

Peter Robinson: I'm Peter Robinson. Be sure to follow us, by the way, on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/uncknowledge>. <http://twitter.com/uncknowledge>. Paul Rahe holds the Charles O. Lee and Louise K. Lee Chair in Western Heritage at Hillsdale College. He is the author, most recently, of *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*. Our text today comes from the website Power Line, to which Dr. Rahe is a frequent contributor and on which, in recent weeks, he's been discussing his book *Soft Despotism*. I quote: "I have discussed the tyrannical ambitions of the Obama administration. The danger a consolidation of government poses for the people of the United States. The psychological disposition that makes democratic peoples vulnerable to servile temptation. The institutions that once, in some measure, shielded Americans from these propensities and some of the reasons it is now possible for us to recover the liberty that once was ours. What we have there is a one paragraph dissertation on American history. Let's take each clause in term. Segment One: Tyranny – Paul Rahe quote, "President Obama's health care proposals presuppose the administrative states assuming a power over our lives that is nothing less than tyrannical".

Paul Rahe: Alright.

Peter Robinson: Make me believe that Paul.

Paul Rahe: Well, here's the crucial thing. The government will assume a kind of control over our lives that involves others, bureaucrats, operating within the government, making decisions that are life and death decisions for us. That is to say, the aim of the Obama health care bill is to save money. The claim is we're spending too much money on medical care. That we're doing so, I don't have any doubt, and some shifts in tort law might alter the amount of money that we're spending in medical care. But its aim will be to reduce the expenditures by rationing medical care. This involves a rejection of the notion of individual rights and a substitution of a utilitarian calculus. The question is how much is your life, Mr. Robinson, worth? What's it worth to society to keep you alive. Into that calculation...

Peter Robinson: If you ask me, a very great deal. If you ask some bureaucrats...

Paul Rahe: Right. If you ask some bureaucrats they will say "well, he's of a certain age, he doesn't really have much left to contribute".

Peter Robinson: They'll pull out the actual Arian tables.

Paul Rahe: That's right. Repairing his knees, doing a knee replacement operation will cost so much, he's not worth that. That's the sort of calculation that goes on in Canada. It goes on in Great Britain, it goes on in France, and it goes on in Germany.

Peter Robinson: Paul, let me ask you a question. You said that President Obama's underlying intention is to cut health care costs. Do you believe that, or do...not so much with regard to President Obama personally, as to the entire political impetus behind the health care legislation, or do you believe that there actually is a stashed impulse in Washington that wishes to see the state expand for the sake of state expansion? Are they simply stumbling into this mistakenly, or do they know what they're doing and want it?

Paul Rahe: They know what they're doing and they want it.

Peter Robinson: All right.

Paul Rahe: Let me see if I can put it this way. We are all in the grips of the meddling impulse. If I were to say to you that you were a busy-body, you might say to me, surely not, and I would say to you, ask your children and everyone's children will say the parent is a busy-body, because we all feel that impulse. That is to say, we all feel that we know better than other people. Sometimes we really do. The more educated people become, when you give them PhD's, the more expertise they have, the more you have inflated their sense of the right to interfere in the lives of other people. So the progressive impulse goes back to the 1870s and the 1880s and the establishment of major research universities on the German model in the United States. The function of these institutions is to produce people who can successfully meddle in other people's lives...

Peter Robinson: And in Barack Obama we have...

Paul Rahe: The representative of that class.

Peter Robinson: Yes the perfect...yes, exactly. Who is a full and complete product of the faculty aspirations at Columbia University and Harvard Law School.

Paul Rahe: That's exactly right.

Peter Robinson: All right. Now you make frequent use of Alexis de Tocqueville...in your book *Soft Despotism*. You make frequent use of Alexis de Tocqueville's phrase "soft despotism". What does it mean, why is it relevant, why do you bring that particular phrase to bear, again and again, in your writings on the current moment?

Paul Rahe: Soft despotism is from Tocqueville's perspective, a new species of despotism. The phrase despotism becomes a common phrase because of Montesquieu and from his perspective, what he means by despotism is what he sees in China, what he sees in the Ottoman Empire, which is...

Peter Robinson: Montesquieu writings of 1748. A full...not quite a century ahead of Tocqueville.

