal responsibility." Hungry kids aren't getting opportunities, and they're not personally responsible for their hunger. Cato's Chris Edwards doesn't care.

38. *Robert Waldmann* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:15 pm](#)

What PatrickM said "Low-income families often suffer from poor food choices and obesity, not a shortage of calories."

Amazing that even the CATO Institute can fail to recognize the blazing stupidity of this sentence.

It's not as important as the argument in the post, but there is more to nutrition than calories. Poor food choice often means choosing cheap, filling, unhealthy food.

Edwards should try eating on a food stamps budget as some intrepid congresspeople did. They discovered that the first trick is to buy the least healthy food (fattest meat etc) which is cheaper per calorie.

Also school lunches are a way of reducing truancy. I mean incentives and all that. Edwards only fails to consider this, because of the brain damage due to malnutrition caused by his belief that calories are all that he needs.

39. *joe from Lowell* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:17 pm](#)

We (liberals) shouldn't spend any more time debating them than we do communists, communitarians, Maoists or monarchists.

So, between 1/5 and 3/5 of every comment thread on Matt's blog?



40. *N* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:19 pm](#)

Libertarians are Republicans who don't like to take responsibility for or even admit that their party is dominated by evangelical Christians. They're smirking douches that look down their nose at the majority of people who vote the same way they do as if they're above them.

Libertarians like tax cuts but they also like to do bong hits and download porn – so they call themselves 'Libertarians' like that somehow makes them principled. Libertarians end being about nothing more than pointless and heartless penny pinching gestures like cutting food stamps while ignoring the fiscal elephants in the phone booth.

Don't do stupid things like invading Iraq – save \$780 billion and counting. Don't do a last minute, throw together poorly written drug benefit bill – save \$100 billion a year. Don't cut taxes on the rich while increasing spending. I don't hear any of this from dumb as shit Libertarians. Food stamps though . . .

41. *joe from Lowell* says:
[May 18th, 2010 at 2:19 pm](#)

matt w says:

May 18th, 2010 at 2:08 pm

On a more serious note, I go hungry one day a year (for religious reasons), and it completely destroys my concentration. I can't imagine what it would be like for a six-year-old kid to try to learn while undernourished.

And then, when he grows up and can't get a job paying more than twice minimum wage, libertarians will whip out their copies of the Bell Curve and explain that biological factors explain why the demographic groups that are disproportionately poor will stay that way.

42. *Midland* says:
[May 18th, 2010 at 2:24 pm](#)

We (liberals) shouldn't spend any more time debating them than we do communists, communitarians, Maoists or monarchists.

So, between 1/5 and 3/5 of every comment thread on Matt's blog?

To be fair, Abb1 is the only Maoist who hangs out here, and Fostert is, as far as I know, the only monarchist. The conservative trolls have them badly outnumbered.

43. *MarkOhio* says:
[May 18th, 2010 at 2:30 pm](#)

You might want to click through to the referenced proposals. Cutting food stamps and other nutrition programs is one of several proposals. Also, see bottom of the post for another [web site](#) identifying specific proposals to cut federal spending. I don't agree with many of the specific proposals, but they have done a nice job of laying out the details of the federal budget. And I don't know of a progressive source of information that is equally detailed about proposed spending cuts. Seems like progressives need to offer some specific funding cuts as alternatives to the bullshit cuts proposed by conservatives.

The time fast approaches (assuming recovery continues) where specific and permanent reductions in the federal budget will be needed. I am pretty sure that solving the structural deficit (not the cyclical deficit caused by the recession) will require more than increased taxes.

BTW, one of the proposals identified on the web site, eliminate farm subsidies, is something I think most progressives could support. At least a significant reduction in direct payments to (mostly corporate) farmers.

44. *joe from Lowell* says:
[May 18th, 2010 at 2:32 pm](#)

Seems like progressives need to offer some specific funding cuts as alternatives to the bullshit cuts proposed by conservatives.

Cut the DoD budget in half. That's over \$300 billion per annum.

45. *fostert* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:35 pm](#)

I think we should take Chris's advice and apply it to Defense spending. Cut the Defense budget in half and let them rely on charity for any additional funding. If charity works so well, this will have no impact on the security of our country. Surely Mr. Edwards would agree.

46. *tomemos* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:38 pm](#)

"Fostert is, as far as I know, the only monarchist."

Well, Myles SG.

