

## Other Musings

Regarding Liberty and the Bill of Rights and the Freedom of Speech....

The Left's ideology and their definition of "acceptable politically correct speech" run roughshod over the individual. This attack on individual Liberty is ultimately extremely dangerous. Our Editorial Board believes in our citizens' unfettered right to free speech. This includes those situations where the expression of controversial views (even by the lunatic fringe of either the Left or the Right) is abhorrent to the vast majority of everyone else in civil society.

*Sticks and stones my break my bones, but words will never hurt me.* It is true that "hate speech" (by its very definition) is hateful. However, every individual is free to make their own decisions in life, and develop their own set of values. Your rejection of speech that you deem to be hateful can even serve to strengthen your own set of values. Every citizen should be concerned about any limitations on our First Amendment rights, because the next attack on "hate speech" might be defined by (and might be carried out by) someone with a different viewpoint, and it might be directed towards eliminating one of your own personal values.

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*If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.* - James Madison, in The Federalist # 51

Unfortunately, men are not angels, and history includes innumerable examples of where political power plus money (especially when it's someone else's money) has led to corruption.

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Also unfortunately, there is plenty of "private" money (from both the Left and the Right) that is sloshing around in the swamp. Special interests and crony capitalism abound within the swamp. And then there are the career politicians who do not have any qualms about using our citizens' own tax dollars to buy votes by bribing the citizenry with our own tax dollars.

*An avaricious man might be tempted to betray the interest of the state for the acquisition of wealth.* - Alexander Hamilton

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Inflation is a tax on the prudent, who have to stand by and watch the value of their bank accounts and bond investments magically disappear. Inflation is a subsidy for scam artists who can borrow money for harebrained schemes and pay it back later with money that has no value. And inflation is a hardship for the old and the poor, who live on fixed incomes. Government deficits are well-hidden from the public and are less immediately painful than high inflation or huge tax increases, although constantly re-occurring deficits eventually lead to both.

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Over the past 50-60 years or so, the federal government's elites and its "experts" have attempted to "socially engineer" our country's citizens via manipulations and changes to the US tax code. This is part of the reason why the US tax code is now over 74,000 pages long. Our Editorial Board believes that it is time for We-the-People to begin to socially re-engineer the federal government, and divert funds away from the federal government and towards Not-for-Profit charities and other local community groups that can actually help those people who are in need, so that those individuals / families can lift themselves out of poverty.

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*It will be of little avail to the people, that the laws are made by men of their own choice, if the laws be so voluminous that they cannot be read, or so incoherent that they cannot be understood.* – Alexander Hamilton

It is time to "socially re-engineer" the federal government, and begin dismantling the Administrative State by eliminating all counter-productive regulations that have been implemented over the years.

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The reason why our Editorial Board characterizes *The 2020 Initiative* as being a "nonpartisan" solution to help correct the country's growing debt problem is that it includes provisions that run counter to the tenets of both political parties. In other words, it will take bipartisan compromise to implement the recommendations that are included in *The 2020 Initiative*.

The Right needs to acknowledge that wealthy individuals will need to continue to be the primary source of funds for both the operation of the federal government and for civil society. The Left needs to acknowledge that each citizen needs to take Personal Responsibility for their own life. Although our Editorial Board agrees that reducing the size and scope of the federal government and the level of taxation would most definitely have a positive effect on the economy's growth rate, we do not feel that tax revenues should be decreased (yet) until the year that the federal government's annual deficit has been eliminated. And although we support the concept of a flat tax rate that should be applied at the same rate on the taxable income for all citizens, the majority of our Editorial Board agrees that progressive tax rates will need to remain in place until the federal government has begun to repay the cumulative debt. And we also mostly agree that the "death tax" (aka the estate tax) should not be repealed until the federal government's cumulative debt has been repaid.

The Left needs to give up its tactic of buying people's votes with other people's money. The Left also needs to disavow Socialism and Big Government, and agree that the federal government should focus **only** on those responsibilities that are listed in the US Constitution. This means that we need to correct the fundamental flaws of Social Security and other welfare programs, eliminate these programs from federal government spending, and rely upon civil society to take care of people who are in need of assistance. It is time to dismantle the Administrative State and allow civil society to re-establish itself. Charitable contributions will naturally flow to those social service agencies and local community groups that prove to be the

most effective in fulfilling their organization's mission, rather than having those funds coercively sent to the federal government to be squandered.

