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A Collapsing Empire — Opportunities for Restoring the Republic

by Karen Kwiatkowski

The following is a transcript of a speech given at The Future of Freedom Foundation's June 2008 conference, "Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy & Civil Liberties" held in Reston, Virginia.

Jacob Hornberger: Our next speaker is Karen Kwiatkowski. Karen retired from the United States Air Force as a lieutenant colonel in 2003. She has an M.A. in government from Harvard University, an M.S. in science management from the University of Alaska, and a Ph.D. in world politics from Catholic University. She has authored two books on African security issues. And her final assignment while she was in the service was in the office of the Secretary of Defense. She has been a frequent contributor to LewRockwell.com and has written for *The American Conservative*, Salon, Antiwar.com, and others. She is one of these great rising stars, or a risen star, in the Libertarian movement and been a big inspiration to a lot of us. She actually played a featured role in the film documentary *Why We Fight*. The title of Karen's talk is "A Collapsing Empire: Opportunities for Restoring the Republic." Please welcome Karen Kwiatkowski. <applause>

Karen Kwiatkowski: Thanks very much for the very kind introduction and for having me back as well. It's always great to be here. We, and not just those of us attending this wonderful conference, understand that the American imperial experiment is ending. The results were not quite as the experimenters envisioned, yet the results have been very much as the Anti-Federalists foresaw, as the so-called Old Right witnessed against, and as many in this room and by extension their extensive networks of free market ideology and small L libertarianism implicitly understand.

The American Empire is over. Our fiat money is increasingly valueless and garners a generalized disgust around the world. Our economic engine was once driven by a purer form of capitalism and by people who could think and compete and aspire to do so. Today we find an American version of national socialism where the subsidized and intensely regulated planes and trains don't really run on time, but we are sublimely grateful for the government's assistance and leadership just the same. We find today in America a massive government bureaucracy at multiple levels, each layer lapping and snarling hungrily for its sustenance and its justification. We may think of regulators, inspectors, tax collectors, police forces, and city managers. Curiously, in many rural counties across this country the largest employer is, in fact, the school system, binding a plurality of workers and parents to a national education system that strives to leave no child unscarred by standardization. <applause>

Karen Kwaitkowski: Whether this goal is accomplished by prescription medication, the slow torture of boredom, the ritualized sacrifice at the altar of the multiple choice state exam, or simply by the grinding, relentless, institutional punishment of youthful curiosity and individuality, the goal is indeed accomplished. Our military is nationalized and permanently standing, as well funded as it is poorly led. The late Colonel David Hackworth, a veteran of several 20th century American wars overseas, referred to what he called perfumed princes in an article he wrote in 1987, several years before the Cold War ended. Echoing both Major General Smedley Butler circa 1933 and President Eisenhower, who warned of the unseemly power of our military industrial complex in early 1961, Hackworth defined these men, and I quote, as "corporate generals and admirals who should be sent packing to industry where their brilliance would be well used."

The perfumed princes that Hackworth believed should be sent packing to industry were indeed going to industry, and instead of seeking the nation's peace and prosperity and security, these perfumed princes were then, as they are today, completely vested in war and insecurity. Several months ago Congressman Ron Paul asked a top general, a man who is today the Central Command Combatant Commander, a question related to the United States Constitution. Dr. Paul asked, "Does the administration have the authority to bomb Iran without further congressional approval?" I assume that General Petraeus is familiar with Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution, granting the power to declare war to the Congress and expressly not granting that power to any single man or woman who may be angry, frustrated, ill informed, or trying to gain the approval of his or her play group. I think it is fair to say that this general, in his now famous response, and I quote, "That's not my purview," demurred, sidestepped, and lied in the manner of all perfumed princes.

More recently the mainstream media were, as Sheldon just told us, shocked to learn that a long list of well-known so-called military experts were receiving and devotedly parroting page after page, year

after year, Pentagon- and White House-drafted talking points. I hate to disagree with Colonel Hackworth, but I do believe he overstated the brilliance of the generals and the admirals. They are as undistinguished and ordinary in the corporate world as Hackworth understood them to be in the world of war. Thus, the empire is bankrupt, bereft of talent and capacity. It spends \$2.5 billion a day on its security apparatus, over \$1 trillion a year. Its green eyeshaders, like apocalyptic horsemen, gallop faster and faster as the currency debases, spending monstrous sums on military maintenance and training, the conduct of current wars, and funding that overfed toddler we call the intelligence community in order to ensure future wars. Our military, the one we say fights for freedom and peace around the world, is a grand Gulliver, bound and disabled and continually amazed by what it encounters on the Island of Lilliput. The American Empire is unsustainable at home by American workers and homemakers. And, as Herb Stein famously observed, things that can't go on forever don't.

