

Proper Role of Government

"There are certain basic principles regarding the proper role of government. If principles are correct, then they can be applied to any specific proposal with confidence... The true statesman values principle above popularity, and works to create popularity for those political principles which are wise and just."



THE PROPER ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Excerpts from the article by The Honorable Ezra Taft Benson, Former Secretary of Agriculture.

GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE BASED UPON SOUND PRINCIPLES



Right and wrong as moral principles do not change. They are applicable and reliable determinants whether the situations with which we deal are simple or complicated. There is always a right and wrong to every question which requires our solution.

Unlike the political opportunist, the true statesman values principle above popularity, and works to create popularity for those political principles which are wise and just.

THE CORRECT ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

These are the principles which, in my opinion, proclaim the proper role of government in the domestic affairs of the nation.

"(I) believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society."

"(I) believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life..."

"(I) believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, which protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and

that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly; and that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest; at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience." (D&C 134: 1-2,5)

THE MOST IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT

It is generally agreed that the most important single function of government is to secure the rights and freedoms of individual citizens. The great Thomas Jefferson asked: "Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath?" (Works 8:404; P.P.N.S., p.141)

Starting at the foundation of the pyramid, let us first consider the origin of those freedoms we have come to know as human rights. There are only two possible sources. Rights are either God-given as part of the Divine Plan, or they are granted by government as part of the political plan. Reason, necessity, tradition and religious convictions all lead me to accept the divine origin of these rights. If we accept the premise that human rights are granted by government, then we must be willing to accept the corollary that they can be denied by government. I, for one, shall never accept that premise. As the French political economist, Frederick Bastiat, phrased it so succinctly, "Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place." (The Law, p.6)

THE SOURCE OF GOVERNMENTAL POWER

The important thing to keep in mind is that the people who have created their government can give to that government only such powers as they, themselves, have in the first place. Obviously, they

cannot give that which they do not possess. So, the question boils down to this. What powers properly belong to each and every person in the absence of and prior to the establishment of any organized governmental form? A hypothetical question? Yes, indeed! But, it is a question which is vital to an understanding of the principles which underlie the proper function of government.

THE PROPER FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT

This means, then, that the proper function of government is limited only to those spheres of activity within which the individual citizen has the right to act. By deriving its just powers from the governed, government becomes primarily a mechanism for defense against bodily harm, theft and involuntary servitude. It cannot claim the power to redistribute the wealth or force reluctant citizens to perform acts of charity against their will. Government is created by man. No man possesses such power to delegate. The creature cannot exceed the creator.

In general terms, therefore, the proper role of government includes such defensive activities, as maintaining national military and local police forces for protection against loss of life, loss of property, and loss of liberty at the hands of either foreign despots or domestic criminals.

THE POWERS OF A PROPER GOVERNMENT

As John Locke explained many years ago:

“The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. For in all the states of created beings, capable of laws, where there is no law there is no freedom. For liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others, which cannot be where there is no law; and is not, as we are told, ‘a liberty for every man to do what he lists.’ For who could be free, when every other man’s humour might domineer over him? But a liberty to dispose and order freely as he lists his person, actions, possessions, and his whole property within the allowance of those laws under which he is, and

therein not to be subject to the arbitrary will of another, but freely follow his own.” (Two Treatises of Civil Government, II, 57: P>P>N>S., p.101)

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

Another standard I use in deterring what law is good and what is bad is the Constitution of the United States. I regard this inspired document as a solemn agreement between the citizens of this nation which every officer of government is under a sacred duty to obey. As Washington stated so clearly in his immortal Farewell Address:

THE VALUE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

It is a firm principle that the smallest or lowest level that can possibly undertake the task is the one that should do so. First, the community or city. If the city cannot handle it, then the county. Next, the state; and only if no smaller unit can possibly do the job should the federal government be considered. It is well to remember that the states of this republic created the Federal Government. The Federal Government did not create the states.

FIFTEEN PRINCIPLES WHICH MAKE FOR GOOD AND PROPER GOVERNMENT

As an Independent American for constitutional government I declare that:

- (1)** I believe that no people can maintain freedom unless their political institutions are founded upon faith in God and belief in the existence of moral law.
- (2)** I believe that God has endowed men with certain unalienable rights as set forth in the Declaration of Independence and that no legislature and no majority, however great, may morally limit or destroy these; that the sole function of government is to protect life, liberty, and property and anything more than this is usurpation and oppression.
- (3)** I believe that the Constitution of the United States was prepared and adopted by men acting under inspiration from Almighty God; that

it is a solemn compact between the peoples of the States of this nation which all officers of government are under duty to obey; that the eternal moral laws expressed therein must be adhered to or individual liberty will perish.

