



How Popular is the Libertarian Movement?

Mark Skousen
August 17, 2014

“Libertarians are living in a fantasy world.” — Paul Krugman, *New York Times*

The New York Times magazine published a cover story last week with the headline, “Has the Libertarian Moment Finally Arrived?” It highlighted Sen. Rand Paul’s recent growth in popularity and his potential as a presidential candidate in 2016. But the reporter did his best to portray the libertarian movement as a “radical fringe” element of society by highlighting a bunch of young people more interested in pot than getting a successful job.

My reaction: The libertarian movement will truly arrive when *The New York Times* does a serious article on the #1 libertarian think tank (Cato Institute), the #1 libertarian TV show (Stossel on Fox) and the #1 libertarian conference (FreedomFest).

After the article appeared, Paul Krugman opined that libertarians are living in a “fantasy world.” He used as an example the call to replace the hodge-podge welfare system with a national guaranteed minimum income without a means test. Charles Murray has recommended that every American receive \$10,000 a year from the federal government to replace the welfare program.

Krugman thinks the guaranteed income idea is crazy. I don’t especially like it myself, because it means giving welfare to people who don’t need it (the middle class and wealthy). Fifty years ago, Milton Friedman advocated a negative income tax, which makes more sense.

But Krugman is terribly insensitive to the plight of the welfare class in this country — it is a serious and growing problem with 47 million Americans on food stamps, Medicaid, Section 8 housing, etc. We’ve developed a dependent class in this country, with fourth-generation welfare recipients. Federal case workers often discourage people from getting off welfare.

The Welfare Reform Act of 1996, pushed through by President Bill Clinton and a Republican Congress, went a long ways toward solving the welfare program in this country by requiring able-bodied people to find a job after five years of getting welfare. The number of people on food stamps and Medicaid actually declined for more than a

decade — until the Great Recession of 2008. Then the program was gutted. Now is the time to bring it back.

You Blew It! Americans Overeat

America is #1 in many ways, but one recent United Nations report gave the country a dubious honor. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the United States has the highest calorie intake of any country by averaging 3,770 calories per person daily.

One could interpret this announcement as positive evidence that Americans are better fed than people in other countries. But it also could mean that Americans are overweight. In fact, more than one-third of Americans are considered “obese” — a total of 79 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That means more heart disease, diabetes, cancer and strokes.

The countries just behind the United States were Austria, with an average of 3,760 calories consumed per day and Italy, averaging 3,660 calories per person each day.

Countries with the lowest average daily calorie consumption were India with 2,300 and the Congo at 1,590. Hunger is a serious problem in these countries.

I admire First Lady Michelle Obama for taking on the issue of food habits — just as long as it's a voluntary effort and not a government program.

In case you missed it, I encourage you to read my e-letter column from last week about what has contributed to a falling deficit.