

"So much damage has been done"

by P.M. Carpenter via reed - smirkingchimp.com *Sunday, Sep 2 2007, 10:47pm*

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Compared to all the truly gargantuan troubles brought down on us by the Bush administration -- two incomprehensibly executed wars; a hopelessly broken military; fiscal policies that make the subprime industry look thoughtful; the utterly unaddressed baby-boomer boomerang; a string of constitutional and other crises -- this is a relatively minor story. Yet it lays bare, in microcosmic form, the Bushies' macrocosmic traits: favoritism, incompetence, bullying, buck-passing, malfeasance, negligence, blindness, stubbornness, recklessness, deceit, distortion, laissez-faire lassitude and free-market fundamentalism. In short, boneheaded madness.

You'd need to read the story yourself to fully appreciate just how boneheaded and mad they are; nevertheless I'll offer a taste here, just in case you fear that your reading of yet another lengthy item on the Bush administration's demented doings would push your own sanity over the edge.

This one, this merely the latest one, looks at what's been done to the Consumer Product Safety Commission -- another of those federal watchdogs turned oxymoron. Were Voltaire still around, he would likely modify his famous quip and note that the commission cares about neither consumers, products, or safety. It is, on the other hand, a tremendous friend to profitmongers and giddy libertarians.

Aside from mollicoddling product manufacturers, the commission now caters to the profoundly happy-go-lucky George Wills of the world; those who religiously hold faith that the marketplace is, and always is, the proper judge. If, as happened in 2004, 44,000 children are injured and nearly 150 killed by adult-sized all terrain vehicles permitted for sale to those under 16, well, these bumps in the road will sort things out for themselves. The kids will grow wiser, the parents more responsible, "pediatricians, consumer advocates and emergency room doctors" less frantic.

If such a mature perspective takes time -- and perhaps another 150 dead children, and another, and another -- shucks, that's life (or not). Heaven forbid that some bureaucrat should write an intrusive regulation. And the grieving parents should be thankful: The agony of a dead child is nothing compared to the oppression of an A.T.V. ban. Grow up, mom and dad. Read your Friedrich Hayek.

Those who've left the commission in disgust obviously have not read or appreciated their Hayek. "The head of the poison prevention unit, for example, resigned when efforts to require inexpensive child-resistant caps on hair care products that had burned toddlers were delayed so industry costs could be weighed against the potential benefit to children."

The ominous findings? One or two cents per package. Said the former safety commission employee ordered by the White House to protect children not from poison, but two-cent oppressions: "So much damage has been done."

Naturally the commission's acting chair is indignant, befuddled and angered by bad press. "The commission is currently doing more to protect consumers than it has at any prior time in its history. Even more could be done with greater resources, but the media's portrayal of a crippled and

impotent agency, unable to deal with basic problems, is reckless and just plain wrong."

One of her employees -- a "senior agency official" -- however, has a somewhat different view: "It is a complete disaster. There is just no other word for it."

I wonder if that official had in mind the commission only?

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