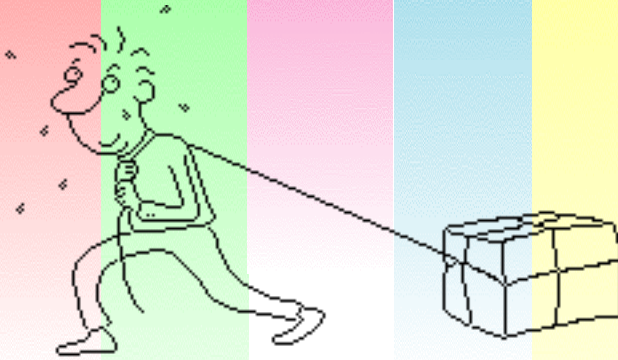


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what i want to know



essays, short stories and poetry by janet kuypers

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Balancing the Budget

If we are going to try to balance the budget, the key isn't in doing it by taxing everyone until the debt is gone. The key is accepting more responsibilities as citizens, and not expecting the government to make things easier on us.

The reason why the government costs so much money is because we continually expect it to do more and more for us. The capitalist base that this country was founded on suggests that the government is there to protect our basic rights - "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This means that as individuals we reign supreme - the no one has the right to take our life, our property or our ability to achieve what we are willing and capable of achieving.

However, as the years have progressed, our political leaders have told us that we need to be taken care of, and to appease us they have offered, as a government, to do more and more for us. And we have agreed, these things would be better if the government took care of them for us. But that was where we went wrong.

The government is bogged down with a quagmire of laws protecting ourselves from ourselves. Seat belt laws. Motorcycle helmet laws. Speed limits. Laws to tell you when a rapist moves into your neighborhood, or laws to tell you when you're mature enough to drive a car, or drink. Although it seems to make sense that we shouldn't do these things, that we should make responsible choices, the government is going beyond it's basic role of protecting us from the force of others by telling us as individuals what is legally safe, which is infringing on our rights.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we speed on a highway. By telling us we cannot speed, the government is infringing on our rights to do what we want with our property, as long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. If, because of our speeding, we hit another car and injure another person and/or their property, then we have infringed on another person's rights and we should be punished. But not until then. The government's job is to protect us from others, not from the possibility of accidents caused by others.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we choose to not wear our seat belts while driving or riding in a car. The government's job is not to protect us from ourselves, but from others. Even if we get injured in our cars because we weren't wearing our seat belts, we cannot and should not blame the government for not intervening - their job is to protect our right to decide whether or not we want to use these safety measures.

I won't argue that wearing your seat belt is not a good idea, or that all 10-year-olds should be learning to fly airplanes, but I'm not going to tell anyone that they should relinquish the responsibility of making these decisions to their government. When you let the government make some choices for you, what's to stop them from making all your choices for you? Capitalism is a clearly-defined set of rules, all surrounded around the notion that the individual human being's rights

are most important. When you start to slip into socialism, however, and let the government take control of some aspects of your life for you, they can take more and more - you've let them - until you're faced with a dictatorship, with communism, and no rights as an individual at all.

The government is also bogged down with providing for those who originally can't - and now won't - provide for themselves. The productivity generated by a free economy has produced a great many things, for all of the people in this country and others. It has raised the standard of living for all. Considering the standards people lived at two hundred years ago, considering the number of religious wars that killed so many over the thousands of years of human history, considering the hundreds and hundreds of years the world lived in moral and economic darkness with other political systems, it is evident what people owning their own work can do for productivity, creativity and progress.

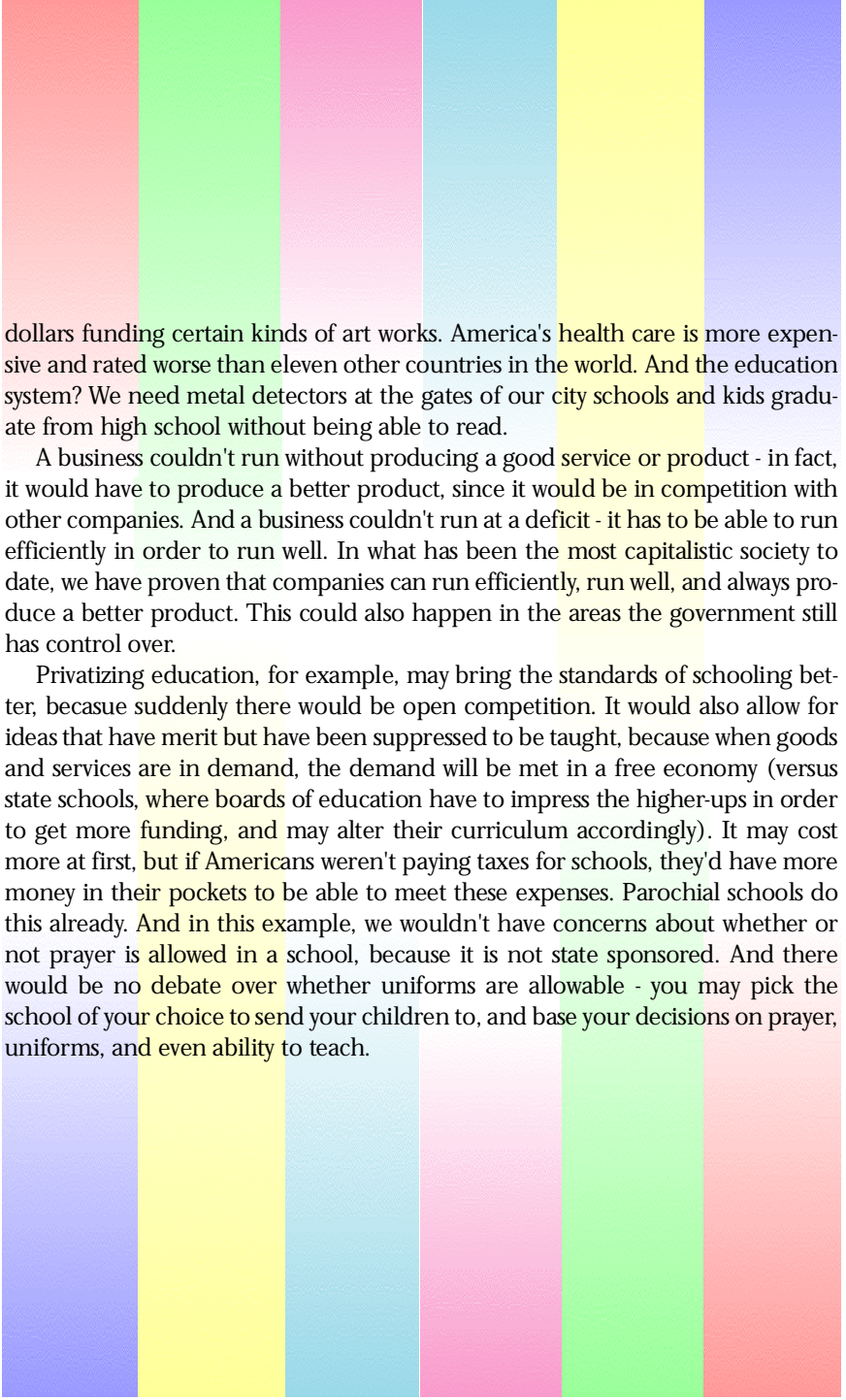
The creation of the welfare state has given people a reason to be unproductive. The creation of the welfare state has made people believe they deserve something for nothing. The government never said that every individual in the country was granted "life, liberty and a block of government-subsidized cheese." But this attitude, the attitude that people deserve something for nothing from their government, can be seen in our homeless on the streets, with their cups in their hands, marking a post to beg from in front of people daily commuting to work. They ask for money, bless you when you pass (invoking the notion of a god and the altruistic notion to give to others, even if - especially if - they don't deserve it), and occasionally, when they don't get the money they want from you, they scream in protest, as if the money in your pocket isn't yours, but theirs, and they have every right to expect a handout from you. America created this mentality when they created the welfare state, and we're paying for it in many ways. The lack of a balanced budget is only one way we're paying.

