

# LIBERTARIAN LIFELINE

## Why Governments Fear Cyberspace

Governments and computers just don't seem to be getting along these days. While cautionary science fiction tales from decades ago predicted how computers could be used by governments to control and enslave citizens, the evolution of microcircuitry and the internet has instead empowered individuals to be more independent and simultaneously frustrated bureaucrats who just can't quite seem to understand a technology they can't control.

California has recently given up on implementing a new computer system that would track "dead-beat parents" to force them to pay child support. After spending \$100 million on a computer system for tracking such parents, the Wilson administration abruptly abandoned the project last month, conceding that it was fraught with problems too costly to resolve. "Ultimately, I expect [this] will be viewed as one of the most inefficient expenditures of tax dollars in California's history," said Assemblywoman Elaine Alquist (D-Santa Clara), who heads the legislative committee overseeing computer technology.

While it is tragic that innocent children may be harmed by the negligence of their parents, and unfortunate that the bureaucrats have squandered such vast sums of taxpayer money on this boondoggle, it is nevertheless refreshing to see how ineffective governments can be when attempting to design systems to track and punish citizens. Had the effort succeeded, how much more difficult would it have been to modify the system to allow the government to track such dangerous "criminals" as tax protesters, non-violent recreational drug users, people with AIDS or any other category of non-conformists?

This is the third major computer fiasco Governor Wilson has faced during his administration, and by far the most costly. In 1994, the DMV spent over \$51 million on a new computer system that never worked and prompted the governor to sign an Executive Order that outlawed sole sourcing of state contracts for such

services. Then in 1995, according to a state audit, poor management of a computer contract at the California Lottery forced the state to pay millions of dollars in unnecessary legal fees and contract dispute costs.

Even when bureaucrats *do* manage to get a computer system up and running, they can't be trusted to administer it properly. According to *Government Computer News*, the organizers of last month's FedWeb '97 conference learned a valuable lesson about how easy it is to compromise sensitive data on the World Wide Web when they accidentally made the telephone numbers, mailing addresses and credit card numbers of attendees freely available to anyone who visited their website to register for the conference. Ironically, the conference was hosted by a group calling itself the Council for Excellence in Government and featured a workshop session on computer security and break-in detection. Fortunately, the conference was attended mainly by federal government bureaucrats responsible for directing agency internet efforts, most of whom paid their registration fees with government-issued credit cards.



## New Officers to be Elected at January LP Meeting

*The next East Bay Region General Meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 20, 1998 at Ricky's Sports Lounge and Steakhouse, 15028 Hesperian Boulevard in San Leandro, near BayFair Mall. We will be electing new officers at this meeting, as well as recognizing the local Libertarians who have agreed to serve as our candidates in the November 1998 general election, so please join us and exercise your right to vote for a Libertarian. Enjoy a fine meal from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., and then stay for the elections immediately following. All dues-paying members of the East Bay LP who have signed the "Non-Initiation of Force" declaration (see page 7) are eligible to vote. For more information, please call the LP at (510) 531-0760.*

# Even a *Bad* Investor Can Beat Social Security

By Christine Murphy

*I had a discussion with a friend about the recent proposals to allow individuals to divert part of their Social Security taxes into private investments. "The problem is that most people, including me, don't know much about financial planning," said my friend, echoing one of the oft-heard arguments against privatization. "Social Security isn't great, but at least I'm better off with it than I'd be if I made stupid investments and lost my money." My friend's comment prompted me to do some back-of-the-envelope calculations to see just how bad an Investor you can be and still beat Social Security.*

*Let's suppose that, like my friend, you're 32 and you've paid \$46,788 into the Social Security fund. According to the Social Security Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement, you can expect to receive \$610 per month when you are eligible for full benefits at age 67. To make the calculations simpler,*

*let's pretend Uncle Sam has excused you from paying another penny into Social Security for the rest of your life and has returned to you the \$46,788.*

