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"Cost of State Government" Pt. 4**

Radio Address by Director of the Budget, June 30, 1932

THE COST OF STATE GOVERNMENT—DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

By means of these weekly discussions, as Governor Roosevelt has told you on previous Thursday nights, we in the State government of New York are seeking your help in determining what figures will appear on your tax bill next year. In the long run, you through your legislative representatives write your own tax bill. We, as public officials, simply present for payment the bill you have written. If you wish to write a smaller bill in order to reduce taxes, it is important that you have facts upon which you may base your decisions. Through the analysis of the costs of one department each week, we are trying to present such facts.

The reduction of your taxes presents much the same problem as the reduction of any other bill, such as that from the grocery, the meat market, or the light company. If your grocery bill is too large, it is rarely because it was added wrong or because things bought by someone else are charged to you. Rather, it usually is because you bought strawberries in January or ordered a porterhouse steak instead of a pot roast.

Government is much the same. If your tax bill is higher than you wish to pay, it is not likely that it was added wrong, or that a tax was levied on you which should have been levied on someone else. Instead, it is because you, the people next door, the other families on the same street, and the folks on the next farm, have been ordering governmental strawberries out of season. It is simply a case that, in making your requests for public service through your chambers of commerce, farm bureaus, fish and game leagues, parent-teachers' associations, automobile clubs and other organizations, you have said, "Charge it," so often that a bill of inconvenient amount has been run up. For government, you know, runs on a charge account basis. The items on this year's bill were ordered last year, or 10 or 20 years ago. And if next year's bill is to be more nearly within your means, it will be because right now you give your best thought to reducing the public services out of which expenditures and tax bills grow.

That explains why we are talking to you about taxes in July rather than when the Legislature meets next January. The decisions to be made within

p. 603

the next few weeks will determine the items to be written into the budget for legislative consideration. Thus, now is the time to analyze the items on this year's bill, especially those which were not on the bill 10 years ago, and indicate the retrenchments which you wish to help bring about in next year's bill, if, as we assume, you really wish to have taxes reduced.

To analyze one considerable item on your bill, we must go back nearly two generations. Shortly after 1900, Theodore Roosevelt and men sharing his views added a new word to the average American's vocabulary. The word was "conservation." It represented a new idea, that of conserving our natural resources for our children and grandchildren. Not only did the word sound good, but we liked the idea behind it. In fact, we liked it so well, we bought some; a little at first, then more later. We have been buying it in increasing quantities, especially since we decided twelve or fifteen years ago that preserving natural resources for the future was all right, but that developing them for recreational use in the present was even better. So we have been buying both kinds. Thus, in general, the question before us must have in mind as we look at particular items and increases in the cost of the Department of Conservation is: How much conservation do we want to buy? How much protection of wild life, reforestation, forest fire prevention, State park facilities, propagation of fish and game, and control of forest tree diseases can we afford? How much are we willing to pay for? On some of these items, we already have declared what we want to do for some time to come, as in the case of reforestation, when we passed last year a constitutional amendment committing the State to the expenditure of \$19,000,000 over the next 10 or 11 years for that purpose. On other items, such as the propagation of fish and game, we have in the amounts of money paid by sportsmen for licenses to hunt and fish a direct index of our willingness to buy those services. But, on the whole, our problem the next few weeks is to determine the quality and quantity of conservation services we wish to buy and are willing to pay for.

To give that question definite point, suppose we compare the department's present costs with those of 10 years ago, examining particularly the increases since that time. For various reasons, we will get the best grasp of this department by analyzing its affairs on a basis of appropriations. In 1922, the appropriations were \$1,337,000. This year, the total is \$4,482,000—a 10-year increase of 235 per cent.

Let us look first at the Conservation Department proper, including certain special activities. In 1922, the appropriation was \$954,000. By 1932 it was three times as much. The increase embraces numerous items. Here are some of the principal ones.

The largest single increase is the \$1,000,000 appropriation for the acquisition and reforestation of idle land added by last year's constitutional amendment. It is assumed that you consider this an investment which you wish to make. If you have changed your mind, you should give new instructions to the Legislature and have the question resubmitted to the voters.

