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Summary

On 9/11, the federal government failed in its most important duty to protect the American people. Part of this failure comes from the growth in the size of government. If we are to make America safe, we must make government smaller.

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“Making government smaller must become a centerpiece of the effort to make America safer.”

Make America Safer by Making Government Smaller

by *Lawrence W. Reed*

Few Americans would argue with the proposition that the most critical, indeed the most indispensable, duty of the federal government is to protect the American people from foreign attack. If it loses your mail or forgets to feed the elephants at the National Zoo, we'll manage to get by. But if its negligence or incompetence invites assault, people get killed.

Now hold that thought for a minute.

On Thursday, July 22, the 9/11 Commission reported, after a 19-month investigation of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, that the failure of Congress and agencies tasked with defending the nation was staggering in its scope. The looming threat from our enemies was left to, as the New York Times put it, “a disparate collection of uncoordinated, underfinanced and dysfunctional government agencies.” Excuse me, but is this what we pay hundreds of billions of dollars in defense-related tax dollars for every year?

Now hold that one for a minute, too. I'll add some more dots and then try to connect them.

During the last week of July, the Democratic Party held its national convention, nominated its presidential ticket and put the final touches on its official platform. The message: Our Brobdingnagian federal edifice must get even larger. According to the National Taxpayers Union Foundation, Kerry's spending plans would balloon federal outlays by \$226 billion in his first year alone—an amount that works out to about \$2,000 per American family.

These dots just won't connect. On one day, we learn that government failed horribly to accomplish its primary mission. A few days later, people who want to lead the nation tell us that we must send government more of our money and trust it more than ever with not only our lives, but with just about

everything else too. This welfare state of ours has become one big circle of 300 million people, each with his hands in the next fellow's pocket.

It may come as a surprise to those who see aspirin made in Washington as the cure for every ailment, but the federal government is not God. It can't even be a good Santa Claus because it can't give anybody anything that it doesn't first take from somebody else. It's no Mother Theresa either, because on those occasions when it does do some good it usually costs an arm and a leg and sends a big part of the bill to generations yet unborn. The fact is, the bigger government gets, the more it starts to look like Moe, Larry and Curly.

Let me cut to the chase and make my point abundantly evident. There is a direct connection between the government failings of 9/11 and the assumption by government of countless responsibilities once regarded as the proper province of responsible adults in a free society. Americans can't expect government to do virtually everything for them and do it well. Americans must wake up. Making government smaller must become a centerpiece of the effort to make America safer. Period.

Republicans who read this and think they're off the hook should listen up: You're part of the problem, too. With the GOP in full control of Congress, non-defense spending in the Bush administration rose so fast it makes me wonder if Ebenezer Scrooge was our Treasury Secretary during the Clinton years. The fact that John Kerry would squander even more doesn't excuse such profligacy.

So let's come to our senses and save this country. That process starts by mustering whatever character and fortitude it takes to keep our hands in our own pockets.

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