

AMERICANS FOR TAX FAIRNESS
OPINION PIECES FROM EDITORIAL BOARDS & COLUMNISTS
January 1, 2015 to May 29, 2015

Below are opinion pieces written by editorial boards and columnists. They are included here because Americans for Tax Fairness is confident that it has directly influenced the media outlets or authors because they received ATF editorial board memos, press releases promoting ATF reports, solicitations to run syndicated op-eds and in many cases direct outreach from American Forum, a media firm hired to reach out to editorial writers and columnists. While the columns may not mention ATF, they typically reflect some of the information and messaging that was provided through our materials.

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NATIONAL

Column: The Death Tax Deception -- *Bloomberg View*

By Barry Ritholz
April 28, 2015

There was some pushback on yesterday's rather tame suggestion that the U.S. properly finance the fund that pays to maintain and repair our roads. Much of the correspondence was surprising. Then again, I am continually flabbergasted by the cognitive errors that the human brain can make. It's a marvelously designed piece of wetware that does a great job at its intended purpose: keeping you alive on the savannah. Its flaws are easily revealed when applied to off-label tasks.

Let's go over some of the criticisms from yesterday in declining order based on their lack of credibility...

Column: Fix The Tax Code Friday: Should We Repeal The Federal Estate Tax? -- Forbes

By Kelly Phillips Erb
April 24, 2015

Last week, the House of Representatives voted to kill the federal estate tax with a vote of 240-179 in favor of H.R. 1105. This week, the bill headed to the Senate where it faces an uncertain future.

What is certain is that the federal estate tax is unpopular. It's consistently ranked at the top of the list of the most hated taxes in the country.

It's also a money maker. In 2012, the total net estate tax reported on federal estate tax returns filed for the year was \$8.5 billion...

...The federal estate tax continues to be polarizing... So today's Fix The Tax Code Friday question is:

"Should the federal estate tax be repealed?"

Column: The Republican Recipe for Widening Inequality -- The New York Times

By Teresa Tritch
April 21, 2015

...Separate from the budget plans, nearly all House Republicans and seven Democrats passed a bill last week to repeal the federal estate tax on inherited wealth. Repeal would benefit the 5,500 wealthiest families in America each year and would do nothing for everyone else, because the estate tax applies only to those at the very top of the wealth ladder. For estates valued at \$50 million and up, for example, repeal would save the heirs about \$20 million per estate, on average, in 2016...

...The role of untaxed inheritances would also be stark. The top 0.1 percent of families — the main beneficiaries of estate tax repeal — possessed 22 percent of the nation's wealth as of 2012, the most recent data available. The top 1 percent controlled 42 percent. Such concentrations of wealth — unseen since the Roaring Twenties — are an anchor on the upward mobility of everyone else, because as wealth becomes more concentrated, a big inheritance becomes ever more important to one's future prospects....

Editorial: Repealing estate tax would reward 0.2%: Our view -- USA TODAY

By The Editorial Board
April 16, 2015

...The roughly \$22 billion a year the tax pulls in is less than 1% of all federal revenue. But here's another way to look at that: It's almost enough to pay the combined annual budgets of the FBI, the Coast Guard and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More important, think of it this way: Repealing the estate tax would mean that other, far less affluent taxpayers would have to take up the slack. And that's unfair, no matter how you look at it...

Editorial: A big tax break for billionaires, courtesy of the GOP -- The Los Angeles Times

By The Editorial Board
April 15, 2015

Why are Republicans so eager to give a tax break to millionaires and billionaires?

To commemorate Tax Day, House Republicans plan to pass a bill Wednesday that would cut taxes by nearly \$270 billion over the coming decade. Don't break out the champagne, however — the money almost certainly isn't going into your bank account. Instead, the tax break would benefit fewer than 5,500 households, or about one out of every 20,000 taxpayers, and the recipients would all be multimillionaires.

Why is the GOP, which has adopted so much of the tea party's populist rhetoric, so eager to cut the elites a break worth an estimated \$3 million on average? Because the tax at issue is the estate tax, which has become a Republican symbol for big government's rapaciousness and Washington's nasty habit of penalizing success...

