

# CONSENSUS

Published by: **Texans For Efficiency in Government** - A Tax Exempt Non-Profit Corporation

## *It might be funny if it weren't our money!*

### ❖ General Services Administration

Several years ago, the General Services Administration tested offices of the U.S. Forest Service in Montana, decided they had too much light, and removed a bunch of light bulbs. Recently a worker in the offices, who wears contact lenses and says he needs more light to read, asked for some bulbs to put in the empty sockets. The General Services Administration returned with a light meter, pronounced the light level fully in accordance with regulations, and told the worker if he wanted more light bulbs he would have to bring a note from his doctor.

National Review<sup>1</sup>

### ❖ Army Corps of Engineers

The Army Corps of Engineers is trying to kick farmers off their bottomlands on the grounds that low-lying land bordering rivers is "wetlands" under control of the federal government. Other farmers have been prosecuted for constructing levees to prevent flooding of their farmland.

One man was sentenced to prison for cleaning up a tire dump on his property and filling a ditch, which the government claimed was "wetlands."

In Florida, a retiree and his son are in jail for trying to build a home on a lot that the government claimed was "natural wetlands."

Bank owners and depositors are now faced with multimillion-dollar environmental liabilities for having lent to businesses that the government has retroactively declared to be polluters.

Electric power consumers in Phoenix face a \$4 billion rate hike because the Environmental Protection Agency is blaming Grand Canyon visibility problems on what is apparently a clean-coal power plant nearly 200 miles downwind from the canyon.

Houston Chronicle<sup>2</sup>

### ❖ Efficient???? Congress

... Senator Ernest F. Hollings had the unmitigated gall to spend taxpayer money so that third world countries could observe Congressional budgeting and financial practices.

New York Times<sup>3</sup>

### ❖ New York

In New York City, people who died in a recent subway fire were the victims of a bureaucratic mess that had allowed the exhaust fans that could have prevented their deaths to sit in a Ohio warehouse for 13 years.

Los Angeles Times<sup>4</sup>

### ❖ Bigger Breasts

San Diego—Navy doctors are performing hundreds of free cosmetic surgeries at taxpayer expense on Navy personnel and their families—a benefit rarely provided by private health insurance and specifically prohibited by Veterans Administration hospitals.

In San Diego alone, 544 free cosmetic operations were performed during the past two years. From 1986 to 1989, Navy doctors nationwide performed more than 1,800 breast augmentations, face lifts, nose jobs, lipo suction and hair transplants—operations that usually cost thousands of dollars apiece.

In San Diego, the plastic surgeons are deluged by about 100 requests monthly, mostly from women who desire bigger breasts, wrinklefree faces and smaller noses—in that order.

Los Angeles Times<sup>5</sup>

### ❖ Washington Monument Syndrome

Residents of New Orleans could tell it was budget time last fall because the city coroner issued a familiar threat: "No more picking up dead bodies on the street." And further, Dr. Frank Minyard warned, any corpses lucky enough to make it to the morgue would just have to lie there: budget cuts would prevent his office from doing autopsies, too. The bodies did not, it turns out, pile up on the streets. The city managed to find more money. The plan to shut down the coroner was part of a city ploy to wrangle funds from the state—and it didn't work. The governor suggested that before the mayor went begging—or cutting essential services—he might first trim the city's wasteful patronage jobs. For example, New Orleans traffic courts employ special judges who earn \$67,000 a year, take 60 days vacation and maintain private legal practices—and work only part time on the bench.



New Orleans's gambit was a creative variation on a common bureaucratic strategy. When faced with across-the-board cuts, agency directors may slash the most visible or important services to show the public they cannot spare a dime. The goal: intense public outcry forcing city hall to back down. (Bureaucratic turf battles everywhere owe a debt to federal parks officials who have responded to budget cuts by padlocking the Washington Monument.) In New York City, transit-authority officials facing budget shortfalls first threatened to shut down night subway service, used by 39,000 people daily. When the city cut 98 Bureau of Bridges jobs in November, a deputy commissioner warned that even major bridges connecting Manhattan to the rest of the city might have to be closed. The cuts came anyway—and they're doing more maintenance than ever.