When the government - and the people - thought it was a good idea to help others, they didn't realize that helping themselves by being productive raised the standard of living, created new products and services for everyone, and did end up helping others. They also didn't realize that the productive earnings given to those who didn't earn it had to come from somewhere - and where it came from was from the productive people's pockets. And our productivity, as well as our budget - suffered for it.

The government is even bogged down with controlling and subsidizing many aspects of our lives.

National defense is a job for the national government, because part of it's job is to protect us from outside threats (that's the "life" part of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"). But supporting the arts, education, medicine - the government is not responsible for any of these things. And most of the mediums the government has some level of control over have suffered in one way or another.

The arts have come under great scrutiny because people don't want their tax



dollars funding certain kinds of art works. America's health care is more expensive and rated worse than eleven other countries in the world. And the education system? We need metal detectors at the gates of our city schools and kids graduate from high school without being able to read.

A business couldn't run without producing a good service or product - in fact, it would have to produce a better product, since it would be in competition with other companies. And a business couldn't run at a deficit - it has to be able to run efficiently in order to run well. In what has been the most capitalistic society to date, we have proven that companies can run efficiently, run well, and always produce a better product. This could also happen in the areas the government still has control over.

Privatizing education, for example, may bring the standards of schooling better, because suddenly there would be open competition. It would also allow for ideas that have merit but have been suppressed to be taught, because when goods and services are in demand, the demand will be met in a free economy (versus state schools, where boards of education have to impress the higher-ups in order to get more funding, and may alter their curriculum accordingly). It may cost more at first, but if Americans weren't paying taxes for schools, they'd have more money in their pockets to be able to meet these expenses. Parochial schools do this already. And in this example, we wouldn't have concerns about whether or not prayer is allowed in a school, because it is not state sponsored. And there would be no debate over whether uniforms are allowable - you may pick the school of your choice to send your children to, and base your decisions on prayer, uniforms, and even ability to teach.

Let the Government Tell You When You're Ready?

I have been hearing reports that a few counties are interested in putting waiting periods on obtaining marriage licenses unless the couples go through pre-marital counseling. Divorce rates are high, these people claim, and it is our responsibility as the people who allow marriages to make sure couples know what they're getting into. These defenders claim that divorces cause social stress as well as economic stress, and it is their responsibility to try to correct the problem.

The counseling would come in the form of meetings that would focus on such things as communication skills, dealing with problem solving, compromising and the like. It wouldn't be a matter of passing or failing; you would get your marriage license as long as you attended, even if you learned nothing. And what would the waiting period for a marriage license be? Three days if you take the counseling. Sixty days if you don't.

However, there are a number of problems this idea poses.

First, the decision in one county to wait on giving out a marriage license doesn't stop an anxious couple from going to the next county to get a marriage license. This merely makes people not want to marry in that particular county.

Second, couples can still hold out through the waiting period to get their marriage license, all without marriage counseling. Then the waiting period accomplishes nothing except putting off what the couple wanted in the first place.

Third, there is no clear definition of what kind of counseling would be done. Who decides what kinds of things need to be covered in these small sessions? The people running the sessions? What background do they have, and isn't it possible their views would conflict with the people they are counselling?

Fourth, who gets to be the counselors? Therapists? Psychologists? Psychiatrists? That costs a lot of money. People with marriages that have worked well? With little training, they would hardly be effective. The lawmakers? I know that personally I don't want the government to have as much intervention in my life as to tell me how to be a good wife.

Fifth, these counselling sessions are going to cost money. Therapy sessions cost \$100 and up an hour, so how is this going to be cost-effective for all people to be able to utilize? The answer is that in order to make it cheaper, the additional paperwork, the counselors, the space people are even counseled in - would have to be supported by tax dollars. In other words, every single taxpayer is going to be paying money so that couples who want to get married can have cheaper counseling. Additional paperwork costs money. Additional staff members to accom-



modate the work costs money. The rent for space couples use for counseling costs money. The counselors cost money.

For married people and people who aren't going to get married, or for people who are willing to wait and therefore don't go through the counseling, this means they are forced to pay money for something they cannot utilize. I know this happens everywhere in our current tax system, but adding more to it is insulting. The citizens of the United States should not have to subsidize other people's counselling. Counselling that the government is making them take.

Sixth, we have no idea if any sort of counselling or waiting period is effective at all in reducing the rate of divorce. In theory, all this expense, additional paperwork, and time consumed could amount to nothing. No studies have been done to test the effectiveness of this kind of plan.

Some religions offer counseling to people who plan to get married. Catholicism, for instance, requires people to go through a day-long seminars with their priest before that priest will marry them. Religious institutions have the right to do this, because people decide to be a part of an institution that imposes these restrictions. The United States government was designed with the rights of the individual in mind, and the idea of government-imposed counseling for couples who want to marry violates individual rights in two respects. One is that a couple should be able to get married, without the government forcing them to wait (the government is not supposed to apply force; it is supposed to protect its citizens from force). The other is that the government is forcing people to give up more of their money (in the form of additional taxes) and giving it to other people (the people being paid, and the people going through the counseling).

The government is not our moral regulator, nor should it ever be. And economic problems, in a capitalistic society, should be the concern of the individuals within the society, not the government. This is why these defenders are wrong when they claim that it is their responsibility to try to correct the problems of social and economic stress form divorce. The government has no reason - and no right - to intervene in people's private lives. This includes intervening with marriage - and divorce. There may be a problem with divorce in America, but the government is not the group to solve it. We - as individuals - are.

What Are Flexible Ethics?

The Lutheran Brotherhood compiled the following statistics: Nearly two-thirds of all adults believe ethics "vary by situation" or that there is no "unchanging ethical standard or right and wrong." Nearly eighty percent of all adults from age 18 to 34 believe ethics vary by situation, but even forty-eight percent of all adults aged 65 and up believe ethics vary by situation. Never did a majority of adults believe that there is one standard for every situation.

Now, I needed to look up the word "ethics" to make sure I wasn't getting confused with my terms. According to Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Tenth Edition), "ethic" has the following meanings:

1. the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation,
2. a set of moral principles or values,
3. a theory or system of moral values,
4. the principles of moral conduct governing an individual or a group,
5. a guiding philosophy.

