

POLICY BRIEF

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Thanksgiving Thoughts

As Thanksgiving approaches, it is truly a time for reflection. This year will find millions of Americans in a somber mood as the still raw memories of September 11 provide a backdrop for our celebrations. In view of what the country has been through it is more important than ever for the American people to be grateful for the rich blessings we have had bestowed upon us. For citizens of the United States the most precious of these blessings is our liberty. A gift to us that has been purchased over the years at a very high price by those who sacrificed much defending freedom.

Our freedoms remain under assault from many directions. And the saddest truth is that Americans have been far too willing to see their freedoms eroded in exchange for illusory and fleeting benefits. Locally, we see far too much evidence of a mentality that denigrates or denies the powerful and positive role the private sector plays in our economic well-being. Those who hold these views are constantly pressing to have the government play a greater role in directing activity that is properly the province of the private sector.

Two recent news stories are particularly distressing. In Washington County, officials want the former Western Center to be taken over by the County's Redevelopment Authority. The state had originally planned to auction the property, appraised at \$9.5 million, to the highest bidder. A number of state legislators intervened to have the land taken off the "surplus property" list in order to give the County the inside track. Their rationale: a public entity would develop the land for the public good. Unsaid was the implied criticism that the private sector cannot be trusted to develop the land to its highest and best use.

Also implied is that the profit motive, which drives private sector activity and has boosted our living standards to the highest in the world, is not to be trusted in Washington County. How unfortunate. Profit seeking by businesses and individuals is a clear example of the application of our unalienable rights of liberty and pursuit of happiness. The competition produced by profit seekers helps preserve our economic freedom and well being by providing an endless variety of products and occupations from which to choose.

In a second story, the co-director of the Western Pennsylvania Living Wage Campaign responded to Councilman Martoni's plans to discuss the proposed living wage ordinance with representatives of Chambers of Commerce by saying, "I think it is very troubling when you hear members of council say you have to run this by chambers of commerce." The message: the business community has no right to have input into far-reaching legislation, which is almost certainly harmful to the business climate of Allegheny County. What hubris. According to this

spokesperson's view, the very people who produce jobs by putting their capital, sweat and hearts into business enterprises should have no standing with the Council on this critical issue.

A fundamental truth must be rediscovered in this region. There is no individual freedom without economic freedom. The highest expression of economic freedom is the ability to use one's resources and talents to create and own a business and to try to make a profit. It is time for us to recognize and be thankful for the fact that in most of this country the pursuit of profits is not something society merely tolerates as a necessary evil but something to be encouraged and applauded.

The founders of this nation who put their lives, fortunes and sacred honor on the line to achieve independence could not have intended that their descendants would pursue happiness by turning private market decisions over to the government. We must be jealous of our liberties and rights and preserve them for generations yet unborn. Our freedoms are our greatest blessing as a people. We should be thankful enough to want to keep them.

We wish you a Happy Thanksgiving.

Jake Haulk, Ph.D. President

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