



Gene Ziegler

Octogenarian Time Capsule

## **The rent is too damn high!**

*Where does government regulation come from? Why is the government so big?*

A comedian named Jimmy McMillan made a splash with a one-liner “The rent is too damn high”. It made no sense, but he kept repeating it and we all laughed. I think for some it came to represent that the cost of living was rising faster than incomes. A former Phoenix-local TV personality published a bizarre opinion piece during the Obama administration entitled “Obama is a Traitor” in which she claimed he woke up each morning and thought “What can I do to make government bigger today”. Her theme made even less sense than Jimmy’s.

So where does big government come from, if not from Obama? Most of it evolves in response to conflicts between people, between individuals and corporations, between two corporations, and between corporations and the international community. Most laws and most government agencies are there for good reasons. They are the fabric of our evolving civilization. They are there to curb the impulses of our darker angels. They are there to make us better, fairer, and to help us live up to our noble goals of equality and opportunity.

But not all programs come from practical concerns. One of the things that happens at Universities, where I spent most of my adult working life, is that when you get a collection of bright, well educated people together in any organization, they come up with a million good ideas to stretch the boundaries of the education enterprise. The result is an almost uncontrolled growth of new programs, new courses, new degrees, new activities. The same thing happens in government, and particularly in state legislatures. Take a look, if you have a strong stomach, at bills that are proposed, particularly those that never come up for a vote. You will be torn between tears of laughter and paralyzed by fear. It gets crazy out there.

Conservatives like to rail against “Big Government”. For most, it’s a slogan and lacks substance. Few can name what exactly part of big government they would like to see go away and are shockingly ignorant of what that might mean for them personally. The Tea Party was born out of personal frustration from feeling left out, left behind, unheard. But their inability to articulate or even understand their plight or place in American society leads them to lash out in all directions. “The taxes are too damn high!”, “The government is too damn big!”, “We are living beyond our means”. “We need a balanced budget”. “We need to slash programs and shrink government”.

There is an element of truth to all of this, but the slogans don’t help. They give rise to a sub-class of venial politicians, many of whom are ideologically aligned with the sloganeers, but many others who are opportunists more than willing to exploit the populism for their own ends. The results are too often draconian and short sighted, bloodletting, shredding of the fabric of

civilization. Throwing the baby out with the bath-water seems to be the political climate de jure. It culminates in authoritarianism and touches all of us.

I worked for an Ivy League business school that never lived within their budget. When they needed more money, they asked their wealthy alumni for more and always got what they needed. Can we do that as a nation? Yes, we actually can. It's all about taxation. Currently, the richest 1% hold about 38% of all privately held wealth in the United States while the bottom 90% held 73% of all debt. According to The New York Times, the richest 1 percent in the United States now own more wealth than the bottom 90 percent.

*~Gene Ziegler, Arizona, 2019*