

American Lemmings and Crony Capitalism

Written by Kathleen McCarthy
Wednesday, 15 May 2013 05:39

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It's become a fascination to observe what I refer to as the American "lemming effect." So far, government overreach – no matter how egregious, harmful, dangerous, or in some cases lethal – has elicited no discernible impact on the average American's willingness to act for change.

I wonder if most Americans believe there is some sort of undefined limit or invisible line that government will eventually reach that will magically trigger a halt to all the political and financial corruption that is prevailing in our nation.

In the past decade alone, the abuse of power has reached an all-new high because we the people have been civically and politically idle. Our silence and immobility are our consent, delighting politicians, bureaucrats, and corporate executives beyond measure.

Emboldened by the American people's collective inertia, legislators, regulators, and the courts are continually creating laws and rules that exempt themselves from the same laws that bind the rest of us, providing ultimate protection from prosecution for their criminal conduct.

The primary mandate for government is no longer that of agency representation of the American people. Instead, "continuity of government" has become the underlying justification for nearly all it does in the 21st Century, disingenuously using the mantle of America's safety and security as its perfect cover for replacing individual rights with a centralized model of governance.

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On April 15, President Barack Obama signed into law S.716, repealing Section II of the Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge (STOCK) Act of 2012, rationalizing that by making this information more accessible to the public, national security might be compromised. A letter from high-ranking officials from multiple agencies (to whom Section II also applies), including the Department of Homeland Security, was sent to Congress and the administration, giving Congress the excuse it needed to repeal the portion of the STOCK Act that gives it any teeth (RCReader.com/y/letter).

The STOCK Act makes it a crime for government personnel to engage in insider trading, especially because legislators and bureaucrats are privy to sensitive, market-changing information on a regular basis. Recall that in October 2012, the *Washington Post* published a report that, among other things, showed that between 2004 and 2010, the median net worth of Congress rose 5 percent while falling 39 percent for the average American (RCReader.com/y/wealth).

Section II requires Congress, including staff, and senior-level employees of the executive branch to provide full disclosure of finances by filing electronically in a user-friendly, searchable, sortable database. Currently this same information is provided in paper form, but is only available in one location in DC, making it extremely difficult by design for the public to access, analyze, and track malfeasance.

Government watchdogs such as the Sunlight Foundation and the Government Accountability Institute dismiss national-security concerns as absurd and scaremongering on the part of Washington insiders who have aligned to protect themselves from proper scrutiny (RCReader.com/y/sunlight). The Government Accountability Institute's president, Peter Schweizer, wrote the book *Throw Them All Out* , which provided the research that prompted the STOCK Act.

The added disgrace is that it took Congress less than 30 seconds to pass this insular measure. It passed by unanimous consent, without a roll-call vote, giving cover to legislators to later disclaim it. Obama signed it with precious little media coverage (the same day as the Boston Marathon), preserving the status quo so that politicians and bureaucrats remain free to engage in criminal activity under the radar.

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Mainstream media in the Quad Cities area reported on the original act more than a year ago, but searches on local news media's Web sites for coverage of last month's continuity-of-government coup only turned up one story from a local broadcast station's site: "Obama signs law limiting disclosure requirements," KWQC.com/story/21982445/obama-signs-law-limiting-disclosure-requirements. That page has now been removed.

All of our so-called representatives – including Chuck Grassley, Tom Harkin, Dave Loebsack, and Cheri Bustos – were silent, offering no objection to repeal the requirement for online disclosure of their financial activity. This arrogance is inexcusable, and should qualify for recall or some sanction that provides remedy. We the people cannot expect the criminals to prosecute themselves.

Another shocking act by Congress is the passage of H.R. 933, the Consolidated & Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013, which, in part, effectively exempts Monsanto from any liability stemming from products that utilize genetically modified organisms. Recent French studies have revealed that rats ingesting GMOs for longer than 90 days develop large tumors in their digestive systems. Since these studies are the only ones conducted for longer than 90 days, the results are alarming and should provide America with the red flag(s) that have prompted Europe, Japan, and many other developed countries to ban GMOs altogether. If GMOs are safe, why does Monsanto require special dispensation from harm GMOs might cause? (See the *Reader's* cover story "Cutting Through the Frankenfood Debate" at RCReader.com/y/gmos.)

Meanwhile, H.R. 933 – also dubbed the Monsanto Protection Act – contains Section 735, which was purportedly snuck in, with no one yet taking credit. The provision, within a 240-page bill, gives the Secretary of Agriculture (currently former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack) the authority to grant, upon request, a temporary permit or deregulation of what has been determined to be un-regulated by the courts. So, essentially, Monsanto can just make a call if any of its work product or activities happen to be found harmful (RCReader.com/y/hr933).

This is a classic example of the public/private partnerships that are pervasive in global economies. Capitalism and free markets are not functional when government and corporate monopolies collude to provide such comprehensive protection of profits. The Center for Food Safety released a report in February that reveals that only three corporations control most of the global commercial seed market, and that the average cost to plant an acre of soybeans rose by 325 percent between 1995 and 2011. Meanwhile, the impact of Monsanto's victory in the

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Supreme Court this week (RCReader.com/y/patent) on America's small farmers and growers is ominous at best. The court upheld Monsanto's claim that its patent and property rights on genetically modified seeds carries over into succeeding generations of seeds, no matter whether the farmer knew such seeds were mixed into his crop or not.

Such historic rulings have prompted some public awareness of the matter, including a worldwide "March on Monsanto" on May 25, to protest what many consider to be crony capitalism at the expense of food safety and affordability. Locations of the marches, including a to-be-determined one in Moline, are available at RCReader.com/y/march .

Capitalism has all but disappeared in America under the umbrella of government intervention in nearly all economic transactions. Americans need to reacquaint themselves with the principles of capitalism, free markets, and open societies before it is too late. A good source to start that education is David Stockman's recorded presentation on crony capitalism found at RCReader.com/y/stockman

. At least bother to understand what is at stake due to the lemming effect.