

OCPA FaxLine Report

a public policy information service for members of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, Inc.

Dear OCPA Member:

Thursday, September 24, 2009

In my last *FaxLine Report*, I quoted a statement by Walter Williams, the John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia who wrote in 1998, that “we are heading toward totalitarianism and arbitrary governmental abuse and control.” The recent growth of federal government in the last year seems to validate Williams’ observations of trends he spotted eleven years ago.

Reading a subsequent July 2009 column from Williams generated a related thought worthy of exploring further. He writes, “Why did the founders of our nation give us the Bill of Rights? The answer is easy. They knew Congress could not be trusted with our God-given rights. Think about it. Why in the world would they have written the First Amendment prohibiting Congress from enacting any law that abridges freedom of speech and the press? The answer is that in the absence of such a limitation Congress would abridge free speech and free press. That same distrust of Congress explains the other amendments found in our Bill of Rights protecting rights such as our rights to property, fair trial and to bear arms. The Bill of Rights should serve as a constant reminder of the deep distrust that our founders had of government. They knew that some government was necessary but they rightfully saw government as the enemy of the people and they sought to limit government and provide us with protections.”

We are continually told, however, that the federal government is our friend, caretaker, protector, provider and benefactor -- *sort of like a benevolent dictator*. But our republic was never intended to operate that way. Instead, it is guided by three branches of government: the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial. Both the chief executive and members of the legislative body (or Congress) are re-elected or defeated as their term of office expires. When we elect human beings to represent us, there are bound to be disappointments. Examples of human failings occur at times as officials on both sides of the aisle fall victim to pride, greed, and carnal lusts.

That’s not to say that we don’t have good, hard working, well meaning, and principled elected officials who uphold the public’s trust. I’m merely pointing out that imperfect human beings are tasked with making important decisions which impact all of our lives on a daily basis. We can be certain that we don’t understand all the motivations of those who are in elected office. The allure of power, prestige of position, and public adoration that many of them enjoy while in office can become corrosive to even the most sincere, well-intentioned, and apparently “grounded” public servants.

As Williams noted, our founders cautioned us against providing too great of a trust in those who govern us. They hoped we would understand that, unless restrained, people in government naturally seek to grow their authority and power. As government grows, it becomes more intrusive and abusive. The best way to guard against such growth is to keep the federal government to its constitutional parameters and return more of the decisions to the states and local municipalities. Citizens then have greater access to those who represent them and can thus better protect their own liberties.

Until next time . . . Brett A. Magbee, Vice President for Operations

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