



BY DAVID BOAZ

“Where did Chairman Barton get the idea that a college football championship was a matter of federal concern?”

Editorial Republicans, Smaller Government, and Terrell Owens

The Bible tells us that not a sparrow falls but that God knows about it.

Congressional Republicans seem to have decided that the federal government should follow the same rule. Nothing should happen in America without Congress getting involved.

The latest example comes from Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, who called a hearing to investigate the “deeply flawed” Bowl Championship Series that determines a national college football champion.

Where did Chairman Barton get the idea that a college football championship was a matter of federal concern? Well, he might have gotten it from all the other Republicans who have recently subjected all manner of sports to congressional meddling.

Take Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA). He’s suggested that the Senate Judiciary Committee, which he chairs, investigate the Philadelphia Eagles’ treatment of wide receiver Terrell Owens, who was suspended for being a difficult teammate. After all, the Senate Judiciary Committee has nothing else to do these days. Except, you know, Supreme Court nominations, rules for the war on terror, habeas corpus reform, grand jury reform, property rights, immigration, and so on.

Today’s Republicans hold three-ring-circus hearings on steroids in baseball, requiring top stars to testify under oath as if they were Mafia dons. They introduce bills to mandate steroid testing. They threaten to punish Major League Baseball if the owners allow left-wing billionaire George Soros to be a part owner of the new team in Washington.

When Major League Baseball owners suggested that Congress had no authority to investigate steroid use, committee chairman Tom Davis (R-VA.) and ranking Democrat Henry Waxman told baseball that the committee “may at any time conduct investigations of any matter.” So much for James Madison’s promise that “the powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined.”

Republicans have come down with a serious case of Potomac Fever. They believe that their every passing thought is a proper subject for federal legislation. They vote for a federal investigation of the video game “Grand Theft Auto.” They sharply increase the fines for alleged indecency on television. They hold hearings on whether college textbooks are too expensive.

Last year and again this year they held hearings on

whether the TV industry’s ratings czar, which faces little competition, needs government oversight. “It’s impossible to achieve a high quality of broadcasting if shoddy audience measurement practices are permitted to proliferate,” charged Sen. Conrad Burns (R-MT).

Republicans used to accuse Democrats of setting up a nanny state, one that would regulate every nook and cranny of our lives. They took control of Congress in 1994 by declaring that Democrats had given us “government that is too big, too intrusive, and too easy with the public’s money.” After 10 years in power, however, the Republicans have seen the Democrats’ intrusiveness and raised them. They too use the powers of the federal government to lavish money on favored constituents, summon us before congressional hearings to explain ourselves, and intrude into our most local and personal decisions.

Federal meddling in football games and television ratings may be more ridiculous than ominous. But the busybody Republicans have taken on bigger matters as well. They have pushed the feds further into the local schools with the No Child Left Behind Act and tried to take marriage law away from the states with the Federal Marriage Amendment. They overruled a series of Florida courts in the Terri Schiavo case, imposing the massive power of the federal government on a tragic family matter.

In a free society citizens don’t turn to the national government to solve every problem. Indeed, a free society is measured by the amount of life that remains outside the control of government. We may all be tempted from time to time to say “There oughta be a law!” when we’re angry or frustrated. Indeed, that’s why we wrote a Constitution—to protect us from our own temptations to turn our exasperation into laws and to protect us from our fellow citizens yielding to the same temptation.

As citizens of a free society, we don’t need government to be either Big Brother or a national nanny. We have the right and the responsibility to live our own lives without interference, so long as we don’t infringe on the rights of others. Neither our football teams nor our local schools need Congress’s supervision. Republicans who campaign on the promise of smaller government forget that at their peril.