

A Politician's Promise

Darian Worden | Guest Writer
CENTER FOR A STATELESS SOCIETY

Barack Obama is declaring "Something Accomplished" in Iraq. Behind the television smiles, 50,000 US military personnel will remain, the State Department is increasing the size of its contractor army, and the largest embassy in the world will serve as an imperial outpost.

An Antiwar.com editorial by Jason Ditz pretty well sums up the story in its title: "US Announces Second Fake End to Iraq War."

It's no wonder that an administration struggling to maintain political dominance over a state that continually fails to deliver what it promises would play a back-patting opportunity for all it's worth.

"Mission accomplished" is a frequent rallying cry of governments trying to keep up appearances of success. If the economy was in better shape now, recovery would be credited to the wisdom of our glorious leaders. But we're supposed to believe that the benefits just haven't reached us yet and without the bold measures of politicians, things

could only be worse (but of course!). No matter the outcome, politicians will take credit for the good, and pass the bad onto rivals while claiming that they did not have enough control over your life to do what was necessary.

It's the same as when failing state budgets are dealt with by kicking the ball down the road to the future and crime statistics are manipulated to make whatever point politicians are trying to get across.

Tough talk and reforms around the margins are meant to crowd out the real questions. Questions like: "How is military empire building, the biggest government program on the planet, affecting the economy?" "Who are you using political power to pay off this time?" and "Why are you telling us what to do in the first place?"

Fortunately the internet makes it easier to find out what the reality is behind the official story. But this is not enough when online information is selected through bias. So information must be made more accessible and interest-grabbing. It needs to be actively put in front of people who are accustomed to looking in specific places for answers.

And building up alternatives to state power while inspiring people to live independently from government will undermine the power of politicians until it is easy enough to resist and treat as any other crime.

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Libertarians Protest Ad Ban on Facebook

The Libertarian Party (LP) is protesting the decision by Facebook to refuse advertisements that advocate for the legalization of marijuana.

The LP had been running a highly successful Facebook ad to express its support of marijuana legalization, but Facebook banned the ad about a week after accepting it.

In a July 23 email to the LP, a Facebook rep wrote, "We do not allow ads for marijuana or political ads for the promotion of marijuana."

The LP asserts that its ad is not intended to promote marijuana itself, but rather to take a position on the high-profile political question of legalizing marijuana. The issue is particularly relevant now, as a major marijuana legalization measure (Proposition 19) will be on the ballot in California this November.

Wes Benedict, Executive Director of the LP, commented, "Whether or not the folks at Facebook like marijuana, we think they should end their ridiculous censorship of our ad, which expresses the Libertarian position on a political issue of interest to many people."

Benedict continued, "We recognize Facebook's right to control their content and censor whoever they want. But we're also exercising our First Amendment right to complain about their bad decision, and to alert other consumers to put pressure on them."

On July 15, Facebook notified the LP that it had accepted the ad. Then, on July 22, Facebook revoked its approval, stating that "The image of this ad is either irrelevant or inappropriate."

Recently, the LP learned that Facebook revoked approval of similar ads from other groups, including Just Say Now and the District of Columbia Patients' Cooperative, claiming that their ads violated Facebook's ban on images of "smoking products." The LP notes that Facebook's ad guidelines prohibit "advertisements promoting tobacco products," but that the Libertarian ad does not promote the product itself, and that it is not a tobacco product.

Kyle Hartz, the LP's Development & New Media Assistant, said, "Our ad is targeted to people who have indicated that they are interested in the issue of marijuana legalization. It's bizarre that Facebook won't allow us to advertise to the very people who support what we are advocating."

For more information on the Libertarian Party: www.LP.org

Brave World of Trash, Students, RFID

Bob Barr | Guest Writer
FORMER U.S. CONGRESSMAN

The nightmare world in which Winston Smith lived in George Orwell's dystopia, 1984, was furnished with technology based on World War II-era know-how. Yet even with such primitive technology as envisioned when Orwell wrote his prescient novel in 1949, the government of Oceania was able to track almost every move its citizens made; similar to the transparent world imagined a century and a half earlier by Jeremy Bentham in his Panopticon. If only Orwell, Bentham, Aldous Huxley, and the other writers whose foresight enabled them to discern the horrors of constant government surveillance, had been aware of the tiny transmitters of information now becoming common-place — radio frequency identification chips, known as "RFID" chips — they could have added entire new chapters to their books.

RFID technology is advancing rapidly; arm-in-arm with the imagination of businesses and governments to develop new ways to use these tiny electronic snoops to monitor and control behavior of their customers and subjects. Business web pages proudly tout the many uses to which the chips can be put in order to "streamline" municipal activities; and to then direct the behavior of the citizens paying for such services. Texas Instruments, for example, has a page on its web site devoted entirely to the wonders of using RFID chips to monitor municipal trash collection in order to determine whether people are properly recycling. Careful lest its exuberant endorsement of RFID tags imbedded in trash cans might be perceived as government snooping, the company's webpage refers to this eerie activity as "forward-thinking" and consistent with "growing consumer interest in recycling."

Instead of urging governments to purchase its technology as a way to penalize citizens for not being good citizens by recycling, Texas Instruments lauds an "incentive-based recycling program" the company describes as "fun," that is used in cities such as Philadelphia, Houston, Dallas-Ft. Worth, and elsewhere in the

United States and, of course, in the United Kingdom, the surveillance capital of the world. In this program, citizens are treated essentially as laboratory rats, in which they are rewarded each time they perform the task desired of them — in this case, recycling — with "Recycle Bank Reward Dollars." The collection trucks, decked out with state-of-the-art computer monitoring equipment, is able to then oh-so-efficiently transmit the "customer information . . . directly to a host computer" for data-mining and billing.

The city council in Cleveland, Ohio, on the other hand, is far less concerned with even the appearance of benevolence in its RFID-based trash monitoring program, than is Texas Instruments. The council recently voted to expand its RFID trash program by mandating the installation of the devices in order to determine and hand out fines for failure to participate. In yet another example of the unholy alliance between business and government in expanding the reach of Big Brother, Cleveland has retained a private company to handle its high-tech recycling program. It's a win-win — the company makes money by collecting the recycled trash, and the city reaps at least a short-term windfall by receiving payments from the company for a task it formerly had to carry out. The loser, of course, is the consumer who is paying the taxes and fees for such activities; and surrendering to the company and the city council any privacy in their accumulation or disposal of garbage.

In California, schools are finding that students — like municipal citizens — constitute another captive audience on which to experiment with RFID chips. One school district in Contra Costa County, for example, now requires all its students to wear jerseys embedded with RFID tags, so their whereabouts can be monitored all the while they are at the schools, and then data-based. The tags also reportedly will alert school officials if a student has not eaten; though what punishment will befall dieting students is unclear.

Where is the Contra Costa County school system getting the money to implement such a school-based Big Brother program? They get the money from same place most of these and other privacy-invasive programs come from — you, the American taxpayer; generously given away as federal "grants."

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