Paul Rahe: And he's a man who visits England and sees the future and sees that it works just exactly the way Tocqueville does 100 years later when he comes to the United States.

Peter Robinson: So he sees the emergence of individual rights and a democratic system in England.

Paul Rahe: A liberal, commercial, religiously tolerant systems based upon the separation of powers, allowing one to have something like a republic on an extended territory without it descending into despotism the way ancient Rome did.

Peter Robinson: Right.

Paul Rahe: So, something great and glorious has happened in England and its effect is that Louis XIV lost wars when Montesquieu was a young man and he comes up with a political tychology into republics, monarchies and despotisms; and monarchies are governments where you have a king but his power is limited in one fashion or another, usually by a nobility. Despotism is unlimited power and these operate on the basis of psychological principles. What drives a despotism is terror. What drives a monarchy is the sense of honour, the love of honour. It illicit a certain kind of behaviour from people. What is required in a republic is virtue and that is hard to achieve because you have to train people in virtue. It does not come naturally or easily to us to prefer the public interest over the private interest. Tocqueville follows up on this and he asks "What difference does the French Revolution make?" He argues that it's a watershed and you have one world on one side of the French Revolution and another world on the other side of the French Revolution and on the other side of the French Revolution is a world in which the principal of equality is unquestioned. Which means that the future of Christian civilization, and that's his focus, meaning Europe and the Americas.

Peter Robinson: What we would then call the Americas.

Paul Rahe: Yes. Is a world in which the starting point for every argument is equality and he then asks "what are the dangers in this new situation?" And the answer is, not the old fashioned form of despotism. The danger is a new kind of despotism. Montesquieu had suggested that the English form of government is sustained by a kind of vigilance on the part of the citizenry. That is to say, he was not worried that it would become corrupt, the way many people in the eighteenth century were. Because the ordinary people in Britain were dependent upon commerce for their income. They didn't depend upon State power or patronage and if they didn't like what was going on in parliament, they would shake it up and they would throw the rascals out.

Peter Robinson: And soft despotism, to get to the definition.

Paul Rahe: Soft despotism comes, Tocqueville thinks, when very gradually within a liberal democratic polity the government offers a helping hand to people. It's always welcome. Business men who argue against government interference in the economy are always willing to have government help in their particular area of the economy. And very gradually, very slowly, unobtrusively, without anyone quite noticing what's going on, the government ends up helping in a thousand and one ways and just like parents with teenagers there are always strings attached.

Peter Robinson: Right. Segment Two - The Danger. Paul Rahe, I quote you to yourself again. "It is easy to see why political leaders should succumb to the progressive vision." You say it is easy to see why the political leaders... harder to see why citizens, but the political leaders first, why would they succumb to the temptations of soft despotism?

Paul Rahe: John Locke once said, with regard to religious persecution that there is a natural bias to our minds and the natural bias is that we think we know better than other people. The better educated people are, the stronger that bias is in them; it gets inflated in character. So the tyrannical impulse, the desire to run other people's lives, for their benefit, of course, is there in all of us. It's especially visible in parents and it's a good thing in parents. It keeps their children in line. It is much resented and that's also a good thing. But it can be transferred into the larger world very easily. That's easy to explain. It's easy to explain the nanny state, because there's a nanny inside every one of us. It is not so easy to understand why somebody would want to be under the nanny, except, according to Tocqueville, according to Rousseau before him and Montesquieu, the dominant mood within liberal commercial societies where there is a modicum of actual equality is ananke, it's a word they borrowed from Pascal and it refers to fear without a certain object. It refers to anxiety. It refers to a sense of not knowing what to do; of feeling just a little bit lost. In liberal societies, no one tells you what your religion is going to be. Eventually, I mean, your parents may, but they lose control at a certain point and eventually the burden of deciding where you're going to come down falls upon you. In liberal societies you do not inherit much property. Your parents send you to Dartmouth and you gain skills, and making a life falls upon you. In liberal societies the economy is generally prosperous, but it goes up and down and there will be times when bankruptcy may suddenly appear out of nowhere at a time when you thought you were very prosperous.

