



Aaron Brown

We Are Better Than Better Than This

Does belief in limited government automatically make you a jerk?

Edward Kleinbard makes some important points in his new book, *We Are Better Than This: How Government Should Spend Our Money*, in order to argue that we should have bigger, more powerful, and more expensive government. But he makes the odd decision to drive away in the first couple of pages anyone who doesn't already agree with him.

Where are the rest of us?

In the very first paragraph, he defines government as, "all of us, acting collectively." But we don't need government for things we all do. Government is some of us forcing all of us to act. Kleinbard's misdefinition makes invisible the most important reasons to limit government size and power: fear of tyranny, disagreement about what should be done, respect for minority opinions, and protection of individual rights. It allows him to label supporters of limited government as "jerks." A more precise term would be "antisocial," which is not the same thing, because in his formulation small government supporters oppose what "all of us" want.

The absurdity of the definition is shown a couple of pages later, when we learn that we all "reject racism, sexism, religious intolerance, or other invidious distinctions among us." If that were true, there wouldn't be any racism, sexism, or intolerance. When President Eisenhower sent the 101st Airborne to Little Rock Central High School, it wasn't because we all reject racism, it was to point



guns at the racists who were preventing nine black students from enrolling. While we all cheer that action today, some of us remember that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, when the government unleashes military force against its own citizens, history judges it to be on the wrong side of the issue – not only that the use of force was unjustified, but also that it would have been better to use force on the opposite side.

Government is not all of us acting collectively. It is some of us using the threat or reality of organized violence to get our way, plus enough institutional superstructure to distinguish government from bullies, extortionists, and terrorists.

Organized violence is a serious thing, however strong the institutional controls built around it. Small government types believe in using it sparingly, pacifists and anarchists believe in not using it at all. Most of us won't read a book that begins with a definition that ignores the people on the wrong end of the guns.

Next, Kleinbard claims that small-government advocates are indifferent to the plight of hungry people. You don't need big government to stop hunger, and making the government bigger is unlikely to [AQ1] reduce hunger. Large-scale famine is caused by government – whether through war, great leaps forward, laws of the spikelets, expropriation, or other means; left to their own devices, people are very good at getting food, and very willing to provide it to those in need (if that weren't true, humans would have died out long ago). The US government spends an order of magnitude more effort – whether measured by dollars, legislative words, or Congressional speaking time – on making food prices high, which makes it harder

for people to feed themselves, than it does on feeding hungry people. We have agricultural price supports, stockpiling, subsidies, tariffs, ethanol rules, price maintenance rules, crop destruction, payments for not producing food, and price-increasing regulations and taxes throughout the food-processing and retailing industry that dwarf federal hunger relief efforts.

And although the federal government has nearly 100 anti-poverty programs, none are simple deliveries of food to hungry people. Depending on the program and your circumstances, you may have to do various things to get the food: look for a job, enroll in school, pass a drug test, have a

child, get current on your taxes or child support, or simply satisfy a government employee. None of those things have much relation to being hungry. Moreover, due to the complicated and overlapping programs, and a wide variety of practices, navigating the bureaucracy to get food can be as random and daunting as navigating the private economy to earn money. Social engineering using people's hunger as a motivator is not in the same moral category as feeding the hungry. It may be a good thing, or not, but it's not "for I was hungry and you gave me food."

No one begrudges the small cost of making sure everyone has enough to eat. But some of us think the world would be a better place if the government lightened up on its food meddling: if it got rid of subsidies and supports and tariffs, reduced regulations and taxes, and scaled back the complicated and ambitious war on poverty in favor of direct, nonmeans-tested aid, such as soup kitchens, food pantries, and meal deliveries to the homebound. Obviously, Kleinbard disagrees with this, and there's plenty to debate about it. But pretending that small-government types want poor kids to go to bed hungry or old people to eat cat food is insulting. Worse, it ducks his responsibility to defend government policies as actually working well enough that they should be expanded. It's enough for him that these programs have good intentions, and that people like me have bad intentions.

Eat the rich

If anyone with libertarian tendencies is still reading, Kleinbard's final attempt to drive her off is to claim she believes that you can't tax the rich enough to make much difference to the poor, so you should not tax them at all. I'm pretty sure he knows no one makes this argument or either of the two arguments above, as in a book loaded with endnotes, he has no citations for them (okay, Leona Helmsley did say: "Only the little people pay taxes," but the Queen of Mean does not speak for everyone, and anyway her claim was about the current state, not the desired goal).

