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you. Verbally criticize his management style. Send an e-mail that blasts the company's priorities. Leave a voice message that questions an important decision that she just made. Most people probably wouldn't even consider doing any of those things.

Can you responsibly let out your anger at home? I suspect that some can, while many cannot. It depends on the dynamics of your relationships with the other people in your household. The ones who cannot release their anger instead might choose to transfer it toward the government. It's easier.

People have different comfort levels regarding what level of government they choose to unleash their wrath on. Today, many don't feel like they should question the federal government, particularly if the criticism has anything to do with national security. However, those very same people may feel safe unloading their contempt toward state and local government. State legislatures, city councils and town meetings often are not very efficient and, therefore, do not have the administrative structure to punish citizens who complain.

Second, I believe that government is condemned because it is a universal symbol that citizens can blame for all of society's ills. The problems may be new or old. They could be caused by politicians and government programs. Alternatively, they could be created by private business, individual greed or simple ignorance. They may be exacerbated by governmental action, or inaction.

Recently, there has been anger over Auburn's property tax re-evaluation. Tax-

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es will be going up for many homeowners. I suspect that there is more to the anger than the financial challenge it will pose. There is probably a feeling of powerlessness which is just now surfacing. The dispute over the proposed new parking garage, while certainly not new, has been intensified by the property tax re-evaluation.

The majority of the people who are questioning Auburn's fiscal policies are not government-haters. They simply want to understand the details behind the re-evaluation and the proposed new parking garage. They have also begun to question the school budget. Unfortunately, their honest questioning of Auburn's priorities has been caricatured as ignorant hostility by some and fraternal brotherhood by others.

Local government is complicated. Auburn is no exception. There are no easy solutions to the challenges of Auburn's budget. If there is an easy solution, it is usually wrong, temporary, or unjust. But that doesn't stop some people from using the disputes as evidence that all government can do is mess things up.

Third, government is broadly condemned because of ideology. Many believe that the private sector can do just about everything better than the public sector. From an efficiency point of view, that is usually correct. However government is more than simply transmitting public services. Gov-

ernment represents citizens and all their conflicting interests. Do the citizens of Auburn want to clamp down on spending for education, fire and police or roll back their property tax bill?

Many budgets are the end product of negotiation and, ultimately, compromise. They may not make the most fiscal sense, but they can placate citizens. Ideally, a large part of the public feels that their interests and concerns have been included in the final product.

It is healthy when people criticize government. I would even go so far as to equate skepticism with patriotism. However, constantly expressing a general disdain for government is unhealthy because it never solves anything. It is like eating junk food: it is quick, cheap and easy but it never fills you up. While blindly blaming government may provide some temporary camaraderie with a fellow citizen, it can never ultimately accomplish anything.

We own the government. Everything "they" do is done in our name. If we allow the public discourse to devolve into emotional, blustering attacks on government, then all we are doing is wallowing in our own grievances. Carried to an extreme, we all become victims of our own cynicism.

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