

The Liberty Manifesto



by P.J. O'Rourke

P.J. O'Rourke is the Cato Institute's Mencken research fellow. He delivered these remarks at a May 6, 1993 gala dinner celebrating the opening of the Cato Institute's new headquarters in Washington.

The Cato Institute has an unusual political cause — which is no political cause whatsoever. We are here tonight to dedicate ourselves to that cause, to dedicate ourselves, in other words, to...nothing.

We have no ideology, no agenda, no catechism, no dialectic, no plan for humanity. We have no "vision thing," as our ex-president would say, or, as our current president would say, we have no Hillary.

All we have is the belief that people should do what people want to do, unless it causes harm to other people. And that had better be clear and provable harm. No nonsense about second-hand smoke or hurtful, insensitive language, please.

I don't know what's good for you. You don't know what's good for me. We don't know what's good for mankind. And it sometimes seems as though we're the only people who don't. It may well be that, gathered right here in this room tonight, are all the people in the world who don't want to tell all the people in the world what to do.

This is because we believe in freedom. Freedom — what this country was established upon, what the Constitution was written to defend, what the Civil War was fought to perfect.

Freedom is not empowerment. Empowerment is what the Serbs have in Bosnia. Anybody can grab a gun and be empowered. It's not entitlement. An entitlement is what people on welfare get, and how free are they? It's not an endlessly expanding list of rights — the "right" to education, the "right" to health care, the "right" to food and housing. That's not freedom, that's dependency. Those aren't rights, those are the rations of slavery — hay and a barn for human cattle.

There is only one basic human right, the right to do as you damn well please. And with it comes the only basic human duty, the duty to take the consequences.

All we have is **the belief** that people
should do what **people want** to do,
unless it **causes harm** to other people.

So we are here tonight in a kind of anti-matter protest — an unpolitical undemonstration by deeply uncommitted inactivists. We are part of a huge invisible picket line that circles the White House twenty-four hours a day. We are participants in an enormous non-march on Washington — millions and millions of Americans not descending upon the nation's capital in order to demand nothing from the United States government. To demand nothing, that is, except the one thing which no government in history has been able to do — leave us alone.

There are just two rules of governance in a free society:

- Mind your own business.
- Keep your hands to yourself.

Bill, keep your hands to yourself. Hillary, mind your own business.

We have a group of incredibly silly people in the White House right now, people who think government works. Or that government would work, if you got some real bright young kids from Yale to run it.

We're being governed by dorm room bull session. The Clinton administration is over there right now pulling an all-nighter in the West Wing. They think that, if they can just stay up late enough, they can create a healthy economy and bring peace to former Yugoslavia.

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The Clinton administration is going to decrease government spending by increasing the amount of money we give to the government to spend.

Health care is too expensive, so the Clinton administration is putting a high-powered corporate lawyer in charge of making it cheaper. (This is what I always do when I want to spend less money — hire a lawyer from Yale.) If you think health care is expensive now, wait until you see what it costs when it's free.

The Clinton administration is putting together a program so that college graduates can work to pay off their school tuition. As if this were some genius idea. It's called getting a job. Most folks do that when they get out of college, unless, of course, they happen to become governor of Arkansas.

And the Clinton administration launched an attack on people in Texas because those people were religious nuts with guns. Hell, this country was founded by religious nuts

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with guns. Who does Bill Clinton think stepped ashore on Plymouth Rock? Peace Corps volunteers? Or maybe the people in Texas were attacked because of child abuse. But, if child abuse was the issue, why didn't Janet Reno tear-gas Woody Allen?

You know, if government were a product, selling it would be illegal.

Government is a health hazard. Governments have killed many more people than cigarettes or unbuckled seat belts ever have.

Government contains impure ingredients — as anybody who's looked at Congress can tell you.

On the basis of Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign promises, I think we can say government practices deceptive advertising.

And the merest glance at the federal budget is enough to convict the government of perjury, extortion, and fraud.

There, ladies and gentlemen, you have the Cato Institute's program in a nutshell: **government should be against the law.**

Term limits aren't enough. We need jail.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In the early 1970's, P.J. joined *The National Lampoon* where he became the editor-in-chief and created, with Doug Kenney, the now classic *1964 High School Yearbook Parody*. In the 1980's, he decided the real world was funnier than anything National Lampoon's writers could invent, so he became a roving reporter covering crises and conflicts around the world.

P.J. O'Rourke is the best-selling author of ten books. He has written for such diverse publications as *Automobile*, *The Weekly Standard*, *House and Garden*, *Foreign Policy*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Forbes FYI* and *Rolling Stone* and is currently a regular correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*.

P.J. is known as a hard-bitten, cigar-smoking conservative (making him unique among contemporary humorists). But, in fact, he bashes all political persuasions. As he puts it, "Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys."

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
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