

April has passed and we've all probably grudgingly paid our federal taxes. Have you ever wondered what it would be like if you could be proud and happy to pay your taxes? Would you feel differently about paying your taxes if you knew they were going to support services that you, your family and your community rely on such as public safety, roads and bridges, schools, health care and social services?

Most of us file our taxes each year without a clue of how it is distributed. This is surprising, considering that individuals are our nation's primary bill payers. Income taxes paid by individuals account for 47 percent of all federal tax revenues, which are projected to be \$3.18 trillion in 2015. Other tax revenue comes from payroll taxes paid jointly by workers and employers, accounting for 34 percent and corporate income taxes paid by businesses, which make up 11 percent.

Across the United States, the average taxpayer paid almost \$13,000 in federal income taxes in 2015. Nationalpriorities.org has done a great job of breaking down where our money goes. Per dollar spent, the big winners are the pentagon and military at 25.4 cents per dollar and you can add another 5.9 cents to that for veterans benefits for a grand total of 31.3 cents. Health was next coming in at 28.7 cents while interest on the federal debt amounted to 13.7 cents on the dollar. Throw in the cost of government, 2.9 cents, and you have already spent a little more than 76 % of each and every dollar. To put that in perspective 76% of that 3.18 trillion is 2.42 trillion. Everything else our government spends on making our lives a little better comes out of that 24% or \$760 billion.

Here's the rub as far as I'm concerned – Americans don't all pay taxes equally. In theory the tax code is progressive, meaning those

who make more money pay higher tax rates — yet in practice that's not always the case. As Warren Buffett made famous, billionaires sometimes pay lower rates than middle-class workers. And some corporations, like Bank of America and Citigroup, have gotten away with paying zero federal income taxes, even when they make billions in profit. That's because the tax code is chock-full of tax breaks.

Ten of the largest tax breaks that together totaled more than \$750 billion in tax savings in 2013 – latest data available - overwhelmingly benefited the wealthiest Americans. Let's think about that for a second. By eliminating those tax breaks we could double the amount the federal government spends on roads and bridges, education, energy, and the environment?

As primary investors in our nation, we should all speak up with our own opinions on these questions. Making our priorities clear to lawmakers in Congress is a key part of making tax day something we can be proud of, even as we groan about filling out all those IRS forms.