

This Town Wants to Rob Disadvantaged Students to Build a School for the Rich

Every time I see a new government school under construction, it reminds me of the significant burden local taxpayers bear to pay for that coercive new institution. In the town of Brookline, Massachusetts, an affluent community adjacent to Boston, this form of government coercion has reached new heights. Last week, town officials contacted the president of a private college there to say that they were planning to take seven acres of college land by eminent domain to build a new public elementary school.

The town wants to snatch the land that the college is not interested in selling.

The Boston Globe reported this week that “the college was caught off guard and is angry that town officials would suggest seizing the land instead of building elsewhere.” Pine Manor College, while surrounded by some very wealthy neighbors, serves mostly low-income, minority, and first-generation college students. *The Globe* reports that 85 percent of the Pine Manor’s students are people of color and 84 percent are first-generation college attendees.

In the past, the college sold off some of its land to the town, as well as to its well-to-do neighbors like New England Patriots quarterback, Tom Brady, who purchased 5 acres from Pine Manor in 2013. But this recent notification states that the town wants to snatch the land that the college is not interested in selling.

Eminent domain is the power of government to seize private land for public use. It is often used as a justification for taking private property to build roads or pipelines that, it is thought, would benefit the greater public good. Why would the government be so arrogant to determine that a compulsory elementary school in a rich neighborhood serves the public good more than a private college that caters to primarily disadvantaged students?

In his 2005 FEE article, “The Dangers of Eminent Domain,” economics professor, Donald Boudreaux, writes that the inherent problem with eminent domain is that no entity, public or private, should be able to seize someone else’s land. He explains that “it is implausible to suppose that government needs, or should be entrusted with, property-seizing power that no one in his right mind would entrust to private people.”

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Boudreaux lists several reasons why eminent domain is problematic. One reason is that “the power to seize property is both especially dangerous and especially tempting to those

who possess this power...A state that can seize people's homes can also seize publishers' presses and broadcasters' studios. And no one should be entrusted with such power. Anyone possessing it is too easily tempted to abuse it."

In the case of Brookline, the power to seize private land to build another coercive government institution is doubly concerning. Unlike roads, which are voluntary to use, compulsory schooling is mandated under a legal threat of force.

We should be wary of a government's power to take private land, as well as to expand coercive institutions as a result. The events in Brookline show that the interest of the "public good" is often better served by private entities than through the forceful authority of the state. Let's hope the citizens of Brookline speak up and stop this latest example of government overreach.