



## Continuing on the Question of Government Growth...

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on May 6, 2005 - 12:03pm

One thing I think that got lost in my discussion of government growth into either fascism or communism the other day is my distaste for completely centrally empowered government totalitarianism of either ilk. Centralization of any kind takes away freedoms by definition: the more centralized, the less freedom there is.

My point is that oil dependency is creating, and will certainly create more and more over time, the need for government: if peak oil is indeed here or past or right around the corner, and supplies get disrupted creating superspikes, many scenarios exist (including those that involve terrorism and those that do not) where the powers that government already has can grow in expedited fashion, either to the right or to the left, by the demands of the people.

By the way, to be candid, my discussion of fascism was prompted for two reasons: it just happens to be that the right is in power right now...and I have a problem with people calling Bush a "conservative" (hence my contrast between Reagan's devolution of government power to Bush's growth of it). He's not. He is a Reactionary at best.

But let's be clear, I'm not necessarily cracking on Bush, I'm cracking on the system.

It may surprise you, but I think if the Democrats were in power right now, similar behaviors would be happening, for what it's worth. But, understand, that's a symptom of our two party system and the influence of corporate interests at work.

There might be more resources granted to those who want to create alternate forms of energy under a Democratic regime due to green pressures, but even the Democrats would not be willing to take the politically unwise steps needed to quell the coming crisis, such as demand destruction through taxes and massive redistributions of wealth and power from corporate interests.

I guess that's my even bigger point. Solving this quickly is a conundrum. A big one. That's why activism from both sides, from the right AND the left, and political unity on this issue is going to be the ONLY thing that could save us from suffering the ills of peak oil and its related problems. So, either we wait for the crisis (which I agree with many of our readers is going to be the course of things, but I'd sure like to avoid it if possible...) or we work together.

In fact, that's why unprecedented political will and bipartisan cooperation are #2 on Matt Savinar's list of things that need to occur to avoid this crisis:

1. A few dozen technological breakthroughs,
2. Unprecedented political will and bipartisan cooperation,
3. Tremendous international collaboration,
4. Massive amounts of investment capital,
5. Fundamental reforms to the structure of the international banking

6. No interference from the oil-and-gas industries,
7. About 25-50 years of general peace and prosperity to retrofit the world's \$45 trillion dollar per year economy, including transportation and telecommunications networks, manufacturing industries, agricultural systems, universities, hospitals, etc., to run on these new sources of energy,
8. A generation of engineers, scientists, and economists trained to run a global economy powered by new sources of energy.

It is my opinion that we need to push for government to expedite the creation of alternative energy sources now, while we have the resources, if we wish to protect any of our freedoms. It's that simple. Oil dependency is creating a scenario where our country's standard of living will have to regress quite a bit before it gets better.

And remember, once governments, whether communist or fascist or whatever, get entrenched with power, as the Founders said, it's very difficult to get the power back from them, meaning freedoms are restricted for quite a while until the people take them back.

I rather like my freedoms. They're pretty cool.

There's a great [piece in The New Republic today by Jonathan Chait](#) that's dead on topic re: the growth of government power under Bush. It's subscription only, but here's a blurb from it:

"Big-government conservatism" may sound like an oxymoron, but Bush has proved that it is not: He is undeniably a conservative, and, just as undeniably, he has expanded the power of the federal government. How, though, can a conservative preside over a larger and more intrusive government? Conservative intellectuals have made a series of attempts to explain (or, in some cases, explain away) the president's Leviathan tendencies. Three interwoven theories have emerged.

The first defines big-government conservatism as a concession to public demand. As Ramesh Ponnuru of National Review has written, "[T]he constituency for smaller government is too weak to prevail." Many of the critics as well as the defenders of big-government conservatism agree on this point. The critics--like Ponnuru and his colleague Jonah Goldberg--see big-government conservatism as a simple ideological capitulation.

Defenders have tried to portray big-government conservatism as making virtue out of political necessity. George F. Will defines big-government conservatism as using government programs to promote moral values among the citizenry. Weekly Standard editor Fred Barnes posits that big-government conservatives are "realistic and programmatic," embracing "programs that work." The Economist has endorsed both the virtue and the programmatic interpretations.

None of these accounts, though, goes very far toward explaining what Bush has done and why he has done it. If government has expanded under Bush because of hostile currents of public opinion, then it should have expanded even faster under President Clinton, who was less conservative than the current president. But, in fact, non-defense spending as a percentage of the economy actually declined under Clinton, from 17 percent of gross domestic product to 15.5 percent, before rising smartly under the present administration from 15.5 to 16.5 percent. (Did homeland security contribute to the rise in spending under Bush? Just a bit: It accounts for about one-seventh of the domestic spending hikes.) Conservatives haven't explained why a moderate liberal like Clinton had an easier time than Bush in resisting popular demand to spend.

And the efforts to put a positive spin on big-government conservatism are embarrassingly sparse. If you itemize the ways Bush has enlarged Washington's power, few of them have any plausible connection to moral values. (David Kuo, former White House deputy director of faith-based initiatives, complained that the administration "never really wanted the 'poor people stuff.'") Fewer still can be considered demonstrably effective. (Barnes musters only three examples of Bush supporting "programs that work": the Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program, the National Weather Service, and the National Science Foundation, which combined represent a miniscule portion of the expansion of spending under his administration.)

The failure of intellectuals on the right to adequately define big-government conservatism reflects their failure to grasp the ways that DeLay and Abramoff became central to the conservative movement in Washington. To define big-government conservatism as a form of pragmatism or as the promotion of virtue is to miss its fundamentally corrupt nature. In truth, the most accurate definition--that is, the definition that explains the broadest scope of Bush's big-government initiatives--is far less edifying: Biggovernment conservatism consists of initiatives that benefit economic elites without using free-market mechanisms."

I'll give you a why: peak freaking oil. That's why.

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