

Americans unwilling to foot the bill for the many services they expect

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Be Counted

Are we living beyond our means? Well, we are if you include our mortgage debts and other loans. However, I'm not writing about this, since we hopefully can make the monthly payments on these loans.

What I am writing about is that we want something for nothing. Of course, who doesn't? Look at the lotteries and casinos that abound. My concern is on a more serious note, that we are hurting our society because we want services but are unwilling to pay for them. Take for example local taxes: real estate and state taxes. I am sure there is a lot of waste and corruption in government, but the overwhelming majority of taxes are used for a purpose that the citizens or their elected representatives demand. Since we re-elect our state and local representatives in high numbers, one can assume that we are happy with these expenditures.

So why all the yelling about rising taxes? Do we support cuts in the budget? If so, make a list and send it to your representative, either in Trenton or in Washington. Of course, don't go cutting other people's services. Don't cut that road in Virginia, cut the one in your town. Cut the services your town offers — the library, the community center, the butterfly park (no kidding, the town I live in has one!), or any of the other "necessities" that we demand. Or vote the official out of office if your demands are not met.

Many of our national issues also flow from a similar denial of paying for what we need or want. We allow illegal immigration, even though it results in a significant increase in crime in the Mexican border region and allows terrorists to enter the country, so that certain businesses can hire cheap labor. In many border areas, hospitals have had to close, towns have had to beef up their police forces, and crime — some of it violent — has soared because of illegal immigration. We know that our lawns are taken care of by undocumented workers. Some of us hire a nanny and don't worry about her "legality." Would you like to pay more for the lawn guy to hire Americans to do your lawn? Or for the restaurateur to hire Americans to do the dishes? Many entry-level positions that illegal immigrants now occupy were the domain of teens and other less-skilled workers. Labor has been hurt tremendously due to the existence of millions of jobs that are underpaid and without worker rights. And yet, we the people are very disturbed by this issue, but I don't know if we are willing to pay Americans more to do the same work. Our two political parties just don't care. They are pandering all around.

On another level, American graduate schools in the sciences and engineering are primarily populated by foreign students. Americans are rarely interested in graduate school in engineering because the salaries obtained after graduation are not high enough, and we don't pay our students high enough fellowships to make the five years of graduate study necessary to earn a Ph.D. in engineering attractive. Shouldn't we offer better fellowships to American graduate students? Our society and our defense depend on a large population of engineers. Do we really want to outsource our engineering research and design overseas? Do we want our civilian and defense infrastructure in the hands of Americans?

Another recent example of not paying our way is the expansion of eminent domain by the U.S. Supreme Court. The new ruling says that the constitutional right to property is now subservient to towns and developers, who see no problem with condemning someone's home so that it can be replaced by a property with a higher tax-revenue potential. Before this ruling, eminent domain was used sparingly and for the larger public good, for building hospitals, schools, roads and eliminating slums. Now it can be used to pay off the developer who donated a thousand dollars to the town politician.

There are many other examples. But unless we are willing to pay the true cost of what we desire, we will be hurting our society and ourselves. Signs are all around us that prove this point.

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