

Pushing Back Against Big Government and the Government Class

Presented by Tom Giovanetti, IPI President

On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary Celebration: A New Frontier for Liberty

My wife's eyes just roll when we are in a social situation and someone asks me "And what do you do?" She's learned that my answer "I work for a free-market public policy think tank" normally results in kind but blank, confused stares.

Because it's not exactly a typical job. To this day I'm not sure my parents understand what I do for a living, though my father does feel free to regularly tell me what's wrong with the country, and what I ought to be doing about it.

My wife's shorthand explanation of what I do for a living is to say "he's in politics." Which technically is not true, but more importantly, what we do at IPI is actually more important than politics. Let me explain.

Whoever wins the battle of ideas in the public mind, wins the politics. It really is true that we have to persuade people—win hearts and minds, as they say—if we are going to see our ideas make their way into law. Otherwise, politics can be relied upon to make things worse. So if we do our jobs right, we make it a lot easier for our elected officials. If we win the battle for ideas, we open windows of opportunity that our elected officials can sail through.

And, by the way, when I talk about winning the battle of ideas, I mean that we have to persuade Republicans as well as Democrats. As we've painfully learned, just because a Republican claims to be a conservative, that doesn't mean that he or she won't go out and spend money like crazy, bail out failing financial institutions, create new entitlement programs and vote for unconstitutional Internet tax proposals.

Just because someone calls themselves conservative doesn't mean they are faithful to conservative principles. Today there are conservative think tanks in Washington that are pushing carbon taxes. There are conservative think tanks in Washington that thought Romneycare was a great idea. There are conservative think tanks that defended TARP and the bank bailouts. Not IPI. That's one of the benefits of being a safe 2,000 miles from Washington DC.

Today, we're trying to put a leviathan federal government back within its constitutional restraints. We're arguing that it's time for the states to stand up against the federal government, remembering what Ronald Reagan said in his first inaugural address: "All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government." (by the way—that's your assignment for tonight when you get home—read Reagan's first inaugural address. It sounds as if it were written for today. Let's hear no more from those supposed conservatives telling us that we need to "move on" from Ronald Reagan). For any governor or state legislature that determines to stand up to the federal government, the Constitution is on your side.

We have to put Big Government back within its Constitutional restraints because Big Government has led to the establishment of a Government Class that lives at the expense and off the backs of the productive private

sector. And when you allow a ruling class to live better than you but at your expense, you are on the way to losing your freedom.

Today the Government class enjoys higher salaries, better benefits, better job security, less anxiety, and even exemptions from the same laws that restrict the private sector. They are no longer public servants, and should no longer be referred to as such. An enormous chunk of the economy today consists of activity that is not productive, but rather lives by taking from those who produce and demanding ever more and more. And every problem in our country would be solved if we would only give them more of our produce.

And what happens when we dare suggest that they should rein in their spending by a couple of pennies out of a dollar? They punish us by releasing illegal immigrant felons from prison, by delaying our flights, by closing government buildings and by threatening us with restricted services.

This is not the behavior of public servants. This is the behavior of a Ruling Class, punishing its subjects for questioning its authority. And these are but the first few skirmishes.

If we are serious about putting government back within its Constitutional limits, it isn't going to be pretty. It's going to take courageous leaders like Senator Cruz, and like some of our other elected friends who are here with us tonight. And it's going to take groups like IPI, that are unafraid to explain to the American people that they are in danger of losing their freedom to a Big Government that promises them economic security, when everyone knows Big Government cannot keep those promises.

We have to persuade people—change hearts and minds—that the economic security they desire for themselves and their families is not best achieved through Big Government, but rather through freedom and opportunity. That low taxes and limited government is best not only for the achievers in society, but for everyone—because you can't take care of the needy and provide a safety net unless you have a strong, growing economy.

I mentioned earlier that, in my own humble and biased opinion, that what we do at IPI in persuading people is actually more important than politics, or at least that it logically precedes politics.

Reflecting back on the previous election, I can't help but think if we had spent maybe a few million dollars less on TV commercials in the last election, and instead invested that money in organizations like IPI that are in the business of changing hearts and minds every day of the year, instead of just for 3 months every four years, maybe we would have gained a lot more territory.

If all we do every four years is spend huge amounts of money on political consultants who pass the money through to their own business partners making commercials and buying up so much TV time that people get sick of it and just turn off the TV, we are not going to persuade people. We are not going to succeed.

Someone has said that you can't teach people anything new during an election—you can only remind them of what they already know. What we do at IPI is help them with the “what they know” part.

It frankly makes more sense to invest more in groups like IPI that are in the business of educating and persuading people every day, regardless of where we are in a given election cycle. Because if we don't pry open windows of opportunity, that leaves us completely reliant on the statesmanship of our politicians. Um, hope that works out for you.

I got into this business 20 years ago because I was interested in politics, and conservative philosophy. I got into it because I was in love with Ronald Reagan and Jack Kemp.

For sure you don't go into the think tank business because it pays well, because it doesn't, as every IPI staff member can attest. If you don't believe me, hang around afterward and check out the car I drove here in this evening!

But I stay in this business because of that 15 year-old right there, and because of his friends, because if we don't things back on the right track, we are going to leave them a freakin mess. They're going to inherit a country paralyzed by a crippling debt that has lost its credibility in the world. They're going to inherit a world where the values of Western Civilization and the Judaeo-Christian world view are overrun because we were too caught up in our own economic suicide to defend our own values.

So this is what we do—fulltime, evenings and weekends. We're committed, but we can't do it without an army of partners who every once in a while dig down and make a contribution so that we can keep writing the op/eds and publishing the studies and putting out the press releases and flying around the country to testify in state legislatures.

One thing I can promise you—if you are a supporter of IPI, your contributions are used very carefully. You wouldn't believe how tight we are with a dollar.

Speaking of dollars, if you're here tonight and you want to make a contribution, there are envelopes right there on the tables in front of you. We're not going to twist your arm, but we do want to give you the opportunity to become a partner with us in our work. Don't forget that contributions are tax-deductible, at least this year. If you decide to make a contribution tonight, you can drop off your envelope at the registration tables as you leave tonight, and we'll send you a written acknowledgement of your contribution.

I hope I've conveyed a little bit of the passion and conviction that we at IPI have for getting this country back on track. Frankly, if you care about America, you need people like us doing what we do. So thank you for your friendship, for being here with us tonight, and for your support of the Institute for Policy Innovation. Thank you.