Peter Robinson: Let me see if I understand the underlying point, they underlying psychological point with an illustration. I've heard many friends say that they...this is shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russians would visit the United States, take in all the many wonders and do just fine and then friends would take them...I've heard two or three stories that were roughly the same, then friends would take them to a grocery store and there would be a kind of lock because of an incapacity simply to process the

number of choices; the availability of choice. A kind of debilitating anxiety. One friend who was a Russian, who got out early had brought his cousin and the cousin stood in the produce aisle and broke down into tears. Just couldn't...couldn't, and that's an extreme version of what you're talking about here; the anxiety of freedom.

Paul Rahe: In pre-modern societies there is someone there to tell you what to do.

Peter Robinson: Right.

Paul Rahe: There is the priest. There is the Lord. There is some sort of capo, a boss of one sort or another, but the more commercial we become, the more liberal we become, the freer we are, the heavier the burden on individuals to fashion lives for themselves and that naturally creates a species of anxiety. You can see it in college seniors. They have been on a line, and they have been sent to high school, then they've been sent on to college and suddenly, in the fall of senior year it begins to dawn on them that what happens after college is something that they are solely responsible for and they're afraid. They're afraid because there is nobody to take care of them anymore.

Peter Robinson: Hence they flock to grad school.

Paul Rahe: Yes. They go to graduate school. They go to Law school and they put it off, but none-the-less, it happens.

Peter Robinson: Right.

Paul Rahe: So in such a society, because of the dominance of this mood of anekitude there is a natural propensity for human beings to look for a helping hand.

Peter Robinson: All right, and so that template that you've just laid out from Montesquieu to Tocqueville to Paul Rahe in his book *Soft Despotism* fits beautifully; helps us to understand the psychological impulse of the new deal.

Paul Rahe: Yeah.

Peter Robinson: The depression takes place, no one know where to turn. There is that lovely grandfatherly charming soothing calming figure in the White House, Franklin Roosevelt. Let him run the country. I get that. I even understand, I think, how your template applies to what happened here 18 months ago. Utter economic disarray and Barack Obama pulls ahead in the polls. There is a moment when John McCain is pulling even with him. Then the crisis becomes undeniable and Barack Obama begins to pull ahead and he pundits though because he seems the more reassuring of the two figures.

Paul Rahe: Sure.

Peter Robinson: Okay. Here's what doesn't fit the template. The 1970's, gas lines, Jimmy Carter, but instead of producing a candidate in 1980...a President who took office in 1981 who is stashed, it produced the reverse; you get Ronald Reagan. You get the reversion to an insistence, an insistence on reverting to the old liberties, how come?

Paul Rahe: I think this will happen now, once again, but let me come to that later.

Peter Robinson: Okay, yes please.

Paul Rahe: Let me start with your point. What happens in the 1970's follows the Great Society, which is the successor to the New Deal.

Peter Robinson: Right...

Paul Rahe: You have a massive expansion in the Federal Government just prior to this period of stagflation. Richard Nixon gets onboard and completes it with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Hazard Administration and Affirmative Action and on and on. What happens is, stagflation doesn't fit the template. Government appears to be incompetent. Government appears, in fact, to be the source of the trouble. Rational administration, the promise of rational administration is not kept because the administration is irrational. We have inflation at the same time that we have stagnation. We have interest rates that go as high as 14% on houses. I lived through that period and I was an assistant professor on a very small salary, unable to buy anything and it was terrifying for people.

Peter Robinson: Let me, if I may. Segment Three. What used to shield Americans from this temptation you've described of turning toward the state. You write that Tocqueville identified four characteristics that tended to insulate Americans in particular against what you call the servile temptation. I'd just like to tick down the list, which seems quite disparate actually if you just look at a list, they don't seem to hang together and have you explain them.

Paul Rahe: Explain them. Yeah.

Peter Robinson: Explain them, yes as simple as that. There are four. Local Government?

Paul Rahe: Right, okay. Local government's force is simple. It's your government. You participate in it. The problem with a republic on an extended territory is that it's different from you and largely invisible. The virtue of the commune or the township or the county is if something's wrong you can fix it yourself. You can join with your neighbours and it teaches you civic agency, because there are a whole series of problems that come up locally. Especially in the early American republic where there wasn't much of a national government and not much of a state government. If a road was going to be

built it had to be done locally. If a hospital was needed you had to get together with your fellow citizens and build it. If a school needed to be built...and you can just go down the list.