47. *PatrickM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:39 pm](#)

@ 38 Robert Waldmann:

"It's not as important as the argument in the post, but there is more to nutrition than calories. Poor food choice often means choosing cheap, filling, unhealthy food.

Edwards should try eating on a food stamps budget as some intrepid congresspeople did. They discovered that the first trick is to buy the least healthy food (fattest meat etc) which is cheaper per calorie."

Yes. And also disproportionate cheap starch and carbs, which are a big mainstay in markets in poor neighborhoods. Ramen noodles, boxed mac & cheese, loaves of soft white bread, etc.

It sounds like Chris Edwards at CATO was never even been a "starving student," or he might at least have some dim recollection and understanding of what sort of grocery choices one must make when the food budget is thin.

The stupidity of his observation that "Low-income families often suffer from poor food choices," followed by the recommendation that we give them even fewer resources by which to obtain food, is remarkable. One would think CATO could have taken at least a few minutes time to come up with a more artful rhetorical figleaf for tearing down the safety net that helps impoverished Americans have some means to subsist.

48. *Bob Oso* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:42 pm](#)

The cryptic numbers appear to relate to subject matter tags, and are presumably some kind of short hand code for the tags. I've noticed the pattern where first the cryptic numbers show up and then are replaced with the subject tags.

That's what *they* want you to think!

49. *MarkOhio* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:48 pm](#)

Cut the DoD budget in half. That's over \$300 billion per annum.

All right. Is this a serious proposal? I wonder if it might be doable by seriously reducing (eliminating?) foreign deployments. Or getting rid of weapons systems that made sense when we were planning for a war with the Soviet Union.

Anyway, hoping progressives can join the spending debate in a serious way. The conservatives already have.

50. *PatrickM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:54 pm](#)

"The time fast approaches (assuming recovery continues) where specific and permanent reductions in the federal budget will be needed. I am pretty sure that solving the structural deficit (not the cyclical deficit caused by the recession) will require more than increased taxes."

Nonsense. The problem is revenue, not extravagance with our entitlement benefits.

Earnings are only taxed for Social Security up to \$106k. Take away the cap. Problem solved for the structural deficit in that entitlement. Means-test as well, if that helps.

Make taxation for Medicare a progressive tax. Means-test also, if that helps. Problem solved for the structural deficit in that entitlement.

Realize that military spending is **discretionary** spending, stop treating it as an entitlement program for the military-industrial complex. Make an honest review of America's strategic military needs and obligations, and then streamline and modernize the military to fit the post-cold war reality. Problem solved for the structural deficit in the military.

Recognize that we have made taxes increasingly regressive in this country for 30 years, and that deficits and a shrinking middle class have been the inevitable result. Recalibrate the brackets to pre-1981 levels, remove as many loopholes for wealthy individuals and corporations as possible. Problem solved for the inadequate revenues for our reasonable discretionary spending.

51. *The Tragically Flip* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:56 pm](#)

Not all the \$300B has to come from DoD. There's massive chunks of Defense spending hidden in the Intel budget and DOE budget (nukes!). Literally hidden in the case of the intel budget.

What was the latest estimate, \$70B for Intel?

I wonder how much is saved by Obama cutting the active nuclear arsenal? Can't be cheap to keep ICBMs at 5 minutes notice-to-fire 24/7, what with people to secure, maintain, operate in shifts at whatever godforsaken remote places these things are at. Not to mention the strategic bombers and subs kept deployed 24/7.

52. *joe from Lowell* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:56 pm](#)

MarkOhio,

Yes. I think we could squeak by with a mere five carrier battle groups, vis-a-vis the rest of the world's zero. I think we could decimate our presence in Europe, seriously cut our presence in the far east, and get rid of most of our nuclear stockpile, for starters.

Also, screw the F-22. Upgrade the F-15 if the old airframes are wearing out, and go into anti-air drones.

53. *Jeffrey Davis* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 2:57 pm](#)

“Are there no prisons?” asked Scrooge.

“Plenty of prisons,” said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

“And the Union workhouses?” demanded Scrooge. “Are they still in operation?”

“They are. Still,” returned the gentleman, “I wish I could say they were not.”

“The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?” said Scrooge.

“Both very busy, sir.”

“Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course,” said Scrooge. “I’m very glad to hear it.”

“Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude,” returned the gentleman, “a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?”

“Nothing!” Scrooge replied.

“You wish to be anonymous?”