But it isn't just that national ideological and corporate imperialism cannot create value or produce widgets over the long term. It isn't just that government largesse necessarily stifles real capital formation or that the leviathan necessarily murders freedom. Less obviously, but I think perhaps more importantly, is how the dichotomy between America's sense of self and her actual self, since the later 19th Century, has already defeated our City on the Hill-derived globalism. *USA Today* reported last December that "The Lakota Sioux Indians, whose ancestors included Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, and Crazy Horse, have withdrawn from all treaties their forefathers signed with the United States Government and have declared their independence." <applause>

Karen Kwaitkowski: The report goes on to say that "A delegation delivered the news to the State Department," and notes that the United States Government is in violation and currently standing in violation of 33 different treaties with the Sioux Nation. Along these same lines, CNN reported recently that a group of Hawaiians took over the old Hawaiian monarchy's royal residence and vowed to conduct the kingdom's government from there. CNN noted, "The group is one of several in Hawaii that rejects statehood and seeks to return to the constitutional monarchy that effectively ended in 1893, when a group of politicians, businessmen, and sugar planters, aided by the U.S. minister to Hawaii and the U.S. Navy, overthrew the kingdom's government."

Now last month, National Public Radio, NPR, did a short series on the Indian boarding school system, which, like any boarding school, was a government boarding school. Indian children from any number of tribes across the country would be gathered up, taken away from their homes, brought to a school. Their hair would be cut. Their clothes would be burned, and they would have new, I guess, white man clothes or whatever. I mean it was a total indoctrination. Initially, of course, at the time of the late

1800s, this is something that is seen as valuable and consistent with maybe some cultural expectations; but in fact it was resented and hated and not appreciated.

Now over 100 years, like a lot of things, we get used to government giving us stuff. But, of course, NPR is very upset. The history of the boarding school system was pertinent from NPR's perspective. From their perspective, the modern and evolved federal boarding schools were in terrible danger of losing their funding. But in this report, as with the news of the declared independence of the Lakota Nation, we see and hear of occupation, misuse of military force against the weak, theft of land and resources, re-education of the individual by and for the central state, and the ever ratcheting and expansive nature of government lies.

These mainstream media stories remind us of past and present federal efforts to contain and control Native American peoples. We could have been talking about what our federal government is doing in Iraq or Afghanistan, because the methods and motivations are much the same. I'm all for truth, justice, and the revolutionary American way. It seems like we spend a lot of time discussing whether or not we should be proud of America, or whether supporting the troops abroad and at home means supporting the idiotic and unconstitutional government that placed them there. We witness and sometimes participate in artificial morality plays when we try to determine if the government murder of some people is okay, and whether government torture under some circumstances is ethical.

George W. Bush, speaking for the government, has repeatedly said, "We do not torture." Could it be that he assumes the imperial we? If so, he may be correct. Individual people torture and individual people kill and maim other people, destroy their homes and futures, shoot their livestock, topple their buildings. Perhaps the inanity of our troubled little Caesar is actually part of a larger plan to destroy the imperial mindset and restore the Republic. It goes without saying that the rest of the world is wise to our existing empire, its financial and military incorporation, and its trite and transparent ideological propaganda.

Our government likes to demonize those who have the temerity to speak honestly and publicly about our empire. We say Chavez is the new Castro, Putin is the new Stalin, Ahmadinejad the new Hitler. Some Americans and most non-Americans know enough about European, Soviet, and Cold War history to realize that Castro, Stalin, or Hitler, flavor of the month, is government propaganda directed specifically at a poorly educated American audience and at no one else. America's governmental mythology-- Murray Rothbard referred to it as the carefully nurtured mystique of government-- is being rejected around the world and by Americans themselves. This rejection is a beautiful thing, and it occurs daily, even minute by minute at LewRockwell.com, Antiwar.com, the Future of Freedom Foundation, and

a whole host of free market institutions, political movements, and organizations. It is especially wonderful to see the idea of global empire pummeled and gutted, usually unintentionally, in the pages of *USA Today* and the *New York Times*, to watch it on CNN and to listen via NPR.

When the very purveyors and beneficiaries of American Empire inadvertently educate average Americans on the costs of empire and the truth of our imperial history, it is a very good thing and it signals the end of empire. Americans hear about nation building in Iraq and Afghanistan and they ask for it back home in storm- and flood- and fire-ravaged cities in the South and the West and in the heartland. Americans hear about roads and bridges being constructed and repaired abroad and they'd like to see our tax dollars at home working on these exact same projects. Americans hear about the so-called security services our troops provide overseas and they'd like to see that security applied at our ports and on our borders and even in our troubled urban areas. When Americans are told that they must wait for this kind of nation building and security at home because our economy is in a tailspin. Our government is broke. And the two primary political parties have matching unconstitutional war agendas. They begin to understand the nature of centralized, unaccountable, lawless, imperial-minded government and inherently despise it. This is how crazy it is.

A recent set of articles by Frida Berrigan of the New America Foundation summarizes seven key missions assumed by the Pentagon under the current administration. These range from being America's intelligence agency [to being] her domestic disaster manager and by far the largest recipient of non-entitlement federal spending. They also include the roles of America's global diplomat, global arms dealer, global humanitarian responder, and global viceroy of space and the heavens. It sounds surreal, unbelievable. It is a comedic parity of centralization of power, hubris, and incompetence.

