

# The Tax Revolt We Really Need

---

April 15<sup>th</sup> has passed, and with it onerous task of getting the taxes paid. Or at least an extension filed.

This year, tens of thousands of protesters gathered in “Tea Parties” around the country, to protest the tax situation we all live with. More than a thousand attended the one in Duluth. I was invited, and even was inclined to go but I didn’t. I was too busy working.

I’m in sympathy with the protesters. There are some things wrong with our tax system, and I’d like to see it changed. I just don’t think that a day of placard waving and speeches will do much to fix the problem. The revolt which could result in substantial changes needs to take place in another location, at another time of year.

First, let me clarify my viewpoint on taxes. I understand that we need a tax system that supports essential services – no one favors letting bridges fall down, or roads become impassable, or fire or police protection eliminated. We need a military for our national security. I’m all for paying my fair share for these services. It is just that I, like most folks, want them provided in an efficient and economical way. It is the gap between costs and results in our system that is so infuriating. Why are \$500 toilet seats and \$2000 plastic wrenches so offensive? They can be purchased for a fraction of that cost and work just as well. It’s that same frustration which makes property taxes for funding public schools so annoying. It’s not just that we spend more than \$100,000 per student over 12 years. It’s that we spend that much and still get so many graduates who are illiterate in many essential areas. Plus the property tax system is punitive to people who work to improve their homes and property. The more we improve our homes, the greater the value, and hence the higher the taxes we pay on them. Forever. Penalizing initiative and investment is adding insult to injury.

Since the inception of the income tax under Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt, taxes haven’t been about funding essential governmental services, wisely or unwisely. They are instead a means of wealth redistribution. That is what they were intended to be – a means of taking from those who have, and giving it to those who don’t have.

Even that principle by itself isn’t all wrong. I believe we should help those in need – to feed hungry people, provide some shelter for the homeless, and clothes for the destitute. The problem is that our methods of doing it via our tax system cost so much, and help so few.

I once listened to Rep James Oberstar talk about how our anti-tax attitudes have got to change. Taxes, he explained, are not evil – they are the means by which we fund and care for the greater public good. He talked how, in the “good- ol’ days” of Congress, major spending bills were passed on voice votes, days that are long gone. Frankly I found it offensive that someone who had been living on tax dollars for the past three and a half decades would presume to tell me how I should view taxes.

“Congressman” I wanted to stand up and shout at him, “It was the sweat of my brow that purchased the shirt on your back. Don’t lecture me on the proper attitude I should have toward taxes.” I didn’t say

that – it would have disrupted a public meeting, offended colleagues, and probably got me hauled off to jail.

So, I demurred, not wanting to add to the public burden from the cost of my incarceration. That, and I wasn't too sure my wife would come and bail me out. But I digress.

Let's clarify the time and place for a little effective revolution: November and the polling booth.

We need to keep in mind that while President's submit budgets, it is Congress that passes them. No President can spend a dime without the approval of Congress. It was Congress that passed TARP and gave billions to the banking and insurance sector. It is Congress that is poised to pass a budget that has 30% more spending in it than projected income. It is Congress that has run our national debt into the trillions of dollars. Granted President's from both parties have played their parts, but it is Congress that has authorized the spending.

Insanity, it is said, is doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results.

Which makes me wonder why we keep sending these same folks back election after election, term after term, decade after decade to keep doing the same things over and over. Then we get mad and have protests about what they are doing. Again.

There are only 3 members of Congress, out of the more than 400 members, that anyone can vote for. One Representative, and two Senators. Changing three members won't change the entire place. But if everyone who votes will cast their ballot for someone other than the incumbents, change might happen.

Last fall, in a conversation before the election, I had several folks explain to me that they voted for Oberstar time and again because he was going to win anyway. Those were instructive conversations, because I had always been under the impression that he won because people voted for him, not vice versa.

If we are serious about a tax revolt, we can have one. Let's do it in November, at the ballot box. If we don't do things different then, the "Tea Party" protesting will just be another act of insanity.

*Greg Hull is owner and operator of Hull's Sawmill. His birthday has fallen on April 15<sup>th</sup> for the past 50 years. He found it funny until he began working and paying taxes at age 16.*