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Don't Give Up on the American People...at Least not Yet

by [Dan Mitchell](#)

Gloominess and despair are not uncommon traits among supporters of limited government – and with good reason. Government has [grown rapidly in recent years and it is expected to get much bigger in the future](#). To make matters worse, it seems that the deck is stacked against reforms to restrain government. One problem is that 47 percent of Americans are exempt from paying income taxes, which presumably means they no longer have any incentive to resist big government.



Mark Steyn recently wrote a [very depressing column](#) for National Review Online about this phenomenon, noting that, “By 2012, America could be holding the first federal election in which a majority of the population will be able to vote themselves more government lollipops paid for by the ever shrinking minority of the population still dumb enough to be net contributors to the federal treasury.” Walter Williams, meanwhile, has a [new column](#) speculating on whether this cripples the battle for freedom:

According to the Tax Policy Center, a Washington, D.C., research organization, nearly half of U.S. households will pay no federal income taxes for 2009...because their incomes are too low or they have higher income but credits, deductions and exemptions that relieve them of tax liability. This lack of income tax liability stands in stark contrast to the top 10 percent of earners, those households earning an average of \$366,400 in 2006, who paid about 73 percent of federal income taxes. ...Let's not dwell on the fairness of such an arrangement for financing the activities of the federal government. Instead, let's ask what kind of incentives and results such an arrangement produces and ask ourselves whether these results are good for our country. ...Having 121 million Americans completely outside the federal income tax system, it's like throwing chum to political sharks. These Americans become a natural spending constituency for big-spending politicians. After all, if you have no income tax liability, how much do you care about deficits, how much Congress spends and the level of taxation?

Steyn and Williams are right to worry, but the situation is not as grim as it seems for the simple reason that a good portion of the American people know the difference between right and wrong. Consider some of the [recent polling data](#) from Rasmussen, which found that “Sixty-six percent (66%) believe that America is overtaxed. Only 25% disagree. Lower income voters are more likely than others to believe the nation is overtaxed” and “75% of voters nationwide say the average American should pay no more than 20% of their income in taxes.” These numbers contradict the hypothesis that 47 percent of Americans (those that don't pay income tax) are automatic supporters of [class-warfare policy](#).

So why are the supposed free-riders not signing on to the Obama-Reid-Pelosi agenda? There are probably several reasons, including the fact that many Americans believe in upward mobility, so even if their incomes currently are too low to pay income tax, they aspire to earn more in the future and don't want higher tax rates on the rich to serve as a barrier. I'm not a polling expert, but I also suspect there's a moral component to these numbers. There's no way to prove this assertion, but I am quite sure that the vast majority of hard-working Americans with modest incomes would never even contemplate breaking into a rich neighbor's house and stealing the family jewelry. So it is perfectly logical that they wouldn't support using the IRS as a middleman to do the same thing.

A few final tax observations:

The hostility to taxation also represents opposition to big government (at least in theory). Rasmussen also [recently found that](#), "Just 23% of U.S. voters say they prefer a more active government with more services and higher taxes over one with fewer services and lower taxes. ... Two-thirds (66%) of voters prefer a government with fewer services and lower taxes."

There is a giant divide between the political elite and ordinary Americans. Rasmussen's [polling](#) revealed that, "Eighty-one percent (81%) of Mainstream American voters believe the nation is overtaxed, while 74% of those in the Political Class disagree."

Voters do not want a value-added tax or any other form of national sales tax. They are not against the idea as a theoretical concept, but they wisely recognize the politicians are greedy and untrustworthy. Rasmussen [found that](#) "just 26% of all voters think that it is even somewhat likely the government would cut income taxes after implementing a sales tax. Sixty-six percent (66%) believe it's unlikely to happen."

[Fiscal restraint](#) is a necessary precondition for any pro-growth tax reform. If given [a choice between a flat tax, national sales tax, value-added tax, or the current system](#), many Americans want reform, but it is very difficult to have a good tax system if the burden of government spending is rising. Likewise, it would be very easy to have a good tax system if we had a federal government that was limited to the duties outlined in Article I, Section VIII, of the Constitution.

