

Time to tip America back upright

By RICHARD MCGUIRE



MAY'S (Food for Thought) article about a food czar agency was on target. About 34 years ago, I warned about the approaching "tip point" — the moment at which conditions change direction. It has happened, and we seem to be on the downslope and gaining speed.

Anything we can do to alert people to the terrible consequences is worth trying. Consider these excerpts from my 1975 address to the N.Y. Farm Bureau:

"Football players, coaches and spectators recognize the turning point in a game caused by a fumble, a penalty, a dropped pass or a blocked kick. Those can be quickly pinpointed.

"Other tip points are less discernable. When, for instance, does a drinker become an alcoholic? When does a citizen become only a subject?

"Few would deny that we've entered the Age of Regulators. Many Americans see nothing ominous in regulations. On the premise that freedom cannot exist without order, a conclusion is erected: The more order, the more freedom. But it doesn't work that way.

"The vice of regulation is that it follows a relentless process: First a little, then a lot. The legislative itch on the body politic must be scratched. Statutes tumble upon statutes, laws upon laws, and all must be interpreted, amplified, extended and enforced.

"Enter the regulator and the courts. So we war over development of new life-saving drugs, environmental controls, safety and financial policy.

How far we've tipped

"In 1964, Congress passed a revenue act calling for a \$12 billion reduction in personal and corporate income taxes. Along with the tax cut, there was supposed to be a congressional and presidential commitment to put a brake on federal spending.

"We immediately went the opposite direction. The congressional pastime of throwing money at problems to make them go away became a national sport.

"There's another more frightening dimension of losing control of deficits and accelerated spending: Government, itself, tries to impose more and more control.

"With every increase of government, there's a corresponding reduction in individual freedom. If we've already passed the 'tip point,' we should do everything possible to halt it and start the painful uphill climb back before we slide into oblivion.

What you can do

"We must regain control of government expenditures. First, we elect people that believe in balancing the budget. Second, we support a constitutional amendment requiring it yearly, by restricting spending to a realistic percent of gross domestic product.

"Between free enterprise and outright socialism is the condition toward which

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the United States is now gravitating — a constant increase of governmental interference in business, where it makes more and more decisions, owns more and more property, and takes more and more profit. Legislation stemming from

ill-informed critics has undermined our productivity.

"What alarms me most is the lack of response from those who know better — professional people, farmers and businessmen. It endangers our future.

"Where is the tip point of your consciousness? When do you decide that now is the time to do something about it? The problems of the day will be

decided just as soon as enough people decide to make the necessary effort."

Editor's note: This visionary statement was presented in 1975. Dick McGuire of Cambridge, N.Y., has served American agriculture with distinction as a farmer, a leader in New York and American Farm Bureaus, commissioner of agriculture and vice president of the National Association of Departments of Agriculture.



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