

AS CERTAIN AS DEATH — QUOTATIONS ABOUT TAXES (2004 EDITION)

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Containing 1,029 quotes, this article is an expansion of five prior collections of tax quotes published in *Tax Notes* over the last decade. As before, to provide organization the collection is divided into eight somewhat arbitrary and overlapping categories. No claim of completeness is made. For a variety of reasons, many quotes were considered but not included.

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Interested *Tax Notes* readers are invited to send additional quotes for possible inclusion in a future edition to Jeffery L. Yablon, c/o Shaw Pittman LLP, 2300 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037.

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Taxes Generally

As certain as death and taxes.

— Daniel Defoe

Death and taxes are inevitable.

— Thomas Chandler Haliburton

Our Constitution is in actual operation; everything appears to promise that it will last; but nothing in this world is certain but death and taxes.

— Benjamin Franklin

We have long had death and taxes as the two standards of inevitability. But there are those who believe that death is the preferable of the two. "At least," as one man said, "there's one advantage about death; it doesn't get worse every time Congress meets."

— Erwin N. Griswold

Another difference between death and taxes is that death is frequently painless.

— Anonymous

Death and taxes and childbirth. There's never any convenient time for any of them.

— Margaret Mitchell

Death and taxes may be inevitable, but they shouldn't be related.

— J.C. Watts Jr.

Taxes: Of life's two certainties, the only one for which you can get an automatic extension.

— Anonymous

[T]axation, in reality, is life. If you know the position a person takes on taxes, you can tell their whole philosophy. The tax code, once you get to know it, embodies all the essence of life: greed, politics, power, goodness, charity.

— Sheldon S. Cohen

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[The Internal Revenue Code is] about 10 times the size of the Bible — and unlike the Bible, contains no good news.

— Don Nickles

Only God knows where we got our tax system.

— Sam Gibbons

Taxation, for example, is eternally lively; it concerns nine-tenths of us more directly than either smallpox or golf, and has just as much drama in it; moreover, it has been mellowed and made gay by as many gaudy, preposterous theories.

— H.L. Mencken

America's tax laws are similar to the writings of Karl Marx and the writings of Sigmund Freud in that many of the people who loudly proclaim opinions about these documents have never read a word of them.

— Jeffery L. Yablon

[Tax law jurisprudence is] a field beset with invisible boomerangs.

— Robert H. Jackson

If a client asks in any but an extreme case whether, in your opinion, his sale will result in capital gain, your answer should probably be, "I don't know, and no one else in town can tell you."

— James L. Wood

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

— Herbert Hoover

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

— George Washington

Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us; The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in

— James Russell Lowell

You must pay taxes. But there's no law that says you gotta leave a tip.

— Morgan Stanley (Advertisement)

Pothinus: Is it possible that Caesar, the conqueror of the world, has time to occupy himself with such a trifle as our taxes?

Caesar: My friend, taxes are the chief business of a conqueror of the world.

— George Bernard Shaw
("Caesar and Cleopatra")

The term "tax humor" is no doubt an oxymoron to many people; to the more cynical, it is an apt description of the entire tax code.

— John F. Iekel

Tax issues are fun. Getting to love them may take a bit of effort, but the same is true for Beethoven's string quartets, and think of how much pleasure they give if one does make the effort.

— Peter L. Faber

A fine is a tax for doing something wrong. A tax is a fine for doing something right.

— Anonymous

We are told that this is an odious and unpopular tax. I never knew a tax that was not odious and unpopular with the people who paid it.

— John Sherman

A citizen can hardly distinguish between a tax and a fine, except that the fine is generally much lighter.

— G.K. Chesterton

The reward of energy, enterprise and thrift — is taxes.

— William Feather

I don't know if I can live on my income or not — the government won't let me try it.

— Bob Thaves
("Frank & Ernest")

What is one really trying to do in the investment world? Not pay the least taxes, although that may be a factor to be considered in achieving the end. Means and end should not be confused, however, and the end is to come away with the largest after-tax rate of compound.

— Warren Buffett

The government deficit is the difference between the amount of money the government spends and the amount it has the nerve to collect.

— Sam Ewing

It is not the heavily taxed realm which executes great deeds but the moderately taxed one.

— Old Asian Proverb

Neither will it be that a people over-laid with taxes should ever become valiant No people over-charged with tribute is fit for empire.

— Francis Bacon

Unquestionably, there is progress. The average American now pays out almost as much in taxes alone as he formerly got in wages.

— H.L. Mencken

If you get up early, work late, and pay your taxes, you will get ahead — if you strike oil.

— J. Paul Getty

A person doesn't know how much he has to be thankful for until he has to pay taxes on it.

— Ann Landers
(quoting an anonymous source)

My father has a great expression: "The capital-gains tax has created more millionaires than any other government policy." The capital-gains tax tends to make investors hold longer. That is almost always the right decision.

— Chris Davis

Capital punishment: The income tax.

— Jeff Hayes

The best things in life are free, but sooner or later the government will find a way to tax them.

— Anonymous

As a people the Jews have always been small in number but gigantic in their impact on the course of civilization. Setting aside the religious aspect of Jewish history, their economic and political story has been one continuous struggle after another against outrageous taxation.

— Charles Adams

A tax can be a means for raising revenue, or a device for regulating conduct, or both.

— Felix Frankfurter

Basic tax, as everyone knows, is the only genuinely funny subject in law school.

— Martin D. Ginsburg

Those men would deserve the gratitude of ages, who should discover a mode of government that contained the greatest sum of individual happiness, with the least national expense.

— Giacinto Dragonetti

Like mothers, taxes are often misunderstood, but seldom forgotten.

— Lord Bramwell

The models of motherhood we had did not serve us in the lives we led. . . . We were often the first female members of our families to stay in hotel rooms alone, to raise children alone, to face tax problems alone. . . .

— Erica Jong

A fool and his money are soon parted. It takes creative tax laws for the rest.

— Bob Thaves
("Frank & Ernest")

Loophole: To liberals, any provision of the tax code that fails to claim money earned, inherited, saved, or otherwise pocketed by known taxpayers.

— *The Conservative's Dictionary*

What Mae West said about sex is true about taxes. All tax cuts are good tax cuts; even bad tax cuts are good tax cuts.

— Grover Norquist

[Sex is] the last important human activity not subject to taxation.

— Russell Baker

You have to be oblivious to common sense to believe that taxing people who do work and paying people who don't work results in more people working. That's just not the way the world works.

— Arthur B. Laffer

I'm putting all my money in taxes — it's the only thing sure to go up.

— Anonymous

I'm proud to be paying taxes in the United States. The only thing is — I could be just as proud for half the money.

— Arthur Godfrey

If you drive a car, I'll tax the street.
If you try to sit, I'll tax your seat.
If you get too cold, I'll tax the heat.
If you take a walk, I'll tax your feet.
Taxman!

Well, I'm the taxman.
Yeah, I'm the taxman.

— The Beatles ("Taxman")

Down to the Banana Republics
Down to the tropical sun
Go the expatriated Americans
Hopin' to find some fun
Some of them go for the sailing
Brought by the lure of the sea
Tryin' to find what is ailing
Living in the land of the free
Some of them are running to lovers
Leaving no forward address
Some of them are running tons of ganja
Some are running from the IRS.

— Jimmy Buffett ("Banana Republics")

The tax man's taken all my dough
And left me in this stately home
Lazing on a sunny afternoon

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And I can't even sail my yacht
He's taken everything I've got
All I got's this sunny afternoon.

— Ray Davies ("Sunny Afternoon")

I know everybody's income and what everybody
earns;
And I carefully compare it with the income-tax
returns;
But to benefit humanity, however much I plan,
Yet everybody says I'm such a disagreeable man!
And I can't think why!

— William S. Gilbert and Arthur S. Sullivan
("Princess Ida")

My father always said that there's no free ride
You've got to make a sacrifice
With so many Prophets on the Lord's side
Even your soul has got a price
But talk is cheap it takes money to buy your
freedom
And the tax man's knockin' at your door.

— Jimmy Buffett, Roger Guth, and Jay Oliver
("Carnival World")

I hate taxes
Taxes gonna break my back I swear
Don't you know I paid a lot more than my share
You know I've thinkin' about movin' somewhere
else
But I can't because I love America too much
Especially California
Yeah I guess I'm gonna have to pay these taxes
If I'm gonna live here.

— Robert Cray
("1040 Blues")

Some folks are born silver spoons in hand,
Lord, don't they help themselves, oh.
But when the taxman comes to the door, Lord,
The house looks like a rummage sale, yes.

— John Fogerty
("Fortunate Son")

I love America, but I can't spend the whole year
here. I can't afford the taxes.

— Mick Jagger

Whoever hopes a faultless tax to see, hopes what
ne'er was, is not, and ne'er shall be.

— Alexander Pope

Collecting more taxes than is absolutely necessary
is legalized robbery.

— Calvin Coolidge

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

All taxation is an evil, but heavy taxes, indis-
criminately levied on everything . . . are one of the
greatest curses that can afflict a people.

— Brooks Adams

Tax reform is ultimately a decision about values.

— Bill Bradley

We have come to love income tax laws so much that
we have chosen to have a lot of them. There are (1) the
basic federal income tax, (2) the federal corporate al-
ternative minimum tax, (3) the federal individual alter-
native minimum tax, (4) the federal computation of
earnings and profits for dividends payable to share-
holders other than 20% corporate owners, (5) the
federal computation of earnings and profits for distri-
butions to corporate shareholders that own 20% or
more of the distributing corporation's stock, (6) state
income taxes, departing in various ways from the
federal rules, (7) state minimum taxes, departing in
various ways from the federal rules, and (8) city income
and minimum taxes, departing in various ways from
both the federal and the state rules. The resulting loss
of efficiency in our economy, and cost of private sector
compliance are staggering . . .

— Gordon D. Henderson

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

— Ronald Reagan

Every time this country . . . has cut tax rates across
the board, revenues went up and the economy grew.

— Jack Kemp

The math of the late 1980s was simple. Any company
that exchanged its equity for debt was immediately
worth more, courtesy of the U.S. tax code. And *every*
company was thought to be ripe for such a maneuver.

— Roger Lowenstein

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

All taxation, however disguised, is a loss per se . . .
it is the duty, and the sacred duty, of Government to
take only from the people what is necessary to the
proper discharge of the public service; and that taxa-
tion in any other mode is simply in one shape or
another, *legalized robbery*.

— Richard Cartwright

We understandably hesitate to talk about law in explicitly moral terms. But tax has unavoidable moral and political dimensions.

— Edward J. McCaffery

Everyone who has anything to do with the tax code agrees it's just an unbelievable mess.

— Paul H. O'Neill

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

— Jimmy Carter

We must care for each other more, and tax each other less.

— Bill Archer

The hardest thing in the world to understand is the Income Tax.

— Albert Einstein

Count the day won when, turning on its axis,
This earth imposes no additional taxes.

— Franklin P. Adams

It's not what you make, it's what you keep.

— Anonymous

The taxing authority is an uninvited party to all contracts.

— Myron S. Scholes, Mark A. Wolfson,
Merle M. Erickson, Edward L. Maydew, and
Terry J. Shevlin

Censure is the tax a man pays to the public for being eminent.

— Jonathan Swift

Fear is the tax that conscience pays to guilt.

— Howard Aiken

Once — just once — I'd like to be fixed up with a guy who earns in a year what I pay in taxes.

— Anonymous Female Lawyer

Friends and neighbors complain that taxes are indeed very heavy, and if those laid on by the government were the only ones we had to pay, we might the more easily discharge them; but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly.

— Benjamin Franklin

Every society makes choices as to the tax systems that not only raise the necessary revenues to support government expenditures, but within that choice are inherent reflections of societal values. Not only does a

society choose a tax system but the tax system becomes one of the basic institutions that in itself shapes and molds the society.

— Karen M. Yeager

By this time fashion had condemned the beard in every other country in Europe, and with a voice more potent than popes or emperors, had banished it from civilized society. But this only made the Russians cling more fondly to their ancient ornament, as a mark to distinguish them from foreigners, whom they hated. Peter [the Great], however, resolved that they should be shaven. . . . Wiser, too, than the popes and bishops of a former age, he did not threaten them with eternal damnation, but made them pay in hard cash the penalty of their disobedience. For many years, a very considerable revenue was collected from this source. . . . Those who were refractory, and refused to pay the tax, were thrown into prison.

— Charles Mackay

Men in America were so conditioned that they felt differently about taxes and about prices. The former was an involuntary taking; the latter a voluntary giving No one observed the obvious fact that in terms of total income of an individual it made no difference whether his money went for prices or taxes.

— Thurman W. Arnold

Give us day by day our Real Taxed Substantial Money bought Bread; deliver from the Holy Ghost whatever cannot be Taxed; for all its debts & Taxes between Caesar & us & one another.

— William Blake

When a new source of taxation is found it never means, in practice, that an old source is abandoned. It merely means that the politicians have two ways of milking the taxpayer where they had only one before.

— H. L. Mencken

The government taxes you when you bring home a paycheck. It taxes you when you make a phone call. It taxes you when you turn on a light. It taxes you when you sell a stock. It taxes you when you fill your car with gas. It taxes you when you ride a plane. It taxes you when you get married. Then it taxes you when you die. This is a taxual insanity and it must end.

— J.C. Watts Jr.

. . . what are the inevitable consequences of being too fond of glory: — Taxes upon every article which enters the mouth, or covers the back, or is placed under foot . . . taxes on everything on earth and the waters under the earth.

— Sidney Smith

The Eiffel Tower is the Empire State Building after taxes.

— Anonymous

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Abracadabra, thus we learn
The more you create, the less you earn.
The less you earn, the more you're given,
The less you lead, the more you're driven,
The more destroyed, the more they feed,
The more you pay, the more they need,
The more you earn, the less you keep,
And now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to take,
If the tax-collector hasn't got it before I wake.
— Ogden Nash

The schoolboy whips his taxed top; the beardless
youth manages his taxed horse with a taxed bridle . . .
— Sydney Smith

Thinking is one thing no one has ever been able to
tax.
— Charles F. Kettering

A good new chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank
is worth a \$10 billion tax cut.
— Paul H. Douglas

Tax hatred is what holds the Republican Party
together.
— Bill Schneider

The principle is this — that you ought not in a free
country to lay a tax on the expression of political
opinion — a tax on the diffusion of that information
on public affairs which the spirit of our constitution
makes the interest and concern of every subject in the
State. Still more, you should not, by means of that tax,
create such an artificial necessity for capital that you
secure the monopoly of thought upon the subjects that
most interest the public at large to a handful of wealthy
and irresponsible oligarchs.
— Edward George Bulwer-Lytton

If you want more of something, subsidize it; if you
want less, tax it.
— Old Economic Adage

We always get more of anything we tax less. So if
you reduce the tax on sin, you'd probably get more sin.
— John Snow

People who complain about taxes can be divided
into two classes: men and women.
— Anonymous

Tax pollution — not people.
— Gerry E. Studds

All taxes are a drag on economic growth. It's only a
question of degree.
— Alan Greenspan

We contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into
prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket trying to
lift himself up by its handle.
— Winston Churchill

No nation ever taxed itself into prosperity.
— Rush Limbaugh

Substance controls over form, except where form
controls over substance.
— Sheldon I. Banoff

Taxation under every form presents but a choice of
evils.
— David Ricardo

There's nothing like self-interest to motivate be-
havior. When people ask me what are ways to pick out
tax-efficient [mutual] funds, the first thing I say is,
"Find out whether the manager has his or her own
taxable dollars in the fund."
— Susan Belder

Was it Bonaparte who said that he found vices very
good patriots? — "he got five millions from the love
of brandy, and he should be glad to know which of the
virtues would pay him as much." Tobacco and opium
have broad backs, and will cheerfully carry the load of
armies.
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

I shall never use profanity except in discussing
house rent and taxes . . .
— Mark Twain

Politicians never accuse you of "greed" for wanting
other people's money — only for wanting to keep your
own money.
— Joseph Sobran

Taxes grow without rain.
— Old Jewish Proverb

The thing generally raised on city land is taxes.
— Charles Dudley Warner

A lottery is a tax on people who are bad at math.
— Anonymous

The marvel of all history is the patience with which
men and women submit to burdens unnecessarily laid
upon them by their governments.
— William E. Borah

I want to find out who this FICA guy is and how
come he's taking so much of my money.
— Nick Kypreos

All the Congress, all the accountants and tax lawyers, all the judges, and a convention of wizards all cannot tell for sure what the income tax law says.

— Walter B. Wriston

[P]eople don't complain about taxes because they are selfish or stingy. They complain because they simply don't believe they're getting their money's worth.

— Zell Miller

There is a school which holds that critics of taxation levels merely want to opt out of the social contract, that they don't want to pay their "fair share" to help the least well off. No, what critics of taxation want is accountability.

— Daniel Henninger

Taxes are not levied for the benefit of the taxed.

— Robert A. Heinlein

Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

— *New Testament*

When Jesus tells his audience to "render to Caesar" his point is not that they should pay their taxes like dutiful Roman citizens; his point is that they should be rendering their *selves* to God. When it comes to what people owe God, Jesus is saying, we are all in the very highest tax bracket

— David T. Ball

When I was young, I was taught the story of Jesus and the taxman. The point was that Jesus was good to everyone; so much so that he would even eat with the taxman. The story tells a lot about being good, but it also tells a lot about historical perceptions of the tax collector.

— Christopher Bergin

Our tax code is perhaps the second most remarkable book in Western civilization. Of only one other book can it be said, with equal conviction, that great minds have devoted countless hours to the scrutiny and learned exegesis of every passage; that differing interpretations of the text have given rise to some of humanity's most epic struggles; and that, while millions mine it for valuable insights and inspiration, those who claim to live by the book and follow its precepts probably far outnumber those who actually do so.

— J. Mark Iwry

Introduce a wise and efficient system of taxation, and life and energy will pervade the country. Without such a system, it will sink into general and fatal paralysis.

— *The Atlantic Magazine*

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

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

Inflation is taxation without legislation.

— Milton Friedman

Because of the income tax, a penny saved is more than a penny earned.

— Jeffery L. Yablon

Any tax is a discouragement and therefore a regulation so far as it goes.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

The power to tax the exercise of a privilege is the power to control or suppress its enjoyment.

— William O. Douglas

Taxes are what we pay for civilized society A penalty on the other hand is intended altogether to prevent the thing punished.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Crime had to be committed before liability for the imposition [of disputed levy on illegal liquor] arose. Taxes are not so conditioned.

— Pierce Butler

A sales tax is a tax on the freedom of purchase.

— Felix Frankfurter

The sales tax seems to be more politically acceptable than the income tax.

— Raymond C. Scheppach

A use tax is a tax on the enjoyment of that which was purchased.

— Felix Frankfurter

There are some taxes that are good for our economy, because they discourage harmful activities.

— David M. Roodman

An old tax is a good tax.

— Old Folk Saying

Borrowing imposes a hidden burden upon taxpayers in the short run and an explicit burden in the long run, while taxes impose an explicit short-run burden and a more hidden burden in the long run.

— Richard K. Vedder and
Lowell E. Galloway

The law of taxation is more concerned with the substance of economic opportunity than with classifying

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legal concepts, and tagging them with names and labels.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

Virtually all persons or objects in this country . . . may have tax problems. Every day the economy generates thousands of sales, loans, gifts, purchases, leases, wills and the like, which suggests the possibility of tax problems for somebody. Our economy is tax relevant in almost every detail.

— Potter Stewart

Put not your trust in money, but put your money in trust.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Though tax records are generally looked upon as a nuisance, the day may come when historians will realize that tax records tell the real story behind civilized life. How people were taxed, who was taxed, and what was taxed tell more about a society than anything else. Tax habits could be to civilization what sex habits are to personality. They are basic clues to the way a society behaves.

