



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on June 25, 2013

## Republicans, Big Government, and Daniel Somers

“War is hell.”

Daniel Somers and his family didn’t need Sherman to tell them this.

Somers was a distinguished Iraq War veteran who killed himself on June 10. The hundreds of combat missions and other action of which he partook left Somers with a legacy of post-traumatic stress disorder, brain injuries, and an assortment of war-induced injuries that rendered every moment of daily existence intolerable.

Shortly before taking his life, he wrote a letter bidding farewell to his loved ones. The latter has since given *Gawker* permission to publish it.

Upon informing his family that it was his love for them that managed to keep him alive this long, Somers goes on to describe his body as “a cage, a source of pain and constant problems,” and his mind as “a wasteland, filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety.” Somers writes that he is incapable of laughing and crying, incapable of deriving pleasure from any activity, save sleep. Thus, “to sleep forever seems to be the most merciful thing.”



He assures his loved ones that it is not they who brought him to this point, but the government that forced him “to participate in things, the enormity of which is hard to describe.” During his first deployment in Iraq, Somers states, he and his comrades-in-arms were made to perpetrate “war crimes, crimes against humanity.”

Though he insists that he made his “best effort to stop these events,” he is equally insistent that they were too horrible in nature from which to bounce back. Only “a sociopath” could achieve this feat, Somers asserts.

Yet for as unspeakable as these “crimes against humanity” were, it was covering them up that further fueled Somers’ despondency. “To force me to do these things and then participate in the ensuing coverup [sic] is more than any government has the right to demand.”

While taking shots at Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Dick Cheney, Somers accuses his government of abandoning not just himself, but those veterans who it consigned to the hell of war, including and especially the approximately two dozen veterans who commit suicide each and every day.



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Somers' plight, like that of far too many veterans of the post-9/11 era, is, at best, tragic. At worst, it is scandalous, an outrage. In any event, though, its significance lies in the light that it sheds on our politics, particularly the politics of the Republican Party.

War is the one circumstance under which the government conducting it becomes an *activist* government, i.e., a Big Government. It is the one time, more so than any other, when it is expected that the government will enlist the daily activities of civil society in the service of fulfilling its purposes. That war is the emblem of Big Government explains why those who wish to see America's federal government assume this activist role on the domestic scene not infrequently invoke the imagery of war ("The War on Drugs" and "The War on Poverty" are just two examples that come to mind).

But as real conservatives have always known, individual liberty and Big Government are mutually incompatible. Real conservatives have also known that it is not uncommon for the best laid plans of men — particularly when they are men holding political office — to go awry. And under no conditions is this more likely to occur than the unconditioned chaos of war.

In spite of this, most of today's Republicans who insist upon calling themselves "conservatives" maintain that we are at war with an enemy that, because it has none of the distinctness of those governments that we've gone to war with in the past, promises to be intractable. Our war is a war without end.

However, a war without end requires a big military without end.

And a big military without end *is* Big Government without end.

To put it directly, the Republican Party is either self-delusional or deceptive, for its rhetoric of "limited government" and "individual liberty" is radically at odds with its enthusiasm for growing the military ad infinitum. A smaller, decentralized, truly *federal* government most definitely is compatible with liberty. In fact, the latter can't exist without the former. Calls for Big Government, though, are nothing less than calls for a drastic diminution of liberty and, as in the case of Somers, ever greater individual suffering.

These Republican "conservatives" should bear in mind what no true conservative would ever need to be told: As long as they get their wish, the Daniel Somers of the world will only multiply.



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