

Essays of Freedom 2nd Place Winner

“The Preamble’s Purpose”

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Modern America demands too much from its government. So many citizens from all parties approach the annual election with an entitlement mindset, and base their vote on whoever will make their lives easier and wealthier. America did not begin with such a selfish perspective. This comes out most plainly in the Constitution. Its Preamble explains the purpose of American government. Thus the Constitution cannot be properly interpreted without its prologue. And that prologue can be summed up in one little word- promote.

Before one sees the significance of this little word, he must first view the context. The preamble begins with “We the People, in order to form a more perfect union.”¹ America was born in reaction to British policies. The founding fathers sought to “establish justice,”¹ a quality they obviously found lacking in the English rule. After that comes “insure domestic tranquility”¹- again, they thought the British laws, particularly the quartering act, did not create peace. No one takes well to soldiers taking over his house. The other phrases between the commas establish other duties that Americans deemed invaluable to a government. Last of all came the most important duty- to “secure the blessings of liberty.”¹ The founding fathers considered this the purpose of a government. America fought for government that gave them liberty to pursue happiness. Very few people would disagree with this assessment.

Today’s voters understand all these things except for the means to liberty. One can find the meaning of liberty in that little word that comes just before it, “promote.”¹

All the verbs in the preamble use strong words such as establish, ensure, and secure. In the middle of them all lies this weaker word- promote. Yet it holds the vision of liberty that sparked the Revolution. The founding fathers did not use a strong word in this context for a reason, and a good one.

Americans at that time had a completely different concept of government. No one viewed it as an organization that helps them out. If they did, they would have stuck with the British. After all, they were safer from the Indians with the soldiers everywhere from the quartering act. And the taxes were not anywhere near burdensome, especially by today's standards. Yet the founding fathers wanted a government that, rather than securing general welfare for them, allowed them to pursue their own welfare as they saw fit. This passion, this great spirit, produced the word promote in the preamble. Americans saw the ideal government as one that promoted, not provided, general welfare. Thus they fought for the right to send mail without paying King George, something men consider petty at best today. The fight was over principle. They fought for a world where they could control their own fates.

The new world, as it was called, attracted these types of visionaries. No one but the ambitious would uproot their families and move to a strange land. This spirit of ambition, of pioneer, of independence, put the word promote in the preamble. Government should allow men to make money, to farm, to provide for themselves however they wanted. It should give men opportunity. When the founding fathers wrote promote in the preamble, they put the burden, or rather the liberty, of the general welfare on the people. Americans fought and died for that freedom, and gave today's Americans the opportunities they take for granted.

Today, few see this great vision of opportunity as a liberty. Liberty is being redefined as the ability to buy whatever one wants without working for it. At the time of the revolution, no one would dream of such selfishness. Everyone assumed that he had to work to survive. Work was a privilege and a liberty, not a back-up plan to winning the lottery. The Americans hated British rule because it stopped them from working as they saw fit. Modern America would hate the same government because it was not involved enough. Promote has been replaced by ensure. Americans dismiss the visions of their founding fathers as unfit for any other age.

Yet the principles set by America's founders apply today. The work of private jobs vastly surpasses that of government. Where a private worker goes out of business a bureaucrat gets a pay raise. The threat of bankruptcy and ruin produces the finest products. Accountability is an inherent quality of the private sector, and one that the founding fathers strove to keep on rulers as well. Unfortunately modern America has given the government free reign to "help" them, and stripped away its greatest qualities of checks and balances.

The consequences appear everywhere. One can see it in the recent bailouts. In a normal, healthy economy, where government does not interfere, companies which do badly must (and often do) perform better. If they do not, they go bankrupt. Anyone who seeks to bring about prosperity to himself and everyone else will flourish in such a free system. Today, Americans seem to think that certain companies exist which are above such rules because of their size. Then they make it their government's business to fix that business when that business cannot perform diddly-squat. All of a sudden promote has been replaced by provide. Elected officials have become so arrogant as to suppose that

they know about one's business better than the owner does. Industries lose their standards of performance outside of the private sector, and are not judged by results. This produces utter incompetence. Government cannot have the vital element of accountability that a private company uses as work ethic.

The founding fathers, knowing this, sought to limit the rulers as much as possible by stripping it down to its basic functions. They took away the power to provide wealth from the government, knowing it to be incompetent and corruptible, and gave it to the people. Only the people have a stake in their business, and therefore must be the best judges. Citizens alone have the power to provide their own well-being. So America's architects conceived of a government that promoted welfare. They realized that it was the only means to true liberty.

One can only interpret the Constitution with this in mind. The authors of the preamble expressed the purpose and spirit of their rebellion in the preamble. They crafted their government with checks and balances that stopped anyone from denying another citizen these rights and opportunities. The rest of the Constitution tells of their means to a free nation. No one can properly understand these means to freedom without understanding the ends they work towards.

1 The Constitution of the United States-Preamble