— Charles Adams

Moral turpitude is not a touchstone of taxability.

— Frank Murphy

And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: . . . he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day.

— *Old Testament*

. . . For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent

— The Declaration of Independence

Taxes rise with inflation, however caused or to whatever extent, whether temporary or permanent; and depression, be it ever so great, and whether caused by imaginary difficulties or by war or famine, lessens the demand for contribution in a corresponding ratio.

— Nathan Clifford

Almost all taxes on production fall finally on the consumer.

— David Ricardo

When King Philip of France expelled the Jews in 1306, the reason given was that they charged excessively high interest rates. However, he did not cancel the debts owed to Jews, but instead set about collecting them for his own treasury. To his disappointment, the king discovered that the money collected in this way was less than the taxes that Jews had been paying.

— Thomas Sowell

Natural rights, so called, are as much subject to taxation as rights of less importance.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

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

The ideologists of taxation are constantly attributing their own preferences to some higher disinterested wisdom.

— Louis Eisenstein

Taxation is eminently practical, and is in fact brought to every man's door.

— Rufus W. Peckham

Trade being a sensitive plant, a direct tax upon it to some extent at least deters trade even if its effect is not precisely calculable.

— Felix Frankfurter

The payment of taxes gives a right to protection.

— James M. Wayne

[Tax] liability is one of the notorious incidents of social life.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Visibility enables individuals and businesses to know the true cost of transactions. It also enables them to see what their total tax liability is and to which level of government it is being paid. When a tax is not visible, it can be easily retained or raised with little, if any, awareness among taxpayers about how the tax affects them.

— Tax Division of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants

Those who can do a good trade don't wrangle over taxes.

— Old Chinese Proverb

In my own case the words of such an act as the Income Tax, for example, merely dance before my eyes in a meaningless procession; cross-reference to cross-reference, exception upon exception — couched in abstract terms that offer no handle to seize hold of — leave in my mind only a confused sense of some vitally

important, but successfully concealed, purport, which it is my duty to extract, but which is within my power, if at all, only after the most inordinate expenditure of time.

— Learned Hand

[T]o tax and to please, no more than to love and to be wise, is not given to men.

— Edmund Burke

Has [the tyrant] not also another object which is that [the people] may be impoverished by payment of taxes, and thus compelled to devote themselves to their daily wants and therefore less likely to conspire against him?

— Plato

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

— Thomas Jefferson

There are those who seem to have nothing else to do but to suggest modes of taxation to men in office.

— Robert Peel

The income tax created more criminals than any other single act of government.

— Barry M. Goldwater

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

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

— *New Testament*

Of course [the Orthodox Jewish dietary laws] are inconvenient at times, but not nearly as inconvenient as paying the federal income tax.

— Herman Wouk

There is no such thing as a good tax.

— Winston Churchill

It was as true . . . as taxes is. And nothing's truer than them.

— Charles Dickens

Taxation must affect the distribution of income, whether we will it so or not.

— Henry C. Simons

I like to pay taxes. With them I buy civilization.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

I like to pay taxes. It makes me feel less guilty.

— Anonymous Member of a Two-Income Couple

I'm squared up with the USA.

You see those bombers in the sky.

Rockefeller helped to build them.

So did I.

I paid my income tax today.

— Irving Berlin

[The tax code] is a monstrosity and there's only one thing to do with it. Scrap it, kill it, drive a stake through its heart, bury it and hope it never rises again to terrorize the American people.

— Steve Forbes

I think our tax system is not worthy of an advanced society.

— Paul H. O'Neill

The physical power to get the money does not seem to me a test of the right to tax. Might does not make right even in taxation.

— Robert H. Jackson

The incidence of taxation depends upon the substance of a transaction.

— Hugo L. Black

Taxes are the lifeblood of government and no taxpayer should be permitted to escape the payment of his just share of the burden of contributing thereto.

— Arthur T. Vanderbilt

Man is not like other animals in the ways that are really significant: animals have instincts, we have taxes.

— Erving Goffman

The invention of the teenager was a mistake. Once you identify a period of life in which people get to stay out late but don't have to pay taxes — naturally, no one wants to live any other way.

— Judith Martin
(writing as "Miss Manners")

There's nothing wrong with the younger generation that becoming taxpayers won't cure.

— Dan Bennett

COMMENTARY / SPECIAL REPORT

The expenses of government, having for their object the interest of all, should be borne by everyone, and the more a man enjoys the advantages of society, the more he ought to hold himself honored in contributing to those expenses.

— Anne Robert Jacques Turgot

Any intelligent thinking on taxes eventually reaches the ultimate purpose of life on this planet as each of us conceives it.

— Louis Eisenstein

[I]n most situations, the changes that taxes induce are symptoms of economic waste or, using economic jargon, inefficiency. In the absence of taxes, people and businesses react to prices that approximately reflect the true social costs and benefits of what they buy and sell, and taxes can turn prices from being pretty good signals of social cost and benefit into very bad ones.

— Joel Slemrod

Taxes send messages, and in several ways. They affect the costs and returns to different kinds of activity, thereby influencing patterns of use of capital and labor. They also make statements about the relative desirability of different types of activity and patterns of conduct. Conduct that carries a low tax induces people to emulate that conduct. Conduct that carries a high tax discourages such conduct.

— Edward J. McCaffery and Richard E. Wagner

[I]n one sense the tax structure is art — a subsuming of the infinite muddle of human activity under a single rubric, as though it had a single purpose and could be ordered by a mind heaving the line of a single vision.

— John Casey

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

We shall now embark on a voyage through the various sections of the Income Tax Regulations which are enough to boggle the mind of an English-speaking U.S. Citizen.

— William A. Goffe

Our tax code is so long it makes *War and Peace* seem breezy.

— Steven LaTourette

Don't tax you, don't tax me;
Tax the fellow behind the tree.

— Russell B. Long

Don't tax you. Don't tax me.
Tax the companies across the sea.

— Dan Rostenkowski

When it comes to finances, remember that there are no withholding taxes on the wages of sin.

— Mae West

The wages of sin are death, but by the time taxes are taken out, it's just sort of a tired feeling.

— Paula Poundstone

Cursed war and racking tax
Have left us scarcely raiment to our backs.

— Sir Walter Scott

Work and earn; pay taxes and die.

— Old German Proverb

More Americans pay taxes than vote.

— J. Robert Kerrey

The Legislative Process

The story is always the same [in Congress]: Higher rates are imposed and at the same time loopholes are carefully framed which permit the wealthy to get out from under the higher taxes.

— Hubert H. Humphrey

[American tax laws] are constantly changing as our elected representatives seek new ways to ensure that whatever tax advice we receive is incorrect.

— Dave Barry

It currently requires the same majority to raise taxes as it does to declare National Banana Peel Week. That is wrong. Raising taxes should require a high enough threshold that elected officials do it only when there is a clear and compelling reason.

— Mike Huckabee

There is an ancient belief that the gods love the obscure and hate the obvious. Without benefit of divinity, modern men of similar persuasion draft provisions of the Internal Revenue Code. Section 341 is their triumph.

— Martin D. Ginsburg

[Twenty-one years after noting to the Senate Finance Committee that section 341 contains a single sentence that is longer than the entire Gettysburg Address:] [T]he senators expressed horror about this, but, needless to say, the sentence is still there and the senators in question are not.

— Peter L. Faber

Is there a method to resolve the current problem of the tax system? Perhaps as a first step, Congress can

pass its own ethical rules that will require each representative and senator to prepare and file his own tax return without any professional help or guidance and under penalty of being dismissed from Congress, certify his compliance to his respective ethic committees.

— Denis A. Kleinfeld

Legislative changes in tax policy usually begin as marginal adjustments to the existing tax structure The tax code offers a variety of easily grasped levers. In this sense, it is an incrementalist paradise, susceptible and seductive to political tinkers. As a result, most changes in tax bills consist of simple adjustments in existing tax provisions.

— John F. Witte

The problem is not just that the law is overly complex. The problem is also that we change it all the time.

— Gordon D. Henderson

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

[S]ome uncertainty [in the tax laws] may be useful in discouraging taxpayers from venturing too close to the edge, and thereby going over the edge, of established principles.

— Don Lubick

[T]here are dangers in having the tax laws up in the air all the time

— Martin Neil Bailly

This idea that you start with a clean slate and end up with a beautiful, logical tax system just isn't democracy.

— John L. Knapp

[N]othing guarantees more applause and more support than the call to abolish the IRS.

— Frank Luntz

A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until a majority of voters discover that they can vote themselves largess out of the public treasury.

— Alexander Tytler

Late one night, just blocks from the Capitol, a mugger jumped into the path of a well-dressed fellow and stuck a gun in his ribs. "Give me your money," the thief demanded. "Are you kidding?" the man said. "I'm a U.S. congressman." "In that case," the mugger growled, cocking his weapon, "give me my money."

— *Playboy Magazine*

Politicians certainly must be considered the most formidable barrier to fundamental tax reform.

— David A. Hartman

If we don't do something to simplify the tax system, we're going to end up with a national police force of internal revenue agents.

— Leon Panetta

When Congress talks about simplification, taxpayers may well be reminded of Emerson's comments regarding an acquaintance, "[t]he louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons."

— Michael J. Graetz

The Congress is a circus. To the music of braying donkeys, each elephant is led in circles by the tail of another. While they have the peoples' attention, the clowns write the tax laws.

— Jim Boren

[S]ome in our [Republican] party miss no opportunity to roundly and loudly condemn affirmative action that helped a few thousand black kids get an education, but you hardly hear a whimper when it's affirmative action for lobbyists who load our federal tax code with preferences for special interests.

— Colin Powell

Thus the triple whammy: first, high [tax] rates reduce investment and growth; second, they encourage baroque loophole-seeking, which further exacerbates the unequal treatment of different kinds of income; third, the system gets ever more burdensome, shifting 6 billion person-hours yearly out of the productive economy and into the parasite economy of accountants and lobbyists.

— James P. Pinkerton

The United States will get a value added tax when conservatives realize that it is regressive, and liberals realize that it is a money machine.

— Lawrence Summers (attributed)

The first 9 pages of the Internal Revenue Code define income; the remaining 1,100 pages spin the web of exceptions and preferences.

— Warren G. Magnuson

The most earnest student can falter and reel in the ghost-world of [*The Talmud's* discussion of the laws pertaining to] the Temple: the orders of priests and Levites, the different sacrifices, the varying purity rules for wine, bread, fish, water, metal, glass, wood, clay, leather, textiles; the times and immersions of purification — a network of laws fully as involved and as searching as the U.S. Internal Revenue Code

— Herman Wouk

COMMENTARY / SPECIAL REPORT

Our income tax system has been destroyed by complexity — a complexity caused largely by well-meaning efforts to achieve theoretical purity, eliminate every real and imagined “abuse,” and address nontax policy objectives.

— Fred T. Goldberg Jr.

Since the content of tax policy is both complex and uninteresting to most readers, the press prefers to write about corruption and lobbying. The ideal story reports on a political campaign contribution to a member of the tax committee who has gotten a special interest amendment adopted for the contributor.

— Thomas J. Reese

Killing the corporate income tax would improve the efficiency and competitiveness of U.S. business; eliminate incentives to relocate overseas or to engage in mind-boggling shelter transactions; cut down a major source of accountants’ compensation and a temptation to look the other way; eliminate disincentives to pay dividends and foster more efficient corporations, sensibly valued. Who can argue with that?

— Edward J. McCaffery

The corporate income tax is one of the best examples in American political history of the law of unintended consequences. It was originally intended as a means to tax the rich, but it quickly became one of the prime means by which the rich have avoided taxes.

— John Steele Gordon

One of the fundamental lessons of economics is that the burden of a tax is not necessarily borne by the person who sends a check to the government.

— Gregory Mankiw

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

Taxes are a changing product of earnest efforts to have others pay them.

— Louis Eisenstein

There may be liberty and justice for all, but there are tax breaks only for some.

— Martin A. Sullivan

The less people know about how sausages and laws are made, the better they’ll sleep at night.

— Otto von Bismarck

No one who has witnessed tax lobbyists’ perennial infestation of Capitol Hill can ever again confuse the making of tax laws with the making of sausages: at least when you make sausages, you know the pigs won’t be coming back.

— J. Mark Iwry

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

In a reversal of “No taxation without representation,” women were required to pay federal income tax seven years before they won the right to vote.

— Loch Adamson

In case you didn’t know, ethanol is made by mixing corn with your tax dollars.

— Paul A. Gigot

Business has made it quite clear that the tax credit is the form in which it prefers to receive subsidies.

— Charles H. Percy

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

— Bill Clinton

For me it’s a little difficult to give tax relief to people that don’t pay income taxes.

— Tom DeLay

Tax cuts are for *taxpayers*.

— Phil Gramm

Tax cuts chronically fare poorly in opinion polls but do quite well at the ballot box.

— Fred Barnes

Never trust a member [of the U.S. House of Representatives] who quotes the Bible, the Internal Revenue Code or the Rules of the House.

— Eugene McCarthy

Complexity does not enter the tax code so much out of malevolence as through misguided reform efforts and excessive demands made on tax laws as the vehicle for implementing public policy.

— Sheldon D. Pollack

Tax systems can have multiple goals. For example, in addition to the common goal of raising revenue for the government, goals can also include redistributing income, stabilizing the economy, and achieving various other social and economic objectives through the use of preferences. Generally speaking, the greater the number of goals, the more complex is the tax system.

— The General Accounting Office

It is impossible to simplify the tax code without at the same time affecting the fairness of the tax code.

— William G. Gale

[A]lmost every time we pass a tax bill, we make the code more complex, increase the burden on the taxpayer, and make it harder to enforce.

— Trent Lott

The political function of the [individual and corporate] income taxes, which is served by their being complex, is to provide a means whereby the members of Congress who have anything whatsoever to do with taxation can raise campaign funds. That is what supports the army of lobbyists in Washington who are seeking to produce changes in the income tax, to introduce special privileges or exemptions for their clients, or to have what they regard as special burdens on their clients removed. A [flat tax] would [thwart those objectives] since the structure of the tax is so simple and straightforward.

— Milton Friedman

Lawmakers have hit upon some ingenious ways to keep milking the cash cow. Rather than making certain changes in tax law permanent, they enact them for one- or two-year periods, after which the provisions expire. As the expiration date nears, special interests begin to lobby for an extension and invariably cough up more campaign funds.

— Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele

In the tax law, complexity stems from rapacity taking cover in obscurity.

— J. Mark Iwry

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

If Patrick Henry thought that taxation without representation was bad, he should see how bad it is with representation.

— *The Old Farmer's Almanac*

I'm not for increasing taxes to increase spending on anything no matter how meritorious it is. It's a bad precedent.

— Phil Gramm

One way to reduce taxes is to hold elections every year because there never seem to be tax increases in an election year.

— Anonymous

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

Conservative governments which increase taxation lose elections.

— Margaret Thatcher

Not over my dead body will they raise your taxes.

— George W. Bush

Trouble is, a promise to maintain fiscal discipline doesn't make anyone stand up and cheer. Tax cuts, on the other hand, make millions stand up and cheer and hundreds of thousands so happy they'll write millions of dollars in checks to fund a re-election campaign.

— Bob Kerrey

No party ever won the White House (or Congress) by balancing the federal budget, nor did anyone ever lose a national election by producing huge deficits.

— William Greider

Tax cuts are never as popular with politicians in good times as are tax increases in bad times.

— Arthur B. Laffer

The reality is that for the last quarter century, Congress and the presidents have betrayed us by concocting tax laws that are insincere, unfair, and convoluted. We're just learning that when it comes to taxes, Washington speaks with an accomplished forked tongue.

— Martin L. Gross

Consider the United States Constitution. The Constitution is open-ended, generalized and telescopic in character. What has it spawned? Pervasive ambiguity and unending litigation.

Contrast the extreme counter-model of law, the Internal Revenue Code and its festooned vines of regulations. Code and regulations are particularized, elaborated and microscopic in character. What have they spawned? Pervasive ambiguity and unending litigation.

— Bayless Manning

There is a constant cry and a natural desire for a "simple" income tax law. America can have a simple income tax law anytime it wants it. It would not be especially difficult to draft The trouble is you wouldn't want that law. You wouldn't stand for it. Americans would not tolerate any "simple" income tax law. Why? The reason is simple. Any "simple" income tax law would take a "meat axe" approach. It would be outrageously discriminatory. It would be grossly inequitable and unfair to a lot of people.

— Laurens Williams

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[V]irtually every major accounting firm is an aggressive adversary of tax simplification.

— Stephen Moore

In every free country the power of laying taxes is considered a legislative power over the property and persons of the citizens.

— Salmon P. Chase

Getting a narrow tax break into the tax code is hard enough; getting it out can be even harder.

— Jackie Calmes

They [the people] prescribe no limits to the exercise of this right [taxation], resting confidently on the interest of the legislator, and on the influence of the constituents over their representative, to guard them against its abuse.

— John Marshall

Since the 1980s, it seems as if every journalist writing on tax policy is out to win a Pulitzer Prize by exposing some Watergate-type scandal of corruption and greed lurking behind the provisions of the tax code.

— Sheldon D. Pollack

Our taxes reflect a continuing struggle among contending interests for the privilege of paying the least.

— Louis Eisenstein

An irrepressible conflict has been raging for a thousand years between the strong and the weak, [with] the former always trying to keep the chief tax burdens upon the latter.

— Cordell Hull

The great correction of excessive taxation is its oppression on the constituent, which causes a reaction to reduce it.

— Levi Woodbury

The power to make distinctions exists with full vigor in the field of taxation.

— Stanley F. Reed

Any substantial tax reform would involve substantial redistributions of tax burdens and substantial changes in asset values, and you need some “lubrication” [i.e., transition rules].

— Robert Reischauer

Tax complexity itself is a kind of tax.

— Max Baucus

The tax code has just grown so complex and so ugly, like an unkempt hedge or lawn that never gets mowed.

— Alan Blinder

The complexity of our [tax] code in the main is not there because of some mischief. Most of it is there in the effort to do more perfect justice.

— Russell B. Long

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

[T]wo things are abundantly clear. One, tax simplification is desperately needed. Two, any effort is likely to be an unmitigated disaster.

— Jonathan Clements

The long avoidance of a wealth tax has been one of the great triumphs of the American upper classes.

— Richard Todd

Of course the truth is that the congresspersons are too busy raising campaign money to read the laws they pass. The laws are written by staff tax nerds who can put pretty much any wording they want in there. I bet that if you actually read the entire vastness of the U.S. Tax Code, you’d find at least one sex scene (“‘Yes, yes, YES!’ moaned Vanessa as Lance, his taut body moist with moisture, again and again depreciated her adjusted gross rate of annualized fiscal debenture”).

— Dave Barry

Distinctions which originated under a feudal economy when land dominated social relations are peculiarly irrelevant in the application of tax measures now so largely directed toward intangible wealth.

— Felix Frankfurter

[Tax expenditures are] those revenue losses attributable to provisions of the Federal tax laws which allow a special exclusion, exemption or deduction from gross income or which provide a special credit, preferential rate of tax or a deferral of tax liability . . .

— The Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974

There is nothing in the Constitution which requires a state to adopt the best possible system of taxation.

— Harlan F. Stone

Fundamental [tax] reform almost always runs the risk of making things worse.

— Dan Rostenkowski

The tariff, then nearly synonymous with federal taxes, was a prime cause of the Civil War.

— *American Heritage Magazine*

Systems of taxation need not achieve the ideal. But the fact that the Constitution does not demand pure

reason and is satisfied by practical reason does not justify unreason.