(4) I believe it a violation of the Constitution for government to deprive the individual of either life, liberty, or property except for these purposes:

(a) Punish crime and provide for the administration of justice;

(b) Protect the right and control of private property;

(c) Wage defensive war and provide for the nation's defense;

(d) Compel each one who enjoys the protection of government to bear his fair share of the burden of performing the above functions.

(5) I hold that the Constitution denies government the power to take from the individual either his life, liberty, or property except in accordance with moral law; that the same moral law which governs the actions of men when acting alone is also applicable when they act in concert with others; that no citizen or group of citizens has any right to direct their agent, the government to perform any act which would be evil or offensive to the conscience if that citizen were performing the act himself outside the framework of government.

(6) I am hereby resolved that under no circumstances shall the freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights be infringed. In particular I am opposed to any attempt on the part of the Federal Government to deny the people their right to bear arms, to worship and pray when and where they choose, or to own and control private property.

(7) I consider ourselves at war with international Communism which is committed to the destruction of our government, our right of property, and our freedom; that it is treason as defined by the Constitution to give aid and comfort to this implacable enemy.

(8) I am unalterably opposed to Socialism, either in whole or in part, and regard it as an unconstitutional usurpation of power and a denial of the right of private property for government to own or operate the

means of producing and distributing goods and services in competition with private enterprise, or to regiment owners in the legitimate use of private property.

(9) I maintain that every person who enjoys the protection of his life, liberty, and property should bear his fair share of the cost of government in providing that protection; that the elementary principles of justice set forth in the Constitution demand that all taxes imposed be uniform and that each person's property or income be taxed at the same rate.

(10) I believe in honest money, the gold and silver coinage of the Constitution, and a circulation medium convertible into such money without loss. I regard it as a flagrant violation of the explicit provisions of the Constitution for the Federal Government to make it a criminal offense to use gold or silver coin as legal tender or to use irredeemable paper money.

(11) I believe that each State is sovereign in performing those functions reserved to it by the Constitution and it is destructive of our federal system and the right of self-government guaranteed under the Constitution for the Federal Government to regulate or control the States in performing their functions or to engage in performing such functions itself.

(12) I consider it a violation of the Constitution for the Federal Government to levy taxes for the support of state or local government; that no State or local government can accept funds from the Federal and remain independent in performing its functions, nor can the citizens exercise their rights of self-government under such conditions.

(13) I deem it a violation of the right of private property guaranteed under the Constitution for the Federal Government to forcibly deprive the citizens of this nation of their property through taxation or otherwise, and make a gift thereof to foreign governments or their citizens.

(14) I believe that no treaty or agreement with other countries should deprive our citizens of rights guaranteed them by the Constitution.

(15) I consider it a direct violation of the obligation imposed upon it by the Constitution for the Federal Government to dismantle or weaken our military establishment below that point required for the protection of the States against invasion, or to surrender or commit our men, arms, or money to the control of foreign or world organizations of governments.

These things I believe to be the proper role of government.

We have strayed far afield. We must return to basic concepts and principles – to eternal verities. There is no other way. The storm signals are up. They are clear and ominous.

As Americans – citizens of the greatest nation under Heaven – we face difficult days. Never since the days of the Civil War – 100 years ago – has this choice nation faced such a crisis.

In closing I wish to refer you to the words of the patriot Thomas Paine, whose writings helped so much to stir into a flaming spirit the smoldering embers of patriotism during the days of the American Revolution:

“These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; ‘tis dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial and article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.” (THE POLITICAL WORKS OF THOMAS PAINE, p.55.)

I intend to keep fighting. My personal attitude is one of resolution – not resignation.

I have faith in the American people. I pray that we will never do anything that will jeopardize in any manner our priceless heritage. If we live and work so as to enjoy the approbation of a Divine Providence, we cannot fail. Without that help we cannot long endure.

ALL RIGHT-THINKING AMERICANS SHOULD NOW TAKE THEIR STAND

So I urge all Americans to put their courage to the test. Be firm in our conviction that our cause is just. Reaffirm our faith in all things for which true Americans have always stood.

I urge all Americans to arouse themselves and stay aroused. We must not make any further concessions to communism at home or abroad. We do not need to. We should oppose communism from our position of strength for we are not weak.

There is much work to be done. The time is short. Let us begin – in earnest – now and may God bless our efforts, I humbly pray.