



## How ‘Parks and Rec’s’ Ron Swanson Became the Unlikely Libertarian Hero of the Obama Era

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NBC sitcom *Parks and Recreation* is about to say goodbye to one of the most indelible conservative characters to ever grace our TV screens: the gloriously mustachioed Ron Swanson.

The acclaimed NBC comedy *Parks and Recreation*, starring Amy Poehler and Chris Pratt, airs its series finale Tuesday evening. The show, which premiered during the first year of the Obama presidency and then ran for seven seasons, was in many ways a gift to big-government liberals. It portrayed Leslie Knope (Poehler) as a hard-working, compassionate bureaucrat. It provided a kinder, gentler (and goofier) view of local and federal government. *Parks and Rec* even gave First Lady Michelle Obama a platform to promote her far-left, pro-exercise agenda.

Sure, you could characterize the series as left-of-center. It just so happens that the show’s funniest, most compelling character would rather have the public sector razed to the ground.

Ron Swanson (played by Nick Offerman) is the Director of the Pawnee Parks and Recreation Department. He is macho, he is good with the ladies, he loves red meat—and he is severely libertarian in his worldview.

“I think the entire government should be privatized,” Swanson says in the Season 2 episode “Sweetums.” “Chuck E. Cheese could run the parks. Everything operated by tokens. Drop in a token, go on the swing set. Drop in another token, take a walk. Drop in a token, look at a duck.”

Here’s Swanson quietly delighting in a government shutdown:

Now here he is explaining how stealing a little girl’s lunch is exactly like the government taxing people:

Swanson’s demeanor and staunchly libertarian outlook have made him a (regrettably fictional) hero to conservative observers. “He is, let’s say, an unlikely hero in the age of Obama,” *National Review* declared. “Ron Swanson’s 12 wisest quotes about the government,” *The Daily Caller* compiled. “Swanson’s staunch libertarianism is sprinkled throughout the series—and he’s a hero of the show, not a heel of all the jokes (as you would expect from Hollywood),” the Heartland Institute raved. “[A] lovably awesome libertarian character,” *Reason* blogged. The

libertarian Cato Institute has cited the character both on social media and in policy analysis. And *The Washington Free Beacon* named Swanson “Man of the Year” in 2012.

Moreover, Republican congressman Joe Wilson (of “You lie!” fame) wrote an op-ed for *Politico* in 2010 that praised Swanson: “America has a new champion of limited government and spending restraint,” the piece reads. “Regrettably, Swanson is not running for Congress.”

Now, with *Parks and Rec* ending its run, libertarian activists, journalists, and policy wonks are taking a moment to say sayonara to their fictional fellow traveler.

“[Swanson] has done more to persuade my (French) wife about libertarianism than I have,” Matt Welch, editor in chief of *Reason*, told *The Daily Beast*. “Though in fairness we’ve only been married 17 years.”

“In a media world that can only handle a two-dimensional liberal-conservative spectrum, it’s been great to have one TV star who explains property rights and taxes...to millions of viewers,” David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, remarked. “Ron goes too far sometimes, like when he says ‘all government is a waste of money.’ It’s really only 90 percent...There are all kinds of libertarians. Ron Swanson is a meat-and-potatoes heartland libertarian.”

“I don’t agree with everything Ron Swanson did or said—but the man certainly had conviction for liberty,” Luke Kenworthy, director of policy engagement at the Koch Brothers-backed Generation Opportunity said. “Ron didn’t just teach us about taxation through a lunchbox demonstration—he also spoke eloquently on the more important subjects, like craftsmanship and bacon. In the end, what we’ll have learned is not just politics, but conviction for one’s values. As a fellow Hoosier, I admire him for that.”

Whatever your politics, Swanson’s unique personality is something that will be missed from network television.

Farewell, Ron, and farewell, Pawnee.