



A question of independence: Will big government break the union?

M.D. Kittle

July 4, 2016

MADISON, Wis. — As a nation inspired by tea partiers and revolutionaries turns 240, the United States of America may be heading for its own ‘Brexit.’

A severed America — eventually — is what Trevor Burrus predicts.

Burrus, research fellow at the Center for Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute, said he’s pessimistic about the union as it is holding together for another 240 years because of the ever-expanding federal government and the expectations many U.S. citizens place on it.

“It (the federal government) increasingly does too much for a country of 320 million,” he said. “The basic question is answered in the Constitution.”

The idea that Texas and Massachusetts would have the same health-care plan under Obamacare is absurd, and not tenable under the concept of federalism, Burrus said. There is and will be a greater rejection of federal government-imposed mandates, creating an even greater “schismatic hatred of congress,” he said.

“I predict it is going to get worse because of that centralization of power, and I think there will be movement because of the different ideologies. People from Massachusetts and Texas will move further apart.”

“I don’t think we’ll get 240 more years with the same-looking country. I predict some states will secede in a Brexit fashion,” Burrus said.

Britain’s vote last week to exit — or ‘Brexit’ — the European Union reportedly has revived talk by some of a Texas secession movement.

As the New York Times reported, “On Twitter, there were Texas-less maps of America, videos of head-shaking Jedis and calls for Gov. Greg Abbott to take action.”

David Azerrad said the Declaration of Independence (the resolution to declare independence by 12 of the 13 colonies actually was passed two days before the now-famous Fourth of July), still holds the “self-evident” keys to American independence. But it is the assault on the great document that followed — the U.S. Constitution — that places liberty in peril.

Azerrad, director of the B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics at the Heritage Foundation, said the idea of “consent of the governed” and rights of the individual are taking a back seat to the good of the collective and government by the bureaucracy.

“The Bill of Rights is pretty banged up right now” and ... “federalism is battered and bruised beyond recognition,” he said.

“A lot of our laws are not coming out of the elected branches of government. They are coming from our courts and agencies, a fourth branch of government insulated from the governed that just chugs along,” Azerrad added.

While the left laments the death of democracy, corrupted by the weighted influence of corporate America, Azerrad said today’s progressives as a rule have no problem with an expanding centralized government and the notion that regulators — not individuals — will cure what ails the nation.

More so, big government elitists hold a deep distrust, a disdain for the people, when those people don’t vote their way, the conservative said.

“I don’t want to paint with too broad a brush, but there is a streak on the left that has a contempt for the American people,” Azerrad said. “They stand for what the people would choose if they were wise enough to know what’s good for them. That’s how they approach governance.”

Liberals, of course, see conservatives as the force of division and intransigence, defying the people’s “demand” for more gun control, universal health care, more liberal abortion laws, climate change legislation, you name it.

Therein lies the growing divide in a blue state/red state nation that is growing farther and farther apart, Burrus says.

The good news, the constitutional experts agree, is that despite the division and the potential road to separation, the United States of America remains a freer place today than it did at the nation’s inception.

Up until the 1830s, Massachusetts had a state-funded church, and until 1865 a significant portion of the U.S. population was enslaved, counted as three-fifths of a person.

“We should be grateful and appreciate that this country still exists 240 years after 13 colonies declared their independence against a nation with the most powerful army in the world,” Azerrad said.

The average life expectancy of governments over the past two centuries is nine years, according to Burrus, and most countries don’t have a peaceful transition of power.

He said there have been a few eras in the United States' history in which individual liberty has been greatly limited by the power of government, but the impact is generational.

"We've been doing pretty good, mostly governing with an eye toward liberty in a general sense," Burrus said. "If you do get a period of big government people that control everything, they create things like the Federal Trade Commission that will never go away."

"We are the longest existing constitutional democracy," he added. "That's pretty good."