

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Editorial: R.C. Hoiles and timeless fight for freedom

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We like to think that the commemoration of Nov. 24, the birthday in 1878 of R.C. Hoiles, as Founder's Day here at the Register offers an opportunity not only to reflect on the ideas underpinning a philosophy of liberty that R.C. strove all his life to understand and popularize, but to consider how those ideas fare in modern America. As is so often the case, we seem to be at something of a crossroads.

The great poet T.S. Eliot once wrote that there are no lost causes because there are no won causes. In the ebb and flow of history the fortunes of great ideas and great causes are subject to the apparent rule that no victories are permanent, no traditions last forever, that human beings seem to be always in a process of relentless change. So the ideas of liberty, which seemed hopelessly out of fashion a few years as a financial crisis many inaccurately blamed on deregulation and too much reliance on free markets battered the country, and two

years ago as the country elected a president whose ideas of "hope and change" had more to do with restricting liberty than expanding it was elected, may be in the process of making a comeback.

The failure of debased versions of Keynesian nostrums in the form of unfocused "stimulus" spending and expansion of the money supply to bring back prosperity and full employment have something to do with a revival of concern for limited constitutional governance. The choice by the administration and a strongly Democratic Congress to focus on a health care reform that lacks much focus except expanded government control over life-and-death decisions instead of moving to revive the economy has played a role. With the rise of the Tea Party movement, which focused more on fiscal and constitutional issues than divisive social issues, we are seeing more discussion of the importance of limited government than we have seen in years.

David Boaz, vice president of the libertarian-oriented Cato Institute, told us he sees the Tea Party not as a libertarian movement but a potentially libertarian force in American politics. However, he sees the extreme polarization between the two major parties, expressed in the election process and magnified in the media, which reinforce the impression that left and right are the only two options, as an impediment to understanding. "Many who talk about limited government still support the Iraq war, an aggressive foreign policy, the war on drugs and federal moves to discourage gay marriage, which is hardly consistent with limiting government," Mr. Boaz said. "And those who want to end those incursions on liberty tend to support a nanny state in other areas of our lives. The consistent concern for liberty that motivated our founders still has too small a place in modern American political discourse."

Even so, we dare to hope that recognition of impending crises in our political structures – call it deficit, debt and debasement, posing a strong threat to the economic vitality this nation has enjoyed for so long – will be accompanied by an increasing recognition that personal and economic liberty are the best foundation for prosperity and a rich culture. Perhaps someday more will come to recognize that Lord Acton, of the "power corrupts" maxim, was right when he said that liberty is not important so much as a means to some political or economic end, but is itself the most important political end.

As David Boaz reminded us, however, there never really was a Golden Age of Liberty, nor is there likely to be. As Jefferson noted, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. Each generation must come to grips with the importance (or unimportance) of liberty and find ways to advance its blessings to more members of the

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