

Parliament of Whores: A Lone Humorist Attempts to Explain the Entire U.S. Government Study Guide

Parliament of Whores: A Lone Humorist Attempts to Explain the Entire U.S. Government by P. J. O'Rourke

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Plot Summary

Parliament of Whores is a critical look not only at American government, but at the concept of government itself. O'Rourke argues that the U.S. government is irreparably broken, benefiting the undeserving at the expense of the American taxpayer. In O'Rourke's view, a functional society lies in the hopes and dreams of individuals, as facilitated by a self-correcting free market. O'Rourke holds that when government interferes in economics, people are stifled and freedoms are compromised.

O'Rourke begins by depicting the U.S. government as directionless, subject to the arbitrary whims of public opinion. Nevertheless, Americans find its complexities impenetrable and boring. O'Rourke suggests that the government has become similar to the English monarchy of the American Revolution, with the government even failing to follow the laws of its own Constitution. O'Rourke suggests that American government has become so problematic that it must be stopped entirely.

O'Rourke, disgusted by the idea of a political convention, offers a scathing recollection of the Democratic and Republican conventions of 1988. He cynically observes that candidates abandon their ideas to win nominations. Democrats pander to populist interests, behaving like brats with an overdeveloped sense of entitlement. Republicans, meanwhile, behave like unhip, out-of-touch parental figures. Neither party, O'Rourke observes, stands for the ideals they claim to prize.

O'Rourke examines the three branches of American government, observing that the president exists as a largely symbolic figure, while Congress seems unequal to its many Constitutional responsibilities. The Supreme Court is unfathomable - no one beyond its hallowed walls truly understands how it operates. The dysfunctional American bureaucracy, meanwhile, caters to the whims of popular opinion, as the government ties itself in knots trying to meet the needs of the citizenry. From this mounting chaos, an ever-increasing budget is produced.

O'Rourke examines the way the government spends taxpayer money, concluding that America isn't serious about addressing the many issues it faces. The war against drugs is half-hearted. The war against poverty, meanwhile, only serves to perpetuate the problem it seeks to address. America's farm policy is so dysfunctional that it actually pays farmers not to grow crops. O'Rourke dismisses America's foreign policy as, so far, ineffectual, but sees great promise in America's military technology. Suggesting that American still has many enemies, he counsels against the cutting of military spending.

O'Rourke takes a dim view of most special interest groups, seeing them as parasitic organization attempting to siphon money from the U.S. government. He explores the dynamics of anti-poverty groups, environmentalists, and failed savings-and-loans, observing how each works to the benefit of itself at the expense of the taxpayer. O'Rourke looks at Social Security, presenting it as a megalithic special interest group threatening to bring America to the brink of financial ruin. Finally, O'Rourke returns to his

own New Hampshire town, where he demonstrates how government fails even on the smallest scale.



Mystery of Government

Mystery of Government Summary and Analysis

Parliament of Whores is a critical look not only at American government, but at the concept of government itself. O'Rourke argues that the U.S. government is irreparably broken, benefiting the undeserving at the expense of the American taxpayer. In O'Rourke's view, a functional society lies in the hopes and dreams of individuals, as facilitated by a self-correcting free market. O'Rourke holds that when government interferes in economics, people are stifled and freedoms are compromised.

O'Rourke characterizes government as stupid, greedy and controlling. Government remains unchecked, he explains, because the people are disengaged from a boring, impenetrable political process which ultimately fails to address their needs. O'Rourke refutes the notion that Americans don't understand their rightful place in the operation of a democracy. Instead, he suggests that government doesn't understand its rightful place in the operation of the public - which is to leave individuals to govern themselves.

O'Rourke paints a highly cynical picture of elected officials. They serve for selfish reasons and run on a platform of lies, but never tell lies so grand as to be truly entertaining. He casts an equally cynical eye to the idea of majority rule, picturing a world in which every meal is pizza, all pants are denim, and (with women being the majority) everyone married to Mel Gibson. Majority rule, in essence, undermines personal choice and freedom.

The public's apathy, posits O'Rourke, is surpassed only by its ignorance. He considers a modern high school civics textbook, finding it both politicized and boring. As a society based on the pursuit of happiness, he asserts, Americans can't bring themselves to read dry texts, factual or not. Here O'Rourke implies that the average American's doesn't see the relevance of a complex, bloated government to the operation of their daily lives, the laws of the government seeming external to their experience.

O'Rourke suggests that America's government now embodies the same tyrannical bent that compelled the American colonies to secede from England, offering several conjectured examples of how this might be the case. Just as George III refused to assent to the rule of law, Congress won't amend the Constitution to require a balanced budget. Just as George III interfered with laws for naturalization, so does the U.S. immigration policy. Just as George the III interfered with foreign trade, the U.S. imposes trade quotas and tariffs. In casting the U.S. government as the monarchy of King George III, Americans are symbolically placed in the role of potential revolutionaries.

O'Rourke offers a literal reading of the U.S. Constitution, pointing out several examples of how American laws differ from the specific wording of the Constitution. He deplores what he sees as a pattern of degradation in the latter amendments, particularly with regard to taxation, as well as to apparent loopholes and dodges within the main body of



the Constitution. O'Rourke suggests that the Constitution is flawed and questions the amendment process by which it might be repaired. He also questions the government's ability to correctly interpret the Constitution as written. This points to a unilateral distrust of American government.

O'Rourke addresses the question of the "more perfect union" and whether or not America has achieved its intended goals. He suggests that America has more justice than it can stand and that domestic tranquility is impeded by the very document intended to ensure it. O'Rourke acknowledges that common defense is achieved, but notes that America's common defense now includes the uncommon defense of foreign powers. As for the intent of general welfare, he refers to the overflowing banks of the welfare system. O'Rourke concludes the chapter with the axiom "The mystery of Washington is not how Washington works, but how to make it stop."



The Dictatorship of Boredom, pp. 15-26

The Dictatorship of Boredom, pp. 15-26 Summary and Analysis

In the sub-section "On the Blandwagon," O'Rourke compares the American voter to a blindfolded person trying to smack a piñata candidate. He relates two anecdotes about visiting the political party conventions of the 1988 presidential election, reserving most of his scorn for the Democrats, whom he regards as boring, stupid and specious. O'Rourke characterizes the Republicans as merely vapid. Arguing that the people should govern themselves, O'Rourke is disgusted by the pretense of a political convention.

