Column/Mark Templer

Federal excesses waste tax money

The presidential primary atmosphere is now in full swing, and Democratic candidates are falling over one another to criticize the Reagan administration. The Democratic candidates particularly enjoy lambasting each other about budget deficits, which now hover around $230 billion and promise to stay there indefinitely unless action is taken.

President Ronald W. Reagan, of course, has been concerned about deficit spending. This past week he reported a plan that would cut government spending by $70 billion over the next three years, without cutting essential services for the poor. This plan is the "President's Private Sector Survey on Government Productivity," a report issued by a two-year-old commission headed by Peter Grace.

The Grace Commission is composed of 160 top executives of U.S. companies. Clearly, they have approached the president's budget with an open mind and a fresh attitude. They have worked to find the government waste, fraud, and abuse which Reagan talked about and in which many Democrats laughed.

The Grace Commission did find waste, fraud, and abuse in federal spending. The committee, which has spent $24 million and detailed them in 23,000 pages of reports, its work has been completely paid for by over $40 million in private donations. In addition, there have been thousands of dollars spent on government contracts, supplies, and cash. The commission's work was serious and precise, and it should make people who whine about the deficit and worry about the government's gravy train will keep Congress and the special interest groups creaming when their programs are attacked. Consequently, Congress will probably ignore the Grace Commission's report.

One of the biggest problems identified by the commission was the government's failure to match the productivity of the private sector. Commerce Secretary Lewis Preston, in his White House address, included productivity as the key to the government's competitiveness.

The commission estimated the government's productivity was 25 percent below that of the private sector. One problem is that the government is wasteful. In 1983, the Environmental Protection Agency, for example, spent $511 each for a computer simulator that retail for under $100 per week. It paid $300 for aircraft simulator parts that retail for under $100 a dime. It paid $514 each for lightbulbs that retail for 60 cents.

The examples of government waste were everywhere: a federal court paid $8,000 to fly an investigator 50 miles to inspect an automobile. The Environmental Protection Agency pays $100 per day to rent an office trailer which rents for $100. It paid $4.20 to issue a payroll check, while it costs the private sector only 32 cents.

Another government problem is its excessive payroll costs. The Department of Energy has one supervisor for every three workers, double the private sector's ratio. In 1980, 6.3 percent of government employees filed on-the-job injury claims, compared with 1.7 percent of private sector employees. Government pensions are twice as costly as private pensions, and the retirement age is as low as 55 for civilian service workers and 40 for military personnel. The Grace Commission estimated the government could save $15 billion over three years if it simply treated federal employees the same as the private sector treats its employees.

The examples of government inefficiency and mismanagement go on and on, but the point is clear. There is a lot of waste. Unfortunately, this waste can be eliminated only through legislative action, and no significant interests who benefit from federal largesse scream when their programs are attacked. Consequently, Congress will probably ignore the Grace Commission's report.

Political candidates will continue to yip and yap about the deficit, shaking their heads in despair. They ignore the essence of the deficit's problem to curry favor with special interests and the media. So as the drumbeat of politicians grows louder, the government gravy train will keep rolling down the tracks, right over the taxpayers. All the while, the government will continue to mooch off the taxpayers. All the while, the government will continue to mooch off the taxpayers.

To the Editor:

As one of nearly 400 peace activists that attended the Middle East conference here at MIT last weekend, I was greatly impressed by the unprecedented degree of concern over the Arab-Israeli conflict demonstrated by representatives of the conference's participants (and not just the name "mentality bad," The Tech, Feb. 28). I have decided to respond to all criticism of the column, "Guns mentality bad," that both Israeli Jews and Palestinians. In fact, Arab governments have asked for peace talks, and at which many Democrats are concerned with the Middle East. The government instituted private sector purchasing techniques.

Federal employees also take a free ride at taxpayers' expense. They get 35 percent more vacation time and 33 percent higher health benefits than their private sector counterparts. In 1985, 6.9 percent of federal employees filed on-the-job injury claims, compared with 1.7 percent of private sector employees.

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