



Washington vs. America

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The role of government, in a democratic republic, is to safeguard and promote the interests of the people. In America, the government has taken a different route. Through extensive taxation, massive government outlays, and bloated bureaucratic salaries, the government is promoting its own interests at the expense of the public at large.

It is becoming increasingly clear that America's political class-bureaucrats, elected representatives, and other federal employees-are unashamed at milking the private sector of its resources even in a time of recession and widespread economic suffering. To take an obvious example: In December, when unemployment was over ten percent, Congress approved a two percent pay raise for all federal workers.

This came at a time when 71 percent of Americans, according to Rasmussen Reports, believed that "the federal government has become a special interest group that looks out primarily for its own interests." A more complete examination of federal pay, compared to compensation in the private sector, serves to justify this perception.

According to the Cato Institute, federal employee compensation, taking into account benefits as well as salary, is, on average, double that of employees in the private sector. Obviously, this difference cannot be justified on the basis of merit: consider, for instance, that the American Federation of Teachers publicly opposes merit pay.

Over the past two years-the rough duration of the recession thus far-the private sector lost 7.3 million jobs, while the public sector actually added 98,000 jobs. Total private sector employment has been reduced to 1990s levels.

Compensation for government employees, over the past three years, rose 42 percent faster than private sector compensation. During that time period, compensation for private workers rose 6.5 percent while compensation for their public counterparts increased 9.2 percent. In 2008, average compensation for a federal employee was \$120,000!

These statistics present an unmistakable picture of government growing and prospering even while the private sector, the primary source of government revenue, falters. And Washington continues to ramp up spending and government employee salaries while simultaneously calling for increased taxation on an already suffering population.

Coupled with this objectionable trend is the fact that, for the first time in history, a majority of union members are government employees. Union membership continues to climb among federal employees and drop among private employees. In 2009, 7.2 percent of private workers were unionized, while 37.4 percent of government employees belonged to unions.

The aims of these unions directly contradict the interests of the public at large. For government unions, the goal is to acquire increased funding-either through reallocation from existing programs, or increased revenue-for their members. The economic state of the general public is irrelevant to these concerns. As a result, there exists a large subclass within the government itself whose interests clash with those of the public.

Direct taxation in order to benefit government employees is not the only tool employed by the government to the detriment of the general public. Government expenditures, when they exceed a certain percentage of GDP, actually crowd out private growth-adding yet another layer of harm to the private sector. Since 1950, periods in which the tax-to-GDP ratio has been higher than 18 percent (it is currently 24 percent), the economy has grown at a rate 1.5 percent below what it grew in low-tax years.

The government, then-created to serve and benefit the people-is doing substantial economic harm to the public both through its compensation practices (accompanied by high levels of taxation) and by crowding out private growth with extensive government outlays. In short, the government is acting against the interest of private citizens in order to enrich itself.

There are a variety measures that can be taken to halt or reverse the preying of government on the private sector. First, government compensation could be tagged to private compensation so that average public sector pay would be barred from exceeding, for instance, average private sector pay.

In terms of the more systemic concerns regarding total government expenditures, government spending could be legislatively restricted to a certain percentage of GDP, for example, 15-18 percent. Another possible option would be to ban unions among government workers.

In a republic where the leaders answer to the people, government should serve the citizens-not the other way around. Currently the government is acting to the great detriment of the citizens in order to further its own interests; in so doing it steps far beyond the bounds of limited and legitimate government. The justification that it acts "for the common good" no longer applies. This is an unacceptable trend and the voting public must demand that elected representatives be held accountable.

Austin Raynor is a staff columnist for The DSJ. His views do not necessarily represent those of the entire staff.

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