*Now you want to invest it. You're not hip to the latest hot stock tips, so you opt for a more conservative approach and a more conservative return. Easy enough: you put the \$46,788 in a basic tax-deferred retirement account that invests in 30-year government bonds at a yield of 7% compounded--a yield at which they've been hovering recently, but one that is well below their 7.87% average yield for the last 10 years. When you turn 67 in 35 years, your \$46,788 will have grown to almost \$499,536. If you then invested the \$499,536 at 6%, say, by maintaining it in an annuitized retirement account, you could leave the principal untouched and you could withdraw \$2,498 per month in interest alone. That is more than four times the amount you'd receive from Social Security.*

*It isn't just a lack of investment savvy that makes privatization a bad idea, some people argue, it's that many people are gullible. They'd make downright stupid investments and lose money. Still, the question remains: How bad an investor can you be and still beat Social Security? Very bad.*

*Suppose you gave two-thirds of your original lump sum to a nice man who promised to make lots of money for you in copper futures. He called yesterday to tell you he's sorry, but he lost every penny of the \$31,192 you gave him.*

*Now you're left with \$15,596. Can you invest this amount in a relatively unsophisticated way and still beat Social Security? Yes. Just put the \$15,596 into the same tax-deferred retirement account mentioned earlier. At 7%, your \$15,596 would grow to almost \$166,512 by the time you reach 67. If you then invested the \$166,512 at 6% in an annuitized retirement account, You could withdraw \$833 per month in interest alone without touching the principal. This is still \$223 a month more than what Social Security says you can expect to receive.*

*I showed these calculations to my friend. "Wow!" he said. "I'd be better off investing my retirement savings myself, even if I'm not the smartest investor around." Let's hope the folks in Washington come to the same conclusion . . . before it's too late. □*

Christine Murphy is a writer in Los Angeles. This article first appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, and is reproduced here with the permission of the writer, who can be reached at cmsilk@aol.com

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# From the Chair

Well, I have maintained the Libertarian standards: I came in fourth in a four-person race for two seats on the Danville Town Council. The two incumbents won. They had a considerable amount of money to spend. They had lots of name recognition. They had lots of time since they were both retired.

I don't think that these were the reasons that they won. There is a strong desire on the part of most people to tell others what to do. The two incumbents said that they would take away people's freedom in most cases. Right now small government doesn't sell. Everyone wants to bash someone. The biggest targets that everyone wants to bash are the hated "developers." Ignoring the fact that almost every one of us lives in a house that was built by a developer, they want to make sure that no developer builds any more in their area. The best way to do that is to have the city government extensively harass anyone who wants to build a house. Anyone who wants to build more than one house is in for big time hassles. It is as if developers have no rights of property. They have been taken away by the city or county government and the neighbors who scream like banshees. The "I've got mine" syndrome is alive and well. I have even heard it among Libertarians, would you believe?

I carry no brief for the ACLU, but their finest hour was when they fought for the right of American Nazis to march in Skokie, Ill. I think that Nazis are sick and evil, but if we are to have a free country, we must be strong enough within our own conscience to allow sick, evil people their right to speak. I feel the same way about developers. I may not want an apartment house or a 7-Eleven next door to me, but if I do not own the property, I have no right to prevent the property owner from using it any way that he/she wants (although I may have a right to recompense in the courts for losses in my property values.) That is hard for most Libertarians to swallow and almost impossible for anyone else. The answer is always "Of course you have freedom, but. . ." That "but" is always the one that gets you.

To be honest and honorable we must allow others their freedom no matter how we feel about it, so long as it does not directly affect us. There are a number of hot button issues that get to us and to others: developers, what substances we ingest or inhale, who we go to bed with, building codes, zoning, taxes, etc. There is a strong inclination for us to want to dictate to others "for their own good, of course," but we must not. We must

be willing to allow others to do things that we do not approve of because they have that right in a free country. My, is that hard to do!

