

WE WHO WHINE

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Presidential Election Campaign

Check here if you, or your spouse if filing jointly, want \$3 to go to this fund. Checking a box below will not change your tax or refund.


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Vahe H. Apelian, Ohio, 15 May 2014

About a decade ago Thomas Friedman of the 'New York Times' wrote the bestseller "It's a Flat World". He was not questioning the curvature of the Earth. Metaphorically, he was saying that wherever we may be we stand more in plain view of each other than any other time in history. Consequently, Americans are more visible to the world than before. 

We, Americans, have a lot of good and not so good things for people see in us. Most importantly they see us, at least I see us, as whiners. It does not matter whether we are standing under scorching sun, on a flat world or in the shadow of a tree with a gentle breeze that keeps us cool and comfortable, we will find something to complain about. Why not?

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Let me give a more down to earth example I encounter every day. I live in Ohio, a Bible- belt state. True to its claim, within a leisurely walking distance of hardly five minutes from our house, I have the option of attending two churches. Sunday afternoon to the following Sunday morning these churches and the rest of the churches a bit farther are much like well-manicured and cared for abandoned buildings. Save Sunday mornings, they are lifeless. While the churches are lifeless for the six-and-a-half days of the week, we are actively complaining that our religious values are eroding, that public schools have ceased to guide our sons and daughters to a righteous path and that they do not even offer prayer and so forth. We, on the other hand, have no time to keep the doors of these churches open for at least some of the rest of the seven days of the week.

I have always been civic minded. I set foot in the United States as an immigrant a few days after the Bicentennial in 1976. I was fortunate enough to find a job not long after and thus had the opportunity to file my taxes. On my tax return form I saw a provision asking me to check whether I would like to donate \$1 for a presidential election fund. I checked it and nowadays I ask my tax preparer to check

the box. I do not know how the collected funds are allocated to the presidential candidates. Surely there are laws and regulations governing the disbursement of the fund.

Lately I have taken more interest in the provision in an attempt to counter the proverbial 1% who exercise enormous influence in running the affairs of the country and turn the rest of us into spectators

It turns out the contribution towards the presidential election fund came about in 1976. The provision then called for a contribution of \$1 per taxpayer. It is not a dollar that is taken from the taxpayer's refund. It's sort of an added tax to what the taxpayer already owes. Some time in the mid-'90s the provision was raised to \$3 and has remained at that level. In terms of financial burden on a taxpayer the provision and its increase present the following figures. The Federal Minimum Wage in 1976 was \$2.30 and \$7.25 for 2013. Setting aside adjustments to inflation, in 1976 the average federal minimum wage worker was asked to contribute 43.5% of the money he earned in a particular one hour of work. In 2013 the same worker was asked to contribute 41.4%. The federal government has been fair in assessing a taxpayer's contribution over the years.

I read that President Obama did away with public funding not to be constrained by its rules and regulations, especially that the federal funds probably would not have adequately funded his campaign. Presidential elections do not come cheap. A cursory search on the Internet indicates that we, the people, have been not contributing to the presidential election fund. We find that a coffee and a muffin that surely would cost at least \$3 are far more important to us than giving it up for the sake of contributing to the presidential election fund. In 1976, 27.5% of the taxpayers contributed towards the presidential election fund and in 2008 a mere 7.8% and the trend is downward. Latest figures indicate that it was down to 5.1% for 2012. The 2013 figures are not in.

The program is still active. It was on this year's tax return forms. I read that there is talk for ending the program for good reason. We the whiners do not support it.

I do not know how Plato defined the responsibilities of citizens in the Republic. One thing is for sure, citizens need to create the ways and means to have the first denizen of the republic elected without having him or her resort to special interests. The figures do not lie: we are abrogating those responsibilities and have resorted to whining instead.

Aristotle said that Nature abhors vacuum, be it physical or social. Given our reluctance to shoulder minimum civic responsibility, instead of whining we should be thankful that the 1% of our citizens who whine less and fill in the vacuum to keep our institutions running and our republic going. Otherwise we may end up with no institution at all.