But few cities have practiced the ploy as aggressively as the Washington Monument's hometown, the District of Columbia. A recent blue-ribbon commission found the city's police department was embarrassingly top-heavy with expensive deskbound officers. Yet when the city council cut \$4 million, the department quickly announced that "due to budget constraints" it would have to eliminate special summer street patrols in drug-ravaged areas and in exclusive Georgetown, home to many of the city's wealthiest and most politically influential citizens. A spokesman ominously warned visitors to avoid the trendy area because police could no longer guarantee their safety.

Newsweek<sup>6</sup>

## ❖ Veterans Administration

The Department of Veterans Affairs has paid benefits to more than 1,200 deceased veterans, including about 100 dead for at least 10 years, the General Accounting Office says.

The agency pegs the potential annual loss from the erroneous payments at \$5.7 million.

Auditors for the congressional investigating agency said the department could have reduced the erroneous payments by matching benefit payment files with death information maintained by the Social Security Administration.

Houston Chronicle<sup>7</sup>

## ❖ Vargos Peacocks

Peacocks have roamed the grounds of Vargos' restaurant in southwest Houston for 26 years without so much as ruffling a legal feather.

But late last week they ran afoul of the law when a city Animal Control Bureau officer issued a citation to the restaurant for violating the wild animal ordinance.

Restaurant manager Hans Mair said the citation gave the establishment 109 hours to get rid of the 25 birds.

"I guess somebody complained," Mair said, "but the

people around us have just as many peacocks as we do."

On Tuesday, four uniformed animal control officers showed up to issue another citation, giving the restaurant another 72 hours to remove the birds or lock them up in a cage, Mair said.

"You can't lock up those birds. The peacocks aren't doing anybody any harm. They're nice birds," said Mair, "The kids go out and pick up feathers, and people come every year and expect to see them."

The restaurant's owner decided to fight City Hall and hired a lawyer to defend the peacocks.

But before the birds' counsel could voice an objection, City Attorney Clarence West said the birds can stay on the restaurant's nine acres for the next 26 years if they want.

Apparently, the city's Animal Control Bureau misread the city's ordinance, said West.

As long as the peacocks are 100 yards from a residence, they can remain at the restaurant along with the swans, the ducklings, the turtles and the Canada geese.

"It's like a zoo out here, and people like it," said Mair.

Houston Chronicle<sup>8</sup>

## ❖ National Endowment for the Arts

In its annual report for 1988, the National Endowment for the Arts routinely listed the grants it had made during that fiscal year. In the field of music, this is where our tax money went:

To Sarina B. Bachleitner, New York, \$2,500 to support intensive one-on-one study with pianist Joanne Bracken; to Zachary B. Brown, Brooklyn, N.Y., \$5,000 to support intensive one-on-one study with percussionist Warren Smith; to Ira N. Coleman, New York, \$5,400 to support intensive one-on-one study with bassist Dave Holland.

The NEA made 10 grants ranging from \$12,500 to \$17,500 to would-be playwrights. Teri J. Edelstein, South Hadley, Mass., received \$10,830 "to support travel to London to complete a study of the paintings of Edward Penny." Judi H. Greeman of Los Angeles won \$8,550 "to support travel to France to study museum and gallery collections." Susan T. Goodman of New York received \$10,000 "to support travel to Israel in order to gain greater knowledge of Israeli art." A grant of \$20,000 went to Edmund L. Keeley of Princeton, N.J., "to support the translation from Greek of a selection of Yannis Ritsos' poems based on ancient Greek sources." And so on.

Houston Chronicle<sup>9</sup>

## ❖ Welfare

To understand the current welfare mess, you have to understand people like Rose Johnson. Ms. Johnson (her name has been changed) loves training programs. A mother of two boys, four and six years old, Ms. Johnson has been on public assistance four out of the past seven years. This is the fourth time she has trained for a career as a word processor. Ms. Johnson is no fool. She knows training programs can be a lot better than most jobs, and



with the two kids to take care of, she has more than a day's work at home. Besides, she has money problems. Unexpectedly, she had to go to North Carolina to visit her ailing mother. She was unable to pay the rent that month, so to keep her from being evicted, the welfare department paid it and is now recouping it from her check.

Ms. Johnson is a smart consumer. Most training programs will pay stipends for transportation, lunch, child care and even give a one-time grant for new clothes. The one Ms. Johnson has just joined is a goldplater. She has arranged child care for her boys with a neighbor whose kids she sometimes baby-sits in the evening. The welfare department will pay for the baby-sitting services; as part of her deal with Ms. Johnson, the neighbor will split the payments. Ms. Johnson is bringing lunch from home and keeping the lunch money. She used the clothing grant for necessities and has managed to convince the department that she lives two fares away from the training sites. When she finishes the program, she will go back to staying home with the kids.