— Felix Frankfurter

[A tax loophole is] something that benefits the other guy. If it benefits you, it is tax reform.

— Russell B. Long

Lobbyists know that a 0 percent tax rate on capital income is not, in fact, the lowest possible rate. There can be negative tax rates. There can be subsidies. There can be allowances for depreciation. Lobbyists are adaptive creatures.

— Joel Achenbach

Taxation . . . in most communities is a long way off from a logical and coherent theory.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

[W]e tax generosity within families — even as we encourage people to deduct gifts to strangers.

— Allan Reynolds

Contrary to what some people claim, the tax laws have a lot of respect for logic. They use it so sparingly.

— Jeffery L. Yablon

Although it often seems as though the drafters of tax statutes delight in taxing people on the basis of what their advisers are likely to miss, Congress has not explicitly adopted this as policy.

— Lee A. Sheppard

Representation is the ordinary guaranty of fairness in taxation.

— Robert H. Jackson

In a country advancing in wealth, whose increasing revenue gives it the power of ridding itself from time to time of the most inconvenient portions of its taxation, I conceive that the increase of revenues should rather be disposed of by taking off taxes, than by liquidating debt, as long as any very objectionable imposts remain.

— John Stuart Mill

Taxes are the killing fields for Democrats.

— Grover Norquist

The genius of our ruling class is that it has kept a majority of the people from ever questioning the inequity of a system where most people drudge along, paying heavy taxes for which they get nothing in return.

— Gore Vidal

The soundest principles of republicanism do sanction some relation between representation and taxation

. . . . The two ought to be connected This was the principle of the revolution.

— John Marshall

A desire for equality among taxpayers is to be attributed to Congress, rather than the reverse.

— Stanley F. Reed

[S]cratch the surface in a “business-unfriendly” state and you’ll find a low property tax and high voter demand for services.

— Julia Homer

You [senators] and the American people don’t have a clue about how the IRS does its job, and that’s just the way they like it.

— Shelley Davis

If you ask me what single law I would pass to gain the greatest amount of tax simplification with fairness, I would say, without hesitation, campaign financing reforms. That would be a giant step forward. It’s not that problems of complexity are not understood. Complexity is the result of a failure of will to do anything about it.

— Jerome Kurtz

Lasting tax reform will not come without lasting political reform.

— John F. Witte

In the last twenty years, revenue needs have come to exceed the demands that legislatures feel it expedient to make upon accumulated wealth or property with fixed location within the state. The states therefore have turned to taxing activities connected with the movement of commerce, such as exchange and consumption.

— Robert H. Jackson

The power to tax may be exercised oppressively upon persons, but the responsibility of the legislature is not to the courts, but to the people by whom its members are elected.

— Salmon P. Chase

That the power of taxation is one of vital importance; that it is retained by the States; that it is not abridged by the grant of a similar power to the government of the Union; that it is to be concurrently exercised by the two governments: are truths which have never been denied.

— John Marshall

Objects and means of taxation were not in the years past sought for with the same avidity as at present [i.e., 1904]. The demand for revenue was not so great.

— David J. Brewer

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Our modern income tax experience began with the Revenue Act of 1913. The World War soon brought high rates.

— Robert H. Jackson

The tax law often favors cohabitation to marriage, institutional to family child-care, and indebtedness to parsimony. Is this good social policy?

— Richard K. Vedder and
Lowell E. Galloway

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

I guess you will have to go to jail. If that is the result of not understanding the Income Tax Law I will meet you there. We shall have a merry, merry time for all our friends will be there. It will be an intellectual center, for no one understands the Income Tax Law except persons who have not sufficient intelligence to understand the questions that arise under it.

— Elihu Root

The income tax laws do not profess to embody perfect economic theory.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

I know of no power, indeed, of which a free people ought to be more jealous, than of that of levying taxes and duties.

— Joseph Story

I have long said, "I never met a tax cut I didn't like" — though I would go on to say that I like some better than others.

— Milton Friedman

The best way to restrain the politicians' impulse to spend and to expand government's reach is to keep the surplus modest. That means lowering taxes.

— R. Emmett Tyrrell

[Responding to Chancellor of the Exchequer Gladstone's question as to the practical uses of electricity:] Why, sir, there is every probability that you will soon be able to tax it!

— Michael Faraday

This year is not much different from other years. The Ways and Means Committee worked up its draft of the 1997 tax bill in secret and revealed it on June 9 and 10. The bill passed the House less than a month later. No hearings were held on the actual bill. It was funny (if that is the proper word) to watch the chief of staff of the Joint Tax Committee on June 12 describe the bill to the members. He was speaking at a rapid pace, so fast

that most of the members could not possibly have understood him. I, as a tax expert, had a very tough time in following his rapid explanation. He answered questions very narrowly, and there was a vote. A few good lobbyists got advanced word and were able to change a few things, but most of us only watched in awe, or disbelief, that this was the way to make a law.

— Sheldon S. Cohen

We shall tax and tax, and spend and spend, and elect and elect.

— Harry L. Hopkins
(attributed)

Liberals have practiced "tax and tax, spend and spend, elect and elect" but conservatives have perfected "borrow and borrow, spend and spend, elect and elect."

— George Will

The tendency of taxation is to create a class of persons who do not labor, to take from those who do labor the produce of that labor, and to give it to those who do not labor.

— William Cobbett

Lower taxes that force cutbacks and reforms in spending programs often produce a double benefit. Besides the direct benefit from lower marginal tax rates on income, dividends, or investments, there are indirect benefits from the forced reductions in inefficient spending programs. This might be an overly generous welfare system or programs that benefit constituents of powerful members of Congress.

— Gary S. Becker, Edward P. Lazear, and
Kevin M. Murphy

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

— George Bernard Shaw

[A] democratic government is the only one in which those who vote for a tax can escape the obligation to pay it.

— Alexis De Tocqueville

Hypocrisy . . . raises its head every time the subject of tax simplification comes up.

— Lee A. Sheppard

To extinguish a Debt which exists and to avoid contracting more are ideas almost always favored by public feeling and opinion; but to pay Taxes for the one or the other purpose, which are the only means of avoiding the evil, is always more or less unpopular. These contradictions are in human nature.

— Alexander Hamilton

The only way you can do that [decrease taxes, balance the budget, and increase military spending] is with mirrors, and that's what it would take.

— John B. Anderson

What an increase of rent is to the farmers, an increase of taxation is to the public . . . so long as it is confined within moderate limits, it acts as a powerful stimulus to industry and economy, and most commonly occasions the production of more wealth than it abstracts.

— J.R. McCulloch

There is a prevailing maxim among some reasoners, *That every new tax creates a new ability in the subject to bear it, and that each increase of public burdens increases proportionably the industry of the people.*

— David Hume

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

— Calvin Coolidge

Why should the federal government tax the consumption of red wine, while it does not tax cola drinks, particularly in light of empirical evidence that suggests that moderate wine drinking is actually beneficial?

— Richard K. Vedder and
Lowell E. Gallaway

All taxes discourage something. Why not discourage bad things like pollution rather than good things like working or investment?

— Lawrence Summers

The best legislator is the one who votes for all appropriations and against all taxes.

— Walter P. Brownlow
(attributed)

The design of a tax system, including the extent to which it confers avoidance power, reflects the values of its designers. Tax systems, after all, do not follow the laws of nature. The design of a tax system is not ordained by anything even remotely analogous to the law of gravity. Unlike the falling of a pebble released from a hand, a particular tax system is not the inevitable result of forces which humans can understand, perhaps control and sometimes escape from, but cannot alter. Rather, tax systems are products of human creation. They exist because they serve human objectives, reflecting the values of their designers. A tax system's design can reveal much about those values.

— Alice G. Abreu

If the rich are so powerful, why are they taxed so heavily?

— Robert J. Samuelson

The financial policy of the welfare state requires that there be no way for the owners of wealth to protect themselves.

— Alan Greenspan

Are the Republicans in Congress more Machiavelian than we tend to give them credit for? Can it be that their objective is to so burden every taxpayer that they — of every income bracket — will rise up and revolt and demand a new tax system?

— Denis A. Kleinfeld

If your goal is to get rid of the income tax, creating a variety of unnecessary complexities is a strategic advantage. It gives people a reason to move to another tax system.

— William G. Gale

Taxation is neither a penalty imposed on the taxpayer nor a liability which he assumes by contract. It is but a way of apportioning the cost of government among those who in some measure are privileged to enjoy its benefits and must bear its burdens. Since no citizen enjoys immunity from the burden, its retroactive imposition does not necessarily infringe due process.

— Harlan F. Stone

Tax legislation is not a promise, and a taxpayer has no vested right in the Internal Revenue Code.

— Harry Blackmun

That most delicious of all privileges — spending other people's money.

— John Randolph

Taxing is an easy business. Any projector can contrive new impositions; any bungler can add to the old; but is it altogether wise to have no other bounds to your impositions than the patience of those who are to bear them?

— Edmund Burke

Q. I understand that Congress is considering a so-called "flat" tax system. How would this work?

A. If Congress were to pass a "flat" tax, you'd simply pay a fixed percentage of your income, and you wouldn't have to fill out any complicated forms, and there would be no loopholes for politically connected groups, and normal people would actually understand the tax laws, and giant talking broccoli stalks would come around and mow your lawn for free, because Congress is NOT going to pass a flat tax, you pathetic fool.

— Dave Barry

The federal income tax is a complete mess. It's not efficient. It's not fair. It's not simple. It's not comprehensible. It fosters tax avoidance and cheating. It costs billions of dollars to administer. It costs taxpayers

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billions of dollars in time spent filling out tax forms and other forms of compliance. It costs the economy billions of dollars in lost output of goods and services from investments being made for tax rather than for economic purposes. It involves tens of thousands of lawyers and lobbyists getting tax benefits for their clients instead of performing productive work. It can't find ten serious economists to defend it. It is not worth saving.

— Robert E. Hall and Alvin Rabushka

Government

The revenue of the state is the state.

— Edmund Burke

The point to remember is that what the government gives it must first take away.

— John Strider Coleman

In general, the art of government consists of taking as much money as possible from one class of citizens to give to the other.

— Voltaire

When you listen to tax-cut rhetoric, remember that giving one class of taxpayer a "break" requires — now or down the line — that an equivalent burden be imposed on other parties. In other words, if I get a break, someone else pays. Government can't deliver a free lunch to the country as a whole. It can however, determine who pays for lunch.

— Warren Buffett

If, from the more wretched parts of the old world, we look at those which are in an advanced stage of improvement, we still find the greedy hand of government thrusting itself into every corner and crevice of industry, and grasping the spoil of the multitude. Invention is continually exercised, to furnish new pretenses for revenues and taxation. It watches prosperity as its prey and permits none to escape without tribute.

— Thomas Paine

[A]ll governments must have a regard not only for what the people are *able* to bear, but what they are *willing* to pay, and the *manner* in which they are willing to pay, without being provoked to a rebellion.

— Henry Fox

Government expands to absorb revenue and then some.

— Tom Wicker

The state has grown used to treating its taxpayers as a farmer treats his cows, keeping them in a field to be milked.

— James Dale Davidson and
Lord William Rees-Mogg

Milk the cow, but do not pull off the udder.

— Greek proverb

[T]ax reform consists of more than changes in those items that are called taxes. The real cost of government — the total tax burden — equals what government spends plus the cost to the public of complying with government mandates and regulations and of calculating, paying and taking measures to avoid taxes. Currently, this burden, at federal, state and local levels combined, exceeds half of national income: 40 percent in direct spending, and more than 10 percent in indirect costs. Anything that reduces that real cost — lower government spending, elimination of costly regulations on individuals or businesses, simplification of explicit taxes — is a tax reform.

— Milton Friedman

Tax reform is taking the taxes off things that have been taxed in the past and putting taxes on things that haven't been taxed before.

— Art Buchwald

The trouble with comprehensive tax reform is that it would be a vast project that would plunge the country into two years of furious, all-consuming debate. In that time, nothing else would get done.

— David Frum

[M]odern taxation or tax making in its most characteristic aspect is a group contest in which powerful interests vigorously endeavor to rid themselves of present or proposed tax burdens. It is, first of all, a hard game in which he who trusts wholly to economics, reason, and justice, will in the end retire beaten and disillusioned.

— T.S. Adams

It should be the policy of governments . . . never to lay such taxes as will inevitably fall on capital; since by so doing, they impair the funds for the maintenance of labor, and thereby diminish the future production of the country.

— David Ricardo

Logic and taxation are not always the best of friends.

— James C. McReynolds

Lobbyists act to promote tax changes that benefit their clients, to oppose tax changes that harm their clients, to challenge tax changes that help their clients' competitors, and to advocate tax changes that harm their client's competitors. All this activity is directed toward Congress.

— Franklin L. Green

Do senators introduce tax bills because the tax system is a mess, or is the tax system a mess because senators introduce tax bills?

— Martin A. Sullivan

Congress's decisions with respect to tax policy do not always fit a neat and logical pattern. Sometimes they are even influenced by less-than-objective forces.

— Stephen Reinhardt

They [the members of Congress] have established a system remarkable for its complexity and vexatiousness. They have rendered taxation as mischievous and depressing as a perverted ingenuity could make it.

— *The New York Times*

[T]he tax code is the single greatest source of lobbying activity in Washington.

— Dick Armev

It is logically impossible for the tax law to attain stable equilibrium so long as Congress keeps responding to special interests' demands to "level the playing field." In this area, there is no such thing as a "level playing field:" tax topography is in the eye of the beholder.

— J. Mark Iwry

When I chaired the appropriations committee, I saw the poor. And when I chaired the tax committee, I saw the rich.

— Gordy Voss

What at first was plunder assumed the softer name of revenue.

— Thomas Paine

A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within. The essential cause of Rome's decline lay in her people, her morals, her class struggle, her failing trade, her bureaucratic despotism, her stifling taxes, her consuming wars.

— William Durant

There is no art which one government sooner learns from another than that of draining money from the pockets of the people.

— Adam Smith

No country ever takes notice of the revenue laws of another.

— Lord Mansfield

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

— Jean Baptiste Colbert
(attributed)

Q. Are we EVER going to have a federal tax system that regular people can understand?

A. Our top political leaders have all voiced strong support for this idea.

Q. So you're saying it will never happen?

A. Right.

— Dave Barry

I make a fortune from criticizing the policy of the government, and then hand it over to the government in taxes to keep it going.

— George Bernard Shaw

We don't do tax policy in this country anymore, we do tax politics.

— Christopher Bergin

My position is this — I repeat it — I will maintain it to my last hour, — taxation and representation are inseparable — this position is founded on the laws of nature; it is more, it is itself an eternal law of nature, for whatever is a man's own, is absolutely his own; no man hath a right to take it from him without his consent, either expressed by himself or representative; whoever attempts to do it attempts an injury; whoever does it commits a robbery; he throws down and destroys the distinction between liberty and slavery.

— Lord Camden

Taxation without representation is tyranny.

— James Otis
(attributed)

Taxation Without Representation

— Banner on District of Columbia License Plates

Taxation and representation are inseparably united. God hath joined them; no British Parliament can put them asunder.

— Lord Camden

Our forefathers made one mistake. What they should have fought for was representation without taxation.

— Fletcher Knebel

Taxation *with* representation ain't so hot either.

— Gerald Barzan

Have you ever wondered if taxation without representation was cheaper?

— Anonymous

You don't want the tax law pointy heads running the world.

— Fred T. Goldberg Jr.

COMMENTARY / SPECIAL REPORT

Liberty produces excessive taxes; the effect of excessive taxes is slavery.

— Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brede et de Montesquieu

The politicians don't just want your money. They want your soul. They want you to be worn down by taxes until you are dependent and helpless.

— James Dale Davidson

There can be no taxation without legislation.

— Sheldon S. Cohen

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

— Ronald Reagan

[T]he federal government has [at one time or another] imposed more than 50 kinds of taxes. These include, for example, taxes on incomes, estates, gifts, capital stock, excess profits, admissions, club dues, documents, playing cards, safe deposit boxes, circulation of bank notes, cotton futures, tobacco, snuff and cigarettes, oleomargarine, filled cheese, firearms, and liquor, as well as taxes on the manufacture of many articles, including tires, tubes, toilet preparations, automobiles, radios, refrigerators, matches, electrical energy, gasoline, and lubricating oil, on the transportation of oil by pipeline, and on telegraph, telephone, radio, and cable messages.

— Michael J. Graetz

Little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice: all the rest being brought about by the natural course of things.

— Adam Smith

Why are the people starving? Because the rulers eat up the money in taxes.

— Lao Tzu

[A] reduction in taxes would have the same stimulative effect as an increase in spending, yet it would avoid the long-term adverse effect of increasing the role of government in the economy.

— Milton Friedman

Only the staunchest defender of the big government status quo could claim that a tax cut of any size is a selfish action.

— Newt Gingrich

Tax competition is to be celebrated, not persecuted. It forces politicians to be more responsible, pushing tax rates down and allowing people to enjoy more of the

money they earn. It is good for taxpayers and good for the global economy.

— Dan Mitchell

If the concern is with whether a country's tax regime induces economic activity to shift, then all tax competition is necessarily harmful. The only way to prevent tax-induced changes of investment location would be for all countries to adopt the same tax system and the same tax rates.

— Terry Dwyer

Tax competition [among nations] is a positive force in the global economy. It forces politicians to be more responsible, pushing tax rates down and allowing people to enjoy more of the money they earn.

— Daniel J. Mitchell

Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.

— P.J. O'Rourke

When two-thirds of married couples are required to pay higher income taxes solely because they have married, the American public rightly loses respect for the law.

— Michael J. Graetz

We can applaud the state lottery as a public subsidy of intelligence, for it yields public income that is calculated to lighten the tax burden of us prudent abstainers at the expense of the benighted masses of wishful thinkers. It differs morally from the private casino or underground numbers game in that its beneficiaries are all of us in the prudent sector of the general public, rather than a greedy few private operators on or over the edge of the law.

— W.V. Quine

Many liberal persons defend levies like the tobacco tax on the curious grounds that tobacco is not a necessity — that poor people may or can avoid the burden by not consuming the commodity . . . [I]t seems a little absurd to go around arguing that poor people could or ought to do without tobacco, especially if it is taxed, in the face of the facts that they simply do not do anything of the kind, that the commodity was selected for taxation because they are not expected to do so, and that the government would not get much revenue if they did . . . [T]axes like the tobacco taxes are the most effective means available for draining government revenues out from the very bottom of the income scale. The usual textbook discussions on these points hardly deserve less lampooning than their implied definition of luxuries (and semiluxuries!) as commodities which poor people ought to do without and won't.

— Henry C. Simons

In economics school . . . I was taught that the federal excise tax on cigarettes is a "sin tax." Now that I think

about it, that was not really much of an explanation. The septuagenarian instructor provided no economic justification for taxing sins. Nor did he offer any definition of sin. At the time, all of us in the class knowingly nodded our heads at the notion of sin and the need to tax it. It was not a very scientific idea, but it appealed to our baser instincts.

— Martin A. Sullivan

The great myth of modern American politics is that the middle class is groaning under the burden of huge taxes deployed to support the undeserving poor. In fact, what the welfare state really does is to take from the well-off (a little) and give to the poor (also a little, but because they are so poor it matters a lot). Families in the middle are not much affected either way.

— Paul Krugman

There is just one thing I can promise you about the outer space program: Your tax dollar will go farther.

— Wernher von Braun

One of the reasons some of the advocates of ever-larger government and more government intrusiveness get nervous about discussions of the actual cost of government is that they fear if the American people had a discussion about what government costs, the true cost of taxes, that they might not want as much government as they are presently getting.