There have also been sizable increases in personal service items. Game protectors, the police force which enforces the hunting and fishing laws, now number 132 as against 90, 10 years ago. Their maximum compensation has been increased from \$1,200 to \$1,800 a year. If the number and compensation of game protectors were reduced to the 1922 level, the saving would be \$129,100 in salaries and \$52,000 in traveling expenses.

The same question may be asked concerning forest rangers and observers. They prevent and combat forest fires. As the area of forest lands has been increased, so has the number of rangers. Although more fires start now than 10 years ago, the total timber damage from fire is less. Should the number and compensation of these rangers and observers be returned to the 1922 basis, in order to save \$58,000?

Should a similar policy be followed with respect to the other personal service costs? If we should go back to the 1922 basis, the cost would be reduced by \$84,000.

Supplementing the reforestation work is the operation of nurseries for the growing of trees. In 1922, the State had three nurseries. Now it has five. Ten years ago they had an inventory of nineteen million seedlings. Now they have six times as many. Ten years ago they produced 4,000,000 trees for planting; last year, 40,000,000. In the same period, the former cost of \$50,000 has increased five times over. Should this work be held to the 1922 level, thereby saving \$210,000!

Now we come to a new item. You have heard of State aid for education, for roads, for health centers and the like. We now have also State aid for county reforestation work. Its amount is not large, only \$45,000. There was no corresponding item in 1922. Should this new form of State aid be discontinued!

The next activity also is new in the past 10 years, \$121,000 for the suppression of the gypsy moth. What about that! This moth attacks and ultimately destroys trees. Should we let the pest go unchecked, causing the financial damage of which it is capable? Or should we spend \$121,000 or some smaller amount in an effort to combat it! An identical question can be asked with respect to the \$25,000 increase in the appropriation for combatting white pine blister rust.

The report recently submitted to the Governor by Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Commissioner of the Department of Conservation, lists the other items in the department proper which have contributed to the increase in its appropriations since 1922. Should each of these be cut back to the amount of 10 years ago? The answer, once again, depends upon just how much conservation you want to buy.

Now we turn to another section of this department's work, parks and parkways. The expenditures in 1931 were 33 times the amount of 10 years ago. With the completion of some major construction work last year, the appropriation for 1932 is \$1,517,000, as against \$324,000 in 1922. Apparently the people want these parks; at least they paid \$644,000 in fees to use them last year. Park earnings, you know, are put back into park maintenance along with the \$1,517,000 appropriated out of the general fund. Shall we stop at this point the development and extension of park facilities, perhaps closing those parks which are least popular, and adopting the policy of maintaining State parks only insofar as they can be supported from their own receipts? What do you think! Such a change if carried to the extreme would save more than \$1,000,000 a year.

The next item, \$75,000 for the maintenance of historic sites, is more than twice what it was in 1922. It typifies a thing which has been going on increasingly in recent years. It is the habit of interesting ourselves in some worthy undertaking, supporting it for a while from our own pockets, and then persuading the State to take it over and foot the bill. Ten years ago the State had 14 historic sites. Now it has 20. Do you want to continue paying \$75,000 a year to keep 20 historic sites in condition so that your boys and girls may visit them and learn of the significant events that happened there!

Here is a new appropriation of \$12,000 for maintaining the Olympic bob-sleigh run at North Elba. The people of the town supported it formerly. Then they transferred the bob-sleigh run, and of course its cost, to the State. Should the law authorizing the transfer be repealed!

For the benefit of civic and other organizations, these possible changes of policy are set forth in greater detail in the report submitted by Commissioner Morgenthau to Governor Roosevelt. But even in this brief talk, I have indicated clearly enough what the issue of economy in this department and in all government amounts to in the last analysis. Services and activities cause expenditures. Expenditures are the reason for taxes. Tell the public official what services you are willing to have curtailed, or do without entirely. Then we can tell you by what amount you will have reduced your own tax bill.