

Why must Connecticut always pay?

BY PHIL MAYMIN

When any government needs money, its leaders assume "Connecticut'll pay it," and we don't even protest anymore. Why not? What has become of us?

We have had the highest overall tax burden of any American since 1992, and the gap to second place is widening.

Thanks to the budget passed by Congress last month, we will also pay an extra \$4,311 in federal taxes per person per year by the end of four years — the largest increase for any state in America.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell backed off her plans to increase the state income tax, but only because she confirmed projections that state collections will continue to run vast surpluses into the foreseeable future, enough to cover as much spending as she wants. In other words, at current rates, we already will be paying too much.

On the local level, property revaluations are punishing those of us unfortunate enough to have bought a home that appreciated in value.

How have we become a state of wallet openers, the easy mark for politicians at any level?

We did not used to be such

pushovers. Connecticut has a long and proud history of opposing taxes and defending liberty. Historically, it is perhaps the most libertarian state.

Nearly 400 years ago, we were the site of the world's first written constitution. It was based on the principle that "The foundation of authority is in the free consent of the people."

Have we freely consented to be taxed? Five percent of Americans pay about half off the total federal individual income tax. Of course, 95 percent of people will vote to tax the remaining 5 percent, but that is not free consent by those of us footing the bill.

One Connecticut lawmaker in office during the 1971 state income tax recalls people seeing his legislative license plates and making obscene gestures. We kicked and screamed so much, the legislature actually repealed an income tax before it could go into effect.

Politicians tried again in 1981, but again we held firm.

In 1991, they passed it again, and more than 50,000 people marched on Hartford in opposition. Again, the legislature repealed the tax.

But then Gov. Lowell P. Weicker III vetoed the repeal. Legislators fell one vote short of overriding the veto, and since then, we have been the most taxed citizens of any state. Rankings

by the Tax Foundation, combining state, local, and federal tax burdens, have had Connecticut at No. 1 every year but two since 1992.

Now the federal government has passed a budget resolution that promises to be even more punishing. The budget authorizes spending without explicitly matching revenues, but we know what Congress is thinking: "Connecticut'll pay it."

The Heritage Foundation has calculated the impact such a budget would have on individuals in every state. Its early projections use a dynamic analysis to estimate the effect of allowing the Bush tax cuts to expire, which will be needed to fund the brave new spending.

The cost to Connecticut is greater than for any other state, with individual taxes going up more than \$4,000 annually. This increase is per person, not per family, so look around your table at mealtime and start multiplying.

The word "budget" comes from the French "bougette," meaning a little bag. The size of the bag is small and fixed. When was the last time those adjectives applied to any government?

And how has it come to pass that we in Connecticut are left holding the bag?

Perhaps the 1991 state income tax infuriated the most stubborn tax oppo-

nents among us. A Yankee Institute study last year noted we lost a greater percentage of 18-to-34-year-olds during the 1990s than any other state. Nearly a quarter million native-born citizens have moved out. A generation of residents has grown up assuming it's natural for them to be the most taxed people in the country.

Or perhaps there has simply been no direct outlet for our energy. With so many demands on our money, it's not clear which to oppose first.

Tax revolts often erupt over seemingly small taxes. The Boston Tea Party was over a 3-penny tax, but it was the straw that broke the camel's back.

We've been carrying too much straw for far too long. Governments beware: the next straw that comes along might get us so riled up, we'll shake off all our burdens and say, like our fathers before us, "Be damned if Connecticut'll pay it."

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