Wall Street Journal<sup>10</sup>

## ❖ Post Office

At the giant mail-processing center in New Orleans, 22 clerks sit in front of pigeon holes, the kind used 214 years ago by Benjamin Franklin's office, slowly examining each letter before placing it into its proper, numbered niche....In the course of being sorted and delivered, a typical letter is touched by 14 human hands.

Washington Post<sup>11</sup>

## ❖ Taxes

Despite the Reagan tax cuts, hardworking Americans remain brutally exploited by all levels of government. Those earning \$58,000 or more paid an average federal tax of \$21,473 in 1988, those earning above \$73,000 paid an average of \$34,788.

On average, taxpayers will labor a record 128 days—Jan. 1 through May 8—to earn enough money to pay their 1991 taxes.

In an average eight-hour work Americans will labor 2 hours and 49 minutes to pay taxes.

Texas' 6.25% sales tax rate is tied with Illinois for the fifth-highest in the nation.

Houston's 8.25% sales tax rate where city and metro taxes are added to the state levy is tied for third highest with Illinois, New York and Tennessee.

Tax increases will easily outpace the growth in individuals' income during 1991. Income is likely to rise by only 3.7 percent in 1991 while the total tax take is expected to increase by 6.6 percent.

Houston Chronicle<sup>12</sup>

## ❖ More Taxes

New Jersey's Egg Harbor Yacht Co. normally sold about 120 boats per year, until Congress and Richard Darman entered the scene. Since Washington's imposition of the 10 percent tax on luxury items, Egg Harbor has sold one boat, closed up shop, and put 250 workers on the unemployment line—which brings to mind the phrase coined by The Wall Street Journal's Paul Gigot, "Social Darmanism." When Congress enacted the tax in November, it expected to net \$25 million in 1991. But that figure was based on sales prior to the institution of the tax January 1. According to Charles Kauth of Hatteras Yachts in North Carolina, retail sales in the entire industry were down 89 percent in the first quarter this year, compared to the same period in 1990; the National Marine Manufacturers Association reports that 19,000 jobs in the industry have been lost since the tax kicked in. Imposing a tax that results in fewer people working and fewer people buying is no way to jump-start a sluggish economy.

National Review<sup>13</sup>

## ❖ And Still More Taxes

In her Washougal, Washington mailbox was a tax bill (from California) for \$400, made out to S. Venis. Vickie Laurence wasn't worried until she noticed her own Social Security number at the bottom of the bill. . . .

Vickie suggested that the state of California locate this S. Venis, get its money from him and get his real SS number. "That's when they started telling me I should just pay the tax," says Vickie "I said: 'No way!'"

Vickie called the Social Security Administration and it removed S. Venis' funds from Vickie's account. Vickie called the IRS. It discovered that S. Venis owed the federal government \$20,000 in back taxes. Vickie explained the mistake and the IRS said she wouldn't be asked to pay the \$20,000. But, said the IRS, the state of California had slapped a lien on her 1990 tax return. Vickie really should try to straighten things out with California, said the IRS.

Jim Reber, spokesman for the California tax board, says it's not California's responsibility to clear up the mistake. "We're not in a position to verify some 14 million-plus Social Security numbers," says Jim.

The Oregonian<sup>14</sup>

## ❖ Food

Government influence extends to what we eat each day. Consider the basic four food groups. Ever since 1956, when the USDA began promoting the food groups, they have reflected political reality as well as nutrition policy. "The standard four food groups are based on American agricultural lobbies," says NYU's Nestle. "Why do we have a milk group? Because we have a National Dairy Council. Why do we have a meat group? Because we have an extremely powerful [meat lobby]." As the science of nutrition grew more sophisticated, and the relative roles of fats and carbohydrates became better understood, the food groups came up for revision—not in



content but in graphic design. Rather than simply list the groups or show them on a pie chart, suggesting they are equals, the USDA created "The Eating Right Pyramid" with grains taking up the large space on the bottom, fruits and vegetables the next largest, meat and dairy products in a narrower slice above them and fats and sweets in a tiny space on top. Nutritionists applauded, but after the graphic had gone to the printer Agriculture Secretary Edward R. Madigan suspended its publication indefinitely. Meat and dairy representatives had objected to the new design for its purported slighting of their products. Madigan says the pyramid "was and is under review."

