February 7, 2005 "…man is not free unless government is limited. There's a clear cause and effect here that is as neat and predictable as a law of physics: As government expands, liberty contracts." Ronald Reagan

We've all heard the words democracy and freedom used countless times, especially in the context of our invasion of Iraq. They are used interchangeably in modern political discourse, yet their true meanings are very different. George Orwell wrote about "meaningless words" that are endlessly repeated in the political arena*. Words like "freedom," "democracy," and "justice," Orwell explained, have been abused so long that their original meanings have been eviscerated. In Orwell's view, political words were "Often used in a consciously dishonest way." Without precise meanings behind words, politicians and elites can obscure reality and condition people to reflexively associate certain words with positive or negative perceptions. In other words, unpleasant facts can be hidden behind purposely meaningless language. As a result, Americans have been conditioned to accept the word "democracy" as a synonym for freedom, and thus to believe that democracy is unquestionably good. The problem is that democracy is not freedom. Democracy is simply majoritarianism, which is inherently incompatible with real freedom. Our founding fathers clearly understood this, as evidenced not only by our republican constitutional system, but also by their writings in the Federalist Papers and elsewhere. James Madison cautioned that under a democratic government, "There is nothing to check the inducement to sacrifice the weaker party or the obnoxious individual." John Adams argued that democracies merely grant revocable rights to citizens depending on the whims of the masses, while a republic exists to secure and protect pre-existing rights. Yet how many Americans know that the word "democracy" is found neither in the Constitution nor the Declaration of Independence, our very founding documents? A truly democratic election in Iraq, without U.S. interference and U.S. puppet candidates, almost certainly would result in the creation of a Shiite theocracy. Shiite majority rule in Iraq might well mean the complete political, economic, and social subjugation of the minority Kurd and Sunni Arab populations. Such an outcome would be democratic, but would it be free? Would the Kurds and Sunnis consider themselves free? The administration talks about democracy in Iraq, but is it prepared to accept a democratically-elected Iraqi government no matter what its attitude toward the U.S. occupation? Hardly. For all our talk about freedom and democracy, the truth is we have no idea whether Iraqis will be free in the future. They're certainly not free while a foreign army occupies their country. The real test is not whether Iraq adopts a democratic, pro-western government, but rather whether ordinary Iraqis can lead their personal, religious, social, and business lives without interference from government. Simply put, freedom is the absence of government coercion. Our Founding Fathers understood this, and created the least coercive government in the history of the world. The Constitution established a very limited, decentralized government to provide national defense and little else. States, not the federal government, were charged with protecting individuals against criminal force and fraud. For the first time, a government was created solely to protect the rights, liberties, and property of its citizens. Any government coercion beyond that necessary to secure those rights was forbidden, both through the Bill of Rights and the doctrine of strictly enumerated powers. This reflected the founders' belief that democratic government could be as tyrannical as any King. Few Americans understand that all government action is inherently coercive. If nothing else, government action requires taxes. If taxes were freely paid, they wouldn't be called taxes, they'd be called donations. If we intend to use the word freedom in an honest way, we should have the simple integrity to give it real meaning: Freedom is living without government coercion. So when a politician talks about

freedom for this group or that, ask yourself whether he is advocating more government action or less. The political left equates freedom with liberation from material wants, always via a large and benevolent government that exists to create equality on earth. To modern liberals, men are free only when the laws of economics and scarcity are suspended, the landlord is rebuffed, the doctor presents no bill, and groceries are given away. But philosopher Ayn Rand (and many others before her) demolished this argument by explaining how such “freedom” for some is possible only when government takes freedoms away from others. In other words, government claims on the lives and property of those who are expected to provide housing, medical care, food, etc. for others are coercive-- and thus incompatible with freedom. “Liberalism,” which once stood for civil, political, and economic liberties, has become a synonym for omnipotent coercive government. The political right equates freedom with national greatness brought about through military strength. Like the left, modern conservatives favor an all-powerful central state-- but for militarism, corporatism, and faith-based welfarism. Unlike the Taft-Goldwater conservatives of yesteryear, today’s Republicans are eager to expand government spending, increase the federal police apparatus, and intervene militarily around the world. The last tenuous links between conservatives and support for smaller government have been severed. “Conservatism,” which once meant respect for tradition and distrust of active government, has transformed into big-government utopian grandiosity. Orwell certainly was right about the use of meaningless words in politics. If we hope to remain free, we must cut through the fog and attach concrete meanings to the words politicians use to deceive us. We must reassert that America is a republic, not a democracy, and remind ourselves that the Constitution places limits on government that no majority can overrule. We must resist any use of the word “freedom” to describe state action. We must reject the current meaningless designations of “liberals” and “conservatives,” in favor of an accurate term for both: statists. Every politician on earth claims to support freedom. The problem is so few of them understand the simple meaning of the word.
*Politics and the English Language, 1946.