



Great Moments in State Government: Bureaucrats Threaten Family for Rescuing Bambi

Daniel Mitchell February 1, 2013

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As a public finance economist, I normally focus on big-picture arguments against excessive government.

If the public sector is too large, for instance, that undermines economic growth by diverting resources from the productive sector of the economy.

The damage is then compounded by a needlessly destructive and punitive tax system.

But I've also discovered that it helps to personalize the analysis by pointing out examples of ridiculous and wasteful behavior by government.

That's one of the reasons I share horror stories as part of the U.S. vs U.K. government stupidity contest - such as the world's most pointless sign linked nearby.

Some actions by government, however, belong in a different category. I'm not sure what word I would choose to describe them - perhaps venal, evil, despicable, reprehensible, or disgusting would be good options.

Am I being overly dramatic? Perhaps, but is there any other reaction when the government persecutes a family with possible jail time for rescuing Bambi?

Here are some absurd and disturbing details from the Indianapolis Star.

When Connersville police officer Jeff Counciller first encountered the baby deer, she was curled up in the corner of a front porch. It was clear the fawn was injured. Counciller could see the wounds... If left to its own, the animal would surely die... So the Councillers took in the deer, which they named Dani, cleaned and dressed its wounds and nursed it back to health, all with the intention of turning it out into the wild once it was big enough and strong enough to have a chance on its own. ...she was unable to stand, and her maggot-infested wound was ugly. The Councillers contacted DNR at the time but were told to return the deer to the wild and let nature take its course. "It would have been a death sentence," Jeff said.

So the family did what any decent people would do. They nursed the deer back to health. But decency and government often are in conflict.

Trouble is, what the Councillers did is against the law. Now, more than two years after rescuing the deer, more than six months after conservation officers began an investigation, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources wants them prosecuted. ...DNR officials began an investigation that entailed half a dozen visits to their home and numerous calls to local authorities. In July, the agency issued an eight-page report and asked for a special prosecutor from another county to handle the case. Why the charges are being sought now — six months later — isn't clear.

I think the answer is obvious. The bureaucrats from the Department of Natural Resources are sulking because their imperious demands weren't obeyed.

So they're lashing out at an innocent family, as indicated by the following excerpts.

...when the DNR came calling, the Councillers say they were almost ready to release Dani back into the woods. They were just waiting for the summer drought to pass and the nearby corn crops to mature enough to offer cover and food for Dani. They say they weren't aware it was illegal to keep the deer.

That's when the bureaucratic nightmare began.

When the DNR began its investigation, the Councillers say the conservation officer suggested they obtain a rescue permit. But that was denied. Soon, the DNR said the deer must be euthanized, that it was a safety threat to humans.

Fortunately, an unknown good Samaritan intervened and freed Dani before the government could kill the helpless animal.

But on the day of Dani's scheduled execution, the deer turned up missing, its enclosure left open. The Councillers say they didn't arrange the escape or know how the deer was freed but acknowledge that they didn't probe too deeply to find out.

But no good deed goes unpunished when spiteful bureaucrats are involved.

...there was nothing but silence from the DNR until the Councillers received notice of the charges earlier this month. They plan to fight the case, even though jail is unlikely and the lawyer costs — which could reach \$5,000 — are significantly higher than a likely fine. It's a matter of principle, they say. They don't want to plead guilty for trying to help an animal and when they had no criminal intent.

Not surprisingly, the rest of the community is on the side of the deer (and the persecuted family). Indeed, there's even a Facebook page for folks who want to register their displeasure with this example of government thuggery.

“People are outraged at the DNR and that the government has nothing better to do than harass these people,” said John Waudby, an Indianapolis man who created the Facebook page after hearing about the story. “Anybody in their right mind would have done the same thing.”

All things considered, this story from Indiana shouldn't be part of the government stupidity and incompetence contest. Given the venality of the bureaucrats, it belongs with this list of horrifying examples of government thuggery.