

Skinning the Cat

2021 0502

On the surface, the people of the country seem to be very divided right now. If, however, you take out the fanatic fringes of both the left and right, we really aren't. We all want a peaceful place to live, decent jobs, a good economy, opportunity, fair and equal treatment...in short, the pursuit of happiness.

What has always been at issue is not whether these are good and proper things to want, but how we might obtain them. The highest profile issue at the moment is immigration. As I mentioned, other than the fringe radicals, most Americans want to accept immigrants from other places, but disagree on the process to use so that we can be assured that the desires enumerated above are not threatened, but are enhanced.

Another example is the care of the homeless. Some believe that the government, and most especially, the federal government, has no responsibility in this issue and private charities should handle it. Others, struck by the plight of the homeless, feel that the government does have a duty to fulfill. Still others, want to leave the issue to cities, counties, and even states.

My grandmother always said that there's more than one way to skin a cat. I guess back in 1908, people did skin cats. Although the practice has certainly gone out of style, the message remains quite accurate.

There's another old adage that the ends justify the means. That one indicates that some people believe that if the desired outcome is achieved, it doesn't matter how it was accomplished.

In fact, in terms of our government, the means do matter. At times, when means are justified by the outcome, there are unintended consequences which are difficult to reverse. Specifically, one of the debates about how government should address problems has been going on for about 250 years and it has to do with where the power of government lies. One position is that a large and central governmental structure is efficient and, per force of there being only one super-agency addressing an issue, all those involved will be treated in the same fair and equitable way. In opposition to that is the very real concern that large super-agencies concentrate the power of policy into too few hands. At its core, our federal constitution is structured in such a way that this should not happen, but with the creation of federal super-agencies and how federal

funds are used to leverage local compliance with federal desires, the hands of power are becoming fewer and fewer.

The unintended consequence of increasing federal power and authority is a reduction in the free choices of state and local government, as well as their citizens. Skinning that cat quickly, efficiently, and equitably, can lead to irreversible damage to the Philosophy of Freedom upon which America is built.

© 2021, Thomas R. Cuba, Ph.D.