

Give me a line item veto on how my taxes are spent



BARB GUY

Taxes buy some pretty wonderful things; things that make America great. They also can be used for evil, used in ways that shame our country. But which is which depends on you.

Taxes pay for the space program, energy projects and general science efforts. Taxes pay for natural resources and agricultural, transportation and environmental programs.

Taxes buy medical care for the elderly and they provide income support for retired and disabled people. Taxes pay for food stamps and assist people with housing and health, with social needs and with unemployment. They pay for college educations, they support elementary and secondary school programs and they pay for kids' day care and Head Start.

Taxes give economic assistance to foreign countries and they maintain our embassies around the world.

Taxes outfit and payroll our armed forces and they pay for veterans' benefits and services. Taxes fund "national defense activities" such as the war in Iraq and, in not unrelated news, taxes pay the interest on the national debt.

Taxes run our prisons, fund federal law enforcement, pay for legislative functions and supply the general costs of our federal government system.

I never complain much at tax time. I'm content to pay my share of our country's costs, within reason, but it's best if I don't think about it too hard. The problem with taxes is that no one citizen is likely to welcome paying her own money for each and every thing taxes support.

I wish my tax forms were like a dim sum menu. I'd like it if all the ways my tax money could be used were laid out on a form, like the small Chinese treats one may choose from a list. Then I'd like to allocate my share.

The amount I owe in taxes can be thought of as a lump sum. In this scenario, I could give 100 percent of my lump sum to a particular line item, say, AIDS

research, or I could give smaller amounts to a variety of uses, down all the way to giving 1 percent to a hundred of my favorite uses of government money.

I love the menu idea. It would be my personal line item veto. Tax cuts to make fabulously rich people richer: No. The Iraq War: No. Anything related to Halliburton: No. Veterans benefits: Yes. Getting the rats out of Walter Reed Hospital: Yes. Aid to Darfur: Yes. Programs to care for the poor, the sick, the elderly: Yes. Public education: Yes. Drilling for oil in wildlife reserves: No. Welfare: Yes. Corporate welfare: No. A gazillion dollars to try and fence off Mexico: No. Nuclear weapons testing: No. Smaller classrooms: Yes.

Other people would happily choose to fund the things I find distasteful. One might choose to train and equip people in other lands to murder each other clear into the next century, but I wouldn't have to be a part of it anymore. Someone else might be adamant about not having their tax dollars go toward tobacco or abortion or agricultural subsidies or protecting the snail darter.

With the tax menu, we all would have a voice in how our share is spent. The people who can't be bothered to choose can give their

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whole 100 percent to paying down the national debt. Then even apathy could have a positive effect.

In the aggregate, the lunatic on the left and the fascist on the right would cancel each other out and the good, sensible, regular people who predominate in America but who have distinct valid opinions could all make choices and feel good about them.

So many opinions in America . . .
I wonder how it would turn out.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.