

# Remarks on NHLA Civic Action

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Although best known for his defense of the Alamo, Tennessee militia colonel David Crocket also served three terms in the early 19th century in the United States Congress.

One day in the House of Representatives, a bill was taken up appropriating money for the benefit of a widow of a distinguished naval officer. Several eloquent speeches had been made in its support when Mr. Crockett arose:

*"Mr. Speaker --- I have as much respect for the memory of the deceased, and as much sympathy for the suffering of the living, if suffering there be, as any man in this house, but we must not permit our respect for the dead or our sympathy for a part of the living to lead us into an act of injustice to the balance of the living. I will not go into an argument to prove that Congress has no power to appropriate this money as an act of charity. Every member upon this floor knows it. We have the right, as individuals, to give away as much of our own money as we please in charity; but as members of Congress we have no right to appropriate a dollar of the public money. Some eloquent appeals have been made to us upon the ground that it is a debt due the deceased. Mr. Speaker, the deceased lived long after the close of the war; he was in office to the day of his death, and I have never heard that the government was in arrears to him."*

*"Every man in this House knows it is not a debt. We cannot, without the grossest corruption, appropriate this money as the payment of a debt. We have not the semblance of authority to appropriate it as a charity. Mr. Speaker, I have said we have the right to give as much money of our own as we please. I am the poorest man on this floor. I cannot vote for this bill, but I will give one week's pay to the object, and, if every member of Congress will do the same, it will amount to more than the bill asks."*

And, with that, he took his seat. The bill was put to vote, and, instead of passing unanimously, as was expected, it received only a few votes and was lost.

Later, Davy Crockett was asked by a friend why he had opposed the appropriation. Mr. Crockett then explained in some detail how, when he was out campaigning one afternoon, he stopped to speak with a constituent who took him to task for an earlier vote appropriating funds for the relief of some fire victims. This constituent spoke at length with Davy Crockett, and through the discussion, Mr. Crockett came to understand that Congress truly has no right to authorize government charity, and that to do so was to open the door to fraud, corruption, and favoritism on one hand, and for robbing people on the other.

Now, I have to admit that when I first read this story - many years ago - that this idea that government charity is NOT inevitable, that in fact is not even appropriate, was a completely revolutionary one to me. Certainly, that wasn't a message that I had been taught while a student in public school or even as a student at the university. I tend to be a very compassionate and empathetic person, and I hate to hear stories of the poor, the elderly, or the vulnerable going without. But, this story about Davy Crockett speaking on the distinction between government welfare and private charity, was so inspiring to me that

I began to research not only the history of charity, but also opportunities for creative private solutions to replace government charity.

How things have changed since Mr. Crockett gave that speech!

For many years, traditional American charity was private charity, which up until about 40 years ago, stressed the skills and the attitudes of self-reliance and personal responsibility. Charity was much more than just handing out cash. It was about education and rehabilitation. These traditional private charities did not assume that a poor man was simply a man without money, whose problems could be solved by a handout. Instead they sought to instill recipients with the virtues and skills to succeed on their own. And, the stories of their successes, even with social problems that were no less severe than we face today, are truly remarkable and inspiring.

But, then came the cultural revolution of the 1960's, and ideas about charity changed. Suddenly poverty and other social issues were attributed to much larger forces: to an unjust economy and society - basically a "system" that consigned some to failure regardless of their personal behavior, attitudes, and actions.

With this fundamental change in ideas about charity, the target of philanthropy began to shift, no longer concentrating on individuals but on an abstract all-embracing system that allegedly destroyed lives indiscriminately. Charitable projects became gigantic in scale and ambition, and government stood at the center of them all, seeking to right economic injustice by taking money from working people and redistributing it through a collection of massive and ever-more generous government social programs and subsidies.

Since the start of the War on Poverty in 1965, the federal and state governments have spent more than 5 and a half trillion dollars trying to ease the plight of the poor. This is a huge figure - larger than I can quite get my mind around - yet I'm told it is enough to buy every farm in the United States, as well as every factory, office building, TV station, and hotel - and still, you would have money left over. Yet, what we have received for that massive investment? The principal effect has not been to raise incomes, but instead to increase dependence and virtually eliminate self-sufficiency. And, unfortunately, the War on Poverty is just the tip of the iceberg as that mind-boggling cost that I quoted doesn't even account for many hundreds of other government programs and subsidies intended to alleviate other social issues.

