



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on May 19, 2011

Medved Misunderstands Rep. Ron Paul's Libertarianism

Radio host and political commentator Michael Medved (left) has written an article for the Daily Beast, which argues that Congressman Ron Paul (R-Texas) has "stretched libertarianism past the breaking point." His concern is that if Paul's beliefs were put into practice "that the federal government has no business regulating prostitution, the use of illegal drugs, and related vices" those vices would flourish in American society.



Medved argues that the Paul logic obliterates the crucial distinction between private, intimate activity and commercial enterprise. Though agreeing that private activity is outside the proper purview of the federal government, Medved is of the opinion that commercial activity affects society and so may be regulated in order to protect citizens from vices.

Medved intersperses his article with such pejoratives as the Mad Doctor, crackpot and addle-brained. Most impartial observers, however, see a composed, polite, and gentle Ron Paul, who is also a good listener. In interviews, he actually answers questions put to him (unlike so many politicians). Most importantly, Ron Paul is perhaps the most honest member of Congress. He holds to a consistent set of political beliefs, putting principle above popularity.

In his article, Medved fails to explore the dichotomy between federal regulation and state regulation. Since before the U.S. Constitution, each state of the American Republic has retained substantial power to regulate the behavior of its citizens. Mormons in Utah, for example, have highly restrictive laws regarding alcohol. Nevadans next door do not; in fact, alcohol flows freely in Las Vegas. Nevada is the only state in the union to allow some form of legalized prostitution. Half of the original states had established state churches, and the disestablishment of religion in these states was not brought about by any federal action, but by the states themselves. Even abortion was once solely the province of state law, which is why only a few states had legalized abortion. The federalization of abortion means that local sovereignty is lost, and centralized, one-size-fits-all government control takes the place of states' rights.

Medved's argument that there are two types of private behavior, commercial and intimate, leaves a large gray area of behaviors whose category is unsettled. It is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear line between these two behaviors. For instance, is the production of narcotics in the home for personal use protected from government intrusion, while the sale of those drugs is subject to draconian punishments? The absence of overarching rights of personal liberty means that the gravitational pull of big government will suck more and more private rights into the region of public regulation and



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especially federal control.

Perhaps most troubling about Medved's interpretation of Paul's beliefs and morals is the suggestion that the Congressman would ever lend his voice in support of heroin or cocaine, prostitution, drunkenness, pornography, and the like. Paul has never made any statement to support such a view. As a devout Christian, he is well aware that these vices cripple and may even destroy the soul. But just as he would never insist that the federal government force all Americans to embrace Christianity, though he would see that as vital to the immortal soul, so he would not insist that individuals, who are not harming others, should behave as he thinks they should.

It is very likely that Michael Medved and Ron Paul would agree on how people ought to behave. Both men would believe that biblical rules were intended for an essential reason, that marriage is a sacred institution, that drunkenness and all similar indulgences are sinful, and so on. What they disagree on is the best way to maximize virtuous behavior in a society. Congressman Paul sees personal behavior in society the same as economic behavior in that realm. The two, in fact, are inextricably connected. Thus, business goodwill is often the most valuable asset of a corporation, and any successful salesman learns the lessons of friendly and honorable behavior.

Not only does decent and wholesome living prosper the people who embrace such a lifestyle, but the perception in society that those who live good and proper lives are also happier provides a social force at least equal to the negative force of outlawing behavior.

While Congressman Paul does not believe it is right to have sex out of wedlock or to use alcohol and drugs in a destructive manner, he simply believes (as do all who hold to a strict interpretation of the Constitution in conformity with the Tenth Amendment) that these activities do not fall within the purview of the federal government. Most reasonable people never believed he thought otherwise.



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