

Freedom To vs. Freedom From

Vote-seeking politicians often incorporate the theme of freedom into their campaigns because, to American ears, the word "freedom" is like motherhood and apple pie. It is one of the few things that everyone agrees is good. Who, after all, could be against freedom?

However, politicians do not always use words the same way other citizens do. In particular, there is an important distinction to be drawn between whether a politician speaks of citizens' "freedom to" or their "freedom from."

"Freedom to" candidates say that everyone should be "free" to have something—a free education, free medical care, free meals, etc. When these politicians invoke freedom, they often

are really talking about what are referred to as "entitlements."

The problem with these so-called "freedoms" is that they involve using the power of government to expropriate the labor or property of some citizens to distribute it to other citizens. In a civil society, individuals are not *entitled* to have things provided by others; they instead provide for themselves. Those who are unable to provide for themselves seek assistance from family, friends, or private organizations including churches, soup kitchens, or the Salvation Army.

By contrast, the "freedom from" candidate says to voters, "If you elect me, I will work to free you from the restraints imposed by government." One example



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would be a pledge to reduce or eliminate taxes.

This is real freedom, because freedom from government taxes and regulations involves removing barriers from people's lives so that they truly are free to pursue happiness. It does not impose an obligation upon anyone to provide them with anything.

This summer, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy produced two comprehensive publications that will go far toward advancing the civil society envisioned by those who advocate more freedom from government. *School Choice in Michigan: A Primer for Freedom in Education*, is a guide for exercising parents' right and responsibility to direct the education of their children, and *Michigan Labor Law: What Every Citizen Should Know* recommends a government-neutral approach to labor relations.

Your voluntary support of the Mackinac Center is a great way to advance civil society and to ensure Michigan citizens enjoy maximum freedom from coercive political society.!

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