



The Liberty Manifesto

by P. J. O'Rourke

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.

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.

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 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. □

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

A Call for American Volunteers

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Counting the Days

by Terry Eastland

There are many good reasons for the press not to take the pulse of a presidency after its first hundred days—a practice begun when Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched the New Deal upon taking office in 1933. Still, it would have been hard for the press *not* to have examined Bill Clinton's. Clinton asked for the hundred-days treatment when he promised (another campaign vow) "an explosive hundred-day action period" that would be "the most productive . . . in recent history." And on the eve of the century mark his staff tried to spin the press with a celebratory document that somehow left out such bad moments as the failed Baird nomination.

The hundred-day pieces done by both print and broadcast media were generally thorough reviews of the Clinton presidency through April 29. But I could not find the stories, analyses, and columns that begged to be filed. Here are a few:

The FDR Sidebar. A sidebar on the first hundred days would have been helpful—and easy to execute, given the numerous histories of Roosevelt's presidency. Here's what a news consumer needed to know:

Having won by a landslide (57.4 percent of the vote), FDR took office on March 4, 1933, "a time of acute national privation and foreboding that the closing of the banks reinforced," writes Frank Freidel in *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny*. In his inaugural, Roosevelt famously declared his belief that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Voicing his intention to ask Congress for legislation to meet

the crises of the time, he announced that if Congress did not act, he would, according to Freidel, "ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad Executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe."

Roosevelt did not have to make good on this promise. Immediately he sent Congress an emergency banking measure, which the members passed, despite not having read it; three months later he agreed to a stronger solution, federal insurance of deposits. On March 10, he recommended legislation cutting government salaries and veterans' pensions, which Congress also passed. Then (to quote Freidel again) "dramatically, in helter-skelter fashion, Roosevelt every few days sent Congress a new proposal": March 13, legislation to end Prohibition; March 15, farm legislation; March 21, unemployment relief legislation (which included the Civilian Conservation Corps); March 29, federal securities reg-

ulation; April 3, legislation to save farm mortgages from foreclosure; April 10, the Tennessee Valley Authority; May 17, a national industrial recovery bill.

During his first hundred days, says William Leuchtenburg in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, FDR sent fifteen messages to Congress and saw fifteen "historic laws through to final passage"—often with the help of Republicans, whose votes he skillfully sought. Among other key actions taken pursuant to executive authority, he also took the nation off the gold standard.

The sum of Roosevelt's first hundred days was greater than its parts, large as some of them were. His greatest single contribution to the politics of the 1930s was, in Leuchtenburg's words, "the instillation of hope and courage in the people."

FDR and Clinton: Compare and Contrast. Clinton went to Hyde Park early in his first hundred days. He often quoted Roosevelt's 1932 campaign remark about the need for "bold, persistent experimentation." And again, he's the one who built expectations for a Rooseveltian beginning. Needed was a compare-and-contrast piece, along these lines:

Clinton has not been as busy legislatively as Roosevelt was, or nearly as successful. (The defeat by Senate filibuster of his weirdly named "stimulus" bill is evidence that today's senators *do* read). One reason is that, unlike Roosevelt, Clinton did not cultivate Republicans, instead using a one-party strategy; another is that—a fact neglected in many hundred-day stories—Clinton got only 43 percent of the vote in a three-way race. Finally, 1993 is not 1933, there being no "acute national privation and foreboding," i.e., a Great Depression.

Another striking contrast: Bill Clinton on executive power is no FDR: It is hard



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