

Rights come from governments

Those who buy into the myth of American exceptionalism do so because they view the Founding Fathers' foresight — made manifest in the Constitution — as unique. And it's true, though the U.S. charter was culled from the best law of hundreds of years back to the Magna Carta in 1215.

There is a certain segment of conservatism, however, that insists American exceptionalism was given to us divinely. Rep. Todd Rokita, R-Ind., writing in the Indianapolis Star, said God gave us the rights we enjoy, and a big government threatens them.

Quite the contrary. Government is the reason for those rights.

The Founders did say that our rights are inalienable and are endowed by our creator, which meant that we have rights so fundamental that government cannot take them away. Of course, if you were a woman or slave and not a white landowner, you didn't have as many rights as the powdered-wig class.

What the framers did, however, was enumerate those rights into law and for the last 235 years the U.S. has fulfilled that charter. America still has the same basic government despite tinkering by Congress and the Supreme Court.

No president has used his military for a coup. It is this government — the one that conservatives disparage — that set up our rights and maintained them through the generations, often despite the worst in people.

If man has inalienable rights, then so did the people of Stalin's Russia, Mao's China and Khomeini's Iran. But their governments wouldn't allow those rights. It's the American dedication to those rights that is unique. Without that dedication to preserve, our rights would be nonexistent.

What's ironic about all this is that simple minds like Rokita would gladly see many of our rights taken away and go back to the rich landowners (nowadays, just the rich) being the chosen.

Conservatives are first in line to deny a woman the right to an abortion (Ninth Amendment), ban gay marriage (14th Amendment), deny citizenship to born-in-America immigrants (14th Amendment), do away with the income tax (16th amendment), allow warrantless entries and wiretaps (Fourth Amendment), kill people for crimes (Eighth Amendment), investigate speech and declare printed matter anti-American (First Amendment), put prayer in schools (First Amendment), put up barriers to voting (15th Amendment) and on and on so conservatives can force conformity.

Rokita speaks of the country being founded on Judeo-Christian values. If that were the case, the old, the poor and the sick — the least among us — would be taken care of. We would not seek new enemies to make war upon. We would love our neighbors as ourselves and not pride wealth over work and rich over poor.

We would seek a more equitable society. We would pass laws to prevent our darker selves — call it the Cheney syndrome — from taking over, which we've done admirably periodically through the years. Until lately, with the rise of conservatism.

A strong U.S. government — one that was instrumental in holding the union together through the Civil War, one that promoted civil rights and equal opportunities in education and the work place, one that set up Social Security and Medicare — is what is exceptional.

If conservatives have their way, the country will go from exceptional to mediocre not because they don't understand U.S history, but they think their anti-American ideology is more important than our heritage.



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