This made me want to look up "moral," just to make sure I had this all clear:

1. of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior,
2. expressing or teaching a conception of right behavior,
3. conforming to a standard of right behavior,
4. sanctioned by or operative on one's conscience or ethical judgment.

What these statistics say is that eighty percent of adults from age 18 to 34 believe that what is "right" and "wrong," what is "good" and "bad," can change from situation to situation. What these statistics say is that eighty percent of adults from age 18 to 34 believe that the principles guiding themselves and change from moment to moment. What these statistics say is that eighty percent of adults from age 18 to 34 believe that a "guiding philosophy" cannot be consistent.

I looked at these numbers and was astounded. If the philosophy an individual uses to guide their life is not consistent, it's not a philosophy at all.

Consider it from a religious standpoint. In Catholicism, for instance, you should not have sex before marriage, or commit adultery. Religious leaders may forgive an individual if they have sinned,

their god may forgive them if they repent, but in Christianity is it wrong to have sex before marriage or commit adultery. But there are Catholics who break both of these promises they have made with their religion - with their philosophy. And although the adulterers may ask forgiveness, there are Catholics who claim to be Catholics but still have no problem with having sex before marriage (as long as you don't get caught, I suppose). But what this means is that these Catholics have claimed one philosophy and followed another. If they really believed in their Catholic ethics, they would not want to break them. It's that simple.

And this was in no way to pick on Catholicism versus any other religious belief - or any belief system, for that matter, that an individual claims to follow but does not follow - it is merely to show that a belief system is consistent, and it is the individuals who choose not to follow it consistently.

Consider, as another example, the fourth definition of "ethic." What if the principles of moral conduct for a group that you were in weren't consistent, what if they changed from situation to situation? What if one week it supported you as a member of the group because you got a job at a good business, for being good at what you do, and the next week they were condemning you because a black person should have had the job instead of you? What if one week the group supports your skill in creating a new product to improve people's lives, the next week they are telling you that your time is better spent feeding people who don't work for themselves? What if one week the group said they should support life and wouldn't let a woman in the group get an abortion, and the next week it decided it should reject life and kill your brother, who was falsely accused of murder and is in prison? What if one week the group said the government should lower taxes, and the next week it proclaims that it's the government's responsibility to help the poor, with more of your tax dollars?

I won't even talk about the fact that this "group" is merely a collection of individuals, each with rights that should not be violated. I won't even talk about you as an individual having the right to your own life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But imagine not knowing what laws will be enacted, not knowing what freedoms will be given to you and what freedoms will be taken away. Imagine not being able to gauge what will happen to your future. This is what it's like to have ethics that "vary by situation."

This is what is currently happening in our society today - people do not



have a consistent set of values, of morals, of theics - and it makes living a chronic state of terror.

Why do people, knowing these inconsistencies, living as if there are no absolutes, why do people continue to live this way?

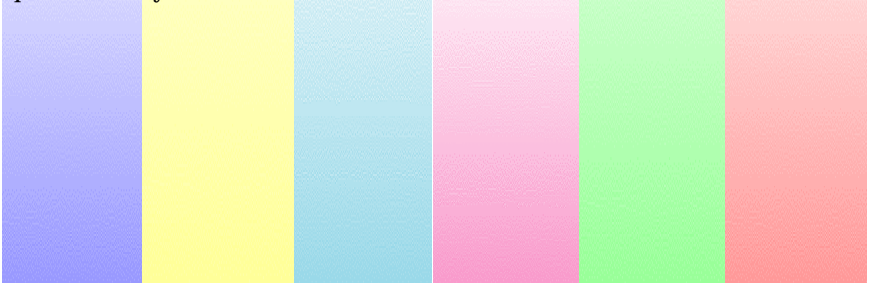
Our current philosophy classes teach people that "the world is in chaos." That "you can't make a difference." They question whether you can prove that you're not dreamiung through your entire life, or tell you that you can't even prove if you are merely a part of someone else's dream and do not even exist. They tell you to answer any difficult question with, "How should I know? I'm only human."

People are rational beings - that's what separates us from animals. People need to use their rational faculties in order to thrive. But they can choose not to use their mind - and the consequences are evident in the current trends in philosophy.

People, when faced with these alternatives for philosophy, turn to the religion that was forced down their throats as a child, to the same religion forced down their parent's throats when they were children, and claim that as their philospphical system. But they don't really believe in it, they don't really follow it.

But they need something, their mind keeps telling them, they need some sort of system of beliefs. And so they keep telling their mind to shut out the fact that the system they chose isn't working for them.

But what they should be doing is listening to their minds, following logic and reason, so that they can find a consistent set of answers to every question they face in life.



Boomers Beware

Who Pays the Price for Taxing the Rich?

Although ability, and the ability to keep what you're earned, individual rights to their own property, is what made America great, people still continue to attack the rich for earning money.

What was originally a reasonable article in the newspaper about how the estate tax affect many more than the "rich" and how it should be eliminated, became yet another slam on success, ability, and everything America worked to become.

USA Toady printed an article by Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise institute called "Boomers Beware: Estate Tax Now Not Just for the Rich."

It started by stating that the estate tax is only applicable to amounts over \$600,000, which has made it in the past apply only to a small group of the very rich. However, Baby Boomers are reaching retirement age - and when they pull their tax-deferred saving out to live on, they multitude of taxes, including the estate tax, could take up to 90 percent of their money away.

Seems reasonable to want to fight that.

What I wonder, though, is why it's okay to take it away from the "very rich," as our government has done in the past, versus the Baby Boomers. Because you're earned more you should be punished more? Because you're earned more means you don't have a right anymore to what you've earned?

The concept of a redistribution of wealth should be like fingernails to a chalkboard wo every American. America was based on the right to work for a living, and the right to be able to keep what you're earned. That's why, as Americans, most here have a profound hatred for communism - because most here believe that you should be rewarded for your achievements, not punished. But placing a higher burden on the "very rich" via taxation is a form of wealth redistribution, yet many people don't think twice about it.

The article then goes on to drop the bomb:

"Beyond the changing politics of wealth accumulation, estate taxes need rethinking for other reasons. The fact is they have not done what they were intended to do: prevent the handful of superwealthy from concentrating their gains even more in a small elite."

Why would the intention of a tax be to make sure the rich don't stay rich? Why would a government want to tell the people that have the most wealth (in other words, the people that produced the most, or the best, orpducts and services, the people that have been the most productive) that after working for their earnings all this time, they no longer have a right to all of it? What harm does someone see in someone being rich?

Other than people who hate accomplishment, hate the good for being good, other than people who are envious of talent, I can imagine no one that would think its fair to take the money away from someone who earned it, because they

earned it. We don't want the government, or robbers, for that matter, doing that to us. Why would we want to do it to someone else?

The article goes on: "Many western countries are doing away with estate taxes altogether, a course advocated by Speaker Newt Gingrich. America won't do that; an estate tax at least makes a statement about our values and our desire to prevent too much concentration of wealth and power."

If an estate tax at least makes a statement about "our values," what statement does it make? And who did he talk to to know that an estate tax makes any statement about our values. Who's values - every American's values? That's strange; the estate tax is anything but capitalistic - it's very un-American.