The argument that Kleinbard is mangling is that it's easy to tax consumption – if someone has a loaf of bread, you can take it and give it to someone else – but hard to tax income or wealth. If someone has a factory that makes bread, you

can seize the factory, but all you get is the building and ovens. Almost all the value is in the skilled and organized workforce, and the network of suppliers and distributors. Those are too intangible to seize. Moreover, seizures destroy the legal certainty in which business value thrives. Nationalization leads to disaster.

You can try to tax the factory – say, by making it set aside one loaf in ten for the poor, or pay a dime for every loaf produced. But the cost of that tax may get passed along to consumers, so you're back to taxing consumption. And income is even less tangible than wealth; there's not even a phys-

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ical factory. Most people need to spend most of their incomes for living expenses, so we can tax them. But people who can afford to invest most of their income require complicated tax codes with hard-to-determine economic effects.

Even if you do somehow manage to extract resources that have been used for capital investment and turn them into consumption, you probably reduce future consumption, so you're still taxing consumption. On top of these theoretical problems, there are the practical issues that ownership is easy to obscure or move, that income can be transmuted by paper transactions, and that rich people can afford to pay expensive accountants, lawyers, and lobbyists. To be clear, there's no doubt that you can get businesses and rich people to write checks to the government; the uncertainty is that the effect is on the distribution of real goods and services.

To the extent that it's true that taxes mostly reduce consumption, it is difficult to pay for expensive social programs by taxing the rich. The top 1 percent have roughly one-third of the wealth in the US and one-fifth of the income, but only spend about one-twenty-fifth of total consumption (these

figures depend quite a bit on definitions, but the relative sizes are not in dispute). So, if we could expropriate the 1 percent's wealth, we could give the 99 percent a 50 percent boost in wealth, if we took all the 1 percent's income we could give a 25 percent increase in income, but if we took everything the 1 percent consumes it would only mean a 4 percent increase in consumption for everyone else (and to the extent that consumption is made up of things like jewelry, art, and designer dresses, it might not help impoverished families much).

Moreover, if you think of the government as taking goods from one person and giving them to

another, it's hard to justify any programs that take from anyone of below median affluence, or that give to anyone above median. The transaction is probably a negative sum; there are costs to redistribution and it reduces the incentives of both donor and recipient, so it would seem to increase net welfare only if you take from people with surplus and give to people in need. While 'surplus' and 'need' are opinions, you can't say that anyone is in both states at once. Or you could argue the government increases value by deploying consumption better than individuals would choose on their own – say, by a tax on gasoline that reduces driving mileage and is used to improve public transportation, leading to more people getting where they want to go faster, at less environmental impact. But that argument doesn't work for programs that just transfer money from one person to another, like social security.

So, the argument is not that rich people shouldn't pay taxes, but that the scope of government programs should be limited to redistribution from rich to poor, and redirection of consumption into higher-value uses. In particular, it argues against middle-class entitlements which generally



shift consumption from poorer people to richer, and from better economic uses to worse, and waste a lot of resources taking money and giving it back to the same people. There certainly are counter-arguments to this analysis, but Kleinbard doesn't bother with them, he merely misrepresents it as "don't tax the rich."

It's the spending, stupid!

After driving away most of the people who will disagree with him, Kleinbard starts to talk sense. His first point is that it is government spending that matters, not taxing or borrowing or the number of pages of regulation. In fact, while he uses the word "spending," he makes clear that it is government goals that matter – what the government tries to do – not how it chooses to make the effort.

For example, suppose we want to reduce the use of incandescent light bulbs. We could tax incandescent bulbs, or subsidize fluorescents, or impose regulations, or run an education campaign. A subsidy could be funded through taxes, borrowing, or unfunded future promises. Regulations could be imposed on manufacturers, retailers, or consumers. There are an infinite number of ways variants of these approaches could be combined.

While there are pros and cons of the different methods, it doesn't make sense to debate them until after we've decided what we want to do. A proposal to tax incandescents might get a knee-jerk response from people who hate tax increases. A proposal to subsidize fluorescents might get an equally strong response from different people who call it "corporate welfare." None of this has anything to do with the issue. You have an ideologically-driven fight, determined by how the proposal is framed rather than a rational discussion of the benefits and costs of incandescent light bulbs.

