

# ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Has the Libertarian moment arrived?

By Doug Bandow  
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The New York Times wonders if the Libertarian moment has arrived. Unfortunately, there've been false starts before.

President Ronald Reagan's election seemed the harbinger of a new freedom wave. His rhetoric was great, but actual accomplishments lagged far behind.

So, too, with the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress. Admittedly, members of the GOP tend to toss around such phrases as individual liberty and limited government. However, their behavior in office looked little different from that of many Democrats.

Since then there's been even less to celebrate in America, at least. George W. Bush was an avid proponent of "compassionate," big government conservatism. Outlays rose faster than under his Democratic predecessor. No one did more to bail out business and enrich corporate America.

President Barack Obama continued the tradition, promoting corporate welfare, pushing through a massive "stimulus" bill for the bank accounts of federal contractors and seizing control of what remained private in the health care system. The only good news is that incipient federal bankruptcy has discouraged Congress from adopting other massive new spending programs.

Over the last half century, members of both parties took a welfare state that was of modest size despite the excesses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal and put it on a fiscally unsustainable basis as part of the misnamed "Great Society."

Economist Lawrence Kotlikoff figures government's total unfunded liability at around \$220 trillion. America's annual GDP is just \$17 trillion. How Uncle Sam will ever make good on all its promises is impossible to imagine.

The national government has done no better with international issues. Trillions went for misnamed "foreign aid" that subsidized collectivism and autocracy. Trade liberalization faces determined resistance, and often is blocked by countries which gain the greatest benefits of global commerce.

Even worse has been foreign policy. The ecstasy felt by most people after the collapse of the Berlin Wall - a quarter century ago - has been forgotten. The defense budget has turned into a new form of foreign aid for America's populous and prosperous allies.

Americans across the political spectrum agree that something is wrong, that the status quo is no good. But they disagree on the remedy.

However, the answer shouldn't be that hard to discern. The definition of insanity, runs the old adage, is to keep doing the same thing while expecting different results. Today, government attempts to solve problems by doing ever more of whatever it already is doing. Thus, those who support such policies, whether on the left or right, and expect things to improve in the future should head off to see their psychiatrists.

The economy is slowing, people are falling behind economically, freedoms are being lost, and security fears are rising? No problem. Roll out the usual failed nostrums.

We know what the impact of these policies will be. All we have to do is look around the world and see what has happened.

It is this reality, not new personalities or generations, that is creating a libertarian moment. The 20th century killed off communism and fascism as serious alternatives. They resulted in totalitarian death states capable of killing on a mass scale, but little else.

The chief competitor was not laissez-faire capitalism, as some suggested, but highly regulated and monumentally expensive welfare states. They were freer and more prosperous than their geopolitical antagonists - even a little capitalism goes a long way - but the erosion of liberty and prosperity was constant.

Perhaps more debilitating was the corrosive impact on the foundational principles of a free society, such as independence, self-reliance, responsibility, accountability and more. This assault in America continues with, for instance, the federal government recently turning health care into another massive entitlement, highlighted by pervasive regulation and income redistribution.

The obvious, and only, alternative to more government, which has failed so badly, is less

government. Lower tax rates and rationalize complex tax systems. Cut the wasteful looting and pillaging that is a hallmark of today's transfer society.

Kill unnecessary regulations, while making legitimate rules more market-friendly. Model liberty, prosperity, tolerance, and peace for others, allowing individual Americans going abroad to be America's best ambassadors.

Has the libertarian moment arrived? The tyranny of the status quo, as Milton Friedman termed it, remains omnipresent and powerful. Those who benefit the politics of plunder will not yield voluntarily.

As a result, the libertarian moment will not "arrive." It will have to be brought forward by those committed to a better and freer America.

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