

## A gripe about the tax gripes

Written by

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3:39 PM, Jun. 17, 2011|

People who scream about taxes gripe me — just as shoplifters gripe me. They want stuff, but they don't want to pay for it. If I want something, I expect to pay.

Historically, Americans have been like me. Colonists had no objection to taxes; it was “taxation without representation.” Whiskey Rebellion protesters wanted fair taxes for small farmers and tax money spent for roads. In the presidential election of 1912, all three candidates supported the Sixteenth Amendment, which approved an income tax. Anti-tax sentiment didn't come to America until the 1970s — when world problems had become so complex and without solution that many taxpayers saw taxes as money wasted.

But it's not wasted. In fact, all of us assume government every day. We expect that government, on some level, will make our food safe, control infectious disease, approve our drugs, teach our children, police our streets, care for our veterans, etc. When we drive over potholes, we mutter unkind things at ... somebody in government, somewhere. People were upset that they didn't get more warning before the recent tornadoes. In the Depression of the 1930s, hard times

meant starvation. In the depression we're struggling through now, we have safety nets. We aren't alone. Our lives as we know them today would collapse without significant government involvement. We depend on government services. We should pay for them.

I think most foot soldiers in the tea party movement are sincere. They want government to manage its finances the way they manage theirs. But I also believe that in the shadows behind the tea party, there are people who are not sincere, who use “low tax” as a ruse for weakening government. Then their benefactors — the very rich and large corporations — can gain greater advantage.

Their theoretician is a man named Grover Norquist (his Wikipedia article opens, “Norquist grew up wealthy”). He is famous for his quote, “Our goal is to shrink government to the size where we can drown it in a bathtub.” He doesn't want government to stay within its means like a family; he wants government out of the way

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altogether.

I say “theoretician” because his idea of no-tax, shrink-government has never been done successfully. It's theory. Ronald Reagan talked, but as libertarian Ron Paul said, “Since (1981) Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party have given us skyrocketing deficits and, astoundingly, a doubled national debt.” George W. Bush talked, too, but as the libertarian Cato Institute observed, “Total government spending grew by 33 percent during Bush's first term.”

States where Republicans gained power this year are racing higgledy-piggledy into a twilight zone. Can states slash money for education, for example, and not pay dearly in the future? And will they make a mess too big for Democrats to fix?

Lee Ballard lives in Mars Hill.

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