— Grover Norquist

Your federal government needs your money so that it can perform vital services for you that you would not think up yourself in a million years.

— Dave Barry

If a people tie the hands of their government, it cannot serve them; if they do not, it uses its hands to pick their pockets and squeeze their throats.

— Charles Issawi

War involves in its progress such a train of unforeseen and unsuspected circumstances that no human wisdom can calculate the end. It has but one thing certain, and that is to increase taxes.

— Thomas Paine

The war is over — the part you see in the picture papers. But the tax collector will continue his part with relentless fury. Cavalry charges are not the only ones in a real war.

— Finley Peter Dunne

Why does a slight tax increase cost you two hundred dollars and a substantial tax cut save you thirty cents?

— Peg Bracken

Every man, to be sure, is desirous of pushing off from himself the burden of any tax, which is imposed, and of laying it upon others.

— David Hume

The corruption of democracies proceeds directly from the fact that one class imposes the taxes and another class pays them. The constitutional principle, "No taxation without representation," is utterly set at naught.

— W.R. Inge

Tyranny consists in the wanton and improper use of strength by the stronger, in the use of it to do things which one equal would not attempt against another. A majority is tyrannical when it forces men to contribute money to objects which they disapprove, and which the common interest does not demand.

— James Bryce

Now, as a public policy, is it or is it not advisable to have as many citizens as can economically do so contribute to the maintenance of the Government? Will they not have more interest in the expenditures and affairs of the Government if they are directly contributing something, no matter how small, toward its maintenance?

— Charles Crisp

Governments last as long as the under-taxed can defend themselves against the over-taxed.

— Bernard Berenson

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

There is a belief among some elected officials that if it moves, tax it. But oftentimes, when you tax it, it won't move.

— Paul Cellucci

There are two distinct classes of men in [England], those who pay taxes and those who receive and live upon taxes When taxation is carried to excess it cannot fail to disunite those two.

— Thomas Paine

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

COMMENTARY / SPECIAL REPORT

Taxes are going up so fast that government is likely to price itself right out of the market.

— Dan Bennett

A spectre haunts the world's governments. They fear that the combination of economic liberalization with modern information technology poses a threat to their capacity to raise taxes.

— *Financial Times*

Americans now get less from their federal government than they used to. But most people pay about as much in taxes — or more — than they did in the past.

— Robert S. McIntyre

Despite what lobbyists and think tanks would lead you to believe, the preponderance of evidence leans toward the conclusion that tax incentives have little effect on investment and economic growth.

— Martin A. Sullivan

The promises of yesterday are the taxes of today.

— William L. Mackenzie King
(attributed)

The trouble with being a breadwinner nowadays is that the Government is in for such a big slice.

— Mary McCoy

What makes the property tax palatable is that it is generally used to finance local government operations. It pays for local roads, police, and schools. There is a connection between what people pay and the public services they receive that is more obvious than at any other level of government. But when property taxes are increased and the excess revenue is diverted to other communities, that connection — or lack thereof — is equally obvious.

— David Brunori

God will surely punish anyone who reinstates an old tax, for that very day, the son of the man who reinstated the land tax caught a fever and three days later died.

— Pope St. Gregory I

No government can exist without taxation . . . This money must necessarily be levied on the people; and the grand art consists of levying so as not to oppress.

— Frederick the Great

Government is emphatically a machine: to the discontented a "taxing machine," to the contented a "machine for securing property."

— Thomas Carlyle

When a government is just, taxes are few.

— Thomas Paine

Taxes are the sinews of the State.

— Marcus Tullius Cicero

The Treasury is constantly presented with proposals to accomplish all sorts of desirable social objectives through the tax system. In general, these objectives can be accomplished more effectively and economically by other means.

— Stanley S. Surrey

He that shall look into other countries and consider the taxes, tallages, and impositions, and assizes, and the like that are everywhere in use, will find that the Englishman is most master of his own valuation, and the better in the purse of any nation in Europe.

— Francis Bacon

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

The income tax reflected a major transformation in prevailing economic thought and fundamentally altered the individual's relationship to the central state.

— Margaret Levi

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 middle class are being told — and are of course always willing to believe — that they are being overtaxed . . . [But] the American middle class is not overtaxed. The middle class collects most of the entitlements. Yet politicians of both parties cheerfully indulge the white middle-class illusion that every nickel of their taxes goes to support black welfare mothers.

— Lee A. Sheppard

But the general rule always holds good. In constitutional states liberty is a compensation for the heaviness of taxation. In despotic states the equivalent for liberty is the lightness of taxation.

— Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brede et de Montesquieu

If taxation is a badge of free men, let me assure my friend that poor people of this country are covered all over with the insignia of free men . . .

— William Jennings Bryan

Taxes are not to be laid on the people but by their consent in person or by deputation.

— James Otis

No man's life, liberty, or property are safe while the legislature is in session.

— Gideon J. Tucker

We do not commonly see in a tax a diminution of freedom, and yet it clearly is one. The money taken represents so much labor gone through, and the product of that labor being taken away, either leaves the individual to go without such benefit as was achieved by it or else to go through more labor.

— Herbert Spencer

[I]t is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people and the undoubted right of Englishmen that no taxes be imposed on them but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives.

— 1765 Resolution of Delegates
from Nine American Colonies

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

Taxes are not debts in the sense that having once been established and paid all further liability of the individual to the government has ceased The obligation of the individual to the state is continuous and proportioned to the extent of the public wants. No human wisdom can always foresee what may be the exigencies of the future.

— David J. Brewer

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

— Karl Marx

The way to crush the bourgeoisie is to grind them between the millstones of taxation and inflation.

— Vladimir I. Lenin

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

The foundation of the obligation to pay taxes is not the privileges enjoyed or the protection given to a citizen by government The necessity of money for

the support of States in times of peace or war, fixes the obligation upon their citizens.

— James M. Wayne

No civilized government has ever existed that did not depend upon taxation in some form for the continuance of . . . existence.

— Samuel F. Miller

The American people on the one hand don't like taxes. None of us do. But, on the other hand, we expect the government to do certain things for us.

— Wesley Clark

Ask the majority of Americans whether they support libraries, schools, housing, and health care and they will say, 'Yes'. However, ask if they are in favor of taxes, they will say, 'No'. This is because they no longer make a connection between the two.

— Fred Ciporen

For every benefit you receive a tax is levied.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

[P]olicymakers use the tax laws for diverse and often conflicting purposes. Among these are raising revenue, as a macroeconomic tool for directing the national economy, as a bipartisan tool for cultivating favor with constituents, and as a partisan tool for implementing party objectives. The use of the tax laws for these conflicting purposes leads to the undermining of the integrity and coherence of the income tax, and increases the gross complexity that already plagues the tax laws.

— Sheldon D. Pollack

'Tis true that governments cannot be supported without great charge, and it is fit everyone who enjoys a share of protection should pay out of his estate his proportion of the maintenance of it.

— John Locke

Taxes are the life-blood of government, and their prompt and certain availability an imperious need.

— Owen J. Roberts

It costs something to be governed.

— Joseph McKenna

If it were not for the American taxpayer . . . we would be slaves instead of free men.

— Lyndon B. Johnson

Taxes owing to the Government . . . are the price that business has to pay for protection and security.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

The government has been compelled to levy taxes which unavoidably hit large sections of the population. The Italian people are disciplined, silent, and calm.

COMMENTARY / SPECIAL REPORT

They work and know that there is a government which governs, and know, above all, that if this government hits cruelly certain sections of the Italian people, it does so not out of caprice, but from the supreme necessity of national order.

— Benito Mussolini

Citizens [of Peru] have to understand that if they don't pay their taxes, their children will not have a good education.

— Beatriz Merino

Take an Argentine man. His first loyalty is to his mother. His second loyalty is to his children. Then you have cousins, aunts, uncles. By the time you get to business associates, the concept of loyalty, or trust, is fairly dissipated. By the time you get to "the country" — forget it. No one here thinks that if he pays taxes, for example, he might get something back from it. He thinks, "if I pay taxes, I'm an idiot."

— Anonymous Diplomat

The obsession of journalists with interest group politics has contributed to the widespread popular cynicism about policymaking, and in particular, about the tax system. Comfortable middle-class taxpayers who benefit from a host of tax preferences specifically designed for them are convinced that everyone else is avoiding taxes through "loopholes," while they are paying at exorbitant rates. They believe that the IRS is incompetent, and they know that policymakers in Washington have sold out to the special interests. On the whole, little of this is accurate. But you would never know it by reading any of our leading national newspapers

— Sheldon D. Pollack

You can't have [a] government like this without an income tax, but we [Libertarians] don't want a government like this.

— Ronald E. Paul

Taxation may run *pari passu* with expenditure. The constituted authorities may rightfully make one equal the other.

— David J. Brewer

Capitation [direct taxes on the individual] is more natural to slavery; a duty on merchandise is more natural to liberty, because it has not so direct a relation to the person.

— Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brede et de Montesquieu

As pressures for new revenues become more and more insistent, ways and means of meeting them present to a state not only the baffling task of tapping fresh sources of revenue but of doing so with due regard to a state's existing taxing system.

— Felix Frankfurter

'Tis pleasant to observe, how free the present Age is in laying taxes on the next.

— Jonathan Swift

The methods and subjects of taxation are matters of governmental policy.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

Tax subsidies, like their counterparts on the spending side, reduce economic efficiency by substituting political micromanagement for routine market decisions about how capital should be allocated across the economy.

— Progressive Policy Institute

Property is made the constitutional basis of taxation. This is not unreasonable. Governments are organized for the protection of persons and property and the expenses of the protection may very properly be apportioned among the persons protected according to the value of their property protected.

— Morrison Waite

What reason is there that he which laboreth much, and, sparing the fruits of his labor, consumeth little, should be more charged than he that, living idly, getteth little and spendeth all he gets, seeing the one hath no more protection from the commonwealth than the other?

— Thomas Hobbes

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

Modern enterprise often brings different parts of an organic commercial transaction within the taxing power of more than one State, as well as of the nation. It does so because the transaction in its entirety may receive the benefits of more than one government.

— Felix Frankfurter

When everybody has got money they cut taxes, and when they're broke them [politicians] raise 'em. That's statesmanship of the highest order.

— Will Rogers

The tax law . . . is the primary link between the nation's citizens and their government. Many more people file tax returns than vote in presidential elections.

— Michael J. Graetz

Our colonial forbears knew more about the ways of taxing than some of their descendants seem to be willing to concede.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

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

Government can pay its bills with tax money, run up a budget deficit or print more cash, creating inflation. Inflation hurts the saver, deficits hurt the investor, taxes hurt the earner, and all three are usually the same person: you.

— P.J. O'Rourke

Solicitude for the revenues is a plausible but treacherous basis upon which to decide a particular tax case.

— Robert H. Jackson

In form, the tax is one upon the value of a privilege, and income is nothing but the measure.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

Of all debts men are least willing to pay the taxes. What a satire is this on government! Everywhere they think they get their money's worth, except for these.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Cut the tax, Jack, and please don't spend no more, no more, no more, no more.

Cut the tax, Jack, and please don't spend no more. Woo Politician, politician don't treat us so mean. You're the biggest spenders that we've ever seen. Pretty soon we'll be out of dough, and you'll have to pack your things and go.

Cut the tax, Jack, and please don't spend no more, no more, no more, no more.

Cut the tax, Jack, and please don't spend no more. Now voter, listen voter hear what we say, They have to cut spending, ain't no other way. If they spend all our money that just ain't okay. Remember if you say so, They'll have to pack their things and go (That's right). Hit the road, Jack, and don't you spend no more.

Don't you come tax no more.

[To be sung to the tune of "Hit the Road, Jack"]

— National Taxpayers Union

The construction which in our view the statute compels safeguards the interests of the Government, interprets a business transaction according to its tenor, and avoids gratuitous resentment in the relations between Treasury and taxpayer.

— Felix Frankfurter

The privilege of use is only one attribute, among many, of the bundle of privileges that make up property or ownership A state is at liberty, if it pleases, to tax them all collectively, or to separate the faggots and lay the charge distributively.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

The state is the great fictitious entity by which everyone seeks to live at the expense of everyone else.

— Claude-Frederic Bastiat

It is time to start over from scratch and develop a new tax system in the United States. It must be a system that is designed on purpose, based on a clear and consistent set of principles, which everyone in the United States can understand.

— William Simon

Tax simplification is complicated stuff.

— Pam Olson

Simplicity is not a goal per se and it is definitely undesirable when it conflicts with the major objectives of a good tax system.

— Robert B. Eichholz

The notion that taxes should be simpler is one of the very few propositions in tax policy that generates almost universal agreement. The fundamental paradox of tax simplification is that despite this consensus, almost every year tax rules become more complex.

— William G. Gale

Lots of people talk about simplifying the tax law. And lots of people agree that simplifying the tax law should be a policy priority. But the problem is that simplification is complicated, and it is politically dangerous work.

— George Guttman

The rise in complexity of the tax laws cannot be attributed solely to an increasingly complex economy and business world. Rather, the tax laws themselves contributed to the complexity in the business world.

— Sheldon D. Pollock

Complexity reduces taxpayers' perceptions of fairness of the Federal tax system by (1) creating disparate treatment of similarly situated taxpayers, (2) creating opportunities for manipulation of the tax laws by taxpayers who are willing and able to obtain professional advice, and (3) disillusioning taxpayers to Federal tax policy because of the uncertainty created by complex laws.

— Staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation

[T]axpayers appear to tolerate significant complexity in order to eliminate marginal horizontal inequity. More importantly, taxpayers generally are unwilling to sacrifice tax benefits to achieve simplicity.

— Deborah H. Schenk

I hold in my hand 1,379 pages of tax simplification.

— Delbert L. Latta

Progressivity and Equity

That which angers men most is to be taxed above their neighbours.

— Sir William Petty

The moment you abandon . . . the cardinal principle of exacting from all individuals the same proportion of their income or their property, you are at sea without rudder or compass, and there is no amount of injustice or folly you may not commit.

— J.R. McCulloch

In a republican form of government, the true theory is to make no distinctions as to persons in the rates of taxation. Recognizing no class for special favors, we ought not to create a class for special burdens.

— Justin S. Morrill

Under wise and constitutional legislation, every citizen should contribute his proportion, however small the sum, to the support of government, and it is no kindness to urge any of our citizens to escape this obligation.

— Stephen J. Field

The tax expenditure concept posits that an income tax is composed of two distinct elements. The first element consists of structural provisions necessary to implement a normal income tax. . . . The second element consists of the special preferences found in every income tax. These provisions, often called tax incentives or tax subsidies, are departures from the normal tax structure and are designed to favor a particular industry, activity, or class of persons.

— Stanley S. Surrey and Paul R. McDaniel

The tax system has become the vehicle of choice for influencing economic policy, the distribution of the tax burden, the state of the economy, the social welfare of families, and almost anything else you want to mention.

— Gene Steuerle

There appears to be a widespread consensus that an element of progression is desirable in the tax structure.

— William Simon

The king employs a considerable part of the tribute in grants of largesse, bestowed by way of banquets or presents, to those whose support consolidates his authority, whereas their defection would endanger it. Do we not see modern governments as well using the public funds to endow social groups or classes, whose votes they are anxious to secure? Today the name is different, and it is called the redistribution of incomes by taxation.

— Bertrand de Jouvenel

As income tax initially enacted at low rates and later seized upon as a means to redistribute income in favor

of the lower classes has become a facade covering loopholes and special provisions that render rates that are highly graduated on paper largely ineffective.

— Milton Friedman

The very first Social Security check, for \$22.54, was paid in 1940 to a Vermont woman who had paid \$22 in Social Security taxes. By the time she died, in 1974, aged 100, she had collected \$20,944.42.

— Andrew Tobias

Unlike proportionality, progression provides no principle which tells us what the relative burden of different persons ought to be . . . the argument based on the presumed justice of progression 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.

— Friedrich A. Hayek

Whenever you have growth and [income tax rate] progressivity, people move into higher tax brackets and the government gets a larger take. The economy may expand fast, but government will expand even faster.

— *The Wall Street Journal*

In the matter of taxation, every privilege is an injustice.

— Voltaire

To tax and to please is not given to me, but to tax and be fair is.

— N.A. Palkhivala

If you look at who precisely pays income taxes, the reason is clear. . . . the top 5% of taxpayers . . . paid over half the total tax revenue. Since it is exactly the rich who disproportionately pay most of the income tax, it would be impossible to lower taxes without benefiting them disproportionately. Hey, it's their money.

— *The Wall Street Journal*

[I]deas of fairness in taxation are usually nebulous.

— Roy Blough and Carl Shoup

The only thing that hurts more than paying an income tax is not having to pay an income tax.

— Lord Thomas R. Dewar

The Higher the Tax Bracket, the Better the View.

— Advertisement for luxury Florida real estate development

[T]he illusion that by means of progressive taxation the burden can be shifted substantially onto the shoulders of the wealthy has been the chief reason why . . . the masses have come to accept a much heavier load than they would have done otherwise.

— Friedrich A. Hayek

A person should be taxed according to his means.
— *The Talmud*

When a rich man is taxed, he need only retrench his superfluities, but when a poor man is taxed that can only increase his miseries.
— George Mason

The fairness of taxing more lightly income from wages, salaries, or from investments is beyond question. In the first case, the income is uncertain and limited in duration; sickness or death destroys it and old age diminishes it; in the other, the source of income continues; the income may be disposed of during a man's life and it descends to his heirs.

Surely we can afford to make a distinction between the people whose only capital is their mental and physical energy and the people whose income is derived from investments.
— Andrew Mellon

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

From the Boston Tea Party to now, tax fairness is firmly parked in the American psyche.
— Richard Neal

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

A tax system, to be workable in a democratic country, must in general appeal to the sense of fairness of the people.
— Roy Blough and Carl Shoup

The more heavily a man is supposed to be taxed, the more power he has to escape being taxed.
— Paul Dickson

[I]t would be dangerous to entrust the power to determine tax policies to a class of citizens who have been granted blanket immunity from taxes. It breeds political irresponsibility.
— Talbot Brewer

One will hardly believe that in order to become noble it is sufficient to become rich; and to cease to pay taxes it is sufficient to become noble. So there is only one way of escaping taxation and that is to make a fortune.
— Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours

The fundamental class division in any society is not between rich and poor, or between farmers and city dwellers, but between taxpayers and tax consumers.
— David Boaz

Our modern federal government is spending \$4,900 a year on every person in America. The average American household of 2.64 people receives almost \$13,000 worth of federal benefits, services and protection per annum. These people would have to have a family income of \$53,700 to pay as much in taxes as they get in goodies. Only 18.5 percent of the population has that kind of money. And only 4.8 percent of the population — 12,228,000 people — file income tax returns showing more than \$50,000 in adjusted gross income. Ninety-five percent of Americans are on the mooch.
— P.J. O'Rourke

It is not too much to hope that some day we may get back on a tax basis of 10 percent, the old Hebrew tithe, which was always considered a fairly heavy tax.
— Andrew Mellon

A 10 percent flat tax should be our goal. After all, back in Bible times, the people of Israel paid a "tithe" — that is, a 10 percent flat tax — to God. If God Himself only demands a tithe, who does Uncle Sam think he is, demanding more?
— Michael Reagan

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

When people ask, "Why should the rich pay a larger percent of their income than middle-income people?" — my answer is not an answer most people get: It's because their power developed from laws that enriched them.
— Ralph Nader

As you have been enabled to accumulate this wealth by the blessings of free institutions, contribute something to perpetuate them.
— Benton McMillin

The purpose of the income tax law is to prevent the accumulation of enormous fortunes, and the control of industry and commerce that goes with such large fortunes.
— Fiorello H. La Guardia

[States progressing towards the ideals of the *Communist Manifesto* will enact] a heavy progressive income tax.
— Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

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The only effective design for diminishing the income inequality inherent in capitalism is the progressive income tax.