O'Rourke sees political conventions as inscrutable, pointless and boring. He dismisses them as a sort of cheer leading rally, almost entirely devoid of real content or meaning. O'Rourke offers examples from the Democratic convention, where the speakers offer broad statements of principles which could apply to any candidate. He argues that, while the Republicans have a unified vision, the Democrats lack identity. O'Rourke characterizes Democrats as unrealistic populist idealists, whereas Republicans are realists who prove the incapacity of government by actually failing to effectively govern.

O'Rourke contends that the American political system suppresses candidates who have real ideas. He offers the example of Jesse Jackson, who seemingly lost his political convictions after making an arrangement with the campaign of Michael Dukakis. Afterward, notes O'Rourke, Jackson and Dukakis put on an unconvincing show of alliance, demonstrating that upwardly mobile politicians sacrifice their principles in exchange for power and favor.

O'Rourke paints the Democratic National Convention in unflattering terms, likening the very convention hall to a giant toilet. He criticizes everything from Dukakis' height to the shades of red, white and blue chosen for the stage. The Democratic speeches, O'Rourke feels, amount to little more than pandering and Reagan-blaming. He recalls indulging in complimentary alcohol, as the crowd turned on Ted Kennedy's "Where was George?" speech to ridicule Kennedy about the Chappaquiddick incident. O'Rourke considers hearing these counter-quipps, which eventually lead to the Republican slogan of "Dry, sober and home with his wife," as the most interesting thing that happened to him at the Democratic convention.

By the third night of convention, O'Rourke admits that he'd fallen into a sick, alcohol-induced stupor, rousing only to watch the televised broadcast of Jesse Jackson's speech from his hotel room. While he doesn't share Jackson's philosophies, O'Rourke is impressed by the man's rhetorical skill and passion. Nevertheless, he takes comfort in the knowledge that Jesse Jackson, like all politicians, will be transformed into an empty, boring machine of American politics.



With another beer, O'Rourke condemns the American political system as insipid: Based upon a political convention devoid of politics, he explains, a leader is selected to stand before no one. O'Rourke doesn't agree with the Democrats, but neither does he see anything there to disagree with; the Democrats believe in everything. What the Democrats don't believe in, the Republicans do believe in. O'Rourke concludes that, whatever they say, neither party stands for what they claim to believe.



The Dictatorship of Boredom, pp. 27-48

The Dictatorship of Boredom, pp. 27-48 Summary and Analysis

O'Rourke begins the sub-section "Attack of the Midget Vote-suckers" by comparing conventions to high-school reunions, seeing both venues as populated with once-relevant faces. He recalls the fall of 1988 and the candidacy of Michael Dukakis. O'Rourke argues that Massachusetts, the state for Dukakis was the governor, was far from a model of success. He observes that Massachusetts' high-tech boom of 1988 would soon collapse; much like Dukakis's bid for the presidency.

O'Rourke mocks Michael Dukakis and running mate Lloyd Bentsen, characterizing the former as a political neat-freak, and the latter as something of a finance slob; together they are a ridiculous "odd couple." O'Rourke casts George Bush, meanwhile, as a playboy turned Republican hero, a vague president heading an incompetent and somewhat corrupt administration. George Bush played to the basest Republican base so effectively that, were it not for his choice of the inexperienced Dan Quayle as a running mate, there might not have been a need for an election at all.

Continuing on the topic of the 1988 election, O'Rourke couches the Republican platform as dumb-old-dad, "you kids today" approach, whereas the Democrats present themselves as whining brats with an overdeveloped sense of entitlement. O'Rourke sees the election as being between Democrats, scummy politicians who refuse to learn from the past, and Republicans, scummy businessmen who can't stop living in the past. While both sides serve to wreck the nation, O'Rourke considers that at least the Republicans make a profit off the mess, whereas the Democrats just want to inflate an already dysfunctional government. O'Rourke blasts the entire lineup of presidential hopefuls, considering them less well chosen than Miss America contestants.

In looking to lay blame for the perceived poor state of the nation, O'Rourke is not willing to fault the sensation-driven media, nor is he willing to deny the healthy ambition of career politicians. Instead he blames the intense, but shallow judgment of the American people, who would rather vote for someone pleasant than consider the ugly truths relevant to electing a true and effective leader. The author begins a new section entitled "The Winners Go to Washington, DC."

O'Rourke suggests that the media's identity as the unofficial fourth branch of government is largely illusory, an intoxication caused by the mere proximity to power. He depicts Washington journalists as tightly-knit, inbred and awash in the trappings of political power. The journalists, like the politicians themselves, live in a metaphorical ivory tower of government, apart from the neighboring crime-ridden communities of Washington. O'Rourke adds that protest rallies are common in D.C., but dismisses them as largely hypocritical and pointless.



O'Rourke details the mechanics of Washington. Civil servants are helpful and hardworking because government workers are judged on input rather than output. Government exists in a state of perpetual failure, O'Rourke explains, because motion is valued above direction and achievement. He cites Frank Levin, who equates a belief in government to the "vapid" peace of mind experienced by church goers.

George Bush's meteoric rise, O'Rourke insists, was largely the product of media spin. O'Rourke mocks the members of Bush's administration, and the first lady as well, as being unworthy of their newfound shining roles. Even the liberals, he suggests, failed to counter the spin of Bush's ascent, with even the hardcore liberals being unseen on inauguration day. The Republicans of the Republican National Committee, meanwhile, descended into juvenile celebration of a non-conservative variety.

O'Rourke considers George Bush's acceptance speech as adequate by virtue of scripting. He describes the Inaugural Balls as stiff, partisan affairs entirely devoid of fun. Seeing the Young Americans Ball, O'Rourke worries that the next generation of conservatives will be too straight-laced. Nevertheless, he looks on in disbelief as Republicans "boogie" and trade licks on electric guitars. The author ends the chapter on an optimistic tone, seeing the potential for peace and prosperity in 1988.



The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, pp. 49-65

The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, pp. 49-65 Summary and Analysis

Beginning the section "National Busybodies" O'Rourke reiterates his poor opinion of the American government, describing it as an organism whose sole purpose is to aggrandize those in power. To truly know the function of government, O'Rourke suggests, requires watching what it does when it isn't doing anything at all.