Keeping an estate tax shows what we don't value more than it shows what we do value. If we value an estate tax, we must not value the right to our own property, because we take money away from people simply because they have more. If we value an estate tax, we must not value the mind, reason or ability, because we are telling our producers that the welfare of poor people, of people who haven't produced and haven't shown ability, is more important than the producer.

And why would America want to prevent too much concentration of wealth and power? Money is power, only in the marketplace - it is not political power, or intellectual power. And the person who earned their money has the right to power in the marketplace, to be able to purchase what they want, or save what they want. That is their right.

Ornstein goes on to say, "But we surely can change a set of levies that ends up punishing savings and investment and will soon punish middle class success." Yes, we shouldn't be punishing savings and investment; that helps our economy as a whole and helps everyone in the nation as a whole. And no, we shouldn't punish middle class success. But why does that mean we should punish upper class success?

I don't know how America could have ever achieved as a nation with the philosophy that wealth should be redistributed. If so, we'd have a nation of equals, just like the Soviet Union promised its comrades. A nation all standing in bread lines together.

Yes, the estate tax should be eliminated, but for reasons that are the opposite of what Mr. Ornstein suggests. The tax is morally wrong. It's wrong, if an individual's rights are to be upheld, to take away their money because they happen to have more. Let's not slip into the same mistakes other countries in history have made, by overtaxing the rich, who earned their money, and giving it to the poor, who didn't. If there's no incentive to work for achievements, and earnings, there will eventually be no one producing, and everyone will suffer. Who pays the price for taxing the rich? Every last one of us.

The Illness of Volunteerism

When I opened up my copy of USA Today this morning (April 22, 1997) I saw a chart as the illustration for the lead story. The chart stated, "Volunteerism: How Strong is the Drive?" and then asked the question, "If your place of work gave its employees the chance to take paid time off of work to do community volunteer work, how likely are you to take the time off?"

The results showed that 51 percent of people surveyed would in fact take the time off to volunteer.

But what they asked for was not volunteerism - what the question asked is would you volunteer if you were still being paid by someone. By definition, that's not volunteering.

Ask the same group of people if they'd be willing to put in the same amount of time when it was their own time, and they were not being paid for it.

I'm sure the results would be much, much lower.

People work for a living. They go to work in the morning, come home at night, and live off of what they earned - that's Capitalism, and for the most part, that's America (at least that's what this country was founded on). People, for the most part, don't want to give away their labor - or their money - to people who haven't earned it.

A summit to encourage people to come together to volunteer is one thing. Asking individuals to volunteer to help out the "less fortunate" is one thing. People have the right to choose what to do with their own time. Making it sound like volunteerism is the responsibility of individual companies is another.

Businesses, by producing better goods and services, have increased the standard of living - for everyone in this country (consider that poor people can purchase televisions, have entertainment and other "luxuries" that no one could afford fifty years ago). Businesses are doing a service to the world as well as to themselves when they produce. They earn a product; competition brings better products; everyone wins. It is not the responsibility of businesses to lose their workers to regular volunteer times, because they don't owe anything to "the community."

"The community" consists of a group of individuals. Individual rights is how this country was founded. Expecting business owners to shell out money to employees for not working - for volunteering - is just another way of extracting money from the producers. Won't that hurt the economy in the end, which affects the standard of living for all?

The article went on, stating that there were philosophical questions with wide-scale, imposed volunteerism:

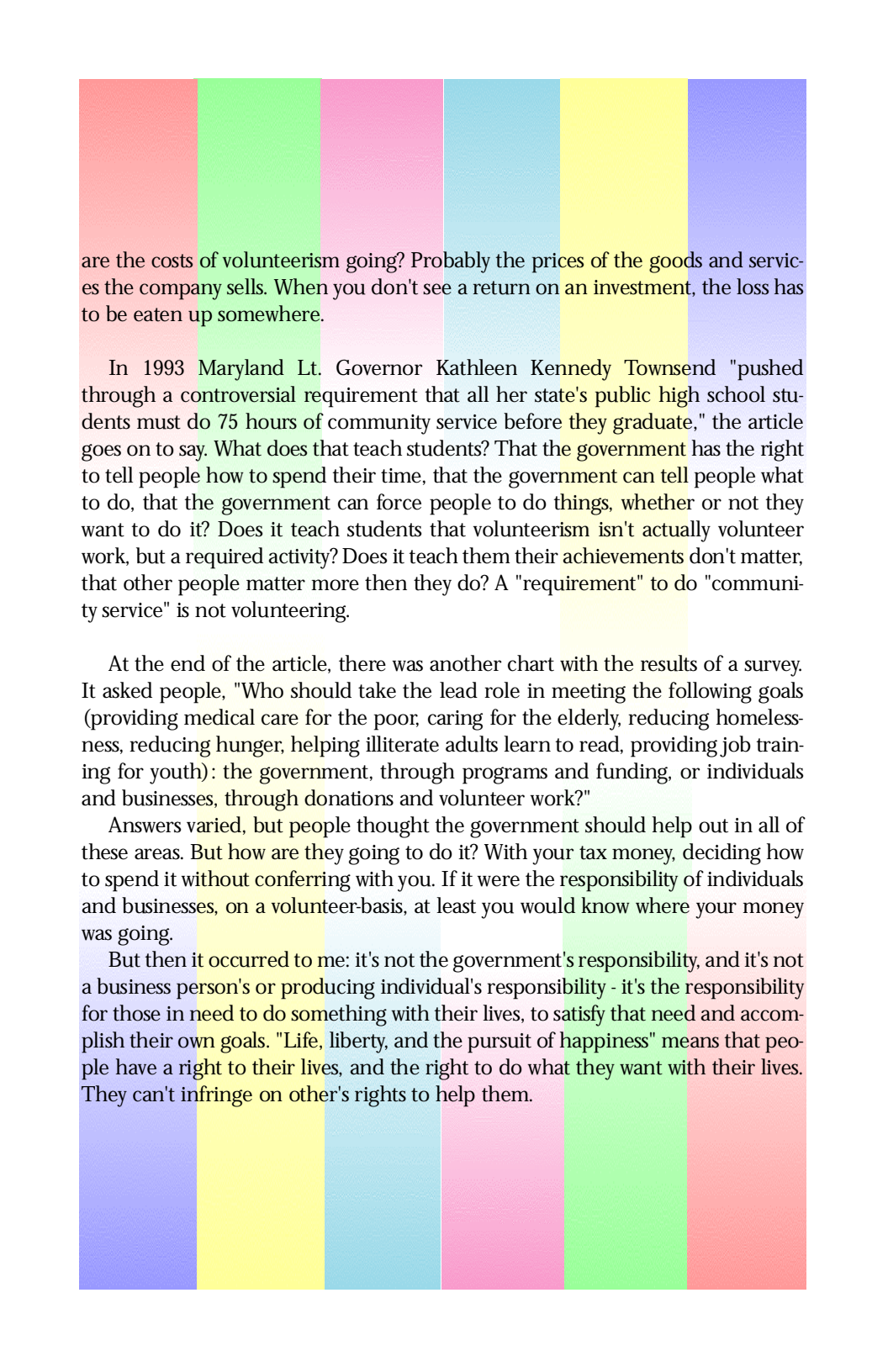
"How should the role of the government be balanced with the roles of companies, individuals and non-profit groups?" It shouldn't be balanced; the government shouldn't be involved. Government intervention would mean more taxes and less freedom for individuals. Companies should not feel the need to volunteer, as imposed by a government; if they want to help, they can, but should not be expected to. They do enough by producing better goods and services for the individuals that purchase them.

