

ought to address is the existence of Hezbollah's "state within a state," when the cure is to replace the militant group's efforts with government programs to meet the needs of the mainly Shiite population of southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut.

Some in Washington may balk at al-

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nately, even before this conflict, the Pentagon had studied the modernization needs of the Lebanese military. This plan must be turned into action.

Another security requirement is to bolster the Lebanese civil police force so it can maintain order in areas now controlled by Hezbollah. The United States does not have much capacity in this area, but the European Union does — and Washington should help pay. The Bush administration should tap two separate special authorities Congress provided in the 2006 budget for up to \$300 million in emergency security transfers from the Defense Department budget.

A fifth principle is to make maximum use of the private sector. As they

the Lebanese are among the most entrepreneurial people on earth. Rather than having the West send huge amounts of food aid that can depress local markets, families should be given cash grants that will allow them to buy food.

Thinking big, donors should tap insurance companies and private banks to help Lebanese businesses. Here there is a positive lesson from Afghanistan, where the United States Overseas Private Investment Corporation has insured businesses for more than \$1 billion. Imagine the potential in Lebanon if the United States, the European Union, and the World Bank's International Finance Corporation an-

tion of new business activity.

And, finally, rescuing Lebanon will require patience and persistence. Among countries that managed to stop wars that were tearing them apart, some 40 percent were at it again within five years. A major reason is that international donors pull out too quickly, before reconstruction takes root.

Yet again, conflict between Israel and Lebanon has wrought immense destruction on both sides. A lasting peace will occur only if the Lebanese people come to see that their government is more capable than Hezbollah of providing them with security, dignity and hope for a normal life. □

jobs through a commitment to a clean energy future and enact tax and other policies to support families in work and child-rearing.

Ten years ago, neither side got exactly what it had hoped for. While we compromised to reach an agreement, we never betrayed our principles and we passed a bill that worked and stood the test of time. This style of cooperative governing is anything but a sign of weakness. It is a measure of strength, deeply rooted in our Constitution and history, and essential to the better future that all Americans deserve, Republicans and Democrats alike. □

THOMAS FRANK

## G.O.P. Corruption? Bring In the Conservatives.

In the lexicon of American business, "cynicism" means doubt about the benevolence of market forces, and it is a vice of special destructiveness. Those who live or work in Washington, however, know another variant of cynicism, a fruitful one, a munificent one, a cynicism that is, in fact, the health of the conservative state. The object of this form of cynicism is "government," whose helpful or liberating possibilities are to be derided whenever the opportunity presents.

*Thomas Frank is the author, most recently, of "What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America." He is a guest columnist during August.*

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Remember how President Reagan claimed to find terror in the phrase, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help"? Or how the humorist P. J. O'Rourke won fame by declaring that even the proceedings of a New England town meeting were a form of thievery?

The true scoffer demands sterner stuff, though, and in the cold light of economic science he can see that government is not merely susceptible to corruption; *government is corruption*, a vile profaning of the market-most-holy in which some groups contrive to swipe the property of other groups via taxation and regulation. Politicians use the threat of legislation to extort bribes from industry, and even federal quality standards — pure food and so on — are tantamount to theft, since by certifying that any product in a given field won't kill you, they nullify the reputations for quality and goodness that individual companies in the field have built up at great expense over the years.

The ideas I am describing are basic building blocks of the conservative faith. You can find their traces

throughout the movement's literature. You can hear their echoes in chambers of commerce across the land. But what happens when you elevate to high public office people who actually believe these things — who think that "the public interest" is a joke, that "reform" is a canard, and that every regulatory push is either a quest for monopoly by some company or a quest for bribes by some politician? What happens when the machinery of the state falls into the hands of people who laugh at the function for which it was designed?

The obvious answer is an auctioning-off of public policy in a manner we have not seen since the last full-blown antigovernment regime held office, in the 1920's. Agencies and commissions are brazenly turned over to campaign contributors; high-ranking officers of Congress throw grander and gaudier fund-raisers even after being arraigned; well-connected middlemen sell access for unprecedented amounts.

What really worries me, though, is that our response to all this may be to burrow deeper into our own cynicism, ultimately reinforcing the

gang that owns the patent on cynicism and thus setting us up for another helping of the same. This may not be apparent now, with the identity of the culprits still vivid and the G.O.P. apparently heading for a midterm spanking. Recall, though, that while the short-term effects of the Watergate scandal were jail sen-

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### Cynics cause, then gain from, a loss of faith in government.

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tences for several Republicans and the election of many Democrats to Congress in 1974, its long-term effect was the destruction of public faith in government itself and the wave that swept in Ronald Reagan six years later.

In the absence of a theory of corruption that pins the tail squarely on the elephant, this is certainly what will happen again. Conservatives are infi-

nately better positioned to capitalize on public disillusionment with the political system, regardless of who does the disillusioning. Indeed, the chorus has already started chanting that the real culprit in the current Beltway scandals is the corrupting influence of government, not conservative operatives or their noble doctrine. The problem with G.O.P. miscreants is simply that they've been in D.C. so long they've "gone native," to use a favorite phrase of the right; they are "becoming cozy with Beltway mores," in The Wall Street Journal's telling. If you don't like the corruption, you must do away with government.

Were he not the main figure in all this, Jack Abramoff would undoubtedly be nodding in agreement with those editorials. A self-described "free-marketeer" who spent his days fighting "government intervention in the economy" and leading the catcalls at Tip O'Neill, he would undoubtedly have seen the political gold beneath the scandals. If, in our revulsion at Abramoff's crimes, we are induced to accept Abramoff's politics, it will be K Street's greatest triumph yet. □

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G.O.P Corruption? Bring In the Conservatives

Thomas Frank

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