

Trump used eminent domain for casinos, golf courses

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By [Randy W. Bright](#)

I have written a number of articles about eminent domain, primarily because of its impact on property rights.

And without property rights, nothing else in our Constitution or market system of economics works.

In the last Republican debate, Donald Trump was questioned about his abuse of eminent domain as Jeb Bush asked him how easy it was to steal an elderly woman's land.

Bush was referring to the case of CRDA v. Banin, which was an eminent domain lawsuit that occurred prior to the infamous Kelo v. New London case, in which the U.S. Supreme Court said that it was within the takings clause of the Constitution to take property from one individual and give it to another.

CRDA v. Banin was the result of Trump's attempt to take the property of three homeowners adjacent to his newly constructed casino in Atlantic City. Trump wanted their property to construct a parking lot for limousines. The elderly lady Bush referred to was Vera Coking, who had lived on her property for three decades.

Coking didn't want to sell, so after she refused an offer of \$1 million for her property, Trump went to the CRDA (Casino Reinvestment Development Authority). The CRDA gave Coking 90 days to leave her property and offered her \$251,000.

One of the other property owners was Peter Banin who, along with his brother, had recently purchased their building for \$500,000. The CRDA also ordered them off of their property, and only offered them \$174,000. Banin, a Russian immigrant, was quoted to have said, "I knew they could do this in Russia, but not here. I would understand if they needed it for an airport runway, but for a casino?"

In a 1994 case, Trump wanted to build a \$350 million office and entertainment complex along the waterfront of Bridgeport, Connecticut, promising to turn it into a world-class tourist destination. The only problem was that there were five business owners who didn't want to sell. Trump made a deal with the city to become his partner in the development. The city was to condemn and take the land, after which Trump would buy the land from the city. His scheme never saw fruition, however, because the project fell apart before the land was taken.

Trump makes no secret of the fact that he likes the most recent version of eminent domain resulting from the Kelo v. New London case, telling Fox News anchor Neil Cavuto that he agreed with it "100 percent."

Michelle Malkin quotes him saying, “The fact is, if you have a person living in an area that’s not even necessarily a good area, and government, whether it’s local or whatever, government wants to build a tremendous economic development, where a lot of people are going to be put to work and make (an) area that’s not good into a good area, and move the person that’s living into a better place – now, I know it might be their choice – but move the person to a better place and yet create thousands upon thousands of jobs a beautification and lots of other things, I think it happens to be good.”

Recently Trump took a question in a New Hampshire press conference from reporter Philip Klein of the *Washington Examiner*, who stated, “Property rights are a big issue in New Hampshire. In Atlantic City, you used eminent domain laws aggressively to expand your casino.”

Calling his question stupid, Trump said, “I am all for private property rights. There’s nobody who wants property taken away less than I do, believe me. I would lose a lot of money if my property were taken away. But when you’re building a road, when you’re building a highway, when you’re building from a municipal standpoint, you may need a corner of a piece of property.”

But pipelines, roads and bridges have nothing in common with Trump’s projects that include, among other things, casinos and golf courses. Perhaps he would feel differently if someone were to take his properties for some more worthy cause such as multifamily housing or mixed-use developments?

The bottom line is that if we can’t keep what we have earned, if all that we have worked for and paid for is at risk of being taken at the whim of someone more powerful than us, we are no more than serfs living under an archaic feudal system.



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