



Memo to Actors: Dream On . . . Just Use Your Own Dime

[Larry Elder](#)

Colaboraciones n° 1935

September 18, 2007

"Don't you think — because of that program — society benefits?" an actor friend of mine asked me recently. She referred to a taxpayer-provided health care program that she "turned to" during one of the many "down periods" during her career.

"Who told you to go into acting?" I said. "Some careers — whether an actor, a baseball player or a ski bum — are high-risk and low-reward. Why should taxpayers support your career choice?"

"But didn't you get scholarships and grants to continue your education past high school?" she asked.

"Yes," I responded, "because, unfortunately, government got into the business of funding students to go to college. I would have preferred to have gone to a bank and applied for money."

"Why would it be better to go to a bank?"

"Well," I said, "taxpayers would not subsidize my college choice and major. Secondly, a lender would likely require a major in something that would lead to a job so that the lender gets repaid. We, therefore, would produce fewer art history, English lit and drama majors. Or students might pursue double majors, so that if the 'dream' career fails to materialize, there is a viable alternative."

I showed her a recent sympathetic article in a major newspaper about the lives and struggle of several New York actors. They, for the most part, happily pursued their high-risk careers while using wit and creativity to survive in a high-cost city. The actors' ages ranged from 34 to 67. In two cases, after the actors' plays ended, they resorted to unemployment compensation. This is

actually a government program that pays out-of-work people. Government requires employers to pay an unemployment tax, an inefficient system that discourages people from looking for work. Employers, as with all taxes, pass along the expense by raising prices charged to their consumers. So in the end we, the taxpayer, pay.

In another case an actor obtained, at long last, a government-subsidized apartment for \$700 a month. New York, which once had a rich and varied supply of apartments, began rent control during WWII. While this benefits those tenants lucky enough or connected enough to land an apartment, the policy reduces the available supply of apartments and prevents landlords from getting fair market value from their investment.

Question: Should taxpayers, through government programs and policies, support the choices of other people?

Take health care.

On the presidential campaign trail, candidates on both sides of the aisle talk of the nation's "health care crisis" and offer varying schemes to use taxpayer money to "solve" the problem of those without health care insurance.

Never mind that of those born in America, 86 percent have health care. Or that many of the so-called 44 million without health care insurance include the estimated 11 to 20 million illegal aliens — only 57 percent of non-citizens have health care

insurance. Or that 14 million of those households earning more than \$50,000 lack health care insurance, over 7 million of them in households earning more than \$75,000. Or that in the 20 years preceding Medicare, a one-day stay in a hospital increased threefold, versus the first 20 years post-Medicare when the same one-day stay in a hospital increased eight times.

What about government welfare? Most high school students read Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America," the Frenchman's famous examination of what makes America tick. Few read, however, the book he wrote a few years later, called "Memoir on Pauperism."

Tocqueville noticed in the 1830s that despite its wealth, England seemed to have the greatest number of street beggars. Why? England enacted one of the world's first welfare programs. "I am deeply convinced," wrote Tocqueville, "that any permanent, regular administrative system whose aim will be to provide for the needs of the poor will breed more miseries than it can cure, will deprave the population that it wants to help and comfort, will in time reduce the rich to being no more than the tenant-farmers of the poor, will dry up the sources of savings, will stop the accumulation of capital, will retard the development of trade, will benumb human industry and activity, and will culminate by bringing about a violent revolution in the State, when the number of those who receive alms will have become as large as those who give it, and the indigent, no longer being

able to take from the impoverished rich the means of providing for his needs, will find it easier to plunder them of all their property at one stroke than to ask for their help."

"So by all means," I told my actor friend, "pursue your dreams. Just do so with your eyes open — and on your own dime."

Creators Syndicate Copyright 2007 Laurence A. Elder