"Is volunteerism a politically popular but lightweight response to the intractable social problems government leaders can't, or won't manage?" Now we're getting somewhere. Volunteerism won't solve a problem if the individual you are helping doesn't want to help themselves, or expects to be helped instead of working on finding their own solution. The government, when involved with other aspects of our lives, has made a very expensive tangled mess of red tape - consider education, for example. Pressure groups have pulled funding back and forth for education, providing not the best education, but what the right people wanted. The result? a poor educational system that the government thinks more money will solve. When more money doesn't help, add more money, and tax the people some more.

"Volunteerism is one of the great glories in America," states Will Marshall of the Progressive Party Institute. No it isn't. It's a great glory to communism, where people are supposed to make sure everyone is equal and not be able to advance with their achievements, therefore giving them no incentive to achieve. It's a great glory to Christianity, because you're not supposed to rise above everybody else, you're supposed to not like the things to earn. "The meek shall inherit the earth." No, it's individual rights, and the right to own your accomplishments and achievements that is one of the great glories of America, and that directly opposes volunteerism. The right to produce and create and succeed is the American way - and it developed this country into the greatest country in the world. But for years now, we've been told that we need to help others. Since we've heard that cry, our country has been slipping.

General Colin Powell is working on the volunteerism summit, and he added that it is in individual's best interests to look beyond their neighborhoods when volunteering. Why? How is it in any individual's best interest to do work for free that doesn't affect their lives? No answer.

Companies may be interested in participating in volunteering programs because it bolsters their image in their community, providing business. Or it may give the employees a feeling that their company cares about others, which may reduce the turnover rate. Or it may be a tax write-off. Either way, the only reasons a business should - in order to be an efficient business - explore volunteerism, is in order to help their own business out somehow. The CEO of Home Depot, Bernie Marcus, said, "We don't do it (volunteerism) because it increases our business." Well, then, your business isn't running as efficiently as it should be. Where



are the costs of volunteerism going? Probably the prices of the goods and services the company sells. When you don't see a return on an investment, the loss has to be eaten up somewhere.

In 1993 Maryland Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend "pushed through a controversial requirement that all her state's public high school students must do 75 hours of community service before they graduate," the article goes on to say. What does that teach students? That the government has the right to tell people how to spend their time, that the government can tell people what to do, that the government can force people to do things, whether or not they want to do it? Does it teach students that volunteerism isn't actually volunteer work, but a required activity? Does it teach them their achievements don't matter, that other people matter more than they do? A "requirement" to do "community service" is not volunteering.

At the end of the article, there was another chart with the results of a survey. It asked people, "Who should take the lead role in meeting the following goals (providing medical care for the poor, caring for the elderly, reducing homelessness, reducing hunger, helping illiterate adults learn to read, providing job training for youth): the government, through programs and funding, or individuals and businesses, through donations and volunteer work?"

Answers varied, but people thought the government should help out in all of these areas. But how are they going to do it? With your tax money, deciding how to spend it without conferring with you. If it were the responsibility of individuals and businesses, on a volunteer-basis, at least you would know where your money was going.

But then it occurred to me: it's not the government's responsibility, and it's not a business person's or producing individual's responsibility - it's the responsibility for those in need to do something with their lives, to satisfy that need and accomplish their own goals. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" means that people have a right to their lives, and the right to do what they want with their lives. They can't infringe on other's rights to help them.

Capital Gains - or Losses?

I read a debate in the newspaper about whether or not the capital gains tax should be eliminated. The first argument, coming from the newspaper, was that the tax is only affecting the rich - and Republicans are trying to make their lives easier by eliminating it. It is not a tax burden on the people who have to pay the capital gains tax, because overwhelmingly these people are making over \$100,000 annually. Furthermore, the burden from the eliminated tax revenue would shift from the rich to the poor if the capital gains tax was eliminated. The newspaper also wrote that they were disappointed that the Republicans, who talk so strongly about balancing the budget, are willing to cut taxes to the rich, which would impede the process of a balanced budget.

I read this all, and it made sense. I thought, "Yeah, we should keep the tax. Who is it hurting?"

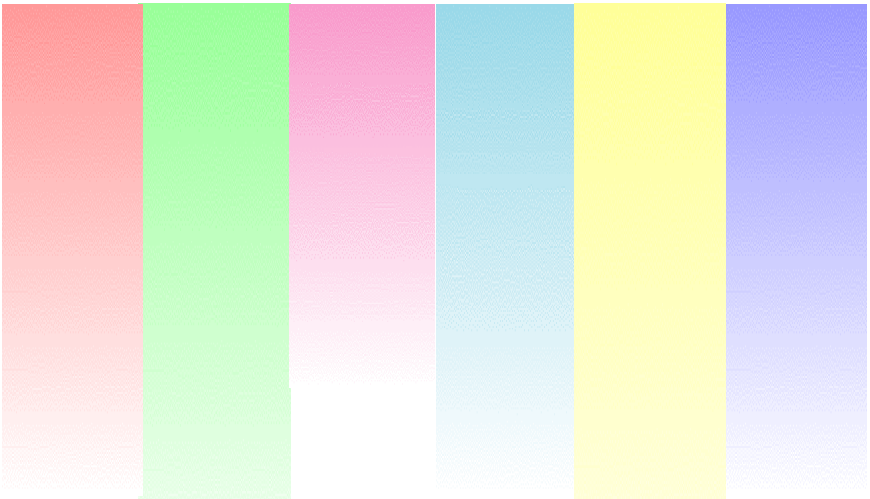
Well, the response to this article came from Newt Gingrich, a man with whom I seldom agree. When I started to read, I had to reassess my position.

The tax, he said, is wrong. You're taxed on investments, and are taxed again when you pull your money out of the investment. These taxes are difficult to manage with at tax time, there are many forms and schedules and exceptions that make filing a tax report come April 15th with capital gains taxes more difficult. (This extra processing and paperwork also costs the government money, keep in mind, which we pay for - with more taxes.) Eliminating the capital gains tax would save the people - as well as the IRS - headaches.

It also is a relatively small tax, directed to a relatively small group - people who invest. What this tax then does is makes people who want to invest less likely to because of overtaxation. What effect does this have on the economy? The government, if they are going to be involved with regulating the economy in the first place, should definitely not be hindering people from investing their money.

people who invest for their own businesses suffer too, as well as people who invest their money. I knew of a man who made a business out of buying old houses, renovating them and reselling them. He hired carpenters, electricians, plumbers, landscapers and painters to renovate his homes - helping people get jobs. He purchased appliances, carpeting, supplies for renovation - putting money back into the economy. But when higher capital gains taxes were implemented, doing these renovations was no longer economical for him - which cost jobs, which meant fewer products were purchased, which meant people were less productive.