O'Rourke tells of his visit to the House of Representatives, describing the underpopulated House chamber in mocking detail. He details the House practice of "one minute" speeches, where representatives take turns giving a speech of sixty second duration. O'Rourke presents an unflattering picture of House Democratic efforts to talk environmentalism in advance of Earth Day. He pans all the representatives, on both sides of the aisle, as bad public speakers.

The one minute speeches cross a wide range of topics, seeming in O'Rourke's opinion to be rambling, esoteric, and delivered in a stilted fashion. Members of the House trickle in as the session continues, but representatives are still few in number, with the press box itself being empty save for O'Rourke. With the "one minutes" finished, the House moves on to making and carrying motions. O'Rourke depicts the resulting debates as convoluted and unproductive. The author admits that this was not a typical day in Congress; on a "typical" day, Congress isn't even in session.

O'Rourke tells of the day he followed along with the daily routine of an unnamed congressman. The statesman flies from one committee meeting to another, never staying for the duration. Along the way he is exposed to a myriad of vague, convoluted and expensive legislation, which the congressman never examines in detail. He is friendly toward visiting constituents, but hasn't the time for in-depth discussion. This, the congressman suggests, is a "light day."

O'Rourke runs down the list of every piece of legislation that the congressman is expected to consider and then adds all of the many other issues that a congressmen are expected to be cognizant of and conversant with on a daily basis. He suggests that it is unreasonable for the people to expect one elected official to master so much information and also to act without bias or self-interest. O'Rourke reveals that congressmen use "cheat cards" that offer a summary of proposed bill and how the congressman should vote to best preserve his or her career.



Looking at the relatively small staff employed by each congressman, and considering the heavy workload they carry, O'Rourke thinks American taxpayers are getting a bargain. He explains that congressmen have the unenviable task of listening to the demands and complaints of the American public, which includes promptly answering tens of thousands of letters each year. O'Rourke reports that, after reading through seven hundred letters sent to the congressman, he saw only one thank you letter, implying that being a congressman is a thankless job.

Vocab: aggrandizement, intestine, mystified, verbatim, pedaled, testimony, squalor, comprehensive, committee, subsidized

The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, p. 66-84

Summary and Analysis

Beginning a new section entitled "Only Human in His Own Immortal Way: The President," O'Rourke characterizes the President of the United States as relatively unemployed, a leader for a nation that should be leading itself. He compares the president's decision-making ability to that of a two year-old, as the executive is compelled to act in accordance to the people's collective will. O'Rourke muses over the president's supposed power to "blow up the world" using a computerized briefcase.

O'Rourke suggests that, in practice, the president's true function is to be watched every hour of every day. He describes, in the detail, how the White House Press Corps watch intently, waiting for an opportunity to ask a question or take a picture. Occasionally a pool reporter is allowed to ask a question of the president. Sometimes the president gives a press release. Once a day, the press secretary fields questions. O'Rourke invites the reader to imagine the sheer annoyance of enduring 24 hour scrutiny.

Referring to one of George Bush's daily agendas from July 25, 1990, O'Rourke argues that the president's role in government is largely symbolic. He makes appearances, listens to briefings, inspires with his presence, but seldom makes decisions. After briefly digressing to mock the Americans with Disabilities Act, O'Rourke concludes that the American desire to idolize and worship the president effectively makes the holder of the office into a kind of priest-king. Until he or she finally disappoints the people, the president is a god among men.

Beginning a new section entitled "Doing the Most Important Kind of Nothing: The Supreme Court," O'Rourke presents the legislative branch as needing to do nothing more than to let others make fools of themselves in their presence. He refers to the 1990 flag desecration case, characterizing the plaintiffs' lawyer as a liberal hobo and the plaintiffs themselves as foolish, oddly-clothed and unwashed. Seeing the strange collection of tourists, journalists, and protesters, O'Rourke contemplates that what Washington really needs is as dress code.

After the Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to burn the American flag, O'Rourke notes that the subject fell entirely off the country's radar and, further, that he himself can't recall what his once strong opinion was on the matter. He concludes that

Americans are unprincipled, distracted by the many material luxuries that American citizens enjoy.

O'Rourke recalls the flag desecration trial, where he, along with other less prominent journalists, is seated such that he cannot see the presiding justices. At issue is whether or not the first amendment allows Americans to burn the flag in protest. Kenneth Starr, the solicitor general, and the justices discuss the particulars of what it means to burn an American flag and whether or not congress has the power to prohibit the activity. Kunstler, attorney for the plaintiffs, argues that, in a free society, citizens cannot be compelled to respect a political symbol.

Weeks later, the Supreme Court rules that flag burning cannot be prohibited. O'Rourke reasons that it is because so many other, similarly obnoxious behaviors are permitted and legal. O'Rourke admits that he doesn't understand the ruling, complaining that the workings of the Supreme Court are unknowable and autocratic. He does contend, however, that without the Supreme Court, the arbitrary will of a democracy would tear the country apart. In the end, O'Rourke concludes, the ruling was just and that freedom is its own punishment.



The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, pp. 85-108

The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, pp. 85-108 Summary and Analysis

Beginning a new section entitled "Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry: The Bureaucracy," O'Rourke considers a subsection of the Department of Transportation. For twenty years, he explains, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has faced an outbreak of "runaway car syndrome," a situation where a vehicle spontaneously accelerates independently of the driver's will. Implying that the idea is ridiculous, O'Rourke describes how consumer advocates compel increased bureaucracy by forcing the government to address people's frivolous complaints.

O'Rourke tells the story of how the Audi 5000, through a combination of media hype and special interest group support, became branded as unsafe due to "runaway car syndrome." The media compels the government to investigate the claims and, after an exhaustive study, determines that the cause is likely user error, users which O'Rourke then mocks. Much to his disgust, the DOT study absolves drivers of blame, announcing that a second study will question the safety of pedal design and placement. All told, O'Rourke sees the incident as a waste of taxpayer's time and money.

In the interest of fairness, O'Rourke visits the bland, uncomfortable headquarters of the Department of Transportation. He is surprised to discover that many DOT workers are car enthusiasts, much like himself. After speaking off the record to an anonymous functionary, O'Rourke learns, much to his disappointment, that automotive engineers make more money working for the government than they would in the private sector. The functionary also admits that the "runaway car syndrome" study was compulsory and also admits that it wasn't politically possible for the DOT to blame the voting public for its own mistakes.

