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## Freedom Of Speech ... But Not For The Fast-Talking

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I find it kind of funny that a person who wants to be an auctioneer requires a government license, while a 16-year-old who wants to operate a large roller coaster, like where I work, does not.

Hillsborough County issues two different auctioneering licenses: one for selling your own property and one for selling someone else's. (I contemplated interviewing an actual auctioneer, but I realized that he or she might be difficult to understand.)

When I last checked, the tax collector's Web site had 65 pages with about 20 different occupational licenses listed on each page. A host of other people need, however dubiously, a government license: aquarium cleaners, book binders, wig stylists and so on.

Some activities should require a license; driving comes to mind. But then again, I'm reminded of how easy my driver's license test was and how long I had to wait in a crowded line, not to mention the many licensed drivers I've observed breaking any number of traffic laws.

No doubt the positives of licensing drivers still outweigh its negatives. But what about occupations like auctioneer?

The idea that a license is a way to of guaranteeing that a person has the appropriate skills is noble. But like many other well-intentioned government actions, licensing requirements do have their downsides.

The licensing boards may be controlled or influenced by established contractors, who could use the board to prevent competitors from entering the market. This leads to higher prices for consumers. That a license is needed creates a burden on would-be practitioners to enter the given profession.

Licensing also can conflict with the idea of a free market. Person "A" may be willing to pay for the services of person "B" but may be hindered by the fact that B has not obtained a license. Government, in such a situation - under the auspices of good intentions - hinders the free market through its preponderance of licensing requirements for occupations.

So what if there were no licensing requirements for auctioneering? If an auctioneer were bad at his job - which may sometimes be hard to determine, given that most people can't keep up with what they are saying - then word would get out, largely through nongovernment groups like the Better Business Bureau.

That organization states on its Web site that it "has proven that the majority of marketplace problems can be solved

fairly through the use of voluntary self-regulation and consumer education."

No mention of government there.

Despite what seems to be prevailing government orthodoxy, a license isn't needed for every occupation imaginable. But any time government can find a way to license or regulate a given activity, it will.

It's reminiscent of this quote from Ronald Reagan: "Government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: 'If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.'"

Come to think of it, the only reason you don't need a license to be a journalist is the First Amendment's guarantee of the freedom of the press. Just imagine how many journalists would be out of work if the job required a license.

What if there were a government license required to be a community columnist? I might not even be writing this column. OK, so maybe some readers would like that idea.

Perhaps the only way to end licensing of auctioneering would be to add a new constitutional amendment with wording similar to the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the fast-talking."

Would-be auctioneers, unite!

Adam Fowler recently graduated with a degree in political science and works at Busch Gardens. Keyword: Community Columnists, to read other recent columns.

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