

## Foreign aid or no, Americans are still most generous

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It's popular among certain political observers among us, when the subject of the federal budget comes up, to call for cutting foreign aid.

And, while it doesn't sound like much when compared to the recent financial bailout, the \$23.53 billion in official development assistance the U.S. government paid out in 2006 was a tidy sum.

While by far the leading provider of foreign aid, the United States was near the bottom as far as what it paid as a percentage of our gross national income, less than 0.2 percent.

Still, if all U.S. government aid were cut today, we would still by far be the most generous nation in the world. U.S. private giving was \$34.8 billion in 2006, with \$12.8 billion of that coming from private and voluntary organizations, \$8.8 billion from religious organizations, \$5.5 billion from corporations, \$4.8 billion from foundations and \$3.7 billion from universities and colleges, according to the Index of Global Philanthropy and other sources.

It's fine if rich people like Bill Gates and Warren Buffett give away their money, you say, but what about middle- or lower-income people like us?

In fact, some of the poorest among us are the most generous, according to the statistics.

Charitable giving as a percentage of family income shows that, yes, richer folks can give more, with those earning \$400,000 to \$499,999 giving an average of 5.4 percent and those just below that, \$300,000 to \$399,999, gave 5.2 percent.

But the poorest level, those making \$1 to \$9,999 a year, managed to give 2.3 percent of their income, climbing to 2.9 percent for those making \$30,000 to \$39,999.

That final figure bested those making \$200,000-\$299,999, who contributed only 2.8 percent to charity. And, those who made more than \$1 million a year gave only an average of 3.2 percent of their income to charity.

As we listen to all the pre-election rhetoric, we need to remember: It's one thing to help those less fortunate out of our own pocket; quite another to force others to do so using the Internal Revenue Service.

Still, as a slow economy puts more pressure on those helping the neediest among us, like the McCook Pantry, Salvation Army and others, it's a good time to be thankful for what we do have and do what we can to help.

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