

Grassroot Perspective: Frankly My Dodd, I Don't Give a Damn; Bad Laws' Benefits, and More

By Malia Hill

Quote of the Week:

"The best way to get a bad law repealed is to enforce it strictly."— Abraham Lincoln

Each week, we'll be monitoring the web to find the most interesting, challenging, or important items for those who are concerned about liberty, accountability, and big government. Here are some of the highlights from the past week:

Frankly, My Dodd, I Don't Give a Damn

If you've ever wondered why you should support think tanks like the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii or the Cato Institute, I present to you Exhibit A: The Dodd-Frank law. That's 2300 pages of financial regulations that affect you in ways that you can't imagine and which could drive you to attempted suicide-by-paper-cut when you try to read and make sense of them. It's the think-tanks that exist on your donations that look into these government efforts that are stuffed to the brim with intentions (good and bad), little understanding of consequences, and liberally seasoned with pork, and try to understand what effect they have on us ordinary folk.

And Dodd-Frank is a mess. Ever wondered where your free checking went? Thanks to Dodd-Frank's regulations, the percentage of banks offering free checking dropped from 96% in 2009 to 34.6% in 2011. It's helping make mortgages harder to get (and more expensive), and creating tons of new regulations and fees for banks—the price of which will be passed on to all of us, and which have impacted the credit ratings for many banks, which isn't exactly great for the economy in general. For those attempting to understand the impact of Dodd-Frank, but who would rather not spend the rest of the year reading regulatory law, check out [this analysis from the Heritage Foundation](#). And then spend some time pondering how much more time, energy, and money is going to have to go into untangling this particular debacle.

The Upside of Bad Laws

Who doesn't love to read about silly laws—especially when they aren't in your state? You get the same rush of superiority usually supplied by watching *Dance Moms* or the *Real Housewives*; that kind of "hey, things might be messed up here, but at least we didn't just pass a subsidy for beekeepers." (That was Virginia, by the way.) But, as [Antony Davis explains](#), there is a certain benefit for a system that allows states to experiment with policy, regardless of how badly they might do so. It has been a while since we have heard the term "laboratory of the states" when talking about policy, but it used to be a popular way of describing one of the benefits of federalism. With the federal government attempting to expand its power in more and more ways, the impetus to let new policy ideas play out on a smaller scale seems to be drying up. But what better way to see the consequences of law than by creating a kind of free market in policy ideas? And to force people to confront their own analysis (or lack thereof) of whether a law is beneficial—while still occurring at a level where it is practical and possible to reverse it? There are many, many reasons to resist the growing federal interference in policy decisions that rightfully belong to the states, but the destruction of the marketplace of policy ideas is a one that doesn't get enough consideration.

Railing Against Corrupt Politics

Money has lots of insidious ways of affecting politics and elections. Also, water is wet and chocolate is delicious. We should take these kinds of comments as beyond obvious, and be prepared to evaluate electoral attacks and such on that basis. And yet, some idealistic optimistic side of us continues to be shocked and upset when it becomes clear just how pernicious that economic influence can be. Take that current Honolulu Mayoral election. Cayetano is well-known for his anti-rail views. A little bit of logic tells us that there are people who stand to make a lot of money from rail, and that they would therefore oppose his candidacy. So is it any surprise to see that those parties would use their money and influence to try to defeat him? ([Honolulu Weekly, which raises this point in a recent issue, posits that they may even be using taxpayer dollars to do so, and asks for help in uncovering any possible wrongdoing.](#)) Not to get all “told you so” about it, but in the [Grassroot Institute’s recent *In Pursuit on the rail project*](#), we noted that one of our major concerns was the potential rail had of corrupting Hawaiian politics. Too bad we can only get points for being logical, as it didn’t exactly take a soothsayer to see that one coming.

The Ones Who Aren’t Doing It for Themselves

The President has received a lot of (well-deserved) flack recently for his dismissive comments about American initiative and business. [But as Carrie Lukas points out in this column](#), there was an element of truth to his comments, at least as far as certain businesses go. There are quite a few businesses that survive (or succeed) due almost solely to government largesse and “help.” The ones that haven’t seemed to be able to make a go of it in the free market, that are deemed worthy of stimulus funding, that belong to industries that meet political interests. More shame to us, of course, for allowing our tax dollars to be used to prop up industry and businesses, of course. (And how strange is it that there is a point on which both Tea Partiers and Occupiers could find themselves in perfect agreement?)

The Rush to Half-Formed Judgment

In the wake of last week’s tragedy in Aurora, it was no surprise to see a renewed push for gun control from the President and others this week. In the face of so much senseless death and reckless hate, one can be pardoned for thinking, “we need to do whatever we can to make sure guys like that can’t do things like this ever again.” However, there is a good reason that laws and policies should not be made in haste and based on emotion, no matter how powerful or sympathetic that motivation may be. As [Jacob Hornberger explains in this blog entry](#), not only is stricter gun control not a viable answer, it actually demonstrably failed in this case. I have nothing but the greatest sympathy for the victims in Aurora—and all those who suffer because of the actions of the vicious in this country, but before we turn tragedy into a way to score political goals, we should spend a little more time thinking about the possible consequences of those policies.