

Op-Ed

Submitted by the
Libertarian Party

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FLORIDA DEBACLE SHOWS HOW GOVERNMENT WORKS

GOVERNMENT IS POLITICS. AND POLITICS IS POWER.

BY HARRY BROWNE, 2000 LIBERTARIAN PARTY
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE (815 WORDS)

The Florida ballot fiasco has produced at least one valuable benefit: It has shown us *exactly* how government actually operates.

Almost everyone watching this news story can see that anyone with the power to affect the Florida outcome — the Secretary of State, the various judges, the many local election-board officials — is a Democrat or Republican who is acting according to his own partisan interest.

So the final outcome won't depend on "truth" or "justice" or "fairness" — but on the party affiliation of whoever turns out to be the person making the final decision. In other words, what should be a non-partisan, objective ruling will instead be a partisan, politically motivated decision.

Is that the way government should operate?

Perhaps not, but that's the way government *does* operate.

And that's the way government *always* operates.

In fact, if politicians will act in such a blatantly self-interested way as they have in Florida with the whole country watching them, imagine what they do when there's no press coverage of their decisions.

For example, we like to think Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials have only your health and safety in mind when they decide what food or medicines they'll let you buy. But they are as politically motivated as any Florida election official.

The FDA has routinely kept life-saving medicines off the market for years until the bureaucrats were positive they could never be held responsible for a single death. While waiting for the FDA, tens of thousands of people have died for lack of the medicines — far more lives than the FDA could possibly claim to have saved.

People have suffered unnecessarily — or even died — with such problems as heart disease, depression, schizophrenia, kidney cancer, and epilepsy, just because FDA officials were afraid of the political consequences they would face if they made even a minor mistake.

Robert Goldberg of Brandeis University has estimated that FDA delays in approving drugs that were already used safely elsewhere in the world have caused at least 200,000 Americans to die

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over the past 30 years. These delays affected Alzheimer patients who weren't allowed to take THA, people with high blood pressure who couldn't take beta-blockers, those with kidney cancer who couldn't take Interleukin-2, and AIDS patients who died while the FDA pondered whether drugs like AZT were cost-effective.

Almost any medical doctor will tell you that taking a baby aspirin or drinking a glass of red wine every day helps reduce the threat of a heart attack. But the FDA has threatened aspirin makers and wineries with fines or imprisonment if they try to tell you that. Why? Because aspirin and wine could provide competition for industries that have better political connections.

The people who run the FDA — or any other government program — are politicians, appointed by other politicians for political purposes, just like the Florida election officials.

The nature of government is politics — the politics of winning and holding office, the politics of rewarding one's friends, the politics of punishing one's enemies, the politics of looking out for #1.

When George Bush and Al Gore propose a new prescription-drug program for senior citizens, they are actually proposing a new political boondoggle by which a new group of politically connected people can get rich, by which politically appointed bureaucrats will have more life-or-death authority over your health, by which a larger area of your life will be ruled by politics.

How can we remove politics from government?

We can't. And we should quit pretending we can. Instead, we should remove government itself from our lives wherever possible.

The way to make health care more efficient and more affordable is to take the government and politics out of it — not intrude politics further into it with Medicare reform, or with prescription-drug programs or a "Patient's Bill of Rights."

The way to make education more efficient is to take the government and politics out of it — not intrude politics further into it with more federal spending, or by giving the government control over private schools through vouchers, or with federal testing programs.

As Michael Cloud has pointed out, the problem isn't the abuse of power; it is the power to abuse. And the only relief is to remove from politicians the power to abuse us.

This is why Libertarians oppose *every* new government program — because we know each such program will be used to help those who are politically connected at the expense of those who have no political influence.

This is why Libertarians favor *every* reduction in government — because we know that the way to expand the power of each of us to control his own life is to take away from politicians the power to run our lives for their benefit.

If the Florida fiasco has helped people understand that what we think of as "government" is really politicians making political decisions for political purposes, we should all be grateful.

Harry Browne was the 2000 Libertarian presidential candidate.

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NOTE: A photograph of Mr. Browne and an electronic version of this essay are available. Call Press Secretary George Getz at (202) 333-0008 Ext. 222 for more information.