Peter Robinson: Right.

Paul Rahe: Okay, what happens is, people... it quiets ankeatude, and it quiets ankeatude because you're not anxious. You know how to do these things. You know how to do these things because you grew up doing them in your township and that brings me to the second thing on your list, I suspect; Civic Association.

Peter Robinson: Exactly. Right.

Paul Rahe: The thing that Tocqueville noticed when he came to the United States that was unheard of and unthinkable in France to this very day...

Peter Robinson: Tocqueville visits in the 1830's.

Paul Rahe: Yes, the early 1830's., is that most of the things that the French looked to the government for Americans did through private organizations. It was his belief that they learned what he called the art of association through participation in local self-government. That is to say, the existence of these townships taught them how to cooperate with other people and they were then able to do this and bypass the government altogether and build a road. Bypass the government altogether and build a school or a hospital or a poor house or something along those lines.

Peter Robinson: People actually develop a specific set of skills at addressing anxieties through concrete collective action.

Paul Rahe: Right, and so they see themselves, instead of being passive, instead of being victims, they see themselves as agents. Yes there are problems. We faced this sort or problem before; we know how to deal with it. We will pull ourselves together and deal with it.

Peter Robinson: So the fundamental difference between a citizen and a peasant or between a citizen and a client of the State.

Paul Rahe: Or a citizen and a subject...

Peter Robinson: Or a subject.

Paul Rahe: ...is agency, and the French didn't have that. They had no local self-government. The mayors were appointed by the prefects. They didn't elect any local official. It was illegal to form associations because the government feared that these might be revolutionary in character. And the consequence is they had no experience with

doing things themselves. To this day, in France, if you were a very wealthy man you could not start a foundation. You couldn't set it up. There's no law to allow you to do it. You would have to go the council of state and get the permission of the government to start the foundation...

Peter Robinson: To give away your own money.

Paul Rahe: ...and the government would ask to have a representative on your board to guide you in giving away your money. So that's what's called centralized administration.

Peter Robinson: We've got another too—religion. Religion. How does religion shield Americans from the servile temptation?

Paul Rahe: Okay, the French weren't very religious. The Americans were shockingly religious to Tocqueville. Religion, be it Judaism or Christianity teaches that one is a child of God. It also, especially Protestant Christianity, which was the dominant form in the United States, teaches that the salvation of your soul is your own business. It throws you back on yourself and it makes you responsible and no one else can take that responsibility for you. In other words, this is not a world of medieval tutelage with the church guiding you. No, you're the interpreter of the Bible yourself. It is your responsibility. The effect of this is you have a sense of your own dignity and you have a sense of areas of life that you would not allow anyone to encroach upon because they belong to you in some fundamental primeval way. So you have a kind of natural pride that makes it very hard for you to become a subject; very hard to turn a serious fierce Protestant into a subject. I say this as someone of Catholic background. I'm not...I'm not taking sides on this, but the old Protestant ethic in the United States was an ethic of, well, religious quarrels, they were always splitting into new sects.

Peter Robinson: Right.

Paul Rahe: That's a sign of how seriously they took religious doctrine, but also how seriously they took themselves. And when you take yourself seriously, you won't allow people to walk upon you.

Peter Robinson: Paul, the American family. Surely they had families in France. This is possibly the most puzzling item on the list.

Paul Rahe: Okay. Montesquieu once said in *The Spirit of Laws*, that a Frenchman does not like to talk to another man about his wife because he's afraid the man with whom he is speaking may know her better than he does. The French family was not in great shape in the 18th and the early 19th centuries. Adultery was commonplace in France. Tocqueville was shocked in America. Adultery was virtually unheard of. He was amazed

that American women chose their own husbands and stuck with them and made the thing work. The consequence is...

Peter Robinson: So this is not the subjection of women in the United States, on the contrary, there's a kind of insipient feminism that has already asserted itself.

Paul Rahe: Well, feminism might not be the right word for it...

Peter Robinson: Pride, sense of dignity.

Paul Rahe: Women are strong-minded. His American women are not weak.

Peter Robinson: Right. Try that on me buster and I'm kicking you out of the...locked out.

Paul Rahe: That's right. They want family so they've chosen the private realm, but they make the choices. The men beg and the women say yes or no and then once having said yes...