Newsweek<sup>15</sup>

## ❖ Health Care

"There is no use going to bed early to save candles if the result is twins." Administrative costs in general reflect this result.

One out of every four or five dollars we pay for health care—19.3 percent to 24.1 percent—actually goes for administration, according to estimates based on 1987 figures. That's \$96.8 billion to \$120.4 billion spent not on medicines or surgery or medical technology or care—but on regulations and paper work and administrators to see that all the rules of all the different insurers and government programs are followed.

Dr. Steffie Woolhandler and Dr. David U. Himmelstein in the *New England Journal of Medicine* estimate that administrative costs jumped 37 percent (in real dollars) just from 1983 to 1987, "The recent quest for efficiency has apparently amplified inefficiency," they point out. All those programs to contain costs cut out only "modest amounts of unnecessary care," but required "an army of bureaucrats" to monitor.

And according to them it's going to keep on getting worse. Health-care administrative costs will take one out of three health-care dollars 12 years from now and one of every two dollars by 2020 if the present rate of growth continues.

Houston Chronicle<sup>16</sup>

## ❖ Public Housing

Jack Kemp, Secretary of Housing & Urban Development, understands that the cause of the wealth of nations is wit, invention, enterprise. If you want to multiply wealth, multiply the number of minds at work in creating it. Give willing people at the bottom assets. Let them develop those assets as they develop themselves. Ownership invites people to blend their own being with their work.

To his disgust, Kemp has found that the incentives in public housing are all wrong. One 36-year-old welfare mother from Milwaukee who saved a little for her children's education was arrested and fined \$15,000 for "welfare fraud," because she had assets of \$1,000 in the

bank. "That's not a tax rate of 33%" Kemp explodes. "That's a tax rate of 1,500%."

Those who want to save and build and improve something of their own are prevented from doing so by law and regulation, Kemp has found. "Public housing is our own Eastern Europe. It's our own socialism for the poor." The whole point of welfare for two generations now seems to have been to keep the poor impoverished, to make them dependent instead of independent, to depress their spirits and to smother their visions and their dreams. Nobody intended to create Eastern European socialism in the center of our cities, Kemp says, but that's what they did.

Forbes<sup>17</sup>

## ❖ New York Again

New York public employees who speak up about waste and corruption are more often treated like chumps than champs. The whistle-blowers deserve better protection from the state.

New York City's Deputy Commissioner for Transportation was fired after publicly criticizing the Transportation Department's program for bridge maintenance and repair.

An Emergency Medical Services employee who repeatedly warned about dangerous conditions was fired. The employee, who supports his six children and invalid mother was jobless for eight months.

A Federal court upheld the dismissal of a Department of Personnel employee who testified at a public hearing that police officer tests were graded at such a low standard that "functional illiterates" could pass. She lost her job in 1985 and was never able to find comparable employment.

New York Times<sup>18</sup>

## ❖ And Again

Although its population was stagnant in the 1980s, New York City expanded its job rolls by 53,000 to 417,000, or one city worker for every 17 residents. Labor has been able to extract fat concessions from an all-too-pliable city hall. School janitors, for instance, are required by contract to sweep lunchroom floors only once a week.

Newsweek<sup>19</sup>

## ❖ Ann Richards

"The reason people distrust government is that they think government wastes. I don't blame them. They're not getting their money's worth."

Texas Monthly<sup>20</sup>

"(state) agencies often seem impervious to the wants and needs of the people that they are obligated to serve. There is no accountability; there is no concept of customer service; there is no effort to keep up with technology that would make work of the agency more efficient."

Houston Chronicle<sup>21</sup>



## ❖ Ralph Yarborough

"Money is subverting politics, when both sides can spend millions of dollars, the issues take a back seat." According to Yarborough, congress is a good example of what's happening to American politics. People go there not to serve the public, but to line their pockets.

"It is going to destroy democracy if it is not stopped," he said. "The people have got to rise up and demand that it be stopped. It's got to be driven home that democracy is being bought out."

