

Public Direction

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Public Direction is an entirely new perspective on the relationship of a state to its citizens. It allows every citizen a say in the budgetary process, where they are given an equal and active role and can effectively represent their interests by determining the distribution of the federal budget.

The Proposal

Public Direction uses a simple form that lists each federal department, agency, and category of mandatory spending and gives voters the ability to rate them on a scale of 0 to 10. The departments are rated relative to each other, allowing the necessity and potential benefits of each to be considered separately. Voters fill out the form, and departments receive their budgets from those results, rather than from the perceptions of a small number of government officials.

The distribution system takes voter ratings and the overall size of the department into account. A department's average rating is multiplied by its proportion of the total budget to determine its component score. A department's component score is then divided by the sum of all component scores to determine its new percentage of the total budget.

The Framework

It is crucial that each citizen be given an equal say, rather than discretion over their personal tax contribution. A system that allows richer citizens proportionally more influence over public programs, while giving none to those who pay no taxes, cannot possibly be called democratic. All citizens are recipients of government services, therefore all citizens should have an equal voice in the administration of public funds.

The representative nature of this system is by far the most attractive and intriguing aspect. Rather than programs being passed by a majority in power, both popular and limited interest programs are funded proportional to the public support of their department. Because public direction takes this approach, rather than “winner takes all”, the results are truly representative of public attitudes. A clear picture of the public's needs and desires is seen in the distribution of revenue, giving clearer direction to public servants, and reducing the pressure to operate in deficit.

The Result

With public support defining the new balance of power, the role of the government is refocused on effectively and efficiently administering public programs. When the public

is given the ability to put a price on services, the government takes on the role of a service industry, guided and stabilized by ordinary market forces. Individual departments are given a better definition of the demand for their services, and are accountable for their actions. They are answerable to voters, driven by public will, and must cater to public needs.

Year to year, as voters consider the necessity and potential benefits of each department, the departments will compete for tax dollars by creating better visibility of the services they provide. This will drive transparency and improve their understanding of how best to serve the people.

Finally, the public must have control over 100% of spending, which also gives 100% accountability from the government. This is essential to develop trust, transparency, and accurate representation of the American people. For citizens to be engaged, empowered, and better informed, it cannot be a slight influence and it cannot be symbolic.

The seeds of the American Revolution were sown in 'No Taxation Without Representation.' Now, 'No Administration Without Representation' may be a more appropriate refrain.

Giving the public control over the budget falls neatly between direct democracy and centralized control, where historically there is no middle ground. Power is balanced between voters, who set the budget, and civil servants, who have administrative authority. Government power is derived rather than taken, and when every citizen has an equal say, the government is truly representative of the public will.