— John Kenneth Galbraith

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

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

I have never viewed taxations as a means of rewarding one class of taxpayers or punishing another. If such a point of view ever controls our public policy, the traditions of freedom, justice and equality of opportunity, which are distinguishing characteristics of our American civilization, will have disappeared.

— Andrew Mellon

The subjects of every state ought to contribute toward the support of government, as nearly as possible, in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the protection of the state.

— Adam Smith

[T]he old saw “freedom isn’t free” applies at least as much to paying taxes as it does to the other ways in which we protect and defend our liberties.

— E.J. Dionne Jr.

Those who say that the poorer the people, the larger the families — the heavier the taxation placed upon them, the greater their effort to pay it blaspheme — against the human race. They ought to experience the bitter destitution to which they condemn their fellow citizen in order to determine how false and atrocious is their attitude.

— Désiré Joseph Mercier

[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

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

— Thomas Jefferson

I do not believe that the government should ask social legislation in the guise of taxation. If we are to adopt socialism, it should be presented to the people of this country as socialism and not under the guise of a law to collect revenue.

— Calvin Coolidge

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

It will be a sad day for the revenues if the goodwill of the people toward their taxing system is frittered away in efforts to accomplish by taxation moral reforms that cannot be accomplished by direct legislation.

— Robert H. Jackson

Faced with a requirement to select a tax structure, an individual might choose a proportionate rate structure simply because no other rate structure comes immediately to mind. It is as if, in choosing a tax structure, the polity were a lost traveller faced with a selection of equally well-trodden paths. Lacking any convincing rationale to turn right or left, the traveler continues on the path that leads straight ahead. Perhaps we can do no better than the lost traveler and are condemned to raise and redistribute a substantial portion of the world’s wealth on a formula selected through intuition. But before resigning ourselves to that fate, it would be worthwhile to examine theories of distributive justice that might shape the tax structure.

— Joseph Bankman and Thomas Griffith

A flat tax is a bad idea whose time has not come.

— Lawrence Summers

We can’t afford a fair tax system, so we go with an unfair one.

— Gerry Padwe

There is no simple tax, at least no simple tax that is also fair.

— Joel Slemrod

The expense of government to the individuals of a great nation is like the expense of management to the joint tenants of a great estate, who are all obliged to contribute in proportion to their respective interests in the estate. In the observation or neglect of this maxim consists what is called the equality or inequality of taxation.

— Adam Smith

I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call their land. Let them continue to call it their land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell, if we take

the kernel. It is not necessary to confiscate land; only to confiscate rent.

We already take some rent in taxation. We have only to make some changes in our modes of taxation to take it all.

— Henry George

[The property tax] puts a premium on dishonesty and debauches the public conscience. It reduces deception to a system and makes a science of knavery. It presses hardest on those least able to pay. It imposes double taxation on one man and grants entire immunity to the next. In short, the general property tax is so flagrantly inequitable that its retention can be explained only through ignorance or inertia. It is the cause of such crying injustice that its abolition must become the battle cry of every statesman and reformer.

— Edwin R. A. Seligman

Those who pay [the federal income tax] are the exception, those who do not pay are millions; and the whole moral force of the law is a dead letter. The honest man makes a true return; the dishonest hides and covers all he can to avoid this obnoxious tax. It has no moral force. This tax is unequal, perjury-provoking, and crime encouraging, because it is at war with the right of a person to keep private and regulate his business affairs and financial matters. Deception, fraud, and falsehood mark its progress everywhere in the process of collection. It creates curiosity, jealousy, and prejudice among the people. It makes the tax gatherer a spy.

— Dennis McCarthy

There are two methods . . . whereby man's needs and desires can be satisfied. The production and exchange of wealth: economic means . . . and the uncompensated appropriation of wealth produced by others: political means.

— Albert Jay Nock

To tax the community for the advantage of a class is not protection: it is plunder.

— Benjamin Disraeli

In a system of taxation based on justice and equity it is fundamental that the burdens be proportioned to the capacity of the people contributing. . . . But the common good also requires the public authorities, in assessing the amount of tax payable, take cognizance of the peculiar difficulties of farmers.

— Pope John XXIII

A good prince will tax as lightly as possible those commodities which are used by the poorest members of our society; e.g., grain, bread, beer, wine, clothing, and all other staples without which human life could not exist.

— Desiderius Erasmus

We cannot lose sight of the fact that complexity is the result of our struggle for fairness.

— Margaret Milner Richardson

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

— Andrew Jackson

Even tax administration does not as a matter of principle preclude considerations of fairness.

— Felix Frankfurter

How could we, in a free society of a bunch of Christians, have the worst, most unjust tax structure that you could ever have dreamed up?

— Susan Pace Hamill

The task of devising means for distributing the burdens of taxation equitably has always challenged the wisdom of the wisest financial statesmen.

— Stanley F. Reed

Bachelors should be heavily taxed. It is not fair that some men should be happier than others.

— Oscar Wilde

He who only has the base necessities of life should pay nothing; taxation on him who has a surplus may, if need be, extend to everything beyond necessities. He may urge that on account of his rank what is superfluous for a man in a lower position is necessary for him, but that is untrue, for a nobleman has only two legs like a cowman, and each has only one belly.

— Jean Jacques Rousseau

If we enjoyed the freedom of the framers it is possible that we might, in the light of experience, devise a more equitable system of taxation than that which they gave us.

— Harlan F. Stone

Revenue laws are notoriously not expressions of an ordered system of reason and fairness. There has probably never been a revenue statute which, by design or oversight, has not favored some groups and laid the basis for a claim of unfairness to others similarly situated.

— Felix Frankfurter

Do we imagine that our assessments operate equally? Nothing can be more contrary to the fact. Wherever a discretionary power is lodged in any set of men over the property of their neighbors, they will abuse it.

— Alexander Hamilton

When the same man, or set of men, holds the sword and the purse, there is an end of liberty.

— George Mason

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Nothing is more familiar in taxation than the imposition of a tax upon a class or upon individuals who enjoy no direct benefit from its expenditure, and who are not responsible for the condition to be remedied.

— Harlan F. Stone

Uniform taxation upon those equally able to bear their fair shares of the burdens of government is the objective of every just government.

— Hugo L. Black

By squeezing the destitute of their bare subsistence the state deprives them of all strength. Of the poor man it makes a beggar, of the workman an idler, of an unfortunate a rogue, and thus leads through starvation to the gallows.

— Guillaume Thomas Francois Raynal

Perfect equality and perfect uniformity of taxation as regards individuals or corporations, or the different classes of property subject to taxation, is a dream unrealized. It may be admitted that the system which most nearly attains this is the best.

— Samuel F. Miller

There is . . . no constitutional guaranty of equality of taxation.

— Harlan F. Stone

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

Any reasonable system of taxation would be based on the slogan "Soak the Rich."

— Heywood Broun

Suppose a star has reached the peak and can get \$150,000 for his services in a picture. If he makes two pictures a year the Federal Government charges him \$164,000 for being so snooty, to which the State of California adds a moderate tax of \$36,000, for the use of its valuable climate. The net result is that each year, the star is allowed to work four months for himself on condition that he work eight months, free of charge, for the people. Under these circumstances, one might think that the Government would have nothing but encouraging smiles for these public benefactors. On the contrary, it matters deeply that such incomes are indecent and that people who have the ability to pay such heavy taxes should be reduced to the more democratic condition of inability to pay.

— William C. deMille

Mathematical equality . . . cannot be reached in any system of taxation, and it is useless and idle to attempt it.

— Rufus W. Peckham

Let us not make the income tax so high that the man whose money we want to use in business prefers not to take the risk.

— Wendell L. Willkie

All taxes upon the transference of property of every kind, so far as they diminish the capital value of that property, tend to diminish the funds destined for the maintenance of productive labor.

— Adam Smith

Don't soak the rich, soak the poor. There's more of them.

— Eric Wright

A sound tax policy must lessen, so far as possible, the burden of taxation, on those least able to bear it; and it must also remove those influences which might retard the continued steady development of business and industry on which, in the last analysis, so much of our prosperity depends.

— Andrew Mellon

I don't think we should be embarrassed that a large corporation pays nothing in tax. I've never seen a corporation enjoy a good meal. I've never seen a corporation go on vacation.

— Andrew Lyon

Corporations don't pay taxes, they collect them.

— Paul H. O'Neill

The real friends of property are not those who would exempt the wealth of the country from bearing its fair share of the burdens of taxation, but rather those who seek to have every one, without reference to his locality, contribute from his substance, upon terms of equality with all others, to the support of the government.

— John Marshall Harlan

Eccentricities of incidence are common, and perhaps inevitable, in every system of taxation.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

Those who are subject to be taxed cannot complain that they are denied the equal protection of the law because those who cannot legally be taxed are not taxed.

— Joseph McKenna

Protection and taxation are not necessarily correlative obligations, nor precise equality of burden attainable, however desirable.

— Horace H. Lurton

Systems of taxation are not framed, nor is it possible to frame them, with perfect distribution of benefit and burden. Their authors must be satisfied with a rough and ready form of justice.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

It is fairer to tax people on what they extract from the economy, as roughly measured by their consumption, than to tax them on what they produce for the economy, as roughly measured by their income.

— Thomas Hobbes

All taxes upon the articles of consumption, because of the power that must necessarily be vested in the officers who collect them, will in the end destroy the liberty of any people that permits them to be introduced.

— Albert Gallatin

It may be true that plaintiff does not receive the same amount of benefit from some of these taxes, or from any of them, as do citizens living in the heart of the City But who can undertake to adjust with precise accuracy the amount which each individual in an organized civil community shall contribute to sustain the organization?

— Samuel F. Miller

One might as well compare the federal income tax of a banker whose net earnings are in the millions with that of a thousand clerks who by reason of exemptions are to pay no tax whatever. The comparison proves nothing unless it be the obvious fact that taxpayers are few when the count is at the highest level.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

Taxes generally are imposed upon persons for the general advantages of living within the jurisdiction, not upon property, although generally measured more or less by reference to the riches of the person taxed.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

The state is not called upon to explain the reasons for taxing the members of the one class more heavily than it does the members of the other.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

Wealth has long been accepted as a fair measure of a tax assessment.

— Stanley F. Reed

Of all burdens imposed upon mankind that of grinding taxation is the most cruel.

— Ward Hunt

Justice requires that the burdens of government shall as far as is practicable be laid equally on all; and if property is taxed once in one way, it would ordinarily

be wrong to tax it again in another way, when the burden of both taxes falls on the same person.

— Morrison Waite

Income tax, intrinsically the most just of all taxes.

— Justin S. Morrill

. . . the wit of man never devised a fairer or juster tax than a graduated income tax.

— Champ Clark

The income tax is a just law. It simply intends to put the burdens of government justly upon the backs of the people.

— William Jennings Bryan

There is no tax which, in its essence, is more just and equitable than an income tax.

— John Marshall Harlan

Where there is an income tax, the just man will pay more and the unjust less on the same income.

— Plato

I believe [the income tax] is the most easily concealed of any tax that can be laid, the most difficult of enforcement, and the hardest to collect. . . . [I]t is, in a word, a tax upon the income of honest men and an exemption, to a greater or lesser extent, of the income of rascals.

— Sereno Payne

We do not believe there is a tax levied by the Government so onerous upon so large a class of people as the Income Tax.

— *The New York Daily Tribune*

In every civilized country there is an exemption of small incomes which it would be manifest cruelty to tax.

— Henry B. Brown

I'm convinced that, if you use income as the base of taxation, you have inherent in the system a magnet that draws all kinds of complexities. That's what I think we've learned from history — that you cannot keep a simple income tax.

— Bill Archer

A fair tax system should consistently tax spending, not work or savings, and should use progressive rates to meet whatever liberal or redistributive objectives it has.

— Edward J. McCaffery

It has long troubled me, however, that even when a consumption tax is mentioned by an economist or a politician, there is never expressed the fundamental reason why such a tax is the fairest kind of tax: that it

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taxes the use — and hence the inability of anyone else to use — the resources of the earth, which once belonged to no one, or to all mankind, or (arguably) to all creatures.

— Edgar C. Keller

If middle-class Americans had any realistic sense of how rich the rich really are, policy moves that cater specifically to the wealthy — like the repeal of the inheritance tax — would face a much rougher ride.

— Paul Krugman

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

Where there's a will, there's an inheritance tax.

— Anonymous

The taking of possession of inherited property is one of the most ancient subjects of taxation known to the law.

— Harlan F. Stone

Death is the most convenient time to tax rich people.

— David Lloyd George

Taxing people after they die just doesn't seem fair.

— Bob Schaffer

Those who support the death tax generally do so not for economic reasons but for political ones. They want to make the tax code "fair" by taxing away the lifetime wealth of others.

— William Beach

[The estate tax] has its roots in socialism.

— Richard C. Shelby

The estate tax raises very little, if any, net revenue for the federal government. The distortionary effects of the estate tax result in losses under the income tax that are roughly the same size as estate tax revenue.

— Joint Economic Committee

[T]he 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

[Anti-estate tax slogan:] No taxation without respiration.

— Bob Schaffer

[Estate taxes are not really taxes but] penalties imposed on those who neglect to plan ahead or who retain unskilled estate planners.

— Henry Aaron and Alicia Munnell

... Americans like "sin" taxes, such as those on cigarettes and alcohol. But the estate tax is the opposite case: it is an anti-sin, or a virtue, tax. It is a tax on intergenerational altruism, on thrift.

— Edward J. McCaffery

A well-timed death is the acme of good tax planning, better even than a well-timed marriage.

— Donald C. Alexander

Succession duties first of all possess the grave economic fault of tending to fall on capital or accumulated wealth rather than on income; they therefore may retard progress.

— C.F. Bastable

[T]he history of modern taxation is the history of . . . class antagonisms.

— Edwin R. A. Seligman

Opinions about death taxes vary greatly in a society relying on private incentives for economic growth. Some believe that these taxes hurt economic incentives, reduce saving, and undermine the economic system. But even they would concede that death taxes have less adverse effects on incentives than do income taxes of equal yield. Income taxes reduce the return from effort and risk taking as income is earned, whereas death taxes are paid only after a lifetime of work and accumulation and are likely to be given less weight by individuals in their work, saving, and investment decisions.

— Joseph Pechman

The policy behind estate tax legislation . . . is the diversion to the purposes of the community of a portion of the total current of wealth released by death.

— Felix Frankfurter

The idea that some people would pay half of their estate, after some substantial exemptions, to the federal government seems to me entirely appropriate.

— Bill Gates Sr.

If rich people care about their kids, they should spend money on them while they're alive, not wait till they're in their graves before family values kick in. Better still, tell the kids to work for a living and give money to people who really need it, in donations to charity. Thus truly compassionate conservatives should have little truck with efforts to abolish the death tax. Conservatism should be about rewarding work, not inheritance, and encouraging success, not genetic dumb luck.

— Andrew Sullivan

The estate tax helps keep America more of a democracy than a veiled plutocracy. Meritocracy and the estate tax go hand in hand.

— Daniel J. Kornstein

Although we can't know all the diverse motivations people have for giving, the estate tax is certainly an inducement for high-net-worth families to extend their generosity.

— Bill Gates Sr. and Chuck Collins

I would be dishonest if I claimed that this consideration [the estate-tax deduction] had nothing to do with my decision [to donate to charity]. . . . Abolishing the estate tax would remove one of the main incentives for charitable giving.

— George Soros

I don't see why a man shouldn't pay an inheritance tax. If a country is good enough to pay taxes to while you are living, it's good enough to pay in after you die. By the time you die you should be so used to paying taxes, that it would be almost second nature to you.

— Will Rogers

But why should the frugal and thrifty among the rich be taxed heavily on their deathbeds, while the spendthrifts who live luxuriously are not?

— Edward J. McCaffery

Since the accumulation of a substantial estate is one of the motivations that drive people to work hard, a death tax on saving is indirectly a tax on work.

— Richard Posner

[The estate tax is] an act of economic waste which is damaging to all.

— Joseph Schumpeter

[Slogan on button:] "Death taxes steal from America's family-owned businesses."

— Food Distributors International

I've always been impressed by the attention paid to the dead. The Democrats make sure they get to vote. The Republicans give them a tax cut.

— Bob Somerby

General taxation to maintain public schools is an appropriation of property to a use in which the taxpayer may have no private interest, and, it may be, against his will. It has been condemned by theorists on that ground. Yet no one denies its constitutionality. People are accustomed to it and yet accept it without doubt.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Countries, therefore, when lawmaking falls exclusively to the lot of the poor cannot hope for much

economy in public expenditure; expenses will always be considerable, either because taxes cannot touch those who vote for them or because they are assessed in a way to prevent that.

— Alexis De Tocqueville

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

A woman's income chargeable to income tax shall . . . (for any year) during which she is a married woman living with her husband be deemed for income tax purposes to be his income and not to be her income.

— UK Income and Corporation Taxes Act, 1970, sec. 37.

Once a woman is married, the tax laws really don't want her to work.

— Virginia Postrel

A tax against the depositors which is recoverable only from the bank looks like a tax against the bank.

— John Marshall Harlan

The notion that a man's personal property upon his death may be regarded as a universitas and taxed as such, even if qualified, still is recognized both here and in England.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Exemption

Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of priests only, which became not Pharaoh's. . . .

— *Old Testament*

The Rosetta Stone, . . . whose text in hieroglyphics, demotics [sic], and Greek was the key to revealing the stories of ancient Egypt, was in fact a grant of tax immunity. Which is why, of course, it was engraved in stone and not written on papyrus.

— Alvin Rabushka

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

Every tax exemption constitutes a subsidy

— William J. Brennan Jr.

Tax exemption is a privilege derived from legislative grace, not a constitutional right.

— Lapsley W. Hamblen Jr.

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You have no authority to impose taxes, tribute, or duty on any of the priests . . . at this house of God.

— *Old Testament*

Churches have nothing to fear from tax reform and, like most people and institutions, would have much to gain from better economic conditions brought about by reform. Despite their dominant position in gifts, churches are not the leaders in fighting a tax reform that denies deductions. Instead, institutions serving the absolute economic and social elite — universities, symphonies, opera companies, ballets, and museums — are protesting the loudest. No compelling case has ever been made that these worthy undertakings should be financed by anyone but their customers. A glance at the crowd in any of them will tell you that it is perverse to tax the typical American to subsidize the elite institutions.

— Robert Hall and Alvin Rabushka

The pressures upon [Christians and Jews living in the Mideast during the spread of Islam] to convert came not from the “sword” as Christian polemicists used to maintain, but rather from the purse: Christians and Jews paid a special tax from which Muslims were exempt.

— Malise Ruthven

Take the case of my [son] Huzziya. I made him lord of Tappassanda. But he listened to the people there, saying, “If you give us tax exemptions, we will support you in a rebellion against your father.” So I deposed Huzziya.

— Hittite King Hattusili I
(c. 1640-1610 B.C.)

All Israel was “dismayed and terrified” [at Goliath’s challenge] and, not surprisingly, there were no volunteers until the young harpist and poet, David, stepped forward. Now why would he be that foolish? Because Saul promised that the man who slays Goliath will receive riches, the king’s daughter, *and exemption from all taxes!* “Riches” is a relative term that could mean anything, and we all know that most women were virtually chattel, a dime a dozen, in the Bible, *so it had to be the tax exemption that drove David to risk his life!*

— Conrad Rosenberg

Why should one who enjoys all the advantages of a society purchased at a heavy expense, and lives in affluence upon an income derived exclusively from interest on government stock, be exempted from taxation?

