



Economic Duties of Governments towards Citizens in Mercy Otis Warren (1727–1814)

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Mercy Otis Warren's views on the economic duties of the government toward its citizens is expressed in her *History* and in her correspondence and other works and is based on her philosophy of human nature and its interconnection with the nature of a republican mode of government. Inherent in a citizen's human nature is the right to life. A republican government, a government of the people, is thus responsible for the right to life of its citizens which entails an economic incumbency. To fulfill its economic duties, the government should see that there is fair and equal distribution of wealth, maintain "economy in expenditure," be transparent, and tax directly. Although despots draw "money from the pockets of the people," more "consistent with republican opinions and manners" are "open measures and direct taxes."

In addition, no "monies should be made [...] without the consent of the people by their representative voice." What revenue is collected should be transmitted not only to the "Federal City," but in order to keep it closer to the people, also to the states. If these procedures of economic dispersment are not met, the fear is that the people could become enslaved. Since a republic must protect the life of its individual citizens, as well as ensure liberty and equality, it has a duty, for example, to pay its military and do so promptly. But it should not support it in a grand style on the "labor of the poor." Congress should not determine their own salaries, and they should rotate frequently and submit to term limits in order not to gain undue wealth. When they abide by these conditions, their constituents will be better represented, the economy better served, and their economic duties fulfilled. The tug of self-interest will be overcome by respect for the people.

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Keywords:

citizens, congress, duties, economics, government, human nature, human rights, republicanism, tax, transparent, wealth