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Concerned About Community Welfare, Carbon Emissions? Try Economic Freedom

By James Harrigan and Antony Davies

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In the two-hundred weekly polls that Rasmussen Reports has conducted over the past four years, 65 percent of Americans have said that the country is moving in the wrong direction. Not once in four years has a majority of Americans said that the country was moving in the right direction. Both parties are responsible for driving us to the edge of the fiscal cliff and Americans are now realizing that neither party knows what to do to fix our problems.

This is because politicians and bureaucrats regard government as the sole source of solutions rather than the primary source of our problems. Across countries, states, and time, economic data tell a consistent story: The road to wealth, equality, a cleaner environment, and less exploitation is economic freedom. And economic freedom comes from returning government to its rightful place as defender of property rights, not manipulator of markets and controller of people's actions.

Progressives decry the market's quest for wealth while ignoring government's quest for power. But wealth is positive-sum – when free people exchange talent for treasure, they all gain wealth.

Power, meanwhile, is zero-sum – the more power Washington gains, the less power the states and the people have.

Our nation suffers from a political cancer. The cancer feeds on power, replacing the rights and responsibilities accorded free people with the restrictions and entitlements accorded children. This cancer methodically destroys markets and personal choice, leaving in its wake people beholden to a government that tells them whether they may work, what they may buy, and what they will pay. It tells them with whom they may associate and what they may do with their own bodies. It treats them not even as well as children. It treats them as pets.

The cure to this cancer is freedom. The Fraser Institute's [Economic Freedom of North America](#) and [Economic Freedom of the World](#) reports provide clear evidence. Countries with more economic freedom have greater gender equality and less income inequality. In developing countries, child labor rates decline as economic freedom increases. Economic freedom even benefits the environment. Countries with more economic freedom have less pollution, better air quality, and significantly reduced CO2 emissions per GDP.

And this isn't just a cross-country phenomenon. Splitting the 50 states into two groups – the most free and the least free – yields eerily similar results. In every one of the past 25 years, economic growth in the most free states has been greater, unemployment has been lower, median household income has been higher, per-capita income has been higher, and the poverty rate has been lower. Census data show that people took notice and moved. Population growth in the most free states has been 60 percent greater than in the least free states.

As we become less free, we become more beholden to the whims of our elected politicians. And as they expand their power and control over our economy, we all lose. Everywhere we turn we are

bombarded with dire warnings of the looming fiscal cliff, but precious few have the nerve to speak the obvious truth: Politicians put us on the edge of this cliff by attempting to do things they had no business doing. The right thing for them to do is also the simplest: stop meddling in the economy and in the lives of the citizens. People must be free to make their own decisions and to live with the consequences of those decisions.

In throwing off the yoke of tyranny, our ancestors pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. Generations since then have given their lives to preserve our freedom and to extend it to others. The tyranny our ancestors overthrew was far less onerous than the tyranny under which we live today, and it is time for the present generation to begin looking at its situation as the Founding generation looked at its own. Now, as then, we will make no progress until the people themselves declare that enough is finally enough.

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