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Gilchrist, O'Reilly, and the Cowardice Factor

by Jacob G. Hornberger

A debate on immigration controls vs. open borders was recently scheduled to take place at Pomona College in California. On one side of the debate was a man named Jim Gilchrist, a conservative who founded the “Minuteman Project,” an organization devoted to helping the U.S. Border Patrol arrest, punish, and repatriate immigrants who illegally enter the United States. I was on the open-borders side of the debate, a libertarian position we have [strongly advocated](#) at The Future of Freedom Foundation since our inception some 18 years ago.

The Student Union at Pomona College spent months organizing the debate, marketing and advertising it, and spending money on it, including purchasing an airline ticket for me.

A few days prior to the event, however, Gilchrist cancelled his commitment to participate in the debate. What was his reason for cutting and running? According to [an article](#) in the student newspaper, Gilchrist withdrew from the debate because he became offended by [an article](#) that appeared in the March 9, 2007, issue of the newspaper. Gilchrist purportedly sent an email to the school newspaper threatening to cancel his participation in the upcoming debate unless two conditions were met: (1) the student newspaper granted him an interview, and (2) the newspaper wrote a second article about the upcoming debate that was not “propaganda engaged in by scoundrels losing an argument,” conditions that the newspaper did not meet, possibly because, according to the newspaper’s editor-in-chief, the paper never received Gilchrist’s email.

Gilchrist later stated that he was concerned about “tyrannical, anti-freedom of speech mentalities” on American college campuses. He was referring to an appearance he made at Columbia University last October in which a group of students rushed toward the stage and screamed at him, frightening him into canceling a talk that he was scheduled to deliver.

After Gilchrist canceled his commitment to debate at Pomona, Fox News conservative commentator Bill O’Reilly hosted Gilchrist as a guest on Fox News’ “The O’Reilly Factor,” where they both lamented the light penalty that Columbia University officials had meted out to the students who had disrupted Gilchrist’s speech. During the interview, Gilchrist advised O’Reilly that he had canceled his appearance at Pomona College because of an “anarchist mindset” among

Pomona students, causing O'Reilly to sympathize with and comfort his friend. Not one time did O'Reilly admonish Gilchrist for breaking his word or breaching the contract with Pomona.

There is really only one word that can describe Gilchrist's decision to cut and run from the Pomona debate: cowardice, which was manifested in two ways: (1) the fear of facing an audience that might be hostile to his conservative views on immigration, and (2) the fear of debating a libertarian who would have made mincemeat out of his conservative arguments.

No one forced Gilchrist to enter into the agreement with the Pomona Student Union last January to participate in the debate. If he feared "anarchists" on college campuses, then he shouldn't have entered into the contract to debate at Pomona College in the first place. Don't forget: The episode at Columbia took place last October. Yet, the following January Gilchrist voluntarily made the commitment to debate at Pomona in April.

Once Gilchrist entered into the contract to debate, he had both a moral and legal duty to fulfill the terms of his commitment, no matter how scared he was of the audience or his debate opponent. Fear and cowardice are not valid reasons for breaching one's word and violating a contract.

What about Gilchrist's purported fear that the "anarchists" at Pomona College were going to inflict violence on him?

For one thing, the school was willing to provide adequate security to calm Gilchrist's nerves. Second, as someone who has plenty of anarchist friends, I can attest that just because a person is an anarchist doesn't mean that he's violent. Most important, it seems that Gilchrist's fears of violence are entirely conjured up in his own mind. According to what he told O'Reilly in the March 29 interview, none of the Columbia students initiated any force against him. Oh, they hurled some words at him and no doubt scared him with their bullying tactics, but at no time did they ever assault him.

In fact, when you stop to think about it, what those Columbia students did to Gilchrist is no different, in principle, from what his conservative buddy Bill O'Reilly does to people all the time. O'Reilly screams at, intimidates, interrupts, and cuts off those guests on his show with whom he disagrees. For a recent example of O'Reilly's bullying behavior, take a look at how he treated Geraldo Rivera, who was a guest on O'Reilly's show to discuss immigration:

http://www.foxnews.com/video2/player06.html?040607/040507_oreilly_gerald&OReilly_Factor%27Factor%27%20Face-Off&acc&US&-1&News&341&&&new

Why did Gilchrist get scared at the prospect of debating a libertarian? He cut and run for the same reason that the number of libertarians O'Reilly has on his show pales in comparison to the number of statist he hosts: Both of these conservative bullies know that libertarians make mincemeat out of silly and nonsensical conservative positions. As everyone knows, bullies prefer to pick on people who are unable to defend themselves, such as illegal immigrants, than to face people who can, like libertarians.

Let me also point out that Gilchrist would not have been the only one who might have had to confront hostile people in the Pomona audience. Do I need to remind anyone that open borders is no longer the mainstream immigration position in America? We face hostility from conservatives all the time because of our libertarian open-borders position and undoubtedly I would have faced it from conservative students in the Pomona audience. But the thought of cutting and running from the Pomona debate because of potential conservative hostility to libertarianism never even entered my mind. Heck, I was actually looking forward to mixing it up with Gilchrist and his fellow conservative statist.

My advice to Gilchrist: Given that you clearly can't take the heat, you need to get out of the kitchen. Just go into the living room, plop yourself down on the couch, munch on those potato chips, and let all those retired generals and admirals on Fox News fill you with courage, even as those Fox News commentators are scaring you to death with their never-ending fright stories about how the terrorists, the drug dealers, the illegal aliens, Osama, al Qaeda, Saddam, Zarqawi, the ayatollahs, the communists, Chavez, and the Islamo-fascists are coming to America, taking over the federal government, and making American women wear ponchos and burkas.

Ever since 9/11, Fox News commentators have filled people's minds with terrifying terrorist scenarios, which, in my opinion, was one of the major reasons that frightened American sheeplings cowardly traded away our fundamental rights and liberties after 9/11, some of which stretch all the way back to Magna Carta, in return for the government's promise of "safety" from "the terrorists."

As Bill Thompson, assistant editorial-page editor of the Ocala, Florida, Star-Banner aptly put it in a [recent article](#), "We are not spaghetti-spined because we might exit Iraq anytime soon. We became a bunch of yellow bellies on Sept. 12, 2001. That was when, in our fear and anxiety, inspired by the endless images of the still smoldering remnants of the Twin Towers, we Americans checked 200 years of self-reliance and the Constitution at the door..."

The result is that we are now saddled with a president with omnipotent and perpetual "commander-in-chief" powers; a government with the power to monitor email and telephone calls; overseas torture and sex-abuse camps with kangaroo military courts beyond the reach of the law; secret warrants and secret judicial proceedings akin to those in the Soviet Union; a dirty war that would make any Latin American military brute proud with its kidnappings, torture, sex abuse, renditions, disappearances, perpetual imprisonments, and executions; and a ridiculous war-on-terror enemy-combatant doctrine that has given the U.S. military supreme power over American civilians.

And those frightened American sheeplings who traded away our rights and freedoms to the fox, after being frightened by Fox News, are in for a rude awakening if they really believe that the federal government is going to eagerly let us have our rights and freedoms back anytime soon.

And all because of cowardice, like that manifested by conservative Minuteman Project founder Jim Gilchrist, who cut and run from a debate he had committed to participate in because he was frightened by a few college students who disagree with his statist views and by a libertarian opponent who was going to make mincemeat out of his ludicrous conservative arguments on immigration.

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