

101 Tax Quotes for Tax Day

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The quotes presented are from the 10th edition of *As Certain As Death: Quotations About Taxes*, which will be published by Tax Analysts in 2015.

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It's income tax time again, Americans: time to gather up those receipts, get out those tax forms, sharpen up that pencil, and stab yourself in the aorta.

— Dave Barry

Republicans believe every day is the Fourth of July, but Democrats believe every day is April 15.

— Ronald Reagan

If the Lord had meant us to pay income taxes, he'd have made us smart enough to prepare the return.

— Kirk Kirkpatrick

This [i.e., preparing my tax return] is too difficult for a mathematician. It takes a philosopher.

— Albert Einstein

I don't care anymore whether I pay more taxes or less taxes, as long as I don't have to understand it.

— Bob Thaves ("Frank & Ernest")

A progressive income tax is also the most complicated and difficult of taxes to maintain. It places a premium on sensitivity to economic changes and to public attitudes. It demands high technical skills on the part of those who shape the legislative structure, who administer and interpret its provisions, and who advise the public on how to order its business and family affairs under the tax. It requires a literate citizenry with a respect for law and a willingness to shoulder fiscal burdens.

— Joseph J. Thorndike

Taxation without comprehension is as inimical to democracy as taxation without representation.

— Lawrence A. Zelenak

There is untold wealth in America — especially at income tax time.

— Anonymous

The IRS spends God knows how much of your tax money on these toll-free information hot lines staffed by IRS employees, whose idea of a dynamite tax tip is that you should print neatly. If you ask them a real tax question, such as how you can cheat, they're useless.

— Dave Barry

The scary thing is that the IRS is, relatively speaking, one of the more efficient federal agencies.

— Paul Streckfus

Tax avoidance is a natural thing. It's like gravity.

— Jeff VanderWolk

On my income tax [Form] 1040 it says "Check this box if you are blind." I wanted to put a check mark about three inches away.

— Tom Lehrer

The Spanish used to burn people they didn't like. In England they once cut off your ears for stealing a penny. Russia had the whip. But for sheer ingenuity in instruments of torture, America wins again. We refer to income tax Form 1040.

— Announcer on *Fibber McGee and Molly* radio series

Every good citizen . . . should be willing to devote a brief time during some one day in the year, when necessary, to the making up of a listing of his income for taxes . . . to contribute to his Government, not the scriptural tithe, but a small percentage of his net profits.

— Cordell Hull

I must be the only person in America that every time — I pay the maximum tax rates — every time I sign that tax form, I smile. I thank God I live in a country that gave me a chance to make the money I do.

— Bill Clinton

It would be nice if we could all pay our taxes with a smile, but normally cash is required.

— Anonymous

Tax day is the day that ordinary Americans send their money to Washington, D.C., and wealthy Americans send their money to the Cayman Islands.

— Jimmy Kimmel

The income tax has made more liars out of the American people than golf has. Even when you make a tax form out on the level, you don't know when it's through if you are a crook or a martyr.

— Will Rogers

We can trace the personal history of a man, and his successes and failures, just by looking at his tax returns from his first job to his retirement.

— Charles A. Church

Income taxes are the most imaginative fiction written today.

— Herman Wouk

[Suggested simplified tax form:] How much money did you make last year? Mail it in.

— Stanton Delaplane

I have *no idea* what was in my federal tax return. Like 93 percent of all U.S. taxpayers, I just sign it and send it in. For all I know, it states that I am a professional squid wrangler.

— Dave Barry

Nothing makes a man and wife feel closer, these days, than a joint tax return.

— Gil Stern

People want *just* taxes more than they want *lower* taxes. They want to know that every man is paying his proportionate share according to his wealth.

— Will Rogers

But the argument based on the presumed justice of progressivism provides no limitation, as has often been admitted by its supporters, before all incomes above a certain figure are confiscated and those below left untaxed. Unlike proportionality, progressivism provides no principle which tells us what the relative burden of different persons ought to be. *It is no more than rejection of proportionality in favor of discrimination against the wealthy without any criterion for limiting the extent of this discrimination.* [Emphasis in original.]

— Friedrich A. Hayek

As a matter of policy, it is advisable to have every citizen with a stake in his country. Nothing brings home to a man the feeling that he personally has an interest in seeing that government revenues are not squandered, but intelligently expended, as the fact that he contributes individually a direct tax, no matter how small, to his government.

