



Fear's tyranny and freedom

By Jim Waters

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Our nation is guided by a Constitution entrusting individuals with a great deal of freedom while very intentionally restricting government's own ability to take away that freedom from citizens.

Yet recent developments indicate this principle is being turned on its proverbial head.

One glaring example comes from neighboring Indiana where FBI agents raided the rural home of 91-year-old Don Miller.

So, Miller must be an awful man charged with some heinous crime who was hauled off to jail, right?

Nope.

As I write this, Miller hasn't even been charged. Instead, the FBI's "art crime team" (what, you didn't know such an entity exists?) invaded Miller's home and seized artifacts — including Native American pieces — he collected during decades of missionary work worldwide.

The Indianapolis Star reports that I'm-too-powerful-and-important-to-even-be-questioned Special Agent in Charge Robert Jones wouldn't give details, saying only agents raided Miller's home because it "might be illegal" for him to possess some of the artifacts.

The Cato Institute's reaction was appropriate.

"Might be illegal. Or might have been acquired lawfully. They're not saying!" wrote Cato's Walter Olson in an article aptly entitled: "FBI Seizes Antiquities First, Asks Questions Later."

If you think the founders of America and its Constitution intended for a retired missionary to have artifacts he gathered over 80 years seized just because he "might" possess some of them illegally, I own a Mayan calendar straight from the Stone Age that I will gladly turn over!

While law enforcement officials often deal with tough circumstances, constitutional boundaries have been put in place to protect our liberties by restraining overzealous military types and

police agencies.

Are we moving in the wrong direction in this area even in Kentucky — where, for example, some simply suspected of serious drug crimes have property seized even before their guilt or innocence is determined?

While our society is quicker than ever to criminalize naïve – or even worse, innocent – citizens, it has become way too slow to lower the hammer on its own governments' corrupt activities.

Take, for example, the Kentucky Legislative Ethics Commission's failure to reprimand former Rep. John Arnold of Sturgis, who resigned last year after substantive accusations involving the sexual harassment of legislative aides in Frankfort.

Three of the commission's eight members missed the body's April meeting, at which it was decided that the commission would not publicly condemn Arnold, who faced several credible charges of groping, grabbing and propositioning female staff members right in the offices of House Democratic leaders at the Capitol in Frankfort.

The commission needed five votes to reprimand Arnold and/or fine him up to \$6,000. Only four votes could be secured; three of the commission members were — conveniently — out of town.

It should greatly concern all Kentuckians that we find ourselves in a time when jack-booted government thugs are emboldened while members of a state's ethics commission are afraid to even slap the hands of a degenerate lawmaker who apparently couldn't keep his to himself.

This is a twisted approach that must change if our society is to maintain even a semblance of the liberty our forefathers intended for us to enjoy and previous generations sacrificed to defend.

I fear we have too many law-enforcement officers who are not content with what should be their highest priorities: keeping the peace and protecting, not denying, our liberties — especially when there is absolutely no evidence of criminal activity.

This brings fear, which intimidates citizens and keeps them from exercising their constitutionally protected rights and living in full expression of their divinely given liberties.

“Where the people fear the government you have tyranny,” John Basil Barnhill said during a famous debate in 1914 with avowed socialist Henry Tichenor. “Where the government fears the people, you have liberty.”

I bet Don Miller agrees.

Jim Waters is president of the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Reach him at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com. Read previously published columns at www.bipps.org.