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Big government's fat remains hard to trim

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The French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr knew what he was talking about when, in 1849, he coined the phrase "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." (The more things change, the more they remain the same.) It has been repeated and attributed to different people, but he appears to have said it first.



The quote is especially true when it comes to modern politics.

I recently found an interview I conducted with Dr. Ron Paul (the father of Kentucky Republican Senator Rand Paul) in April 1976. I was a reporter for the local NBC station in Houston and Ron Paul appeared to have won a primary runoff election for a House seat. There was a delay in the final ballot count. Would you care to guess why? It was because of a malfunctioning vote-counting computer in Brazoria County. A Dr. Paul campaign billboard I have never forgotten depicted an overweight "Uncle Sam" with the caption: "Put big government on a diet." If only.

A much younger me asked Dr. Paul what he felt was his greatest strength in the race? He replied: "I think one thing was clear cut. Government is too big and the people are fed up with it. The usual politicians will not (get us) out of it."

One of the problems with overthrowing the establishment, I said, is that you then become the establishment (take note Democratic Socialists of America). What's to prevent somebody running against you in two years, saying: "throw that politician out of office"?

He offered this defense: "We're going to stop spending and stop the taxation and stop the controlling of peoples' lives."

How is that going?

I asked Paul to identify the greatest source of fat in government. "The biggest is HEW (now known as the Department of Health and Human Services). But it's big everywhere — every agency, everywhere you can think of. We're spending too much money."

He was right, then, but what would he think now? In 1976, the federal debt

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was approximately \$629 billion. Today it is \$39 trillion and counting. In 1976, the defense budget was \$90.5 billion. Today it's \$838.5 billion. Welfare spending 50 years ago amounted to \$331 billion. Today it's \$1.82 trillion, which includes federal, state and local spending. Yes, inflation is part of it, but not all of it.

A quote often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, though there is no clear proof he ever said it, warned where unlimited spending and debt has led other countries and where it could lead ours: "When the people find that they can vote themselves money, that will herald the end of the republic." Note

There is also the issue of human nature, along with the promotion of envy of what others earn that you have a "right" to have. Note

In that long-ago interview, Ron Paul was on to something. His son has tried to carry on his father's economic legacy. While his father encountered resistance from the establishment of his day, Sen. Rand Paul has faced far greater resistance.

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It's because they fear the wrath of their political opponents who will accuse them of starving grandma.

Perhaps Vice President JD Vance's Task Force to Eliminate Fraud will produce tangible and lasting results. Given past efforts and the desire of Congress to keep spending, I wouldn't count on it.

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