

By Gary Porter, National Director, Constitution Leadership Initiative, Inc.

Seventeen-trillion and counting. By the end of Mr. Obama's final term our national debt will surely be north of \$20 Trillion. Of course, if you or I tried to conduct our affairs this recklessly we'd be forced to declare bankruptcy; but then we're not the federal government, who can just borrow endlessly from that great fiction called the Federal Reserve, who turns around and prints more money whenever it runs low. Where's the Constitution in all this? Missing in action, that's where. The Founders gave us no provision in the Constitution that would restrain government spending; it was viewed simply as a moral issue. Of course, to the Founders morality actually had meaning. Integrity, honor, respect, responsibility; these were terms of substance – no longer to today's politicians, it seems. Today they borrow 40% of every dollar they spend without blinking an eye and then yelp when forced to cut spending by 2.4 percent, as in the recent sequester. The lack of a constitutional provision restraining spending has resulted in the call for a Balanced Budget Amendment, overlooking the fact that Congress could produce a balanced budget any time they wanted to. There's that integrity thing again.

Some on the Left have argued that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Section 4 (look it up) allows the President to spend without regard to any debt ceiling passed by Congress. However, since the debt ceiling is a legitimate exercise of Congresses' legislative power under Article 1 Section 8, it would seem the President has no choice but to "take care that the laws are faithfully executed."

Most of the Founders (Alexander Hamilton being the notable exception) took a dim view of deficit spending. Jefferson wrote quite often about it: "The principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale." Washington added: "...avoiding likewise the accumulation of debt, not only by shunning occasions of expence (sic), but by vigorous exertions in time of peace to discharge the debts which unavoidable wars may have occasioned, not ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burthen which we ourselves ought to bear." Madison concluded: "'I consider [public debts]... as evils which ought to be removed as fast as honor and justice will permit.'" Would the Founders be shocked at a public debt that now exceeds 80% of our Gross National Product, or a total national debt (including personal and corporate debt) exceeding 270% of GDP? Do I need to answer that?

Every bubble pops - and this debt bubble will pop at some point - and the result will not be pretty, in fact I suspect it will be downright ugly, frightening, painful; and it will test our resolve as a country to its core. Some will use the occasion to demand a new Constitution.

How did we get in such dire straits? How did we reach the point where our national survival might now be on the line? I would blame it on a citizenry (which includes myself) that disengaged from politics and government. Oh, we still voted and all that, but we paid little attention to who we were electing, what they really stood for (beyond the campaign rhetoric), how they viewed the Constitution, and most importantly, what they did once they got to Washington. We didn't seem to care when Congress invented things for the federal government to do that were well outside their enumerated powers; there was always a good reason, or so it seemed, for doing so. Well, soon we will reap what we have sown. Soon we must pay the piper, and China, and Japan, and.....

Sorry this column was so depressing (and so long), next week's will be slightly more upbeat as we turn our attention to: The Infamous 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

© 2013 The Constitution Leadership Initiative, Inc. This essay first appeared in the Yorktown Crier-Poquoson Post on 4 Apr 2013. Reproduction for non-profit purposes is hereby given.