

The Future the US Budget Foretells

The key drafters of the U.S. Constitution may have had dreams of a government to “promote the general Welfare” but that goal has long since been lost to factionalism and special interests, a reality that is growing worse as money increasingly buys American politics, as Lawrence Davidson describes.

By Lawrence Davidson

I can make high-probability predictions for 2015 and the near-beyond without the benefit of a crystal ball, tarot cards or tea leaves. The only thing that I need is a list of items from the new 2015 U.S. federal budget. Here are some of my forecasts and the budget items that make them so highly probable:

–There will be more deadly truck-related accidents than necessary on the nation’s highways in 2015. That means more deaths, injuries, highway delays, stress and frustration. How do I know? Because the 2015 budget rolls back the safety requirement that truckers need to get more rest between driving assignments.

The regulation that was rolled back was itself barely adequate. It restricted drivers to a 70-hour week with mandated rest times between long periods behind the wheel. Nonetheless, despite obviously being in the public interest, this regulation could not survive the pressure of the lobbies representing the trucking industry and its corporate customers. Now we are back to truckers working 85-hour weeks with hardly any mandated rest at all.

–Either in 2015 or soon thereafter there will be another major banking crisis requiring the outlay of enormous sums of public money to avert economic meltdown. How do I know? Because the 2015 federal budget rolls back the requirement, put in place after the last financial crisis, that forced the trading of derivatives to be done by corporate entities separated from the banks and not covered by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company.

In other words, if the banks wanted to devise unreasonably risky investment strategies for their more gullible customers, they had to insulate these strategies from their main banking operations that are crucial to the national economy. In addition the government was not required to insure such undue risks through the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Although obviously in the public interest, these regulations could not survive the pressure coming from the banking lobbies and so, once more, we all must be prepared to pay the price of this version of insufficiently regulated capitalism.

–The political influence of the nation’s wealthiest individuals will increase by

a factor of ten in 2015, making the United States more of a plutocracy and less of a democracy than at any time since the 1920s. How do I know? Because the new federal budget emasculates what little was left of the 2002 McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act by increasing tenfold the amount of money individuals can give to political parties.

This is the result of conservatives' demanding that political campaigns be underwritten wholly by private funds. Common sense tells us that such an arrangement can only confirm political power in the hands of those who are already economically dominant. By the way, most countries claiming to be democracies regulate against just this dominance of private money because it is recognized as politically corrupting.

–Environmental protection will deteriorate in 2015. If you live in a rural area where there are large farms, your water supply will become more suspect. How do I know all this? Because the 2015 federal budget slashes funding for the Environmental Protection Agency by \$60 million and forbids the same agency from applying the Clean Water Act to farm ponds and irrigation ditches. In the public interest? Of course not. However this move pleases agribusiness concerns and other industries.

–Israel, the economically developed nation that has violated just about every human rights regulation listed under international law, and also has repeatedly broken U.S. law forbidding the use of U.S.-supplied weapons for offensive actions against civilian populations, will continue to be both economically and militarily subsidized by the American taxpayer in 2015. How do I know this? Because the 2015 federal budget follows in the footsteps of so many past budgets by setting aside huge sums of money – in the present case \$3.1 billion in total aid – for the Zionist state. Of that aid package, \$619.8 million is military related.

I could not get exact gross figures for how much money the federal government gives back per year to U.S. states for various programs, but certainly Israel gets more of your federal tax dollar than any single state does, and maybe more than all 50 states put together.

On the same topic of foreign aid to undeserving governments, the 2015 budget will help insure the survival of the brutal military dictatorship in Egypt. That bunch of gangsters will be getting \$1.3 billion in military aid.

These dubious expenditures are also not in the U.S. public interest for they will undermine democracy in Egypt and uphold dictatorship. In the case of Israel the money will help uphold racist authoritarianism, ethnic cleansing and religious bigotry. All of which (including the aid to Egypt) has been

successfully encouraged by the financial power of the Zionist lobby.

Boehner's Bipartisanship

According to House Speaker John Boehner, the 2015 federal budget is a product of bipartisan compromise: "Understand all these provisions were worked out in a bipartisan, bi-cameral fashion."

However, this can hardly be the whole story. Boehner's statement implies that there were only Republicans and Democrats in the proverbial back room where the budget was worked out and that everyone was practicing sweet reason so as to come to a compromise that benefits the nation.

In truth, looking over the shoulders of those representing both parties were numerous lobbyists who had given a lot of money to all these politicians and now wanted something back for their investment. As a result, we as a nation, as a community, were thoroughly outbid by the trucking industry, the bankers, agribusiness, and a good number of conservative ideologues who want the right to gut the federal government (particularly the Environmental Protection Agency and the Internal Revenue Service) while monopolizing funding of our two major political parties. They want to do this so that, among other things, they don't have worry about regulations or pay even a reasonable amount of taxes.

The ultimate conclusion we can draw from this "bipartisan" process is that there is no sense of national interest, and damn little sense of community, in the American political system. Both concepts have been superseded by the particular parochial goals and sense of solidarity of groups and subgroups with the deep pockets necessary to buy legislators and legislation.

This is what happens when democracy allows itself to be captured by an increasingly unregulated capitalist ethic – an erosion of any politically based sense of a need to work for the common good.

The really depressing part is that for most of our national history it has not been very different. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, President James Polk, himself a man of questionable integrity, observed, "There is more selfishness and less principle among members of Congress than I had any conception of, before I became President of the United States." Well, the problem persists, and given our political way of doing things, it may never be fully overcome.

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