



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 1, 2011

Voters: Spending Cuts, Yes; Just Not My Programs

The Cato Institute's massive 262-page study, *Downsizing Government*, by Chris Edwards, is the most recent offering of suggestions and recommendations for cutting severely the size, cost, reach, power and influence of the federal government in the lives of American citizens. In general, those citizens welcome such suggestions, according to Rasmussen Reports, which announced that two out of three Likely Voters they polled prefer a government with fewer services and lower taxes rather than a more active one with more services and higher taxes. Surprisingly this was supported by almost half of those Likely Voters who were also Democrats, along with 67 percent of unaffiliated voters, and 90 percent of Republicans voters.



Cato wants to cut the Department of Health and Human Services by more than \$80 billion annually through reforms in Medicare and Medicaid by depending upon the private market much more than currently to provide many services. They would eliminate altogether the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, noting that private charities should be relied upon to provide such assistance.

The study went after the Department of Defense, proposing savings of \$150 billion annually by refocusing U.S. defense strategy more on protecting the country's vital interests rather than its current excessively ambitious strategy that tries to do too much, but leave the nation less safe from true threats. U.S. ground forces should be cut by one-third, and the Navy completely restructured into a surge force, reducing greatly its current mission to provide a permanent global presence. Greater dependence by other countries in providing for their own security would relieve the U. S. from having to maintain substantial forces in Germany, Japan, and South Korea.

Cato targeted the Department of Transportation, which employs 58,000 workers, has a budget in excess of \$90 billion a year, and tries to operate 85 different subsidy programs. Federal highway funding should be eliminated, with the states taking over maintenance of roads. Air traffic control should be commercialized along the lines of the Canadian success in doing so. Amtrak subsidies should be eliminated, and Amtrak itself sold off to private interests who would have the incentive to develop the most profitable routes more completely. And subsidies for high-speed rail should be eliminated altogether.

Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) has a [similar hit list](#), which would eliminate \$500 billion in just the first year alone, including eliminating the Department of Education, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. His plan says nothing about cuts to Social Security or Medicare, but Paul is working up a separate plan to address those runaway programs.



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The only problem is that as these analyses and studies begin to focus in on specific agencies and entitlement programs, the more nervous Americans become. The Gallup organizations latest study [released last week](#) indicated that the only item that generated majority support for cutting was foreign aid. *Every other area surveyed for substantial cuts was opposed by more than half the respondents.* For instance, cuts in Homeland Security were opposed by 56 percent of those polled. The other percentages were:

- Military and national defense 57 percent opposed cuts
- Medicare 61 percent opposed cuts
- Social Security 64 percent opposed cuts
- Education 67 percent opposed cuts

Gallup noted that It has become a maxim of U.S. politics that Americans approve of cutting spending in concept but disapprove of cutting specific programs. At least Americans appear to be realistic about their expectations. Rasmussen [noted](#) that nearly half of Likely Voters are predicting that government spending will increase during the 112th Congress while only 17 percent think spending will decline. Those polled think taxes will go up, along with the federal budget.

Despite the continuing flow of suggestions about how to cut government spending, when those suggestions threaten the citizens own self interest, they become far less enthusiastic. In the absence of self-restraint, then, it appears that governments march to fiscal oblivion will continue unimpeded.



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