— Andrew Mellon

If the IRS took 100 taxpayers at random and sent each an incorrect notice that they owed an extra \$92.35 in taxes and interest, more than two-thirds would probably just send in a check without investigating further.

— George Guttman

The Opera reminds me of my tax audit. It was in a language I didn't understand. And it ended in tragedy.

— Chris Cassatt and Gary Brookins
("Jeff MacNelly's Shoe")

You can have a Lord, you can have a King, but the man to fear is the tax collector.

— Anonymous citizen of Lagash, a city-state that existed approximately 6,000 years ago in what is now Iraq

In connection with the payment of taxes due, no person shall fear that he will suffer, at the hand of perverse and enraged judges, imprisonment, lashes of leaded whips, weights, or any other tortures devised by the arrogance of judges. Prisons are for criminals. . . . In accordance with this law, taxpayers shall proceed with security.

— Constantine

The IRS fully recognizes its potential for instilling fear, and quite deliberately uses intimidation tactics to make us more docile and unquestioning taxpayers.

— Vernon K. Jacobs

Why do you think we [IRS enforcement agents] go after the little guys? They can't fight back.

— Anonymous IRS lawyer

It may be the pleasure and pride of an American to ask, what farmer, what mechanic, what laborer, ever sees a tax-gatherer of the United States?

— Thomas Jefferson

To meet revenue needs, the tax collection process has focused on easily measured sources of income, leaving many transactions either partially taxed or untaxed.

— Ralph B. Tower

The income tax allows the government to confiscate the wealth of its citizens. The curse of the withholding tax is that it allows the government to commit this crime systematically, effortlessly, painlessly, and benevolently.

— Laurence M. Vance

Most voters would rather have their purse or wallet stolen than be audited by the IRS.

— Frank Luntz

We [Internal Revenue Service employees] are not the bosses of taxpayers; they are ours.

— T. Coleman Andrews

We must get rid of the IRS. It's a bureaucracy fraught with totalitarianism.

— Sonny Bono

The power of collecting and disbursing money at pleasure is the most dangerous power that can be trusted to man.

— Davy Crockett

Another way of verbally masking elite pre-emption of other people's decisions is to use the word "ask" — as in "We are just asking everyone to pay their fair share." Of course governments do not ask, they *tell*. The Internal Revenue Service does not "ask" for contributions. It takes. It can confiscate bank accounts and other assets and it can put people behind bars for not paying.

— Thomas Sowell

You don't pay taxes — they *take* taxes.

— Chris Rock

Unofficial Motto of the Internal Revenue Service: "We have what it takes to take what you have."

— Anonymous

People try to argue that government isn't really force. You believe that? Try not paying your taxes. . . . When they come to get you for not paying your taxes, try not going to court. Guns will be drawn. Government is force — literally, not figuratively.

— Penn Jillette

Despite having an arsenal of weapons, no IRS agent has ever fired a shot at anyone.

— David Cay Johnston

A remarkable and potentially far-reaching byproduct of America's voluntary system of taxation is a tax collector that actually aspires to be popular.

— J. Mark Iwry

The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest possible amount of feathers with the smallest possible amount of hissing.

— Jean-Baptiste Colbert

This year, it is important for you to know that the Internal Revenue Service now has a positive, taxpayer-friendly image. What does this mean to you, the individual taxpayer? According to [the head of the IRS] it means you are now expected to tip: "If you're a married taxpayer filing jointly, tucking a \$50 bill inside your tax return will definitely cause the IRS employee serving you to feel appreciated and be less likely to select you for the auditing procedure we call 'The Closet Full of Snakes.'"

— Dave Barry

Few of us ever test our powers of deduction, except when filling out an income tax form.

— Laurence J. Peter

Helpful Hints When Choosing a Return Preparer:

- Avoid tax preparers who claim they can obtain larger refunds than other preparers.
- Avoid preparers who base their fee on a percentage of the amount of the refund.
- Use a reputable tax professional who signs your tax return and provides you with a copy for your records.

— Internal Revenue Service

Citizens should be able to comply with the tax code without having to spend absurd amounts of money to do so. The fact that there is such a large compliance markup in our tax system indicates that the tax system has gone awry. All of these hours could have been used for something a lot more productive than just making sure our taxes are filed and paid correctly.

— Arthur B. Laffer

Tax law complexity confounds those who want to comply, provides numerous opportunities for those who don't, and creates a dense fog that permeates the entire tax administration system making detection of non-compliance, whether accidental or intentional, exceedingly difficult.

— IRS Oversight Board

It will be of little avail to the people, that the laws are made by men of their own choice, if the laws be so voluminous that they cannot be read, or so incoherent that they cannot be understood; if they be repealed or revised before they are promulgated, or undergo such incessant changes that no man, who knows what the law is to-day, can guess what it will be to-morrow.

— James Madison

I am amazed at the serenity at which we accept another (near) mandate: That we must pay somebody to help us do our taxes. The government does not specifically require us to hire paid tax preparers or buy commercial software, of course. But it has, in effect, left millions of taxpayers with no real choice. Congress has created a tax code that makes it nearly impossible for many Americans to file returns without paid help.

— Howard Gleckman

Overall, the complexity of the tax code leads to perverse results. On the one hand, taxpayers who honestly seek to comply with the law often make inadvertent errors, causing them to either overpay their tax or become subject to IRS enforcement action for mistaken underpayments. On the other hand, sophisticated taxpayers often find arcane provisions that enable them to reduce or eliminate their tax liabilities.

— Nina E. Olson

The avoidance of taxes is the only intellectual pursuit that still carries any reward.

— John Maynard Keynes

A ton of economists, both liberal and conservative, have argued for a flat tax, but nobody's ever had the nerve to do it. . . . It would simplify things, but simplification doesn't seem to be in the human psyche.

— Clint Eastwood

Simplicity in modern taxation is a problem of basic architectural design. Present legislation is insufferably complicated and nearly unintelligible. If it is not simplified, half of the population may have to become tax lawyers and tax accountants.

— Henry C. Simons

Even if you are sure you are right and have all the records to prove it, fighting the IRS, one of the most powerful government bureaucracies on the planet, can be the ultimate nightmare. Seemingly routine struggles can drag on for years, leading to endless frustration and sleepless nights. Even those who eventually triumph may wonder if the fight was worth all the time, effort and expense.

— Tom Herman

I personally believe that the relationship between taxpayer and tax administrator will always be adversarial. This isn't a good thing or a bad thing; it's just the way it is.

— Mary Lou Fahey

Bad things happen to people who ignore IRS correspondence.

— Nina E. Olson

Like many Americans, I face a patriotic dilemma: how much cheating can I get away with? It's important to pay your taxes but it's just as important to pay as little tax as possible. Think of it as putting big government on a diet.

— Stephen Colbert

Yes, if you support our troops, you have to support the work of the Internal Revenue Service.

— E.J. Dionne Jr.

[The IRS] may take some solace in the fact that Matthew was a tax collector before he became a saint.

— Donald C. Alexander

I'm sick and tired of politicians beating up on the IRS. We have the best and fairest tax-collection system in the world.

— Charles B. Rangel

I wouldn't mind paying taxes — if I knew they were going to a friendly country.

— Dick Gregory

The IRS has a new way to get ordinary decent folks to comply with the tax code: Throw other ordinary, decent folks in jail.

— *Forbes Magazine*

The IRS has had substantial success in Chicago. Al Capone was convicted on tax evasion charges here, and that was probably the last time a majority of Americans applauded the IRS on anything.

— Sheldon I. Banoff

The higher a taxpayer believes the rate of tax cheating to be, the more likely that taxpayer is to cheat, too. In fact, a taxpayer's perception of compliance by others is a more powerful predictor of whether the taxpayer will act honestly than is the taxpayer's assessment of the risk of an audit or the likely penalty for evasion.

— Jason Mazzone

Any one may so arrange his affairs that his taxes shall be as low as possible; he is not bound to choose that pattern which will best pay the Treasury; there is not even a patriotic duty to increase one's taxes.

— Learned Hand

Members of the *Monty Python* [British comedy] group have incorporated for tax reasons in the United States. The name of their company: EvadoTax, Incorporated.

— *Mother Jones Magazine*

Last year I had difficulty with my income tax. I tried to take my analyst off as a business deduction. The Government said it was entertainment. We compromised finally and made it a religious contribution.

— Woody Allen

Employees make the best dates. You don't have to pick them up and they're always tax-deductible.

— Andy Warhol

No other nation in the world has ever equaled this record [of voluntary tax compliance]. It is a tribute to our people, their tradition of honesty, and their high sense of responsibility in supporting our government.

— Mortimer Caplin

We do not have, and never had, and could not have a "voluntary" tax system.

— Donald C. Alexander

COMMENTARY / TAX QUOTES

The American compliance record stems from a combination of civic obligation, fear of audit, and confidence that everyone else on the block is chipping in. Remove any one of those, and you could quickly undermine the whole system.

— Fred Hiatt

“I pay my taxes,” says somebody, as if that were an act of virtue instead of one of compulsion.

— Robert G. Menzies

As a cop, the IRS has to balance customer service and law enforcement. Stated another way, the agency’s motto could be: “We’re your friend. But if you push that friendship too far, we’ll ruin your life and then throw you in jail.”

— Christopher Bergin

Tax fairness is a social construction, and all that matters is how people feel about it.

— Joseph J. Thorndike

Most Americans would not tolerate a tax system that collected all the taxes it was supposed to!

— Lawrence M. Stone

There is only one way to kill capitalism — by taxes, taxes, and more taxes.

— Karl Marx

If the government takes all or nearly all of one’s disposable income or surplus income, it must undertake the responsibility for spending it, and it must then support all those works of charity and mercy and all the educational and religious works which in this country have heretofore been supported by private benevolence.

— *The Washington Post*

The Boston Tea Party . . . was a revolt against tax loopholes, not high taxes.

— Joseph J. Thorndike

Overall, the U.S. is a relatively low tax country. But we are not a low income tax country.

— Michael J. Graetz

You can do anything under [the Constitution’s] taxing power.

— Harlan Fiske Stone

The Constitution is first a tax document, a pro-tax document, written by nationalists to allow the federal government to tax people and things directly without going through the states.

— Calvin H. Johnson

It used to be that the sole purpose of the tax code was to raise the necessary funds to run government. But in today’s world the tax mandate has many more facets. These include income redistribution, encouraging favored industries, and discouraging unfavorable behavior.

— Arthur B. Laffer

There is no end, of course, to people promoting the use of the tax code to support nice-sounding things. That’s why we have the tax code we do.

— Holman W. Jenkins Jr.

We need to regard enacting tax expenditures as analogous to engaging in incest. Both can seem like good ideas at the moment. But history has taught us that both are very bad ideas.

— Jeffery L. Yablon

Because most of us are risk averse, we would benefit from buying insurance against the risk of being poor. A progressive income tax is like an insurance plan against being poor.

— Martin A. Sullivan

Some conservatives have claimed that taxing dead rich people is immoral. It is even more immoral to tax live poor people, who need the money for food, housing, and other necessities.

— Robert Michaelson

We must place limits upon every form of compulsory taxation, until we are strong enough to destroy it finally and completely; and to transform it into a system of voluntary giving. Under that voluntary system alone can a nation live in peace and friendship and work together happily and profitably for common ends.

— Auberon Herbert

Supply-siders never tire of proclaiming that taxes are the root of all evil, but reasonable people do get tired of explaining, over and over again, that they aren’t.

— Paul Krugman

Higher taxes never reduce the deficit. Governments spend whatever they take in and then whatever they can get away with.

— Milton Friedman

When you don't have an argument against fair taxation, you come up with a slogan: Class Warfare.

— Lawrence O'Donnell

Economic theory indeed supports the view that high tax rates can actually spur, rather than hinder, work effort.

— Jeffrey Sachs

Money made by money should be taxed at the same rate as money made by men.

— George McGovern

Our tax system sucks the substance and spirit of entrepreneurs and workers alike, filters that substance through Washington, then sends it back through countless federal programs that instruct us in minute detail about how to use the government's beneficence.

— Roger Pilon

In American political culture, taxes are no longer the price of civilization — they are the lifeblood of a parasitic state.

— Joseph J. Thorndike

Serious arguments about taxes are never just about taxes. They are about government's proper size and purposes.

— George F. Will

A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul.

— George Bernard Shaw

Government can't deliver a free lunch to the country as a whole. It can, however, determine who pays for lunch.

— Warren Buffett