

# **Power Line Blog: John Hinderaker, Scott Johnson, Paul Mirengoff**

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## **THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT**

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What is the central purpose of government? That question might be tricky to answer in theory, but here in the U.S., the practical answer is easy: the principal function of our national government is to transfer wealth from the young and the middle-aged to the elderly. Such transfers currently account for around \$1.159 trillion, nearly one-half trillion more than we spend for national defense, and far more than any other category of the budget.

Am I the only person who finds this bizarre? No political philosopher has ever argued that the central purpose of government is to transfer wealth to the elderly. No politician, to my knowledge, has ever run for office on such a platform. It would be odd, at best, for such transfers to be deemed the principal purpose of government, even if the elderly were not--as one would expect--the wealthiest segment of our society.

As the nation embarks on a debate about how to restore fiscal sanity to our government, a debate that will dominate our politics for years to come, a sensible starting point would be to ask, what is the purpose of our federal government? Many believe, apparently, that the main function of government is to transfer wealth from the young and the middle-aged to the elderly. Let's put that theory on the table, and challenge its proponents to justify it.