Augustine wrote *The City of God* in the early 400s, at a time of the late and undeniable collapse of the Roman Empire, which had been considered a Christian empire for nearly 200 years. Augustine wrote something that defines empire and clearly labels the hypocrisy that is its undoing. Many of you have probably heard or read this before, but it's worth repeating here, and I'll quote from Augustine:

“Without justice, what are kingdoms but great robber bands? What are robber bands but small kingdoms? The band is itself made up of men, is ruled by the command of a leader, is held together by a social pact. Plunder is divided in accordance with an agreed upon law. If this evil increases by the inclusion of dissolute men to the extent that it takes over territory, establishes headquarters, occupies cities, and subdues people, it publicly assumes the title of kingdom.” And it goes on, “A fitting and true response was once given to Alexander the Great by an apprehended pirate. When asked by the king what he thought he was doing by infesting the sea, the pirate replied with noble insolence, ‘What do you think

you're doing by infesting the whole world? Because I do it with one puny boat I'm called a pirate. Because you do it with a great fleet you are called an emperor.”

The American Empire is collapsing, and as with the natural collapse of other empires, people in and out of the empire's grasp simply stop believing some decades and generations before the physical end, and this is where we are today. And unlike all previous empires in collapse, we live in an age of rapid communication and instant access to history, research, commentary, and imagery available for the asking. Tradition and habit can keep an empire on life support for centuries; at least it worked this way centuries before now. Today change can come as quickly as ideas can travel, guide, and inform individual choices and actions. We could identify many more signs of our collapsing empire from professional expeditionary mercenary forces posing as a defense to the absolute lack of real debate on the future of our fundamentally one-party governing establishment.

There is a modern cliché that fits: It is what it is. Those Americans deeply invested in the empire will face painful change, but at the same time opportunities for freedom, for restrained republican government, for prosperity and purpose exist, and they are available now for the rest of us. And remember, we are the majority. We can conceive of these opportunities on several levels, and in the next few minutes I'd like to explore some specifics.

Last year at this venue, I spoke of restoring the Republic. Some listeners were surprised when I veered around and passed the idea of the single massive Republic for this country and suggested that a confederation of independent republics and states might work. This would reverse the Lincoln legacy, a sacrilege in Washington, but not a bad idea for the rest of the country. When we speak of empire, we speak of the taking and controlling of subordinate regions and people, motivated by the economic interests of the politically connected and justified by a public ideology of patriotic and moral goodness. Certainly the Civil War could be described as a militarized policy to restrict the Southern capitalism that was squeezing Northern industrial and banking interests, energized by a widespread moral rationale that was leveraged, not shared but leveraged by the political leaders.

A subsequent imperial expansion and interventions from the Indian wars, the Hawaiian annexation, the Spanish American War, the U.S. involvement in the First and Second World Wars, and the 70-plus military interventions since then, including the ones we see in Afghanistan and Iraq, have all met these same criteria. When we speak of opportunities for restoring the Republic, we need to imagine a time in American government that we have not seen in 200 years. It is that republican ideal that we should seek to restore: really small government, weak and poorly nourished government, government that approaches us rarely, and when it does behaves like a friendly yet uncertain puppy.

In my lifetime, the Libertarian Party has typically articulated this type of vision, but what is typically not articulated is the kind of person who creates this kind of small, benign government, thrives under it, the kind of person who resists feeding and entertaining the cute little puppy. Baby animals, as we all know, evolve to be cute, round, and fuzzy and submissive because cute, round, and fuzzy and submissive baby animals tend to get more positive attention from parents and others and thus survive to make more creatures who, regardless of how obscenely frightening, monstrous, and aggressive they are destined to be when they grow up, are friendly and appealing in their infantile state.

So it is with government, and this is an aspect of the Leviathan problem that defeats the wisest constitution. Government also grows and centralizes. Empires expand until they collapse because we the people want to be good, rich, and admired, but all on the cheap. Luckily for us, today in America we are getting an object lesson on how being good on the cheap through the ambition of ideologues and fools and the sacrifice of other fools and conscripts far from home is immoral and costs way more than advertised for far less benefit. Instead of being admired and venerated, we are feared and hated by the rest of the world. Instead of gaining wealth and freedom, we see our own lives and livelihoods made debtbound and fruitless. We wonder why, and often we don't understand our own culpability in the misery of tyranny.

Etienne de la Boetie, a French lawyer and philosopher in the middle 1500s, shared his thoughts on this problem in his work, *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*. De la Boetie wondered, and I quote, "What strange phenomenon is this? What name shall we give it? What is the nature of this misfortune? What vice is it or rather what degradation to see an endless multitude of people not merely obeying but driven to servility, not ruled but tyrannized over?" He goes on to describe the typical tyrant, and we recognize the type, and I quote, "The people suffer plundering wantonness, cruelty, not from an army, not from a barbarian horde on account of whom they must shed their blood and sacrifice their lives, but from a single man, not from a Hercules, nor from a Samson, but from a single little man. Too frequently this same little man is the most cowardly and effeminate in the nation, a stranger to the powder of battle and hesitant on the sands of the tournament."

To end the tyranny and the empire, to reverse the concentration of power, to stop the ambitious Leviathan, de la Boetie at the age of 18 years advised us simply, and I quote, "There is no need of fighting to overcome this single tyrant, for he is automatically defeated if the country refuses consent to its own enslavement. It is not necessary to deprive him of anything, but simply to give him nothing. There is no need that the country make an effort to do anything for itself provided it does nothing against itself. It is therefore the inhabitants themselves who do permit or rather bring about their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit they would put an end to their own servitude. A people that enslaves itself cuts its own

throat when, having a choice between being vassals and being free men, it deserts its liberties and takes on the yoke, gives consent to its own misery” (de la Boetie).

