

## **Overweight government jockey is slowing down racehorse economy**

By Rick Maier

Picture a magnificent racehorse ridden by a lean and clever jockey. Together they outperform all challengers, shattering one record after another. As winning becomes routine, the jockey puts on some weight. Their times slow, so the jockey restricts the horse's feed and activities. Soon the team can't compete, which is okay with the now rotund jockey, because he thought it was about time to give the other horses a chance to win.

That's how I see the relationship between government (jockey) and private industry (racehorse). The jockey keeps getting fatter until the load is so great that even the most determined horse can't win. Like a jockey, government should be there to provide a minimum of guidance, not take over and meddle with free market forces.

Before the 1930's, our government was lean, focused primarily on regulating treasury, defense and justice. Big entitlement programs grew out of the depression and accelerated in the 1970's following a variety of political and social issues that screamed for attention.

Liberals led the attack on the "establishment", joined by moderates from both parties. Thirty years later, liberals represent the establishment, and frankly, it's not a pretty scene. The private sector is lumbering under the weight of growing taxes, regulation and massive redistribution of wealth, while the public sector has had little impact on reducing poverty or encouraging investment.

Look how the Feds have treated Wal-Mart, an American racehorse that has done more for consumers than all the government regulations put together. The bureaucrats have attacked them over immigration and overtime – two of the most bewildering set of regulations on the books. If companies are supposed to check the papers of vendor employees, what does INS do? And good luck trying to find a clear definition of who is exempt or nonexempt from the overtime rules.

If we've learned anything in the last 30 years, it's that fixing what advocates of big government consider an injustice can cause a variety of new problems. Paved with good intentions, the movement from individualism to "village-ism" has gone too far and cost too much.

We still have the best government in the world, but just imagine what we could do if we put things back in balance. While industry has its abuses, government is plagued by widespread waste and partisanship.

Take California. State government became so big and intrusive that businesses left and took the good jobs with them. The state economy can no longer support all the

regulations and entitlements, and a new team has been elected to try to fix the deficits and attract industry back to the state.

Just as in California, the national mood now appears to be shifting. The third of Americans who aren't stubbornly liberal or conservative seem to be moving right. More people are speaking out against judicial excesses, finally realizing that we all pay for exaggerated court awards. Conservative radio and cable TV shows are booming in popularity, and Americans are a lot less tolerant of fringe special interests following the attacks on 9-11.

Still more changes are needed: flatter taxes, or better yet, consumption taxes; squared off election districts; focusing on performance - not political correctness; and a shift of power back to elected representatives and away from the courts.

As we begin the 2004 political season, I will support candidates who believe that government is best that governs least, and that good jobs are what drive prosperity – not a bunch of social engineering. Bloated government throws a wet blanket over the economy and increases dependence on entitlements. The public sector needs to trim down and give our racehorse private sector the freedom and resources to grow and prosper.

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