

The Jefferson of Our Time

By Thomas J. DiLorenzo

American politicians, from Lincoln to FDR and even Bill Clinton, have tried to claim the political mantle of Thomas Jefferson. Lincoln was truly the anti-Jefferson who nevertheless mouthed Jefferson's words of "all men are created equal" to try to win the support of Jeffersonians in the North in the 1864 election. FDR even more ludicrously tried to paint the New Deal as a Jeffersonian program for similar reasons; and political junkies may recall that President William Jefferson Clinton made a point of stopping off at Jefferson's home, Monticello, on the way to his first inauguration. (He then turned around and proposed to nationalize the health care sector of the economy, funded by the largest tax increases in history – decidedly anti-Jeffersonian positions.)

American politicians understand that there are – and always have been – a great many Americans who believe in the Jeffersonian philosophy that "that government is best which governs least." They may want minimal government, as called for by the Constitution, but by and large they want to be left alone to live their own lives within the rule of law and the norms of civilized society. They distrust centralized political power and hold the commonsense view that government is always easier to control the closer it is to the people.

That's why politicians from Lincoln to Clinton have mouthed Jeffersonian slogans. They want the votes, but have no intention of adopting any of Jefferson's political beliefs and policies based on them. (For his part, George W. Bush is probably more familiar with "The Jeffersons" television show of the 1970s than the political ideas of our third president.)

In reality, Grover Cleveland was the last American president who actually believed in Jeffersonian principles of government and was even moderately successful in implementing them (he vetoed literally hundreds of pieces of legislation). It's been almost 120 years since a genuine Jeffersonian has been a major candidate for the highest office in the land, but we finally have in our midst the genuine item – the real deal – in the person of Ron Paul.

Unlike all other candidates for the presidency, Ron Paul does not attempt to dupe the public into believing that he is in favor of fiscal responsibility, limited and decentralized government, and individual liberty. He has spent the past three decades demonstrating that he is single-mindedly devoted to these principles, and sincerely believes that he can succeed in returning them to the American polity.

When Ron Paul proposes abolishing the Federal Reserve Board and returning to the gold standard, he is taking Jefferson's position in his great debate with Hamilton over the propriety of a government-run bank. As explained in my forthcoming book, *Hamilton's Curse*, Hamilton wanted a big, expansive and intrusive central government that would centrally plan the economy and pursue "imperial glory" in foreign affairs. He wanted America to imitate the British empire. In order to achieve this, he knew that a government-run bank would be necessary. Jefferson, on the other hand, believed that the sole purpose of government was to protect the lives, liberty and property of the people, and that such a bank would be a danger to liberty. The two men debated the issue in long essays submitted to President George Washington, who eventually adopted the position of his fellow Federalist, Hamilton. (The Federalists in Congress played a role by passing legislation that enlarged the District of Columbia so that it would be adjacent to Washington's property on the Potomac River. They had blocked Washington's request for this until he signed the bank bill.)

It was a Jeffersonian Democrat, President Andrew Jackson, who would de-fund Hamilton's Bank of the United States some forty years later, after it had fueled decades of political corruption and economic instability. Hamiltonian central banking was subsequently revived by one of his political heirs – Lincoln – and then cemented into place by the Federal Reserve Act in 1913.

Ron Paul also calls for a dramatic reduction in government debt by abolishing unnecessary and harmful government bureaucracies, such as the U.S. Department of Education, as well as a foreign attempting to centrally plan and police the entire planet. government's debt was only legitimate in emergencies, should never exist for more than 19 years. He believed debt – even in a defensive war – that would financially fortunes of our republic," he wrote, "as depending, in the public debt." As president, his party abolished all of taxes and reduced the government debt from \$83

Hamilton, on the other hand, wanted a large affluent of the country to the government, just as today. The affluent would be the government therefore provide political support for all the tax would be paid their principal and interest. He called the view of government debt prevailed, more or less, until which Hamiltonian Keynesianism became the order of debt to the tune of some \$70 trillion if one includes all government pension liabilities. Ron Paul wants to immoral policy of rampant government debt

The income tax has centralized all political power independence of the states, and has made tax slaves out of millions of Americans. Once again, Ron Paul's call for the abolition of income taxation is a genuine Jeffersonian sentiment. How inspirational and revolutionary would it be to hear President Ron Paul quote Jefferson's first inaugural address at his first inaugural: "[A] wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government . . ." (emphasis added).