We are speaking today of the collapse of the American Empire, and it is collapsing precisely because so many of us are already doing what de la Boetie advises, giving the tyrant nothing, ceasing to submit to his authority, living as free men. Simply knowing that this is what is happening by us, around us, and throughout the country and so too the rest of the world is powerful. We need to recognize this fact, that this reality in this moment, the Ron Paul banner revolution with the emphasis on the letters L-O-V-E, is in perfect concert with the way things really do change. The way we think about the collapse of empire is key to actually restoring a Republic and in recognizing the opportunities inherent in this collapse.

Empire and its well-funded military machine grasping around the world, deep into the heartland and into space, as some massive, physical entity, the collapse will indeed be a catastrophic event. Catastrophes like the Black Plague in Europe always bring new opportunities, often painfully forced through death, poverty, starvation, and crisis. But our American Empire, this economic and militaristic dominatrix, is less a physical entity than an idea we voluntarily embrace, and even those of us who dedicate ourselves to targeting the empire can by our very obsession overstate our empire’s inherent abilities and power. The empire we speak of and bemoan, and indeed from which we suffer economically and morally, is little more than a veneer. The empire has no clothes.

We know the fable well. It is also true that the American Empire itself is hollow, a movie set with authentic-looking building fronts but nothing behind them. The currency of our empire, whether fiat money or military effectiveness, is likewise not believable and therefore not valued. The American Empire rests entirely on our belief in it. Take away that faith and we shed the empire. The collapse of empire is really the act by each one of us of rising up from our knees and brushing off the dust.

Thus, what are the opportunities as we rise up in freedom? How do we help our families, neighbors, friends, and those in our network to rise up in freedom? I’d like to discuss three simple things that we can do to leverage, to speed, and perhaps to ease the process of returning to republicanism. The first is cultivating a certain quality of mind. If we wish to be self-governed politically, we must first be self-governed individually. To be self-governed is to live our lives as we wish in complete concert with our deeply held values, bold every day. To live this way, we must be educated, logical, and morally brave, all qualities of mind. We must move ourselves, our children and grandchildren, friends and neighbors, continually in this direction.

Mark Twain once said, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." We know that these qualities of mind are never the result of public schooling or public employment, but it is important to remember that they are certainly not precluded by it. Education is not just about knowing facts and gathering up information. Colin Murphy, former *Atlantic Monthly* editor and writer, [in his recent book, *Is America the New Rome?* examines] the similarities between [Ancient] Rome and the United States. He speaks of a fatal parochialism of Roman citizens, "A lack of interest in the outside world even among the elites." As a result, the Roman government, military, and people were often taken by surprise.

Think about that. Many of us who are Libertarian or anarcho-capitalist are part of the anti-interventionist Right or Left. We got there by thinking and reading, listening, and observing, and I don't think a single one of us hasn't stumbled upon some surprising bit of perfect wisdom from older and other cultures. We may have started with the Bible, but beyond that we discovered that governing dilemmas, issues of human liberty and human slavery, human choices, have been debated and examined by the brightest men and women for centuries. We cherish the Founders, especially the Anti-Federalists, for their fierce devotion to liberty and their passionate distrust of centralized political power, yet they too base their understanding on those who went before. They were educated beyond the parochial, beyond the narrow confines of a single country, a single era, a single religion, a single narrow philosophy, a single career specialty. The recent tell-all book by Scott McClellan depicts George W. Bush as intellectually uncurious and prone to self-deception. When the book came out a few weeks ago, the White House inadvertently confirmed its former spokesman by saying it was "surprised and puzzled," claiming that this was not the Scott McClellan it knew. For those familiar with the story, with the history of Washington politics and this administration in particular, little that Scott McClellan is saying is new or surprising. When one knows nothing, everything is surprising, puzzling, a mystery. <applause and laughter>

Karen Kwiatkowski: To promote the qualities of mind suitable for a free people, we should learn and keep learning, both classically and technologically. Not that long ago, I thought about iPods in a very parochial way. I thought they were for popular music and not really useful for me--- modern entertainment only. But iPods are for podcasts and lectures, movies, educational videos, documentaries, and for sharing, discussing, and creating new knowledge and new perspectives. Most things that innovators create within the capitalistic systems that reward and enable them are not end items at all but stepping stones to more innovation, new ways of living, thinking, producing. Think about the Internet. We probably all used it to get here, to prepare ourselves for the conference, to pay our bills. Some of us may be using it right now.

Its predecessor, the first packet-switching data transfer system, was called ARPANET, later DARPANET, and it was created as a way for the Pentagon to maintain command and control over its missiles and bombers after a nuclear attack had destroyed the central control point. The goal was to maintain functionality through the strength of independent, self-organizing decentralization. We no longer worry about fighting a force-on-force nuclear war with a communist superpower, and we rarely mention the ARPANET, except we did last night, so you guys are ahead of the game.

