

In 1972 I was a sophomore in high school and workin' for the Brushy Creek Ranch outfit near Rockett, Texas. The banker owner, Mr. Singleton, was a Limousin cattle pioneer, importing into the United States two of the first full-blood bulls, Bandito and Beauregard. They were big boys for the time, each about 2,400 pounds. I weighed a strappin' 120 with a couple of big rocks in my pockets. Now I had grown up mashin' cows, so I was no complete rookie around these beasts, but at the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo that year, I had a learning experience.

On one particular day of the show, my buddy and I were tasked with parading these two big baloney casings around in the rodeo arena so folks could appreciate them in public. My pardner took Bandito. I drew Beauregard. Here we were walking two long-ton bulls through the exhibit alleyways and into the arena. I was in the lead. In order to get to the arena floor, you had to go through several hundred feet of hallway corridor. It was a Saturday morning so people and their kids and grandkids were everywhere, most of them with no experience being around these big critters.

Well, ol' Beauregard decided to single-handedly stampede everyone he could find. He drug me through that corridor like I was a dirt dauber on his back. I wasn't much in the way of ballast, but I hung on. I held tight as he drug me through the dirt in the arena. He made two passes from one end to the other. At first women and children were screamin' as we blew through the corridor and into the open. I just held on to those double lead ropes and tried to keep from getting stepped on.

As I spit red dirt at the end of the first pass, I came to the realization that the screams of terror had given way to applause and laughter. It went through my mind that they must have thought I was part of a clownish double muggin' bit of rodeo entertainment. Anyway, Beauregard finally got over what was pinchin' him and stopped. He acted like a perfect gentleman thereafter. It was then that I had an epiphany of what the law of supply and demand meant. He had more demand than I could supply.

This brings me to the present. I recalled that lesson recently as I was ruminating on what someone of great notoriety had said. The point was that we could reduce the size of the federal government by freezing hires

TALES FROM THE WASTELAND **Supply & Demand**

What are you willing to do without?

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

for several years until the workforce was decreased by a predetermined amount. Now I'm certain that this would reduce the employee head count, but it seems to me that until we actually reduce the public demand for government, any workforce reduction is going to be inefficient or temporary in its effect.

Whether we like to admit it or not, we currently have an almost unlimited demand for government. Some demand is necessary and good, like infrastructure. Some is entrepreneurial like R&D for high-tech military weaponry. Some is a sign of our benevolence

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and character as a society, like the SNAP program. We demand that our government provides a form of retirement and disability assistance, higher-education financing, and a banking and finance system. We demand that it participates financially in K-12 education, law enforcement, and incarceration systems. We demand that it protects us from domestic and foreign enemies, that it supports scientific and medical research, that it oversees natural resources like water, rangelands, forests, oil and gas, minerals, and air. We want our automobiles and food to be safe. These are good things in concept and practice. I suppose there is not one aspect of our lives where we as a society have not demanded that the government somehow play a role.

The size and excesses of our federal government are larger now than 50 years ago. Some of that growth is from simple population increase. There was a much smaller population in 1960 when the census counted 179,323,175 people, while the 2010 census counted 308,745,538. That's a 72 percent increase. But as the population has grown, even some of the good things we demand

have become excessive. The demand has become a juggernaut that cannot be sustained. The only real way to reduce the size, excesses, and associated intrusiveness of our federal government is to reduce the demand for it. And that's the problem.

The demand for the excesses of government is fierce. There are too many individuals and multinational corporations on the dole. (There is such a thing as corporate welfare.) Millions are lined up at the federal trough demanding something. There are thousands of privately owned businesses, large and small, that survive on government contracts. How do we reduce their dependency on those income streams? If you just cut across the board, you indiscriminately injure or permanently close some of those businesses that have created jobs based on government contracts. People will suffer across all levels of society. If you pick and choose which pieces of government to cut, some will be upset and cry foul. Value judgments always make decisions more difficult because somebody has to give up something.

How do we wean ourselves off the federal demand trough? In order to begin the process, there must be an alternate income stream to supply the demand. We must identify a means for government-dependent individuals, employees and businesses to generate enough resources from nongovernment sources to make up the difference. In order to do that, there must be an engine of creation. I think that engine is good old American know-how, ingenuity, creativity and energy. I say turn it loose! But turning it loose will necessitate that it be nurtured by the very government we would be attempting to downsize. That is a big challenge.

Coincidentally, we have to decide individually, and as a nation, what we are willing to do without. What will we demand less of? The devil is in the details, but it's our load and we gotta tote it. Like my tale about ol' Beauregard, I couldn't stop his demand by myself, and as long as everybody just screamed and got out of the way, his demand kept draggin' me around. ■

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