

Charity and Politics

Americans are being asked to decide many things this election year, but perhaps the most important is how the United States should take care of its poorest citizens. President Obama and the Democratic Party in general believe that income redistribution is the way to go. Since Mr. Obama has been in office, entitlement spending has risen 41% to about one trillion dollars a year. There are currently an astounding 126 separate anti-poverty programs in place.

Mitt Romney and the Republicans reject the concept of "income inequality" and say that a rising economy should lift all households. The GOP wants the free marketplace to provide income opportunity, not a giant federal nanny state. With the nation more than \$16 trillion in debt, the Republicans have economics on their side, but emotion is another matter.

Americans are a generous people. The group Giving USA says that last year we donated almost \$300 billion to charity. That largesse was voluntary. When the government decides to take our money forcefully through taxation, that's when things get dicey.

And so it is instructive to examine the charitable contributions of politicians that are driving fiscal policy. In 2011, President and Mrs. Obama's adjusted gross income was \$789,674. The first couple donated about 22% of that to charity. Very generous.

But Vice President Biden is another story. He and his wife donated just 1.46% of their \$379,035 income to charity. Paltry? You bet. And not unusual. Since Joe Biden took office in 2009, he has made close to \$1.1 million. His charitable donations: \$16,710. Advice to kids: don't go trick or treating at the Biden house.

During his time in office, President and Mrs. Clinton gave

generously to charity, despite big-time legal bills. So did George and Laura Bush. But Dick and Lynne Cheney topped all of them, giving a whopping 77% of their income to charity in 2005: a total of \$6,800,000.

The all-time miser seems to be Al Gore. As Vice President in 1997, Gore donated exactly \$353 to charity off an income of close to \$200,000. Plus, Gore has all that family trust fund money. Hey, Al, come on, man. That's just embarrassing.

A recent Google study shows that conservative Americans give twice as much to charity as liberals do. Some researchers believe that's because more conservatives than liberals go to church; therefore, they are tithing. Mitt Romney gives a lot of money to the Mormon Church, so there may be something to that. By the way, Romney's campaign estimates, that in 2011, the governor and his wife gave about 19% of their \$21 million income to charity.

The Bible says, "To whom much is given, much is expected." President Obama has paraphrased that while urging higher taxation on the rich. But there is a huge difference between taking money away from folks under threat of prison and charitable largesse. My tax dollars don't count towards my moral obligation because I must render to Caesar. But otherwise, as Al Gore well knows, I am free to do as much or little as I want.