Column: GOP's estate tax swindle: Carving out a bonus for millionaire heirs while hiding behind farmers -- Salon

By Simon Maloy
April 15, 2015

Congratulations, absurdly wealthy people! You win yet another Tax Day. After exploiting the galaxy of loopholes, deductions, and exclusions that disproportionately benefit people at the very top of the income ladder, America's wealthiest have managed to slash their tax burden by substantial

margins. It's great to be rich in America, and it's entirely likely that at some point in the next couple of years, things will only get better for the wealthiest of the wealthy.

Right now, there's a heated competition happening within the Republican Party to see who can come up with the tax policy that is the most generous towards the people who don't actually need that generosity. Case in point: the upcoming votes in the Republican controlled Congress to repeal the estate tax, a policy choice that would accomplish absolutely nothing beyond allowing the wealthy offspring of wealthy people to grow even wealthier...

Column: Milbank: Republicans push for a permanent aristocracy -- The Washington Post

By Dana Milbank

April 14, 2015

ATF brought the estate tax story to the attention of Milbank and urged him to write a column

Give credit to Republicans in Congress.

They've discovered, belatedly, that income inequality is a problem, and they're no longer proposing to give tax breaks to the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans. Now they are proposing to give tax breaks to the wealthiest two-tenths of 1 percent of Americans.

On Tuesday afternoon, the House Rules Committee took up H.R. 1105, the "Death Tax Repeal Act of 2015," with plans to bring it to a vote on the chamber floor Wednesday — Tax Day. It is an extraordinarily candid expression of the majority's priorities: A tax cut costing the treasury \$269 billion over a decade that would exclusively benefit individuals with wealth of more than \$5.4 million and couples with wealth of more than \$10.9 million.

That's a tax break for only the 5,500 wealthiest households in the country each year, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation. Of those, the 318 wealthiest estates each year — those worth \$50 million or more — would see an average windfall of \$20 million each, according to the **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**.

And this at a time when the gap between rich and poor is already worse than it has been since the Great Depression? Never in the history of plutocracy has so much been given away to so few who need it so little.

This is the ultimate perversion of the tea party movement, which began as a populist revolt in 2009 but has since been hijacked by wealthy and corporate interests. The estate tax has been part of American law in some form since 1797, according to the advocacy group **Americans for Tax Fairness**, a shield against the sort of permanent aristocracy our founders fought to rid themselves

of...

...Double taxation? **Americans for Tax Fairness**, citing Federal Reserve data, notes that 55 percent of the value of estates worth more than \$100 million comprises unrealized capital gains that have never been taxed...

Column: Fact Checker: Is the estate tax killing small farms and businesses? -- *The Washington Post*

By Glenn Kessler

April 14, 2015

ATF brought the idea of a fact checker column to Kessler and supplied him with opponents' quotes and data to refute their claims.

The raw facts may not entirely support the case against the estate tax, but increasingly this does not seem to matter. It has become a philosophical issue, even if in the end the data shows that that relatively few small farms or businesses appear to be affected. Ryan said the tax "hits the little guy"—and even if it may be only a handful, that's apparently all that matters.

Certainly, farmers and ranchers believe they will be hit by the estate tax and do not want to be bothered with paying for lawyers to figure out ways around it. Is that enough to justify throwing out a tax that now mainly affects the very wealthy who are passing on stock portfolios that have never been subject to capital gains taxes? Is that better than an alternative that might require immediate payment of estates with capital gains (as what happens in Canada, where there is no estate tax)?

That's for the pundits to decide. We are not going to issue a Pinocchio ruling on the grounds that the issue of the estate tax has become so unmoored from the facts that it has moved into the realm of opinion. But we would urge foes of the estate tax to acknowledge that this is a problem that affects very few Americans. With land values increasing, some farmers may have a case. But the vast majority of taxpayers never have to worry about the estate tax.

Column: Republicans have a new plan to cut taxes for the top 0.2 percent -- *The Washington Post Wonkblog*

By Matt O'Brien

April 1, 2015

A specter is haunting America's super-rich — the specter of progressive taxation.

Don't worry, though, the Republican Party is manning the barricades against this menace. That's been true for the last 35 years, and it's no less so now. Indeed, the Paul Ryan-led House Ways and Means Committee just symbolically voted to end the estate tax entirely. In other words, to stand in solidarity with the heirs of the top 0.2 percent...

