



Cooper, intentionally or not, promotes civil society

John Trump

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Gov. Roy Cooper was talking like a libertarian.

He probably didn't even realize it.

About a week ago, in his state of the state address, Cooper talked about many things. He discussed his budget plans and House Bill 2. He talked about education and the need to recruit the best teachers. To raise teacher pay. He addressed the need to help small business and about lowering the state's unemployment rate.

He talked about Mackenzie Hinson, a 12-year old girl from Grantham who founded "Make A Difference Food Pantry" in her community.

Mackenzie stood in the Senate gallery, obviously a little nervous and probably embarrassed by the attention.

Lawmakers, led by the governor, stood to applaud.

Cooper spoke of the state's "resilient spirit" and called Mackenzie "remarkable."

An "inspiration."

Hurricane Matthew struck coastal North Carolina in October and caused, according to some estimates, \$2 billion in damage, as well as 28 deaths. This placed Matthew among the worst natural disasters in state history, surpassed perhaps only by 1999's Hurricane Floyd.

The state and federal governments have committed hundreds of millions toward recovery.

Mackenzie committed her valuable time and energy.

After the storm, Cooper said, Mackenzie and her band of volunteers got busy replenishing the pantry and offering whatever help they could provide.

“Mackenzie and her team were not deterred,” Cooper said in his prepared speech. “With the help of businesses and volunteers, they restocked and got to work. After Hurricane Matthew, Make A Difference Food Pantry was open for 42 straight days, serving 6,914 hot meals and distributing food boxes and toiletry items to over 8,000 people in Wayne, Johnston, and Sampson counties.”

Mackenzie didn’t wait for the government to arrive on its proverbial white horse. To tell residents everything would be OK. She and her friends took care of all that on their own.

Which is how it’s supposed to work.

John Locke argued, as the Cato Institute’s David Boaz writes in *Libertarianism: A Primer*, that we “establish government so that we may be secure in our lives, liberties, and properties as we go about the business of surviving and flourishing,”

We can’t do that alone, of course. We need a community, whether that’s defined as a town, a family, a church, or common goals, and common beliefs.

Those associations, Boaz writes, form the basis for the idea of a civil society. The idea that neighbors — and communities — will step in to help in times of need. The government, or state, only impedes this process. In other words, government can interrupt and even eliminate charity.

When a real need exists people — not necessarily government — will step in for the benefit of friends and neighbors. People like Mackenzie.

Many news stories falsely reported President Trump wanted to drastically cut funding for “Meals on Wheels” programs. But, as Walter Olson wrote in *National Review*, the meals program gets much of its money from the Older Americans Act, and not from Community Development Block Grants, which, as *Reason* magazine writes, is ripe with cronyism and pork-barrel spending.

Yet news — whether biased, misguided, or just wrong — travels fast.

The *Washington Post* reported that, according to Meals on Wheels, the group has “taken in more than \$100,000 since the White House announced plans to eliminate the Community Development Block Grant program on Thursday — compared with about \$1,000 on a normal day.”

Mackenzie should be proud.

“By following your example,” Cooper said, “we will rebuild our communities and be a stronger state than ever. Good work, Mackenzie.”

It’s a great irony — a progressive governor calling on a young resident who exemplifies the best aspects of the libertarian spirit.

Whether that was Cooper’s intent isn’t clear.