



Ceteris Paribus

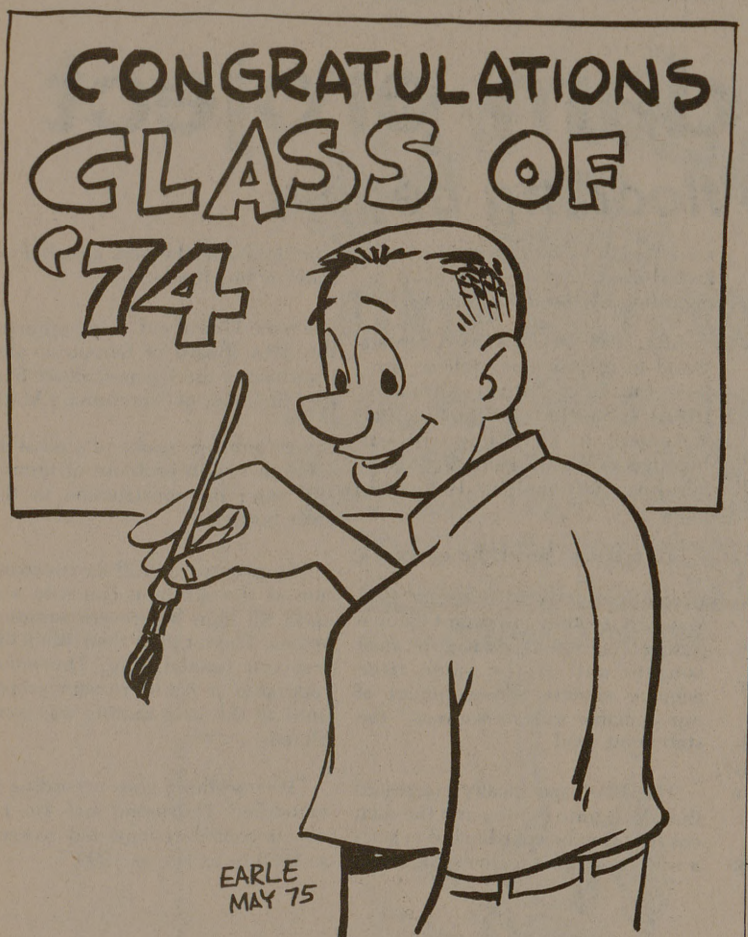
Are feds missing the goal?

By MARK RANKIN
HEW's big brother-like black-mail of our university last week provides us with an excellent opportunity to reflect on government activity and the legitimacy of government as we know it.
One wonders if an audit of Texas A&M or the financing of political campaigns fall within the generally stated goals which "promote the general welfare."
If the current trend continues we will be faced with harsh constraints on the way we use our land as well as the wages that we choose to work for.
Not even the most staunch supporters of limited government would deny the elderly widow her daily bread, but I doubt that we could find any support for the Navy's use of \$60,000 to revise its training manual for the ninth grade reading level as was reported by CBS News several weeks ago.
The government's attitude toward spending money seems to be dictated by two considerations: a) all federal funds are "spontaneously generated" in Washington D.C. and b) the federally spent dollar somehow gains importance as the distance increases between its point of origin and its destination. One of

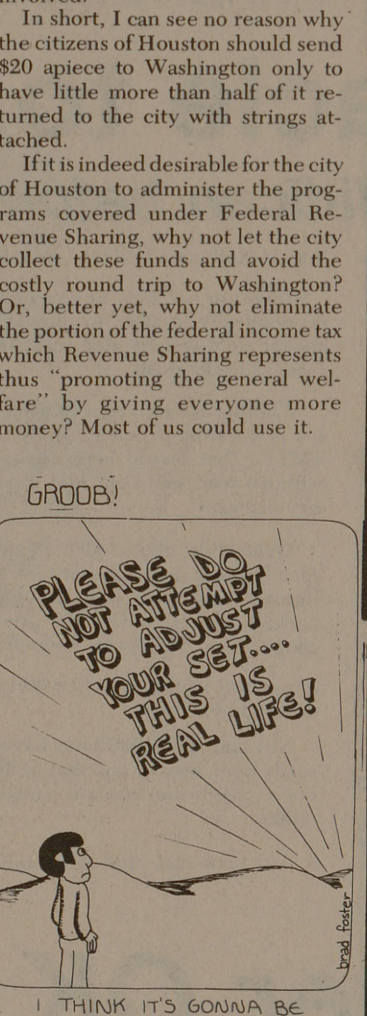
the finest examples of the economic futility of government spending is the Federal Revenue Sharing instituted in 1972.
This program is truly a landmark in the politics of Richard Nixon even though it leaves much to be desired from the standpoint of economics. The Revenue Sharing program is the type of legislation every President dreams of since it appeals to liberal and conservative alike.
From the liberal's point of view the program is appealing because money is allocated to local governments largely on the basis of welfare needs and ethnic composition. Conservatives like the program because it is a token gesture of decentralization of government spending. Despite these political pluses, the Federal Revenue Sharing program demonstrates the classic futility of most government economic programs.
In the first place, federal funds are not "spontaneously generated", they are extracted from the general public in the form of a tax. The dollar bill undergoes a marvelous transformation after it leaves your pocket.
In the case of Federal Revenue Sharing, the dollar leaves your pocket and flies to Washington and is processed and budgeted by

bureaucrats who decide its eventual destination. The Revenue Sharing dollar is then returned to the local government with certain stipulations concerning its use.
Virtually every political entity, from the state to the smallest township, receives these funds provided they have filed the proper papers and can show that they intend to use the funds in some welfare-producing activity. The question is: Is this rather expensive trip necessary? The answer is no.
For fiscal 1971, the state of Texas share of federal taxes was 4.93 per cent of the total. In return the state received 4.61 per cent of the funds released through Federal Revenue Sharing. For the same period, the state of Texas ranked 31st in per capita income, sixth in the amount of money contributed in taxes, and fifth in funds received through revenue sharing.
It was recently announced that the city of Houston's share of Revenue Sharing for the upcoming fiscal year will be somewhat over \$18 million or considerably more than \$10 for every man, woman and child in the city.
If the program were abolished and its part of the federal budget eliminated in the form of across-the-board tax cuts it would be safe to assume that the per capita figure could rise to \$20 because of the elimination of the bureaucratic costs involved.
In short, I can see no reason why the citizens of Houston should send \$20 apiece to Washington only to have little more than half of it returned to the city with strings attached.
If it is indeed desirable for the city of Houston to administer the programs covered under Federal Revenue Sharing, why not let the city collect these funds and avoid the costly round trip to Washington? Or, better yet, why not eliminate the portion of the federal income tax which Revenue Sharing represents thus "promoting the general welfare" by giving everyone more money? Most of us could use it.

Slouch Jim Earle



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