But there is an absolute rationality in decentralized, adaptable, and flexible information transfer. Through this magic, Macs can talk to PCs, can talk to cell phones, can talk to Blackberrys, can talk to convection ovens and automobiles, you name it. Certainly the incredible potential for individual empowerment and networking, for capitalism, was not envisioned by the federal government. Had it been fully realized, what only the marketplace of human desire and ingenuity could know, it would have resisted the technology as incompatible with centralized control and top-down order. It is the hallmark of government and empire. In fact, government has resisted the free market-driven Internet since the beginning, albeit mostly without success.

In an information-saturated world, we do yearn for simplicity and clarity. Often this is satisfied by slogans and labels. The challenge before us is to satisfy human desire for clarity and simplicity through a moral, logical, and accessible approach to politics, economics, and government. Thanks to Ron Paul's presidential run and his wonderful book, *The Revolution*, millions of Americans are now learning about, talking about, and wondering about liberty, the Founders' intentions, and even the workings of the Federal Reserve and fractional banking. To help more people adopt a quality of mind that is unafraid of learning, unafraid of thinking, we can share the right kinds of books and articles, the right kinds of audio and video recordings, the right kind of ideas via personal contact and our own creative leveraging of all types of communication and all types of inspiration. Information and education must be exchanged like certain vitamins in forms that can be effectively absorbed and utilized by the body politic.

I read somewhere recently that in the age of Shakespeare most people in England were unable to read, illiterate. To broadly share information and ideas, the preferred medium was audible, spoken and theatrical, and in fact nothing else worked. For writers to complain today that people don't read anymore is not only untrue, it is parochial thinking, something we have to get over. It is about learning, not necessarily reading. In our age, we have a vast audience of readers, viewers, and listeners and multiple avenues for sharing new freedom-oriented ways of thinking about life and societal order. Through our attention, time, finances, and care, we can support any number of organizations and individuals who promote the creative and critical thought process that the future free Americans must cultivate.

We can support a more honest understanding of our country's history and increased study of the Founders and their philosophy. We can support a wider awareness of economics as it really operates through the promotion of the Austrian school and the work of the Mises Institute and Liberty Fund. We can support by reading, viewing, and sharing the outstanding contributions to the national conversation offered by the Future of Freedom Foundation, the Foundation for Economic Education, the Independent Institute, LewRockwell.com, and even the Cato Institute, among so many others. We can support the parents of this country who have liberated their precious children from public schooling. According to an alliance, the Alliance for Separation of School and State, these eight million, today eight million liberated students equate to the entire student body of 25 different states and Washington, D.C. and that's not chump change. <applause>

Karen Kwiatkowski: This one area of information flow, targeted in support of a living liberty, is full of opportunity. At worst each of us is individually improved and made wiser, a little more free and a little more bold. At best a whole country may live free and win the battle against cowardly bureaucracy, consummate centralization, and the inhumanity of empire. A second set of opportunities for a new Republic amidst the ongoing collapse is economic, and yet it relates, as all things do, to how we think and what we believe. Economics is a battlefield where centralized, socialized control of choice and human action, call it communism, socialism, or fascism, constantly moves to crush economic liberty and capitalism. Augustine's pirate boldly advises the emperor that it is he who is the greater criminal. Twelve hundred years later, Frederic Bastiat described what he called the legal plunder conducted daily by the state. The most well-known Marxist treatise is called *Das Kapital* in recognition that society and government are linked to the economic system. In Ron Paul's seminal book, *The Revolution*, two of seven concise chapters are dedicated to this topic of human and state economy: what are the economic opportunities in a collapsing empire, and how do we discern them? Pete Schiff's latest book, *Crash Proof: How to Profit from the Coming Collapse*, is an example of economic advice suited to the collapse of empire. Bill Bonner and Addison Wiggin's *Empire of Debt* and *Financial Reckoning Day* come to mind. There are many others.

For those of us, though, who have little money, the question of where to invest has more to do with the resources we all have, our interests, our study, our work, our time. In a collapsing empire, the answer is not difficult. Do not invest your interest, study, work, and time in those activities that depend on a robust empire, a grand, centralized state, and the plunder of others. The American Way of Empire, the American Leviathan, is not only corrupt and deadly; it is ending. At a minimum, we ought to avoid throwing good money after bad. Beyond that, the choices of where to spend our money and time are really wide open. What works? What is republican in concept? What do we like and value in a free society? This is where to put your money and your time.

We find it so easy to advise others to avoid meat or fur or genetically modified food, to recycle, to buy shade-grown coffee. It should be just as easy and just as common to advise others to avoid funding and supporting the deadly enterprise and empire. As the empire collapses around us, we need to recognize that capitalism is and has been for centuries made to be a villain with few defenders. If one considers the economic policies of the main contenders in this election year for king of the empire, we find the hardcore socialism offered by Obama. The Club for Growth said that Senator McCain's eager embrace of grossly inaccurate class warfare demagoguery demonstrated at best a painful ignorance of pro-growth economic principles, a lot of words. Bob Barr's run for president as a Libertarian offers some hope. His economic platform is based on reduced federal spending and corporate welfare and sadly replacing the income tax with a national sales tax. But only when you look under the issue of individual liberty on Barr's website do you see veiled reference to unfettered capitalism, and then only if you use your imagination.

