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Idaho Common Sense™



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United States - the world's provider and protector

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We consider ourselves a giving, caring country. But how do we compare to other "rich" nations in our willingness to provide foreign aid? The Paris-based Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a thirty-nation organization that works with countries to develop "open market economies, democratic pluralism, and respect for human rights." In 2003, OECD reported how much their member countries gave in foreign aid. The United States was responsible for 35 percent of the total contributions of the thirty nations and gave more than twice that of the next biggest giver, Japan. But, when the same foreign aid data was presented as a percentage of the country's gross national income; the United States did not fare as well, ranking in the lower third of the world's richest countries, giving only 0.15 percent of our gross national income compared to the most generous country, Norway, that gave 0.92 percent, followed by Denmark that gave 0.84 percent.

Do Norway and Denmark proportionally give six times more foreign aid than the United States? Are these much smaller countries doing more for the world than the United States? Is this data an accurate representation of the foreign aid that is given or is it biased; the data incomplete because it only reports the foreign aid given by a government, excluding any private giving? Does reporting only government foreign aid misrepresent the amount of foreign aid provided by the United States, giving the false impression that some European nations give more? Remember, European countries are mainly socialist, welfare states that heavily tax their citizens, allowing the governments the money they want for national and international social programs. As a result, these countries have little individual giving; the opposite of what occurs in the

United States where roughly 79 percent of the total foreign aid comes from private sources. You have to wonder why data is reported that falsely depicts the United States' giving.

How does the United States fare if all giving is included, both government and private? Is the United States actually generous rather than stingy? Using the Index of Global Philanthropy, which includes government and private giving; the United States gives the most of any country in the world and is seventh of twenty-two in giving as a percentage of gross national income. But, why are there still seven countries that give more than the United States? Do we need to consider more than just government and private foreign aid to complete the picture? Maybe something is still missing.

Maybe these countries just appear to give more than the United States because they spend precious little on their own national defense. In 2002, before the war in Iraq, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported the Netherlands spent 1.6 percent of its gross domestic product on defense; Norway spent 2.1 percent and Switzerland 1.1 percent. In contrast, the United States spent 3.4 percent. Might these countries be less generous if they had to provide for their own defense rather than relying on the United States? World defense spending exceeds \$1 trillion a year and the United States is responsible for half the total, \$500 billion. Although critics decry the money our government spends on national defense, the term is a misnomer because we do not spend \$500 billion a year on national defense. Rather, we spend \$500 billion a year on world defense.

The United States has military cemeteries scattered throughout Europe, reminding Europeans of the price the United States paid for their freedom. There are 124,913 American war dead

buried in those cemeteries and we asked nothing in return. Colin Powell summed it up when he said: "The only *land* we ever asked for was enough land to bury our dead." Europe knows the United States would come to their defense again, even as they regularly disparage our country.

The reason the socialist European countries can spend their over-taxed citizens' money on so many social services and foreign aid is directly related to their dependence on the United States for their defense. How little do they really spend on their own defense? All European nations combined spend less than half of what the United States spends. And we do this with an economy that is superior to the socialist economies of Europe. We spend staggering sums of money on foreign aid and world defense, doing so with tax rates that are only two-thirds of European countries' rates. And we still maintain our per capita national income 50 percent higher than Europe's.

We are still the greatest country in the world, with nothing to be ashamed of. Yes, we have problems, we have made mistakes, and we will make more mistakes. But, we are still light years ahead of any other nation and we are still the envy of the world. We can always hold our heads high and say with pride, "I am an American."

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