This does not mean that they have a "right" to force us to bail them out when their bad actions come home to roost. If they can coerce us to help them, then we can insist that they limit their actions in ways that will cost us money. Libertarians believe in freedom in both directions: freedom to be self-destructive and freedom from having to bail out the self-destructive people.

A couple of election items: First, we need people to run for office in the Libertarian Party for next year: We need people to step forward and throw out the incumbents. Make the world a better place through your efforts. Give me a call. Elections will be at the meeting at Ricky's in January. We need a lot of people to attend the election and to run for office. If you are interested in running, give me a call at 510-820-0812 and let me know.

Secondly, we need people to run for political office in 1998. There are a large number of elected offices opening up, starting with the House seat in Oakland. I will have more information in the next Lifeline, but there is not much time.

Running for national and state offices is not that hard. You do not have to have millions of dollars to run. The neat thing is the number of people who call you up and ask your opinion about a broad variety of subjects. Suddenly, you go from being a person whom no one would listen to if you were buying free drinks in a bar, to the person with intelligent ideas you knew you were all along. You do get respect. People do listen to you. It is a chance to talk about freedom for everyone.

Go to your election office in Martinez or Oakland and ask what you need to do to run. The Libertarian Party will be glad to help you. We should have people running for every elected office in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. The main thing, we must prevent the Republicans or Democrats from getting 50% of the vote in the primary elections in June so they don't have to run in November. That would be awful.

Running for election gives us a chance to talk about freedom to a lot of people. They may not have the faintest idea about giving freedom to others so that they will be able to keep their own freedom. You know, we really are trying to change the world. You can be part of a wonderful crusade for a goal that is beyond price. Whether you win or not, your legacy will be an increase of freedom for everyone. It may be small, but it will be there for you having put in the effort. You will be doing it for your children and all future generations. We all need YOU!

-- Douglass Ohmen

# Memories of the Prague Spring

by Katherine McKay

*In the late 1960's I spent two years in West Germany, first on a fellowship and then working in the German economy. In 1968 I traveled to Czechoslovakia twice, the first time in April, during the "Prague spring," an experiment in liberalizing Communist strictures under Party Chief Alexander Dubcek.*

*Before the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia and before World War II, the country had been highly industrialized and as prosperous as Germany. After 15 years of Communist central planning, which ruined the economy, the standard of living of the Czechs was about half that of the West Germans. When I visited, two decades after the forced conversion to socialism, Prague (in spite of its medieval charm) gave the impression of drabness and poverty. Run-down storefronts were empty of goods. Down-town streets were clogged with malfunctioning old cars emitting vast quantities of visible exhaust. On the outskirts of town, factory smokestacks devoid of cleaning devices poured particles into the air. (Not until I visited Mexico City did I see comparably bad air pollution.) I had thought the West Germans dressed dowdily, but in Prague, people appeared to be wearing the Germans' castoffs. There were few telephones. Apartment buildings were run down, with light fixtures permanently not working and bricks falling out of facades. People explained to me that since the buildings belonged to no one, no one felt responsible for their upkeep.*

*True to the artificial shortages which arise in centrally-planned economies, apartments were in extremely short supply. People put their names on years-long waiting lists to rent them, meanwhile living with parents and relatives. Marriages were delayed because of the lack of living space for new couples, and people became desperate for a place of their own. This was powerfully illustrated for me by the first place I stayed in Prague, a spare room in an apartment, which I got through Cedok, the travel information agency. The apartment was old and spacious, with several rooms; it even had a tiny*

*shower - an incredible luxury. The man of the house, an architect who spoke neither German nor English, was young and handsome. The middle-aged woman, whom I took to be his mother, spoke German fluently and talked with me occasionally during my stay. I was surprised one day to hear her refer to "mein Mann," since I had seen no one I could identify as her husband. I was stunned to realize the young man had married a woman a generation older than he in order to have a comfortable, roomy apartment, obviously hers, to live in.*