Houston Post<sup>22</sup>

## ❖ Air Force

Secretary of the Air Force Donald B. Rice used one of the Air Force's C-20 Gulfstream III jets to fly to last Saturday's Air Force-Notre Dame football game—a daylong excursion that cost the taxpayers nearly \$5,700.

Rice, accompanied by his wife and top aide Lt. Col. Carl Tickel, departed Andrews Air Force Base at 8:45 a.m. Saturday, arriving in South Bend, Ind., an hour and 35 minutes later. After attending a morning brunch for visiting dignitaries given by Notre Dame President Edward A. "Monk" Malloy, Rice watched Notre Dame beat Air Force, 57-27. Rice and his party left that afternoon and were back in Washington by 6:30 p.m.

Air Force spokesman Lt. Col. Darrell Hayes yesterday called the trip "official business" and said Rice, a 1961 Notre Dame graduate, met with Notre Dame Air Force ROTC officials and cadets to discuss the school's program. He said Rice had no intention of reimbursing the government for the trip's cost.

But the commander of Notre Dame's Air Force ROTC program disputed the Air Force's account of the trip and said that, as far as he could tell, Rice conducted no Air Force business during the trip.

"He came out to attend the game—that's really all he did," said Col. Howard Hanson, commander of the Notre Dame's Air Force ROTC program, who accompanied Rice to the university brunch and sat with him during part of the game.

Washington Post<sup>23</sup>

## ❖ Navy

Naval Institute Press advertises a Dictionary of Naval Abbreviations—45,000 of them on 344 pages.

Wall Street Journal<sup>24</sup>

## ❖ National Park Service

Around the headquarters of the National Park Service, the joke these days is that the agency soon will be getting a new name: The National Pork Service.

Over the objections of Park Service officials, Congress this year targeted money for dozens of projects and acquisitions that the agency says have little to do with its mission: preserving the nation's natural and cultural heritage.

They include an industrial theme park for southwestern Pennsylvania, an old railyard in the same state, a historic, four-across movie theater in West Virginia and the birthplace of Franklin D. Roosevelt's secretary of state. All told, Congress appropriated \$271 million in new construction funds for the Park Service, more than three times the administration request.

The projects have irritated Park Service officials, who say they should not be in the business of local economic development.

One example is the Cordell Hull National Historic Site in Tennessee. Congress approved \$500,000 in planning funds for a park and museum built around the birthplace of Cordell Hull, Roosevelt's secretary of state. "We don't do secretaries of state and never have," said a Park Service official who requested anonymity, "We do presidents."

A spokeswoman for Sen. Albert Gore Jr. (D-Tenn.), who helped secure the funds, noted that Hull was the nation's longest serving secretary of state and a Nobel laureate. "He was no ordinary secretary of state," she said.

A Park Service official suggested that lawmakers are turning to the Park Service to fund projects out of concern for faltering local economies.

Washington Post<sup>25</sup>

## ❖ Government Travel

Maryland travel agent Jack Skloff knows firsthand how cavalier the federal government is with your money. For the past seven years, his company, Dimensions Travel, has made travel plans for several federal agencies. But no more.

Skloff has kissed \$7 million a year in business goodbye because, "I didn't want to continue to help them to rape the taxpayer," he told us "I want to work for people who say, 'Jack, save me money,' not 'Jack, spend my money.'"

No longer will he face the rush to book tickets to Las Vegas and Palm Springs for "meetings" just because it's the end of the federal fiscal year. (One federal agency called Skloff one September and exclaimed, "We've got \$49,000 left in our travel budget. Set up some meetings. We'll figure out what they're about later.")

Our associate Jim Lynch has examined the ledgers of several federal agency travel budgets for last year. The amount spent on travel in September, the end of the fiscal year, is almost double that spent in August, and most other months, too.

Not only is the government wasteful. Skloff has seen it be downright stupid when it comes to venturing outside Washington. One federal travel coordinator called Dimensions asking for help to find the town of Vicinity. Her office told her to book travel to St. Louis and Vicinity, but she couldn't find it on the map. Another federal employee asked for help finding the town of Maconga. As it turned out, the destination was Macon, Ga.

Washington Post<sup>26</sup>



## ❖ More Government Travel

When most U.S. officials travel abroad on government business, they stay in hotels that most U.S. taxpayers couldn't afford on a dream vacation. Yet taxpayers foot the bill so their public servants can travel in style.

