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Business owners told to fight for their rights

[Print Page](#)By **NANCY KIMBALL/Daily Inter Lake**

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Pick up the phone and call your senators and congressman. Personally. Do it daily.

That's what David Keene, chairman of the American Conservative Union since 1984, told those attending the Flathead Business and Industry Association's annual meeting Tuesday.

"If we have a society where individuals and businesses make their own decisions, we've got to tell those we send to Washington every day what it is we believe," Keene said.

Since most lawmakers on Capitol Hill detach from constituents and meld into the political fray after being there for any length of time — and believe they are better informed than the average person on how to run individual lives, he said — a shouting match with them is pointless.

"Politicians may get out of touch with their voters, but they're also always scared. Make them know what you believe and why you believe it. Make your argument. And the fact that you care enough to make it" will have an impact.

When it comes to business taxes, Flathead Valley business owners have reason to employ that tactic.

Keene cited a 2007 survey conducted by the Anderson Economic Group of Michigan, ranking state business tax burdens.

Montana was the worst.

When all taxes paid by businesses as a share of business profits earned within the state was compiled, based on 2005 data, Montana's burden was 44.24 percent. That was nearly double the national average of 24.4 percent.



David Keene, chairman of the American Conservative Union, speaks to members of the Flathead Business and Industry Association in Kalispell on Tuesday afternoon. Nate Chute/Daily Inter Lake

Business owners here need to continue their campaign to improve the ability to turn a profit, fighting on the battle front of legislative and congressional contacts.

If they don't, things can deteriorate quickly.

Keene first hit Washington in 1970, the same week that Congress held hearings on whether AstroTurf should be outlawed. It sent chills up his spine.

"If they can get involved in that," he recalled thinking, "they can get involved in anything."

That chilling vision is being played out.

Keene recounted the big-spending Carter administration which ended with personal taxes at 29.5 percent and the nation's first-ever case of stagflation, a combination of high interest rates, high inflation and high unemployment.

Tax cuts in the Reagan administration ushered in one of the greatest periods of prosperity in U.S. history. Runaway spending and increased government control of the marketplace followed.

"Now we have a new president who appears to be taking us back to what Jimmy Carter gave us," he said. Ironic, he said, since Barack Obama's campaign criticized George Bush's excessive spending.

"The government is spending money at a faster pace than ever before in history. Since the beginning of the year the supply of money has almost doubled," Keene said. That will lead to inflation that cuts the value of money in half, he predicted.

"Now [Obama] is spending at a rate that makes Bush look more like Calvin Coolidge than Lyndon Johnson," Keene said.

And, he said, the government is moving into an era of government regulators, central planning and "the largest tax increase in the history of the world cap and trade." He said it will pump \$646 billion into a budget that hasn't even been passed yet.

The fallout will hit middle- and low-income people the hardest, transfer wealth to states like New York and cost the nation 4 million jobs, Keene said.

Combined with new federal partnership in major banks after promises to stay hands-off, nationalization of auto makers and a new government board to review executive compensation for all companies, not just those receiving bailouts, "this is a very different vision of the American economy than the vision that dominated in the '70s and '80s," Keene said.

But Keene said all this turmoil proves one thing: "Free societies have to be fought for and striven for every day."

Reporter Nancy Kimball can be reached at 758-4483 or by e-mail at nkimball@dailyinterlake.com

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