— John Marshall

The exemption of property from taxation is a question of policy and not of power.

— John McLean

Exemptions from the operation of a tax always create inequalities. Those not exempted must, in the end, bear an additional burden or pay more than their share.

— Stephen J. Field

When the Government grants exemptions or allows deductions all taxpayers are affected; the very fact of the exemption or deduction for the donor means that other taxpayers can be said to be indirect and vicarious “donors.”

— Warren E. Burger

I don’t know of a single foreign product that enters this country untaxed, except the answer to prayer.

— Mark Twain

Strong considerations of fiscal and social policy view tax exemptions with a hostile eye.

— Frank Murphy

[E]ven people such as Henry Ford — who objected to the very concept of a foundation and strongly believed that such an institution would ultimately pervert good, effective charity — found that for purposes of estate planning and control of their companies, tax policy left them no choice.

— Heather R. Higgins

People hear “nonprofit” and they think “white hat public interest,” but all it really means is a tax designation. Most Washington nonprofits are either industry fronts or rely on industry money and good will.

— John Stauber

The taxpayers of this country deserve a break, and the tax-exempt foundations and charitable trusts can give it to them by contributing their gross revenues to the Federal Government for the duration of the Vietnam War.

— Wright Patman

Who is it that takes up these ideas against the working man, the auto worker, and the businessman and the farmer? It’s usually some fellow from one of those multi-billion dollar tax-exempt foundations, that when the taxes are raised, they don’t pay any taxes because they were tax exempt.

— George Wallace

The real motive behind most private foundations is keeping control of wealth (even while the wealth itself is given away).

— *Business Week Magazine*

Whether the property of the United States shall be taxed under the laws of a State depends upon the will

of its owner, the United States, and no State can tax the property of the United States without their consent.

— Horace Gray

Just what instrumentalities of either a state or the Federal government are exempt from taxation by the other cannot be stated in terms of universal application.

— Harlan F. Stone

The exemption from taxation of money or property devoted to charitable and other purposes is based upon the theory that the government is compensated for the loss of revenue by its relief from financial burden which would otherwise have to be met by appropriations from public funds, and by the benefits resulting from the promotion of the general welfare.

— House Ways and Means Committee

[T]ax exemption for public charities should be restricted to those areas where the quality or quantity of goods and services that would be produced strictly through market forces is inadequate.

— O. Donaldson Chapoton

It is easier to admire the motives for [a religious tax] exemption than to justify it by any sound argument.

— William Z. Stuart

Many nonprofit groups strive for a just and humane life for the people they serve, yet at the same time have people on staff who are eligible for food stamps.

— John Pratt and Sondra Reis

[G]overnment relieves from the tax burden religious, educational, and charitable activities because it wishes to encourage them as representing the highest and noblest achievements of mankind.

— Chauncey Belknap

Institutions which teach morality, respect for law, good health practices, and so forth, do much good for society, but they do not necessarily have any greater claim to a state property-tax exemption than do parents who teach their children such things.

— Joan E. O'Bannon

A grant of exemption is never to be considered as a mere gratuity — a simple gift from the legislature A consideration is presumed to exist. The recipient of the exemption may be supposed to be doing part of the work which the state would otherwise be under obligations to do. A college, or an academy, furnishes education to the young, which it is a part of the state's duty to furnish.

— David J. Brewer

Donors who are only interested in the tax benefits of their gifts may give philanthropy a bad name, but their money still helps.

— Mark Litzler

A charity ball is like a dance except it's tax deductible.

— P.J. O'Rourke

Most philanthropy is tax-motivated. The notion that charity wouldn't be hurt if you eliminated the death tax is absurd.

— William Zabel

The legislative reasons for granting immunity from taxes to . . . charitable institutions . . . prominent among which would doubtless be the fact, that the support and maintenance extended to the objects of the charity relieves the State from a burden which would involve a much larger amount of taxation than that which it waives by granting the exemption.

— Joseph P. Bradley

[B]usiness people on charity boards frequently approve decisions that ignore the very sense and insights they use in their own businesses.

— Randy Richardson

[Z]oning regulations very properly forbid nonprofit organizations, such as universities, to have shops in their buildings, on pain of losing their tax-exempt status. The result is that whole quarters come to consist of nothing but university buildings that, being deserted after hours, form a splendid rearing ground for crime.

— Charles Issawi

I didn't see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster.

— Henry David Thoreau

[The House Ways and Means] Committee intends that an individual need not necessarily accept reduced compensation merely because he or she renders services to a tax-exempt, as opposed to a taxable, organization.

— House Ways and Means Committee

The public appears uneasy about, if not hostile to, the increasing nonprofit commercialism. So far, charities have enjoyed a "halo effect" in our political economy. The rationalized myth of charities as selfless, donative, and volunteer-run deliverers of services to the poor has never entirely been true, but it underlies society's grant of tax exemption and tax deductibility for contributions. To the extent, however, that this quid depends on the idealized quo, should charity's core myth change — in a way that becomes visible to the

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public — society's willingness to alter the subsidies could also change.

— Evelyn Brody

Looking backward it is easy to see that the line between the taxable and the immune has been drawn by an unsteady hand.

— Robert H. Jackson

Like a photo-negative, the tax treatment of charities presents a reverse image of normal incentives. Nominally peripheral to the tax system, charities actually benefit from a tax structure that imposes high rates on their for-profit competitors and their donors. The greater the regular corporate tax burden, the greater the relative value of the charity's tax exemption. The higher the individual income-tax rates, the lower the price of giving to charity.

— Evelyn Brody

The tax-exempt privilege is a feature always reflected in the market price of bonds. The investor pays for it.

— Louis D. Brandeis

Those tax-exempt bonds were put in so that a town or a state or a government could sell more bonds than it ought to.

— Will Rogers

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

Unless . . . savings are exempted from income tax, the contributors are twice taxed on what they save, and only once on what they spend.

— John Stuart Mill

Trying to understand the various exempt organization provisions of the Internal Revenue Code is as difficult as capturing a drop of mercury under your thumb.

— Stephen J. Swift

Old MacDonald had an agricultural real estate tax abatement.

— Anonymous

Collection and Administration

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

Two years ago it was impossible to get through on the phone to the IRS. Now it's just hard to get through. That's progress.

— Charles O. Rossotti

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

— Albert Einstein

Nuclear physics is much easier than tax law. It's rational and always works the same way.

— Jerold Rochwald

Every time the government changes things, [my tax return preparation] business does increase. Every year a few more people throw up their hands and say "I can't prepare my return any more."

— Henry Bloch

Convenience of payment is important in helping to ensure compliance with the tax system. The more difficult a tax is to pay the more likely that it will not be paid.

— Tax Division of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants

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

— Kirk Kirkpatrick

The tax which each individual is bound to pay ought to be certain, and not arbitrary. The time of payment, the manner of payment, the quantity to be paid, ought all to be clear and plain to the contributor, and to every other person, so that the tax payer is not put in the power of the tax gatherer.

— Adam Smith

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector."

— *New Testament*

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

Beware of strong drink. It can make you shoot at tax collectors . . . and miss.

— Anonymous

Love will find you when you least expect it. Which makes it more like the IRS than we think.

— Jeff MacNelly ("Shoe")

[I]f 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

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

If the IRS used only the maximization of yield approach, it would meet its goals of using its resources most effectively to yield the most revenue. The purpose, however, of the audit program, is not to produce the greatest revenue but to produce the greatest level of voluntary compliance

— IRS Commissioner's Advisory Group Study (1978)

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

— Frank Luntz

[The Head of the Internal Revenue Service] points out that when we sign our tax returns, we are in effect taking a legal oath. "This means," he sternly reminds us, "that the information you provide must meet the same standard of truth and accuracy that President Clinton met when he testified under oath about alleged acts of internship with Monica Lewinsky." For example, if you have three dependents, when you fill in the box that says "Number of Dependents," the following answers would meet the Clinton Accuracy Standard:

"Three."

"Four."

"Around twenty-seven."

"I don't recall."

"It depends what you mean by 'dependent.'"

— Dave Barry

The taxpayer-rights provisions of the Internal Revenue Code are like the civil-rights provisions of the former Soviet Union's constitution. On paper, they tell

a wonderful story. In practice, for many taxpayers there is no effective protection against government abuse.

— Bob Kamman

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

— T. Coleman Andrews

One of the underlying problems is that too many of us think that tax policy is made at the National Office in Washington. The real tax policy is made by that auditing agent who is sitting in your client's office. He can miss issues that are screaming, or he can dig in on absurd issues, but it can be very expensive to get him back on the right track.

— Terence Floyd Cuff

The reality, as you must know, is that about half the IRS work force is of little use to management, either because of a lack of motivation or ability.

— Paul Streckfus

To think that the IRS can become a modern financial services institution while administering the current income tax is to believe that you can turn a Winnebago around without taking it out of the garage.

— Michael J. Graetz

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

— Sonny Bono

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

— Anonymous

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

I want to begin by saying we have had good experience with the Internal Revenue Service; it's the Internal Revenue Code that doesn't work.

— Brian Gloe

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

[N]othing can be more ruinous to a state or oppressive to individuals than a partial and dilatory collection of taxes.

— Anonymous Citizen of Colonial Philadelphia

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A perfect revenue law, if improperly administered or resisted by a hostile public, will soon become a practical monstrosity; but an imperfect law, if wisely administered with a reasonable public, will produce very satisfactory results.

— Aubrey R. Marrs

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

No other branch of the law [i.e., tax law] touches human activities at so many points. It can never be made simple, but we can try to avoid making it needlessly complex.

— Robert H. Jackson

Gross inequalities may not be ignored for the sake of ease of collection.

— Owen J. Roberts

[Speaking of the IRS:] Thank God they're not doing brain surgery.

— Fred Allen

All that happens is, you take your financial records to the IRS office and they put you into a tank filled with giant, stinging leeches. Many taxpayers are pleasantly surprised to find that they die within hours.

— Dave Barry

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

No fact speaks so well for the loyalty of the American people, and in support of their determination to pay their debts as the readiness with which they submit [in late 1865] to the payment of war taxes in times of peace.

— *The Nation Magazine*

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

— Anonymous

An accountant once told me that the definition of fair market value for tax purposes is the value arrived at in negotiations between a willing tax lawyer and a willing revenue agent, neither of whom has ever bought or sold anything of consequence in his life.

— Paul H. Asofsky

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

— Gil Stern

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

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

There was wisdom as well as wit in the cynical wag's remark that the lawyers had transformed the ancient principle of "no taxation without representation" into a doctrine of "no taxation without litigation."

— Robert H. Jackson

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

— Laurence J. Peter

You first have to decide whether to use the short or the long form. The short form is what the Internal Revenue Service calls "simplified," which means it is designed for people who need the help of a Sears tax preparation expert to distinguish between their first and last names. . . . The IRS wants you to use the short form because it gets to keep most of your money. So unless you have pond silt for brains, you want the long form.

— Dave Barry

Next to being shot at and missed, nothing is quite as satisfying as an income tax refund.

— F.J. Raymond

The tax farmer would advance money to the monarch — the equivalent of planting his seeds — and then go about collecting it from the citizenry — the equivalent of gathering in a harvest whose ultimate value, as with all farmers, he hoped would exceed the cost of the seeds.

— Peter L. Bernstein

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

— Anonymous

As I sit in my poverty-stricken home, looking at the place where the piano used to be before I had to sell it to pay my income tax, I find myself in a thoughtful mood.

— P.G. Wodehouse

All money nowadays seems to be produced with a natural homing instinct for the Treasury.

— Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

Every child born in America can hope to grow up to enjoy tax loopholes.

— TRB (Richard Stout)

Income taxes are the most imaginative fiction written today.

— Herman Wouk

Certain states are out-and-out aggressive. But in most, you can drive a Mack truck through the revenue department and no one will notice. They're often clueless about how to question our tax planning strategies and techniques.

— Anonymous Oil Company Tax Director

Students of federal taxation agree that the tax system suffers from delay in getting the final word in judicial review, from retroactivity of the decision when it is obtained, and from the lack of a roundly tax-informed viewpoint of judges.

— Robert H. Jackson

If [a United States Supreme Court Justice is] in the doghouse with the Chief [Justice], he gets the crud. He gets the tax cases . . .

— Harry Blackmun

A tax . . . may obstruct the industry of the people, and discourage them from applying to certain branches of business which might give maintenance and employment to great multitudes. While it obliges the people to pay, it may thus diminish, or perhaps destroy, some of the funds which might enable them more easily to do so.

— Adam Smith

I will tell you a secret, which I learned many years ago from the commissioners of the customs in London: They said, when any commodity appeared to be taxed above a moderate rate, the consequence was to lessen that branch of the revenue by one half; and one of those gentlemen pleasantly told me, that the mistake of Parliaments, on such occasions, was owing to an error in computing two and two to make four; whereas in the business of laying heavy impositions, two and two never make more than one; which happens by lessening the import, and the strong temptation of running such goods as paid high duties.

— Jonathan Swift

You don't have to be chairman of a Wall Street investment bank to grasp that higher taxes on capital lead to a lower level of investment and slower growth.

— Henry M. Paulson Jr.

Governments likely to confiscate wealth are unlikely to find much wealth to confiscate in the long run.

— Thomas Sowell

High taxes . . . frequently afford a smaller revenue to the government than what might be drawn from more moderate taxes.

— Adam Smith

[As the Roman Empire declined] the resources of the farmers were exhausted by outrageous burdens of all taxes, the fields were abandoned, and the cultivated land reverted to waste.

— Lactantius

If, as the rate of a particular duty is increased, the revenue yielded increases, the duty is predominantly a tax. But when the rate is increased above the point at which the yield in revenue is a maximum, it is clear that some element of penalty is present, and we finally reach a duty of prohibitive amount, whose yield is very small or non-existent. This is closely akin to a simple prohibition of production or importation, with a penalty for infraction.

— Hugh Dalton

At the beginning of the dynasty, taxation yields a large revenue from small assessments. At the end of the dynasty taxation yields a small revenue from large assessments.

— Ibn Khaldun

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

The high duties which have been imposed upon the importation of many different sorts of foreign goods, in order to discourage their consumption in Great Britain, have in many cases served only to encourage smuggling; and in all cases have reduced the revenue of the customs below what more moderate duties would have afforded. The saying of Dr. Swift, that in the arithmetic of the customs two and two, instead of making four, make sometimes only one, holds perfectly true with regard to such heavy duties.

— Adam Smith

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

— Calvin Coolidge

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[U]sing tax cuts to stimulate the economy is probably a waste of time and money.

— Allan Sloan

Any man of energy and initiative in this country can get what he wants out of life. But when initiative is crippled by legislation or by a tax system which denies him the right to receive a reasonable share of his earnings, then he will no longer exert himself and the country will be deprived of the energy on which its continued greatness depends.

— Andrew Mellon

The relative stability of profits after taxes is evidence that the corporation profits tax is in effect almost entirely shifted; the government simply uses the corporation as a tax collector.

— K.E. Boulding

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

— Stanton Delaplane

The arm of the tax-gatherer reaches far.

— Wiley B. Rutledge

It is the part of the good shepherd to shear his flock, not flay it.

— Tiberius Caesar

In levying taxes and in shearing sheep it is well to stop when you get down to the skin.

— Austin O'Malley

What is the difference between a taxidermist and a tax collector? The taxidermist takes only your skin.

— Mark Twain

There is one difference between a tax collector and a taxidermist — the taxidermist leaves the hide.

— Mortimer Caplin

It is of course idle to expect that the complexities of our economic life permit revenue measures to be drawn with such simplicity and particularity as to avoid much litigation.

— Felix Frankfurter

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

— Donald C. Alexander

Never has it come to my attention or been part of my experience that a revenue agent, a tax collector, has put humanity above regulation. They are, again in my experience, the most abjectly humorless, dehumanized,

order taking, weak-charactered, easily vicious, almost casually amoral people I have met.

— Karl Hess

In the time of Emperor Vespasian, the government provided urinals in the streets of Rome and charged a fee for their use. The emperor, seeking to reduce his budget deficit, decided to raise the fee. His son, a finicky fellow, asked the emperor whether the additional receipts should be considered a tax increase or a reduction of government expenditure for the provision of the facilities. To this the emperor made his famous reply (in Latin, the only language he spoke): "*Non Olet!*" The literal translation is, "It doesn't smell." But the meaning is, "It's all money, and it doesn't matter which side of the ledger you put it on."

— Herbert Stein

It is impossible to escape nice distinctions in the application of complicated tax legislation.

— Felix Frankfurter

Sophisticated tax practitioners do not, in fact, benefit when tax practitioner incompetence and tax avoidance succeed. Quite the reverse, as the profession discovered in the tax shelter era.

— Burgess J.W. Raby and William L. Raby

My company [AT&T] fills out 39,000 tax forms a year; that's one every three and a half minutes.

— Michael Armstrong

As a taxpayer, you are required to be fully in compliance with the United States Tax Code, which is currently the size and weight of the Budweiser Clydesdales.

— Dave Barry

Elaborate machinery, designed to bring about a perfect equilibrium between benefit and burden, may at times defeat its aim through its own elaboration.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

I recently heard a CPA remark that the only accounting principle which the Internal Revenue Service regards as "generally accepted" is "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Although my friend overstates his case a bit — quite a bit — I cannot dismiss the thrust of his comment without some soul searching.

— Sheldon S. Cohen

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")

Taxes must be laid by general rules.

— Harlan F. Stone

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

— Dick Gregory

Judicial efforts to mold tax policy by isolated decisions make a national tax system difficult to develop, administer or observe.

— Robert H. Jackson

Tax statutes and tax regulations never have been static. Experience, changing needs, changing philosophies inevitably produce constant change in each.

— William O. Douglas

We [Judges of the U.S. Tax Court] have from time-to-time complained about the complexity of our revenue laws and the almost impossible challenge they present to taxpayers or their representatives who have not been initiated into the mysteries of the convoluted, complex provisions affecting the particular corner of the law involved Our complaints have obviously fallen upon deaf ears.

— Arnold Raum

I have something my tax doctor calls “narcotaxis.” Within 20 seconds of hearing someone launch into an explanation of tax laws, my eyes become glassy, my body loses all feeling, and I go into a shallow coma.

— Russell Baker

A distinction between bonds and stocks for the essentially practical purposes of taxation is more fanciful than real.

— George Sutherland

Many inequities are inherent in the income tax. We multiply them needlessly by nice distinctions which have no place in the practical administration of the law.

— William O. Douglas

It is reasonable that a man who denies the legality of a tax should have a clear and certain remedy Courts sometimes, perhaps, have been a little too slow to recognize the implied duress under which payment is made.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

If any person shall complain in court that payment has been unduly exacted of him or that he has sustained any arrogance and if he should be able to prove this fact, a severe sentence shall be pronounced against such tax collector.

— Constantine

The Constitution does not require uniformity in the manner of collection. Uniformity in the assessment is all it demands.

— Morrison Waite

No government could exist, that permitted the collection of its revenue to be delayed by every litigious man or every embarrassed man, to whom delay was more important than the payment of costs.

— Ward Hunt

Conflicts are multiplied by treating as questions of law what really are disputes over proper accounting. The mere number of such questions and the mass of decisions they call forth becomes a menace to the certainty and good administration of the law.

— Robert H. Jackson

It would be an extreme if not an extravagant application of the Fifth Amendment to say that it authorized a man to refuse to state the amount of his income because it had been made in crime.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

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

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*

Under penalties of perjury, I declare that I have examined this return and accompanying schedules and statements, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, they are true, correct, and complete.

— Required Declaration,
IRS Form 1040

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

It took an IRS accountant to catch Al Capone.