In "Would You Kill Your Mother to Pave I-95: The Federal Budget" O'Rourke explains that the problem with the federal budget is that the public wants more assistance from the federal government than they're willing to provide in taxes. O'Rourke contends that George Bush's popularity plummeted after congressional spending forced him to break his promise not to raise taxes. The final, compromised budget is so lengthy that it would take a year to read. As a result, no one truly knows what it contains.

O'Rourke complains that the federal budget has increased yearly, with spending on social programs and income entitlements increasing even during the Reagan



administration. Some of this spending, he adds, inexplicably occurs off the budget. If budgetary targets cannot be met, expenses might even be assigned to the previous year. The budget grows every year relative to last year's baseline, increased by factors such as cost of living, population and projected growth of government projects. Politicians use this baseline to argue - disingenuously in O'Rourke's opinion - for or against budgetary decisions.

O'Rourke explains that spending is inflated due largely to mandatory program spending and unspent budget authority. In essence, the government is perpetually buried in promises to cover certain expenses: everything from Social Security to government projects. O'Rourke mocks the government's National Helium fund, arguing that since taxation is compulsory he is paying for such frivolity at gunpoint. O'Rourke goes over the 1991 Bush budget, line by line, and flippantly "eliminates" a wide range of services and programs. Being a "real Republican" O'Rourke's hypothetical budget doesn't raise taxes, but it does eliminate numerous exemptions.

O'Rourke notes that while the federal deficit isn't yet critical, it can't be justified in a time of peace. The problem, he explains, isn't that Congress won't cut spending, nor is it a president who won't raise taxes. O'Rourke claims that the problem is an American public with a bottomless sense of entitlement to federal money. He warns that Social Security and Medicare will soon become an economic disaster. O'Rourke declares that selfishness has afflicted the body politic.



Our Government: What the Fuck Do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money? pp. 109-122

Our Government: What the Fuck Do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money? pp. 109-122 Summary and Analysis

The author opens the chapter with a section called "Drug Policy: The Whiffle Life." O'Rourke explains that Americans agree that something should be done about illegal drugs. The government, however, wastes time and money merely recognizing the problem. The American public articulates the problem as a hysterical mistrust of its young people. Crack cocaine, however, despite middle-class hysteria, is not a problem of the middle-class.

O'Rourke, admitting that he has freebassed cocaine, sees crack as a drug of perfected evil. He does not, however, see hysteria as an effective means of waging the war on drugs. O'Rourke suggests that the hysteria over crack cocaine could be the product of latent racism, crack seeing more use in poorer, minority neighborhoods. The American fear of crack cocaine could be nothing more than a fear of otherness. O'Rourke concedes that crack is a real problem, but doesn't see a realistic solution. The solution is too costly, in terms of both money and politics, for anyone to seriously consider.

O'Rourke spends an evening with the Washington DC police department. Perpetrators are arrested and booked, only to be released weeks, days or hours later with a slap on the wrist. Countless man-hours are wasted on bureaucratic paperwork, procedure and red tape. O'Rourke marvels that even in America, the richest nation on Earth, beggars still populate the streets. He dismisses drug-dealing as another form of beggary, another way to make money without working.

O'Rourke concludes that America doesn't take the war on drugs seriously. He cites several other issues about which he feels America is "not serious;" issues ranging from welfare moms to rent control. While O'Rourke doesn't believe that all "drugs of pleasure" should be made illegal, admitting that he himself is an occasional user, he sees that America is consumed more with puritanical notions of morality, than in finding workable solutions. He suggests that neither Congress, nor the public, is taking the problem seriously.

O'Rourke decides that Americans, rich and poor, don't suffer consequences for bad decisions. They live a "whiffle life," sheltered by a nanny state. Privileged Americans

never truly suffer, while the poorest Americans have neither fear nor hope. O'Rourke insists that Americans, as citizens of a democracy, can choose to step up and take responsibility whenever they are ready. Until then, America deserves its drug problem.



Our Government: What the Fuck Do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money? pp. 123-154

Our Government: What the Fuck Do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money? pp. 123-154 Summary and Analysis

Beginning a new section called "Poverty Policy: How to Endow Privation," O'Rourke visits a filthy, smelly, government-subsidized apartment complex in Newark, deciding that it is the least hospitable place he's ever seen. Nevertheless, he dismisses American poverty as a mathematical myth, insisting that government aid more than compensates for the income deficit of the poor. He argues that, in fact, modern poor Americans earn greater income than the middle-class Americans of 1900 and that, compared to the impoverished in other parts of the world, poor Americans are quite well off.

O'Rourke confesses that no one - not even experts - can explain the phenomena of the rundown Newark apartment complex. It appears that merely giving money to poor people doesn't stop actual, real poverty. Hoping to see poverty first hand, O'Rourke takes a trip to the South Bronx escorted by a group of Guardian Angels. He meets a diverse group of squatters fighting for legitimate residency in the face of bureaucratic tangle. O'Rourke also watches as the Angels walk the streets, breaking crack pipes.

Housing projects are places of poverty. O'Rourke explains how drug dealers work their way into projects by exploiting poor, lonely welfare mothers, turning their homes into places of drug business. He describes a government-owned complex with Plexiglas windows and concrete walls which defies personalization. Government housing stifles individuality. This suggests that private ownership is more conducive to social health.

Back in the terrible Newark complex, O'Rourke is met by friendly people with a long list of complaints about the government. When he asks the Newark residents if they'd be interested in owning the apartment complex themselves rather than be managed by the government, they take one look at the squalor in which they live and flatly refuse the idea. This implies that the residents have diminished expectations.

Although he didn't realize it at the time, O'Rourke grew up in a poor family. Despite his mother's poor choice in men and personal illness, O'Rourke's family never descended to the squalor of the Newark complex. He attributes this fact to the much harder world of his childhood. There were no handouts, no easy rides. O'Rourke's family was, in his mind, stronger for not having been helped.