*The "Prague spring" was initiated by Smrkovsky, the leader of the national assembly, calling for freedom of thought and democracy in January 1968, and carried out by Dubcek, the party chief, a true believer in the coexistence of democracy and socialism. During this short-lived era of relaxed central control, Czech culture bloomed once again. The government instituted democratic reforms and lifted the heavy hand of censorship. Suddenly, newspapers carried real news and opinions again and were coveted for purposes other than wrapping fish. Creativity blossomed: plays were written and performed, books and articles were published, public demonstrations and discussions were held, all without censorship. There was an atmosphere of lightheartedness on the streets, and much lively discussion.*

*Even the centrally planned economy was to undergo fundamental changes. The new vice-premier for economics recommended that businesses should be free to make whatever they wanted and to sell their products to whomever they wanted at whatever price they wanted, and that the state should not subsidize businesses. The future seemed to open onto an expansion of freedom of expression and action, and enormous pent-up energies were unleashed.*

*Predictably, the lifting of censorship led to the intelligentsia's fierce criticisms of the way matters had been handled within the country in the past 20 years, and eventually to criticisms of the Soviet authorities themselves, who were directly blamed for political arrests and executions of many Czechs and Slovaks. Although the reform-minded government proclaimed that Czechoslovakia would remain Communist and a member of both the Warsaw Pact and the eastern economic community, the avant-garde soon began to*

push against these boundaries as well. Vaclav Havel, the writer who later became head of state when the Soviet Union fell, wrote in 1968: "One can speak of a true democracy only where the people have the ability to freely choose who shall rule them." The journalist Jiri Hanak wrote: "What if the majority of the population did not want to be led by the Communist Party any longer?"

Prague's reform government genuinely believed that Communism could coexist with democracy and freedom of expression. The authorities in Moscow realized that these could only subvert Communism and threaten the Russians' hold on their East Bloc satellite. Over the course of the summer they held repeated meetings with the heads of the maverick state, demanding that the reforms be reversed. On August 21 they invaded with tanks and armies from the Soviet Union and neighboring East Bloc countries, taking Dubcek and other members of the government in custody to Moscow, where they considered executing them. The only high official not arrested was President Svoboda, who was asked to head a new government. He refused and threatened to commit suicide if Dubcek and the others were executed. Eventually they were released, after being forced to agree to undo all the liberalization measures that had been taken in the previous half-year.

Five days after the invasion, I returned to Czechoslovakia, this time to stay with parents of a friend. I carried in with me the latest copy of *Der Spiegel*, an exhaustive weekly German news magazine, devoted to the story. My host family had received no news at all about what had happened to Dubcek and the other officials, censorship having been reimposed, so they avidly read the account in the magazine. I left the issue with them and it undoubtedly made the rounds in Prague for months thereafter.

The atmosphere in the city was markedly different from my last visit. Everyone on the street looked as though they had just lost their mother. There was no friendly conversation with strangers; once again the inhabitants were shut in and suppressed. I did not see the Russian panzers but I did see the machine-gun bullet holes in the facade of the National Library which they had made. Shortly after

my visit the border was closed to western tourists and journalists.

A few days before I left I spied oranges in the window of a shop which had a line out the door and down the street, and I stood in line for an hour to buy a few for the little granddaughter of my hosts. I learned that a shipment of oranges had just arrived from a southern country, and while they lasted each customer could purchase up to one or two kilos. The rarity of a commodity which in the West is taken for granted as an easily obtainable everyday food seemed a fitting end to my experience with the centrally-planned state.

Resources: several issues of *Der Spiegel* from 1968.