...Now in theory, you could get rid of the estate tax, and, as long as you also got rid of step-up basis, it at least wouldn't be a massive giveaway to the top 0.2 percent. But that's not the Republican plan. They don't want to tax heirs at all: neither an estate tax nor step-up basis. In other words, a \$246 billion gift to the Paris Hiltons of the world over the next decade.

At a time when wealth inequality is already at a 70-year high, that'd really be heightening the contradictions.

CALIFORNIA

Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Contra Costa Times (CA)*

By Dana Milbank
April 17, 2015

COLORADO

Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Canon City Daily Record (CO)*

By Dana Milbank
April 17, 2015

FLORIDA

Column: Milbank: GOP pushes for aristocracy -- *The Herald Tribune (FL)*

By Dana Milbank
April 17, 2015

Column: Milbank: Republicans push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Miami Herald (FL)*

By Dana Milbank
April 15, 2015

ILLINOIS

Column: GOP panders to the rich -- *The Alton Telegraph (IL)*

By John Dunphy
April 28, 2015

The Republican-dominated U.S. House of Representatives on April 16 of this year voted 240 to 179 to repeal the estate tax on inherited assets worth more than \$5.4 million for individuals and \$10.9 million for couples. Republicans accounted for 233 of the aye votes, while 176 of the 179 no votes came from Democrats. If there was any doubt that the GOP is owned lock, stock and barrel by our nation's most reactionary millionaires and billionaires, these Republican politicians dispelled it by their support for this measure...

...In his column "Repeal of Estate Tax Rewards Billionaires, Punishes Working Americans," **Frank Clemente** berated Republicans for using "all the dirty tricks at their disposal to misinform the public in order to undermine support for the estate tax." For example, GOP politicians and their shells in the right-wing media typically call it the "death tax" to mislead us into believing that every family that loses a loved one pays it – and that's a blatant lie. Clemente reminded us that "99.8 percent of American families are untouched by the estate tax." While giving yet another tax break to the wealthiest Americans, he observed, the budget proposed by House Republicans "also would cut \$5 trillion in funding for benefits and services that make groceries, health care and college more affordable, pay for road improvements, and invest in scientific research."

Editorial: Keep the Estate Tax -- *The Chicago Daily Chronicle (IL)*

By The Toledo Blade Editorial Board
April 20, 2015

Ohio's repeal of its estate tax more than two years ago has had a disastrous impact on local communities that relied on revenue from the tax to pay for essential public services. Now, Republicans in Congress want to repeal the federal estate tax — a giveaway that would hand \$270 billion in tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires over the next decade — even as they claim to care about rising wealth inequality...

...Revenue from the estate tax goes toward many of the same government functions as income taxes, including health care, national defense, and deficit reduction. But the benefits of the estate tax go well beyond paying for government services.

The tax has been one of the most powerful tools for progressive taxation in the nation's history. Opponents call it a "death tax" that punishes heirs for the hard work of their family members. But such cynical labels misstate the roles of the tax: to limit the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, and to require wealthy Americans to pay a fair share of taxes on fortunes they did not earn...

Column: Milbank: Estate tax repeal will only benefit the very wealthy -- *The Herald-Review (IL)*

By Dana Milbank
April 16, 2015

MAINE

Column: Milbank: The GOP aims for aristocracy by repealing estate tax -- *The Bangor Daily News (ME)*

By Dana Milbank
April 16, 2015

Column: Milbank: The GOP aims for aristocracy by repealing estate tax -- *The Portland Press Herald (ME)*

By Dana Milbank
April 16, 2015

MICHIGAN

Editorial: Repealing estate tax would reward 0.2%: Our view -- *The Detroit Free Press (MI)*

By The USA Today Editorial Board
April 16, 2015

MISSOURI

Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)*

By Dana Milbank
April 19, 2015

MONTANA

Column: Milbank: GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Montana Standard (MT)*

By Dana Milbank
April 17, 2015

NEW JERSEY

Editorial: Estate tax repeal / Not much help -- *Press of Atlantic City (NJ)*

By The Editorial Board
April 22, 2015

...Rep. Frank LoBiondo, R-2nd, who was among the majority in the 240-to-179 vote largely along party lines, was quick to proclaim repeal of this tax on inherited wealth as an attempt to save "South Jersey business owners and farmers" from a "reprehensible" tax burden.