In Tokyo, for example, the hotel of choice for traveling pencil-pushers is the Okura, recently ranked the fourth best hotel in the world. The Okura, with its seven restaurants, fitness center, shopping mall and secretaries for hire, is not just the place for members of Congress, diplomats and White House staff members to lay their heads. The U.S. Embassy in Japan routinely books plane loads of low-level bureaucrats into the Okura.

Until auditors caught on, taxpayers were paying \$160 a night for lodging for every U.S. government traveler in Tokyo, plus another \$64 a day for meals and \$23 a day for walking around money. Call it "Japan on \$247 a day: Roughing it, U.S. style."

Auditors from the State Department inspector general's office surveyed travel records from around the world and found that daily travel allowances were too often based on the ritziest hotels and restaurants. Smart travelers take the per diem based on the high-priced hotels.

Then they stay in cheaper accommodations and pocket the difference. And it's all perfectly legal. The State Department requires few receipts for foreign travel.

Washington Post<sup>27</sup>

## ❖ Congress

The staffs of Congressional offices and committees are far too large, and the sheer quantity of staff members is a major reason that Congress's legislative work is approaching paralysis. It is true that in a real crisis, or when the pressures to act are enormous, Congress moves with lightning speed. It is also true that it has not passed an appropriations bill on time for the last 10 years.

In 1974 there were 16,000 people on House and Senate staffs, at a cost of \$328 million. Today, there are 20,000 at a cost of a shade less than \$1 billion. Each House member has half a million dollars available for staff hire. Senate offices have an average of more than \$1 million.

Congress operates out of 12 buildings around Capitol Hill—five for the House, seven for the Senate. There is a master plan eventually to take over the entire area surrounding the Hill for future office buildings.

Why has Congress grown so much? Not because this is a bigger country. Since 1970, the population has increased by 7 percent; Congressional staffs have increased 43 percent. Not because the issues are more complex; they have always been complex.

The fundamental reasons are the members' desire to make a mark, to get publicity and the need to raise campaign funds. Every Congressional office and committee staff has a cadre of assistants whose main incentive is to enhance their bosses' public standing through a bill, amendment, speech, floor statement, newsletter, etc. They want to do a good job, so they think up jobs to do.

Add to this the system of campaign financing, dominated by political action committees. More than 9,000 organizations are represented by registered lobbyists. Servicing them vastly increases staff work because there is no way a Congressman can deal with all of them himself.

In the last Congress, 8,700 bills were introduced and 664 passed. All the work on the other 8,036 was wasted. If an interest group wants to kill a bill, it doesn't need a majority—just the right members, properly placed.

New York Times<sup>28</sup>

## ❖ 1991 Federal Budget

In the most recent federal budget Congressman Martin Sabo, Democrat of Minnesota, wants to know why more people don't ride bicycles to work. The \$1 million appropriation he sponsored will fund a Department of Transportation study of the nonridership problem. That investigation might discover that traffic lanes specifically designated for bicycles, more courtesy from motorists, an increased number of theftproof places to park bicycles, and promotional campaigns pointing out the environmental and health benefits could encourage the use of two-wheelers.

In the same budget Congressman Ralph Regula, Republican of Ohio, sponsored an item for \$320,000 to purchase the home of William McKinley's wife's parents. By coincidence Congressman Regula graduated from a law school named after William McKinley.

And in still the same budget \$25,000 is being spent to pay for a study to determine where a new workout facility for congressional staff members should be located.

Newsweek<sup>29</sup>

## ❖ Previous Budgets

In recent years budget items added by Congress have: forced each U.S. base in Europe to stockpile a year's worth of coal; created a national center for the study of weeds; helped 20 beekeepers by removing the \$250,000 limit on honey subsidies; subsidized the commercialization of New Mexico wildflowers; reimbursed the town of Frederick, Md., for the ransom paid to the Confederate Army during the Civil War!

Christian Science Monitor<sup>30</sup>

## ❖ Republicans and Democrats

Polling data show that the American public has little regard for the commitment of anyone in government to reduce waste and inefficiency in government. But when respondents are asked which party does a better job, Republicans consistently score higher than Democrats.

Washington Post<sup>31</sup>

## ❖ Your Standard of Living

According to a study by a Washington based research group, the standard of living of most working Americans and their families declined during the past 10 years.

