

Cato Policy Report

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Washington, DC 20001

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“To Be Governed...”

LOS ANGELES DEBATES LEGALIZING THEFT

Looking to combat a rash of thefts from Priuses and other cars, the Los Angeles City Council voted Tuesday to make it illegal to possess an unattached catalytic converter without proof of ownership.

On an 8-4 vote, the council approved an ordinance allowing police to arrest anyone who has a catalytic converter that is not connected to a vehicle—and fails to produce a receipt or other identifying information, such as documentation from an auto repair shop, spelling out the ownership.

Punishing people for possessing unattached catalytic converters “doesn’t help anybody,” [Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez] said.

“When somebody gets something stolen, the city should be doing everything we can to make sure they’re made whole—not to punish another person,” [Councilmember Marqueece] Harris-Dawson added.

—*Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 2023

THE MILITARY BUDGET CAN’T BE CUT

Every day, teams of technicians at a vast Air Force base in Tucson, Ariz., tend to a fleet of attack jets the Pentagon has been trying to retire for more than a decade. They have picked replacement parts from the base’s famous “Boneyard,” where old military planes go for scrap, which stretches far into the surrounding desert.

The Air Force has said for years that the A-10 jets, nicknamed Warthogs for their bulky silhouette and toughness in a fight, have passed their prime and will be vulnerable in the wars of the future.

Congress has other ideas. Bowing to members whose constituencies are dependent

on the jet for jobs and the flow of federal tax dollars, it has instead insisted nearly all the planes keep flying at a cost of more than \$4 billion over the past 10 years.

This kind of intervention is common.

—*Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 2023

IS THIS CONSTITUTIONALISM?

I am the ranking member on the Senate Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction over about half of the U.S. economy, including all of telecom and all of broadcast and all of big tech. And in that role I launched an investigation of DirectTV’s decision to deplatform Newsmax. And I made very clear to DirectTV that this investigation would keep going until the only acceptable outcome was allowing Newsmax back on air. And today’y’all are back on air. That’s a great victory... for free speech.

—**Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX)** on Newsmax, March 23, 2023

REGULATIONS ARE FOR THE LITTLE PEOPLE

Faced with a threat of a lawsuit, Palo Alto administrators have reversed their earlier decision and will now allow the new restaurant that chef José Andrés plans to open at Stanford Shopping Center to use natural gas.

Simon [Property Group, the mall operator,] applied for the project in 2019 and received approvals from the city’s Architectural Review Board and from planning staff. All of these approved plans included a gas line, which the developer installed in 2021.

The situation got thornier earlier this year when planning staff informed Simon that the new restaurant building, known as Building EE, would have to be all-electric. The determination was based on the City Council’s revision to the building code last year, which

included a provision requiring all new buildings to be all-electric.

—*Palo Alto Weekly*, May 16, 2023

BY “HISTORIC” THE SENATOR MEANT “IT HAPPENS FREQUENTLY”

Lawmakers aired fears Tuesday about the potential misuse of generative AI, peppering OpenAI CEO Sam Altman with questions as he repeatedly said he’d welcome legislation in the space.

Altman called for a government agency that would promulgate rules around licensing for certain tiers of AI systems “above a crucial threshold of capabilities.”...

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) called it “historic” that a company was coming to Congress pleading for regulation.

—*Axios*, May 16, 2023

WHY CAN’T HE JUST CROWN HIMSELF KING ALREADY?

When Congress declined to forgive student debt, President Biden announced he would do it on his own. When lawmakers balked at extending an eviction moratorium, his administration did so unilaterally. Facing congressional paralysis on immigration, Biden issued a string of executive orders on the issue.

Now, as time grows short for a debt limit deal and progressives call on Biden to sidestep Congress and resolve the standoff via executive action, the longstanding tension in his presidency between traditionalism and presidential power is at a new level. His willingness to push the limits of presidential authority at strategic moments in the past is emboldening liberals to demand that he invoke the Constitution to disregard the debt ceiling.

—*Washington Post*, May 27, 2023