

We Want Limited Government...Except When (Fill in the Blank)

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The true starting point, especially for Americans, is to candidly acknowledge that our primal impulse is a belief in limited government.

The second true starting point is to candidly acknowledge that our belief in limited government is, itself, limited.

The profound and intense conviction that government should be kept under strict control, off our backs and out of our lives, was the linchpin of the original American Revolution. It has been the centerpiece of our history—the *leitmotif* of the continuing American Revolution—ever since. It remains the staple of today's politics

But when the nation was attacked on September 11, 2001, or when the economy collapsed as it did in 2008, no one in America wanted our government's response to be limited.

Nor do we really want government's to be too limited when there is a burglar at the door, a fire in the kitchen, brown sludge coming out of the tap, a pothole in the street, a broken light at the intersection, an overflowing garbage cart, a problem school, or a rancid piece of meat.

Nor do we want government to be limited when it comes to honoring the commitments it made, once we turn 65, to enroll us in Medicare and pay our medical bills.

Nor do we want government to limit our Social Security checks.

In all these situations, we want government to be visible, strong, on our side, and true to its word. When the United States is attacked, we want government to hit back soon and hard. When the economy crumbles, we want government to act swiftly to bring about a recovery.

We want government to act—to act now, and to act efficiently—to protect us against criminals and safeguard us from health risks, to help us to get an education and to guarantee us a predictable pension, to keep inflation in check and make sure we do not get mangled at work or swindled by the bank. And we want government to honor its commitments to us—to provide us the Unemployment Insurance benefits, the Medicare coverage, and the Social Security benefits that we worked years, typically decades, to earn.

Yet at the same time, we want government to stay away—far, far away—from the day-to-day personal decisions we make. Should we take a nap or sit on the

porch? Our call. Eat a hot dog or pizza? Our call. Order pepperoni or three cheeses? Our call. Drink a soda or a beer? Our call.

Work, quit, retire, worship, read, listen, write, play, vacation, join, invest, wed, divorce, rent, own? All our calls. In 99% of the decisions that we make each day, both large and small, we want government to play no role whatsoever

In short: Americans want government to perform dozens of specific functions that make our lives physically safe, economically secure, and protected from the abuses of the marketplace, *and* at the same time we want government to be extremely limited in its reach and power so that we can remain free individuals in a free society with a free economy.

Given, then, American's twin impulses—and potentially conflicting goals—of security and freedom, how should we define the place that government ought to occupy in the economic and social life of the United States?

More specifically, since we cannot ignore history, in the wake of the many decisions that the New Deal has *already* made about the role of government in our economy and society, how do we *redefine* and then *restructure* the place of American government so that it simultaneously maximizes both security and freedom in the 21st century?

How to solve this puzzle is the subject of this website.