“I wish to be left alone,” said Scrooge. “Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don’t make merry myself at Christmas and I can’t afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned: they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there.”

“Many can’t go there; and many would rather die.”

“If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides — excuse me — I don’t know that.”

“But you might know it,” observed the gentleman.

“It’s not my business,” Scrooge returned. “It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people’s. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!”

54. *bperk* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 3:02 pm](#)

The time fast approaches (assuming recovery continues) where specific and permanent reductions in the federal budget will be needed. I am pretty sure that solving the structural deficit (not the cyclical deficit caused by the recession) will require more than increased taxes.

But, it just isn't true. You only have to increase revenue to address structural deficits. It doesn't matter if you are conservative or progressive, there is not enough "extra" to make a difference in our massive deficits. Cuts to the defense budget won't do it. Certainly, cuts to food stamps and housing assistance won't do it. It is a very useful exercise in reality to go through the federal budget along with the CBO's volumes of Budget Options to consider how you would balance it. You will quickly discover that all the money is available on the revenue side. As far as that goes, letting the existing tax cuts expire would make a huge difference. And, anyone who says that you can keep those tax cuts and still reduce the deficit is unserious.

55. *J Bean* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 3:02 pm](#)

Matt W and Joe from Lowell have it. You don't feed kids enough and they grow up with significant IQ and educational limitations. Instead of becoming contributing members of society, they form an underclass, are more likely to commit crime, and, in general, represent a drag on productivity. Child nutrition is a cheap investment with an excellent return. The same for early childhood education.

Oh, but wait, to a Republican an uneducated and easily exploitable underclass is a feature, not a bug.

56. *The Tragically Flip* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 3:15 pm](#)

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides — excuse me — I don't know that."

I think this cuts to the heart of conservatism and libertarianism. They simply still assume at some low level that we live in a malthusian world where there really isn't enough to go around no matter how you slice it up. So redistribution will always mean someone ends up with too little to live on.

That world GDP per capita (and food production) long ago passed a level sufficient for adequate nutrition of every human being if distributed better hasn't sunk it. In Scrooge's day this sort of thinking was more forgivable, there probably wasn't really enough to go around. Liberalism long ago took us out of the malthusian/hobbsian horror, yet conservatives still operate by that structure.

57. *joe from Lowell* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 3:37 pm](#)

Matt W and Joe from Lowell have it.

Me?!? I caught it from you!

58. *Renate* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 3:42 pm](#)

Maybe the CATO people find time to read *The Other America* by Michael Harrington.

59. *Ed Marshall* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 3:52 pm](#)

I've had more than one conversation with a libertarian that went **specifically**, "liberals think libertarians are just all about kicking people on welfare in the teeth, and they completely misunderstand us".

60. *fostert* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 4:04 pm](#)

"Fostert is, as far as I know, the only monarchist."

I'm a monarchist now? I've been called pretty much everything, but that is a first. Call me what you want, I don't care. Okay, there is one label I don't like: "Likudnik." But nobody has called me that in twenty years. And that was back when I was one.

61. *DTM* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 4:05 pm](#)

Anyway, hoping progressives can join the spending debate in a serious way. The conservatives already have.

The first thing the serious people will tell you is that the whole spending debate is really about health care costs, and everything else is small beans in comparison. Fast-forward to the end of that story, and I think you will find plenty of wonks on all sides with something to say, but not so much when it comes to politicians. And it isn't the progressive politicians who aren't being serious about the issue.

62. *cmholm* says:

[May 18th, 2010 at 4:07 pm](#)

Al (#17), if an articulate gentleman like Mr. Edwards makes a policy suggestion that has a reasonably foreseeable consequence, it's fair to suggest that he is aware of the possibility, and perhaps comfortable with that consequence.

Per Mr. Edwards: "*Food Subsidies (Food Stamps and School Lunch). Low-income families often suffer from poor food choices and obesity, not a shortage of calories. Food aid for the needy should be left to private charities. Save \$90 billion.*"

Per a [study](#) (328KB PDF) from the University of Indiana, charities spent \$19b in 2005 for "basic needs" (p30), including food and housing, out of \$252b total giving. Mr. Edwards may think that donations will just magically switch from the philharmonic to more food, but his other suggestions would demand more from the charitable sector than the added food. He's merely guessing at the results.

[About Work Room](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy \(off-site\)](#) | [RSS](#) | [Donate](#)

© 2005-2008 Center for American Progress Action Fund