

press release about state finances, "Additional cuts in reimbursement rates to local doctors and hospitals will reduce access to care, which is effectively refusing to provide care.... The state's failure to fund Medicaid increases your own insurance costs and undermines the financial health of health care providers across the state."

The most conservative members of the Republican Party supposedly want to shrink government down to a size where we can drown it in a bathtub, in the words of lower-tax advocate Grover Norquist. That's worrisome enough.

It's even more alarming if the real goal is to drown domestic programs focusing on people with the least political clout while turning the military-industrial complex into an Olympic-class swimmer.

Here in Iowa, our participation in the military-industrial end of things is minimal. So it looks as if we don't have any time to waste in building the strongest state economy we can, an economy that adds value to farm products and pulls in lots of new money from elsewhere, because our uncle wants us to leave him alone so he can write checks to his more favored relatives.

We're a long way from knowing what the final federal budget will look like. But this is as good a time as any to start calculating just what "small government" might really look like, how it might change our social values and how much we'll have to spend to adapt.

The federal government throws around money that it doesn't have in an effort to keep everybody happy. Iowa tries to live on a budget, but still wants lots of happiness. Could be tough to do. □

Work status woes create other problems

Recently released movie, "In Good Company," tells the story of Dan Foreman (played by Dennis Quaid), who has been working for a popular sports magazine as a leading advertising sales representative for 25 years. When the company is taken over by a large corporation and a 26-year-old man becomes his supervisor, Dan finds his position in jeopardy. The audience feels the uncertainty that often accompanies corporate restructuring, particularly at a time when age starts to be a factor in employment decisions. Even though Foreman is more experienced than his new boss, he is the one being pushed out.

The movie is marketed as a comedy and drama, but it is the drama that lingers with people who are over 50. It is easy to empathize with Foreman as his life spins out of control.

In a new book, "The Status Syndrome," Michael Marmot, a professor of epidemiology and public health at University College in London, argues that people's positions in the social hierarchy can affect how much control they feel they have over their lives. He says that social and economic position can affect health and susceptibility to sickness. In other words, lower status means less personal control over your life and that may lead to higher levels of chronic stress, which shortens lives. Most people are part of a hierarchy in the workplace, and Marmot found that a low level of

control at work leads to more illness.

The past few decades have produced more educated people who are feeling less control over their professional lives as companies downsize or restructure in an increasingly competitive world. Marmot concluded that the lack of control in our

jobs is doing more to kill us than cigarettes, sugar and too many hours spent watching television.

The phase of life commonly referred to as retirement is being studied and traditional assumptions are being called into question as Baby Boomers approach late middle age. It is now being called several things, such as Second Adulthood, Eldering, the Second Pass and Positive Aging. Regardless of the name, the focus is the same: It is important to live the second half of life intentionally and with meaning based on choices. Today's average life expectancy is 77 years; if you are 50 or older, the time to take control of your life is now.

According to Zelman Schachter-Shalomi in his book "From Ageing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older," people who take control of their

lives are "sages." He says the characteristics of a sage are that they:

- provide wise, prudent leadership
- offer their experiences and wisdom for the welfare of society
- express their hope in the future by the contributions they make for the generations that come after them
- give encouragement generously
- mentor younger people who are drawn to their wisdom
- model a life that finds validation, self-worth and meaning from within.

There are places and programs (such as eldering institutes and life coaches) to help people decide how to take control over the next phase of their lives so that they are productive and feel good about themselves. It is a win/win/win situation for everyone — individuals, organizations and communities.

It's important to remember that feeling connected to people and causes that are important is essential to living a quality life. Feeling that one is continuing to contribute to something meaningful is vitally important to a sense of personal fulfillment and, as Marmot says, to one's physical health. We can choose to become a sage and it is never too late or too early to do so. □



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