American revolutionary Patrick Henry wrote, "Perfect freedom is as necessary to the health and vigor of commerce as it is to the health and vigor of citizenship." In 1956, not so long ago, Ludwig von Mises published a small book, *The Anti-Capitalist Mentality*. In it he tried to understand and explain why the social organization of capitalism, the very engine of progress and prosperity, is misunderstood by average people, discredited by politicians, and hated by the intellectual and chattering classes. He points out that representative government, the foundation of any republic, has a constitutional corollary. This constitutional corollary, and I quote, is "economic freedom, consummated in the market economy (capitalism)."

Mises explained in a variety of ways how the social and political deck is stacked against the system in which we vote with our capital. In this system, merit and competition determine winners and losers. More importantly, capitalism's winners can never rest on their laurels, never indulge for long in sloth and pride and gluttony, greed, lust, or envy, or even wrath. In a free market such indulgences open the door to the less slothful, the less greedy, the less prideful, the less angry competitors. If capitalism is the constitutional corollary for the republican form of government, it is also a moral corollary for living a good and productive life.

Yet as Mises points out, and I quote, "As a result of economic ignorance as the people see it, the unprecedented technological improvements of the last 200 years were not caused or furthered by the economic policies of the age. They were not an achievement of classical liberalism, free trade, laissez-faire, and capitalism. They will therefore go on under any system of the society's economic organization."

This misconception underlies the American tendency to undervalue capitalism as a system of social organization. It underlies the ongoing American willingness to sacrifice capitalism as a necessary

evil instead of as the fundamental factor responsible for lifting men and women far beyond expectations of birth and class while delivering an improved quality of life and livelihood for everyone. Even among free market conservatives and Libertarians, we often fail to aggressively and vocally defend capitalism in the face of a constant onslaught here at home, here in the world's fifth most economically free country, according to the Heritage Foundation.

Ron Paul's latest book is an excellent vehicle to combat this anti-capitalistic mentality here at home. And a nice companion book that may help us be more proud and more vehement promoters of capitalism beyond our normal circles is the Mises Institute Fellow Robert Murphy's *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*. When the empire collapses, unless unfettered capitalism and the free market prevail, we will not have a Republic. In its place, we will have a contracted empire, a grand putrefying socialist corpse. Many in this room, throughout this country, and around the world worry that America has adopted a form of national socialism, even as we wave the tattered flag of a constitutional Republic and spout endlessly the verbiage of freedom. If we are to be republicans living in a republic, we must preserve and defend unfettered capitalism and be prepared to fight for it.

There is one other category of opportunity in this collapsing empire beyond that to educate for self-government and to preserve and defend the conduct and honor of capitalism. This last category is also the most fun, and perhaps if we do it well it will cover sins of omission in the first two. In the quote I used earlier regarding the conversation between the pirate and Alexander the Great, the particular translation of Augustine's *City of God* quoted uses the phrase "noble insolence." Noble insolence was the attitude of the lowly pirate in his answer to Alexander the Great, a fearsome emperor and warrior-- noble insolence. It isn't shock talk radio. It isn't Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh, and even much of what is offered on Air America. Noble insolence isn't a wisecracking or overly poetic preacher seeking to wake up his congregation and make them remember his advice, and it isn't plain old insolence defined as contemptuously rude and impertinent behavior in speech.

I think a better way of understanding this concept is to look at the archaic definition of insolence, which is the quality of being unusual or novel. Of course, noble means of superior quality, admirable, and distinguished. We should all take some time to think about and to practice this noble insolence. The American Empire is a socialistic and increasingly authoritarian Leviathan. As Anthony Gregory [correct?] described it yesterday, the state has become brazen. Yet this empire is the social and political system under which we have grown up and to which we have become accustomed. If we are to live free, we will by default be unusual and novel even as this novelty and rarity echoes the wisdom of those before us and reflects the fundamental values of millions of normally silent Americans.

In a time when a failing, panicked, and hungry centralized state will react to its ongoing collapse by attempting to persist, survive, and to expand in size and import, our leadership, courage and idealism, in Alex Cockburn's words, our spirit of mutiny, is more necessary than ever. It is one thing to recognize and understand what is happening. It is another to actually live and work freely, to loudly challenge empire wherever it is found and to practice noble insolence. It is easy to learn and think about self-government and to find fault with the empire at hand and to wish for an improved and renewed constitutional Republic. For us as lovers of capitalism, it is easy to see how the unfettered free market is consistent with improved quality of the lives and overall moral and meritorious conduct of all people.

But the challenge to orthodoxy, when it seems as if we are outnumbered, or in the face of seeming great power in a country that is militaristic in both attitude and economy, this is a real challenge. We face barriers to the truth we may wish to promote, whether it is in the form of aggressive smears or institutional silence. From an establishment invested in empire, we face practical and physical assault on our freedom if we challenge the empire here at home, whether on the so-called public highways and airways or our overregulated private enterprises, our property, and our capital. Noble insolence in the face of all these things is truly necessary, and it is a great and difficult duty of republican citizenship.

I'd like to share a quote from Leo Tolstoy, who discovered what we are discovering about morality and freedom, statism and tyrants. He did not live to see the communization of Russia, the public acceptance of many forms of fascism, or totalitarianism's persistence. He did not live to see the peaceful rejection of unjust government inspired by Gandhi in India and some other places. He is not here to see Americans claim their peaceful, free, non-interventionist birthright, something we are chartered to do or die trying. Tolstoy wrote that, "This social order with its pauperism, famines, prisons, gallows, armies, and wars is necessary to society, and that still greater disaster would ensue if this organization were destroyed. All this is said only by those who profit by this organization, while those who suffer from it, and then are ten times as numerous, think and say quite the contrary."

