



My View: The wealthy manipulate 'liberty'

By: Tom Maertens – April 11, 2013

Al DeKruif's paean to libertarianism (My View: Too much government isn't good, March 28) might have been more persuasive if he had gotten his facts straight.

For openers, DeKruif alleges that the Code of Federal Regulations costs the economy \$1.75 trillion every year, a figure probably derived from a dubious "study" by Nicole Crain and Mark Crain that used public opinion polling unsupported by any data and counted costs but not benefits.

In contrast, OMB prepares an official estimate of the aggregate costs and benefits of federal regulations for Congress every year. Its most recent estimate found that annual regulatory costs ranged from \$62 billion to \$73 billion, while the total benefits outweighed the costs by as much as 10 times ... \$153 billion to \$806 billion.

Libertarians argue that individual liberty is the highest political end, and predictably, DeKruif has a litany of alleged assaults on our freedom, like, why should you be told what your kids must eat for school lunch?

Answer: School cafeterias serve healthy lunches because parents demand it, and because up to 20 percent of American students get only one full meal per day, school lunch. But kids have the "right" to eat mudpies if they prefer.

DeKruif obviously thinks the government compels small businesses to "become unions" (sic ... unionized?). This is backwards. The government protects workers' right to organize without the threat of having their homes firebombed or being tortured and killed by corporate thugs -- at least 50 were killed just in Detroit, for example. That is what should provoke libertarian outrage.

He repeats the urban legend about welfare recipients being "entitled" to free cell phones, a fable from the conservative media bubble. See Snopes.com.

He also parrots the most common libertarian indictment: "No one bothers to argue that government is an efficient provider of services or a proficient decision-maker."

The federal government administers a Social Security system with 57 million benefit recipients and 200 million contributors. Do you hear people complain about not getting their SS checks on time? Me neither.

Medicare has 47 million recipients and 158 million contributors. Time recently reported that Medicare processes claims for an average of 84 cents each, while private insurance companies pay in the neighborhood of \$30 per claim. In other words, Medicare is about 35 times more efficient at processing claims.

The government manages Medicaid payments to 9 million recipients, a taxation system involving 220 million taxpayers, and delivers checks on time every month to 1.5 million military and 1.8 million civilian employees.

What private company is more efficient?

Conspicuously missing from DeKruif's piece is any recognition of how the libertarian philosophy he promotes has been twisted to justify predatory capitalism and environmental looting.

The leaders of this swindle are the Koch brothers, David and Charles, whose businesses include some of the most polluting in the country: oil refineries, pipelines, chemicals, and paper products. With \$31 billion each, according to Forbes, they have spent hundreds of millions underwriting a huge propaganda network, including the "libertarian" CATO Institute they founded in 1977. Their goal is to persuade the gullible to demand freedom from "onerous" government regulations that, not coincidentally, restrict the Koch brothers' freedom to pollute.

A University of Massachusetts study named Koch Industries one of the top 10 air polluters in the United States. Greenpeace called the company a "kingpin of climate science denial ... worse than Exxon."

Charles Lewis of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan watchdog group, has pointed to the Kochs' "pattern of lawbreaking, political manipulation, and obfuscation," and termed them "the poster child of a company run amok."

Every year, more than 200,000 workers are incapacitated and 40,000 Americans die prematurely from toxic workplace air, according to the New York Times. Still others die from refinery explosions, mine collapses and industrial accidents. The "libertarian" Koch brothers want to abolish all federal regulatory agencies.

EPA figures from 2008/9 show that 81 percent of U.S. coastal waters and 69 percent of our lakes, ponds and rivers are impaired, as are all the Great Lakes. The Koch brothers want to abolish clean water regulations.

Each year, the coal industry generates over 136 million tons of waste which contain arsenic, chromium, selenium, thallium, lead, mercury, uranium and other contaminants. The Koch brothers want to abolish clean air regulations.

DeKruif wrote that "America was designed as a "free" nation but not this type of free." So what should a free nation do about wealthy profiteers who manipulate the uninformed with doublespeak about liberty in order to justify destroying the environment?