

<http://reason.com/blog/2009/10/08/james-pinkerton-most-republica>

James Pinkerton: "Most Republicans Are Not Libertarian," So Deal With it

Matt Welch | October 8, 2009

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal's recent health care proposals in the *Washington Post* drew a mixed response from free-market commentators, including Reason's own Peter Suderman and the Cato Institute's Michael Cannon, especially over the sticking point of requiring insurance companies to cover anyone who applies. The critiques provoked a sharp slap at libertarian purity from conservative thinker (and occasional *Reason* contributor) James Pinkerton. Excerpt:

Everyone has a right to his or her principled position, but the majority has rights, too. In the case of a ban against discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, some 89 percent of Americans support such a provision, according to a Wall Street Journal poll. The Cato Institute, never having to worry about elections, will suffer no harm from upholding a position held by just a smidgen of the population--and can even hold up its minoritarian resolve as a badge of honor--but politicians are in a different category. [...]



So while it was not surprising to see Cato denounce Jindal, it was a bit surprising to see a conservative publication, *The American Spectator*, join in the denunciation; within hours of Jindal's op-ed, Philip Klein, writing for the Spectator, had posted his response, headlined, "Jindal's Incoherence on Health Care."

Why the surprise on the *Spectator's* attack on Jindal? Because while the libertarian Cato Institute can always be expected to uphold ivory-tower free-market purity--completely abstracted from the chore of actual governance--conservatives, for the most part, have given themselves the task of forging a "governing conservatism." Libertarian heroes are figures such as Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, and Ayn Rand, none of whom ever ran for office, much less were ever in charge of anything. Indeed, the great value of libertarian thinking is its purity [...]

Yes, it's true that any sort of government mandate is un-libertarian. But here's a newsflash: The American people are not libertarian. Most conservatives are not libertarian. Most Republicans are not libertarian. Yes, conservatives and Republicans have libertarian impulses, but they are more likely to be moved by instincts toward traditional morality, patriotism, and nationalism.

That's why conservatives and Republicans tend to support plenty of regulation that is un-libertarian. Most are pro-life, for example, and supportive of other government efforts to bolster family values. Moreover, conservatives and Republicans support the police, the military, and other upholders of public order. Indeed, most conservatives--and virtually all elected Republicans--support at least some form of Social Security, Medicare, public education, pollution controls, and other restrictions on perfect freedom. And in the realm of health care and medicine, most conservatives support government restrictions on stem-cell research, organ trafficking and euthanasia.

Governing conservatives, such as Jindal, must take this lumpy political and ideological reality into account. Libertarians can be expected to take their shots at Jindal & Co., because the mere act of getting elected can be taken as proof that a man or woman is prepared to make compromises.

Cannon responds [here](#); Klein [here](#).