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## **An Open Letter to High-School Students: Pay Attention to Government**

**by Bart Frazier**

To every high-school student in this country between the ages of 15 and 18, this letter is to you. If there is ever something that you should take the time to learn about, it is government.

Why? — you ask. If your idea of government is endless babbling by old congressional codgers on C-SPAN, you're partly right. The art of government, or politics, is less entertaining than a visit to the dentist. However, hidden among all the babble of congressional rules and yeas and nays that you hear on television, the real secret that is never explained to you in school is that government is force, and government can use this force to violate your rights.

It is through government that other people can take your money, forbid you to visit foreign countries, prevent you from drinking alcohol, mandate attendance in public (i.e., government) schools, and even force you into the military to possibly die in battle thousands of miles away from American shores. In short, you need to be interested in government because government officials can adversely affect your lives in the most serious of ways.

Since government at its basic level is force, what should the role of government be? After all, with force government can act in just about any way that we allow it to, right or wrong. Philosophers have debated the question for centuries, but a sound rule of thumb that has emerged is that government should defend our rights, while at the same time not violate them.

In other words, government should protect us from the violence of others but not initiate violence against us. The government should not be allowed to steal from us, it should not be allowed to enslave us, and it should not be allowed to murder us. In short, it should protect our fundamental rights but not transgress them.

It sounds pretty straightforward, doesn't it? Government should not prevent any activity that does not violate the rights of another person. However, you'll see, in fact, that most of the things that government does today violate individual liberty in one way or another. Let's look at a few examples.

## **The drug war**

One example that all of you are probably familiar with is the drug war. This ought to be an easy one for all of you. You probably have friends who have done drugs, and you may have even heard of undercover narcs in your school. I am certainly not telling you that doing drugs is okay because, as you have been told a million times by your parents and teachers, drugs can and do kill people. At the very least, they can numb your brain and make you stupid. However, what your parents and teachers do not tell you is that government has no right to throw anyone in jail for doing drugs. If someone sits in front of his television and smokes a joint, whose rights has he violated? Nobody's!

Last year alone, more than 1.8 million people were arrested on drug offenses and, with the exception of those who used violence against others, not one of them deserves to be behind bars. Plain and simple, drugs should be legalized, even the hard ones. As long as people don't initiate force against others in the process, people should be free to do unhealthy things. That's what genuine freedom is all about it.

## **Conscription**

The draft is another example of the government's violation of individual rights, and this one could have a profound effect on you. You may not be familiar with the draft, but you should be, because it is a program the government uses to enslave people your age. The draft is the process whereby the government selects people to be part of the military. If your name is selected, you have no choice — you must obey or be punished. If the country is at war at the time you are drafted, you will go through a short training period and then you will be sent into battle, most likely in some faraway country. On the battlefield of whatever country you are sent to, you will have to kill others in order to survive and you may die yourself, most likely for a cause that's not worth killing or dying for.

Slavery is one of the most despicable crimes that can be committed against anyone, and forcing a person to fight in an army is among the worst forms of slavery. Not only is the victim's labor stolen but there is also a good chance he will die in the process. The draft is one of the most egregious violations of individual rights our country has ever committed. If he were alive, you could ask Daniel Webster, who penned a famous essay entitled "On Conscription," which you can easily find on the Internet.

The idea that the government would draft you may sound far-fetched to you right now, but it has happened before. Ask your parents about the Vietnam War; they will certainly know people who were enslaved and perhaps even died as a result of the draft. And ominously for you, there is talk in the air of instituting the draft again to serve in the occupation of Iraq. If you didn't know that, you need to pay more attention to government.

## **Welfare**

Third, contrary to what your teachers may have taught you, government welfare is not charity. It is theft. Social Security is not the warm and fuzzy charitable retirement program that you have been led to believe it is. It is instead a scheme that enables the government to take money (by force) from one group of people — i.e., the young and productive, most of whom are struggling to start families — in order to give it to a group of elderly people, many of whom have plenty of money saved up after decades of work.

Let's suppose that you are hungry but you have no lunch money. In order to buy lunch, you beat up a middle-schooler and take his pocket change to feed yourself. I know all of you would agree that this would be wrong. Theft is always wrong, no matter what the intention is, no matter how hungry you are.

Yet this is exactly what government does with Social Security when it takes the wages of the working to give to the elderly. The only difference is that instead of beating you up, they use the IRS to take your money. If you don't pay your taxes to the IRS, government agents may not beat you up but they will send you to jail. How can it be right for the government to take one person's money and give it to someone else, especially when it is clearly so wrong for anyone else to do so?

No matter how well-intentioned, the government cannot morally take from one person what is rightfully his and transfer it to another person. Charity exists only when a person *voluntarily* gives his money or time to help someone out. The only moral way to help the elderly, sick, and poor is to freely give your time or money. Good examples abound, such as the work your church or local soup kitchen does.

Social Security, and all other government programs that transfer money from one person to another, are legalized theft and should be abolished. Americans lived without these welfare-theft programs for more than 125 years; our ancestors believed in voluntary charity, not coerced welfare. If you did not know that, you should pay more attention to government.

## **Gun control**

Gun control is another issue that most young people don't understand because they have been taught that guns are dangerous and responsible for the deaths of countless persons every year. It is true that guns are dangerous, but people are responsible for the deaths of those they shoot, not the guns they use. Guns are only tools, and they are dangerous only in the hands of dangerous or careless people. Keep in mind that every person has a natural right to defend himself, even with a gun, as long as he doesn't violate the rights of others in the process.

I am sure that you have heard of the Second Amendment to the Constitution — it guarantees the natural right we all have to keep and bear arms. In other words, the government is

not legally permitted to do anything to take our guns away. When the Constitution was written in 1787, why would the authors want to make sure that we could all keep our guns? Your civics teacher will never tell you this, but the reason is so that we could defend ourselves *against our own government* should the need should ever arise.

Does this sound crazy to you? If so, listen to what Thomas Jefferson had to say about gun ownership: “What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms.” These are not the words of some whacko, but rather of the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence.

You should be extremely outraged at any politician who favors the idea of gun control. Though it seems like a small and meaningless act, taking away guns from the citizens of a country is one of the first steps that dictators take to rule their countries with iron fists. They know that once the people have been disarmed, there is nothing they can do to stop the government from violating individual rights. As long as citizens are armed, politicians will always think twice about doing very bad things to their own people. If you didn’t know why the Founding Fathers wanted you to own guns, you should pay more attention to government.

There are many more examples of the abuses that we suffer at the hands of government, but as long as you learn this one lesson — *that government is the biggest threat to the freedom of its citizenry* — you are well on the way to becoming an educated citizen and a patriot. There are no parting words more appropriate with which I could leave you than these words attributed to George Washington: “Government is not reason; it is not eloquence; it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master.”

That is why you should pay attention to government.

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