



ROSSMOOR NEWS

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Republican Perspective

By Christopher Panton

Flights of Fancy

Quick! What do the following repressive regimes have in common? Russia, North

Korea, Iran, China, Cuba and Zimbabwe? Give up? They all allow cigarette smokers to smoke in their own homes. But what, I hear you cry, about that bastion of freedom - nature's most treasured gift; that legendary pinnacle of freedom; that eloquent epitome and selfless defender of freedom: The one and only, incomparable United States of America?

The Walnut Creek City Council just passed a law making it illegal to smoke in multi-unit residences. Excuse me? Smoking is legal in the United States, but illegal in your own home?!?! This absurdly outrageous governmental invasion of privacy is made no less unconstitutional by the fact that this same city law makes it legal to smoke marijuana - by federal law, illegal in the United States - in your home!

It is important to understand how this fatuous, Alice-in-Wonderland situation came about. The justification is that secondhand smoke (SHS) is a "health issue." The main impetus for this claim is a 2006 edict from the surgeon general (i.e. the U.S. government) and a later pronouncement from the Centers for Disease Control (i.e. the U.S. government), which, together, deemed SHS to be a major health hazard to the extent that many thousands of nonsmokers were dying from it and many thousands more were incapacitated.

The original report was a rehashed compendium of previous SHS "health studies," many of which had been thoroughly discredited by independent reviewers because of their failure to adhere to scientific principles and, charitably put, their inconclusive results. As for the quoted numbers of dead and dying, they came right out of someone's nether regions.

At their peak, the federal government's mindless hysterical shrieks transmogrified into the equally brainless sound-bite message: If you smell cigarette smoke, no matter how faintly, you're gonna die! Enter, stage left, the Walnut Creek City Council in full crusade regalia.

To demonstrate how far this lunatic contagion of balderdash has spread, a recent newspaper article carried a priceless, straight-faced report from some government Department of Idiocy that a suspicious increase in teenage deafness was attributable to SHS. You know teenagers. They're the ones who listen to the racket that passes for today's music through their headphones and ear-buds at decibel levels clearly audible at the other end of a football field.

By this time, I imagine that readers, pro and con SHS, are wondering why the rant? Two reasons. One, the only vote against this most egregious of local laws was by a Republican. I'll come back to that later. Two, what's really going on here? I'll deal with that next, following this disclaimer: I am not a conspiracy theorist. Like other columns in the Rossmoor News, this is an opinion piece. So, that's what you're going to get. Maybe it will give you something to think about. That would be nice.

As I have previously indicated, social legislation is a necessary and, theoretically, valuable dimension of politics. After all, probably all of us benefit from it in one way or another. It has an easy appeal - the warm fuzzies of well-intentioned do-goodedness. And therein lies the trap. Its "easy appeal" is too easily corrupted by unscrupulous government entities to advance political agendas, the common theme of which is greater government control and, therefore, less precious freedom (see above).

Don't ask me why governments are motivated to expand their domestic powers by encroaching on the personal freedoms of the very people who put them into government in the first place. It's what governments do. My observation is that they do it at four levels: local (see above; other present examples: The sugar-in-soda hoo-ha and Richmond's eminent domain fracas); area (the Association of Bay Area Governments' (ABAG) Plan Bay Area); state (for California - the most regulated state in the nation - pick one from numerous); federal (e.g. the latest intrusion, Obamacare).

Republicans, to whom "too much government" is an anathema, can get noticeably riled up over federal and state intrusions. But when it comes to area or local political shenanigans, things really get serious because the focus is much closer to home and is often almost personal. As a result, I've noticed that friends (and enemies), colleagues and people I hardly know expend unmistakably more energy over local and area freedom issues than over state and federal ones. So what?

Well, what if we were to investigate every single local and area administration in this country and collate all instances of loss of personal freedom at those levels? Even if the impact of the integrated total was less than that occurring at the state and federal levels, perhaps it is, nevertheless, a significant enough distraction to dilute our attention away from higher level abuses? Just a thought.

One of the guys who worked for me used to call the deleterious, integrated effect of a large number of small, apparently not too alarming, individual events as "being nibbled to death by ducks." Are we?

And what about that lone vote cast by a Republican at the recent Walnut Creek City Council SHS Gong Show. As they say: There's one in every crowd. In this case, one sparkling ray of common sense. Leading to a more fundamental question: What, and/or how much, can Republican legislators - at all levels of government - do to stem this

inexorable tide of creeping Socialism Unbound? Fortunately for me, I've run out of space and can leave that question pending.

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