## *Lifeline*

### Monthly

## Retains

### Schedule!

The East Bay Libertarian Party wishes to express its heartfelt gratitude for the tremendous outpouring of support for the *Libertarian Lifeline*, prompted by last month's appeal for funding.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our members and subscribers, we now have the resources to continue publishing the *Lifeline* on a monthly basis for the next year. Although we requested only a few small donations to get us through a few months, we were astounded by the deluge of gifts from Libertarians throughout the Bay Area.

You have demonstrated your appreciation for our work and we will strive to make you proud of our organization and its newsletter. Once again, thank you all very, very much!

# Marin Elects Officers

by Tammy Austin

*The Libertarian Party of Marin has elected its officers: Chair: Tammy Austin; Vice-Chair: Janice Edelstein; Secretary: Matt Turly; Treasurer: Richard Lowry.*

*At the November meeting, Jon Petersen, Northern Vice-Chair of the Libertarian Party of California, chaired the elections and Jeffrey Sommer, the East Bay Region's Executive Committee representative, volunteered to assist with the educational committee. This committee will focus on developing a presentation for the Tamapais High School campus. A few students attended our meeting, and we are eager to assist them by showing them about the political process in our presentation at their school.*

*We are currently canvassing at the Civic Center Farmer's Market on Thursday mornings from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Our first fundraising event will be a garage sale on Saturday, January 31, 1998, for which we are requesting donations of household and other useful items (contact Ms. Austin for further information).*

*Our next two meetings are scheduled for December 21 and January 18, and both will be held at 4:30 p.m. at the Mill Valley Masonic Lodge, 23 Corte Madera Avenue, Mill Valley.*

*Also, please join us for a play about liberating them ind. The Impromptu, written by Tad Morsel, will be performed on Sunday, December 28 at 2:00 p.m. at the Mill Valley Masonic Lodge, same address as above.*

*We are a small group of eager volunteers and we are in the process of forming committees to outline our goals and directions as a political party. If you are interested in getting in on the ground floor of the political process, give us a call and help the party grow in Marin.*

*Contact the Marin Party at (415) 331-1500 extension 139, P.O. Box 10671, San Rafael CA 94912, or Marin LP@webtv.net. You may also contact Jon Petersen at 141 Hayes Avenue, San Jose CA 95123.* ■



Celebrate December 15th

Bill of Rights Day

ALL of the  
BILL of RIGHTS  
for ALL citizens

by Aaron Zelman, Executive Director, Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, Inc.

*The United States of America might never have existed without one thing: the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights limits the power of the government and protects the rights of the people. It was so important that several of the original 13 states would not ratify the Constitution without it.*

*Nearly everything that makes an American proud to be one comes from the Bill of Rights. Freedoms to speak, print, read, assemble, pray, petition the government, keep and bear arms. Protection from unreasonable arrests and searches, excessive bail, double jeopardy, coerced confessions, cruel and unusual punishment. Rights to due process, jury trials, counsel, and to present defense witnesses. These are the freedoms and rights that define America.*

*Surprisingly, Americans do not celebrate the foundation of our political freedom, the Bill of Rights — but we should. After all, the Bill of Rights is part of our Constitution, it is what our military people pledge to serve and die for. It is uniquely American. People on the political left, center, and right can all rally around the Bill of Rights because it expresses our shared basic values.*

*On December 15, 1791, the Bill of Rights was ratified and has since protected American citizens for 206 years. We should celebrate December 15 every year. By officially designating December 15 as Bill of Rights Day, we would be reminding our fellow citizens and younger generations of our heritage. Bill of Rights Day would declare America's commitment to civil and human rights to the world. The special day would annually remind politicians, bureaucrats, prosecutors, and judges that their authority and power are limited — that the government serves us Americans, it does not rule us. December 15, Bill of Rights Day, reminds us of the liberty we have and what it costs to keep it. By celebrating Bill of Rights Day every year, perhaps we shall never forget.* ■

# Dealing With Bureaucrats

by Jonna Jerome

A New Orleans lawyer sought an FHA (Federal Housing Administration) loan for a client. He was told that the loan would be granted if he could prove satisfactory title to a parcel of property being offered as collateral. The title to the property dated back to 1803, which took the lawyer three months to track down.

