



Freedom cuts through the fog

By Jim Waters

I often mention the late free-market hero Milton Friedman because he excelled at doing what we attempt in this column: Cutting through the fog of intentionally complicated government policy to expose ways big-government tries to keep hard-working, tax-paying and freedom-loving citizens in the dark while dipping into their pockets.

Some elitists want to use our current economic turmoil to tear down the monuments to liberty and free markets erected by the late Friedman, a pioneering Nobel laureate who was 94 when he died in 2006.

But if anything, our current recession presents delectable opportunities to reconfirm Friedman's capitalistic principles — tenets that made America the most prosperous nation in history and lifted the world's economic tide. His is a "spread-the-wealth" plan you can believe in.

Is the capitalism that Friedman so masterfully espoused perfect? No. Does it come with abuses? Sometimes. Are these reasons to scrap it? Only if you offer something better.

Despite having just 5 percent of the world's population, our nation's free-market system produces 25 percent of the world's gross domestic product. Let attacks on Friedman and his free-market philosophies cease, unless the attackers bring something more productive — and promising — to the table.

To some, socialism's "equalize-the-wealth" philosophy embraced by the current occupant of government housing at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. offers a more attractive theory.

Granted, the utopian philosophy built on the socialist buzzword of "fairness" comes with appeal. Those who favor creating a society of cradle-to-grave government control cling to it. Others already addicted to such dependency, whether in the form of individual or corporate welfare, crave it.

Kentucky knows plenty of both.

But the nation's founders didn't choose revolution based on some twisted notion of fairness. Rather, they fought for the right to live free. As Friedman once noted, the words "free" or "freedom" are used several times in the Declaration of Independence and once in the First Amendment to the Constitution. The word **"fair" can be found nowhere in either document.**

So, which is more constitutionally sound: A "fair" health care plan subsidized by government, which destroys competition and the health care marketplace, or a plan that avails individuals the "freedom" to choose what kind of plan they want, or whether they even want coverage?

Which adheres more closely to the founders' principles: A **state pension system** such as Kentucky's, which forces taxpayers — the wealth-producers — to pay for ritzy benefits for state workers, who mostly develop programs that *take away* our wealth, or a policy requiring those on the public payroll **to pay for at least some of their plan?**

Kentucky taxpayers should not have to go broke making up the difference in a \$30-billion, under-funded pension system.

Government bailouts — whether stimulus packages for the chosen few or paper money spit out by Washington's ginned-up presses — have produced a spending stupor in Frankfort and Washington, D.C. which, in Friedman-speak, will result in a severe “economic hangover.”

But just as alcoholics are loath to admit addiction, those hooked on government's teat reject the very cure they badly need — while hunting for another drink.

When she served as first lady, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: “The unfettered free market has been the most radically destructive force in American life in the last generation.”

Friedman refuted that premise 35 years earlier: “What most people really object to when they object to a free market is that it is so hard for them to shape it to their own will. The market gives people what the people want instead of what other people think they ought to want. At the bottom of many criticisms of the market economy is really [lack of belief in freedom itself](#).”

The fog is lifting.

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