



From the Inside **Fat City**

Nothing better than a government job.

By Stephen M. Studdert

Words are inadequate to express my elation and gratitude for President Donald Trump's pardons of Oregon cattle rancher Dwight Hammond and his son Steven. Knowing of the behind-the-scenes work that brought about this action, I applaud our president for correcting a disgraceful wrong wrought by power-blinded federal prosecutors and unaccountable gun-toting BLM zealots.

The problem is that it's just one case. Washington, a city where I remain too engaged, is dangerously out of control. President Trump's unceasing efforts and our present robust economy notwithstanding, I'm ever more concerned about where things are headed with our government. Acting to fulfill his campaign promises, Trump is attempting to downsize the bloated federal bureaucracy, make bureaucrats accountable to elected officials, slash excessive federal regulations, freeze federal worker pay increases, and reduce obscene government spending.

But Trump's efforts have awakened the "establishment," now unrelentingly fighting him at every turn. Partisan bickering, personal vitriol, unhinged protesters, and civil disorder—the ferocity of which we haven't seen since sitting vice president of the United States, Aaron Burr, in a now infamous duel shot his political rival Alexander Hamilton, the former secretary of the Treasury—has pathetically become the daily norm in Crazytown.

The most formidable resistance to Trump's every move is from rank-and-file federal employees and their labor organizations. This overpaid crowd is fighting to protect its golden goose at all costs, and it's a lawyer's heyday.

The growing disparity and disconnect from real America in the overpaid federal

workforce is appalling. Even the Congressional Budget Office recognizes they are overpaid. It finds that on average federal salaries and benefits are 17 percent above private-sector jobs, and federal retirement packages are substantially above comparable private-sector retirements.

Almost nobody ever gets fired in the federal government. A recent report reveals that of 2.1 million federal employees, about 10,000 are fired each year—less than half of one percent! And another recent federal study finds that voluntary turnover, those who quit, is five times less than in the private sector! Why would anyone quit such lush compensation?

Another painfully glaring indicator of bureaucratic wealth is that eight of America's richest counties with populations of 65,000 or more, as measured by median household incomes, are all suburbs of Washington, D.C., which is populated by federal workers and contractors.

My second concern is that federal deficits are far worse than we're told by our government, which wants us uninformed and in the dark. Politicians and bureaucrats magically declare that some of the increased debt isn't part of the deficit. Do you run your checkbook that way?

Our government's fiscal condition is bad, and worsening. Today borrowing finances an astounding 77 percent of federal spending. And yet politicians just keep spending to buy our votes, and we blindly keep electing them.

Through sleight-of-hand deception, in just 20 years the federal government debt payments increased from \$2.18 trillion to \$8.43 trillion. That \$8.43 trillion debt payment is 10 times the Social Security benefits paid out (\$842 billion). But to look good and get reelected, many politicians fail to mention these payments when reporting government spending.

Federal spending is much higher and the budget position is more precarious than Washington is telling us. Borrowing to pay for previous borrowing, to pay interest, is a prescription for disaster.

And so on it goes. Trump is making much welcome progress, but we're losing the war. For those of us who live in western states where the federal government "owns" 47 percent of the land, and thus wrongly controls too much of our lives and livelihoods, we need to be especially worried, and vote. ■

Stephen M. Studdert, a sixth-generation westerner, was a senior White House advisor to three presidents.