

Property Rights September 4, 2006 In recent weeks I've written about the threat of rising property taxes posed by state and local governments hungry for more and more of your money; and the threat of widespread eminent domain actions posed by a planned North American superhighway running straight through Texas. It's clear that many political and business interests are only too willing to drive people literally out of their homes to make way for the grand schemes of those in power. This is why every American needs to understand that property rights are the foundation of a free society. Without property rights, all citizens live subject to the whims of government officials. When government can seize your property without your consent, all of your other rights are negated. Our founders would roll over in their graves if they knew that the takings clause in the Fifth Amendment was being used to justify unholy alliances between private developers and tax-hungry local governments.

Now one year removed from the notorious Kelo decision by the Supreme Court, Americans are still reeling from the shock of having our nation's highest tribunal endorse using government power to condemn private homes to benefit a property developer. The silver lining, however, is that many Americans have been stirred to action and are demanding new state laws to prohibit the Kelo scenario from repeating itself in their cities. The Kelo case demonstrates that local government can be as tyrannical as centralized government. Decentralized power is always preferable, of course, since it's easier to fight city hall than Congress. But government power is ever and always dangerous, and must be zealously guarded against. Most people in New London, Connecticut, like most people in America, would rather not involve themselves in politics. The reality is that politics involves itself with us whether we like it or not. We can bury our heads in the sand and hope things don't get too bad, or we can fight back when government treats us as its servant rather than its master. Congress can and should act to prevent the federal government from seizing private property. I've introduced and cosponsored several bills that prohibit or severely limit the power of Washington agencies to seize private property in locations around the nation. But the primary fight against local eminent domain actions must take place at the local level. The people of New London, Connecticut, like the people of Texas, could start by removing from office local officials who have so little respect for property rights.

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