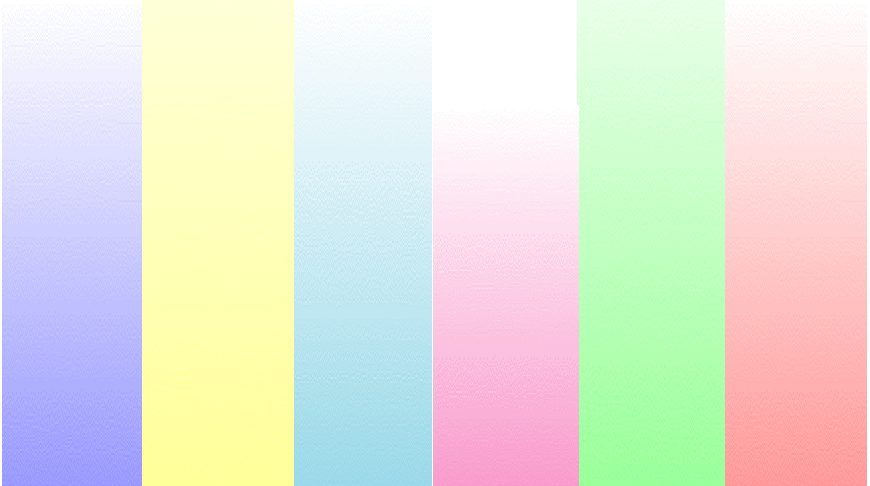
Some could also argue, he suggests, that pointing a tax at investors is pointing a tax at the rich simply because they are rich, which is discriminatory. There is less incentive to be more productive and earn more when it means that more money



will be taken away from the producers by the government. The government shouldn't be hindering people from making more money, or from going into business - that's what keeps the economy strong.

Expecting people with more money to pay more than their "fair share" to help out the "less fortunate" is essentially forcing them to give away more of their money to other people - people who haven't earned it. Most people would call this kind of scenario a robbery.

If we are going to try to balance the budget, the key isn't in doing it by taxing everyone until the debt is gone, like the newspaper suggested. The key is accepting more responsibilities as citizens, and not expecting the government to make things easier on us. If we did that, if we took that responsibility, there'd be no need for excess taxes - especially like capital gains.



prom '97

... or doing things right

My mother just gave me a bunch of her cocktail and formal dresses that she wore when she was young. Floor length dresses, usually with some beadwork, all really spectacular, unique formal dresses, and I thought, wow, these are really great, I'd love to wear these dresses, and then I thought, wait, I have nowhere to wear these dresses, and then I thought, wait, no one I know of would have any place to wear these dresses, these are dresses that look like they should be worn to award ceremonies in southern California and there's nothing like that going on around here in Chicago and if there was, I'm sure I couldn't afford to go to it. So then the thought struck me, like a sequin that caught the light and glared into my eye from the shoulder of a floor-length one-shoulder satin dress with matching stole: I could have a formal party. Host it in my living room. Decorate the whole place. Well, then, since it was mid-May and I couldn't get a limo rented for a friend's birthday because they were being used by a bunch of sleazy seventeen-year-olds wasting their parents' money, it occurred to me that ten years ago this year I went to my own prom, and then the vision struck me with even more clarity. I was to have a prom party.

Prom '97, it was, I had to decorate and make it prom, except more fun, because we're older now and probably have a better idea of how to actually have fun. So, where to start, where to start. Needed streamers, hanging down from door frame to floor in every door way. Needed lighting... Got my white christmas lights out from storage in the basement and strung lights all around my living room and dining room, on the tables, on the walls. Needed balloons, so I got 75 large silver balloons, blew them all up and let them cover the floor. Bought a crystal punch bowl, made a punch that would force people to eventually have fun, got a ton of food for the buffet, sprinkled glitter and streamers and confetti all over the place, even got a disco ball.

Needed to make favors, remember at formal dances you'd get little booklets with the name of the prom and the location and the theme song and the class president? Well, had to make those, and they should match the invitations, and come to think of it, there's usually a photographer with a backdrop in the corner of the dance floor so you could get your portrait taken... Hmmm... I'd have to borrow the grey portrait backdrop my sister made by painting over one of those maps they have in elementary schools, that roll down over the chalkboard like a projection screen and put it in one of the bedrooms so my friends could have their portrait taken.

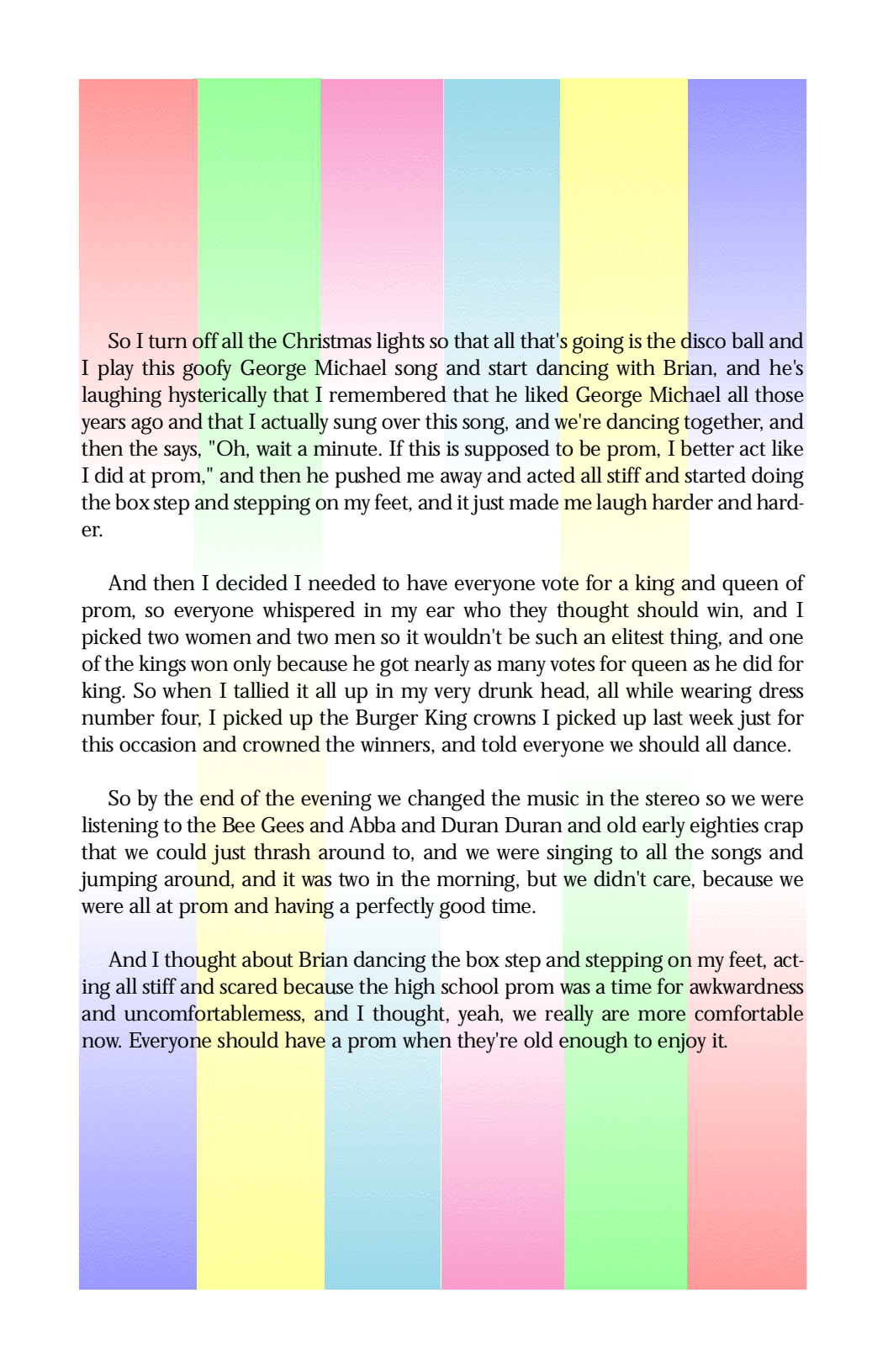
And my friend Brian was even coming into town for this party, because in high

