



## “Big Bird has to die,” CATO senior fellow says

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Uh oh, liberals. Those pesky right-wingers are after Sesame Street... again!

“Big Bird has to die,” joked [Tom Palmer, senior fellow and director of CATO University](#), on Thursday night. “But I think Big Bird actually can support itself in the market very effectively,” he added, more seriously.

Palmer was one of four experts to speak about the impact of young people upon the future of this country, at an event titled, “Millennials and the Welfare State: Burden or Blessing?” The event, a student forum hosted by the [public policy research organization CATO Institute](#), also featured CATO Senior Fellow [Michael Tanner](#), Brookings Institution Senior Fellow [William Galston](#) and CATO Director of Student Programs [Chip Bishop](#). The conversation presented varying views on the status of America and its welfare system.

After jesting about Big Bird, [a recently controversial topic after Mitt Romney brought it up in the first presidential debate](#), Palmer admitted that the federal subsidies to public broadcasting are “just a drop in the bucket.” Palmer’s statement echoes [remarks made by a CATO Institute legal scholar](#) last week about the minimal amount of federal funds PBS does in fact receive. “Big Bird only consumes ... seed,” Palmer said dryly, drawing raucous laughter from the young crowd in attendance. He said government programs need to be examined to determine which ones can be cut, since the current system is unaffordable.

“We are in an orgy of public spending in this country,” he said. “And there are other countries we can look to for much more sober approaches.” As an example, Palmer referenced the lack of housing subsidies in Canada, where discussions about decreasing the number of welfare systems has resulted in cutbacks.

“And lo and behold — I actually went to Canada — they have homes,” he quipped. “I was shocked. There was no government program to encourage home ownership, and there they were, in their homes. It was really amazing.”

Palmer encouraged young people to save their own money instead of relying on Social Security, Medicare or other future benefits. Tanner told the audience there was nothing wrong with getting rich and preventing oneself from living off of society. Bishop instructed the young adults in the crowd to become informed on the issue of the welfare state and consistently let others challenge their beliefs on it, in order to refine their views.

And while several of the speakers stressed a moral obligation to ensure older adults still retain the benefits for which they have worked and paid, Palmer said young adults need to step up and stop the government reliance. He stressed there is no time to waste, since every day the problem goes unaddressed it gets worse.

“I think it’s really time to take the axe, right directly to the trunk of this tree and chop it down,” he said. “The welfare state really has to go, and I think it’s your generation that should stand up and say, ‘You know, we want to be more responsible than our elders’.”

And the first step to that responsibility just might be knocking Big Bird’s nest out of the tree.