When we discuss goals, it's easy to compromise. I want to reduce incandescent use 20 percent and you want to reduce it 80 percent, so we agree to split the difference and aim for 50 percent. We both feel good; we got something of what we wanted, our views were respected, and we gave up something for someone we respect. Even if my views are far out of line with the compromise outcome, I understand that the right way to make progress on this issue is to convince others of my views; I was not repressed or ignored. Another advantage is that it's

going to be easy to tell if the program is successful or not, and if not, we can adjust it. When the goal is accomplished, the program can be retired.

If we instead roll this up into eternal ideological disputes about whether taxes are too high or too low, or whether we're broke or rich, or how good the market is at determining things, little compromise is possible. 'Splitting the difference' can lead to irrational policies, unlike the case with simple goals. Whatever the outcome, half the people are likely to feel something was crammed down their throats and the other half that they were forced to accept some flawed half-measure. No one will have a stake in the success of the effort, not even the people tasked with the job. Without clear goals, the program can degenerate into mindless enforcement, even if the rules are not effective, and it can take on a life of its own, expanding in scope and power long after the original intentions are forgotten.

Divide and conquer

I think it's even worse than Kleinbard suggests. Once the policy debate gets fragmented into unresolvable side issues, we're going to end up with opaque and complex legislation. That creates the opportunity for people to sneak in special benefits that represent no one's idea of any consensus goal. Politicians can grandstand, special interests can lard in pork, narrow ideologues can insert unpopular terms in the fine print.

There's another reason that public debate should concentrate on goals rather than means. Any government goal is likely to involve all government means. We might decide on a tax to reduce incandescent light bulb usage, but that's going to lead to lots of regulation defining exactly what the tax applies to; we're going to need administrative machinery to collect the tax, and police powers to enforce it. The tax money will be spent or invested elsewhere, which requires more government action. We have one basic choice about how much the government should try to do. The more we want accomplished, the more we will have to pay. The resources for the program will come out of our consumption. The rules will reduce our freedom. There will be more taxes, regulations, government employees, secrets, lies, lawsuits, crime, and punishment. We will fill out more forms, stand in more lines, and experience more conflicting or

nonsensical regulations. There will be more waste, rent-seeking, political grandstanding, corruption, lobbyists, cronies, and revolving-door employment. History seems to indicate that we can't pick and choose among those costs; big government is a package deal.

An extreme illustration of this is when a government goes to war. This is a massive, even an existential, expansion of goals. Taxes and borrowings go up, of course, but the government must often also resort to simple redirection of consumption: rationing, expropriation, conscription, and similar means. Civil rights are pruned: dissent may be labeled treason, labor organizing punished as sabotage, religious objections to violence treated as aid and comfort to the enemy. Government employment explodes, war profiteers thrive, and political discourse is narrowed to crude jingoism. Secrecy expands and accountability shrinks.

As few of us are anarchists or totalitarians, we all have to pick a level of government that balances the benefits and costs. We will also differ in how to assign that government power among functions like external defense, internal law and order, welfare, education, infrastructure, and other government goals. This is productive public debate in a way that "we're broke/we're not" or "people who feed at the taxpayer-funded trough are moochers and looters/public sector workers are wise, selfless, all-knowing servants of the general good" are not.

Lies, damned lies, and statistics

Kleinbard's next major point is the unreliability of gross domestic product (GDP) as either a policy criterion or a means to evaluate programs. It does not even purport to measure general welfare, and definitional and measurement issues means it isn't all that reliable, even for what it tries to measure. While it's true, in general terms, that most people are better off when GDP is growing than when it is flat or shrinking, any more specific statement than that is questionable.

Again, I agree and would go further. Far too much trust is put in aggregate economic statistics. For another example, consider the unemployment rate. There are many different employment statuses: happily employed, unhappily employed, employed but likely to be fired soon, unemployed but looking for work, student/retired/part-time/

self-employed by choice, student/retired/part-time/self-employed by lack of alternative, unemployed, and so on. Compressing all of them to just three: employed, unemployed and looking for work, unemployed and not looking for work is a major distortion. Of course, there are a lot of employment measures that try to capture different aspects of unemployment, but even collectively they do not describe the employment situation with enough accuracy and detail to be useful, except as general good/bad indicators.

