Roth: Rhetoric and regulation

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Rhetoric and regulation

I'm about to share an opinion that seems highly unpopular today: I believe there is a role for government and responsible regulation to keep people safe.

Why is that so unpopular? Or even controversial to some? Perhaps it's because I'm an Oklahoman who dares suggest that government has a role to play in our collective lives or perhaps it's because I'm suggesting that people may need protection, in some form, from businesses that serve the public at large.

But if you are the parent of a 10-year-old boy who died at a

Kansas City water park, or of any of the three young girls dumped out of a malfunctioning Ferris wheel in Tennessee, or of the boy who fell out of a wooden roller coaster in Pennsylvania, all in the past week, you may be wondering why tragedy befell your loved one and why more wasn't done by the regulator to keep them safe.

Regulation, such as the role of regulators to inspect and approve the operation of amusement parks, equipment and rides, comes in many forms in American life, yet it seems to have become a bad word in political rhetoric in these modern times. And to be honest, I'm really at a loss as to why.

We've all heard the rhetoric: "too many regulations are killing jobs" or "we don't need government regulation micro-managing our lives." But which specific regulations are actually killing jobs by saving people's lives? And if that's the trade-off, doesn't regulation win that swap each day and in every way?

I once had a close friend, a very smart business owner with hundreds of employees, tell me he was voting for George W. Bush so he would "rein in OSHA and needless safety regulations." My friend left me perplexed as he seemingly framed it in an excessive cost-to-doing-business argument.

Yet, when I did some research for myself, I learned that the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* actually concluded that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration does not kill jobs; rather, it prevents jobs from killing workers.

The much-maligned Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for implementing and enforcing America's Clear Air Act, among many other environmental and public health law objectives. Chiefly the Clean Air Act, first passed in 1973, and amended in 1990, both by Republican presidents, is a comprehensive federal law that regulates air emissions and air quality by removing dangerous pollutants that "endanger public

health and welfare."

As of the 2011 prospective cost-benefit analysis, it has been determined that massive reductions in pollutants like sulfur dioxide, mercury and nitrous oxide have now helped avoid up to 230,000 premature deaths for Americans over the age of 30 each year, help avoid 280 infant deaths a year, have dramatically reduced bronchitis, asthma and other respiratory disease and in turn will help America save over $3.7 trillion in annual benefits by 2020.

And yet this campaign for president features a debate over reopening old coal mines for out-of-work coal miners, who while mining the greatest source of pollution when burned, suffer much risk to injury and health themselves. The better idea may be to retrain them for something that is better for themselves and all the rest of us.

So when you hear politicians talk in large generalized platitudes attacking big, bad ol' "job-killing regulations," please ask them:

Which regulation can you prove has cost how many jobs?

Or, which amusement park, factory or meat-processing plant should we not inspect?

Or, what harm, injury or death to your loved ones would you say is worth having for less regulation?

And please be specific.

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