

Forum

Escape From the Liberal Plantation

Politicians propose massive, high-priced government programs because they're moved by compassion for the common man, right? Wrong, says Alan Lee Keyes, head of Citizens Against Government Waste. He adds that a little knowledge of American history would help people take a more realistic view of men from the government who say they're here to help us. Founded in 1984, CAGW is supported by its 350,000 members to promote the cost-cutting recommendations of the Grace Commission. Dr. Keyes was Assistant Secretary of State from 1983 to 1985 and later U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. For further information, contact: Citizens Against Government Waste, 1301 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Ste. 400, Washington, D.C. 20036, 202/467-5300.

California Political Review: *In a recent interview in New Dimensions magazine you said, "I find it surprising that people think the government will make the public good top priority. That's not what our founders told us." What should we expect government to make top priority?*

Keyes: Politicians and bureaucrats really haven't much incentive to serve the public interest. A bureaucratic incentive exists, but it's the imperative to expand one's empire and improve one's position through increasing revenues and larger programs that mean more influence, more power, more perquisites. The same is true in the political arena. Politicians stitch together their coalitions by making promises to various and assorted groups: I'll do this for you; I'll spend that on you. As government revenue increases so does their ability to maintain and expand that base of patronage and political support. So the selfish interests of bureaucrats and politicians run

counter to the interest of the public they are supposed to serve.

I don't know why folks are surprised at that. Our Founding Fathers told us government was going to operate that way and that, therefore, people have to maintain an active role in defense of their own interests and not to expect a benevolent government to look out for them.

CPR: *Is government waste, then — as defined from the point of view of the public interest at least — not an aberration but rather something we should expect if we leave those in government to govern as they will?*

Keyes: I think the cause of the problem is not just that there are wasteful approaches and wasteful systems and people who abuse their privileges. It isn't that waste is endemic. But the pursuit of an ever-larger share of the country's resources is endemic to those in government. Our government is like a huge conglomerate that provides goods and services. Our so-called representatives have more and more become not representatives of our interests but sales agents and marketing strategists for these government products — and for the taxes to pay for them. The problem is endemic to government. It discourages efficiency and feeds the juggernaut of waste.

CPR: *California's Gov. Pete Wilson has talked about establishing a kind of Grace Commission for our state.*

How would you advise such a commission to proceed? What obstacles and opportunities should they expect?

Keyes: We encourage state level efforts modeled on the Grace Commission. We provide materials on how to go forward, how to cut through the rhetoric and start identifying specific areas where improvements in government operations will save money, and how to recruit people, following the Grace Commission model, from outside of government who can recommend more efficient ways of doing the jobs government performs: accounting, financial



management, pension funds, data processing, and so forth. That is not to say the private sector is perfectly efficient either, but comparing private and public ways of doing things encourages people to think about improvements and saving money.

Having said all that, I should add that people should not fool themselves. One reason Citizens Against Government Waste exists and that we are working to mobilize people around the country is that no matter how thorough your study is and no matter how good your recommendations are, they'll get nowhere without the political will in the legislature and the executive branch to implement them. *That* is the great challenge.

The federal Grace Commission came up with \$424 billion in savings that could have been achieved over a three-year period. To date — which is six to seven years later — we have achieved close to \$200 billion of those savings by our estimates. But at the same time problems that were neglected — in the savings and loan area, in accounting at places like HUD — have resulted in hundreds of billions of dollars in losses in that same period of time.

So without a will in the legislature to act — and a lot of what is left to do at the federal level requires Congressional approval that hasn't been forthcoming — without that will a Grace Commission, or mini-Grace Commission at any level, federal or state, means nothing. It's just for show. And it will always *be* for show until the community at large puts pressure on government to become efficient. That means that the legislature's or the executive's political will to do this, if it exists at all, comes from the people. We shouldn't be sitting back and saying okay every time they ask us for higher taxes. We should be organizing ourselves to make it clear that, if you raise our taxes and spending, there will be terrible political consequences: we're going to kick you out.

CPR: *That, of course, is the textbook description of how democracy is supposed to work. Why, though, do the American people seem so docile? We have the vote. Why don't we use it as you suggest? Why do taxes and spending, our democratic system notwithstanding, always go up?*

Keyes: Those in government try, often successfully, to convince us that we have a major stake in the benefits government provides. But balance what they take against what we get and you'll see there is no balance. Government at all levels — the "public sector" — is

consuming 42 percent of the gross income of the average median income family in the country. *Forty-two percent.* That means people are working nearly *half* the year — until May 8 or something this year — to acquit their burden to the public sector: federal taxes, state taxes, local taxes, property taxes, excise taxes — all that adds up to nearly half.

CPR: *Are you including time spent meeting bureaucratic regulations, filling out forms?*

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Keyes: Oh no — not even including that. I'm just talking about money turned over to the government.