Republicans should never acquiesce to higher taxes. All these good numbers and optimistic findings are dependent on voters facing a clear choice between higher taxes and bigger government vs lower taxes and limited government. If Republicans inside the beltway get seduced into a "budget summit" where taxes are "on the table," that creates a very unhealthy dynamic where voters instinctively try to protect themselves by supporting taxes on somebody else – and the so-called rich are the easiest target.

Last but not least, I can't resist pointing out that I am part of a debate for U.S. News & World Report on the [flat tax vs. the current system](#). For those of you who have an opinion on this matter, don't hesitate to [cast a vote](#).



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[MarkG](#) 101p · 1 hour ago +2

"No Representation Without Taxation"
It is not your money

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[macvettes](#) 87p · 57 minutes ago +3

The light at the end of my personal tunnel is history. The last time we had an administration comparable to this one in any way (Carter) it only lasted 4 years, and the country promptly snapped out of the hysteria and elected one of the greatest and most conservative presidents ever: Reagan.

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[FreeKirk](#) 56p · 54 minutes ago +3

I haven't given up on the people, but they, the corrupt elite, will not go into the night willingly or give up their seat of power

without trying to corrupt the system even further before they depart. I do not trust the power hungry mob who have forsaken the Constitution of the United States.

We, the people are the rightful masters of both Congress and the courts, not to overthrow the Constitution, but to overthrow men who pervert the Constitution. - Abraham Lincoln

Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect every one who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force. Whenever you give up that force, you are inevitably ruined. - Patrick Henry, speech in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, June 5, 1778

An unlimited power to tax involves, necessarily, a power to destroy; because there is a limit beyond which no institution and no property can bear taxation. - John Marshall, McCullough v. Maryland, 1819

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 [Ellie](#) · 52 minutes ago +3

People are hurting for jobs and Obama is pretending to be fighting his friends on Wall-St. It is like playing chess in Versailles when the hungry crowd is waiting at the gates. Americans will not give up. They need Obama out - to survive.

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 [onecent](#) 78p · 52 minutes ago +4

I'll throw in the towel on maybe more than half of my fellow citizens if the 2010 mid-term elections are an opportunity lost because of voter hubris and stupidity. Obama is a mistake that you make once. At this point if you are undecided or clueless as to what is going on then you are irrevocably a huge part of the problem and not deserving of this great country.

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 Zack · 42 minutes ago +2

I think we, the Tea Party, will be out in more strength than those of the community organizers. This coupled with the added fear, disdain, and mistrust of the government will send the voters in on November 2010 to vote Washington out and replace them with new blood. This is the only way we will see any change in our government.

Look at the Goldman Sachs catastrophe, it isn't just the Dems that take the money, Sen. Demint took it as well in March. Who ever wants our backing needs to return the money. Forget about the donations in the way past for people that lost the battles, but if you are in power and received large amounts of money, give it back. Here are some of the things happening with Goldman Sach and the Democrats: <http://www.americanparchment.com/library/financia...>

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 A.Men · 42 minutes ago +2

By 2012, the Thug-in-Chief, will have the means to steal the election for himself. Amnesty for all Obama-voters, ACORN, and Holder will put the nail in the coffin of a free, democratic election. Unless the patriots organize to prevent this theft of our freedoms.

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 Richard Williams · 37 minutes ago +3

There's much more to being pro freedom and anti-statist than just taxes. Case in point. Two of my children received the 1st time home buyer's rebate (\$8000) this year in ADDITION to their rather huge refunds. Another daughter and son in law got a huge tax refund. Only 2 of my six children actually paid anything in. Yet they all oppose the socialist agenda, Obamacare, statism, etc. IF I paid 0 taxes and the Democrats promised me a monthly check to live on for the rest of my life, I would still vote against them.

