

A likable liberal ... but he still is wrong nonetheless

Wayne Hoffman/Idaho Freedom Foundation

I find Idaho columnist Chris Carlson to be a likable guy, and it's easy to see why some of his more liberal allied-interests have been politically successful.

But by golly, I have to disagree with him on some of the statements he wrote in his last column, which perpetuates some myths. Chris implies that Herbert Hoover embraced the free market at the onset of the Great Depression, leading the country deeper into economic despair and the eventual election of Franklin Roosevelt, whose Big Government plans saved the country and its economy. That's just not so.

Hoover didn't have a sit-on-your-hands-and-let-the-market-work approach. In fact, many historians note that Hoover's policies—of government-led spending, high tariffs and confiscatory taxes—dovetailed into FDR's New Deal plan. And the New Deal did little to help the economy and probably helped prolong the nation's pain, as Amity Shlaes artfully captures in her book "The Forgotten Man."

But Chris is correct that our nation's politicians—Republicans and Democrats—have abandoned the free market in favor of special interest subsidies.

And then Chris presumes that even I would champion my own interests over the free market.

"So what is your favorite subsidy from the taxpayer, Wayne? Do you take the personal mortgage deduction? Will you turn back your Social Security check when you reach retirement? Will you enroll in Medicare when you can? Will you accept government help if struck with a catastrophic disease like cancer or Parkinson's?" Chris asks.

So here's the answer: I'd gladly give up my mortgage interest deduction. I think it's a shame that renters, for example, have to pay higher taxes to help subsidize my benefit. I actively encourage its repeal, and its related government-manipulated economic underpinnings. Politicians pass such tax breaks in order to garner favor with voters, and to crow about how they've voted to "protect" the tax break. Taxes should be low and uniform. Period.

Social Security and Medicare are broken programs. The government has an obligation to the people who paid into them, but the programs are insolvent, a drag on the economy and prevent other, superior free market solutions from taking root. They should go away

And Chris has cancer, he wrote, for which he receives an expensive shot each month to treat it, paid by Medicare.

"That's my major subsidy, Wayne," says Chris. "And I know this: left to your mythical free market I would have been dead years ago."

But Chris, I'd argue that the government is the one that made your shot costly in the first place. The government made health insurance a product of your job in the 1940s. It banned interstate insurance sales in the 1950s and 1960s. It added insurance mandates during the last 40 years.

Medicare and its bureaucracy have proven to be expansive and expensive. The government process for getting medical treatments approved is too time-consuming. The government restricts the importation of drugs. Also expensive. And then the government bans plausible, cheaper, better alternatives that would compete against the government. All so that politicians can claim credit for offering you the lifesaving drug you needed in the first place—and claim that without their program and without them—you'd be dead. They won't tell you that they're part of the problem.

Clearly, Big Government hasn't produced the utopia we've been promised. It's been 80 years, and you're still waiting for it. Maybe, Chris, you should give my free market solution a try.

Wayne Hoffman
Executive Director
Idaho Freedom Foundation