



## Governing Is About Choices, Even on Disaster Aid

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May 23, 2013

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*About Michael D. Tanner:*

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Oklahoma Republican Senator Tom Coburn has been criticized for suggesting that any money appropriated to pay for disaster relief for Oklahoma should be offset by spending cuts elsewhere in the federal budget. But Coburn is right.

Whenever a disaster like the Oklahoma tornado strikes, our hearts go out to the victims. The American people, who are among the most generous on Earth, can be expected to rush to provide money and other charitable assistance.

But as the government begins to provide assistance, we also must face the cold, hard arithmetic. We don't have an unlimited amount of money. The donation I make personally to help the victims of this or any disaster means that I have less money to spend elsewhere. It is no different for the federal government.

In fact, in some ways, it is even more relevant. The federal government is already massively in debt. Every extra dollar we spend today is a dollar that comes at the expense of our children and grandchildren. There is no real compassion in adding to their future burdens.

In addition, requiring offsetting cuts might cause legislators to think twice about loading disaster relief bills with unrelated pork. Recall that assistance in the wake of Hurricane Katrina passed out money for some two dozen states, including Iowa, Michigan, and Utah, which were nowhere near the hurricane. And the Hurricane Sandy relief bill included funds for everything from Alaskan fisheries and Head Start to the prison at Guantanamo Bay.

Governing is about making choices. If we choose to help the suffering people of Oklahoma, we may have to choose not to do something else of lesser priority. That's not hard-hearted, it's common sense.