After sending the information to FHA, he received the following reply: "Upon review of your letter adjoining your client's loan application, we note that the request is supported by an Abstract of Title. While we compliment the able manner in which you prepared and presented the application, we must point out that you have only cleared the Title to the proposed collateral property back to the year 1803. Before final approval can be accorded, it will be necessary to clear the title back to its origin."

Annoyed, the lawyer responded as follows: "Your letter regarding Titles in Case No. 189156 has

been received. I note that you wish to have Titles extended further than the 194 years covered by the present application. I was unaware that any educated person in this country, particularly those working in the property arena, would not know that Louisiana was purchased by the U.S. from France in 1803, the year of origin identified in our application.

"For the edification of uninformed FHA bureaucrats, the title to the land prior to U.S. ownership was obtained from France, which had acquired it by Right of Conquest from Spain. The land came into possession of Spain by Right of Discovery made in the year 1492 by a sea captain named Christopher Columbus, who had been granted the privilege of seeking a new route to India by the then reigning monarch, Isabella.

"The good queen, being a pious woman and careful about titles, almost as much as the FHA, took the precaution of securing the blessing of the Pope before she sold her jewels to fund Columbus' expedition. Now the Pope, as I'm sure you know, is the emissary of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And God, it is commonly accepted, created this world. Therefore, I believe it is safe to presume that He also made that part of the world called Louisiana. I hope you are satisfied. Now, may we have our damn loan?"

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(For those joining the LP as a voting member)

I hereby certify that I do not believe in nor advocate the **initiation** of force as a means of achieving social or political goals.

Signature(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & ZIP+4 \_\_\_\_\_

(Optional)

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_

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LP NEWS + Lifeline) \$25

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**Libertarian Party of California**

I would like to join: ☐ Marin County LP ☐ East Bay Region LP

☐ Recorded in database

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS **DECEMBER**

**Monday, December 15, 1997. Bill of Rights Day.** Celebrate the 206th anniversary of the ratification of the first ten amendments to the Constitution of These United States. Bill of Rights Day has been promoted for several years by Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, Inc., one of the country's most aggressive civil rights organizations, and awareness of the importance of what happened on December 15, 1791 has been greatly improved by their efforts. Take some time on this day to read the Bill of Rights once again for yourself, and then read it to your children to help them understand and appreciate what it means to be free.

**Sunday, December 21, 1997, 4:30 p.m. Marin County LP General Meeting.** Help reinvigorate the Marin LP by attending their monthly meeting at the Marin Masonic Lodge, 23 Corte Madera Avenue in Mill Valley. For more information, call (415) 331-1500 x 139 or send email to [MarinLP@webtv.net](mailto:MarinLP@webtv.net).

**Sunday, December 28, 1997, 2:00 p.m. *The Impromptu*,** a play by Tad Morsel about freedom and the individual spirit will be performed at the Mill Valley Masonic Lodge, 23 Corte Madera Avenue in Mill Valley. For more information, call (415) 331-1500 x 139

**Friday, December 26, 1997.** This is the first day candidates will be able to file papers at the Alameda and Contra Costa county Registrar of Voters to run for office in the November 1998 elections. Please allow plenty of time to get your materials because the lines will be long and the paperwork daunting. The LP will be happy to help you with the process if you've never run for office before. For more information on how to become a candidate, call the LP at (510) 531-0760.

**Tuesday, December 30, 1997, 7:00 p.m. Oakland/Berkeley Libertarians** in the 16th Congressional District will meet to discuss regional issues at the offices of Resources for Independent Thinking, 5236 Claremont Avenue, Oakland, CA. For more information, contact Jeffrey Sommer at (510) 537-3212.

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