CPR: *I'd like to ask about another issue you've been addressing recently: President Bush's nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court and, more broadly, the rather stunning way liberals react to black conservatives. In a recent column, for example, you quoted liberal black columnist Carl Rowan as having said, "If they had put David Duke on I wouldn't scream as much because they would look at David Duke for what he is. If you gave Clarence Thomas a little flour on his face, you'd think you had David Duke talking." How do you explain this kind of outburst?*

Keyes: I think the ugly, personal attacks that we're seeing thrown at Clarence have nothing to do with him. You have this decent guy, not in *any* way abrasive or offensive, who has worked his way up from a difficult background — why would anybody harbor animosity toward him?

But the reason these brickbats and ugly, nasty personal remarks are being made is that Clarence Thomas represents a fundamental challenge and contradiction to the dogmatic ideology of some of the radical liberals who have maintained that the *only* way you can address the problem of poor people, black people, and so

forth, is through the consolidation of power in the government.

These folks have made their livings this way. They have built their reputations and careers on being, in a way, shills for the government welfare establishment. They have redefined all the terms of our public discussion so that if you don't agree with them, you are going to be read out of the ranks of decency. If you are a black person, you are read out of the black race. They get to excommunicate you. From their point of view, Clarence Thomas is a heretic and their reaction is the same reaction of fanatical religious ideologues of several hundred years ago. They want to burn him at the stake. And since, of course, we don't allow such travesties, they do it as best they can verbally and rhetorically.

CPR: One criticism is that Thomas, as Ronald Reagan's chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, pursued individual cases of discrimination rather than the class action suits his predecessors emphasized. The idea in class action is less to find the guilt or innocence of particular defendants than to win vast victories intended to reshape society. Is race or racism the real issue in this sort of criticism — and in the whole affirmative action debate — or is it that liberals don't like the idea of individual responsibility, that they prefer to blame society and don't like judges who don't share that preference?

Keyes: Liberal ideologues have tried to redefine America's concept of rights so we no longer talk about individual rights but about group rights. It's a dangerous trend and completely contradicts the views on which our country was founded. Actually, I would argue that it stands those views on their head. The reason, for instance, that it was wrong to discriminate against blacks wasn't because they were black. The reason it was wrong to discriminate against blacks was that they were human beings and all human beings are entitled to certain rights. That's the premise. Therefore, if I come along and violate your rights because you are black I have contravened your human nature, your dignity as a human being, and that is what makes it unjust.

Now the liberals stand that on its head when they

say: the reason I am going to protect your rights is because you belong to a *group* that in the past was the victim of discrimination. They assign preferences to certain groups of people and deduce from that who should be protected and who should not. I try to remind people that *that* was the way the world looked at people before this country was founded. First we agree who is good and who is bad by group and on that basis who has rights and who doesn't have rights.

But in America, all we're supposed to need to know about you is that you are a human being and therefore have certain fundamental rights. That's the Clarence Thomas approach. It emphasizes individual rights. It

emphasizes enforcement that will produce redress for individuals, *real* redress, rather than statistics for demagogues to cite to further their political agendas.

Affirmative Action is a group rights approach It isn't affirmative action, it's affirmative apartheid.

CPR: But its supporters argue that affirmative action removes barriers that divide people thereby reducing group polarization and laying

the groundwork necessary to insure that individual rights will be respected.

Keyes: But affirmative action *is* a group rights approach. It reminds me of the apartheid system in South Africa. Few Americans realize that the apartheid ideology, at an intellectual level, was not justified on grounds that blacks are inferior. No, the ideological argument was: we have these different groups and each group has its rights, its claims that have to be respected. And so the whites have their rights and the blacks have their rights and the different tribes in South Africa have their rights — it was a group-rights ideology. The folks today who preach this quota version of affirmative action are taking us down the same road. It isn't affirmative action, it's affirmative apartheid. It will lead people to an intense emphasis on their group identity, to compete with one another in terms of their group identities. It is therefore going to intensify group resentment, group hatred, and group conflict in this country until we disintegrate into a maelstrom of group violence that we won't be able to control.

That is obviously a recipe for tearing down the fabric of our society rather than building on the common principles that our Founders gave us. We have unify-

ing principles in America that could keep us from that, that could help us define our common identity without giving up our individuality, without giving up our individual backgrounds and heritage.

CPR: *Are both the government waste issue and the group versus individual rights question forms of the same question: who will run things, individuals or government?*

Keyes: Well, I would say that if we talk about the agenda of civil rights — the fight against poverty, against racism, against injustice — this is a good agenda. But unhappily it has been hijacked by people who aren't interested in producing results for human beings, only in using our concern about the problems to justify increasing their own power and the power of government. I call it covert totalitarianism. It doesn't come out and announce that the agenda is to take control of the society's resources but uses all these other causes to pursue that goal in a quiet, stealthy way.