O'Rourke joins the Guardian Angels on a drug den raid. The Angels blitz the location, destroying drugs, tearing up cash and wrecking everything of value. The Angels overextend themselves, inciting a riot, narrowly escaping just ahead of armed enforcers. Later, one of the Angels explains that it was not they who cleaned up their home neighborhood, but the collective will of the locals. O'Rourke cites how much more effective the Guardian Angels are compared to government intervention.

Beginning a new section entitled "Agricultural Policy: How to Tell Your Ass from a Hole in the Ground," O'Rourke discusses how the government wastes billions of dollars on farm subsidies. The government mandates a communist-style price parity for foodstuffs which allows farmers to receive loans using their overvalued farms as collateral. If the food doesn't sell, or if the farmer simply plants nothing, the government pays the farmer anyway. O'Rourke contends that the policy is so ridiculous that it actually drives most farmers out of business.



Our Government: What the Fuck Do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money? pp. 154-184

Our Government: What the Fuck Do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money? pp. 154-184 Summary and Analysis

In a new section entitled "Very Foreign Policy" O'Rourke contends that American diplomacy has seldom been effective. He considers the war in Afghanistan a rare success for U.S. foreign policy. However, since O'Rourke characterizes most of the Mujahedeen as deceitful, violent and self-serving, there exists an air of doubt as to whether or not the U.S. should have aided the group's fight against the Soviets.

Visiting Afghanistan to cover the expected fall of Kabul, O'Rourke shirks his journalistic duty in favor of shopping and drinking. Wandering a crowded, third-world bazaar, where everything from cigars to weapons might be purchased, O'Rourke marvels at the power of the free market. There are no beggars, no thieves and the only dishonesty he sees is the sort inherent in business.

O'Rourke stresses that the best foreign policy for dealing with Afghani Pathan tribesman, is to simply stay away. He offers several examples of their violent barbarism. The visiting American ambassadors, one late and the other a no-show, fail to impress the Afghans. O'Rourke is critical of the way that America hands over food, aid and arms to Afghanistan, trusting that the country will use the resources responsibly, despite all evidence to the contrary.

O'Rourke begins a new section "Defense Policy: Cry 'Havoc!' and Let Slip the Hogs of Peace," with a disclaimer that the chapter was written prior to the war in the gulf. He nevertheless affirms all of his principles with the one exception being that he now feels that the gulf war may prove profitable. Beginning the section proper, O'Rourke addresses the problem of wasted defense budgeting during time of peace, wondering if the American arsenal might be put to functional, regular use.

O'Rourke visits Panama in the wake of Operation Just Cause. He admits that the country is war torn, but prefers its deplorable state over the Panamanian tyranny of recent years. O'Rourke is disgusted by the media's hysteria over collateral damage. He argues that the citizens are pleased and that there is no evidence of high collateral damage. One Colonel reports that he is proud of his men's precision and restraint.



O'Rourke remarks on how technology allows the U.S. military to act quickly, precisely and safely. He considers it all a worthwhile investment for the security of the United States. O'Rourke worries that Russia still poses a threat, concerned that the newly fallen Soviet Union might be waiting for America to fall beneath the weight of its own dissent.

O'Rourke contends that America has too many enemies to afford complacency, seeing military spending as far less dangerous than the creation of more social programs. He characterizes "public" institutions as inevitably dysfunctional whereas military spending at least creates military jobs. His "best and final" argument against military cuts is the happiness that every male feels when he has a gun in his hand.

O'Rourke tells of his visit to the USS Mobile Bay, a herculean-sized guided missile platform. After gushing over the power, complexity and cleanliness of the vessel, he turns equally loving attention to its crew, whom O'Rourke characterizes as clean-cut and professional. He rapturously details the electronic capabilities of the vessel as well as the magnitude of its firepower. Clearly O'Rourke considers the ship as money well spent. The USS Mobile bay is America's "gun in hand."



Special Interest Groups: The Original Barrel of Monkeys That Nothing is More Fun Than

Special Interest Groups: The Original Barrel of Monkeys That Nothing is More Fun Than Summary and Analysis

The chapter opens with a section entitled "Among the Compassion Fascists: The National March for Housing Now!" While generally critical of special interest groups, O'Rourke reluctantly admits that they play a vital role in politics. He explains that SIGs are comprised of people with similar interests, such as farmers or veterans, who, for whatever reason, expect special treatment from the government. O'Rourke's concern, however, is when SIGs take on the guise of altruism.

O'Rourke describes a DC rally for "Housing Now!" characterizing most of the demonstrators in stereotypical terms: hippies, bohos, Marxists. O'Rourke condemns their arguments as spurious, implying that their interests are unworkable and self-serving. He suggests that past programs of such "perennially indignant" people have actually worsened the problem of homelessness. Merely giving homes to the homeless, O'Rourke explains, won't address the root problem of homelessness.

O'Rourke begins a new section entitled "Dirt of the Earth: The Ecologists." Pointing to environmentalism, he contends that a justified special interest is potentially the most dangerous of all, as righteousness can breed a lynch-mob mentality. Like most movements, environmentalism is focused on a common enemy. In this case, that enemy is "big business." O'Rourke argues that pollution is a byproduct of progress, and that Americans will need the help of "big business" to clean up the mess. He condemns those who demonize "material progress."

O'Rourke accuses ecological activists of ignoring science, insisting that their hysterical hyperbole isn't helping their cause. He suggests that while the world can theoretically achieve environmental health by the year 2000, it can't possibly come about by act of congress. O'Rourke paints environmentalists as either naïve, wrongheaded idealists who mistakenly believe in man's good nature, or else they are equally wrongheaded animal lovers who believe that "beasts" deserve the same consideration as man.

Beginning a new section entitled "Setting the Chickens to Watch the Henhouse: The-Savings and-Loan Crisis," O'Rourke condemns the \$500 billion bailout of the "nitwit populist" savings-and-loan industry, citing it as yet another example of the government habitually giving money to "jerks." He blames that S&L collapse on industry-wide corruption, complacency, and soaring interest rates caused by the Carter administration.

He also heaps blame on congressional collusion, insisting that a market controlled by legislation compels the buying and selling of legislators.

O'Rourke opens the section "Graft for the Millions: Social Security," by characterizing social security as the nation picking its own pocket. He claims that Social Security serves only to pad the bank accounts of senior citizens, an ever-increasing segment of society. O'Rourke is concerned that America spends far too much on its senior citizens, warning that the price-tag will only get higher as the country ages. He depicts seniors as a powerful voting bloc with an overdeveloped sense of entitlement. They block any and all legislation that might help mitigate the Social Security meltdown.

