

PHEONIX RISING: My Aching Back

President Obama just submitted a budget to Congress that has 30% more spending than projected income. Our state is dealing with a deficit in the billions of dollars Minnesota is suffering from a terrible budget crisis. Lawmakers have been working to close the gap, with a variety of ideas put forward.

One is to modify mandatory sentencing guidelines for prisoners, shaving months off of prison time, and thus reducing expenses. Opponents of the plan have said publically: "Don't balance the state budget on the back of the correctional system"

Another is for state workers to take mandatory unpaid days off. By at least one calculation, it would amount to two days per month per employee – or 48 days over the next two years. One Union representative has opposed the idea, saying "don't balance the budget on the backs of the state employees".

A local land-owner recently stopped by to see me, his property tax statement in hand. He was upset about the valuation of his property, and the subsequent property tax increase he was seeing. "Every time the state wants money, they just come to us property owners, and put a bigger burden on our backs" he complained.

The national association formed to support and help small businesses has been working overtime in recent months, keeping their membership updated on changes to the tax laws and the possible implication for business owners. They want to make sure that – you guessed it – no larger burden is placed on the backs of small business owners.

With this many aching backs, the chiropractic association must be beaming.

We all want someone to fix the problem, but don't want them to expect us to help any more than we are. No one wants be told to do more, while getting by with less.

Now let it be said that I despise paying taxes as much as anyone, maybe more than most. I think we have a punitive tax system, which penalizes initiative and personal industry, and rewards indolence. I understand that taxes are not merely a method of funding essential government services, such as roads and police protection, it has become a means of wealth re-distribution. Through programs from the New Deal to the Great Society, the idea was to take from those who have more and redistribute it to those who have less. I have no argument against helping those who are in need and have less than me. I just don't like how those making these decisions define who has "more" and how much can be given to those who have "less".

Which made me wonder why, when the bankers who received last fall's billions in bail-out money were later assailed and castigated by Congress for their mis-management of taxpayer funds, no one howled

with derisive laughter. Self-righteously angry members of Congress using their two minutes of microphone time to assail and scold the silent and red faced bankers seated in front of them? If ever one needed an example of the pot calling the kettle black, it was those Congressional hearings. No organization has done a worse job of wisely spending other people's money than Congress, with the possible exception of Bernard Madoff.

I wish I was smart enough to figure out a tax code which would reward productivity and initiative, and would penalize lassitude. Such a system would then eliminate some of the inherent inequities, and motivate the types of productivity we will need in future years to work our way out of the incomprehensible debt we have built up. But even if such a person existed, I'm not sure he or she would ever get elected to Congress, let alone be able to change the system. After all, we keep voting our personal pocket book election after election. When we keep sending the same people back to Congress decade after decade, and laud them for the amount of funds they bring home to us – funds taken from other people – we deserve these aching backs.

So two things do seem obvious to me. One is that those who have "more" are going to have to hand over a larger percentage of what they do have to the people who are running our current system. The other is that those who are deemed to have "less" are going to have to plan on getting less. Much less.

At least, that way, while we each will be carrying different loads, perhaps we can equalize the amount of ache we'll all have to live with.

Greg Hull is owner and operator of Hull's Sawmill. He takes a sauna three nights a week to relax the ache in his back from piling lumber. He has yet to come up with a plan to ease the ache in his back from the tax code.