Peter Robinson: I recognize the pattern.

Paul Rahe: Yes, right, yes. Once having said yes, they make the thing work. Okay, the effect of that is that the home is a kind of haven in the world. It is not a source of ankeatude as it is in France; it is a haven. It reinforces your sense of being in control of life because there is this space of quiet in your life. If you asked Tocqueville why is America different in this way he says because the women are religious. So it's tied back to the religious question. And the religious question, another aspect of that is, all of the religious groups teach the same morality, so there's a strong sense of what is right and wrong. One is not at sea and therefore facing ankeatude when it comes to moral questions. You understand where you stand morally. You understand where you stand with regard to your wife and children. There is a kind of solidity to American life that you don't see in France.

Peter Robinson: Paul, Segment Four – Where things have gone wrong. I'm quoting you again. Paul Rahe, author of *Soft Despotism* - "If the United States has gradually succumbed to what Tocqueville called "soft despotism", it is arguably because we have abandoned the advantages that we possessed in Tocqueville's day". So, each of the four shields against the servile temptation that you described in the past segment has become weakened. Some remain intact; others...explain what has happened here.

Paul Rahe: Okay, let me start with local self-government, since he does.

Peter Robinson: Tocqueville does?

Paul Rahe: Yes. In the 19th century the first thing that happens is the states begin to encroach in a serious way on the townships. And that means that power, influence and importance flow to state capitals, away from local government. Now this is significant, but it's not overwhelming. In the late 19th century...

Peter Robinson: Does that take architectural expression? There are so many state capitals, particularly east of the Mississippi that are gigantic, magnificent structures.

Paul Rahe: That's right, and that growth...

Peter Robinson: There establishing their dominance.

Paul Rahe: And their significance is part of the story.

Peter Robinson: All right.

Paul Rahe: The second stage is the coming of the progressives. As an intellectual movement, it begins in the 1870's and the 1880's in American universities. The model is the German university. The inspiration is Heidegger's Phenomenology of Spirit. It means moving away from the idea of individual rights towards the notion of a collective good that is represented by the Civil Service, who are to be trained at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Michigan and Johns Hopkins University and so forth. This becomes a force in the 20th century. It begins with Woodrow Wilson in 1912 in the beginning of Rational Administration and the experimentation during World War 1 with that. It becomes very big, with the New Deal and much larger with the Great Society and the follow up by Nixon. The consequence is local government and even state government is subsumed under national government. And the way it works is, the national government provides grants, and those grants are conditional upon the state government, the local government, the city council, the school board meeting all sorts of mandates that are laid down as a condition for receiving this money, and it extends into the private realm as well. My favourite example is the Buckley Amendment, authored by James Buckley, senator from New York, a libertarian. Even libertarians are busy-bodies is the point that I like to make. He apparently, was unhappy when he was in college because the school sent his grades home to his parents and so he inserted in an educational bill a rule that if you took one dime of money from the Federal Government through student loans or The Veterans Administration, The GI Bill, or something along those lines you had to honour the privacy of 18-year-olds and not communicate with their parents concerning their well-being. I was once teaching at the University of Tulsa and I had a freshman honours course and I had a student show up the first day and then he showed up a month later. I thought he'd dropped, but apparently he hadn't dropped and I called the dean's office and I said something's wrong. They looked into it and they found that he was living in a fraternity surrounded by whiskey bottles. He'd become a binge alcoholic. Legally they couldn't call his parents because of the meddling senator Buckley. I teach at

Hillsdale College. We don't take that money, we communicate with parents. Now, look, my simple point is this. Prior to the Buckley Amendment colleges had an element of autonomy, self-governance, and discretion, deciding what was morally right and what was morally wrong themselves. That was taken away from them by the Buckley Amendment. What allowed that to happen was the power that the Federal Government exercises over any institution that it gives money to. So the consequences if you were on the school board...

Peter Robinson: To pause on your example for a second, though. It was taken away from them by the Buckley Amendment pursuant to their own inability to resist the government handout.

Paul Rahe: That's right.

Peter Robinson: Right?

Paul Rahe: Yeah.

Peter Robinson: Okay. So this, in other words, what I want to get back to is, you described in the previous segment an America in which people would easily have resisted government handouts. Would have been puzzled by the notion that the government owed them anything at all and now we're talking about an America in which the government handout is taken as a matter of course.

