

If there is an absolute maxim by which the federal government seems to operate, it is that the American taxpayer always gets ripped off. This is true whether you're talking about taxpayers being forced to fund high-priced weaponry that will be used against us, endless wars that do little for our safety or our freedoms, or bloated government agencies such as the National Security Agency with its secret budgets, covert agendas and clandestine activities. Rubbing salt in the wound, even monetary awards in lawsuits against government officials who are found guilty of wrongdoing are paid by the taxpayer. Not only are American taxpayers forced to "spend more on state, municipal, and federal taxes than the annual financial burdens of food, clothing, and housing combined," but we're also being played as easy marks by hustlers bearing the imprimatur of the government.

With every new tax, fine, fee and law adopted by our so-called representatives, the yoke around the neck of the average American seems to tighten just a little bit more. Everywhere you go, everything you do, and every which way you look, we're getting swindled, cheated, conned, robbed, raided, pickpocketed, mugged, deceived, defrauded, double-crossed and fleeced by governmental and corporate shareholders of the American police state out to make a profit at taxpayer expense. The overt and costly signs of the despotism exercised by the increasingly authoritarian regime that passes itself off as the United States government are all around us: warrantless surveillance of Americans' private phone and email conversations by the NSA; SWAT team raids of Americans' homes; shootings of unarmed citizens by police; harsh punishments meted out to schoolchildren in the name of zero tolerance; drones taking to the skies domestically; endless wars; out-of-control spending; militarized police; roadside strip searches; roving TSA sweeps; privatized prisons with a profit incentive for jailing Americans; fusion centers that collect and disseminate data on Americans' private transactions; and militarized agencies with stockpiles of ammunition, to name some of the most appalling.

Meanwhile, the three branches of government (Executive, Legislative and Judicial) and the agencies under their command—Defense, Commerce, Education, Homeland Security, Justice, Treasury, etc.—have switched their allegiance to the Corporate State with its unassailable pursuit of profit at all costs and by any means possible. As a result, we are now ruled by a government consumed with squeezing every last penny out of the population and seemingly unconcerned if essential freedoms are trampled in the process. As with most things, if you want to know the real motives behind any government program, follow the money trail. When you dig down far enough, as I document in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, you quickly find that those who profit from Americans being surveilled, fined, scanned, searched, probed, tasered, arrested and imprisoned are none other than the police who arrest them, the courts which try them, the prisons which incarcerate them, and the corporations, which manufacture the weapons, equipment and prisons used by the American police state. Examples of this legalized, profits-over-people, government-sanctioned extortion abound.

In the schools: The security industrial complex with its tracking, spying, and identification devices has set its sights on the schools as "a vast, rich market"—a \$20 billion market, no less—just waiting to be conquered. In fact, the public schools have become a microcosm of the total surveillance state which currently dominates America, adopting a host of surveillance technologies, including video cameras, finger and palm scanners, iris scanners, as well as RFID and GPS tracking devices, to keep constant watch over their student bodies. Likewise, the military industrial complex with its military weapons, metal detectors, and weapons of compliance such as tasers has succeeded in transforming the schools—at great taxpayer expense and personal profit—into quasi-prisons. Rounding things out are school truancy laws, which come disguised as well-meaning attempts to resolve attendance issues in the schools but in

truth are nothing less than stealth maneuvers aimed at enriching school districts and court systems alike through excessive fines and jail sentences for “unauthorized” absences. Curiously, none of these efforts seem to have succeeded in making the schools any safer.

On the roads: It has long been understood that police departments have quotas for how many tickets are issued and arrests made per month, a number tied directly to revenue. Likewise, red light camera schemes—sold to communities as a means of minimizing traffic accidents at intersections but which in fact are just a vehicle for levying nuisance fines against drivers often guilty of little more than making a right-hand turn on a red light—have been shown to do little to increase safety while actually contributing to more accidents. Nevertheless, these intrusive, money-making scams, which also function as surveillance cameras, are being inflicted on unsuspecting drivers by revenue-hungry municipalities, despite revelations of corruption, collusion and fraud.

