

The Moral Liberal

Rick Perry: Conservative or Big Government Republican?

By Jack Kerwick

Governor Rick Perry, so goes the conventional wisdom, is a real conservative. How could he not be? After all, his three terms as governor of Texas has marked a period of spectacular job creation. It has been said that nearly 40% of all jobs in the United States at present are to be found in the lone star state. In addition to this consideration, there are several others to substantiate the pervasive belief that, from the conservative Republican's perspective, Perry is the genuine article.

If we are to accept Republican Party rhetoric of "constitutionalism," "limited government," "individualism," etc., then what we must determine is whether Perry is the partisan of liberty that, presumably, Republicans should want as their party's presidential nominee and, ultimately, their president. It is to the end of making this determination that we shall now look at some highlights from Perry's political career.

Domestic Policy

Taxes

The Club for Growth—an organization dedicated to the lowering of taxes and tax rates, the reduction of spending, and, in short, greater economic liberty and prosperity—generally regards Perry's record as Texas governor favorably. Yet it also is quick to point out that it is not without its fair share of blemishes.

For instance, in 1987, while still a Democratic Congressman (itself a telling tidbit), Perry voted in favor of the largest tax increase, not just in the history of Texas, but in that of the United States, up until that juncture.

To the objection that this was when Perry was a Democrat and, thus, it doesn't count, a reply is ready at hand. As recently as 2003, well after Perry became a Republican and after he was elected governor, he issued his first budget. While he did cut spending and did not raise taxes, he elicited billions of dollars in revenue by way of a complex of "revenue adjustments, surcharges, and fees" on an assortment of services. As the Club for Growth notes, these fees are not equivalent to increases in taxes, "but they are anti-growth and serve the same purpose of funding government."

But there are other spots on Perry's record.

In 2006, Perry advanced an ambitious property tax-cut proposal. To insure that his proposal would become law, he is also lent his support to a “gross receipts tax”—a tax on the gross revenues of Texas corporations. The corporate income tax may have been eliminated, but this new tax “nearly tripled the amount that Texas collected from businesses.” According to the Cato Institute, although Perry’s bill supplied property owners with relief, it “really socked it to businesses.” Moreover, it “centralizes fiscal power at the state level, which will encourage government growth in the long run by stifling local tax competition.”

Spending

Perry is a mixed bag on spending as well.

While his “record on spending generally reveals fiscally conservative tendencies,” Perry has “created well-intentioned, but misguided state-funded subsidy programs to attract corporations to Texas,” a move on his part that “again indicate that Perry doesn’t necessarily fully rely on free-market principles when he makes economic decisions.” Club for Growth reports that Perry “aggressively used government spending to attract jobs to Texas” (emphasis mine). The Texas Enterprise Fund and the Texas Emerging Technology Fund are two robust economic development initiatives that Perry signed into law. The problem is that “initiatives like these, often supported by big business, create huge market distortions in a place that should naturally be a nationwide leader in attracting jobs.”

To put it simply, Perry has proven himself to be a proponent of corporate welfare. As Club for Growth states, Perry’s “gimmicky subsidies” implies that he “is more pro-business than he is pro-free markets.”

In his Fed Up! Perry objects to the federal government’s several failed attempts to address the economic crisis of 2008. However, as Club for Growth observes, he also intimates reluctant support for such measures—as long as they are “temporary.” President Bush may have initiated the expansion of government power over the economy, but, as Bush himself famously (notoriously?) said, he “abandoned free-market principles to save the free-market system.” That is, because government intervention courtesy of Republican President Bush was only meant to be for a limited time to address a crisis, it may be necessary. But Democratic President Obama seeks to make such intervention “permanent.”

As far as entitlements, Perry’s work at trimming them down has been not altogether unsuccessful. Yet it isn’t just congratulations that he his owed. As the Governor of Texas, Perry couldn’t resist trying to impose a mandate on insurance companies that would have required them to offer a specific prescription drug plan.

It is also important to recall that while Perry was a candidate for Agriculture Commissioner in 1990, he advocated price supports for farmers.

Other Issues

That Perry is most definitely not the champion of liberty that he makes himself out to be is also born out by two other highly significant facts.

First, as governor of Texas, Perry permitted illegal aliens to pursue a higher education for the same tuition price charged to the state's legal residents—a decision that amounted to the decision to grant a de facto amnesty.

Secondly—and this is particularly disturbing—Perry attempted, by way of executive order, to impose a vaccination upon young girls—whether they or their parents wanted it or not. That is, in order to get his way, Perry sought to circumvent the legislature.

Foreign Policy

Perry's foreign policy stance is not easy to differentiate from that of every other establishment Republican. He supports "the War on Terror," specifically, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and he is a stalwart defender of Israel. Considering that Perry has never so much as come close to signaling a desire to alter the current relationship between America and Israel, it is most reasonable to conclude that he wishes to continue subsidizing the latter via American foreign aid.

Conclusion

There is only so much that can be said about Perry within the little amount of time available to say it. Hopefully, what has been said here is sufficient to establish that Rick Perry, like the Republican Party to which he belongs, is bewitched by an ideology of Big Government.