Paul Rahe: Yes.

Peter Robinson: What happened?

Paul Rahe: Well, in the 150 years between these two events you get the New Deal, you get the Great Society, and you get the Nixon administration. That's part of the story. Another part of the story is...

Peter Robinson: The Americans who Tocqueville saw in the first half of the 19th century being trained, implicitly trained, in civic agency are now being trained by their own polity in dependence.

Paul Rahe: Yes. Aid to dependent children does this, or did it, really on a massive scale. So, it's very hard to turn that money down. In other words, human beings are a fierce lot and they can stand up to anything but temptation, and the trouble is that the temptations have grown. In my view, the great turning point is 1913 when 16th and 17th Amendments are passed. The 16th Amendment legalized the income tax and that allows the Federal Government to have almost unlimited funds. The only limits on the funds it gets are really what we make, but what it's willing to take. The 17th Amendment decouples the Federal Government from the State Governments, provides for direct

election of senators, rather than their choice by legislatures. When senators are chosen by state houses and state senates, the practical effect is they're beholden to their constituents. They're not going to run roughshod over those same state houses and state senates, and what that meant was that the state governments have a kind of leverage within the federal government that protects state prerogatives and allows federalism to live on and on and on.

Peter Robinson: Segment Five – Recovering our liberty. “Despite President Obama’s attempt at a vast expansion of the federal government” you write, quote, I am quoting Paul Rahe, the author of *Soft Despotism*, quote “this country is not going to accept a tax regime as onerous as the one that exists in France”. Well, but you have just described a trajectory that leads to exactly that kind of subjection before the federal government.

Paul Rahe: Okay, and I’ll tell you why we’re not going to get there...

Peter Robinson: Please. I could use a little cheery news.

Paul Rahe: And why the political moment in which we live is a moment of great, great hope. The welfare state is coming to a crisis. It has built into it the seeds of its own destruction. Not just in the United States, but throughout the world. These were recognized in 1944 by Gunnar Myrdal, who gave a series of lectures at Harvard on the welfare state and one of the themes of these lectures was that if you have social insurance, what we call social security you have changed the incentives that govern the conduct of family life. If you were to ask somebody ‘what did we do before social security’ and the answer is ‘we had children’ and they looked after us when we grew older. And he predicted in 1944 that everywhere where there was a social insurance arrangement, starting with Bismarck’s Germany and moving throughout Europe and the United States by that time. Wherever there was social security, one of the props that supported families having sizeable families was gone and over time mores and habits would adjust. It wouldn’t happen overnight. You change the incentives and people continue to behave the way they behaved before out of habit, but gradually the habits give way. So the consequence is everywhere in the world now where there is a social insurance regimen, the population rate has fallen. The United States has the highest rate of any advanced industrial country. That is to say, we’re at replacement rate, we have 2.1 children...

Peter Robinson: Thanks largely to the most recent immigrants.

Paul Rahe: That’s right, yes. I mean it’s complicated in that way. But if you go to Russia, they’re losing a million people a year. That is to say, a million more people are dying each year than are being born. Same thing is true in Japan. China is approaching that. Western Europe is, it’s already baked in the cake, that is to say, the babies haven’t

been born and when you get the bulge of my generation, of the baby boom generation beginning to die off the population is going to drop precipitously. So that's happened.

Peter Robinson: You said there was some cheering news here Paul.

Paul Rahe: Well, there is cheering news. I'll get to it.

Peter Robinson: All right. All right.

Paul Rahe: The second half of it is modern medicine, since the 1960's has advanced in remarkable ways and we're living longer in the United States, in Europe and in other places as well. There is an imbalance developing between the number of people receiving social insurance and the number of people paying in. so next year in the United States less money will come in to social security than will go out. What that means is the old system cannot go on. We can't do this anymore. This is true of Medicare already. Medicare does not pay for itself. A good chunk of the money comes out of ordinary federal income and it's going to get more intense as time goes on. So leave aside what Barack Obama's trying to do, if he did nothing the whole thing would come apart over the next 10-15 years.

Peter Robinson: I grant you every word of that, but it does not follow that it will be replaced by a reassertion of the old liberties.