In the prisons: States now have quotas to meet for how many Americans go to jail. Increasing numbers of states have contracted to keep their prisons at 90% to 100% capacity. This profit-driven form of mass punishment has, in turn, given rise to a \$70 billion private prison industry that relies on the complicity of state governments to keep the money flowing and their privately run prisons full, “regardless of whether crime was rising or falling.” As Mother Jones reports, “private prison companies have supported and helped write ... laws that drive up prison populations. Their livelihoods depend on towns, cities, and states sending more people to prison and keeping them there.” Private prisons are also doling out harsher punishments for infractions by inmates in order to keep them locked up longer in order to “boost profits” at taxpayer expense. All the while, the prisoners are being forced to provide cheap labor for private corporations. No wonder the United States has the largest prison population in the world at a time when violent crime is at an all-time low.

In the endless wars abroad: Fueled by the profit-driven military industrial complex, the government’s endless wars is wreaking havoc on our communities, our budget and our police forces. Having been co-opted by greedy defense contractors, corrupt politicians and incompetent government officials, America’s expanding military empire is bleeding the country dry at a rate of more than \$57 million an hour, and that’s just the budget for the Dept. of Defense for 2016, with its 1000-plus U.S. military bases spread around the globe. Incredibly, although the U.S. constitutes only 5% of the world’s population, America boasts almost 50% of the world’s total military expenditure, spending more on the military than the next 19 biggest spending nations combined. In fact, the Pentagon spends more on war than all 50 states combined spend on health, education, welfare, and safety.

In the form of militarized police: The Department of Homeland Security routinely hands out six-figure grants to enable local municipalities to purchase military-style vehicles, as well as a veritable war chest of weaponry, ranging from tactical vests, bomb-disarming robots, assault weapons and combat uniforms. This rise in military equipment purchases funded by the DHS has, according to analysts Andrew Becker and G.W. Schulz, “paralleled an apparent increase in local SWAT teams.” The end result? An explosive growth in the use of SWAT teams for otherwise routine police matters, an increased tendency on the part of police to shoot first and ask questions later, and an overall mindset within police forces that they are at war—and the citizenry are the enemy combatants. Over 80,000 SWAT team raids are conducted on American homes and businesses each year. Moreover, government-funded military-style training drills continue to take place in cities across the country. These Urban Shield exercises, elaborately staged with their own set of professionally trained Crisis Actors playing the parts of

shooters, bystanders and victims, fool law enforcement officials, students, teachers, bystanders and the media into thinking it's a real crisis.

In profit-driven schemes such as asset forfeiture: Under the guise of fighting the war on drugs, government agents (usually the police) have been given broad leeway to seize billions of dollars' worth of private property (money, cars, TVs, etc.) they "suspect" may be connected to criminal activity. Then—and here's the kicker—whether or not any crime is actually proven to have taken place, the government keeps the citizen's property, often divvying it up with the local police who did the initial seizure. The police are actually being trained in seminars on how to seize the "goodies" that are on police departments' wish lists. According to the New York Times, seized monies have been used by police to "pay for sports tickets, office parties, a home security system and a \$90,000 sports car."

In government contractors: We have been saddled with a government that is outsourcing much of its work to high-paid contractors at great expense to the taxpayer and with no competition, little transparency and dubious savings. According to the Washington Post, "By some estimates, there are twice as many people doing government work under contract than there are government workers." These open-ended contracts, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, "now account for anywhere between one quarter and one half of all federal service contracting." Moreover, any attempt to reform the system is "bitterly opposed by federal employee unions, who take it as their mission to prevent good employees from being rewarded and bad employees from being fired."

In defense contractors: Over the past two decades, America has become increasingly dependent on private defense contractors in order to carry out military operations abroad (the government's extensive use of private security contractors has surged under Obama). In fact, the United States can no longer conduct large or sustained military operations or respond to major disasters without heavy support from contractors. As a result, the U.S. employs at a minimum one contractor to support every soldier deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. With paid contractors often outnumbering enlisted combat troops, the American war effort has evolved from the "coalition of the willing" into the "coalition of the billing."

