



Grassroot Perspective: Risky Businesses, Religious Freedom's Rarity, and More

Scanning the week's national news, views and clues with you and yours in mind

By Malia Hill

“That no free government, or the blessing of liberty, can be preserved to any people but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue, and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles.”— George Mason, Virginia Declaration of Rights [1776]

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:

[Risky Businesses \(and the Lawyers Who Love Them\)](#)

Cost versus benefit. It sounds good to say, but when you're measuring relative risk versus increased costs, suddenly everyone goes a little crazy. Which, [as this new report by the Cato Institute points out](#), has the tragically ironic effect of undermining consumer safety in the field of product liability. It turns out that, while our tort system works well at a certain level to ensure safer products, it also has a surprising adverse effect on consumer safety when it comes to innovation and industry measurements of reasonable risk. Erratic, unpredictable (and sometimes sky-high) punitive jury awards make it more economically efficient for companies to leave the marketplace rather than introduce new products or possible safety improvements. And our unwillingness to recognize the fact that consumers will accept certain risks in order to save money on the product make it difficult for companies to attempt the same balance. In short, the very product liability judgments that should have us living in a safer world may, paradoxically be further endangering us.

[Religious Freedom Still a Global Luxury](#)

American debates over religious freedom must seem bewilderingly picayune to many for whom “religious freedom” doesn't conjure up debates about the appropriateness of silent

prayer in schools, but rather, the ability to worship without being thrown in jail or killed. Does that seem excessive? Shouldn't the world, in these enlightened times, be past the point of religious oppression? According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, things are actually getting worse. [As Doug Bandow details in Forbes](#), the global assault on religious liberty includes not only the expected (Iran, North Korea, most places that end in “-stan”), but also countries like Turkey and Russia, where anti-Semitism and government repression are rampant. And religious intolerance is even-handed in its targets—with Muslims, Christians, Catholics, Jews, and even Buddhists all receiving their share of oppression. Freedom of religion is freedom of conscience, of thought. But in too many places in the world, you are not even free inside your own mind and heart.

Gore's Renewable Interest . . . in Cash

Time for a thought experiment—in this one we all get to pretend we're rich, so bear with me. Let's imagine that we all have lots of money invested in shares of Apple stock. So we want them to make good decisions about spending and profit, and we are not annoyed at the fact that they constantly make our latest iPhone obsolete. Now, imagine that we just learned that they're constructing a fuel cell facility next to their North Carolina server farm at a cost of \$30 million, and that it's the most expensive form of electricity (with much cheaper local alternatives available), and that they're buying it from a company whose Senior Partner just so happens to sit on Apple's Board of Directors. Would you call that a big, fat conflict of interest? [As Paul Chesser reveals](#), that conflict is real, and the conflictor-in-chief is none other than Al Gore. It just goes to show—fat cat corporate shenanigans know no party affiliation.

Public Servants Become the Public's Masters

No, I didn't come up with that headline myself—though I really wish I had. That clever summation of the problems with public sector unions comes from Steven Greenhut's new book, *Plunder! How Public Employee Unions are Raiding Treasuries, Controlling our Lives, and Bankrupting the Nation*. The title pretty much says it all. [As Chris Edwards explains in his glowing review of the book](#), we are uncomfortable confronting the problem because of the debt we tend to feel towards public workers like teachers, firefighters, or police officers. But (as we in Hawaii will soon learn to our detriment if we don't take action), closing our eyes to the growing problem is not going to make it go away.

There's Gold in Them There Taxpayers

Who wouldn't want to be an overpaid government bureaucrat? (Assuming, of course that you're not the type to feel guilty about rooking the taxpayers). [Daniel Mitchell has been keeping an increasingly depressing](#) list of government employees whose compensation packages belie the claim that one can't get rich as a civil servant. The newest addition is Carole Hankin, a school superintendent in Syosset, Long Island, whose total compensation for overseeing 6600 students in 10 schools comes to \$537,767

annually. And she's allowed to take outside consulting jobs too. You know, to help make ends meet. I know that if I lived in Syosset, not only would I be demanding a tax refund, but I'd want to see some major Superintending going on.

Views expressed in this column are intended to promote creative thought, educate, and, we hope, prompt comment. Accordingly, thoughts expressed do not necessarily reflect the official position of Grassroot Institute of Hawaii or the author.

If you want to support the efforts of GRIH to promote individual liberty in Hawaii society, please support [HERE](#).

Please let us know what you think about this reporting. We want to serve your needs, so include your recommendations. Send to maliah@grassrootinstitute.org