

Eminent disaster

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Normally I rant against government taking money from one person and giving it to another. Now I think I've found a way to argue for that same principle, but with a twist. Hopefully I can get those on both sides, left and right, to agree with me on this one.

In a case that isn't expected to be ruled on until June, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments last week from both sides of a Connecticut eminent-domain dispute.

New York's The Journal News reported: "Susette Kelo and several other homeowners in New London filed suit after city officials announced plans to bulldoze their residences to clear the way for a riverfront hotel, health club and offices. The residents refused to move, arguing it was an unconstitutional taking of their property."

The Journal News also said the city's justification for such an action was, "The private development will generate tax revenue and improve the local economy."

Justices "expressed serious doubts whether the court has the authority to protect" the homeowners.

Leaving the legal issue of whether or not the Supreme Court has jurisdiction and authority in this matter aside, what about the moral implications of this issue? I know I can't be the only one who sees this as a serious abuse of government power. I'm sure some on the left would have to agree with me on this; after all, don't they hate big business?

Newsday paraphrased Justice Sandra Day O'Connor asking, "Can a city decide to get rid of the Motel 6 and put up a Ritz-Carlton ... because the luxury hotel would produce more taxes?" She added, "That would be OK?"

Shockingly, Wesley Horton, the attorney arguing on behalf of New London, said, "Yes, your honor, it would be."

To my friends on the left who would oppose such a government action: Is this not the same thing as taking money from one person and giving it to another? If so, then what's the moral difference in the situations that causes you to approve of one and oppose the other?

Newsday quotes Justice Antonin Scalia asking, "Are we saying you can take from A and give to B if B pays more taxes?"

The premise of those who support such an action is that doing so would generate more tax revenue for the city and thus go toward "the common good." But do the ends really justify the means?

Imagine the government coming to you and telling you that you have to sell your house because some bureaucrats decided that a new shopping center being put on your property would generate more tax revenue.

Worse yet, imagine you're some elderly woman and the government comes to you and tells you that you have to sell and move out of your house that you have been living in for 50 or more years just because some hotel wants to move in and the government is desperate for more tax revenue.

Can either of these cases be morally justified? If you say they can be based on the fact that it's the government doing it, just stop and seriously think about that for a moment. If it were not the government doing it, would it be justified? What if I come by one day and tell you I'm going to force you to sell your house to me, whether you like it or not? Justifiably, you'd kick me off your property and maybe even call the cops on me. Yet somehow when government does it, we tend to excuse it.

All sorts of immoral actions that no one would dare commit themselves suddenly get justified when government commits them. What's wrong with that picture?

Whether it's money or a house, it's just plain wrong to forcibly take it from the rightful owner and give it to another person, no matter what the legal justification may be. The right to property is one of the fundamental rights in our society.

If you still don't agree with me, start packing your bags and loading your car up; you may be next. Don't worry though; the government will compensate you. Besides, it's for the "common good."