O'Rourke points out that taxes, even taxes intended for Social Security, get lumped in with the national budget. For government, there's no "saving up for a rainy day." He suggests that the U.S. government might consider privatizing Social Security, but considers it a political impossibility. Such an option would, O'Rourke sarcastically observes, destroy the economy. After visiting the AARP, O'Rourke is presented with statistics that prove Americans are enthusiastically in favor of Social Security. O'Rourke laments that he at last has found the ultimate special interest group: one which includes everyone.



At Home in the Parliament of Whores

At Home in the Parliament of Whores Summary and Analysis

O'Rourke introduces the New Hampshire town where he lives, calling it "Blatherboro." He describes it almost idyllic terms. The area is small-town beautiful. Everyone is friendly, hard-working, and considerate. Even the Blatherboro government is pleasant. Every year, O'Rourke attends a town meeting where people crowd into a high-school gym to sit in uncomfortable metal chairs. There they discuss budgetary and zoning matters, with individuals representing the interests of the groups to which they belong.

In the front row are the elderly retirees who moved to New Hampshire because of its tax policy, New Hampshire being one of the few states that doesn't collect taxes. The retirees, whom O'Rourke clearly doesn't much approve of, spend much of their time trying to think of ways to "improve" Blatherboro. Seated in the back row are the natives, who fear that the retirees' improvements will inflate the one tax that New Hampshire does have: property tax.

O'Rourke contends that, despite the smallness of the town, and despite the good intentions of its citizens, Blatherboro suffers from the sort of stupidity common to all governments. He refers to the inefficient way in which Blatherboro allocates its budget, observing that they spend too much on law enforcement and not enough on the fire department.

Blatherboro's schools are failing. Despite implementing cutting-edge pedagogy, local high-schools still have an abysmal dropout rate. O'Rourke suggests that if Americans were serious about education, they'd consider privatized schooling through academies or tutors. He adds that a cheaper alternative could involve sending the children to Catholic school, where a rap on the knuckles could serve as "counseling."

O'Rourke feels that Blatherboro is out of its depth when it comes to city planning. Despite all its boards and commissions, and their insistence on white clapboard and green shutters, the town is giving way to urban sprawl. While O'Rourke, as a private-property strict constructionist, doesn't mind the sprawl, he does mind the town wasting his tax money by failing to prevent it.

In an effort to block the completion of a local golf course, the Blatherboro townsfolk decide that any new sewer system costing more than \$50,000 must be approved by a special town meeting. Though he is loathe to admit it, O'Rourke sides with the town, reasoning that the golf course would draw more people to the town. Since New Hampshire only collects property taxes, people are a drain on the Blatherboro economy. Despite his culpability in making the decision, O'Rourke is disgusted by the idea. He sees it as government intruding on the rights of private citizens. He considers the town

government to have "stolen" the golf course. O'Rourke concludes that, because government can stifle the free market, government is immoral



Characters

Perennially Indignant People

Throughout *Parliament of Whores*, O'Rourke complains of perennially indignant people. These are people whom O'Rourke views as deadbeats, whiners or opportunist. They are, in O'Rourke's mind, people who are unwilling to offer an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. Instead they beg, demonstrate or engage in criminal activity. O'Rourke includes most special interest groups under this category, as they typically lobby Congress for support in creating social programs, which they then use to funnel money to their constituents.

There is a pattern to the sort of people that O'Rourke is likely to classify as perennially indignant. Firstly, they must want something. Secondly, the people in question typically belong to a marginalized group: e.g. women, minorities, elderly, and handicapped. Lastly, they are righteous. They feel that they are being denied something to which they are entitled. O'Rourke seems to regard the perennially indignant in shades of severity. He counts the willfully unemployed as the worst of the lot. The least objectionable are the union protesters, who, while they might be indignant, at least work for a living.

Ever the capitalist, O'Rourke subscribes to the notion that success must always be earned, that no one deserves a handout. This is central to understanding O'Rourke's distaste for the perennially indignant. He feels that unfettered government charity sets a bad socioeconomic precedent. The more involved that government is in the lives of individuals, the less freedom individuals have, and the less motivated those individuals are to strive for excellence.

Working Folks

As a journalist, O'Rourke sees things from the ground. His instinct is to go where the people live and talk to them directly about whatever issues are affecting them. To investigate the problem of poverty, for example, O'Rourke visits the slums. To understand Congress, O'Rourke spends the day with a congressman. Wherever O'Rourke goes, however, he always seems to find ordinary, hard-working folks who exemplify his own objectivist work ethic.

O'Rourke seems to suggest that the American worker, or anyone seeking to improve his or her situation, faces a subtle kind of oppression at the hands of the U.S. government. The bureaucracy limits business, hinders free trade. Social programs, meanwhile, keep poor people in badly maintained subsidized housing. O'Rourke repeatedly meets people who complain that government is limiting or preventing their progress, inhibiting their pursuit of happiness.

Working folks are not necessarily employed. Rather, they are defined in terms of unsupported effort. They are not a drain on the rest of society. O'Rourke has more



respect for the "sweat-equity" of Bronx squatters than he does for the privileged son of a friend who is continually insulated against his own malfeasance. O'Rourke values responsibility and independence ahead of economic success.

The People

The People includes the entirety of the American citizenry. They comprise the heart of American democracy and provide the taxes necessary to keep the government functioning.

The President

The President of the United States is the head of the executive branch of the government. O'Rourke considers the president as a largely symbolic role, someone who can serve as a focus for American hero-worship.

Congress

Congress is the legislative branch of the government, including the Senate and the House of Representatives. O'Rourke considers Congress unequal to its Constitutional responsibility.

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is comprised of nine justices. O'Rourke depicts them as smart, argumentative and entirely unfathomable.

The Republicans

O'Rourke depicts the Republicans as stuffy, unsympathetic capitalists who seldom live up to their own ideals.

The Democrats

O'Rourke depicts the Democrats as being a populist tax-and-spend party that panders to special interests.

Jesse Jackson

O'Rourke sees politically active Reverend Jesse Jackson as one of the few remaining classical orators.



Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan is the 40th president of the United States. O'Rourke considers Reagan to be oppressively classy.

George H. W. Bush

George H. W. Bush is the 41st president of the United States and the sitting president at the time *Parliament of Whores* was written. O'Rourke sees him as little more than a product of media spin.

Demonstrators

O'Rourke has a poor opinion of demonstrators, seeing them as misguided, stupid or even outright greedy.

Anonymous Sources

O'Rourke cites several anonymous sources throughout *Parliament of Whores*, from the unnamed congressmen to the unnamed official at the Department of Transportation.

Journalists

Journalists appear throughout the book. Generally they are depicted as tired, scruffy and constantly waiting for something to happen.



Objects/Places

Presidential Briefcase

O'Rourke imagines that the President of the United States carries around a computerized briefcase capable of launching a nuclear assault. This is central to the mythology of the American president.

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is one of the two houses of Congress. O'Rourke visits during an off-session and is appalled by the mediocrity of the proceedings.

Supreme Court Building

The Supreme Court Building is the office of the Judicial branch. O'Rourke visits the Supreme Court during the flag-burning trial.

Audi 5000

The Audi 5000 was the vehicle at the center of the "unintentional acceleration incident" scandal. The UAI phenomenon was eventually attributed to user error.

The White House

The White House is the office of the executive branch, where the president lives.

Washington DC

Washington DC is the capital of the United States and is where much of O'Rourke's narrative is located.

American Flag

The American flag is central to the flag-burning controversy.

The Budget

O'Rourke describes a U.S. budget so thick and so extensive that no one knows the entirety of its contents.



USS Mobile Bay

The USS Mobile Bay is a technologically advanced naval warship capable of firing long range missiles with impeccable accuracy.

Afghani Bazaar

O'Rourke buys Cuban cigars at an Afghani bazaar. He sees the bazaar as a triumph of free market philosophy.

Five-Hundred Billion Dollars

Five-hundred billion dollars is the amount of the savings-and-loan bailout.

Blatherboro

Blatherboro is the pseudonym for the New Hampshire town where O'Rourke lives. He uses Blatherboro as an example of how government fails even on a small scale.

O'Rourke's Home

O'Rourke's home is overvalued due to government interference in the form of rent fixing.

The Statue of Liberty

O'Rourke uses the Statue of Liberty as a unit of measure to describe the size of the USS Mobile Bay.



Themes

Tyranny of Government

O'Rourke sees government as something inherently harmful to society. At best, he argues, it is bloated, inefficient and wasteful, concerned firstly with its own self-perpetuation and only secondarily with the people it would govern. At worst, government is something akin to organized crime, with greedy individuals acting in concert to deprive others of freedom. In the Book's final chapter, "At Home in the Parliament of Whores," O'Rourke demonstrates how the town of Blatherboro exploits a legal loophole to block the construction of a local golf course. He equates this move to an act of theft, condemning government as immoral.

O'Rourke suggests that a politician's first concern lay with his or her job security. This is problematic since, as the author demonstrates, elected officials generally serve multiple masters. Not only do they answer to the voters who elected them into office, but also to their various constituents, including lobbyists and their respective political parties. This means that the focus of these public servants isn't on the public, but on their own self-preservation. Politicians therefore lean with the political wind, eager to please whoever best supports their political survival.

O'Rourke warns that special interests drive the growth of government bureaucracy. As these groups demand assistance, the government, eager to satisfy the electorate, creates costly programs to satisfy public outcry. These programs invite further intrusion into people's private lives and necessitate the writing of further laws. Such laws often interfere with private sector, a fact which O'Rourke finds unforgivable.

Capitalism

O'Rourke holds property rights in high esteem, seeing life and liberty as primarily expressed through material progress. This "bootstrap" notion, common to capitalist thinking, is highly individualistic. It assumes that property is an extension of selfhood and that the accumulation of property is therefore a kind of personal growth. Since government limits what is bought and sold, thus limiting material progress, O'Rourke sees government as inherently oppressive.

O'Rourke visits government housing projects where people, by the very design of their apartments, are denied material progress. The windows are scratched Plexiglas. The walls are stone. The tiled floors appear permanently soiled. The implication is that these people cannot materially complete their own identity. Since they can't change, alter or otherwise customize their apartment, it can't truly seem like a home. One resident, at the Newark projects, is so disgusted by her apartment that she refuses to entertain the possibility of owning it. This, argues O'Rourke, is the problem of public vs. private.



O'Rourke contends that anything "public" is destined to be of the lowest quality, referring to the example of the public restroom. The implication is that, for something to be properly maintained, it must be someone's responsibility. It must, in other words, be genuine property. The lights at the Newark project are broken and never repaired precisely because they don't actually belong to an individual. No one cares. The government cannot extend its selfhood in the manner of an individual. Government cannot be responsible in the manner of an individual.

The Problem of Charity

O'Rourke rejects the notion of altruism, suggesting that people are first and foremost motivated by self-interest. He characterizes special interest groups as generally greedy and self-serving, intent on "mooching" money from the government. O'Rourke suggests that the unifying interest might even be secondary to the cash grab. He further claims that special interests often perpetuate, perhaps knowingly, the very problems they claim to address.

O'Rourke depicts social programs, ostensibly designed to help people, as potentially harmful to society. He warns against the advent of the "whiffle" world, where individuals are protected against the consequences of their own actions. Criminality is treated rather than punished. Corruption is tolerated. Welfare perpetuates poverty by keeping the poor comfortable. This implication is that without appropriate consequences, choice becomes irrelevant. O'Rourke argues that this dynamic demotes individuals to the role of children, casting government into a parental role.

O'Rourke doesn't have a problem with charity given willingly between individuals. His concerns lay with people who demand charity from the government, creating, in O'Rourke's opinion, a drain on the American taxpayer. As an objectivist, O'Rourke feels that everyone should take responsibility for themselves and not become a burden to others. An individual is a "private" concept and thus, O'Rourke would argue, cannot be addressed publicly.



Style

Perspective

O'Rourke is disgusted by government, even the "small" government favored by his own Republican party. His perspective is that of a free market true-believer who sees government as restrictive, stifling force. O'Rourke values the individual over the collective, competition over cooperation. He fears that an overprotective government will foster a dull, complacent nation content to live on government support instead of striving for its own betterment.

