

February 5, 2007 With the elections over and the 110th Congress settling in, the media have been reporting ad nauseam about who has assumed new political power in Washington. We're subjected to breathless reports about emerging power brokers in Congress; how so-and-so is now the powerful chair of an important committee; how certain candidates are amassing power for the 2008 elections, and so on. Nobody questions this use of the word "power," or considers its connotations. It's simply assumed, in Washington and the mainstream media, that political power is proper and inevitable. The problem is that politicians are not supposed to have power over us-- we're supposed to be free. We seem to have forgotten that freedom means the absence of government coercion. So when politicians and the media celebrate political power, they really are celebrating the power of certain individuals to use coercive state force. Remember that one's relationship with the state is never voluntary. Every government edict, policy, regulation, court decision, and law ultimately is backed up by force, in the form of police, guns, and jails. That is why political power must be fiercely constrained by the American people. The desire for power over other human beings is not something to celebrate, but something to condemn! The 20th century's worst tyrants were political figures, men who fanatically sought power over others through the apparatus of the state. They wielded that power absolutely, without regard for the rule of law. Our constitutional system, by contrast, was designed to restrain political power and place limits on the size and scope of government. It is this system, the rule of law, which we should celebrate--not political victories. Political power is not like the power possessed by those who otherwise obtain fame and fortune. After all, even the wealthiest individual cannot force anyone to buy a particular good or service; even the most famous celebrities cannot force anyone to pay attention to them. It is only when elites become politically connected that they begin to impose their views on all of us. In a free society, government is restrained--and therefore political power is less important. I believe the proper role for government in America is to provide national defense, a court system for civil disputes, a criminal justice system for acts of force and fraud, and little else. In other words, the state as referee rather than an active participant in our society. Those who hold political power, however, would lose their status in a society with truly limited government. It simply would not matter much who occupied various political posts, since their ability to tax, spend, and regulate would be severely curtailed. This is why champions of political power promote an activist government that involves itself in every area of our lives from cradle to grave. They gain popular support by promising voters that government will take care of everyone, while the media shower them with praise for their bold vision. Political power is inherently dangerous in a free society: it threatens the rule of law, and thus threatens our fundamental freedoms. Those who understand this should object whenever political power is glorified.