But the federal estate tax is hardly much of a burden anymore on the vast majority of even well-off families, and exceedingly few South Jersey families are or will be subject to it...

...Inherited wealth is an issue that is central to the growing disparity in income and wealth among Americans, one of U.S. society's chief concerns heading into this century. The nation may have a legitimate interest in how much a person's financial ease is determined by their birth...

Editorial: Federal estate tax repeal an elitist scheme -- *The Courier Post (NJ)*

By The Editorial Board
April 20, 2015

Editorial: Federal estate tax repeal an elitist scheme -- *The Asbury Park Press (NJ)*

By The Editorial Board
April 19, 2015

Editorial: Federal estate tax repeal an elitist scheme -- *The Daily Record (NJ)*

By The Editorial Board
April 17, 2015

Just what America needs — another tax break for the wealthy. Might as well try to funnel an even higher percentage of the nation's income into the hands of a precious few, right? That's better for ... well, the precious few.

That's what the House told us last week by approving a repeal of the federal estate tax. This is a very different animal from New Jersey's own estate tax, which has a much lower income threshold — \$675,000 — before the taxes kick in. On the federal level, the exemption is more than \$5 million for an individual and \$10 million for couples.

In other words, a small number of people — about two of every 1,000 people who die — are affected by the federal version, and they're all very rich. So they need a tax break on their estates why, exactly?...

Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Burlington County Times (NJ)*

By Dana Milbank
April 17, 2015

NEW MEXICO

Column: Milbank: \$269 billion tax cut for the very rich -- *The Albuquerque Journal (NM)*

By Dana Milbank
April 20, 2015

NEW YORK

Editorial: A new corporate welfare -- Albany Times Union (NY)

By The Editorial Board

April 19, 2015

THE ISSUE:

The working poor rely on government funded anti-poverty programs to get by.

THE STAKES:

A functional free market must take responsibility for its workforce.

Major U.S. corporations are racking up billions in profits while taxpayers are providing Medicaid, food assistance and other publicly-funded anti-poverty programs to sustain their low-wage workers, who do not earn enough to live on.

According to a report released by the group **Americans for Tax Fairness**, government programs for the poor provide \$6.2 billion annually just for employees of Walmart, the nation's largest private employer. The coalition of 400 state and national progressive organizations based its estimates on data from a 2013 study by Democratic staff of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

Walmart, which ranked first on the 2014 Fortune 500 list of the world's largest companies by revenue, made \$16 billion in profits last year, according to its own website. Yet its workers, including 37,000 in New York state, are among the lowest paid. The market-research firm IBISWorld found that, as of 2011, the average pay for an "associate" at Walmart was the poverty-level wage of \$8.81 per hour.

Americans for Tax Fairness points out another irony — Walmart is a major beneficiary of the government's programs to help the working poor, who are eligible for the federal SNAP program, which replaced food stamps. Many of those same low-paid workers who are eligible for food assistance spend billions buying their groceries at Walmart...

Column: Milbank: Republicans push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Brighton-Pittsford Post* (NY)

By Dana Milbank
April 15, 2015

Column: Milbank: The GOP aims for aristocracy by repealing estate tax -- *The Daily Messenger* (NY)

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Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Wellsville Daily Reporter* (NY)

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Column: Milbank: A push for permanent aristocracy -- *The Charlotte Observer* (NC)

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April 20, 2015

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...Revenue from the estate tax goes toward many of the same government functions as income taxes, including health care, national defense, and deficit reduction. But the benefits of the estate tax go well beyond paying for government services.

The tax has been one of the most powerful tools for progressive taxation in the nation's history. Opponents call it a "death tax" that punishes heirs for the hard work of their family members. But such cynical labels misstate the roles of the tax: to limit the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, and to require wealthy Americans to pay a fair share of taxes on fortunes they did not earn...

Editorial: Keep the Estate Tax -- *The Cleveland Morning Journal (OH)*

By The Toledo Blade Editorial Board
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Editorial: Keep the Estate Tax -- *The Cleveland News Herald (OH)*

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OKLAHOMA

Column: Milbank: GOP seeks permanent aristocracy -- *The Tulsa World (OK)*

By Dana Milbank
April 22, 2015 *Link is no longer active.

