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INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY™

Growing Beyond the Consent of the Governed

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2/2/10



The \$3.8 trillion dollar federal budget that President Obama announced Monday is another bruising blow to American freedom. Government is growing beyond the consent of the governed.

In 2008, government spent 38% of everything produced in the U.S. (gross domestic product) and last year the figure shot above 40%, perhaps as high as 43% though the numbers are still being crunched.

When government spends so much, less is left for people to spend as they choose. Only once before in American history did government spending cross that 40% threshold — to wage World War II. Nothing today justifies a similar confiscation of nearly half of people's resources.

Amazingly, though the 40% mark is being crossed, politicians continue to propose costly programs that you will have to pay for with the fruits of your labor. No matter who your employer is, you're actually toiling for the politicians. They're not public servants. They're making you a servant. How much more freedom are you willing to give up?

I bet no member of Congress has ever asked you: "Would you rather buy something for your family or re-cover your sofa instead of funding National Public Radio? Would you rather make your own car payments instead of bailing out the auto industry or expanding aid to Africa?"

Washington politicians don't want to hear your answer. The more programs they create, the more followers they gain and the more powerful and celebrated they are.

Your Dollars At Work

Ride Amtrak from New York to Washington, D.C., and you'll pass by the monumental Frank R. Lautenberg train station, named for the New Jersey senator, still very much alive, who took credit for getting federal dollars to pay for the building. Excuse me, not federal dollars, your dollars.

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Almost no one in Washington, D.C., is calling for spending controls. In the nation's capitol, the cause célèbre is deficit reduction. Last month, numerous senators from both parties called for a deficit-reduction commission to close the gap between federal spending and tax revenues.

To avoid burdening the next generation, they said, Americans must "pay as they go." Nothing should be "off the table," including tax increases, said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine. President Obama joined in, announcing in his State of the Union message that if Congress won't set up a deficit-reduction commission, he will.

Don't be bamboozled by these sanctimonious calls for deficit reduction. In plain English, it means raising your taxes to keep pace with what politicians are spending. The real danger to our freedom is the level of spending, not whether it's paid for with taxes now or borrowing. They'll come after you and your children later. What's needed is a cap on overall spending.

During the last 18 months, federal spending as a percentage of what the nation produces (gross domestic product) soared to 28% from 20%. Add in state and local government spending, and the result crossed that critical 40% threshold.

The president said in his State of the Union message that the federal government must tighten its belt, just the way American families are doing. But his budget proposal increases federal spending by \$85 billion. That is belt-loosening.

Many Republicans seem as unaware as the president of the growing public outrage over the size of government. Endorsing the call for a bipartisan deficit-reduction commission, Sen. Collins said Americans have to face the harsh reality of "out-of-control debt" and consider tax increases.

Fortunately, patriots across the nation are forcing politicians such as Collins to address another harsh reality — the public does not want to put 40% of everything produced in this nation into the hands of government.

Welcome To Germany

The level of public spending is one indication of the power of government and the loss of individual freedom. Total government spending in the U.S., as a percentage of GDP, is approaching levels found in social welfare states like France and Germany, where life is highly regulated by the state.

Another indicator is the hundreds of thousands of federal employees, with more being hired all the time as private sector workers lose their jobs. This week, Americans need to deliver a clear message in response to the president's budget that they do not want their country to be Europeanized.

McCaughey is a former lieutenant governor of New York State.