On top of the definitional problems, measurement is very crude. Reporting lags are another issue. The delay between an economic event and when its effects show up in government statistics, plus the lag between statistics and policy reaction, plus the lag between policy changes and economic effects, can easily reach half the length of the business cycle, in which case policy will be completely out of synch with reality.

This issue goes far beyond econometric technicalities. Economic statistics change the basic relation between the government and the governed. Before the modern era, individual problems might have been addressed by family, religious organizations, charity, political authorities, or other means. Feeding the hungry, treating the sick, rescuing those in danger, finding work for the idle, and so on were general social obligations. They were not always undertaken with enthusiasm or competence, but they were claims individuals had on the general populace. Shouting “help” makes a claim on the attention and assistance of anyone who can hear you. Everyone agreed that places where social obligations were taken seriously were good places to be, while places that ignored individual troubles – or even exploited them – were bad places.

Modern governments took over some of these obligations and rationalized them. Instead of yelling “help” you yell “police” or dial 911. Volunteer fire brigades were replaced by municipal fire departments. Militias, posses, and regulators became police forces and armies. Individuals in trouble still had a claim, but it was a narrower administrative right to be pursued through the appointed channels. You could still ask for hand-outs on the street (in some places, anyway) but passersby could legitimately respond that you should take your problems to social services. Paying taxes

to make sure there were professionals and resources available to help everyone in genuine need was sufficient for many people to satisfy social obligations to the less fortunate.

Aggregate economic statistics do something similar from the other side. Instead of having an obligation to feed hungry people, the government is supposed to fight poverty. Rather than find jobs for people, it fights unemployment. Rather than providing a climate that promotes prosperity, it seeks to grow GDP while controlling inflation. Rather than curing the sick, it tries to improve health outcomes. All of these are measured by aggregate statistics rather than individual appeals for help.

In principle, having the government collect and publish statistics does not force it to change policy focus to those statistics. In practice, however, the two seem to invariably go together. This was an explicit political movement toward ‘scientific’

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government that began in Germany in the 1880s and expanded to nearly the entire developed world over the next 50 years. It was explicitly fought as well, especially in the United States. Both sides recognized that once the government began official measurements of social variables, its commitment to individuals would be weakened significantly.

There is an important philosophical issue here. Do you want a society built around every individual respecting every other individual’s right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Or are you willing to subordinate individual respect and individual rights to get a government that works to provide high aggregate levels of life, liberty, and happiness? But, for the most part, philosophical considerations are irrelevant because the aggregate measures are so bad that no one should want to

trade individual rights for quantitative social good.

There are exceptions where goals are simple and objective. We can measure the effect of forcing everyone to get vaccinated on the incidence of a disease, or the effect on aggregate wildfire damage of dynamiting some people’s homes to create a firebreak. In these cases, there is a legitimate philosophical debate. But for complex social issues, government by the numbers doesn’t work.

Putting it all together

A good example to see how these principles apply is Obamacare. Kleinbard spends a good deal of time on it. Imagine if the debate had been focused on goals rather than means. If we put the issue on an ordinal scale we might say that 100 is a desire for fully nationalized healthcare. Zero is the position that the federal government should reduce its role in healthcare as much as possible: convert Medicaid

to block grants to States, sell the VA hospital system, and convert Medicare, Veteran’s benefits, and other federal-provided care to vouchers to be used to purchase private insurance. If the current system, as of 2008, was a 50, Obamacare was about a 60. That probably was close to the median opinion on goals – that the federal government should take significant steps to increase its role in healthcare in order to address recognized deficiencies, but it should work through the existing private insurance and private provider system and should reduce rather than increase total expenditures. There should be little change for the large majority of people who were satisfied with their healthcare arrangements.

Of course, there was no shortage of zealots who wanted 100 or 0, but the realistic ones recognized

that there was no chance of either extreme. A large majority of people agreed that some additional government intervention was called for, and the specific proposals that made up Obamacare had enjoyed wide bipartisan support for nearly 20 years. And nobody would be hugely harmed by a 60. For most people, it would make little difference, and most of those for whom it made a big difference would be helped. So, you would expect almost everyone to go along either out of agreement, respect for consensus, or political realism.