Although O'Rourke doesn't use the term, his capitalist views are representative of Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism. He sees capitalism as a fundamental truth of the human condition. People have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and capitalism, O'Rourke believes, facilitates this pursuit. He argues that an individual can achieve his dreams through free enterprise, creating something that is uniquely his own, something which no one has the right to deprive him of. Since government can deprive people of such gains, O'Rourke concludes that government is immoral.

O'Rourke writes from the perspective of his own beliefs as a conservative and from his own experiences as a journalist. While he offers concrete examples, they are filtered through considerable layers of conjecture and sarcasm. O'Rourke is angry, and this is apparent in his acerbic, often mean-spirited humor. He is cynical, particularly suspicious of any non-centralized group or organization.

Tone

O'Rourke's tone is one of indignation. While he aspires to humor, his first priority is to sound off against perceived injustices, to objectively expose the flaws of government for all to see. O'Rourke's work is highly ideological, informed by his faith in capitalist, free market philosophies and tempered by his years of working in the shadow of Washington. He leans heavily on this credibility to present an argument in absolute terms: To disagree with O'Rourke's paradigm is to invite mockery. Nevertheless, he is scant on the details of his few proposed solutions, often dismissing matters to the power of his ideology or else dodging into humorist hyperbole.

While O'Rourke is educated, even intellectual, he presents himself more as an average Joe, someone who speaks plainly and thinks clearly. He strives to put things in the simplest possible terms, even to the detriment of specificity. In this way, O'Rourke characterizes the government as opaque, its inner workings unknowable or unfathomable. This creates a sense that no one is at the helm, that the government is a blind, headless beast. The question then becomes: If the author, as an intelligent, educated man, can't claim to understand the government, how can the politicians claim effective leadership?



O'Rourke casts a favorable light on dedicated, hard-working individuals, even those who work within the government. He holds ambition and drive as the highest of virtues. His ideology demands that talented people have the opportunity to experience material growth. Conversely, O'Rourke heaps scorn on anyone whom he perceives as a looking for a "free ride," almost without exception to circumstances. O'Rourke believes that merely being elderly or handicapped does not necessarily entitle one to government aid.

Structure

The book is broken up into six chapters, each pertaining to a general aspect of American government. Rather than numbers, the chapters are given long, humorous titles that represent the particular brand of sarcasm dominating the chapter in question. Many of the chapters are similarly broken up into several self-titled subsections which explore a specific topic or issue.

The author begins by examining the way America elects its president. In chapter three he considers the three branches of government, including a look at the overall bureaucracy and an account of how America creates a federal budget. In chapter four the author follows the money, looking at the government's spending in the war on drugs, poverty, agriculture, foreign policy, and defense. Chapter five addresses the dysfunction of special interest groups and chapter six demonstrates how even small government fails to suit the needs of the people.

The book is punctuated with amusing anecdotes that either illustrate the author's point or lend support to an argument. When this happens the flow resolves into a genuine narrative as the reader is treated to a story from O'Rourke's misadventures as a journalist. These stories are generally more colorful than the rest of book, but are not without politics, opinions or the odd quoted statistic.



Quotes

"The mystery of government is not how Washington works but how to make it stop." —
The Mystery of Government, page 14

"So what if I don't agree with the Democrats? What's to disagree with? They believe everything. And what they don't believe, the Republicans do. Neither of them stand for anything they believe in, anyway." —The Mystery of Government, page 26

"Thus in our brief national history we have shot four of our presidents, worried five of them to death, impeached one and hounded another out of office. And when all else fails, we hold an election and assassinate their character." —The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, page 74

"Freedom is its own punishment." —The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, page 84

"I told you government was a bad thing. Let's get together and have these people fired." —The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, page 93

"Ninety-five percent of Americans are on the mooch." —The Three Branches of Government: Money, Television and Bullshit, page 105

"My friend's kid lives in a well-padded universe, a world with no sharp edges or hard surfaces. It's the Whiffle Ball again. The kid lives a Whiffle Life, and so does my friend and so do I." —Our Government: What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 121

"The people of Mott Haven didn't need to understand Curtis Silwa's exact words, any more than they needed to understand every aspect of federal social legislation. They could see the results of government policy, and they could see the results of the Guardian Angeles. They could tell what works." —Our Government: What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 141

"Here at last is a simple problem with a simple solution. Drag the omnibus farm bill behind the barn, and kill it with an axe." —Our Government: What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 153

"Whatever it is that the government does, sensible Americans would prefer that they do it to somebody else. This is the idea behind foreign policy." —Our Government: What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 154

"But the best and final argument against cutting federal spending cannot be put into words. It's visceral, hormonal. It's that excitement in the gut, that swelling of the chest, the involuntary smile that comes across the face of every male when he has a weapon



in hand." —Our Government: What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 176

"It's hard to imagine anyone who got a close look at the 'Housing Now!' demonstration ever voting for a social program again. It was though we as a nation had made the mistake of feeding the dog at the table. Now Spot won't leave us alone and is going to have to be tied out in the yard." —Our Government: What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 192

"When buying and selling are controlled by legislation the first things to be bought and sold are legislators." —Our Government: What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 210

"So we've won the prize. Social Security is a government program with a constituency made up of the old, the near old and those who hope or fear to grow old. After 215 years of trying we finally found a special interest that includes 100 percent of the population. Now we can vote ourselves rich." —What the Fuck do They Do All Day and Why Does it Cost So Goddamned Much Money?, page 220



Topics for Discussion

Based on his criticisms of the U.S. government, what sort of government would O'Rourke like to see?

O'Rourke suggests that public education could be replaced by private or religious instruction. What are the pros and cons of such options?

O'Rourke argues against cutting the U.S. defense budget. Are his reasons sound? Why or who not?

O'Rourke argues that individuals need to take responsibility for their own well-being rather than expecting the government to take care of them. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Is it possible to help people without fostering dependence?

O'Rourke suggests that politicians are, by their very nature, biased by self-interest. Do you agree or disagree with this stance? How might politicians be encouraged to put their constituent's needs ahead of their own?

The author presents government as slow, convoluted, and inefficient. Is there any benefit to living in a bureaucracy? Would a faster, more efficient government necessarily be an improvement?

How is O'Rourke influenced by Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism?