

Presidential Quotes About Taxes

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No taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant.

— George Washington

Many of the opposition [to the new Federal Constitution] wish to take from Congress the power of internal taxation. Calculation has convinced me that this would be very mischievous.

— Thomas Jefferson

Taxes, after all, are dues that we pay for the privileges of membership in an organized society.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

The power of taxing people and their property is essential to the very existence of government.

— James Madison

I thought at first that the power of taxation [given in the new Federal Constitution] might have been limited. A little reflection soon convinced me it ought not to be.

— Thomas Jefferson

I trust that the Congress will give its immediate consideration to the problem of future taxation.

Simplification of the income and profits taxes has become an immediate necessity.

— Woodrow Wilson

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if the laws be so voluminous that they cannot be read, or so incoherent that they cannot be understood; if they be repealed or revised before they are promulgated, or undergo such incessant changes that no man, who knows what the law is today, can guess what it will be tomorrow. Law is defined to be a rule of action; but how can that be a rule, which is little known, and less fixed?

— James Madison

I can't make a damn thing out of this tax problem. I listen to one side and they seem right — and then I talk to the other side and they seem just as right, and here I am where I started. God, what a job!

— Warren G. Harding

My friends, don't you believe that our taxes are too high, too complicated, and utterly unfair?

— Ronald Reagan

[The federal income tax system is] a disgrace to the human race.

— Jimmy Carter

Taxes should be proportioned to what may be annually spared by the individual.

— Thomas Jefferson

Is this not true — That in proportion to the value of their estates the extremely wealthy pay far less taxes than those of moderate means? Compare the amount paid by millionaires with the amount paid by ordinary citizens. I believe that in proportion to

their estates they pay less than half as much as ordinary citizens, whereas they ought to pay more.

— Rutherford B. Hayes

Here is my principle: Taxes shall be levied according to ability to pay. That is the only American principle.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate.

— Theodore Roosevelt

Another means of silently lessening the inequality of property is to exempt all from taxation below a certain point, and to tax the higher portions of property in geometrical progression as they rise.

— Thomas Jefferson

In time of this grave national danger, when all excess income should go to win the war, no American citizen ought to have a net income, after he has paid his taxes, of more than \$25,000 a year.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

Why is it inflationary if the people keep their own money, and spend it the way they want to, [but] not inflationary if the government takes it and spends it the way it wants to?

— Ronald Reagan

[I favor] a progressive tax to put it out of the power of the owner of one of these enormous fortunes to hand on more than a certain amount to any one individual.

— Theodore Roosevelt

Social unrest and a deepening sense of unfairness are dangers to our national life which we must minimize by rigorous methods. People know that vast personal incomes come not only through the effort or ability or luck of those who receive them, but also because of the opportunities for advantage which Government itself contributes. Therefore, the

duty rests upon the Government to restrict such incomes by very high taxes.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

There can be no moral justification of the progressive tax. Perhaps that is why the bureaucrats pretend it is proportional taxation. Proportional taxation we would gladly accept on the theory that those better able to pay should remove some of the burden from those who are least able to pay.

— Ronald Reagan

Calculation has convinced me that circumstances may arise, and probably will arise, wherein all the resources of taxation will be necessary for the safety of the state.

— Thomas Jefferson

War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few.

— James Madison

War costs money. So far, we have hardly even begun to pay for it. We have devoted only 15 percent of our national income to national defense. As will appear in my Budget Message tomorrow, our war program for the coming fiscal year will cost . . . more than half of the estimated annual national income. That means taxes and bonds and bonds and taxes.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

Sound principles will not justify our taxing the industry of our fellow citizens to accumulate treasure for wars to happen we know not when, and which might not perhaps happen but from the temptations offered by that treasure.

— Thomas Jefferson

There were always those who told us that taxes couldn't be cut until spending was reduced. Well, you know, we can lecture our children about extravagance until we run out of voice and breath. Or we can cure their extravagance by simply reducing their allowance.

— Ronald Reagan

No matter what anyone may say about making the rich and the corporations pay taxes, in the end they come out of the people who toil.
— Calvin Coolidge

[This bill that I am vetoing] is not a tax bill, but a tax relief bill providing relief not for the needy but for the greedy.
— Franklin D. Roosevelt

The purse of the people is the real seat of sensibility. Let it be drawn upon largely, and they will then listen to truths which could not excite them through any other organ.
— Thomas Jefferson

The taxpayer — that's someone who works for the federal government but doesn't have to take a civil service examination.
— Ronald Reagan

One of the major characteristics of our tax system, and one in which we can take a great deal of pride, is that it operates primarily through individual self-assessment.
— John F. Kennedy

As I went about with my father when he collected taxes, I knew that when taxes were laid someone had to work to earn the money to pay them.
— Calvin Coolidge

Taxation is, in fact, the most difficult function of government and that against which their citizens are most apt to be refractory.
— Thomas Jefferson

The taxing power of government must be used to provide revenues for legitimate government purposes. It must not be used to regulate the economy or bring about social change. We've tried that, and surely we must be able to see it doesn't work.
— Ronald Reagan

The tax which will be paid for education is not more than the thousand part of what will be paid if we leave the people in ignorance.
— Thomas Jefferson

[I want to turn the poor from] tax eaters to tax payers.
— Lyndon B. Johnson

The same prudence which in private life would forbid our paying our own money for unexplained projects, forbids it in the dispensation of the public monies.
— Thomas Jefferson

Collecting more taxes than is absolutely necessary is legalized robbery.
— Calvin Coolidge

Our view is that taxpayer dollars should be spent wisely or not at all.
— George W. Bush

If the Nation is living within its income, its credit is good. If, in some crises, it lives beyond its income for a year or two, it can usually borrow temporarily at reasonable rates. But if, like a spendthrift, it throws discretion to the winds, and is willing to make no sacrifice at all in spending; if it extends its taxing to the limit of the people's power to pay and continued to pile up deficits, then it is on the road to bankruptcy.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

Governments are necessarily continuing concerns. They have to keep going in good times and in bad. They therefore need a wide margin of safety. If taxes and debt are made all the people can bear when times are good, there will be certain disaster when times are bad.

— Calvin Coolidge

We don't have a trillion-dollar debt because we haven't taxed enough; we have a trillion-dollar debt because we spend too much.
— Ronald Reagan

A wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.

This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

— Thomas Jefferson

Good government cannot be found on the bargain-counter. We have seen samples of bargain-counter government in the past when low tax rates were secured by increasing the bonded debt for current expenses or refusing to keep our institutions up to the standard in repairs, extensions, equipment, and accommodations.

— Calvin Coolidge

We've got the hardest working people in the world. We've got the best tax policy in the world. I mean, we've got a lot going for us.

— George W. Bush

I would suggest the taxation of all property equally whether church or corporation, exempting only the last resting place of the dead and possibly, with proper restrictions, church edifices.

— Ulysses S. Grant

I am well aware that these tax privileges are sometimes defended on the grounds that they encourage the production of strategic minerals. It is true that we wish to encourage such production. But the tax bounties distributed under present law bear only a haphazard relationship to our real need for proper incentives to encourage the exploration, development and conservation of our mineral resources. A forward-looking resources program does not require that we give hundreds of millions of dollars annually in tax exemptions to a favored few at the expense of the many.

— Harry S. Truman

I cannot undertake to lay my finger on that article of the Constitution which granted a right to Congress of expending, on objects of benevolence, the money of their constituents.

— James Madison

You've got too many companies ending up making decisions based on what their tax director says, instead of what their engineer designs or what their

factories produce. And that puts our entire economy at a disadvantage.

— Barack Obama

The prime objective [of estate taxation] should be to put a constantly increasing burden on the inheritance of those swollen fortunes which it is certainly of no benefit to this country to perpetuate.

— Theodore Roosevelt

When we proclaim that the necessity for revenue to support the government furnishes the only justification for taxing the people, we announce a truth so plain that its denial would seem to indicate the extent to which judgment may be influenced by familiarity with perversions of the taxing power.

— Grover Cleveland

There's a lot of evidence you can sell people on tax increases if they think it's an investment.

— Bill Clinton

We're going to close the unproductive tax loopholes that have allowed some of the truly wealthy to avoid paying their fair share. In theory, some of those loopholes were understandable, but in practice they sometimes made it possible for millionaires to pay nothing, while a bus driver was paying 10 percent of his salary, and that's crazy. It's time we stopped it.

— Ronald Reagan

There is a limit to the taxing power of the state beyond which increased rates produce decreased revenues.

— Calvin Coolidge

It is a paradoxical truth, that tax rates are too high today, and tax revenues are too low, and the soundest way to raise the revenues in the long run is to cut the tax rates.

— John F. Kennedy

Taxes are paid in the sweat of every man who labors. If those taxes are excessive, they are reflected

in idle factories, tax-sold farms and in hordes of hungry people, tramping the streets and seeking jobs in vain.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

During the [California gubernatorial] campaign it looked almost as if we could put our fiscal house in order without resorting to new taxes. We did not know just how bad the situation was then. Now we have had access to, and a chance to read, the fine print. As a result, we have, as you know, submitted a revenue bill of nearly one billion dollars in increased taxes.

— Ronald Reagan

My opponent won't rule out raising taxes, but I will. Congress will push me to raise taxes, and I'll say no, and they'll push, and I'll say no, and they'll push and I'll say, "Read my lips: no new taxes."

— George H.W. Bush

Not over my dead body will they raise your taxes.

— George W. Bush

The appropriation of public money always is perfectly lovely until someone is asked to pay the bill.

— Calvin Coolidge

Why you don't marry that girl? She lives in Monte Carlo and you can live tax free.

— Richard M. Nixon

There are only three ways to meet the unpaid bills of a nation. The first is taxation. The second is repudiation. The third is inflation.

— Herbert Hoover

Those who do work are denied a fair return for their labor by a tax system which penalizes successful achievement and keeps us from maintaining full productivity.

— Ronald Reagan

To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical.

— Thomas Jefferson

Over the years, a parade of lobbyists has rigged the tax code to benefit particular companies and

industries. Those with accountants or lawyers to work the system can end up paying no taxes at all. But all the rest are hit with one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world. It makes no sense, and it has to change.

— Barack Obama

For voluntary self-assessment to be both meaningful and productive of revenues, the citizens must not only have confidence in the fairness of the tax laws, but also in their uniform and vigorous enforcement of these laws. If non-compliance by the few continues unchecked, the confidence of the many in our self-assessment system will be shaken and one of the cornerstones of our government weakened.

— John F. Kennedy

The suppression of unnecessary offices, of useless establishments and expenses, enabled us to discontinue our internal taxes. These, covering our land with officers, and opening our doors to their intrusions, had already begun that process of domiciliary vexation which, once entered, is scarcely to be restrained from reaching, successively, every article of property and produce.

— Thomas Jefferson

[We should avoid] ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burden which we ourselves ought to bear.

— George Washington

The principle of spending money to be paid by posterity under the name of funding is but swindling futurity on a large scale.

— Thomas Jefferson

In a country of great industries like this, it ought to be easy to distribute the burdens of taxation without making them anywhere bear too heavily or too exclusively upon any one set of persons or undertakings. What is clear is that the industry of this generation should pay the bills of this generation.

— Woodrow Wilson

Blessed are the young, for they shall inherit the national debt.

— Herbert Hoover

I don't suppose we will ever get to the point where people are pleased to pay taxes, but we owe

it to them to see that the collection is done as efficiently as possible, as courteously as possible, and always honestly.

— Lyndon B. Johnson

The method of raising revenue ought not to impede the transaction of business; it ought to encourage it.

— Calvin Coolidge

The question where an income is earned is always a matter of doubt when the business is begun in one country and ended in another.

— William Howard Taft

The most damaging thing you can do to any businessman in America is to keep him in doubt, and to keep him guessing, on what our tax policy is.

— Lyndon B. Johnson

History shows that when the taxes of a nation approach about 20 percent of the people's income, there begins to be a lack of respect for government. . . When it reaches 25 percent, there comes an increase in lawlessness.

— Ronald Reagan

Large continued avoidance of tax on the part of some has a steadily demoralizing effect on the compliance of others.

— John F. Kennedy

Methods of escape or intended escape from tax liability are many. Some are instances of avoidance which appear to have the color of legality; others are on the borderline of legality; others are plainly contrary even to the letter of the law. All are alike in that they are definitely contrary to the spirit of the law.

All are alike in that they represent a determined effort on the part of those who use them to dodge the payment of taxes which Congress based on ability to pay. All are alike in that failure to pay results in shifting the tax load to the shoulders of others less able to pay, and in mulcting the Treasury of the Government's just due.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

The really rich people figure out how to dodge taxes anyway.

— George W. Bush

Tax avoidance means that you hire a \$250,000-fee lawyer, and he changes the word "evasion" into the word "avoidance."

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

To the extent that some people are dishonest or careless in their dealings with the government, the majority is forced to carry a heavier tax burden.

— John F. Kennedy

Every real American is proud to carry his share of any burden. I simply do not believe for one second that anyone privileged to live in this country wants someone else to pay his fair and just share of the cost of his Government.

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

Make sure you pay your taxes; otherwise you can get in a lot of trouble.

— Richard M. Nixon

The same government that requires a taxpaying citizen to document every statement on his tax return decrees that questioning a welfare applicant demeans and humiliates him.

— Ronald Reagan

The tax on capital gains directly affects investment decisions, the mobility and flow of risk capital the ease or difficulty experienced by new ventures in obtaining capital and thereby the strength and potential for growth in the economy.

— John F. Kennedy

So inscrutable is the arrangement of causes and consequences in this world that a two-penny duty on tea, unjustly imposed in a sequestered part of it, changes the condition of all its inhabitants.

— Thomas Jefferson

The man of great wealth owes a peculiar obligation to the State, because he derives special advantages from the mere existence of government.

— Theodore Roosevelt

The wise and correct course to follow in taxation and all other economic legislation is not to destroy

those who have already secured success but to create conditions under which every one will have a better chance to be more successful.

— Calvin Coolidge

[The lottery is a] painless tax, paid only by the willing.

— Thomas Jefferson

The government's view of the economy can be summed up in a few short phrases. If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.

— Ronald Reagan

I want the people of America to be able to work less for the government and more for themselves. I want them to have the rewards of their own industry: That this is the chief meaning of freedom.

— Calvin Coolidge

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

— Ronald Reagan

We put those payroll contributions there so as to give the contributors a legal, moral, and political right to collect their pensions and their unemploy-

ment benefits. With those taxes in there, no damn politician can ever scrap my social security program.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt (attributed)

There is no fairness in taxing the salaried man and the merchant upon their incomes and taxing at far lower rates the profits on the capital of the speculator.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

The apportionment of taxes on the various descriptions of property is an act which seems to require the most exact impartiality; yet there is, perhaps, no legislative act in which greater opportunity and temptation are given to a predominant party to trample on the rules of justice.

— James Madison

The wisdom of man never yet contrived a system of taxation that operates with perfect equality.

— Andrew Jackson

It is fair that each man shall pay taxes in exact proportion to the value of his property; but if we should wait before collecting a tax to adjust the taxes upon each man in exact proportion with every other man, we should never collect any tax at all.

— Abraham Lincoln