

Why Government Is Not Getting Us Anywhere – the Process

As far back as I can remember, government action has been touted as the remedy to nearly every cultural, economic, and political problem. With hindsight, most people would agree that such actions have failed to match the promises.

Regardless of your belief, I would like to step through the process of government action, and why it so seldom succeeds. With any large governmental or political change, there must be a consensus that something needs to be dramatically altered. In addition, the impetus for change must be substantial.

The initial stage is to convince people that something is completely broken. You would think this would be an enormous challenge, considering that, in many ways the United States is the greatest country that has ever existed. Yet, incredibly, Americans by the millions are easily swayed into believing that various aspects of the country are truly “broken.”

The media does its part and informs the viewers that something needs to be done to solve this national crisis. Television shows, movies, talk shows, documentaries, advocacy groups, and politicians all push for change in an attempt to create momentum.

Elected officials produce legislation to fix the broken problem. After all, that is what legislative bodies are elected to do – pass laws. Government “experts” write hundreds and sometimes thousands of pages of legislation claiming to solve the problem. Politicians and their supporters rush to appear on news interviews to applaud the legislation.

The media stress that the legislation needs to pass because something – anything – has to be done. The language of the legislation is essentially ignored. Even elected officials whose job it is to read proposed legislation sometimes do not bother to read it. Talk shows tend to focus more on the politics of the legislation – who will support the bill, who will oppose it, who are the winners, and who are the losers. The one thing that is almost never discussed is what specifically is in the new legislation.

Much legislation is superfluous. The new laws might benefit minorities, women, pregnant mothers, the children, the poor, the working class, the disabled, the oppressed, or other societal victims. Sometimes it is yet another anti-poverty program or income

distribution program. This is all effective propaganda. Who would be against helping these causes? Whether any of these claims are actually true is disregarded.

Another seldom acknowledged point is that the current laws are sometimes not enforced. If leaders ignore the laws that already exist, why would anyone believe they would abide by any additional laws? Besides, enforcing old laws does not receive media attention or supporter admiration. Therefore, it actually benefits a politician who pushes for new legislation while ignoring previous legislation, because they are perceived as someone who is attempting to solve a problem.

We spend billions, and even trillions of dollars, without ever analyzing the efficacy of programs. Does the program work? Did it alleviate poverty? Did it stimulate the economy? Did it help the intended people? Is the program still required? Amazingly, the debate is seldom whether the program achieved anything, but rather, how much more spending is necessary to keep it going. Flawed legislation is virtually never repealed.

Finally, legislative advocates make ridiculous promises about legislation – promises that are never realized. Try to recall how many times you heard that some program would actually save the taxpayers money. Yet, decades later, the country is more in debt than ever.

In the long run, you would assume that all of the laws, rules, regulations, fines, and penalties improved our lives. However, with a media whose only job is to play advocate, executives who will not enforce the laws on the books, and legislators whose priority is to pass something to gain political attention, the legislative process fails miserably and few things improve.

Sadly, the electorate never seems to learn these lessons. But what can you expect from people convinced they reside in a “broken” country?

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