

Takeaways From This Year's Tax Season

For the last three years I've made my way as a freelance writer. I work seven to eight hours every day, seven days a week, and earn enough to remain solvent. I love what I do.

Last week, I once again paid my income taxes. My children are all grown, I own no property, and therefore I have few possible deductions. And once again, the state and federal governments appropriated about 25 percent of my income. On top of that, of course, are the taxes I pay for goods, food, and gasoline.

Here are my takeaways from this year's shakedown.

First, I worked approximately four months and a bit to pay my taxes. A [2019 study](#) reports that the average American taxpayer works about the same amount of time to pay all local, state, and federal taxes.

Second, the federal government this year again raked off about six times more money from my income than did the state of Virginia. This makes little sense to me. If ours were truly a federal system, Virginia would receive more money, the feds less. It's here, after all, that citizens actually see some of their tax dollars at work. Washington D.C. is a little over an hour's drive from my front porch, yet it might as well be on the far side of the moon for the impact it has on my life.

Third, and most importantly, I wouldn't mind paying taxes so much if I could see that money frugally and efficiently put to use. Schools that worked, a military whose ability to defend our country was assured, flourishing cities, a nation proud of its accomplishments and noble enough to aim for improvement—ticket items like these I'm glad to support.

Instead, every day the headlines bring news of failure and waste. Some \$400 million of the aid we've sent to Ukraine in its war against Russia likely wound up in the pockets of [corrupt Ukrainian officials](#). A recent government [audit](#) of our military has revealed that billions of dollars have gone missing. Many Americans right now are scrambling from paycheck to paycheck, and the military can't account for billions of dollars? In his annual Festivus Report—named after a parody holiday—Sen. Rand Paul lists just some of the government's waste for the year, including these [outrageous examples](#).

Finally, we can all complain about taxes until the cows come home, and we can all vote for representatives who support more fiscally prudent and low-tax policies. However, in the meantime, what can we do to survive tax season?

This may go without saying, but each year, knowing that taxes are coming, we should set aside money in preparation. It doesn't make the financial burden any less in terms of the actual numbers, but it can set us up to shoulder that burden.

Additionally, looking to [sources](#) of [financial wisdom](#) to manage our affairs well and save what we have left after taxes will help us get our financial house in order. As we evaluate our finances, we may even find ourselves re-evaluating our priorities. What are we spending money on that doesn't align with our values?

Do we really need the latest smart phone that will fuel our screen addiction? Should we really be eating out as much as we do—as opposed to healthy home-cooked meals? Maybe we should cancel the subscription to the streaming service that doesn't promote our values anyway.

Once again, another tax season has passed where we've witnessed the severe financial irresponsibility of the U.S. government. And once again, we've had to put far too much of our hard-earned money toward such waste. But just because the

U.S. government spends like there's no tomorrow doesn't mean we have to mirror that behavior: Despite the undue and unjust burden taxes put on each of us, we can use the dreaded occasion as a reminder to evaluate whether we are wise stewards of our own money.

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