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The Founders' Greatest Fear: A Too Big and Too Powerful Government

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One of Thomas Jefferson's least recited quotes was probably one of his most powerful. He stated, "In questions of political power speak to me not of confidence in men but bind them down from mischief with the chains of a Constitution." Equally, James Madison had his own concerns of reining in government when he noted during the Constitutional Convention, "All men having power ought to be distrusted to a certain degree."

The two men were not the only founders of this great nation who knew the importance of limited government intervention in the lives of the governed. From Franklin to Washington, all had personal experience of the dangers of out-of-control and unaccountable government, having lived under the despotism of King George. A too-big and too-powerful government was their collective fear; and to guard against ever returning to such despotism, they intentionally created a form of government that would be restricted in its power by virtue of its three co-equal branches. However it is becoming more and more obvious that these admonitions of the past are not being adequately heeded today. That, my friends, is a grave danger to us all.

Let's look at some examples of ever encroaching government in the lives of all Americans. Since 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security, a creation of the Patriot Act, has expanded to such an extent that now over 10,000 private firms are actively engaged in "national security" with little oversight and an almost limitless budget. Many of these groups have vastly overlapping duties; but limited oversight due to "secrecy" has resulted in monumental waste. However, fiscal waste is just a side issue. The bigger issue is the erosion of personal liberty as literally hundreds of thousands of American citizens are actively working on projects that, in essence, make "citizen suspects" of us all. Now before you go shouting "conspiracy theory," let me assure you that what would have fit well in that category just five or six years ago has become a nightmare today for all who love freedom in this great nation.

I am no different from anyone else—I want to live in a safe place. I want my family to be as safe from Islamic terrorists as from local thugs, but I am NOT willing to give up all of my liberty to that end. Benjamin Franklin was noted for his comment, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." Franklin knew what we should know today: that when not kept in check, and regardless of how good the intentions may be, government has a natural tendency to grow too big, and in the process, destroy that "essential Liberty."

The various "watch" lists are a perfect example of the machine getting too big. You probably would not know whether your name is on a "list," but if you learn that it is, you have no due process to find out why—or how—you can get off. "But Chuck," you may say, "those are to stop terrorists!" Well, consider Retired Brigadier General James Robinson who is also a commercial airline pilot. He has undergone the necessary requirements to carry a firearm in the cockpit in order to protect his plane and passengers from terrorist high-jackings. He, too, is on the watch list, and this makes it difficult for him to board his own flights!

I even have a relative whose name is similar to that of a certain left-wing, radical professor from the Northeast; despite over 30 years difference in age and a 180-degree difference in views, my relative is harassed and subjected to additional screening on nearly every flight he takes. And he has absolutely no recourse. A little hassle, you say? What

happens when jobs are lost and interviews fail because your name was mistakenly placed on a watch list? Where does it stop?

Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has actually suggested depriving law-abiding citizens of their Second Amendment rights if their name happens to have found its way onto one of “the lists.” A sitting U.S. Senator has literally suggested we take away Constitutional, civil rights from citizens without due process of law and with absolutely no recourse to correct errors. This too is an example of too-big, too-powerful government; if it is not brought under control now, the behemoth will eventually take your liberties, too.

Bigger, centralized government is never the answer.