

Opinion

Gulf Breeze NEWS



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2005
 Florida Press Association
 Place Winner
 ■ Editorial Page
 ■ Sports Section



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The late, great American nation

"It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties." —James Madison

We live in a fundamentally different country since 9/11. Not only do many Americans view their government with suspicion, but how their government views them has drastically changed.

A perfect example of this took place last fall. Prior to the elections that transformed the make-up of Congress, the Bush Administration pushed for the inclusion of two stealth provisions into a mammoth defense budget bill. The additions made it easier for the government to declare martial law and establish a dictatorship.

Since the days of our Founding Fathers, when King George III used his armies to terrorize and tyrannize the colonies, the American people have understandably distrusted the use of a national military force to intervene in civilian affairs, except in instances of extreme emergency and limited duration.

Hence, as a sign of the Founders' concern that the people not be under the power of a military government, control of the military was vested in a civilian government, with a civilian commander-in-chief. And the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 furthered those safeguards against military law, making it a crime for the government to use the military to carry out arrests, searches, seizure of evidence and other activities normally handled by a civilian police force.

However, with the inclusion of a seemingly insignificant rider into the massive defense bill (the martial law section of the 591-page Defense Appropriations Act takes up just a few paragraphs), the Bush Administration has managed to weaken what the New York Times refers to as



"two obscure but important bulwarks of liberty." One is posse comitatus. The other is the Insurrection Act of 1807, which limits a president's domestic use of the military to putting down lawlessness, insurrection and rebellion where a state is violating federal law or depriving the people of their constitutional rights.

Under these new provisions, the president can now use the military as a domestic police force in response to a natural disaster, disease outbreak, terrorist attack or to any "other condition." According to the new law, Bush doesn't even have to notify Congress of his intent to use military force against the American people—he just has to notify them once he has done so. The defense budget provision's vague language leaves the doors wide open for rampant abuse. As writer Jane Smiley noted, "the introduction of these changes amounts, not to an attack on the Congress and the balance of power, but to a particular and concerted attack on the citizens of the nation. Bush is laying the legal groundwork to repeal even the appearance of democracy."

The main reason we do not want the military patrolling our streets is that under martial law, the Bill of Rights becomes null and void. A standing army—something that propelled the early colonists into revolution—strips the American people of any vestige of freedom. Thus, if we were subject to martial law, there would be no rules, no pro-

tections, no judicial oversight and no elections. And unless these provisions are repealed, the president's new power will be set in stone for future administrations to use—and abuse.

A fundamental principle of American government is to not trust public officials. But modern Americans, primed by television pabulum and ignorant of their history, have a tendency to trust people in office simply because they appear to share a common faith, say the right things or come from a certain region of the country. But lest we forget, power has a tendency to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Furthermore, the way this was handled proves that we cannot trust government officials. By sneaking this provision in as a rider to a larger bill, public debate and media attention were avoided. Had the provision been openly discussed and debated, there would have been opposition and outcry. And it most likely would have been soundly rejected. Instead, it was rushed through the Republican-controlled Congress prior to the elections and enacted into law.

The Founding Fathers would have literally been up in arms over Bush's actions. They understood the dangers inherent in vesting power in a single person, which is exactly what this legislation purports to do. There's no limit to what the president can now do: the "any condition" language opens the door for total power, a dictatorship. The people

are left with no defense. Furthermore, this legislation erases the balance between the state and federal government. The state governors understood this, and that's why many vocally opposed the provisions. But it was to no avail.

The non-scandal of CEO pay

By Rich Lowery
 National Review

High executive pay hasn't quite reached that status of a bipartisan "crisis," but it's approaching it. The Democratic senator from Virginia, Jim Webb, fulminated against it in his response to President Bush's State of the Union address.

Bush himself, in a "State of the Economy" speech on Wall Street, urged corporate boards to "step up to their responsibilities" to better manage CEO pay.

Once something officially becomes a crisis, that means that it is certain there will be a raft of foolish proposals to address it, and sure enough, legislative measures to crimp corporate pay already are bubbling up. There are, of course, some abuses in CEO compensation packages, but the broad picture justifies the truism, "You get what you pay for."

Skyrocketing CEO pay has coincided with two decades of wondrous economic performance, during which the value of all stocks traded in the U.S. rose from \$1.3 trillion in 1981 to more than \$15 trillion in 2000.

The scolds of corporate pay yearn, in effect, for the bad old days of the 1970s. Then, CEOs were paid relatively small amounts, but corporations weren't particularly innovative and were run with little concern for the interests of shareholders. The hostile-takeover revolution of the 1980s changed all that.

As The Economist magazine puts it, CEOs had been paid like bureaucrats; now they are paid like entrepreneurs. The key innovation was tying compensation to the value of the company's stock through executive stock-ownership plans. A CEO's pay, therefore, was directly related to his

performance, and his interests brought into alignment with those of shareholders.

It worked, and this model of pay spread throughout the corporate world.

The larger a company is, the greater an incentive that company will have to have the best-possible CEO, since it has more riding on it than a smaller firm. The number of people with the management skills, toughness and imagination suited to running a large corporation is small, and competition for their services is fierce. They are going to be paid a lot of money, especially when a profit or loss of billions of dollars depends on how they perform.

CEOs might be paid extremely well, but they don't have easy jobs. Their performance is always evaluated by the inescapable taskmaster, the financial markets. When they are found lacking, they

are canned -- witness Kevin Rollins at Dell, out as CEO after just two and a half years. CEOs last on average about six years in their jobs.

There are always examples of excess. The CEO of Home Depot, Robert Nardelli, stoked outrage when he left the company with a \$200 million severance package. His contract was a relic of the bull market of 2000, but it was understandable that Home Depot had desperately wanted a highly regarded former GE executive.

One theory says that corporate boards of publicly traded companies are too cozy with management, so they dole out excessive pay. This happens sometimes. But companies owned by private-equity firms with a direct stake in their success pay similarly large packages to entice and keep hard-charging CEOs. The market knows what it's doing here.

On the Spot:

WHERE WE PUT PEOPLE "ON THE SPOT" TO ANSWER A QUESTION "ON THE SPOT."
 By Franklin Hayes

"Since daylight-saving time is March 11, do you prefer to spring forward or fall backward?"



"I like it to stay daylight longer."
 -Chelsie Biggs
 Gulf Breeze



"I like to spring forward. It gives you more time in the day to do things."
 -Denise Biggs
 Gulf Breeze



"I personally like spring forward. I like the longer days."
 -Jana Brewer
 Pensacola



"I like to fall backward because I want more sleep."
 -Michele Moody
 Gulf Breeze

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dot's the best
 We all know taxes and insurance have gone up! But I need to thank our own local State Farm Don Waldon's office for all the assistance in our hurricane claims. They are the best.
 Sincerely,
 Sally Rawlins
 Gulf Breeze