

# The Size of North Dakota's Government

Government is like a baby. An alimentary canal with a big appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other.

-Ronald Reagan

North Dakota's government is too big and is growing too fast.

By its nature, government is bankrupt. It can only function by taking money from people and businesses. Increases in government spending directly result in corresponding decreases in individual liberty. The further government intrudes on North Dakotans' rights to pursue happiness, the more liberty is lost. Therefore, it is essential to limit the size and scope of government.

### How big is the North Dakota government?

Consider this: In 1995, there was one state government worker for every 31.5 citizens; just twelve years later, in 2007, there was one state government worker for every 26.8 citizens. Although North Dakota's population has

been relatively stable in the past twelve years the state has added more than 3,500 state employees. That's an increase from 20,350 to 23,900. Factor the increases in federal, county, city and school

employees, and it is easy to see that government employs a staggering percentage of all workers.

Graph 1.1 charts the growth in state government employees.

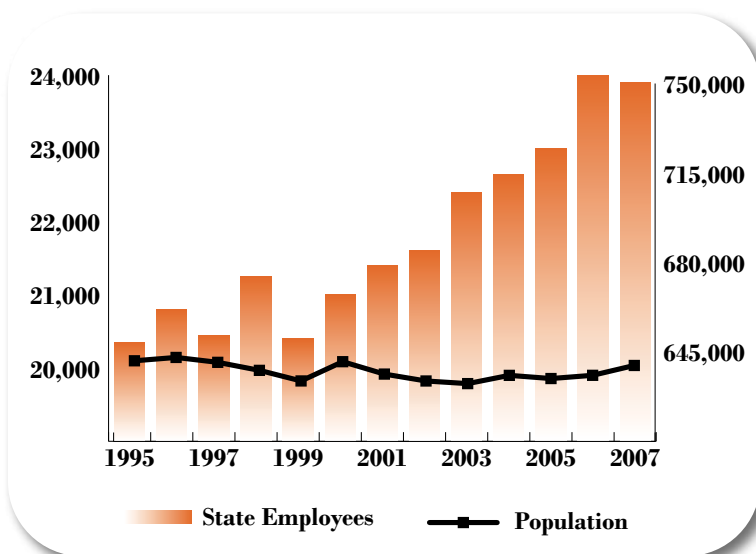
A large bureaucracy has several negative consequences. First, big government is costly. The salaries, wages, and benefits paid to state workers add up. Tax increases are required to pay the increased costs.

North Dakota's general fund has increased almost \$1 billion in the past ten years. State general fund spending per capita per biennium has nearly doubled from \$1,965 in 1993 to \$3,841 in 2007. That's a 94 percent increase! Graph 1.2 compares general fund spending to population trends.

Second, bureaucracies are inefficient. Meetings and reports consume people's time. Layer upon layer of red tape accumulates, making government less accountable to the citizens. As government grows, it demands more of its tax payers and regulates their lives in a myriad of ways.

**Recommendation:  
Stop the growth of government.**

Graph 1.1  
Increase in State Employees



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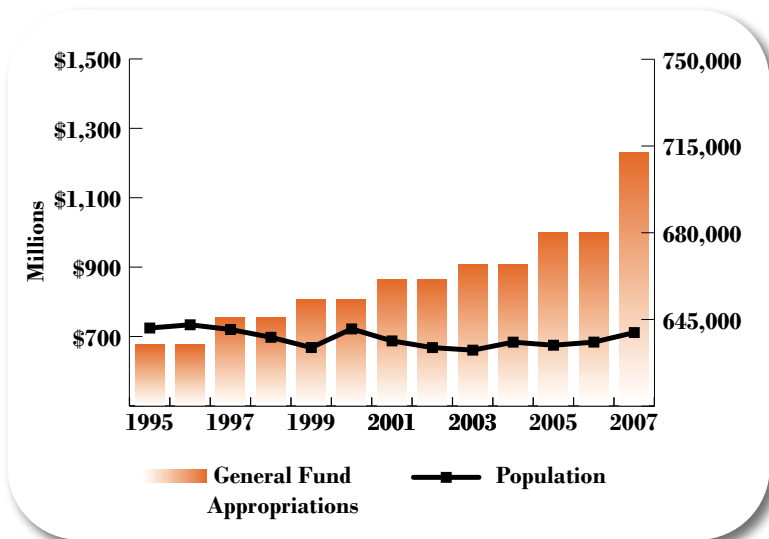
Third, government agencies thrive on central planning, thereby limiting individual freedom and responsibility. Political satirist P.J. O'Rourke wrote, "It is a popular delusion that the government wastes vast amounts of money through inefficiency and sloth. Enormous effort and planning are required to waste this much money."<sup>1</sup>

**Why does it matter?**

No one spends somebody else's money as carefully as he spends his own. Let's face it: government spending is inherently political. Government programs are difficult to cut. Even those that fizzle or fail to produce the expected results never lack funding. Taxpayers often do not get a good return for their tax dollars.

In addition, a large bureaucracy creates a negative effect on economic liberty. The more a government spends, the more it needs to collect from citizens via taxes and fees. When citizens have less money, they have less economic freedom, yet economic freedom is essential for economic growth and prosperity. An individual spends his money better, more efficiently, and more productively than does government. The more money each family has to spend, the better off the family will be and the better off the economy will be as well.

Graph 1.2  
Increase in Appropriations



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