school nine years ago I asked him to prom and he turned me down and we've always sworn that if we could do it over again, we'd go together. So I thought I'd surprise him, and since I sing I got my four-track recorder out and taped my voice over a slow George Michael song, kissing a fool, because we were both dorks in high school and both loved George Michael, and anyway, I sang over this song and was going to have us dance to it together.

So people start showing up for my party, and I'm playing big band and swing music, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Harry Connick Jr., The Glenn Miller Orchestra, because you see, I have taste now and wouldn't play the kind of crap you'd hear at say, your prom or a wedding, like "When a Man Loves a Woman" by Michael Bolton or "At This Moment" by Billy Vera and the Beaters or "Truly" by Lionel Richie or Mariah Carey or Whitney Houston or Natalie Cole without her dead dad's voice in the background. And people are complimenting me on my punch, that it tastes really good, but I don't dare tell them that it's absolut vodka and absolute citron and rum and banana liqueur and a little whiskey and some left over red wine from my last party, all with a splash of orange juice and Ne-Hi fruit punch soda. And Scott is already starting to spill his drink on the floor and bump into people and it's only like eight o'clock so I'm thinking, this is going to be a good party.

And then Helen comes in with Steve, her fiancee, and she's got a new eyebrow ring, and I say, wow, did that hurt, and she said no, it hurt more to look in the mirror and see this big metal circle piercing through the flesh above my eyebrow, but no, when I got it done it didn't hurt at all. And minutes later I hear my roommate talking to her, saying that there's a theory among psychologists and such that if someone gets into multiple piercings or piercings in unconventional places or tattoos, that's a sign that they were abused when they were a child. So my roommate is asking Helen, "So, were you abused as a child?", and I try to cut in to halt this social faux pas, and Helen responds with "No, not really." So I think, okay, I need to know what that means, so I ask, "What do you mean, not really?" and she answers, "Well, my parents were Columbian and I went to a Catholic school. It's a wonder I'm not a serial killer." And I think, okay, maybe Helen's fiancee won't try to start a fight with my roommate after all, maybe things are actually going to be okay.

And more people start showing up, Rachel strolls in wearing her old prom dress, and her and her friend made wrist corsages out of broccoli and spinach leaves. And Dave shows up, that sweet thing, with corsages that match a few of my dresses for me, and I decide to change into dress number two, I mean, there are only so many occasions where I'd have the chance to wear more than one formal dress to a function, I might as well take advantage of it, and everyone seems to be having a grand ol' time, and we start taking pictures and then I decide that Brian, the prom date that never was, should dance with me.



So I turn off all the Christmas lights so that all that's going is the disco ball and I play this goofy George Michael song and start dancing with Brian, and he's laughing hysterically that I remembered that he liked George Michael all those years ago and that I actually sang over this song, and we're dancing together, and then he says, "Oh, wait a minute. If this is supposed to be prom, I better act like I did at prom," and then he pushed me away and acted all stiff and started doing the box step and stepping on my feet, and it just made me laugh harder and harder.

And then I decided I needed to have everyone vote for a king and queen of prom, so everyone whispered in my ear who they thought should win, and I picked two women and two men so it wouldn't be such an elitest thing, and one of the kings won only because he got nearly as many votes for queen as he did for king. So when I tallied it all up in my very drunk head, all while wearing dress number four, I picked up the Burger King crowns I picked up last week just for this occasion and crowned the winners, and told everyone we should all dance.

So by the end of the evening we changed the music in the stereo so we were listening to the Bee Gees and Abba and Duran Duran and old early eighties crap that we could just thrash around to, and we were singing to all the songs and jumping around, and it was two in the morning, but we didn't care, because we were all at prom and having a perfectly good time.

And I thought about Brian dancing the box step and stepping on my feet, acting all stiff and scared because the high school prom was a time for awkwardness and uncomfortableness, and I thought, yeah, we really are more comfortable now. Everyone should have a prom when they're old enough to enjoy it.

Do People Want Justice, or Just a Good Hanging?

Periodically I see efforts by the government to take away our rights, and I feel I have to speak out about them. However, when I see efforts by people in this country, individual citizens, to take away our basic rights, I have to scream out my dissent.

I am disgusted with the backlash to Mike Farrell's commentary about why Timothy McVeigh should not receive the death penalty.

His article appeared in USA Today, and discussed the reasons why the death penalty does not work, not why Timothy McVeigh in particular should be spared. The gist of his story was that no matter how heinous the crime committed (in this case, blowing up of a Federal building in Oklahoma City, killing the largest number of citizens in a single terrorist attack in the United States), we should not stoop to the level of the criminal by administering the same punishment.

