

Letter of Apology

Sorry Kids. I didn't want to spend your inheritance and leave you in such a fix



Mark Accettura

Less than ten years ago we were fighting over how to spend the economic surplus that was calculated to result after years of prosperity and economic growth. Now, what will be left for our children and grandchildren after we're done bailing out our financial institutions and paying for the wars that have no end in sight?

Who are we to blame? The Republicans? The Democrats? The Chinese? The boogiemans?

After years of waste, excess, and unbridled self-indulgence, the blame belongs squarely on each of our ample front porches.

No one made us buy houses the size of turn-of-the-century apartment buildings, cars the size of turn-of-the-century homes, and so much stuff (George Carlin, rest his soul, had a slightly different word) that we need bigger houses so we can go out and "buy more stuff."

It's easy to blame the other guy, but we have only ourselves to blame for living beyond our means and beyond all reason. Chardonnay, Zinfandel, imported luxury cars, and designer everything have been elevated to household names and necessities.

And it doesn't have to be fancy stuff. We've bought so much junk from China that they have set up banks in this country to loan us back the money we've already spent to, you guessed it, buy more stuff!

Our parents knew better. They tried to tell us, but we wouldn't listen.

My father brought some sound reasoning from the old county. He would say that if a man made one hundred thousand dollars but spent one hundred and one thousand, he would be broke.

Foolish old man! I've got my own math: If you buy a one hundred thousand dollar house, you can borrow one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars and then have twenty five thousand

dollars left over to go out and buy stuff you don't need and can't afford. And when your house doubles in value in a few years, as it surely will, you can go out and refinance it for more than double its current value and have enough extra money to buy even more stuff.

What do I need with old-fashioned logic when I can just go out and get as much money as I want?

I know, let's blame the mortgage people. They took advantage of our weakness: our lack of discipline.

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How about the credit card companies; they gave us easy money, hitting us in our soft under belly. Actually, I do blame them. Once they gave us the easy credit they used their influence in Congress to charge fees that would make Tony Soprano jealous and math that would make Isaac Newton cry.

How about the car companies; surely they knew we didn't need the land yachts they were selling us.

Longtime car man, Robert Lutz, the other day explained why the car companies weren't making more small cars. His explanation was that "nobody was buying them."

No, we don't want those old passenger cars; not big enough. We want to drive school buses; no, wait, a Hummer, maybe a Sherman tank. Boy wouldn't we look cool driving down the street in a cement mixer!

How about the fast food companies that made us eat all that fattening food that tastes too good to resist? Isn't it their fault that we're all fat, have diabetes, and need knee and hip replacements from carrying all of that junk food in our trunk?

I wonder if the hospitals and medical building going up on every corner will be able to handle the effects of our sloth. We don't want to spend five cents on diet, prevention, or lifestyle changes. Apparently we would rather take

expensive medications and change our parts.

There's certainly enough blame to go around. Banks, politicians, doctors, lawyers, fast food companies, and auto makers have all helped us accelerate our decline from world prominence.

Unfortunately pointing fingers has never solved anything; we can only blame ourselves. I'm no exception. I bought all the stuff I didn't need and burned so much fossil fuel using it that I should have installed a catalytic converter on my rear end to cut down the fumes.

I hope it's not too late to turn this thing around. Maybe we've learned

from our lessons like our grandparents learned from the Great Depression.

I'm dubious. I think we need some new rules to protect us from ourselves.

It seems that we're going to have to regulate lending, spending, and vending. We've proven that we can't regulate ourselves; we're going to have to appoint others to do it for us.

I'm not sure how it's going to work, but I certainly am willing to try. Optimistically, recent studies have shown that the vast majority of us are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to solve our current problems.

In the meantime, I wanted to write this is a letter of apology to my children and grandchildren.

I owed it to you to leave the world a better place than I found it. Instead, I've left you with the tab for my excessive living that will take generations to pay off.

I should warn you that the bill is a running tab and it might get a lot bigger. In fact, I'm really not sure how big it's going to get. We haven't even begun to address the looming three-headed monster of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

And, oh yeah, keep an eye on that global warming thing I left simmering on the stove; it may boil over one day and scald you.

Contact attorney Mark Accettura at (248) 848-9409 or visit his website at www.elderlawmi.com.