

# Op-Ed

Submitted by the  
**Libertarian Party**

2600 VIRGINIA AVE., NW, SUITE 100

WASHINGTON DC 20037 • PHONE: (202) 333-0008 EXT. 222

## THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

WHY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS SO OFTEN ACHIEVE  
THE OPPOSITE OF THEIR INTENDED RESULTS

BY DAVID BERGLAND (685 WORDS)

In 1964, Congress passed a law designating *white men* as an “oppressed minority” who qualify for preferential government contracts.

In 1990, Congress passed a law to *increase* unemployment among disabled people.

And in 1992, Congress passed a law to persuade more illegal immigrants to *stay* in the United States, instead of returning to Mexico.

Never heard of those laws?

Sure you did: The law that made white men an “oppressed minority” was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 — which would, we were told, protect blacks from discrimination.

The law that forced disabled people into the unemployment lines was the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) — which was supposed to make it easier for the handicapped to find work.

And the law that increased illegal immigration was the much-touted “reform” of the Immigration & Naturalization Service — which, it was promised, would reduce the flow of illegal immigrants.

In each case, however, the law accomplished the exact opposite of what politicians promised. Need proof? Here are some examples of what we’ll call the “Boomerang Effect” in action:

■ After President Bush signed the ADA in 1990, the unemployment rate for disabled men actually *increased*, going from 67% in 1991 to 69% four years later, according to Murray Weidenbaum of the Center for the Study of American Business. The main reason? Some employers avoided hiring workers with disabilities because they feared being hit with complicated ADA-related lawsuits, he theorized.

As Kathi Wolfe, a visually disabled writer, noted: “I’m concerned that abuse of the [ADA] law is hurting people like me. A large number of frivolous complaints brought under the ADA in recent years has contributed to the widespread impression that hiring disabled people is an invitation to trouble.”

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■ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is now being used to provide racial preferences for whites. In *The End of Sanity*, Martin Gross documents the case of Arnold O'Donnell, a white partner in a Washington, DC contracting company, who argued that in predominantly Black Washington, a Caucasian was an "oppressed minority." So, he demanded to be included in the Small Business Administration's minority preference program. The SBA laughed at O'Donnell — until an agency administrative judge ruled in his favor.

■ In 1992, politicians tripled the INS's budget and doubled the number of border patrol agents to try to curb illegal immigration. But the number of illegal residents skyrocketed instead, say immigration experts, from 3 million in 1986 to 5 million today. Why? Apparently stricter controls simply encouraged illegals to stay here *permanently* once they arrive, instead of working for a short period and then returning home.

What explains why government programs so often achieve the exact opposite of what was intended?

The answer is that supporters of new laws fall victim to the "Dictator Syndrome"— the mistaken belief that a law they support will accomplish its intended purpose, as though they were dictators with unlimited power to simply decree an intended result.

But it doesn't work that way. To pass a law, you need allies (each with their own agendas); legislators to write the law (each with their own ideas); bureaucrats to administer it (each with their own goals); and judges to resolve disputes about it (each with their own interpretations).

The result? By the time your program has run this gauntlet, it will be far bigger, far more expensive, and far more distorted than you had imagined. In fact, your program may end up accomplishing the opposite of what you had intended.

Given this track record of failure, what can be done to fix government programs that produce the opposite of what was intended?

The Greek philosopher Hippocrates once wrote: "Opposites are cures for opposites."

He's right. So the next time politicians promise that one more law, one more government agency, or one more federal mandate will solve some social problem, don't believe them. Instead, insist that they *repeal* a law, abolish an agency, or revoke a federal mandate.

After all, if we stop trying to use the government to do "good," maybe we can stop it from doing so much that is bad. That would be a "boomerang effect" we could all live with.

*David Bergland is national chair of the Washington, DC-based Libertarian Party.*

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**NOTE:** A photograph of Mr. Bergland, an electronic version of this essay, and exclusive regional reprint rights are available. Call Press Secretary George Getz at (202) 333-0008 Ext. 222 for more information.