Paul Rahe: Well, that's where Barack Obama has helped us out. He has come in and he has proposed a grand takeover a very large part of the American economy. Preceding that, they passed a stimulus bill that is a looting bill that takes money from the future and pays it into the hands of constituencies of the political party.

Peter Robinson: An eight hundred billion dollar fraud on the American people.

Paul Rahe: That's right, and it was done secretly. Behind closed doors but openly secretly. That is to say, the American people could see that it was going on behind closed doors and there has been an enormous eruption; The Tea Party movement. I cannot think of anything on this scale that has happened in the United States since the eruption against the tariff of abominations in 1828. When Tocqueville came to the United States he was struck by the capacity of the American people outside of the political parties to organize politically about particular issues and to force the congressman to back off. So I think what's going on is, the old spirit of jealousy, the old spirit of vigilance, the old spirit of caution and doubts about government encroachment have been enlivened by the Obama Administration, by Nancy Pelosi and by Harry Reid. They are a gift to the friends of liberty.

Peter Robinson: Does history provide any examples of a state beginning free, becoming overwhelmingly socialistic, that is to say, the citizens quite well trained in dependence and then recapturing a sense of individual liberty?

Paul Rahe: Eastern Europe. It happened all over Eastern Europe in the wake of 1989, just 20 years ago.

Peter Robinson: Okay, but they didn't vote for those soviet imposed regimes themselves, right? The Poles hated it. Certainly the Czech's, we know, hated it. I did an interview with Vaclav Klaus; they hated that regime. There was never a moment's doubt that it was imposed on them from the outside.

Paul Rahe: Yeah, but that's not so clear in Bulgaria. That's not so clear in Yugoslavia.

Peter Robinson: Yeah, right, Yugoslavia broke away from Stalin, all right.

Paul Rahe: Romania, it seemed to be accepted there, but also the Soviet Union itself. So there had been these changes. Now I'm not going to hold up the Soviet Union as a paragon of excellence...

Peter Robinson: But it is better than it was in March 1953 when Stalin died.

Paul Rahe: And they got rid of the socialist straight-jacket that they had.

Peter Robinson: That's a critical point. There's something like free-markets operating across several sectors of that economy being used.

Paul Rahe: It's happening in China. Step by step.

Peter Robinson: Paul, we're nearly out of time, but I want to do something that I've wanted to see you do. I'm going to read you the last paragraph of Mark Stein's review of *Soft Despotism*...

Paul Rahe: My, my.

Peter Robinson: And ask you to tell me in one tight paragraph, as tight as Stein's, why he's mistaken. Quote...He loved the book, but said, quoting Mark Stein, "The story of the western world since 1945 is that invited to choose between freedom and government security, large numbers of people vote to dump freedom every time. The freedom to make their own decisions about health care, education, property rights and eventually, as we already see in Europe, Canada and American campuses, what you're permitted to say and think. Is the shrivelling of liberty inevitable, asks Mark Stein, no not quite, but it seems like the way to bet."

Paul Rahe: It may be the way to bet, but keep in mind, Mark Stein is Canadian.

Peter Robinson: Ha,ha,ha. What a cruel...

Paul Rahe: Well, if you think about it. If he'd been English, he'd have thought of Margaret Thatcher and if he'd been American, he'd have thought of Ronald Reagan and it seems to me that we have something coming, beginning in the congressional elections in 2010, but with the presidential election in 2012 that's going to be shocking to people in this country because there is a movement growing up...

Peter Robinson: You say as a classicist. A man who has studied political systems as they existed over the last free millennia, that you're actually optimistic.

Paul Rahe: I'm optimistic.

Peter Robinson: Absolutely the final question, which was submitted by a viewer by way of Twitter. It's SteveSchaff@twitter: "Can and should a government foster virtue within a democratic society?"

Paul Rahe: I think the answer is yes, but the governments that can foster virtue are local governments.

Peter Robinson: There was division of powers between the federal government and the states and the localities and moral police was left to the localities. That is conducive to liberty because if you don't like the situation you can walk. Got it. Paul Rahe of Hillsdale College and the author of *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*". Thank you very much.

Paul Rahe: Thank you.

Peter Robinson: I'm Peter Robinson for Uncommon Knowledge and the Hoover Institution. Thanks for joining us.