

This morning I saw a bumper sticker that puzzled me. We see these regularly, and it never fails to amaze me how little people understand about our system of governing this country. "Government is not the solution; it is the problem," this sticker proclaimed.

I felt like going up to the man that got out of the vehicle and saying, "You mean that you are part of the problem, then, right?" For, though we all feel much of the time that we have little clout, we ARE the government! And, I also could have added, "And what you and others like you did last November has certainly added greatly to the difficulties people have and will have in this nation. Just remember, because it should be on your conscience."

I have come to believe that two areas of public education have been too long ignored. Knowledge of how our government works should be taught from the very beginning of a child's school years. A year or semester devoted to the working of government, usually taught in the last high school years, is clearly too little, too late.

And, in teaching what is involved in governing this diverse country, making children aware of the benefits they have day after day from our system is an important and integral part of the process. So many people go on and on about taxes, about being "nickled and dimed" and about the fact that any benefits they do admit they receive are, according to them, "earned," while others' benefits are "welfare." What a twisted and unfair way of looking at our way of life.

When we try to list the benefits of having our kind of government, our list becomes so long that it is impossible to find the end. Let's just look at a few of the things we take for granted that actually are government programs.

In our rural neighborhood, just turning a light switch should be a wake-up call. While more populated areas of the country had been enjoying the advantages of electrical power for decades, my mother was still scrubbing clothes on a washboard. Refrigeration was dependent on cutting ice in the winter, and ironing those hand-washed clothes required the homemaker to heat her flatirons on the woodburning cookstove to keep her family's clothing presentable.

Then, though, during Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal years, the Rural Electrification Administration was born, and lines were strung miles, at little cost to families living in rural areas, to bring the benefits of electricity to the countryside.

During those same years millions of trees were planted by the Civil Conservation Corps, the New Deal program that reforested our local "choppings" area among many more across the country. A few men had become rich by denuding the land of the vast and valuable white pine forests, and the young people of the CCC planted the pines that now have made a valuable forest again. Each time a logger cuts one of these trees in 2017, he should remember that it was a government program that was responsible for his having a job today.

And just look at all we take for granted. We can only list a few of the benefits we reap from having government regulations, programs, and laws.

The man with the “government is the problem” bumper sticker was probably living, to a large extent, on his Social Security checks, a government program. He undoubtedly had a Medicare card in his billfold, though he surely would deny the right of government to have a hand in health insurance for others. The fact that our food is relatively safe is, to a great extent, due to government regulation.

All sorts of jobs are safer because of government regulation. People who preach deregulation probably have no family members with missing limbs from being caught in a dangerous machine in a factory.

Just driving down a highway with one of these "government is the problem" bumper stickers is a kind of farce. After all, the highway system is a government program. Unless that road says "private drive" the traveler is reaping the benefits of government.

I could go on and on. Those who advocate governmental retreat from services for the general populace are burying their heads in the sand. But, there is also another area of public education that I think has been neglected.

Children should begin learning the basics of preparing food, cooking, and baking from scratch from kindergarten on. This should begin with learning to grow some of one's own vegetables and fruits. This education should continue throughout the elementary and high school years, hopefully resulting in young adults who know how to feed themselves well and who will understand the importance of eating nutritious foods.

If the reader wonders why I have emphasized "public" education, it is not because I believe that private schools do a better job in teaching their students the importance of our government or of our relationship to food. It is because I believe that ALL children should receive PUBLIC education.