

Our Something for Nothing Society

It seems deeply embedded in human nature to take the path of least resistance. I do not know if that inclination has grown over time, but expecting something for nothing is certainly a fixture of our culture.

In fact, if something sounds too easy it is almost inevitably untrue. Climate Change? Just change your light bulbs, inflate your tires to the proper pressure, throw up a few windmills and solar panels, and the crisis is easily solved. Sounds too easy? That's because it is.

Our society supports candidates that promise to do more for the good of the people. But in politics, the popular way to achieve that is to vote for more government spending and keeping taxes low. The result? Politicians spend without restraint, do not raise taxes, and then borrow money to make up the difference between expenditures and revenue.

So, the system works for a while, and the people get exactly what they want. But what seems like a miracle only delays the inevitable consequences, and the government must pay back the borrowed money over time with interest. Of course, we blame the politicians and not ourselves for the huge deficits – even though they did exactly what the people wanted.

If the government lowers spending on welfare, unemployment, or food stamps, we vehemently protest because the people are owed that money. When these programs were initially created, the recipients were grateful for the supplementary monetary assistance. Typically, that gratitude quickly dissolved into an obligation.

We would like the average worker to receive higher wages, however, we do not want to pay the added costs for the products they produce, or the services they render. Better to go with the cheaper Chinese import.

In the 1960s and 1970s, we protested the pollution produced by heavy manufacturing. But when heavy manufacturing left, we complained about the loss of jobs.

We enjoy the convenience and power of affordable energy, but we demonize the fossil fuel industries that produce them.

We demand that pharmaceutical companies continue to pour billions of dollars into research each year, expecting them to produce lifesaving, life-extending drugs. Yet, many Americans are personally insulted when

they are expected to pay for those drugs, even though it is their health that is affected.

We want “free” health care, but are unwilling to pay for it through higher taxes or higher co-payments.

We want to eat and enjoy as much food as we can, but tend to ignore the deleterious physical problems associated with being overweight. But rather than adjust our diet, increase our exercise, or deprive ourselves of certain foods, we prefer a second helping.

We favor the legalization of casinos, sports gambling, and lottery tickets. We thwart efforts to put monetary caps on lawsuits, which sometimes award millions of dollars to victims for slight inconveniences. People favor anything that gives them the opportunity to make a lot of money with little effort and a little luck.

We complain about the poor quality of our bridges and roadways. Yet, we also grumble about the inconvenience when they are repaired.

We love to spend money, but are surprised that we are always broke.

Culturally, we want sex without consequences, relationships without commitment, love without conditions, achievement without hard work, respect without accomplishment, and authority without responsibility.

We believe morality is relative, then complain when people act irresponsibly. We ignore the wisdom of the elderly, then wonder why we repeat their mistakes. We replace traditional values with no values, and are surprised when our culture begins to collapse.

You might assume that a modern, civilized society would understand the concept that “there is no such thing as a free lunch,” and that some things are not always in our best interests. Sadly, both assumptions would be wrong.

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