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In *The 2020 Initiative* we recommend the establishment of four "pass-through" national charities that would collect charitable contributions for food, housing, education, and healthcare. Citizens would make these contributions, based on which charity that they would like to support. Each charity would then have a pool of funds that they would remit to the states. We make this recommendation under the condition that these pass-through entities would be totally free from the political machinations of Washington DC.

These charities would simply collect funds, process the necessary paperwork, and remit the collected funds back to the 50 states, based solely on the data regarding "need" that is collected each year by the IRS on annual income tax returns. Each charity's funds would be distributed to the states based solely on the number of citizens in each state who are requesting financial assistance / welfare. To further help remove the influence of politics on these charities' operations, maybe these charities should be located in America's heartland (like maybe Iowa). Our federal government could save a substantial amount of money by transforming (and essentially eliminating) the Departments of Education, Health & Human Services, Housing & Urban Development, and Agriculture.

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In addition to 100% tax credits for donations to these four national pass-through charities, taxpayers should be able to get a 50% tax credit for contributions to their own local community groups, religious organizations, and local social services agencies, to ensure that the money is kept locally and targeted to the group(s) that each taxpayer would like to support. There are already several websites, such as [CharityWatch.org](http://CharityWatch.org), [CharityNavigator.org](http://CharityNavigator.org), [Give.org](http://Give.org), [GuideStar.org](http://GuideStar.org), and [GiveWell.org](http://GiveWell.org) that are available to assist taxpayers in making their decisions on where their donations would be most effective. These sites provide information on a charity's operations, including Program Expenditures in comparison to their "overhead", the governance and transparency of their operations, and the salaries of top employees of the charity. Information that is included in the organization's annual tax filing (Form 990) is also available to the public on some of these sites, to assist taxpayers in their decision making.

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Here is a perverse federal income tax policy - - If you and/or your family don't make enough money, you don't have the same Personal Responsibility as other citizens to file an annual (truthful) income tax return. Does this somehow perversely encourage citizens to operate in the underground economy? (Possibly - - Didn't Al Capone get tripped up by this requirement?) Also, does this somehow perversely incentivize people to not make enough income, so they can avoid having the Personal Responsibility to file a tax return with the federal government? Shouldn't we be able to make the process of filing an annual tax return less complicated?

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One of the changes we are recommending in *The 2020 Initiative* is to require every citizen to be accounted for every year via an annual federal income tax return. This recommendation is not being put forward in order to require the poor to pay taxes - - No one should have to pay federal income taxes until they have earned enough income to cover the applicable federal poverty guideline amount. The primary reason for this requirement is to establish a process whereby the government can annually determine whether an individual / family should continue to receive welfare benefits for the upcoming year, and whether that individual / family is making progress on their journey towards self-sufficiency. The Social Security Administration should evolve into an organization that moves away from being a “dispenser of cash benefits” to a consultative organization that can direct people in need towards the appropriate charities and local social services agencies, and assist these individuals / families on their journey out of poverty.

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In addition to establishing eligibility for welfare benefits, there are several other benefits that arise from a requirement that every US citizen be accounted for each year in connection with the annual tax return process. All of the pertinent data that the federal government needs to possess on individual citizens is already included in the Social Security Administration’s database (name, address, date of birth, and Social Security number). And the information that is submitted on the tax return identifies all of the individuals that are included within that family unit for that year. If you truly believe in a color blind society and in the concept of Favoritism to None, there isn’t any reason for the federal government to gather or maintain any other information on our country’s citizens (such as heritage or race).

The annual update of the SSA’s database of all US citizens should allow the government to avoid having to perform an expensive census every ten years. We recommend that the GAO (Government Accountability Office) oversee the reconciliation of the number of citizens per the IRS and the SSA each year. The GAO can also assist the United State Census Bureau in performing a “hard scrub” of the SSA database every ten years, in lieu of performing a separate “once every ten years” census.

The information in the SSA’s database would also be the source of definitive data for use by other government agencies. This information should be utilized by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to resolve any questions about citizenship or immigration status. We also recommend that the SSA database be updated each year in regards to visas and green cards, along with the reporting of US income earned by non-citizens that has been reported to the Internal Revenue Service.