OREGON

Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Oregonian (OR)*

By Dana Milbank
April 18, 2015

Editorial: Purchased politicians still betraying American principles -- *The Daily Astorian (OR)*

By The Editorial Board
April 16, 2015

...Meanwhile moving ahead to cut taxes on America's wealthiest individuals and families, House Republicans planned a Wednesday vote to eliminate the last bits of the federal estate tax, which only applies to estates larger than \$5.4 million. If this effort succeeds, the 318 richest estates each year — worth \$50 million or more — will save an average of \$20 million each that would otherwise go to help balancing the books in the nation that helped make them rich in the first place.

As noted by Washington Post writer Dana Milbank, "This is the ultimate perversion of the tea party movement, which began as a populist revolt in 2009 but has since been hijacked by wealthy and corporate interests. The estate tax has been part of American law in some form since 1797, according to the advocacy group **Americans for Tax Fairness**, a shield against the sort of permanent aristocracy our founders fought to rid themselves of."

PENNSYLVANIA

Editorial: Needless giveaway: Now is not the time to expand the federal deficit -- *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*

By The Editorial Board
April 24, 2015

Republicans in Congress want to repeal the federal estate tax — a giveaway that would hand \$270 billion in tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires over the next decade — at a time that the federal budget, with its yawning deficit, can ill afford it.

The measure, which the House passed last week, is unlikely to gain approval in the Senate, and certainly not from President Barack Obama. But it reflects the extreme anti-tax agenda that has come to characterize many in the GOP Congress.

Revenue from the estate tax, like that from the income tax, goes toward the same essential government functions including national defense, deficit reduction and health care. But the benefits of the estate tax go well beyond that.

The tax has been one of the most powerful tools for progressive taxation. Opponents call it a “death tax” that punishes heirs for the hard work of their family members. But such a label misstates the roles of the tax: to limit the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few and to require wealthy Americans to pay a fair share of taxes on fortunes they did not earn...

Editorial: Super-rich can pay their own taxes -- *The Pocono Record (PA)*

By The Editorial Board
April 8, 2015

If you're like most people, you work hard for a living and pay your obligations, including your taxes.

But Republicans in Congress are hell-bent on making it just a bit harder on most people. They plan to vote next week to end the estate tax. That's the tax that only the very wealthiest Americans pay when they inherit money or property that someone else earned. The tax that, if eliminated, will let a lucky few gain millions in unearned wealth without paying the tax.

These are folks who are already well-heeled enough to hire tax lawyers to find tax dodges for them. These are the folks like the Walton family heirs, who have so little public conscience that even their charitable contributions are miniscule....

RHODE ISLAND

Column: Milbank: GOP seeks permanent aristocracy -- *The Providence Journal (RI)*

By Dana Milbank
April 28, 2015

SOUTH DAKOTA

Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Rapid City Journal (SD)*

By Dana Milbank
April 19, 2015

TENNESSEE

Column: Milbank: The GOP aims for aristocracy by repealing estate tax -- *The Commercial Appeal (TN)*

By Dana Milbank
April 16, 2015

TEXAS

Column: Milbank: The GOP aims for aristocracy by repealing estate tax -- *The Monitor (TX)*

By Dana Milbank
April 16, 2015

UTAH

Column: Milbank: Republicans push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Salt Lake Tribune (UT)*

By Dana Milbank
April 15, 2015

WASHINGTON

Column: 'Clean reader' app or just good ol' censorship -- *The Sunday Herald (WA)*

By Carol Macpherson
April 19, 2015

Have we hit a low point with high tech? Let's scan some of the headlines...

"Ben & Jerry: We don't need this stupid tax cut" : Congress, listen to the super wealthy ice cream guys. Like the B&J ice cream flavor, the proposal to get rid of the estate tax is "half baked." Those of us not worth at least \$5.4 million, or \$10.8 million for a couple, will retreat to our bowls of B&J "chocolate therapy," "americone dream," and "what a cluster" ice cream. Will someone invent an app that will add more swear words to a book?

Column: Milbank: The GOP push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Columbian (WA)*

By Dana Milbank
April 18, 2015

Column: Milbank: GOP rushes to aid wealthiest 5,550 families -- *The Herald Net (WA)*

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Column: Milbank: Republicans push for a permanent aristocracy -- *The Sheridan Press* (WY)

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