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Leviathan Vs. The Cajun Navy

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A friend who has been doing flood relief work in the Baton Rouge area writes, “Remember when I said there was never an emergency the state couldn’t add a layer of bureaucracy to?” He points to [a news story](#) showing a Louisiana state legislator wanting a law to regulate the Cajun Navy, the impromptu collection of citizen boatmen who rushed into the flooded areas to save people. From the story:

Jonathan Perry, a Republican state senator is working on legislation that could require training, certificates and a permit fee for citizen-rescuers to bypass law enforcement into devastated areas, according to a report from WWL-TV.

Perry represents Senate District 26, comprised of Vermilion Parish and portions of Acadia, Lafayette and St. Landry parishes.

“At the end of the day, there are going to be two things that are going to be the hurdle when you approach it from the state’s standpoint,” said Perry in a radio interview, per WWL-TV. “Liability is going to be number one for them. They don’t want the liability of someone going out to rescue someone and then not being able to find them (the rescuers) and, secondly, there’s a cost.”

Some who took part in the rescue parties have spoken out against the proposal, including Dustin Clouatre of St. Amant.

“How can you regulate people helping people? That doesn’t make sense to me,” said Clouatre to WWL-TV.

This is ridiculous. If this law passes, it will be widely disregarded in the next flood, as it should be. The Cajun Navy represents the best of Louisiana’s civil society, because it’s the outward sign of an inward state that Louisiana people carry within them. That law would be like Mayor Giuliani’s trying to ban jaywalking in New York City. It’s trying to go against the Tao. Won’t work.

Caleb Bernacchio, a Baton Rouge native who has family rescued by the Cajun Navy, writes about how there's no way to bureaucratize this kind of thing. Excerpts:

[Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre] envisions relationships that exist between friends, family, and total strangers, that are active in a more subtle way in daily life but which are most apparent in strong communities when disaster strikes. In Baton Rouge and Denham Springs, total strangers gave of their time and resources, sometimes putting their own lives at risk, to help those in need. And in similar communities around the world, on a daily basis communal bonds are evidenced by the way in which fellow community members give assistance to those in need in a manner that extends beyond economic calculations. This type of virtuous care is vital to the well-being of community members, yet it often goes unnoticed.

MacIntyre argues that as human beings we are always vulnerable to threats that make flourishing precarious and that we can only really flourish by relying on the virtuous care of friends, family, and often total strangers to give to us when we are in need. The response to the recent floods gives ample evidence of the strength of virtuous networks spanning the communities of southern Louisiana. But maybe not surprisingly, the localism of the relatively rural population of southern Louisiana also offers an example of the parochialism and “irrationality” derided by elites in the wake of the Brexit vote. While economic models can largely capture increased economic efficiency stemming from globalization, economists struggle to explain the type of widespread cooperation, apparent in southern Louisiana, and described by MacIntyre in terms of networks of giving and receiving.

More:

Mainstream economists often dismiss the type of virtuous behavior on display in southern Louisiana as irrational, or attempt to reduce it to some sort of utilitarian calculation, as if members of the “Cajun Navy” were tacitly performing cost/benefit analyses each time they came across someone in distress. MacIntyre argues that the economic theory is unable to account for the role of genuinely common goods that transcend the distinction between egoism and altruism. The failure of economic theory to explain the virtuous behavior exemplified in the wake of the floods in Louisiana is directly related to the bankruptcy of political discourse in the United States and Europe.

What many pundits, economists, and gleeful proponents of globalization fail to understand is that relationships of gratuitous giving and receiving that form the basis of virtuous communities are often threatened by disintegration and marginalization as a result of globalizing economic policies. These virtuous relationships and personal bonds are required for local communities to subsist and for individuals to flourish, especially when they are in need. MacIntyre, in *Dependent Rational Animals*, points to threats to communal integrity stemming from consumerism and reduced job stability, both making virtuous relationships, and therefore actual human flourishing, more precarious.

Read the whole thing. It's an important short essay that deserves wide distribution.

It sounds petty to people outside the state for us to be irritated by things like the Red Cross not letting people come into shelters to pray with folks (pray, not proselytize), but prayer and religious observance is part of the natural, organic way of life in south Louisiana. Telling people they can't go into shelters to comfort people with prayer is one the spectrum of a legislator wanting to regulate the Cajun Navy.

Say, if you want a t-shirt with the Cajun Navy logo of the photo illustrating this post, [go here to order](#). All proceeds go to the Louisiana Red Cross.

UPDATE: The Louisiana state senator who proposes the regulation says he has been misunderstood. [He explains it from his point of view in this video](#).

Walter Olson [isn't really buying it](#). Excerpt:

I'm trying to give Perry's explanation a charitable reading — I guess he hopes something like a TSA preclear process will give police or authorities more confidence than they now have in letting licensed/approved amateurs past barricades and perimeters. But it's pretty easy for me to imagine that this will change the incentives in a future emergency so as to give the police/authorities reason to be more aggressive in creating and enforcing barriers/perimeters than they currently are.