De la Boetie wrote this great fact as well when he advised, and I quote, "Resolve to serve no more and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer. Then you will behold him like a great colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight, and break into pieces."

I'd like to conclude with something a little closer to home. Not too far from here in 1775, Patrick Henry advised his fellow Virginians to fight, and many were a little reluctant. He told them, "We are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. The millions of people armed in the holy cause of liberty and in such a country as that which we possess are

invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone. It is to the vigilant, the active, the brave.” We are Tolstoy’s majority, ten times more numerous than those who enforce the current order of empire. We are de la Boetie’s heirs, who take his advice and end the support that upholds the state colossus. And we are Patrick Henry’s vigilant, active, and brave army, seizing today and tomorrow every opportunity to live free, honest, prosperous, and honorable lives in a re-emergent American Republic. <applause>

Karen Kwiatkowski: Thank you. Thank you. Okay, questions?

Man 2: Where do religion, morality, and virtue place in regards to restoring the Republic?

Karen Kwiatkowski: To do what?

Man 2: Religion, morality, and virtue: what is their importance in restoring the Republic?

Kwiatkowski: In restoring the Republic, well, I mean, I’m no expert on it. I think to the extent that it makes an individual a better person, more confident, more brave, more bold, more moral, these are qualities of citizenship. So to that extent, I mean, we say religion. I don’t know how to address that really, because the Roman Empire was a Christian empire: religion and government mixing together. This is an ugly thing, so I’m focused on the individual, and to the extent that those things make a better individual, then we make a better country. <applause>

Man 3: No question. I would just like to thank you for sharing this incredible tour de force with us today. <applause>

Karen Kwiatkowski: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Man 1: Karen, thank you for giving us the optimistic opportunity side of what we can look forward to with the coming down of the evil empire and maybe it’ll come faster than even Robert Higgs thinks because the government seems to be burning through capital at incredibly crescendoing rates, so we can maybe look forward to this very quickly or before we think.

Karen Kwiatkowski: I think we’re going to be surprised by it, and that’s why we got to be ready.

Man 1: By the way, in that early version of the emperor is not wearing any clothes, from Augustine, there's always a Libertarian geek in the audience that's going to correct your attribution. It's Book IV of the Confessions, so as a Catholic girl you can do three Hail Marys for that.

Karen Kwiatkowski: Okay, we'll do it.

Man 4: Good morning. As a side note about unfettered capitalism, another good book that people might want to read, may already know about it, is *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* by Ayn Rand and her cohorts, which contains an interesting essay by Alan Greenspan denouncing the Fed and for the gold standard. The question is off topic. I'm just curious: what happened to your radio show?

Karen Kwiatkowski: I didn't have time to keep doing it. I'll be back on the radio. I'll be doing it more, but I got to the point where the dogs were barking and the cats were scratching and I couldn't do that thing. It's just too much. But we'll do more of that, and that's part of that technology thing. The very fact that I can sit in my cluttered room with a computer and the cats and the dogs and the kids and speak to people via the Internet and take calls: amazing stuff and wonderful stuff.

Man 5: I think we're all looking for ways to protest, and I'd like to share with you one of mine. It starts with an essay by Walt Whitman, "I See the President Almost Every Day." That was during the Civil War, and Lincoln would leave the White House because it was lowland, lots of mosquitoes, and he would go up Massachusetts Avenue with a detail of 24 soldiers and he would work there during the day and go back with 24 soldiers, led by a lieutenant with his sword drawn. Well, today there are lots of motorcades that go up and down in Washington, D.C., and Massachusetts Avenue, Connecticut Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue are the big ones, and the configurations of the motorcades differ. Maybe you have six outriders. Maybe you have two cars so you don't know who is in which car. It decreases the probability by half. These things can stop traffic for as much as 45 minutes. I enjoy seeing these things because I have this arthritic middle finger and I'm the only fellow with a coat and tie so attired. Thank you.

Karen Kwiatkowski: Very good. <applause>

Q: I wanted to ask you about language. I noticed you made a distinction between Southern capitalism and Northern industrialism. There's been a lot of discussion at this conference in particular about maybe a new union between the Left and Libertarians. One of the things that I've noticed is this confusion between the words corporatism and capitalism, and on the Left they tend to use them interchangeably. I'm wondering if you thought about this problem of language and how we could address it to help educate the Left and bring them [along]? I mean, I think that we often agree with them if you

read some tracks where they're criticizing capitalism and you just replace the word capitalism with corporatism.

Karen Kwiatkowski: That's the approach to take, and I didn't use that word corporatism. But I figured there was going to be a question because even when I talk about capitalism, what are we thinking of? A lot of us are thinking of, not the pure free market, free commerce, but we're thinking about what we see every day, which is Halliburton has a buddy that has a buddy that calls a congressman that gets a war that gets profits. So yes, there's a big difference. I like the word corporatism. I think it's a good label that we can find some common ground with the Left who are criticizing generalized capitalism. Folks on the Left, Right, anywhere, are all the same. If we have something to sell we'd like to be able to sell it at the best price we can get by people who want to make that free exchange. Nobody doesn't love that. Everybody loves that, even the Far Right Leftists love that, so we got to build on that understanding and oppose what we actually see going on, which sometimes we call all capitalism. It's not all capitalism.