With general agreement for a federal expansion, there would have been no reason to write 1,000 pages of legislation that led to 10,000 pages of regulations that functioned as complex moving parts that would mostly come on line in a big bang five years down the road (with littler bangs earlier and later). Instead, you could have started work immediately on lots of individual reforms, ramping each one up as it was successful, modifying or eliminating the ones that didn't work or proved too unpopular. In particular, you wouldn't cancel individual policies or threaten fines before you got the website working. You would anticipate that there would be lawsuits and pressures for modification; you wouldn't design something so interconnected that one unexpected result – or, for that matter, a technological advance or shift in public opinion – could bring down the whole initiative like a house of cards.

Obviously, that didn't happen. Instead, consensus ideas turned into the most intensely partisan issue in recent memory. A massive bill was written hastily, and drafted badly as a result. It was shoe-horned through via legislative tricks and blatant special favors, without a single Republican vote. That guaranteed that the inevitable problems that popped up could not be fixed by Congress. The bill was not so much unconstitutional as aconstitution-al; that is, written without careful consideration of the constitutional basis for the various provisions, with many parts copied from State or foreign legislation written for entirely different governmental systems. This made it nearly impossible for courts to issue clear opinions on the legislation; in the end, the courts rewrote it in fundamental ways.

The first point is that none of this had anything to do with healthcare. The bulk of Obamacare was uncontroversial minor fixes. And even the simplest

legislation is fraught with surprises and unintended consequences. No sensible person could predict the effect of Obamacare over more than a decade of implementation, with all the court decisions, executive orders, changes in healthcare, and politics; or even just all the complexity.

Support for or opposition to Obamacare was a political decision. In many cases, it was a narrow political decision, based on the next election. But some supporters hoped that enough early provisions would work and prove popular that a coalition could be built for further improvements. Other supporters thought even more broadly, that Obamacare could be a vanguard for an expanded welfare state. On the other side, some people hoped that opposition to Obamacare could generate support for shrinking the federal government.

Why we fight

So, why did we have such a perverse outcome? Kleinbard ignores his own principles of concentrating on goals to put the blame on “jerks” (usually “sniggering” or “sneering”) who didn't want sick poor people to get treatment. He then jettisons his opposition to quantitative aggregates to claim we needed Obamacare because the US spends more and has worse health outcomes than other countries. That's debatable on a factual level, but the main problem is philosophic. Suppose I were to say that the US commuting system is worse than that of other countries because we spend more and take longer to get to work? That's mainly because we're rich and independent, and like to buy sports cars and live far from work. In healthcare, about 90 percent of conditions are self-limiting, meaning you'll either die or get better whether you see a doctor or not. Healthcare spending is not primarily about changing outcomes, it's about feeling better along the way: relieving symptoms and worry, speeding recovery, and coping with symptoms. Much of it is entirely optional: to look better, to participate in dangerous activities, to avoid lawsuits. Rich people will spend more on that than poor people, and they'll spend more to see a doctor more quickly, in more pleasant offices, treated with more respect. Aggregations miss all that. The question is not how much outcome change we got per dollar spent aggregated over everyone, but how happy are individuals with the value they got for their money?

No, the reason we had the fight is that people on both sides wanted to fight. It had no more to do with healthcare than the Battle of Waterloo had to do with control of a square mile of Belgium. And fighting – nonviolent fighting, that is – is good. We need vigorous debate about the appropriate role of government. That's not the problem; the problem is that the fight screwed up healthcare. Have a knock-down, drag-out debate about energy policy, but not in the control room of a nuclear power plant.

I think Frederick Hayek diagnosed the problem. Modern government is two distinct things. On one hand, it is a huge and complicated business. On the other, it wields awesome powers and has responsibility for fundamental values, including justice, individual rights, and general welfare. Those two things do not combine well. The first requires enormous technical expertise and management ability; the second requires wisdom and is better performed by random people (as in a jury) or everybody (as in voting) than by credentialed experts. Bureaucrats should be kept far away from the strongest powers of the State; popular representatives should not be trusted with technical decisions.

This is recognized in two of the three branches of government. The police and Department of Justice do the day-to-day work of maintaining law and order, but they need to go before a judge in order to deprive someone of life, liberty, or property. Judges generally don't have administrative responsibilities beyond running the courts; they are supposed to think about the law and justice, not the effect of their decisions on the litigants (that is, justice is blind). One of the darkest days in Germany's slide into Nazi horror was when the Gestapo was freed from judicial review of its decisions, so the police and courts became one.