Jefferson was of course a strict constructionist in regard to the Constitution, as is Ron Paul. This was the key to Jefferson's debate with Hamilton over a national bank, with Jefferson arguing that the Constitution did not provide for such a function, and Hamilton inventing the subversive notion of "implied powers" of the Constitution to defend his proposal. The Hamiltonian position has prevailed for several generations now, making a complete mockery of the Constitution itself. Ron Paul wants to reverse the damage done by the political heirs of Hamilton.

Along with his strict constructionist views of the Constitution, Jefferson believed that the keystone of the entire document was the Tenth Amendment. After delegating a few express powers to the central government, the citizens of the states reserved all others to themselves, and to the states respectively. The Tenth Amendment announced, essentially, that the citizens of the free and independent states were sovereign. They were the masters, not the servants, of the federal government which they had created by ratifying the Constitution in state political conventions. In his first inaugural he announced his support of "the State governments, in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against antirepublican tendencies . . ." This is how government was to be consistent with the protection of individual liberty in Jefferson's opinion. It is also Ron Paul's opinion.

Jefferson advocated a modest foreign policy, unlike his nemesis Hamilton, the original Neocon, who wanted to invade France and become an imperialistic power. "[P]eace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none," was his foreign policy philosophy (from the first inaugural).

Jefferson understood that war is the mother of the state, and did everything he could to avoid it. When the British began confiscating American ships and kidnapping American sailors, he imposed an economically destructive trade embargo rather than risk an even more economically destructive war with England. Ron Paul is the only presidential candidate in memory to espouse the wisdom of Jefferson and Washington when it comes to foreign policy.

When Ron Paul sounds the alarm about how the current regime has attacked civil liberties, including the freedom of speech, with its totalitarian "PATRIOT Act," its lust to suspend habeas corpus, and even calls by the likes of Newt Gingrich to "rethink" the First Amendment, it is reminiscent of Jefferson's great confrontation with the enemies of civil liberty during his time – the Adams administration and the Federalist Party. One of the first things the Federalist Party did upon assuming power was to make criticism of the government illegal with its Sedition Act. Jefferson orchestrated nationwide opposition to this totalitarian policy, and authored his famous Kentucky Resolve of 1798: "Resolved, that the several States composing the United States of America, are not united on the principles of unlimited submission to their General Government . . . and that whensoever the General Government assumes undelegated powers [such as the abolition of free speech], its acts are unauthoritative, void, and of no force." This would also be an appropriate quote for President Ron Paul's first inaugural address.

The dominance of the Hamiltonian, Big Government philosophy, and the marginalization of Jefferson and his ideas, is the fundamental source of America's biggest problems, including a foreign policy that has run amok; a tax system that treats citizens like medieval serfs; an arrogant and unresponsive central government; the evisceration of the states as independent political sovereignties; the economic boom-and-bust cycle that is generated by "the Fed"; the eagerness of Washington politicians to strip away more and more of our civil liberties; and the infantilization of America that has been created by a gargantuan welfare state. Ron Paul is the only national politician who is devoted to reversing all of these dangerous trends. All other candidates propose either minor tinkering at the margins, or an expansion of the same failed policies. He is the Jefferson of our time, and our true hope of returning to the guiding principles of the founding fathers. We can take this road, or we can continue along on the road to serfdom.

Thomas J. DiLorenzo, professor of economics at Loyola College in Maryland and the author of *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War*, (Three Rivers Press/Random House). His latest book is *Lincoln Unmasked: What You're Not Supposed To Know about Dishonest Abe* (Crown Forum/Random House).