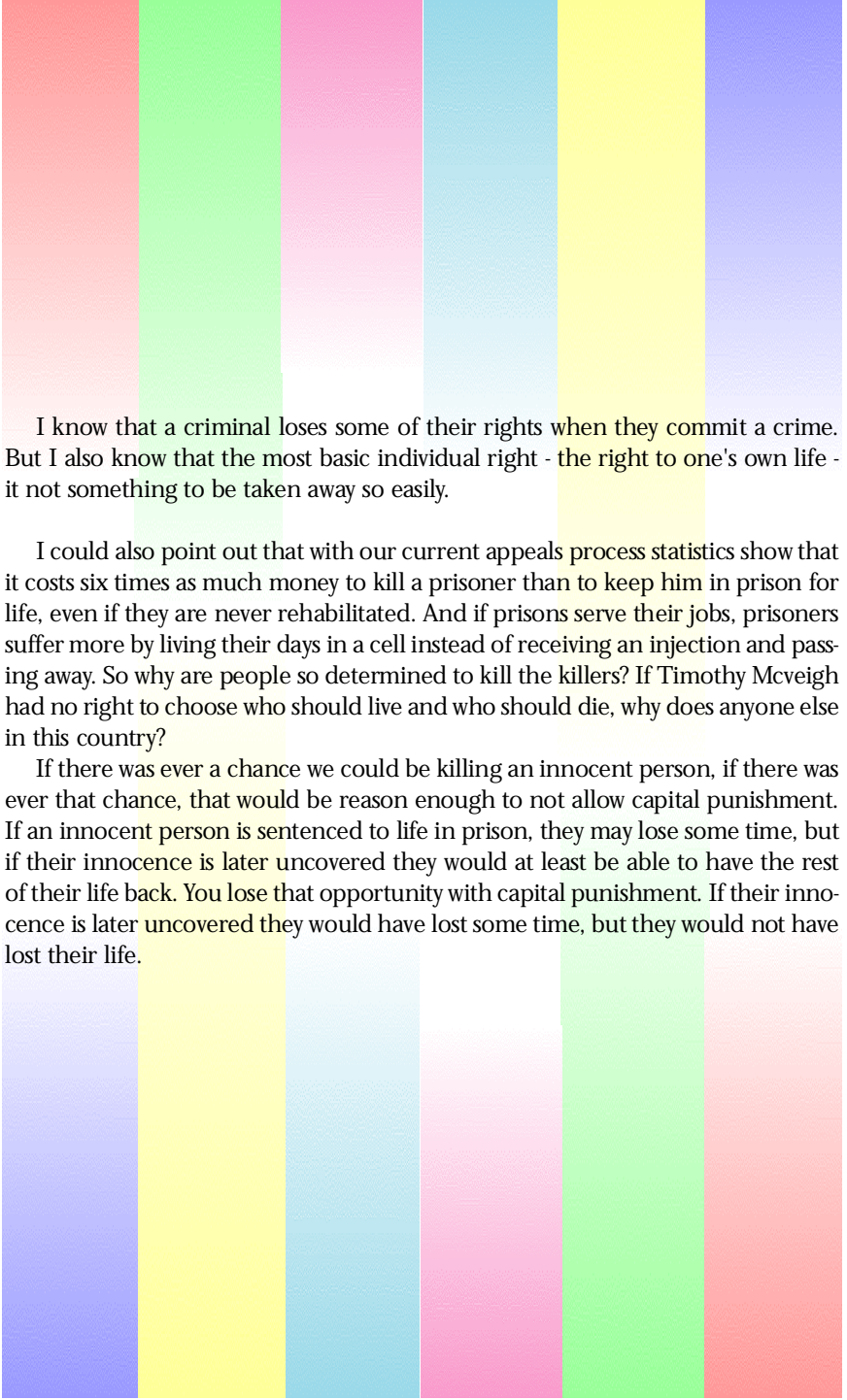
USA Today voiced two responses to Farrell's commentary days later.

Glen Jones of Delaware said that we should "Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you." Apparently he wants everyone to kill him, then, if he advocates the death penalty.

"These despicable acts Farrell describes are not understandable," Jones said, "but rather tolerated because liberal peacemakers like Farrell have pressured us to so believe." The general tide of "liberal" politics in recent years has been to sacrifice others into servitude - in such forms as welfare, charities, volunteerism and altruism - not to value people, but to make them the handmaids of whatever pressure group may happen to demand it.

Scot Ebisch of New Jersey says that the Bible says, "Live by the sword, die by the sword," and "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." These are, however, doctrines from Judaism, not Christianity - in the New Testament, Jesus asks his followers to reject these tenets and "Turn the other cheek." Whatever religion (or lack thereof) one may subscribe to in this country, America's laws more closely reflect Christianity than Judaism.

Furthermore, America's laws are designed to protect individual rights. If we allow the government to kill someone for killing people, what's to stop the government from killing people because they are drug dealers? Or committed robbery? Or voiced the wrong opinions in public?

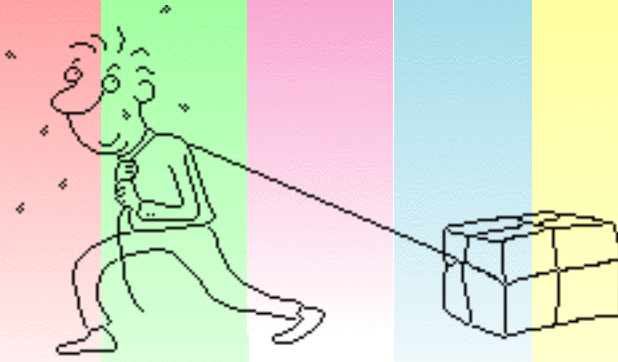


I know that a criminal loses some of their rights when they commit a crime. But I also know that the most basic individual right - the right to one's own life - it not something to be taken away so easily.

I could also point out that with our current appeals process statistics show that it costs six times as much money to kill a prisoner than to keep him in prison for life, even if they are never rehabilitated. And if prisons serve their jobs, prisoners suffer more by living their days in a cell instead of receiving an injection and passing away. So why are people so determined to kill the killers? If Timothy Mcveigh had no right to choose who should live and who should die, why does anyone else in this country?

If there was ever a chance we could be killing an innocent person, if there was ever that chance, that would be reason enough to not allow capital punishment. If an innocent person is sentenced to life in prison, they may lose some time, but if their innocence is later uncovered they would at least be able to have the rest of their life back. You lose that opportunity with capital punishment. If their innocence is later uncovered they would have lost some time, but they would not have lost their life.





Love Has Tendrils

love has tendrils
long, fluid, arcing, curling, pulling
but under the water
I have slipped away
one too many times

escaped the pull

never strong enough
to pull me in
were you

i keep searching
for those endless arms
to wrap themselves around me

to choke me
to kill me

until I rise yet again
gasping for air



in the projects

I saw a woman in the projects, by the apartments you were looking at. I was driving toward the lake, stuck at the intersection in traffic, and she walked across the street, in front of my car. She was wearing a blackjacket, falling off of one shoulder. She was wearing a black and white striped shirt. She was carrying a clear plastic cup in her left hand, like the kind you get in a bar. It was filled a quarter of the way with beer. And she walked across the street, holding her beer at the end of her straight left arm, and the sleeve of her jacket almost covered her hand. And her eyes darted back and forth, as if she knew she wasn't supposed to have open alcohol in public but she'd do it anyway, not caring for the law, but still being cautious. And I thought: I've done that before. We both have things we're running from. What makes her, in the projects, living off the government, any different from me, in the ugly new houses, living off someone else's ideals.



The Deep End

love seems so appealing
love is the bottom of the deep end
love is what makes the kiddies
walk to the edge of the diving board
take a deep breath
hold their little noses
and close their eyes
and brace themselves

and jump in

but none of them stay under too long
because they know
even at an early age
when enough is enough

And what I want to know

I've been dreaming of you lately.
Usually I see you for just a short while,
then you have to leave.
Maybe you tell me you miss me.
Maybe you kiss me.
Last night, when you left me
once again I drove after you
to the airport so I could say
goodbye to you one more time.

In my dreams you're always with me.
In my dreams you're always leaving me.
In my dreams I run after you.
Just to say goodbye again.

And what I want to know is
when are these dreams going to stop.

And what I want to know is
are you dreaming of me too.

I daydream about you in the mornings
while my legs are still tangled in my sheets.
I close my eyes, so I can feel you there,
curled up against me. Why
do I have to get out of this bed.

And what I want to know is
if you saw me hit by a car
my lifeless body lying in the street
would you hold me up against you,
would you hold my limp arms
in your coarse hands.
Would you rock me to sleep.
Would you cry.
Would you not want to say good bye.

And what I want to know is
if you saw the car speeding toward me
would you instantly run
because life is no longer life
without the one you love.

I know what I would say.
I know these answers.
And what I want to know is
are you dreaming of me too.



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