

THOMAS SOWELL

Few things illustrate the difference between liberals and conservatives as clearly as the different approaches to the immigration issue by liberal Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California and conservative Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan.

Pat Buchanan would act directly against immigrants by a moratorium on even legal immigration and by fortifying the borders. Whatever the merits or demerits of this approach, it focuses its attention directly on immigrants.

Mrs. Feinstein advocates a national identity card that all Americans would be required to have and that all employers would be required to see to prevent hiring illegal aliens. It is the classic liberal response of using a particular problem created by particular people to expand the government's power over other people. The same pattern is seen in liberal responses to crimes committed by people with firearms by cracking down on the far larger number of people with firearms who are committing no crimes.

Nothing polarizes the political left and right like the idea of a national identity card. Yet it is not obvious why, in principle, this should be a liberal-vs.-conservative issue. Everyone should be against people escaping personal responsibility for their actions by pretending to be somebody else or by relocating to places where their sordid past is not known, thereby permitting them to victimize more innocent people.

Some hard-nosed conservatives have urged that sex offenders in particular be identified and not be

National ID card: Stamp it totalitarian?

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allowed to escape their past and continue to prey on unsuspecting neighbors, or those neighbors' children, in the future. Would not a national identity card also permit other kinds of criminals, deadbeat dads and other parasites from escaping their past and jeopardizing other people's futures?

Despite the many potential benefits of a national identity card, the painful fact is that battle lines are drawn over this issue for one reason: We cannot trust the government in general, and liberals in particular, to stop at a national identity card to be used to enforce immigration laws or to deter crime.

Control is the name of the game for liberals, even when they call it "compassion." A national identity card would not only permit even greater government snooping into people's private lives, the information gathered would almost inevitably lead to

more laws forcing more people to do more things the way the politicians want them done. It is a down payment on totalitarianism.

Lack of trust is not some purely psychological reaction or a paranoia bred by militias or talk show hosts. History is full of reasons to distrust governments in general and the political left in particular.

Most Americans probably have no more objection in principle to a national identity card than to some form of gun control. It is only in practice that we know that it will never stop there.

Put differently, many of the benefits that we could get from many policies must be forfeited because of the greater dangers created by the untrustworthiness of those who believe in big government as a means of imposing their own superior wisdom and virtue on others.

At the very moment when the liberal media are blaming "anti-government" feeling for such things as the Oklahoma City bombing and blaming conservative talk show hosts for promoting such feelings, the Supreme Court of the United States has given a free home demonstration of betrayal of trust by striking down term-limits legislation passed by overwhelming majorities of voters.

Nothing in the Constitution forbids the states to pass such legislation. Moreover, the 10th Amend-

ment clearly sets forth the principle that the federal government can do only what it is specifically authorized to do, while the states and the people can do whatever they are not forbidden to do. But the learned justices decided to turn this principle upside down — perhaps they should call it the 01 Amendment now — and claim that the states need specific authorization to act.

All this dishonesty served only to impose their preferences and prejudices on the rest of us. Instead of saying where in the Constitution such laws as term limits are forbidden, the Supreme Court majority quoted previous decisions by their predecessors, who also made it up as they went along.

So long as what the justices made up was what the liberal media liked, they went along too. Those justices who think that the constitution means what it says — Justices Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia being the most prominent of these on the present court — are treated as fuddy-duddies and party-poopers.

Betrayals of trust from the bench, from the Congress and from presidents are what has spread such profound distrust. If ever we are to gain the benefits that would be possible in a society where we could trust one another more, that will have to come from "responsible" government officials showing that they are worthy of more trust. It will not come from scapegoating talk show hosts.

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