

What would you think if Congress passed a law making it illegal to have a barbecue in your back yard or to have a fireplace or to drive your car to work.

Congress won't pass such laws — but those things may be outlawed anyway.

How so? Well, it's an interesting lesson in how liberty is taken away through the back door.

All Congress has done is to pass a Clean Air Act. All the law states is that the Environmental Protection Agency can set standards. We are all in favor of clean air, so congressmen can say they're just being good guys.

But the problem is this: If the EPA sets standards, then it must enforce them. And if, as it appears, it sets ridiculous standards not based on sound science, then it may well have to outlaw outdoor barbecues and fireplaces as well as make car-pooling or the use of public transportation mandatory to achieve its standards. The standards almost surely will put a lot of small businesses out of business, not to mention adding an easy 10 percent to everybody's power bills.

When the Endangered Species Act was passed, I thought, well, that's OK. It just means that you can't shoot eagles or other animals that are in danger of extinction. I'm in favor of that.

What I didn't know, of course, was that the government would declare oddball insects and rodents, worms and minnows and obscure plants nobody but a botanist could identify as endangered. I didn't know that the government then would state that, to preserve the species, it must preserve habitat no matter how much economic destruction and injustice it inflicts on people.

The habitat approach is a big difference that has resulted in wholesale injustices and, in effect, the taking of private property without compensation.

If you owned 100 acres of woodland, you

probably wouldn't mind if a woodpecker lived in one of your trees. But then the feds come along and say that woodpecker needs your 100 acres of timber to get three square meals a day, so you can't use the 100 acres in any way that would disturb the woodpecker. You can, of course, continue to pay taxes on it.

Nearly all evil is done in the name of doing good. It's no exaggeration to say that the greatest threats to the liberty of the American people today are environmental laws and the drug war.

Congress needs to revise seriously the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. Unfortunately, the environmental extremist industry, heavily financed by federal grants, tax-exempt foundations and big corporations, screams so loudly at any thought of amending these laws that Congress, which is infamous for its cowardice, is scared to touch them.

But unless you want to live an environmental version of George Orwell's Big Brother dictatorship, you'd better find a way to inject a little backbone and common sense into Congress.

What's missing from environmental legislation and enforcement is what is known as the "reasonable person" rule. Environmentalism has become the new McCarthyism. Anyone who dares to suggest some reasonable amendment is branded an enemy of nature.

That doesn't sit too well with me, because I hate an extremist the way Redd Foxx hated midgets. I hope it doesn't sit too well with you. We can, given the limits of population and economic necessity, do a reasonable job of preserving the environment without destroying the economy, trampling on the most basic human rights and destroying what's left of our free society. But to do that, we must wrest the environmental laws and agencies away from the Green Jacobins.

What good are clean air and clean water if the only people left to enjoy them are an impoverished mass of slaves and a few rich masters? Smoke pollutes air, but fanaticism and bad laws destroy freedom.

Silly laws enter through front door while liberty slips out back

Guest Column

CHARLEY REESE
The Orlando Sentinel

Editor's note

This column in the *Orlando Sentinel* is filled with common sense and is reason enough for everyone to get involved enough to know what is going on in the halls of local, state and national government.

It is why we help fund Legislative Consultant Mike

*Continued on
page 108*