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 Richard Williams · 36 minutes ago +1

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 [ritasowders1972](#) 70p · 34 minutes ago +2

We're fighting back hard and we're winning. Of course the liberal news media won't report that, nor the liberal congressmen and senators won't admit that either.

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 [rckmom](#) 103p · 32 minutes ago

+2


"History by apprising [citizens] of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views."

Thomas Jefferson,

We cannot give up! To do so we lose everything that our ancestors gave their lives for!!!

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 [Richard Williams](#) · 32 minutes ago

0

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 [William Z](#) 63p · 31 minutes ago

+1

The problem is only "Income tax" is used as the basis for the 'over taxation argument.' The fact of the matter is, all people pay some form of sales tax, which includes little kids buying a toy with their birthday money. Just think of the price of gasoline. It was up to four bucks a gallon, and will be again, because of taxes, which affect everyone who has to get to work. Most pay local taxes and state taxes, and let us not forget the local school district. There's the property tax, and of course, the Death tax. And this is just the tip of the taxation iceberg. Taxation hurts the little guy as well.

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 [ngj](#) · 28 minutes ago

0

"One problem is that 47 percent of Americans are exempt from paying income taxes, which presumably means they no longer have any incentive to resist big government."

As you later pointed out, this is not true at all. People on welfare and living on the dole have no desire to resist big government, but working people who are just under the threshold for paying federal income taxes realize that if the government grows bigger, they are likely to have to start paying taxes.

"Republicans should never acquiesce to higher taxes."

Agreed. But a flat tax would result in higher taxes on low and middle-income workers. I don't understand how you can complain about 47% of households not paying income taxes but then say Republicans should never raise taxes. This would have to mean that this 47% would have to either stay the same or grow. I'm no mathematician but I think that going from paying no taxes to paying taxes would qualify as a tax increase. Personally, I have no problem with 47% of households not paying federal income taxes. Federal income taxes were originally intend to apply to only the super-wealthy. The less people who pay taxes, the less people who will have that aspect of their lives controlled by the government.

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 [Pedrosito48](#) 58p · 24 minutes ago

+1

If we don't turn back this fiscal nightmare with the 2010 election, we will face certain disaster. The deficit numbers are staggering, hell this probably will be the whole ballgame.

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 [Paul](#) · 24 minutes ago

0

It all started in 1913 and it will all end by November 2012. Otherwise, start learning to say 'comrade'.

Reply

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 [CHICAGO RALPH](#) · 23 minutes ago

0

The outcome of the coming election in November will be as a result of two very compelling factors.

- 1) The ability of the Left, MSM, state officials and community organizations, such as remnants of ACORN to determine the voting results,..... and or,.....
- 2) The ability of a large portion of American people to wake up and accurately interpret what is going on in this country and OUT vote any other force.

Reply

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 [Equal Pay Gal](#) · 8 minutes ago

0

The most important public opinion poll took place in November 8. The American people voted for a more humane society,

one where rich people pull their weight and give back some of what they've taken.

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midwestmomma · 6 minutes ago

0

WOAH, ngj flawed logic alert! Are we as a people each and everyone equal, yes or no? Just curious, do you pay taxes? I can't help but think that if you did, you'd have put a little more thought into the subject, your comments are confusing.

Fewer people paying more taxes, mean those people are "slaves" to the non payers, yes? Or at least the non-payers are our human pets? When the so called wealthy, have fewer expendable dollars in their pockets to go to a restaurant, movies, shop, etc. - who loses their job? -Not the wealthy. The contraction in the economy is 100% Washingtons fault, PLEASE READ the article called 545 vs. 300 million by Charlie Reese. It explains everything.

The only proven way to increase tax receipts in D.C. is to lower taxes ala Reagan or Kennedy, I would personally prefer a cut like Kennedy did. Kind of a- If you love someone, set them free, thing.

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[KristineFromNYC](#) 73p · 2 minutes ago

+1

I like the whole flat tax idea, for everyone. Simple, and everyone has a stake in the game. Nuff Said.

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