



cnsnews.com
THE RIGHT NEWS. RIGHT NOW.™

A Government Shutdown ‘Actually Would Help Most Americans’

December 31, 2014

By Doug Bandow

The year is drawing to a close and we are supposed to be happy that the lame duck Congress survived its usual year-end brinkmanship and threats of a government shutdown. Horrors! What would the helpless people do if politicians weren't able to legislate, regulate, and dictate in the “public interest”? Why, the republic would collapse.

Not!

The traditional civics book notion of government at all levels is that the state does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. That's typically seen as creating the framework for a free society—police, courts, defense, basic health and safety, “public” goods which otherwise wouldn't be provided.

If the state was this focused on its most important and basic tasks, we might notice if it closed. If you rely on government as a matter of necessity for something that truly matters, then it's obvious when it's not there.

Unfortunately, the state has turned into something very different. It's now a welfare agency for the wealthy, a vast soup kitchen for special interests, an engine for social engineering at home and abroad, and a national nanny determined to run citizens' lives.

While the beneficiaries of programs get excited when the money disappears, no one else cares. To the contrary, closing down Washington's great income redistribution racket actually would help most Americans.

Yet, perhaps the most irritating, even infuriating, government activity is paternalism. What is worse than government taking your money in order to run your life? Often the worst culprits are at the state or local levels.

It's the basic difference between a gang of highwaymen and caucus of legislators. The first group takes your cash and then leaves you alone. The second group empties your wallet or purse, and

then insists on sticking around *for your benefit* to make sure you're eating and dressing right, have correct posture, aren't taking undue risks, and are exercising properly. Your new overseers expect not only regular payment but eternal gratitude for their services.

Consider the concerted campaign against smoking. I've never liked the habit. But adults are entitled to smoke cancer sticks if they like. And the idea that not one restaurant or bar in a city of thousands or state of millions can allow someone to smoke is, well, outrageous, especially when people continue to prattle on about the U.S. being a free society.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg attempted to ban large cups of soda. He's the worst sort of "public servant," substituting his preferences for those of the people he is supposed to "serve."

Last month the city of Berkeley, California took a slightly different approach. It became the first city to impose a special tax on drinks with sugar. Nearly three-quarters of Americans say they oppose the sugar fascists, that didn't matter in Berkeley. Sugar (or other caloric sweetener) tax measures have been advanced in two dozen states and cities since 2009, but leave it to Berkeley to be the first one to act. No word yet on whether the tax man next will target chocolate bars, ice cream, and households lacking an exercise bike or elliptical trainer.

In October the city of Burien, Washington, banned body odor. Or at least too much body odor in public, as determined by the cops. Explained City Manager Kamuron Gurol, "Occasionally, people will unfortunately have such a bodily odor that it's very hard for other patrons to physically be in the same place." So what could be more obvious than to turn the problem over to government?! And are mandatory public showers next?

Around the same time the authorities in North Attleboro, Massachusetts, rejected Selectman Patrick Reynolds's request to eliminate the ban on playing ball in the street after the police broke up a game being played by friends. After all, responded the police chief: what would people think of the city if it appeared the community okayed this horrid practice? Makes you wonder how Americans survive for so many years without the assistance of the paternalists like those in North Attleboro.

In August the state of California did something right by revising its earlier prohibition on people bringing dogs into dining facilities. Until then only service animals were allowed.

Now under a set of specific conditions—in an outdoor area, kept clean in case of an "accident," animal in a carrier or on a leash but not allowed on any furniture, any food and drink for man's best friend only "in single-use disposable containers"—dogs can join their owners at a meal. Why not simply leave the decision up to the owner? Why do exalted elected officials believe they must tell a restaurant to clean up after an animal goes do-do on its premises? If patrons don't like seeing a dog at their feet, why not let them go elsewhere, rather than call in the state authorities?

The FDA long has been perhaps the government's deadliest paternalist, delaying the approval of life-saving drugs, thereby actually killing thousands of people over the years, far more than the

number of people likely saved by preventing the sale of dangerous medicines. Ensuring that patients and doctors can't make choices based on individual circumstances and preferences apparently doesn't keep the agency busy enough.

Last year it outlawed mimolette cheese because mimolette rinds could contain trace quantities of cheese mites. The latter are harmless, but never mind. Earlier this year the FDA decided to ban cheese aged on boards—which, alas, means most European cheese imports. After all, “The porous structure of wood enables it to absorb and retain bacteria, therefore bacteria generally colonize not only the surface but also the inside layers of wood.” As a result millions, no, tens of millions of Europeans die every year from cheese poisoning. Well, not really. But you never can be too careful!

Actually, you can. And government too frequently is, at least when it comes to regulating people's lives. When it comes to spending taxpayers' money, tossing folks into jail, and invading foreign countries, government officials instead go wild and crazy, tossing caution to the wind.

Republican Party leaders ran from the idea of a government shutdown for political reasons. And when seen as a consequence of partisan deadlock a shutdown probably does lose votes. But it's time to shut down government for the purpose of shutting down the activities of government that aren't legitimate. Like most of them.

And especially paternalism. Government should do what we can't, not what we can but which government officials believe they can do better, such as running our own lives.

[Doug Bandow](#) is the Senior Fellow and former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan. He is the author of [Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire](#) (Xulon Press).