Houston Chronicle<sup>32</sup>



**Why do we put up with this?** Are we not a democracy? And do we not have the right to choose the kind of government we want? So why then do we have a government that operates like this? These questions may sound hopelessly naive. But think about it. Our constitution set up a system of government that is of the people. If the system is not doing what we the people want it to do then by all means should we not change the system?

This of course implies that there is a consensus on what "we the people" want to change the system to. Take note. There is this consensus on many important issues: there is a consensus that our government does not operate very efficiently—Desert Storm notwithstanding; there is a consensus today (70% of Americans approve) for capital punishment as there has been for many years; there is a consensus (70%) that many of our officeholders have been in office too long and these people support some form of term limitation. And a consensus (70%) feels that children in our schools are not being properly educated and these people support parental choice in education. The list goes on.

Despite this consensus on many issues, lawmakers in our system of government have continually failed to pass laws to reflect what the consensus wants. And as Representatives 'this is what they have been elected to do.

It is to improve this situation that Texans for Efficiency in Government is dedicated. Our focus will be on consensus issues. Through the effort and creativity of our supporters we will cause change.

How are we going to go about doing this? Let's first look at what has not worked in the past.

One approach has been to influence our current officeholders to pass new laws to make the system more efficient. Since 1791 but more particularly over the last few decades we have continuously tinkered with the system. Adding new laws here and adding new laws there. Lobbyists for special interests have all the while assisted in the process. This tinkering has continued to the extent that in 1990 the Federal Register—which includes all new laws passed by the federal government each year—includes, over 700,000 pages. More are being added each day. Are we growing more efficient? The answer has to be no. These additional laws by almost any objective evaluation have served only to make the process of governing more cumbersome and inefficient.

Another approach has been for us as voters to simply vote officeholders out of office who do not share our views and values. This has not met with much success either. For example, ninety-six percent of congressional incumbents who are running for reelection regularly retain their seats every two years. And as a consequence bureaucracy still abounds. Although we may have voted otherwise the local, state and federal governments have only gotten bigger, grown more bureaucratic and are spending more and more of our money.

Since both these traditional approaches have-not worked we believe we should try something different. Something that provides a new approach to an old problem.

Texans for Efficiency in Government believes that the best solution is for the people to develop an entrenched, nonpartisan significant and organized public presence that focuses on efficiency in government.

It must be entrenched such that it operates in perpetuity. What it cannot be is a one-shot petition drive where there is no established presence on the part of the petition signer after he signs. It must be nonpartisan as efficiency in government is at least vocally supported by both parties. This although the Republican Party in most if not all polls is given greater credit in trying to improve governmental efficiency. It must not be a third party. The Libertarian Party as a third political party has put forth efforts for number of years and their approach has only served to draw support away from the individual Republican and Democrat candidates who share their philosophy on issues. As a consequence their approach has probably hurt their cause.

It must be significant such that at some point: each officeholder takes it into account each time he casts his vote; each government bureaucrat takes it into account at budget time when he tries to increase his departments budget; and each government worker takes it into account each day he performs his job for the public benefit.

And it must be organized so that whatever resources it has at its disposal can be used in the most expeditious manner.

Developing a presence of this sort may seem to be an insurmountable task. But the task need not be that daunting. Texans for Efficiency in Government realizes that those of us trying to make a living in our heavily-taxed, overregulated system may have little time or money to invest in a cause however noble. That is why little time and money is expected of our members. The only thing required of you as a member is that you learn to look at those employed by the government in terms of whether or not they are improving the efficiency of our system and then give or withhold your support accordingly.

To aid you in this process TEG is committed to providing you with good and timely information so that you might be well informed on the issues. Presently we are doing this through a quarterly newsletter. Our means and modes will expand from there based on the individual talents, skills and efforts of our members as our group further evolves.

As you probably are aware there are presently many fine tax limitation groups and various conservative think tanks which continually educate the voter. Their means and methods are admirable and if possible we will use some of their research to help our cause. Their hearts and ours are in the same place. Where we differ though is that we not only wish to provide information but also wish to take a more activist approach with it.

We will work in whatever ethical, moral and legal way to break the pattern of the present system. We will instigate change through public pressure. We are devoted to efficiency in government. And if we as Texans will lead our leaders will follow.

Vern Wuensche—Editor

**Next issue:** Term Limitation as the most efficient method of bringing about change. And of course more boondogels revealed.

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