Americans, by and far, are compassionate people and they supported the institution of government social programs with the best of intentions. But, even the most well-intended actions can have unintended and negative consequences. In recent years at all levels of government, there has been a great deal of debate and some resolutions and actions toward welfare reform meant to alleviate the problem of dependency. Yet, for the most part the notion that government can solve America's social problems has remained unchallenged.

It has been left to a small minority of us to challenge this notion of political solutions to poverty and other social issues, and to advocate for a return to traditional charitable values that stress self-reliance and personal responsibility. Those of us in the liberty movement understand that noble goals and good intentions are not enough. We understand that charitable programs must be judged on their results - and that by far, the results of government social programs have been a dismal failure. Further, we understand that these government-funded programs are unfair to everyone: to taxpayers who foot the bill for failed programs, to the private charities that they have crushed, and to the recipients of government social programs who are trapped in a system that fosters dependency and destroys opportunity.

So, those of us in the liberty movement talk a lot about reinvigorating volunteerism and private charity in the spirit that Davy Crockett advocated. We urge a return to traditional charitable values that seek to help those who need assistance by providing a hand up rather than a handout. We seek to lay a groundwork for new and creative alternatives to government-delivered social services through more efficient, cost-effective, and streamlined privately run charities and volunteer efforts.

It was on this premise that the Civic Action arm of the NHLA was founded.

For too long, those of us in the liberty movement have paid only lip service to the benefits of volunteerism and private charity. It is time now to take action, and that is exactly what NHLA Civic Action is doing.

In the past few months, NHLA volunteers have been researching existing New Hampshire-based private charities, identifying ways that we can reinforce existing efforts and fill gaps not already being met by private charities. We've been working on designing a marketing campaign and series of public service announcements that will promote the benefits of supporting private charities and encourage New Hampshire citizens to step up their support of private charities through donations of both time and money. We've been gearing up to provide support through sponsorship of privately-funded community programs; to send out speakers to various New Hampshire groups; and to launch educational seminars on liberty-oriented topics. And, we have been evaluating ideas for start-up private charitable organizations and serving as an incubator for the launch of those that seem the most viable.

While your generosity through financial support of all NHLA Civic Action programs will be deeply appreciated, it is the last item that I mentioned that I would like to focus on for a moment - the start up and incubation of new private charities, because, it is in the same spirit as Davy Crockett's that the NHLA has committed itself to helping our neighbors without the aid of government.

Last fall, when NHLA was still in its formative phases, Mike Fisher, then a resident of Vermont but who has since moved to New Hampshire, came to us with what we believed to be a brilliant idea. To create a scholarship - since named the Liberty Scholarship Fund - whose goal is to significantly increase the educational opportunities and choices available to New Hampshire children. To achieve this, the fund would channel donations directly to families wishing to take personal responsibility for their children's education through means other than public schools. Mike Fisher and Dawn Lincoln, another founder of the Liberty Scholarship Fund who has also recently moved to New Hampshire, worked together with NHLA Civic Action to form and launch the Liberty Scholarship Fund in time to award our first scholarships for the upcoming school year.

Families applying to the fund will be eligible for scholarships of up to \$1000 per child for their choice of non-public education - whether that means private schooling or homeschooling. While there are certain eligibility requirements that need to be met, a major requirement - in the interest of providing a hand up rather than a handout - is that we ask the applicant families to provide volunteer time to help promote and expand the fund so that it may benefit even more children.

After close to a year of hard work, I'm proud to tell you that recipients of this year's scholarships will be picked on July 15th and we will begin to award scholarships on August 1st in the amount of \$1000 per child.

Of course, I brought brochures and applications with me, if anyone here would like more information or knows of a family that would benefit from it.

But, most importantly, I am here tonight to ask for your support. We need your donations to make the Liberty Scholarship Fund a success and to provide scholarships to as many New Hampshire children as possible. In less than three weeks we will select this year's recipients of the scholarship. Any check you write tonight will be channeled directly to a New Hampshire family who wishes to enroll their children in a private school or to educate their children at home but would be unable to do so without your support.

I would also like to remind you that tonight we are holding a silent auction and that all proceeds will directly benefit the New Hampshire families who have applied for a scholarship from the Liberty Scholarship Fund. Business owners and individuals all over the state have donated goods and services for tonight's silent auction and I urge you to please bid generously for the auction items you are most interested in.