

Greed + Government Cuts Erode Society [Bah, Humbug!]

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, December 24, 2013

<http://politicsrespun.org/2013/12/greed-government-cuts-erode-society-bah-humbug/>

The greedy and selfish among us are NOT on our side.

Happy Christmas Eve!

I hope you're all giving lots of money to charities because 'tis the season and all that. But what happens if generally, as a society, we can't or won't give so much?

Coupled with public sector social service cuts, a decline in charitable giving creates preventable suffering.

But the Fraser Institute is a big fan of the charitable giving solution to public sector cuts. What do they have to say about that this year? It's not good.

Greedy, selfish, people who love their money and want tax cuts and privatization and government to sell off its social service operations [healthcare, education, welfare, pensions, arts, literacy, etc.] dream of a small government utopia where the "free" [sic] market runs everything. Or almost everything.

And when people question them about what happens to people who can't afford \$450,000 for brain cancer treatments or even [US\\$39,299](#) for a hip replacement, the response is usually, "well, philanthropic people will donate to charities and do-gooders will help out those who are suffering; but that shouldn't get in the way of me and my wealthy friends from buying whatever boutique/luxury/tropical hip replacement spa service I can afford."

Yes, just like in the bad old days. Debtor prison and poor houses for those who can't afford these kind of human rights. That's why as a civilization we decided things like ambulance and firefighting services, and

school and hospitals and mental health treatment, etc., should be government-funded public goods. No one should die, bleeding out their thigh in a car accident just because they can't afford an ambulance when it shows up.

But what happens when the economy tanks, or people get greedy and selfish, or just really can't afford to give much to charity? Well, the poor people and the middle class just die, suffer, become lame and incapacitated. And lose their homes and property.

And the hope of the greedy, selfish people is that the rest of us will just believe that there will always be charitable people to cough up the dough so poor people don't die of the most treatable cancers at 32 years old.

Which makes it a sad month that the Fraser Institute, big fans of eradicating public services, has just released a report showing that charitable giving is down. Whoops.

I won't go into the details of their study. Lots of their analytical work is full of spurious data and questionable methodologies. So let's just pretend this study is valid. And fewer people are giving and they're giving less. Over 10% fewer people are giving, compared to almost a decade ago. And those who give are giving about 20% less, on average [see below].

So here's one big argument against relying on charities to help out the poor: they aren't reliable. Even though they mean well. Even THEY know their funding isn't reliable.

Do you know what is more reliable? A provincial and federal government progressive tax system that spreads the investment into social services over the largest populations possible, which minimizes the contributions for each tax payer and doesn't establish a precarious system for easy healthcare and education for the rich and spotty availability of social services for the rest of us. And spotty is all about hoping and praying that charitable people don't stop giving.

The other precarious problem lies in the arbitrariness of various charities. Cancer, for instance, sucks. What if some highly visible male celebrity contracts a reasonably easily treatable kind of cancer, and charitable giving to research into that kind of cancer goes way up, to the detriment of less celebrated, less well-known, but far more deadly cancers that more often afflict women? Based on the systemic sexism in our society, that kind of arbitrary charitable giving undermines a wiser means of allocating cancer research funds: systems designed by medical professionals using criteria that is more just and moral than if some super rap god gets some kind of relatively low-risk cancer.

You see where I'm going here. We can't depend on charity. It's great when it happens, but we have the wealth as a nation--and world--to fully fund social services, healthcare, clean water, education, and decent housing for everyone in the world. But right now, we leave much of that up to charity, leaving billions to suffer and die.

So go out there and give all the charity you want/can. But think hard about getting sucked into the rhetoric of the selfish and greedy who want their taxes to go to zero, making most everyone else more vulnerable.

That's not the world I want to live in; how about you?

Fewer Canadians are donating to registered charities, and they are giving less, according to a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

The study, [Generosity in Canada and the United States: The 2013 Generosity Index](#), measures donations to registered charities claimed on personal income tax returns in Canada's 10 provinces and three territories, the 50 U.S. states, and Washington, D.C.

"There's been a downward trend in the proportion of Canadians donating to registered charities and the share of income they donate. This decline in charitable giving limits the ability of Canada's private charities to serve those in need," said Charles Lammam, study co-author and resident scholar in economic policy at the Fraser Institute.

The study finds that 25.1 per cent of Canadian tax filers claimed a charitable donation in 2005. That number dropped each subsequent year, bottoming out at 22.5 per cent in 2009, before rising slightly to 22.9 in 2011 (the most recent year of available data).

Furthermore, Canadians gave 0.81 per cent of their combined income to registered charities in 2006. Except for a slight uptick in 2010, that percentage dropped every subsequent year to 0.64 per cent in 2011.

[Charitable giving on the wane in Canada; Manitobans remain the most generous Canadians | Fraser Institute.](#)