In the security industrial complex: Not only is the government spying on Americans' phone calls and emails, but police are also being equipped with technology such as Stingray devices that can track your cell phone, as well as record the content of your calls and the phone numbers dialed. The DHS has distributed more than \$50 million in grants—again, paid by taxpayers—to enable local police agencies to acquire license plate readers, which rely on mobile cameras to photograph and identify cars, match them against a national database, and track their movements. Relying on private contractors to maintain a license plate database allows the DHS and its affiliates to access millions of records without much in the way of oversight. That doesn't even touch on what the government's various aerial surveillance devices are tracking, or the dangers posed to the privacy and safety of those on the ground.

These injustices, petty tyrannies and overt acts of hostility are being carried out in the name of the national good—against the interests of individuals, society and ultimately our freedoms—by an elite class of government officials working in partnership with mega-corporations that are largely insulated from the ill effects of their actions. This perverse mixture of government authoritarianism and corporate profits has increased the reach of the state into our private lives while also adding a profit motive into the mix. And, as always, it's we the people, we the taxpayers, we the gullible voters who keep getting taken for a ride by politicians eager to promise us the world on a plate. This is a far cry from how a representative government is supposed to operate. Indeed, it has been a long time since we could claim

to be the masters of our own lives. Rather, we are now the subjects of a militarized, corporate empire in which the vast majority of the citizenry work their hands to the bone for the benefit of a privileged few. Adding injury to the ongoing insult of having our tax dollars misused and our so-called representatives bought and paid for by the moneyed elite, the government then turns around and uses the money we earn with our blood, sweat and tears to target, imprison and entrap us, in the form of militarized police, surveillance cameras, private prisons, license plate readers, drones, and cell phone tracking technology.

All of those nefarious deeds that you read about in the paper every day: those are your tax dollars at work. It's your money that allows for government agents to spy on your emails, your phone calls, your text messages, and your movements. It's your money that allows out-of-control police officers to burst into innocent people's homes, or probe and strip search motorists on the side of the road. And it's your money that leads to innocent Americans across the country being prosecuted for innocuous activities such as raising chickens at home, growing vegetable gardens, and trying to live off the grid. Just remember the next time you see a news story that makes your blood boil, whether it's a police officer arresting someone for filming them in public, or a child being kicked out of school for shooting an imaginary arrow, or a homeowner being threatened with fines for building a pond in his backyard, remember that it is your tax dollars that are paying for these injustices.

So what are you going to do about it?

There was a time in our history when our forebears said "enough is enough" and stopped paying their taxes to what they considered an illegitimate government. They stood their ground and refused to support a system that was slowly choking out any attempts at self-governance, and which refused to be held accountable for its crimes against the people. Their resistance sowed the seeds for the revolution that would follow. Unfortunately, in the 200-plus years since we established our own government, we've let bankers, turncoats and number-crunching bureaucrats muddy the waters and pilfer the accounts to such an extent that we're back where we started.

Once again, we've got a despotic regime with an imperial ruler doing as they please. Once again, we've got a judicial system insisting we have no rights under a government which demands that the people march in lockstep with its dictates. And once again, we've got to decide whether we'll keep marching or break stride and make a turn toward freedom. But what if we didn't just pull out our pocketbooks and pony up to the federal government's outrageous demands for more money? What if we didn't just dutifully line up to drop our hard-earned dollars into the collection bucket, no questions asked about how it will be spent? What if, instead of quietly sending in our checks, hoping vainly for some meager return, we did a little calculating of our own and started deducting from our taxes those programs that we refuse to support? If we don't have the right to decide what happens to our hard-earned cash, then we don't have very many rights at all. If they can just take from you what they want, when they want, and then use it however they want, you can't claim to be anything more than a serf in a land they think of as theirs. This was the case in the colonial era, and it's the case once again.