



Ralph Nader: Heritage's Corporate Lobby Inside Trump's Government Is Not The People's Heritage – OpEd

Ralph Nader

March 14, 2018

The Heritage Foundation, with an annual budget nearing \$90 million a year (including over \$1 million for the salary of its president), calls itself conservative, but more often than not it practices the kind of corporatism dear to the impulses of President Trump. The Washington-based “think tank/lobbying firm” has quite a score card with the failed gambling czar who lost the popular vote but won the vestigial Electoral College tally to become head of state. In fact, they’ve given him a checklist, and he seems to be obediently implementing the Heritage Foundation’s agenda.

Immediately after his Electoral College selection, Trump’s transition team was swarmed with Heritage personnel and their 334 “unique policy recommendations” comprising its massive “Mandate for Leadership.” Indeed, seventy former Heritage employees now work for the Trump Administration.

According to Heritage’s Thomas Binion, the Trumpsters have adopted or implemented “64 percent of the 334 policy prescriptions.” This success rate, Heritage says, exceeds even President Ronald Reagan’s first year in office when his administration adopted 49 percent of Heritage’s policy recommendations.

Heritage’s boldness and energy levels tower over its counterpart institutions on the alleged left-of-center political spectrum. It helps that big corporate money bolsters Heritage’s various projects, including one recently created initiative “Heritage Action,” which dives directly into electoral politics. In its 45 years of operation, Heritage has fed off demanding oil tycoon heirs such as Richard Mellon Scaife and Shelby Cullom Davis, the relentless Koch brothers and, recently, the Trump-backing Mercer financial interests.

Mr. Binion proudly lists some of his organization’s successes with Trump, and more “adopted” recommendations can be found in the full list. Here is a small selection for your perusal:

- Leaving the Paris Climate Accord and cutting funding for research on climate disruption
- Shrinking the public lands
- Greatly increasing military spending
- Making the needy work for government assistance
- Opening up the federal lands to off-shore drilling and coal leasing
- Withdrawing from UNESCO—a move strongly urged by the Israeli government
- Eliminating Environmental Justice Programs
- Ending Renewable Energy Mandates in DOD
- Eliminating Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for children
- Eliminating the Labor Department’s Women’s Bureau
- Eliminating Tribal Housing
- Reducing funding for the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights by 50%
- Cutting budgets for all kinds of help to the poor, the disabled and other deprived Americans such as impoverished patients seeking health care

Hand it to Heritage, it deals with both abstract conservative principles and concrete policies.

The problem is that the principles don’t match what Heritage is pressing for in the avaricious arena of Republican corporate politics.

Here are its principles: “free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.”

Let’s compare Heritage’s walk to its talk. “Free enterprise?” Rhetoric aside, Heritage is inactive on old and new monopolies, and indeed anything to do with massive corporate welfare for the favored big companies and big money in politics which tilt the playing field and shaft taxpayers.

“Limited government?” What about—to invoke President Eisenhower’s warning words—the big government of the bloated “Military-Industrial Complex?” What about the massive outsourcing of public functions to corporations that consider overcharging taxpayers to be a business strategy? What about the system of “criminal injustice,” in which people can be arrested without being charged with a crime? What about prosecutorial abuses and illegal prison abuses? What about DOJ-promoted for-profit prisons that benefit from social systems that continually perpetuate cycles of incarceration and arrest? Do these qualify as “limited government?”

“Individual freedom?” What about the massive invasion of individual privacy by corporations or the destruction of the freedom of contracts—consumer servitude under unilateral fine print contracts not subject to competition? What about the FCC’s elimination of net neutrality,

allowing internet and cable providers to infiltrate, control and monetize every aspect of the internet “commons?”

“Traditional American values?” What about equal protection of the laws in the form of strong enforcement actions against the corporate crime wave that has been documented regularly by the *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week*? Heritage is silent on this obvious, deep American value.

What about compassion values for the poor and preservation of the air, water and soil? Heritage has hooked its reputation onto two of the cruelest of Trump’s henchmen: Scott Pruitt, dismantling the EPA, contrary to his oath of office, and the mad dog of mad dogs—Michael Mulvaney, who heads both the Office of Management and Budget and the Wall Street watchdog, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which he is running through the Wall Street corporate meat grinder.

“A strong national defense?” A wasteful defense is a weak defense and military power in the service of Empire only increases hatred, war and civilian adversaries against the invaders and backers of dictatorships abroad. Heritage is silent on such lessons of history and has sided too often with the neo-con war mongers. The libertarian Cato institute, at least, opposes criminal wars of aggression (as in Iraq) and imperialism.

There are people inside Heritage troubled about this conflict between true conservatives and corporatists masquerading as conservatives. They know that the rhetoric about being against crony capitalism or statism (the corporate state) is not part of Heritage’s muscle on Capitol Hill or at Trump’s White House. But they know where their bread is buttered.