

Our View - Tuesday

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Free to choose
Limited Government Week forums pose
quintessentially American question

Sounding almost Reaganesque, President Bill Clinton in 1996 formally announced that “the era of big government is over,” during a speech touting his budget-balancing successes. The nation should meet most of its future challenges “not through big government,” Clinton said, but “by working together in our communities, our schools, our churches and synagogues, our workplaces across the entire spectrum of our civic life.”

Apparently, nobody else in Washington got the memo.

The statement was unreliable, as many of Clinton’s were, but in this case it wasn’t his fault. Clinton at least went through the motions of being a smaller-government Democrat, rolling out an effort to “reinvent” government and overseeing a post-Cold War contraction of the military. But the size, cost and regulatory reach

of the federal government continued to grow, as formerly fiscally conservative Republicans proved that the power of the purse strings seduces everyone.

The era of big government is definitely not over. But does that mean the limited government precepts championed by the Founders — and echoed in the editorial pages of this and other Freedom Communications newspapers — is dead and gone? Not necessarily. But it will take a grassroots revival among Americans, along with bold leadership by libertarian and conservatives in office, to breathe new life into ideals that, if not dead, certainly seem to be on the defensive.

Toward that end, the Center for Study of Government and the Individual at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs on Sunday begins marking Limited Government Week, by hosting a series of forums on private property rights, eminent domain, free-market capitalism, regulatory reform, privatizing municipal services and other topics. The Gazette is a co-sponsor of the events.

Dr. Jim Null, the former Colorado Springs City Councilman who heads up CSGI, hopes the events will help spur a citywide discussion about what kind of government we want at the local and federal level. “The liberty we all enjoy as citizens of the United States is directly related to the degree of the involvement of government, at all levels, in our everyday lives,” Null tells us. “The purpose of CSGI is to explore the relationship between the state and the individual. Sponsoring an annual Limited

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Government Week will help focus local attention on the many ways government impacts us, and the extent to which its activities benefit or hinder us in terms of liberty, quality of life, prosperity and opportunity.”

This year’s lineup of speakers is impressive.

On Sunday, Dr. David Bobb of Hillsdale College will discuss “Property rights and limited government: Are the founding principles still relevant?” Two local economics professors, Dr. John Brock and Dr. A. Paul Ballantyne, will explore the connection between free markets and limited government. And the subject of privatizing government services also will be examined, with Maurice McTigue discussing New Zealand’s efforts at regulatory reform and two officials from Sandy Springs, Ga., discussing that city’s efforts to outsource services.

Monday evening’s events will feature former Fortune 1,000 CEO Gary MacDougal discussing his efforts to overhaul the social services system in Illinois, as well as UCCS assistant Prof. Richard Carpenter talking about why government’s good intentions so often lead to bad results.

Then, on Wednesday evening, three experts will discuss eminent domain in post-Kelo America — a topic sure to generate sparks and audience participation, given the local and national interest this topic has generated. Panelists include: Carolynne White, a former lawyer and lobbyist for the Colorado Municipal

League; Steven Greenhut, editorial writer and columnist at the Orange County Register, who has authored a book on eminent domain and frequently writes on urban planning issues; and Dr. Thomas DiLorenzo, author of the book “How Capitalism Saved America,” who will be discussing the use of eminent domain in the creation of the U.S. rail system.

Whether you believe that bigger government is better government, or, like us, seem to be paddling against the tide by clinging to limited government ideals, these events will offer plenty to think about and discuss. Limited Government Week is an opportunity to once again ask that quintessentially American question: What type of government is most conducive to freedom, opportunity and prosperity? It’s obviously not a settled question, more than 230 years after the nation’s founding.

For more details about Limited Government Week events, contact Jane Muller at jmuller@uccs.edu or 719-262-4093. Tickets can be acquired, and a full schedule of events found, at www.uccs.tickets.com.

A bumper crop of boondoggles

First the bad news: Congress is expected to write a massive multi-year farm bill this year, which is sure to be loaded with more subsidies, price supports and pork than you can shake a pitchfork at. Now some good news: most members of Congress read The Washington Post, which has been doing an admirable job exposing the massive misuse of money in existing farm

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programs.

The newspaper in the last year has done a blistering series of stories highlighting the abuse of U.S. farm programs, striking again recently with an exposé of how rural development funds are flowing to affluent urban areas due to the vague and elastic way state and federal agencies define “rural.” The loophole means untold millions have been diverted from farm programs to fund projects that benefit affluent urbanites.

Will getting flayed at the hands of the hometown newspaper prompt Congress to do a more responsible job re-writing the next farm bill? We doubt it. But you know the situation’s truly scandalous when the shaming is done by the famously government-friendly Washington Post.

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