— IRS Recruiting Poster

They [i.e., the enemies of Bill Clinton] got him on sex for the same reason the Feds got Al Capone on tax evasion: Because they could.

— Richard Cohen

Just as the tax code has become an instrument of social engineering for politicians, over and above its primary purpose of raising revenue for the government, so too has the tax-enforcement process become an instrument of general law enforcement for law-enforcement stretching far beyond the enforcement required to collect the taxes levied by the code.

— Dan R. Mastromarco and Lawrence A. Hunter

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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

If Congress may tax one citizen to the point of discouragement for making an honest living, it is hard to say that it may not do the same to another just because he makes a sinister living. If the law-abiding must tell all to the tax collector, it is difficult to excuse one because his business is lawbreaking.
— Robert H. Jackson

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 [Tax Court] is independent, and its neutrality is not clouded by prosecuting duties. Its procedures assure fair hearings. Its deliberations are evidenced by careful opinions. All guides to judgment available to judges are habitually consulted and respected. It has established a tradition of freedom from bias and pressures. It deals with a subject that is highly specialized and so complex as to be the despair of judges. It is relatively better staffed for its task than is the judiciary.
— Robert H. Jackson

The tight net which the Treasury Regulations fashion is for the protection of the revenue.
— Felix Frankfurter

The payment of taxes is an obvious and insistent duty, and its sanction is usually punitive.
— Joseph McKenna

Suggesting that the IRS outsource its enforcement activities is like suggesting that the FBI outsource its manhunts and the Pentagon outsource its wars.
— Tax Executives Institute

When a revenue agent confronts the taxpayer with an apparent deficiency, the latter may be more concerned with a quick settlement than an honest search for the truth.
— Tom C. Clark

Many tax collectors, in their zeal to catch those among us who don't pay their taxes, seem to have lost sight of the most important truth about our tax system — that citizens have rights that must be protected.
— Max Baucus

"I pay my taxes," says somebody, as if that were an act of virtue instead of one of compulsion.
— Robert G. Menzies

Dear Mr. President, Internal Revenue regulations will turn us into a nation of bookkeepers. The life of every citizen is becoming a business. This, it seems to me, is one of the worst interpretations of the meaning of human life history has ever seen. Man's life is not a business.

— Saul Bellow
(*Herzog*)

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

[E]very stick crafted to beat on the head of a taxpayer will metamorphose sooner or later into a large green snake and bite the [IRS] commissioner on the hind part.

— Martin D. Ginsburg

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

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

Our tax system depends on each person who is voluntarily meeting his or her tax obligations having confidence that his or her neighbor or competitor is also complying.

— Charles O. Rossotti

America's tax system depends upon our voluntary declaration of taxes owed and a patriotic willingness to pay our fair share.

— J. Robert Kerrey

Our self-enforcement system depends in large part on the tax practitioners being wise and ethical enough not to push things too far. Unfortunately, that idealistic solution has failed since tax practitioners, not unlike all humans, are not angels.

— Lawrence M. Stone

[W]e do not have, and never had, and could not have a "voluntary" tax system.

— Donald C. Alexander

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

The United States has a system of taxation by confession. That a people so numerous, scattered and individualistic annually assesses itself with a tax liability, often in highly burdensome amounts, is a reassuring sign of the stability and vitality of our system of self-government. What surprised me in once trying to help administer these laws was not to discover examples of recalcitrance, fraud or self-serving mistakes in reporting, but to discover that such derelictions were so few.

— Robert H. Jackson

The smuggling of tobacco undoubtedly began when it first become profitable, when James I, out of his hatred of the weed, placed an imposition of six shillings and eightpence upon each pound of it imported.

— Alfred Rive

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

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

It is the small owner who offers the only really profitable and reliable material for taxation . . . He is made for taxation . . . He swarms; he is far more tied to his place and his calling than the big owner; he has less skill, and ingenuity as regards escape; and he still has a large supply of "ignorant patience of taxation."

— Auberon Herbert

Excise: A hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged not by the common judges of property, but wretches hired by those to whom excise is paid.

— Samuel Johnson

Income tax, if I may be pardoned for saying so, is a tax on income.

— Lord Macnaghten

. . . I'm continually amazed at the attitude people have toward their tax refund. There seems to be in most people's minds — and I'm talking about intelligent, educated people who understand the tax system — a disconnect between the refund they get and the amount of taxes they pay. It's like a lottery. People want that check!

— Verenda Smith

Intoxication: euphoria at getting a refund from the IRS, which lasts until you realize it was your money to start with.

— Greg Oetjen

Internal Revenue Service: The world's most successful mail order business.

— Bob Goddard

The United States may become the first great power to falter because it lost its ability to collect taxes.

— American Bar Association

[Old Mission Statement:] The purpose of the Internal Revenue Service is to collect the proper amount of tax revenue at the least cost; serve the public by continually improving the quality of our products and services; and perform in a manner warranting the highest degree of public confidence in our integrity, efficiency and fairness.

— The Internal Revenue Service

The Internal Revenue Service shall review and restate its mission to place a greater emphasis on serving the public and meeting taxpayers' needs.

— The Internal Revenue Service Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998

[New Mission Statement:] The IRS mission is to provide America's taxpayers top quality service by helping them understand and meet their tax responsibilities and by applying the tax law with integrity and fairness to all.

— The Internal Revenue Service

The Power to Tax

It is proper here to remark, that the authority to lay and collect taxes is the most important of any power that can be granted; it connects with it almost all other powers, or at least will in process of time draw all others after it; it is the great mean of protection, security, and defense, in a good government, and the great engine of oppression and tyranny in a bad one.

— "Brutus," Anonymous Author of Anti-Federalist Paper Number 17

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

Congress shall have the power to lay and collect taxes on income, from whatever source derived . . .

— Sixteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

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The payment of poll taxes as a prerequisite to voting is a familiar and reasonable regulation long enforced by many States and for more than a century in Georgia.
— Pierce Butler

An unlimited power to tax involves, necessarily, the power to destroy.
— Daniel Webster

That the power to tax involves the power to destroy; that the power to destroy may defeat and render useless the power to create; that there is plain repugnance, in conferring on one government a power to control the constitutional measures of another, which other, with respect to those very measures is declared to be supreme over that which exerts the control, are propositions not to be denied.
— John Marshall

No one imagines . . . that a law professing to tax, will be permitted to destroy.
— John Marshall

The power to tax is the power to destroy only in the sense that those who have power can misuse it.
— Stanley F. Reed

The power to tax is not the power to destroy while this court sits.
— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

The power to tax is the one great power upon which the whole national fabric is based. It is as necessary to the existence and prosperity of a nation as is the air he breathes to the natural man. It is not only the power to destroy, but it is also the power to keep alive.
— Rufus W. Peckham

The power to tax carries with it the power to embarrass and destroy.
— Willis Van Devanter

The power to tax the exercise of a privilege is the power to control or suppress its enjoyment.
— William O. Douglas

The power to tax is the power to govern.
— Maurice L. Duplessis

The power to tax is the power to rule.
— Brooks Atkinson

A state's power to tax property is plenary.
— Owen J. Roberts

[The] power to tax is virtually without limitation
— Lewis F. Powell Jr.

The power to tax, to seize wealth with or without the owner's approval, is a key feature distinguishing a government from a business or an individual. Many of us feel a natural resentment toward that unique power.
— Hanno Beck, Brian Dunkiel, and Gawain Kripke

The power to tax is . . . the strongest, the most pervading of all the powers of government reaching directly or indirectly to all classes of the people.
— Samuel F. Miller

The power to tax is indeed one of the most effective forms of regulation. And no more powerful instrument for centralization of government could be devised.
— William O. Douglas

[The states] have no power, by taxation or otherwise, to retard, impede, burden or in any manner control the operations of the constitutional laws enacted by Congress.
— John Marshall

O that there might in England be A duty on Hypocrisy, A tax on humbug, an excise On solemn plausibilities.
— Henry Luttrell

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

The right to tax "in its nature acknowledges no limits."
— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

There is no worse tyranny than to force a man to pay for what he does not want merely because you think it would be good for him.
— Robert Heinlein

We cannot be happy without being free; we cannot be free without being secure in our property; we cannot be secure in our property if, without our consent, others may, as by right, take it away; taxes imposed on us by Parliament do thus take it away.
— John Dickinson

The powers of taxation are broad, but the distinction between taxation and confiscation must still be observed.
— George Sutherland

Try not to think of it as "your" money.
— Apocryphal IRS Agent

The supreme power of every community has the right of requiring from all its subjects such contri-

butions as are necessary to the public safety or public prosperity.

— Samuel Johnson

A State cannot tax a stranger for something that it has not given him.

— Felix Frankfurter

Orthodox concepts of ownership fail to reflect the outer boundaries of taxation.

— Frank Murphy

The new technologies should not be used as a justification to create new taxes.

— Glen A. Kohl

A state may not impose a charge for the enjoyment of a right granted by the federal constitution.

— William O. Douglas

The notion that a city has unlimited taxing power, is, of course, an illusion.

— Felix Frankfurter

Due process requires some definite link, some minimum connection, between a state and the person, property or transaction it seeks to tax.

— Robert H. Jackson

A State must not play favorites in the operation of its taxing system between business confined within its borders and the common interests of the nation expressed through business conducted across State lines.

— Felix Frankfurter

The right of the citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President . . . or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged . . . by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.

— 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

What the individual does in the operation of a business is amenable to taxation just as much as what he owns, at all events if the classification is not tyrannical or arbitrary.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

It is one thing to impose a tax on the income or property of a preacher. It is quite another thing to exact a tax from him for the privilege of delivering a sermon.

— William O. Douglas

The encouragement or discouragement of competition is an end for which the power of taxation may be exerted.

— Louis D. Brandeis

Those of us who understand human history know the role taxation has played in shaping the destiny of mankind. The matter of taxes — more specifically, the right to tax — is clearly no stranger to controversy and has frequently served as the catalyst for revolutionary change.

— Owen Arthur

The validity of a tax depends upon its nature, and not upon its name.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

Of all the powers conferred upon government that of taxation is most liable to abuse . . . This power can as readily be employed against one class of individuals and in favor of another, so as to ruin the one class and give unlimited wealth and prosperity to the other, if there is no implied limitation of the uses for which the power may be exercised.

— Samuel F. Miller

It is wise to remember that the taxing and licensing power is a dangerous and potent weapon which, in the hands of unscrupulous or bigoted men, could be used to suppress freedoms and destroy religion unless it is kept within appropriate bounds.

— Frank Murphy

In determining whether the tax is in truth a tax on property, we are to consider, not its form or label, but its practical operation.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

One of our basic rights is to be free of taxation to support a transgression of the constitutional command that the authorities “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

— Robert H. Jackson

Taxes on the circulation of ideas have a long history of misuse against freedom of thought.

— Frank Murphy

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

— Thomas Jefferson

The taxes that have an invidious incidence are those which historically were known in America as “taxes on knowledge.”

— William O. Douglas

Several millennia ago, tribal lords discovered the advantages of collecting some of their people’s property in return for a few identifiable benefits, such as not killing them. Over the centuries, tax collection gained in sophistication, including the relatively novel per-

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sonal income tax. The new millennium shows no sign of abandoning this system.

— Sanford C. Bernstein & Company

The objection to double taxation by a single sovereign is no more potent under the Fourteenth Amendment than the objection that a tax otherwise valid has been doubled.

— Harlan F. Stone

Not even the power of [the Supreme] Court can make income of outgo. To speak of “a tax on corporate income that is paid out” is as self-contradictory as to speak of round squares.

— Robert H. Jackson

The burden of Federal taxation necessarily sets an economic limit to the practical operation of the taxing power of the States, and vice versa.

— Harlan F. Stone

The right to possess private property is derived from nature, not from man; and the state has the right to control its use in the interests of the public good alone, but by no means to absorb it altogether. The state would therefore be unjust and cruel if under the name of taxation it were to deprive the private owner of more than is fair.

— Pope Leo XIII

Avoidance, Evasion, and Planning

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

A taxpayer may engineer his transactions to minimize taxes, but he cannot make a transaction appear to be what it is not.

— Irving Loeb Goldberg

The legal right of a taxpayer to decrease the amount of what otherwise would be his taxes, or altogether avoid them, by means which the law permits, cannot be doubted.

— George Sutherland

[I]t is not the [Canadian] courts’ role to prevent taxpayers from relying on the sophisticated structure of their transactions, arranged in such a way that the particular provisions of the Act are met, on the basis that it would be inequitable to those taxpayers who have not chosen to structure their transactions that way. . . . Unless the Act provides otherwise, a taxpayer is entitled to be taxed based on what it actually did, not based on what it could have done, and certainly not based on what a less sophisticated taxpayer might have done.

— Beverley McLachlin

Over and over again courts have said that there is nothing sinister in so arranging one’s affairs as to keep taxes as low as possible. Everybody does so, rich or poor; and all do right, for nobody owes any public duty to pay more than the law demands: taxes are enforced exactions, not voluntary contributions. To demand more in the name of morals is mere cant.

— Learned Hand

[T]here is nothing wrong with a strategy to avoid the payment of taxes. The Internal Revenue Code doesn’t prevent that.

— William H. Rehnquist

A taxpayer need not arrange its affairs so as to maximize taxes as long as the transaction has a legitimate business purpose.

— Cornelia G. Kennedy

[I]t is axiomatic that taxpayers lawfully may arrange their affairs to keep taxes as low as possible. Nevertheless, at the same time the law imposes certain threshold duties which a taxpayer may not shirk simply by manipulating figures or maneuvering assets to conceal their real character.

— Morton I. Greenberg

Tax-motivated behavior ought to be discouraged. . . . This is because tax planning produces nothing of value to society. It may benefit the taxpayer whose taxes are reduced, but the social product is not increased.

— Martin J. McMahon Jr.

Shall we devote the few precious days of our existence only to buying and selling, only to comparing sales with the sales of the same day the year before . . . only to seek pleasures and fight taxes, and when the end comes to leave as little a taxable estate as possible as the final triumph and achievement of our lives? Surely there is something finer and better in life . . .

— Julius Rosenwald

In tax shelter transactions, an elaborate series of formal steps is contrived to lead to an unreasonably beneficial tax result, usually flowing from some defect or ambiguity in the tax law.

— Peter C. Canellos

[Definition of a corporate tax shelter:] A deal done by very smart people that, absent tax considerations, would be very stupid.

— Michael J. Graetz

The best definition of a “tax shelter” is a transaction that has *higher* rate of return after tax than before tax.

— Calvin H. Johnson

Tax planning is driven by the fact that under a non-neutral tax law, transactions or arrangements whose

economic differences are minor can have significantly different tax consequences.

— James W. Wetzler

In America, in 1913, an income tax law was passed and the rich have been devising tax dodging rackets ever since.

— Elliot Paul

By the late 1970s, the vast majority of the public had come to believe that everybody else was engaging in tax avoidance or outright tax evasion.

— Michael J. Graetz

Everybody thinks that the other guy is beating the tax code, and they're being suckered. They are the schnooks, and the other people are getting away with it.

— Alan Blinder

The American people as taxpayers have begun in wholesale numbers to cheat, out of resentment of a tax system they think is unfair, too complicated and wasteful of their money. The so-called underground economy is growing rapidly — people working for cash only, reporting nothing, paying nothing.

— David Brinkley

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that we are facing a rising tide of corporate and individual behavior that makes going to any lengths to not pay taxes an acceptable activity.

— Larry R. Levitan

Where there is at least a general suspicion of much unnecessary expense, and great misapplication of the public revenue, the laws which guard it are little respected.

— Adam Smith

Unless the government is standing right next to me doing one-third to one-half of my labor, they don't have a right to one-third or one-half of my compensation. There is no law that compels me to file a tax return. I have a choice, as every American has a choice.

— Lynne Meredith

There have always been individuals who, for a variety of reasons, argue that various taxes are illegal. They use false, misleading, or unorthodox tax advice to gain followers. . . . The promoters of this tax advice often charge hefty fees or commissions to subscribe to their philosophies. Unfortunately, in the end, you may pay more in penalties, interest, and legal fees for following their bad advice. Their philosophies have led to the financial ruin of innocent taxpayers deceived by false information. Believe it or not — a number of individuals who market these ideas actually pay taxes.

— The Internal Revenue Service

No man in this country is under the smallest obligation, moral or other, so to arrange his legal relations to his business or to his property as to enable the Inland Revenue to put the largest possible shovel into his stores.

— Lord Clyde

Anybody has a right to evade taxes if he can get away with it. No citizen has a moral obligation to assist in maintaining the government. If Congress insists on making stupid mistakes and passing foolish tax laws, millionaires should not be condemned if they take advantage of them.

— J. Pierpont Morgan

It does not surprise anyone when I tell them that the most important tax haven in the world is an island. They are surprised, however, when I tell them that the name of the Island is *Manhattan*. Moreover, the second most important tax haven in the world is located on an island. It is a city called *London* in the United Kingdom.

— Marshall J. Langer

Avoid falsehoods like the plague except in matters of taxation, which do not count, since here you are not lying to take someone else's goods, but to prevent your own from being unjustly seized.

— Giovanni Morelli

There's no question that it's more fun to do business while relaxing on the beach of some Caribbean paradise than while cooped up in your office back home. But there's more to the offshore world than the sunny climate. There's freedom and privacy beyond your wildest imagination. Off come the shackles of government regulation and the handcuffs of excessive taxation.

— Jerome Schneider

As a citizen, you have an obligation to the country's tax system, but you also have an obligation to yourself to know your rights under the law

— Donald C. Alexander

If you are truly serious about preparing your child for the future, don't teach him to subtract — teach him to deduct.

— Fran Lebowitz

In the United States we have observed that there are two Internal Revenue Codes — one for Wall Street and one for Main Street. Wall Street can afford and often needs the services of sophisticated tax lawyers. Main Street often can't and doesn't.

— Sheldon I. Banoff

To collect all the taxes owed — that is, to close the tax gap — is an impossible task.

— Berdji Kenadjian

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

— John Maynard Keynes

[I]n the area of taxation, it is often difficult to determine where business ends and the law begins

— Ellen Bree Burns

Our entire tax system is threatened by the existence of tax avoidance techniques that are only available to the wealthy in our society.

— Barbara Kennelly

The ancient Egyptians built elaborate fortresses and tunnels and even posted guards at tombs to stop grave robbers. In today's America, we call that estate planning.

— Bill Archer

The fairer and lower tax rates are, the less tax evasion, avoidance and noncompliance there will be.

— Arthur B. Laffer

Too many business decisions are made on the basis of tax consequences rather than what makes good business sense.

— Harold Igaldo

Never let the tax tail wag the economic dog.

— Laura Peebles

[T]o base all of your decisions on tax consequences is not necessarily to maintain the proper balance and perspective on what you are doing.

— Barber Conable

I do not want you ever to initiate any action for any refunds of taxes without first consulting me and presenting the matter fully to me so that I may judge whether it is an honorable and ethical action to take, not simply legally, but according to my own personal standards.

— Ernest Hemingway

A tax return is an attested document. It is signed by the taxpayer and the preparer under penalties of perjury. It is not an opening offer.

— Lee A. Sheppard

Tax lawyers spend about a third of their time converting ordinary income into capital gain.

— Walter Blum
(attributed)

[L]awyers of high standing at the bar are advising their clients to utilize devious tax avoidance devices, and they are actively using them themselves.

— Henry E. Morgenthau Jr.

[T]he [tax] lawyer's passion for technical analysis of the statutory language should always be diluted by distrust of a result that is too good to be true.

— Boris I. Bittker and James S. Eustice

The tax lawyer need not accept his client's economic and social opinions, but the client is paying for technical attention and undivided concentration upon his affairs. He is equally entitled to performance unfettered by his attorney's economic and social predilections.

