

Will Someone Please Increase My Taxes!

By Bob Banov and Roger Ohlsen
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The article began:

Last November, Citizens for Tax Justice and the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy issued a major study of the federal income taxes paid, or not paid, by 280 big, profitable Fortune 500 corporations. That report found, among other things, that 30 of the companies paid no federal income tax from 2008 through 2010.

New information for 2011 shows that almost all these 30 companies have maintained their tax dodging ways.

In fact, all but four of the 30 companies remained in the no-federal-income-tax category over the 2008-11 period.

Citizens for Tax Justice and the Institute on Taxation
and Economic Policy, November 2011

It has to make you wonder. Aren't taxes the dues we all pay as privileged members of a forward-looking society? Add up the taxes they avoided or did not have to pay in the last four years and probably they would have financed the wars the Republicans arranged for us to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, you *can* look at it this way. If the average American pays twice as much in taxes as he would have received in wages at something like the turn of the century, you'd expect he or she would be happy enough. Our guess is in this comparison, most people *are* happy *if they've got a job and are earning money right now.*

Consider the enormous difference between what a particular sum of money bought at the turn of the century (1900) and what it buys now; that is to say, the goods and services available now as compared to what could be purchased in 1910 or 20.

Wouldn't you expect that major corporations would also be happy with what their profits buy today; particularly if they are "people" as the Supreme Court declared in the Citizens United Decision, since they are getting extraordinarily wealthier by the year.

Of course, part of the problem with taxes in this country is that people have to try to live within their income, so they can afford to pay taxes to a government that can't live within its income.

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They also pay sales tax when they buy necessities, and taxes are withheld from their paychecks. They pay for their future Social Security and Medicare, and these payments make it possible for the government to offer Medicaid to poor people and people with disabilities.

So why don't all major corporations pay at the same tax rate, whether they are really "people" or not? One answer is obvious. There's plenty of net bankable money (God forbid, investible money) to go around in modern America, and the wealthiest among us have untold power. In fact, it's more than just corporations that don't pay their fair share. The people in these corporations don't pay their fair share of their personal taxes either.

As Leona Helmsley once said, "We don't pay taxes. Only the little people pay taxes."

"Capitalism," said John Maynard Keynes, "is the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone."

But what the heck, insofar as taxes go, government has no money unless it gets it from all of us. And there is an enormous difference between the potential profits made by big business during the turn of the two centuries ago and today, and the obvious opportunities they have of serving a valuable purpose in this country and the world-at-large at the same time: by paying their fair share, hiring American workers and teaching developing countries how they might prosper by developing their own businesses.

In actuality, how much would it take for corporations to do that? There's certainly enough money around. They've got the power to do just that, and that is investing in us. Somehow, the list of those who haven't is extremely long. We ask you to ponder why.

So as not to digress too far, let's remember that taxes are important. But for whom?

As Andy Rooney remarked, "President Bush's tax proposals leave no rich person behind. Voters approve of President Bush helping the kind of people they wish they were one of."

True or not, all the above appears to be the kind of capitalism we are known for around the world, or at least in the Middle East, and that exacerbates our problems there. Maybe it's because the wealthiest among us are afraid to recognize the difference between money and human wealth or real morality.

Maybe it's the same for a great many politicians who see government as a business – something it was never intended to be. We know that for more than forty years, the United States Congress has used payroll taxes intended for Social Security to fund spending. We don't know what else they've done in detail because they're too evil to tell us.

In the long run, we need to compel these folks. Because the question may simply be:

Can money buy happiness and how much is enough?

Sadly, we may need to remind them that it won't buy them an exemption from death, and even the longest life is short.

It may be that taxes are a Democrat vs. Republican issue. If so, in considering taxes, Republicans need to take a very long look at these up-to-date statements:

Huge deficits loom almost everywhere, from California to New York, from New Jersey to Texas.

. . . Texas is where the modern conservative theory of budgeting—the belief that you should never raise taxes under any circumstances, that you can always balance the budget by cutting wasteful spending—has been implemented most completely. If the theory can't make it there, it can't make it anywhere.

- Paul Krugman

Our conclusion? If Republicans are really concerned about a balanced budget, and Congress really wants to motivate American citizens, the way to do so is not by more and more taking away the services they've paid for, or the kinds of resources that contribute to their ability to become greater taxpayers in this country.

The most obvious example? When do we start building some railways and fixing roads and bridges, and hiring American companies to do that?

When do all the millionaire Republicans join the rest of us in realizing that the tax burden in this country must be shared equitably? Shared by everyone. And when do they finally realize that if our taxes were to increase because our wages went up, most of us would be happy as newborns, and our countries coffers would be easily helped out of this recession by all of us!

Wouldn't it be great if the Congress that exacerbated our current situation were held responsible for their grade school behavior which brought on our current financial situation, paying higher taxes until things right themselves, even if it's after some get voted out of office?