

Cato Institute founder: America is exceptional

By [Zachary Janowski](#)

“One thing I feel strongly about is American exceptionalism,” said [Ed Crane](#), founder and president of the [Cato Institute](#), at a luncheon held Thursday by the [Yankee Institute for Public Policy](#).

Crane said he objects to President Barack Obama’s view of American exceptionalism, which he showed while taking questions in Germany.

“Some kid asked him, ‘Do you believe in American exceptionalism?’ And the President of the United States said, ‘Sure I do. Just as Brits believe in British exceptionalism and as Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.’ Which was to say, ‘American exceptionalism is not very exceptional,’” Crane said. “And that’s a horrible thing for the President to say.”

Crane said America’s exceptionalism is based on the ideas in its founding documents, specifically the inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

“This is a cliché now, but it’s a very, very radical statement,” he said. “It separates us from the rest of the world.”

“This is a nation based on a concept of the dignity of the individual and the state’s just there to let you pursue happiness, to let you pursue your own values, your own dreams. Something that’s very unique in human history.”

“The Constitution itself is a document that created a government consistent with the information learned from the Declaration,” he said. “So it is designed to limit the power of the federal government.”

Crane made the distinction between a civil society, where each individual makes the decisions important to them, and a political society, where someone else makes the decisions for them.

He said the powers of the federal government are “few and defined” and that understanding of the Constitution held up until the Great Depression, when it was distorted through a “tortured interpretation.”

He said Sen. Barry Goldwater, President Ronald Reagan and the Tea Party are all part of “the original American experiment.”

“Therefore, there is cause for hope.”

Crane quoted then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, now Secretary of State, talking about the need to define American national projects in order for the country to be successful. He strongly disagreed with this understanding.

“The idea that there has to be national goals, is so – I don’t even want to say un-American – it’s non-American. It’s not what our country’s about. And yet, it would be nice if there was somebody in the Republican Party who would stand up and say, ‘You know that’s philosophically completely wrong to worry about what are the goals of America. It doesn’t make any sense put in the context of the American founding.’”

“The fiscal catastrophe we face is due in large part to national projects like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid,” Crane said. “Not to mention the national project to make every American a homeowner.”

Crane spoke the day after Obama gave an address on his approach to the fixing the country’s long-term fiscal problems.

He said Obama “gets really furious about the idea that how can the Republicans say they’re going to deal with the deficit if they’re willing to spend \$3 trillion on tax cuts for the rich.”

“Of course you don’t get \$3 trillion out of the rich, that’s the whole population. The whole idea of tax expenditures, government spending money by letting you keep your own money, implicit in that concept is the idea that the government owns all your money and we let you keep some of it.”

He said this idea is “insidious.”

“Certainly, he wanted to take the drivers of the deficit, entitlements, off the table. Everyone wrings their hands over the \$14.3 trillion explicit debt of the federal government, but the true debt of the federal government is \$119 trillion because of the unfunded liabilities of those three major, so-called entitlement programs.”

Crane founded the Cato Institute, Washington-based, free-market think tank, in 1977.

“The Yankee Institute is one of the rising stars among all these great state-based, free-market think tanks, so I congratulate you on that,” Crane said. “It’s the least you could do after sending us Chris Dodd all those years.”



More to come from Crane's speech...