In the executive branch, there is a clear distinction between the large mass of civil service employees and political appointees. Civil servants are selected by competitive exam and promoted based on competence and seniority. They can hold political opinions like anyone else, but they are not supposed to let those influence their job actions. Political appointees, on the other hand, serve at the pleasure of the executive. They are supposed to implement Administration policy, not to strive for nonpartisan decisions.

Of course, these separations are not perfect, but they do a lot to prevent political or philosophic disputes from destroying the efficiency of day-to-day operations. Unfortunately, Congress recognizes no analogous distinction. Its members debate the highest political issues, and meddle in the lowest administrative decisions. They oversee drafting of detailed legislation far beyond their technical expertise. They use the most terrible powers of the State to enforce the most trivial whims (the average American commits three federal felonies per day as a result, which in theory means the country is ruled by prosecutorial discretion, but in practice means that most people ignore the law and no one takes Congress seriously enough to care).

There have been attempts to address this problem. When infrastructure spending became so corrupt that even voters wouldn't stand it, Congress gave the Army Corps of Engineers responsibility for selecting projects, and contented itself with arguing about the overall level of infrastructure spending. The Congressional Budget Office was another group that was supposed to focus Congress on discussing high-level goals rather than designing intricate schemes paid for with outrageous assumptions. But neither of these, nor any other reforms, took.

One recent example of this problem was the \$84 billion relief bill for Hurricane Sandy. Kleinbard rants about the great public anger at opponents (yes, they were "jerks" who wanted poor people to remain homeless), but in fact there was universal acknowledgement that the bill had nothing to do with disaster relief. For one thing, it passed three months after the storm, and little of the money was spent in the first year. It spent money in every Congressional district in the country, in many cases for things completely unrelated to any sort of disaster. The majority of provisions were for spending that had been proposed long before Sandy, but cut out of bills subject to normal budget discipline. The core provisions of the bill were to enhance infrastructure to withstand future storms, not to help people hurt by the past storm. The only anger was from people in Washington who were mad that a few honest people in Congress were threatening the porkfest.

Kleinbard thinks that only a jerk would oppose this because it represents essential insurance that

only the government can provide. But insurance should protect everyone who is harmed, not rain money on victims of a large-scale disaster like Sandy while ignoring some guy whose home burns down in a single-house incident. Insurance should also charge premiums not just to pay for the program, but also to send the right economic signals. People who build houses on sandbars in hurricane zones should pay high premiums, based on the expected risk. To the extent that insurance is subsidized, it should be subsidized by the rich, for the poor. Sandy relief did exactly the opposite. If disaster relief were related to helping the least fortunate who suffered the most harm, Sandy relief would have been 10 percent of the size of Katrina

better than this. We can solve most of our issues through voluntary cooperation if the government stays out of the way. It does not cost a lot to provide the basic necessities of life for everyone, nor to ensure equality of opportunity, nor to provide liberty and justice for all. We don't need the tools of big government: drone assassinations, torture, militarized police, secret police, micro-regulation of every aspect of life and criminalization of all regulatory breeches, mass incarceration, capital punishment, weapons of mass destruction, or any of the rest of it.

Cutting back on State violence means we need to scale back our goals that can only be accomplished by force. We need more respect for minori-

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relief, instead of 65 percent larger. The relative size makes sense only if disaster relief is proportional to the wealth of the people harmed.

We are better than this

Yes, we are better than this. We should fight our political battles without screwing up things like healthcare, essential social safety nets, disaster relief, and other bystanders. We should forge a consensus on what the goals of government should be. That means identifying a median belief and getting almost everyone behind it, not as the perfect representation of their beliefs, but as an acceptable compromise they will make out of respect for their fellow citizens.

Kleinbard assumes that consensus means much bigger and stronger government. I disagree. With consensus you don't need as many regulations, or as many guns to back them up. I believe people are

ty opinions and individual rights. That means more goals will have to be accomplished by voluntary organizations. I trust that we won't let people suffer from the government pull-back, because I think we are better than this.

Shrinking the state reduces Congress' power to meddle, and lobbyists' incentive to lobby. Legislation can be rarer and simpler. Perhaps someday we can get back to a set of laws that an individual can learn and understand, obeying because it's the right thing to do rather than because he got an opinion from a law firm. The lighter the hand of government, the more prosperity, the more individual initiative, the more good we can do individually to make things better for everyone. We are better than this.

[AQ1: Is “unlikely” correct here?]