This definitive data on our country’s citizens should also be pushed out each year to the 50 states’ Board of Elections, to ensure that every state maintains clean voter rolls.

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During the 1930s, the federal government established the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to employ millions of people to carry out public works projects. Our Editorial Board does not advocate the re-creation of a similar agency, but we do suggest that there are a number of “minimal skills level” positions that need to be filled within federal, state, and local governmental units and the Not-for-Profit sector. As we noted above in regards to a transformed Social Security Administration, we suggest that the local SSA office be kept apprised of all job openings within their area in the government sector and in the Not-for-Profit sector. Welfare recipients should be encouraged to pursue these openings as a first step towards re-establishing employment, and which could ultimately lead to a higher level position within such an organization, or ultimately into a better paying job in the private sector.

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Scottish history professor Alexander Tytler (1747-1813) once observed that “A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy.” Tytler also warned us that the world’s greatest civilizations have all progressed through the following sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to great courage, from courage to liberty, from liberty to abundance, from abundance to complacency, from complacency to apathy, from apathy to dependence, and from dependence back into bondage.

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There is about \$180 billion worth of gold in Ft. Knox. The federal government’s deficit for the fiscal year ending on September 30, 2017 is expected be approximately \$600 billion. The total “on book” debt of the federal government as of September 30, 2017 (excluding the present value of Social Security and Medicare “promises”) is in excess of \$20 trillion.

Contrary to the accounting practices that must be followed by businesses in the private sector, the federal government does not currently record the present value of unfunded pensions and post-retirement obligations that have been promised under Social Security and Medicare. However, these (huge) amounts are disclosed in the Social Security and Medicare Trustees’ annual reports. The present value of unfunded Social Security “promises” is \$15.4 trillion, and the present value of Medicare “promises” is \$33.5 trillion. Even though our country’s citizens are finally beginning to become alarmed about the \$20 trillion of “on book” debt, they haven’t even begun to focus (yet) on the \$48.9 trillion of “off book” liabilities that have been promised by our federal government.

Isn’t it “funny” that businesses in the private sector are required to account for, and disclose, the present value of these kinds of promises?

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Our federal government's growing debt problem represents a complete and unequivocal failure of country's leadership. Congress controls the purse strings. Well, sort of, when you exclude "mandatory" spending. But Congress could control that too, if they had the political will to do so. Our country's Founders warned us about politicians bribing us with our own money (or in the case of deficits and debt, our children's and grandkid's money). They also warned us about human nature, and how easy it would be for our elected officials to create an elite "governing class". Congress' approval rating is at a historic low. And yet over 98% of congressional incumbents who ran for re-election in the last cycle kept their seats in the House and Senate. It is time to change the Constitution, and implement Term Limits for members of the US House of Representatives and the US Senate.

Unfortunately, it appears that Congress will never move forward with an amendment to establish Term Limits for themselves. In 1996, GOP Leadership brought to a vote, in both the House and Senate, a constitutional amendment. It failed to secure the necessary two-thirds vote in the House, where 80 percent of Republicans voted for it and 80 percent of Democrats voted against it. Every Senate Republican voted to allow a vote on term limits, but the Democrats killed it by a filibuster.

Fortunately, our country's Founders provided We-the-People with the means to work around such a Congressional roadblock. Under Article V of the Constitution, all it requires is to have 34 of the 50 states call for a Convention of States. Such a convention would propose amendments to the US Constitution to impose fiscal restraints on the federal government, limit the power and jurisdiction of the federal government, and limit the terms of office for its officials and for members of Congress. We encourage every citizen to visit the website [www.conventionofstates.com](http://www.conventionofstates.com) to learn more about the Article V solution, because..... *whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government.*

As we have mentioned elsewhere on our website, our Editorial Board does not believe that there is anything fundamentally wrong with the way the US Constitution was written. In fact, it's still a pretty good "social contract" that should not be abolished. However, the liberal/progressive movement has "fundamentally transformed" some of the key principles that were laid out by our country's Founders. The Left has generally ignored many of the warnings that were laid out in the Federalist Papers and in Thomas Paine's pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. Therefore, our Editorial Board believes that the time has come for We-the-People to (slightly) alter our social contract, by implementing Term Limits, and imposing fiscal restraints on our federal government.