

The Failure of Progressivism

In the Public Interest- Chronicle Guest View

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By John Hendrickson

Investor's Business Daily in a recent editorial reported that the federal government "has spent \$3.7 trillion on welfare in the past five years, with virtually nothing to show for it." Adding more dismal news the economy continues to grow at a slow pace and unemployment remains high. The federal government also is facing a budget crisis as Congress is in the process of negotiating a budget deal in the aftermath of the shutdown and the debt ceiling compromise. With more people becoming dependent on government programs, a lackluster economy with high unemployment, a dangerous debt crisis, and the failure of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), it appears that progressivism and its philosophy of "big government" has failed.

Many Americans are struggling to make ends meet in the aftermath of the Great Recession. It is estimated that 49 percent of Americans receive some form of assistance from various government programs. Overall the federal government continues to spend more on welfare/poverty programs since President Lyndon B. Johnson declared war on poverty with his Great Society. Michael Tanner, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, wrote that "despite nearly \$15 trillion in total welfare spending since Lyndon Johnson declared war on poverty in 1964, the poverty rate is perilously close to where we began more than 40 years ago."

This growing dependency on the government is also directly tied to the unemployment crisis. President Obama's economic agenda of higher spending, higher levels of taxation, higher levels of regulation, and transformative programs such as the PPACA have all resulted in slow economic growth and policy uncertainty. In fact today's college-age generation is being referred to as the "lost generation" because of the difficulty in finding employment while faced with paying off high levels of student-loan debt.

At the heart of this problem is the issue of government spending. Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL), who serves as the Ranking Member of the Budget Committee, stated that "in the last five years, Washington spent more than \$15 trillion and added more than \$6 trillion to the debt." The result, as Senator Sessions explains is "never has so great a sum been spent for so little return." "Despite this huge stimulus spending, wages are lower than in 1999 and nearly 60 million working-age Americans aren't working," added Senator Sessions. The national debt of \$17 trillion also gets worse when the costs of entitlement programs (Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid) are taken into consideration along with the impact of the PPACA.

The progressive policies being implemented by President Obama have failed. The current disastrous implementation of the PPACA is proof. More spending will not solve our problems with unemployment and government dependency. It is time for policymakers to consider solutions based on limited-government principles. National problems do not necessarily require solutions from the federal government.

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