— Randolph Paul

A healthy tax base allows the government to collect the same tax at lower rates. A loophole-ridden tax base is the worst of all worlds because it realizes no revenue, but causes economic damage as taxpayers plan around the tax.

— Calvin H. Johnson

Most tax planning adds little or nothing of worth to our society. . . . Tax lawyers perform a legitimate role of interpreting the law, instructing clients in the sometimes bizarre requirements the law imposes to get a given tax treatment, and planning transactions to avoid the occasional warts in the system. It is an honorable profession, and I am a proud member of it. But let's not kid ourselves that most tax planning is productive.

— David A. Weisbach

The less chance you have of successfully defending your income tax return, the greater the chance it will be randomly selected for audit.

— John Peers

It is often not enough for tax advisers to take the current law into account. In many situations, they must also consider their clients' exposure to the risk of change.

— Franklin L. Green

Those who have large estates and watchful lawyers will find ways of minimizing these tax burdens.

— Robert H. Jackson

A tax system of rather high rates gives a multitude of clever individuals in the private sector powerful incentives to game the system. Even the smartest drafters of legislation and regulation cannot be expected to anticipate every device.

— Stephen F. Williams

Antiabuse doctrines are needed . . . because it is impossible for drafters of the tax law to anticipate each and every interaction of the various tax rules. Inevitably, there will be some unforeseen interaction of the tax rules so that, if one arranges one's affairs in just the right manner, magic happens.

— Daniel N. Shaviro and David A. Weisbach

The primary motive behind demands for certainty [in tax laws] is not to assure proper reporting of transactions in the ordinary course of business. The primary motive behind demands for certainty is to know with precision the extent to which the taxpayer can engage in tax-motivating planning — in the vernacular, “How close to the line can I get?”

— Martin J. McMahon Jr.

[W]here the lawyer believes there is a reasonable basis for a position that a particular transaction does not result in taxable income, or that certain expenditures are properly deductible as expenses, the lawyer has no duty to advise that riders be attached to the client’s tax return explaining the circumstances surrounding the transactions or the expenditures.

— American Bar Association, Committee on Ethics

The difference between tax avoidance and tax evasion is the thickness of a prison wall.

— Denis Healey

[R]elying on the legal and accounting professionals to prescribe appropriate standards of practitioner conduct . . . is an idea whose time has surely passed.

— Michael J. Graetz

Distinguishing tax shelters from real transactions is often a frustrating exercise because tax shelters are usually designed to mimic real transactions. In this respect, tax shelters and real transactions have a relationship analogous to the relationship between money laundering and banking. In both areas, rules designed to curb the abusive activity are a source of complexity in nonabusive cases.

— Peter C. Canellos

The argument that “if everyone cheated on their tax returns, we would all suffer,” understandably dissuades almost no one from cheating. On the contrary, tax evaders are quite certain that nearly everyone else is cheating, and it is precisely this fact that serves as their justification for doing the same.

— Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin

[A] tax lawyer is a person who is good with numbers but does not have enough personality to be an accountant.

— James D. Gordon III

[T]o a fee-maximizing tax professional, the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, is merely a platform waiting for energetic entrepreneurs to construct a superstructure of previously unimaginable complexity.

— Boris I. Bittker

Just let ‘em feel that you can save ‘em something on taxes and nobody will keep you out.

— Warren Buffett

It’s time we tell the bar associations and the IRS to shove their opinions up their cash cows.

— James Traficant

[T]he worst thing about [the week before tax returns are due] may not be the taxes themselves, but the commiserating rhetoric of the politicians who, having created the present tax system, will spend the next few days deploring it as if it were the handiwork of strangers.

— *The Washington Post*

Congress should know how to levy taxes, and if it doesn’t know how to collect them, then a man is a fool to pay the taxes.

— J. Pierpont Morgan

We have a tax code that favors those with the best accountants.

— Shane Keats

[Headline:] Tax Planning May Be Futile

— Albert B. Crenshaw

Let the tax experts employed by the wealthy work a little harder to figure the proper tax obligation of their clients rather than working hard to enable their clients to avoid their fair burden of tax obligation.

— Walter Reuther

Sixty-four percent of women attorneys think that tax lawyers make undesirable dates.

— Daniel Dolan

[It] was like listening to a tax lawyer read the lyrics to a love song. All the words were there, nothing was inaccurate, but all the sizzle was gone.

— Patricia Thomas

Law students who plan to practice in the tax field often take as few advocacy courses as they can get away with. In fact, the persuasive abilities of tax lawyers and tax accountants are probably about the same. Neither group is known for its advocacy skills.

— Joel S. Newman and
Michael B. Lang

I always imagined that a client needs at least two tax advisors. One tells him what the law is. The other tells him what he wants the law to be. Then he can choose.

— Terence Floyd Cuff

A dog who thinks he is man’s best friend is a dog who obviously has never met a tax lawyer.

— Fran Lebowitz

It is not in the best interests of any tax practitioner to keep a complicated tax system. We spend too much

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time interpreting confusing provisions and are often placed in the position of charging our clients so that they can pay more taxes. Often, the person with the more sophisticated adviser will pay more tax on a given transaction than the person who takes a stab at it themselves. This is the exact opposite of what the result should be.

— Ron Hegt

[My law firm] had a rule — at least it seemed to be a rule — that everybody that came had to spend at least a year working on taxes. The general rationale for that rule as far as I could understand it was that taxes were so important to everything that you do, whatever the kind of case you are handling, you have got to know something about the tax consequences of things.

— Charles A. Horsky

When a tax controversy erupts, it is common for clients to blame their tax advisors as well as the IRS for the aggravation they are undergoing; and, if the outcome of the tax controversy is that the taxpayer must write a sizable (as seen by the taxpayer) check to the IRS, it is also common for the client to feel that the tax advisor should somehow share or bear the cost of this disaster.

— Burgess J.W. Raby and
William L. Raby

We spent much of the rest of the night in a driving, freezing rain probing the muck and pea soup mud with our bayonets and seeking to dig up and defuse booby-trapped antitank mines. . . . As I spent more time working with landmines and explosives, I learned three important principles:

- Be careful.
- Be very careful.
- Be very, very careful.

I also learned to assume that every weapon is loaded until you check it yourself and prove that it is not. Do not rely on what anyone else tells you. These are not bad principles for practicing tax law today

— Terence Floyd Cuff

A tax adviser who instills confidence and trust in his or her client or corporate partner becomes highly valued. Indeed, the term guru is generally reserved for two types of individuals — spiritual guides for followers of Eastern religion and tax advisers for adherents of Western capitalism.

— Franklin L. Green

The reality is that most of us practicing tax today have long since compromised our integrity. But if we care about future generations we need to face the fact that tax practice turns our best and brightest into little more than well-paid tax cheats. [I question] whether it is even possible to be a person of integrity and still engage in a lucrative tax practice.

— Paul Streckfus

It is seldom given to mortal man to feel superior to a tax lawyer.

— Anthony C. Amsterdam

[Game Show Host:] You're a genius.

[Contestant:] No, I'm a tax attorney.

— Regis Philbin and
Bill MacDonald

The purpose of the attorney-client privilege is expressed almost universally as promoting *compliance* with the law. Yet . . . [t]he larger social interest in facilitating compliance with law in a wide array of disciplines is not so clearly present when it comes to tax. Indeed it is rather difficult to articulate what may be the social interest in tax minimization. . . . While we may despair of the prospect of true tax simplification in our lifetimes, there are meaningful steps that can be taken in that direction. Elimination of the attorney-client privilege in all but criminal tax matters would be one such step.

— Bruce Kayle

Tax law is a funny thing. I think it fair to say that most CPAs know something about the federal income tax; many if not most lawyers do not.

— Bernard Wolfman

We have always been fascinated with the mysteries of the tax code and with the people who struggle so mightily to plumb its depths.

— Joel and Ethan Coen

Who will protect the integrity of the tax law if the tax lawyers won't?

— Christopher Bergin

Then our new CEO backed up a moving van to the building and robbed us. At first we thought he was breaking the law, but he had a written opinion from his tax lawyer saying it was probably okay.

— Scott Adams
("Dilbert")

The First Rule of Practicing Tax Law: If someone has to go to jail, make sure it's the client.

— Fred Drasner

The tax lawyer assists clients solely with their selfish monetary concerns. He helps them in their unchristian endeavor to shift their tax burden to their neighbors. He deprives the government of revenue needed for the common good.

— Frederic G. Corneel

The tax bar is commonly referred to as a "special priesthood," and it is only slightly more tolerant than the Catholic Church in ordaining women tax priests.

— Paul L. Caron

I think there is something desperately wrong with the system when there is only a small subset of people who understand how it works.

— Todd McCracken

There are few greater stimuli to human ingenuity than the prospect of avoiding fiscal liability. Experience shows that under this stimulus human ingenuity out-reaches Parliamentary prescience.

— Lord Justice Diplock

If capital can move freely across borders, it will tend to leave high-tax countries to go to low-tax countries.

— Eric Engen and Kevin A. Hassett

They [i.e., welfare cheaters] are no more evil than industrialists using high-powered accountants to avoid taxes.

— Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

[W]hile I hate all forms of cheating, in my Inferno, tax evaders occupy a circle of their own. I see them not only as backsliders on their own civic responsibility but as stealing from their fellow citizens: The more successfully they escape what they owe, the more the rest of us have to pay. I take great satisfaction, therefore, in the fact that during my tenure as U.S. Attorney for the district of Massachusetts, every tax evader we prosecuted was convicted, and all of them went to jail.

— Elliot L. Richardson

[Making tax evasion a felony] destroys all proportion of punishment, and puts murders upon equal footing with such as are really guilty of no natural, but merely a positive offense.

— William Blackstone

It is sinful to deceive the government regarding taxes and duties.

— *The Talmud*

[P]eople who profess to have high levels of trust in government to do the right thing are significantly less likely to engage in tax noncompliance.

— Joel Slemrod

The only purpose of the [taxpayer] was to escape taxation The fact that it desired to evade the law, as it is called, is immaterial, because the very meaning of a line in the law is that you may intentionally go as close to it as you can if you do not pass it.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

We have been mindful that for some businesses there is little, if any, meaningful difference between an improvement in financial performance achieved by cutting operating expenses and one that results from reducing taxes. Both reductions improve the financial statement. The tax law, however, requires that the in-

tended transactions have economic substance separate and distinct from economic benefit achieved solely by tax reduction.

— David Laro

If you cheat [on your corporate taxes], your employees will notice that, and they'll cheat you.

— Anonymous Corporate Executive

Here's a rule for stock pickers. If the company bilks investors and fools the analysts, it's a sell. If it bilks and fools Uncle Sam, it's a hold or a buy.

— John Rothchild

A business is nothing more than a conduit for passing along costs to its customers. Taxes are a cost, so tax avoidance is part and parcel of competition to bring consumers better stuff at lower cost.

— Holman W. Jenkins Jr.

Cheating on federal and state income tax is all pervasive in all classes of society; except among the compulsively honest, cheating usually occurs in direct proportion to opportunity.

— Richard Neely

We still have too many cases of what I might call *moral fraud*, that is, the defeat of taxes through doubtful legal devices which have no real business utility, and to which a downright honest man would not resort to reduce his taxes.

— Henry E. Morgenthau Jr.

If taxpayers see everyone else getting away with murder, they will ask themselves if they want to be a chump or a cheat.

— Gregory F. Jenner

In sum, the accepted view is that the taxpayer, or the preparer, may sign a return as "correct" if he believes there is a reasonable possibility the return is not incorrect.

— Frederic G. Corneel

There is hardly an American citizen above the poverty level whose tax conscience is so completely clear that he isn't scared of being audited.

— "Diogenes" (nom de plume of an IRS agent)

Lie detector operators in North America often ask subjects if they cheat on their taxes. The reaction to this question is usually intense, which gives the polygraph operator an insight into the emotional responses of the subject. Since most people have cheated on their taxes, a negative answer gives the operator an indication of how the subject reacts when lying. European polygraph operators would not use this question because tax evasion is not a crime in many European

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countries, and even where it is, people do not consider it a moral wrong.

— Charles Adams

The greatest scourge of mankind, the detestable race of tax informers, must be stopped. We must stifle it in its first efforts and tear out the pernicious tongue of envy. Let not the judges receive . . . information of the informer; let them be given up to punishment as soon as any of them appear.

— Constantine

One information-reporting requirement added in 1986 required people to include on their tax returns Social Security numbers of all dependents over age two. This caused seven million dependents to disappear from the tax rolls.

— Michael J. Graetz

The tax code makes tax avoidance (which is perfectly legal and proper) easy; and tax evasion (which is a felony), tempting. After all, if the best place to hide a book is in a library, the best place to hide a tax dodge (legal, illegal, or somewhere in between) is in the depths of a tax return the size of one or more phone books.

— John Steele Gordon

Only little people pay taxes.

— Leona Helmsley
(attributed)

In religion as in taxation, the authorities' efforts to enforce compliance have historically been aided by the widely held belief in the severity of the ultimate consequences (hell or audit, as the case may be) but hampered by widely held doubts concerning their probability.

— J. Mark Iwry

[The tax evader is] in every respect, an excellent citizen, had not the laws of this country made a crime which nature never meant to be so.

— Adam Smith

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

Everything today is taxes. . . . What better seat on the grandstand of life can I offer you than that of tax counsel Who is the figure behind every great man, the individual who knows his ultimate secrets? A father confessor? Hell no, the tax expert.

— Louis Auchincloss
(*The Partners*)

We feel the necessity of enjoying ourselves and so we must attempt to do so while we wear this hairshirt. If we go to the opera, it is not for enjoyment, but to be improved. If we visit European cities, it is to be cultured, not to enjoy ourselves. . . . Everything else we do is because it is tax deductible.

— Zero Mostel

In short, it is the ethic of the profession that: The tax practitioner does not regard it as his duty to recommend full and fair disclosure of the facts as to items questionable in law.

— Jerome Hellerstein

[A] society which turns so many of its best and brightest into tax lawyers may be doing something wrong.

— Hoffman F. Fuller

It's a game. We [tax lawyers] teach the rich how to play it so they can stay rich — and the IRS keeps changing the rules so we can keep getting rich teaching them.

— John Grisham
(*The Firm*)

The problem with practicing tax law is that the general rule never seems to apply to anything.

— Anonymous Tax Lawyer

Trying to control tax shelters is like stepping on Jell-O. It just squeezes out between your toes and the mess is worse than when you began.

— Anonymous Congressional Staff Member

[Without related-party rules, a taxpayer could] reduce his income tax by transferring his money from one pocket to another even though he uses different trousers. A man with a half-dozen pockets might almost escape liability altogether.

— John Marvin Jones

The tax bar is the repository of the greatest ingenuity in America, and given the chance, those people will do you in.

— Martin D. Ginsburg

So long as we have tax statutes, we will have keen-eyed lawyers and accountants seeking to circumvent them.

— Ferdinand Pecora

Every invasion of the plain rights of the citizen has a lawyer behind it. If all lawyers were hanged tomorrow, and their bones sold to a mah jong factory, we'd all be freer and safer, and our taxes would be reduced by almost a half.

— H.L. Mencken

From a tax point of view you're better off raising horses or cattle than children.

— Patricia R. Schroeder

The way we currently tax capital encourages uneconomical behavior. To the extent that businesses pay tax on income when it is earned, taxing the appreciation and distributions on the intangible assets held by investors (e.g., stock) represents double taxation. To the extent that we insist on imposing this double tax, we should not be surprised that investors enter into contorted financial transactions to lower the after-tax rate of return on their investments.

— Sheldon D. Pollack

[As Justice Potter Stewart said about pornography:] I can't define tax evasion, but I know it when I see it.

— Fred T. Goldberg Jr.

Certain acts of tax escaping are clearly evasion; others are clearly avoidance; between the two is a twilight zone in which it is extremely difficult to determine whether a given act falls on one side of the line or the other.

— *National Income Tax Magazine*

The many small stockholders cannot afford professional counsel or evasion devices.

— Robert H. Jackson

The young century wore a merry, untaxed look. People could get rich without cheating the government.

— Ben Hecht

Let's face it, there is no discernable business reason to try to locate a transaction in a place like the Cayman Islands. . . . nothing that purports to be resident in the Caymans is managed and controlled there, even if the principals do occasionally visit to conduct scripted board meetings.

— Lee A. Sheppard

Why shouldn't the American people take half my money from me? I took all of it from them.

— Edward A. Filene

The net worth method, it seems, has evolved from the final volley to the first shot in the Government's battle for revenue.

— Tom C. Clark

Today is the first day of the rest of your taxable year.

— Jeffery L. Yablon

I'm against an income tax because all the rich people hire lawyers and accountants to be sure that they don't pay income tax.

— Ann Richards

Business may pass on taxes.

— Stanley F. Reed

True, of course, it is that in a system of taxation so intricate and cast as ours there are many other loopholes unsuspected by the framers of the statute, many other devices whereby burdens can be lowered.

— Benjamin N. Cardozo

[Taxes cannot be escaped] by anticipatory arrangements and contracts however skillfully devised . . . by which the fruits are attributed to a different tree from that on which they grew.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Tax law . . . requires that the intended transactions have economic substance separate and distinct from economic benefit achieved solely by tax reduction.

— David Laro

Needless tax complexity promotes chaos and confusion and gives the taxpayer a ready excuse for inattention to detail merging toward outright noncompliance.

— Gene Steuerle

The fact that the incidences of income taxation may have been taken into account by arranging matters one way rather than another, so long as the way chosen was the way the law allows, does not make a transaction something else than it truly is.

— Felix Frankfurter

Delinquent taxpayers as a class are a poor credit risk; tax default, unless an incident of legitimate tax litigation, is, to the eye sensitive to credit indications, a signal of distress.

— Robert H. Jackson

An economy breathes through its tax loopholes.

— Barry Bracewell-Milnes

I know all those people [i.e., tax evaders]. I have friendly, social, and criminal relations with the whole lot of them.

— Mark Twain

Tax evaders under-report the earnings of their legal enterprises, thereby paying less tax than they legally should. Criminals, by contrast, over-report the earnings of any legal enterprises they use for cover, therefore paying more tax than their legitimate front companies would normally be required.

— United Nations Report

That a great reluctance to pay taxes existed in all the colonies, there can be no doubt. It was one of the

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marked characteristics of the American People long after their separation from England.

— G.S. Callender

The Inland Revenue is not slow — and quite rightly — to take every advantage which is open to it under the taxing statutes for the purpose of depleting the taxpayer's pocket.

— Lord Clyde

If you don't drink, smoke, or drive a car, you're a tax evader.

— Thomas S. Foley

A rate of interest on tax delinquencies which is low in comparison to the taxpayer's borrowing rate — if he can borrow at all — is a temptation to use the state as a convenient, if involuntary, banker by the simple practice of deferring the payment of taxes.

— Robert H. Jackson

An Englishman's home is his tax haven.

— *Economist Magazine*

There can be no taxation without misrepresentation.

— J.B. Handelsman

[W]hile a taxpayer is free to organize his affairs as he chooses, nevertheless, once having done so, he must accept the tax consequences of his choice, whether contemplated or not, . . . and may not enjoy the benefit of some other route he might have chosen to follow but did not.

— Harry Blackmun

When . . . a taxpayer is presented with what would appear to be a fabulous opportunity to avoid tax obligations, he should recognize that he proceeds at his own peril.

— Morton I. Greenberg

It scarcely lies in the mouth of the taxpayer who plays with fire to complain of burnt fingers.

— Lord Greene

The avoidance of tax may be lawful, but it is not yet a virtue.

— Lord Denning