



Leaner government? Treasure the thought

By Jim Waters

A chasm exists between anti-government zealots and those who believe in limited government.

One group believes in anarchy. The other holds to the principle offered in a statement attributed most often to Thomas Jefferson: “government governs best which governs least.”

Again, that’s “governs least,” *not* “governs not at all.”

Most big-spending politicians would rather chase skunks than endorse the slightest leaning toward limiting the scope of government. So they employ the “blurring-lines” tactic to make it impossible to distinguish between the very different positions of governing “least” and “not at all.”

Todd Hollenbach offered an example of that during this year’s primary race for state treasurer.

Hollenbach accused his opponent, Melinda Wheeler, who built her campaign around the idea of eliminating the state Treasurer’s Office, of trying to pull rabbits out of a hat while trailing in the primary race.

If you read this after the Nov. 6 election, either Hollenbach or Wheeler has been elected state treasurer. So this column does not serve as an endorsement of either candidate. It does represent a stand against Hollenbach’s mischaracterization of people who salivate with Pavlov dog-like enthusiasm when someone suggests shrinking government. It happens so rarely.

Reporters quoted Hollenbach accusing Wheeler of staking out a position “designed to appeal to the anti-government crowd” in order to win the Republican primary, a race in which she trailed when she pulled her get-rid-of-the-office rabbit out of a hat.

Hmmmm. So does that mean that since Wheeler won her primary that not *all* Kentuckians who favor less government rank as kooks on the level of separatists holed up somewhere in the wild planning attacks on government installations?

Does it mean that policymakers and voters in 14 other states that abolished the elected position of state treasurer – while still ensuring that the few important tasks of the office get done – don’t represent extremists?

No one I know would characterize Georgetown’s Sen. Damon Thayer as “anti-government.” Yet, Thayer, a senator for four years, recently filed a bill to get rid of the treasurer’s office and its \$3.2-million budget.

Of course, characterizing as “anti” whatever those who stand up to Frankfort’s status quo and offer new ideas comes easy.

If you oppose unnecessary spending on children’s health-care programs, Hollenbach and his political siblings

probably consider you “anti-children” or “anti-family.” If you support offering parents a choice – any kind of choice – on where their children attend school, then they call you “anti-public education.”

Narrow-minded politicians and bureaucrats continue to employ these tired tactics out of convenience. It’s more convenient to place vague labels on anyone with new ideas on how to make government leaner (which, if enacted, might force some of them to look for work) and more responsive. They cave when facing the tough work of prioritizing spending so that the greatest number of taxpayers get the most bang for their hard-earned buck.

Thayer wants to do this – at least on one issue. In his statement announcing his pre-filed bill to eliminate the state Treasurer’s Office, he said: “The money can be better spent on education, infrastructure or better services.”

Whether you agree with Thayer, my point is: At least he’s attempting to establish some priorities.

Determining that money could be “better” spent on “better” services suggests that Thayer gave some thought to which projects deserve attention immediately, which can wait and which should get scratched from the list altogether.

That’s what most Kentucky families have to do when they put together their budget. Frankfort should try it, too. Doing so would result in leaner and “better” government.

Call me an “extremist” if you like, but that appeals to me.

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