If we want to preserve self-government in this country we will have to reassert the tradition of individual rights and, therefore, of individual responsibility. It is a tradition of individual action and initiative. In the economic realm it's one of entrepreneurship rather than government regulation, for instance. These alternatives really are freedom and slavery, the same *old* alternatives that led to the founding of this country and that require each generation to make its choice.

CPR: *Are black Americans becoming more conservative?*

Keyes: I'm not sure it's a question of liberals, conservatives, and what have you as much as it's a question of common sense. A lot of the views articulated by conservatives — by black conservatives — are really just common sense. Do you want a decent society? Then put an emphasis on strong family values, on a strong sense of moral identity. Do you want to be suc-

cessful economically? Then emphasize hard work and getting the education you need to do it. Do you want to deal with the problems of crime and drugs? Then inculcate a sense of self-respect and responsibility in people instead of a sense of dependency and passivity and irresponsibility.

Is this ideological? Is this conservatism? I think it's common sense. And within the black community it was the kind of common sense that allowed the race to survive in America despite all the obstacles: all the laws against it, all of the doors that were shut. People survived because, *in spite of* the limited opportunities, they worked hard and prepared themselves and valued things like education and self-discipline that would prepare them for opportunities they could not even enjoy at the time but which they were determined to be prepared for against the day when freedom *was* possible. And I think that approach is subscribed to widely now. Clarence Thomas, for instance, represents a kind of simple, working-class common sense that is the *mainstream* in the black community. It is what most black people have been throughout the history of the country.

But then when you look at the broader community: that's what we *all* have been throughout the history of this country. So these values, reasserted now, are not the special province of black conservatives or conservatives; I think it's just good old American common sense *finally* beginning to rise up against the liberal cant, against the Ph.D.s telling us we no longer can think for ourselves, to say: look, *we* think *we* know what's good for us and, like our founders in the beginning, we have the right to act on that knowledge. That's what self-government means. This is the trend in the country and I think the growth of Citizens Against Government Waste — we've doubled our membership during the last two and one-half years — and similar things we see fermenting all around the country, is a sign the people are ready to take the power back to exercise their responsibilities. My goal is to help them create at the grass roots level the sort of effective networks and organizations to do that. CPR



Criticus

Bubble and Squeak

G. B. Tennyson

HAVING BROUGHT *l'Académie Française* to its senses on the matter of the *circonflexe* (and herewith I take the pledge not to use that word, in French or English, for at least one full issue) and having alerted President Bush, and derivatively countless others, to the perils of Political Correctness (the proximate cause, I am presuming, of his Michigan speech and of the swarm of treatments of the matter now coursing through, albeit to no apparent good effect as the miscreants are unrepentant), your devoted *Criticus* thought he deserved this time around to sit on his laurels and perhaps take you on a gastro-nomic tour of the Pearblossom Highway or offer some other *divertissement* for a lazy summer afternoon. But folly keeps breaking out in all the likely places, and *Criticus* knows it is his duty to call it to your attention. However, to relieve the tedium, I shall try to sprinkle a few peas of amusement amidst the potato mash of wickedness that constitutes the cultural scene.

A RECENT NEWSPAPER article about the chair-person (I use this deplorable form because the incumbent is female and feminist) of a distinguished Southern California private college revealed the professor had had her Damascus Road experience in the class-

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room when she realized that for personal outside reading her students were favoring authors like Alice Walker and Maxine Hong Kingston. Dubious as this sounds to one whose students read, if they read anything at all, the likes of Steven King and Judith Krantz, we shall accept it as true for the sake of argument.

The problem is the response made to this reading preference revelation: confronted with the alleged student taste in outside reading, the professor decided to make a study of these "popular" authors and was moved to cease or reduce



teaching the old standbys (known in Academia as "the canon") and teach instead or additionally these modern writers. This procedure was hailed by all, including the author of the profiling article, with predictable and now bromidic adjectives like *bold* and *innovative*. But why is it meritorious for a pro-

fessor to teach that which students are reading and understanding on their own as opposed to that which they are unlikely to read independently *and* unlikely, if they do read, to understand fully because of the lack of historical and linguistic background that they are in school to acquire? To be sure, a little child shall lead them — but to the higher learning?

NOT UNRELATED to the foregoing is the recent report of a visit to Europe by one of the chancellors of a University of California campus. This worthy is reported to have noted that European universities do a better job than American ones in providing their students with a broad liberal education, but they do a much poorer job in promoting ethnic diversity on campus, to which point he recited the usual *mantra* about percentages of different groups in various populations, as though it were self-evident that the chief purpose of the university was not to provide a broad liberal education but to replicate in its student body the percentages of groups in the population at large. But is this self-evident? And when is a group a group anyway? Don't look now but there is a quiet revolution abrewing against even the term "Anglo," increasingly recognized as a coinage by the

diversity mongers to, yes, marginalize Caucasians. Besides, "Anglo" is a combining form, not a noun, but of course "they" wouldn't know that. My advice: on the next survey, including the census, everyone should check the ethnic category "Other." Or create your own, such as, "Euro-Afghan-