Man 6: Thanks very much for that. That was very good. You say the American Empire is ending. I agree. What's your opinion on what we're going to see as the empire does end? Will the empire tend to lash out and start more wars, in your opinion, or do you think it's going to be more of a quiet dissipation?

Karen Kwiatkowski: They're going to start more wars, but it's not going to be overseas wars because Americans aren't going to let them do that other than Iran. We're not ready to stop that apparently. I think the wars that they're going to start are going to be here against us, and do not kid yourself that any bureaucratic entity, and particularly government, as well armed and as well funded and as arrogant as our government, is going to lay down. They're not going to lay down. But I think the overseas wars are mindset. It doesn't matter what political party, the mindset in this country is we don't want any more foreign interventions, not even wars. We don't want interventions. We want our boys and girls back home and we want to stop giving Halliburton all this money. We want to fix the levees, the dikes, or whatever it is in New Orleans. <applause>

Karen Kwiatkowski: So because of that attitude, I think that does have a public restraining ability, and the next president, even if it's John McCain, is not going to be free to do whatever he damn well pleases overseas. But the survival instinct is just like with any other living entity: it's passionate and we need to be careful. This is why I think it's important to divest ourselves of the things, the trappings, and the economy of empire and of a big state, because we're going to be-- if we depend on the state for everything that we have, we are conscripts for the state. When push comes to shove it's very difficult to say—Well, my father was a little child during the Depression, and he doesn't even remember it, but he remembers the stories. He said, "We bought a 100-pound bag of beans in October and that's what we

lived on all winter long.” Well, I don’t know whether that’s 100 percent true, but how many of us are willing to do that to have those inconveniences, as Sheldon mentioned? It’s a lot to ask.

So we need to get ready for the government’s survival death throes here, which will be against all the people. It’s a great opportunity also because nobody likes to be-- we’re already taxed to death. We’re sick of these cops. We’re sick of everything. We aren’t going to like it. We will have many, many allies in this pushback against government, but that’s where it’s going to come to. I think that’s where the aggression is going to be. I don’t know though. I certainly don’t know. I think we should be prepared for that though. If nothing else, it won’t be a bad thing if we’re prepared for it. That’s pretty scary and depressing. I was trying to be optimistic because Jacob gave me that speech topic, and it was positive and I wanted to keep it positive. But, yeah, we ought to be a little bit-- we have to be preparing ourselves, I think, psychologically, and to some extent economically. for the death throes of a grand centralized state. It’s coming, and it will be faster than I think we are expecting.

Man 7: Karen, if I could ask a biographical question: How have your attitudes toward the military and militarism and such changed since you were actually in the service, and were there any particular epiphany moments, or what drove you to make those changes?

Karen Kwiatkowski: Actually [there were] a number of different things. I, of course, was raised conservative and to kind of expect the government would be full of waste. In my time in the military, almost from the very beginning what I saw was massive waste: some fraud, mostly waste and incompetence. But that was my job. It was the Cold War and I really liked it. Now when the Cold War ended I was midway through my career. I had ten years on the Cold War and then ten years post Cold War. What might have been called an epiphany, although it’s a pretty grand term, but my expectations were that after the Warsaw Pact collapses, and it did collapse very rapidly once the wall came down and the Soviets were free and whatnot. So I expected NATO to follow suit. I really did. I expected a huge drawdown globally because the whole structure of our excuse for this was, these guys and these guys had evaporated. And that quick evaporation, I think, for those of us, and I am not an expert on it, but that’s a model: the quick evaporation of the Soviet Empire.

And what do they have? They don’t have perfect freedom in the Soviet Union. They’re struggling with this and that. We are much better prepared people psychologically and intellectually than the Soviets ever were to deal with the Republic. So I think we’re going to have a different path than them, but it could be very rapid. In any case, I expected a rapid collapse of NATO. I expected a rapid drawdown, and what I saw was just the opposite. We expanded NATO to try to grab onto more of these-- what the heck for? Nobody knew, it didn’t matter, because it’s not about that. It’s about spending money. It’s about feeding

the machine. He's hungry. He wanted more and he kept getting more. And the Bosnia thing: after that, another big mission creep by design, no threat, no concern. You guys were lied to. We know that. But it was this machine and it had a life of its own. It was a Leviathan in real time, and that kind of set me off.

And then, of course, at the very end I got out because of just blatant, blatant abuse of information and propaganda, which was just disgusting but I was prepared for that by what I had seen already. A lot of people, I would say the majority of military officers and enlisted folks who have served in the same timeframe that I did, felt much the same as I did, and for those that stay there is a compromise in their logic of defense. They have compromised. If they approve of it, it is because they changed their view of what defense was about during the Cold War. And so for that generation, if you're still in the military playing the game, you've compromised what you believed only maybe 15 years before, and that's not a good thing. We don't want people like that in the military. Just get rid of them. Okay, well thank you very much, appreciate it. <applause>