

Slavery, Fiscal Irresponsibility, and Interest Groups

Philip Bitar, Ph.D.

campaign@LetsTearUpTheBlankCheck.com

www.LetsTearUpTheBlankCheck.com

www.ThePeoplesAmendment.com

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Slavery

Starting in 1791, the year of the horrendously bloody Haitian slave revolt, the small minority of large-scale slaveholders in the American slave states justifiably became alarmed about the possibility of slave revolts in their states. As a result, they succeeded in establishing a policy of suppressing discussion of alternatives to slavery in the slave states so that word wouldn't leak through to the slaves of such discussion.

For the next 70 years — till the start of the Civil War in 1861 — this suppression of discussion prevented the slave states from maturing out of the mentality of slaveholding, while the northern states did mature out of that mentality because they allowed such discussion.

The southern disposition of suppressing discussion of alternatives to slavery became so extreme that eventually the slave states demanded that the northern states also suppress discussion of alternatives to slavery. And in 1836, the slave states succeeded in formally suppressing such debate in the United States House of Representatives, making such debate illegal in that body. Following this lead, the Senate suppressed discussion in the Senate based on a gentleman's agreement. The House gag rules, as they were called, were opposed by many northerners, and John Quincy Adams, now a member of the House, led the movement to repeal them. They were finally repealed in 1844.

According to the 1860 census, 75% of southern families owned no slaves, and the minority of slaveholders whose livelihood depended on slavery — large-scale slaveholders — comprised less than 1% of southern families.

In today's terms, this problem is the notorious problem of the undue influence of interest groups. Interest groups achieve their ends through a divide-and-conquer strategy applied to a legislature, and this is possible because legislator votes must be public so that their constituents can hold them accountable. It is also true that in the antebellum United States, citizen votes were public, and this expanded the divide-and-conquer influence of the slaveholders from elected legislators to the populace-at-large through intimidation.

As a result of these factors, it was impossible for the non-slaveholding southerners to control the destiny of the southern states even though they comprised an overwhelming majority of the population, and the eventual result was civil war. In short, the fundamental reason for the war, according to my analysis, is that a small but powerful minority of citizens — large-scale slaveholders — could suppress discussion of alternatives to slavery.

Fiscal irresponsibility

What does slavery have to do with fiscal irresponsibility? Here's the parallel:

- ◆ **Prior to 1861, the foremost political problem in the United States was the problem of slavery, and a small minority of southerners controlled the destiny of the southern states through the divide-and-conquer strategy of interest groups.**
- ◆ **Today the foremost political problem is the fiscal irresponsibility of governments, and interest groups are again determining the destiny of governments through their divide-and-conquer strategy applied to legislators. This is the reason that virtually every representative government is fiscally irresponsible, and the larger the government, the worse the problem.**

To illustrate, although the state of California is taxing its citizens heavily, California is among the states that are leading the way into bankruptcy. Why? Because interest groups get benefits through their divide-and-conquer strategy in the legislature, and once an interest group gets such benefits, it's virtually impossible for the legislature to repeal them. In California, these interest groups include — believe it or not — lobbyists for illegal aliens.

Citizen control of their money

What is the solution for the problem of the fiscal irresponsibility of governments?

There is only one solution that solves the problem at its root:

The citizens who earn the money and own the money must control the ability of the government to get their money.

How?

Through a citizen-controlled ceiling on government income+debt.

This will decisively solve the fiscal problem for two reasons:

- ◆ **The citizens will protect their money because they must earn it through work or investment. They can't just vote themselves more money as a legislature can do.**
- ◆ **The citizens are no longer subject to the divide-and-conquer strategy of interest groups because a citizen vote is now private.**

With a fair number of states heading toward bankruptcy — California, New York, and Michigan leading the way — government officials are at the helm of sinking ships of state. A number of Republican governors have recently made headlines in their efforts to stop the unrestrained growth of government that is driven by the divide-and-conquer strategy of interest groups. However, we can see that it is proving extremely difficult to make progress in this endeavor, and the sad fact is that the progress that will be made is bound to be short-term — lasting until Democrats take control, once again, as they are bound to do in the not-too-distant future.

Washington State presents a uniquely informative political testbed because Washington is one of the 24 states that has an initiative process, and the citizens of Washington tend to elect fiscal liberals while also approving initiatives for fiscal restraint. This demonstrates that when the people can vote directly for measures of fiscal restraint, they tend to approve them. Why do they do this? Because of the bullets that I stated above and that I'll restate here:

- ◆ **The citizens protect their money because they must earn it through work or investment. They can't just vote themselves more money as a legislature can do.**
- ◆ **The citizens are not subject to the divide-and-conquer strategy of interest groups because a citizen vote is private.**

Conclusion

As citizens of Washington State, we are privileged because we have an initiative process and because the citizens of Washington tend to elect fiscal liberals. In this context, we can show the other states — and the nation — how to solve the problem of the fiscal irresponsibility of government by a twofold strategy:

- ◆ **In 2012, we get *The People's Initiative* on the ballot in Washington State, and history teaches us that the voters of Washington will approve it. In fact, due to its unique appeal to the people, the initiative should obtain an overwhelming approval vote if we implement a competent campaign.**
- ◆ **With a competent campaign having outstanding publicity, we pay for and publicize the ongoing poll numbers that should reveal a growing tidal wave of support for the initiative. Fiscal conservative candidates for the legislature will then be able to use these poll numbers to ride the tidal wave into office.**

Thus, in learning from history, and we not only get the fiscal restraint that we need through the best initiative that we can conceive, but we also use the initiative to enable fiscal conservatives to ride into office on a tidal wave of popular support for the initiative.