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Michelle Malkin: Donald Trump's Eminent-Domain Empire

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By Michelle Malkin | [@michellemalkin](#)

He has made a career — and a fortune — of trampling private property rights

Don't be fooled by [The Donald](#). Take it from one who knows: I'm a South Jersey gal who was raised on the outskirts of Atlantic City in the looming shadow of Trump's towers. All through my childhood, casino developers and government bureaucrats joined hands, raised taxes and made dazzling promises of urban renewal. Then we wised up to the eminent-domain thievery championed by our hometown faux free-marketeers.

America, it's time you wised up to Trump's property redistribution racket, too.

Trump has been wooing conservative activists for months and flirting with a Republican presidential run — first at the [Conservative Political Action Conference](#) in Washington and most recently at a [Tea Party](#) event in South Florida. He touts his business experience, “high aptitude” and “bragadocious” deal-making abilities. But he's no more a standard-bearer of conservative values, limited government and constitutional principles than the cast of [Jersey Shore](#).

Too many mega-developers like Trump have achieved success by using and abusing the government's ability to commandeer private property for purported “public use.” Invoking the [Fifth Amendment](#) takings clause, real estate moguls, parking garage builders, mall developers and sports palace architects have colluded with elected officials to pull off legalized theft in the name of reducing “blight.” Under eminent domain, the definition of “public purpose” has been stretched like [Silly Putty](#) to cover everything from roads and bridges to high-end retail stores, baseball stadiums and casinos.



While casting himself as America's new constitutional savior, Trump has shown reckless disregard for fundamental private property rights. In the 1990s, he waged a notorious war on elderly homeowner [Vera Coking](#), who owned a little home in Atlantic City that stood in the way of Trump's manifest land development. The real estate mogul was determined to expand his [Trump Plaza](#) and build a limo parking lot — Coking's private property be damned.

The nonprofit [Institute for Justice](#), which successfully saved Coking's home, explained the confiscatory scheme: "Unlike most developers, Donald Trump doesn't have to negotiate with a private owner when he wants to buy a piece of property, because a governmental agency — the [Casino Reinvestment Development Authority](#), or CRDA — will get it for him at a fraction of the market value, even if the current owner refuses to sell. Here is how the process works.

"After a developer identifies the parcels of land he wants to acquire and a city planning board approves a casino project, CRDA attempts to confiscate these properties using a process called 'eminent domain,' which allows the government to condemn properties 'for public use.' Increasingly, though, CRDA and other government entities exercise the power of eminent domain to take property from one private person and give it to another. At the same time, governments give less and less consideration to the necessity of taking property and also ignore the personal loss to the individuals being evicted."

Trump has attempted to use the same tactics in Connecticut and has championed the reviled [Kelo vs. City of New London Supreme Court ruling](#) upholding expansive use of eminent domain. He told [Fox News anchor Neil Cavuto](#) that he agreed with the ruling "100 percent" and defended the chilling power of government to kick people out of their homes and businesses based on arbitrary determinations:

"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 there into a better place — now, I know it might not be their choice — but move the person to a better place and yet create thousands upon thousands of jobs and beautification and lots of other things, I think it happens to be good."

Like most statist promises of bountiful job creation, government-engineered redevelopment math rarely adds up. Trump's corporations have backed casino industry bailouts and wealth-redistributing "tax-increment financing" schemes — the very kind of taxpayer-subsidized interventions we've seen on a grand scale under the [Obama administration](#).

Championing liberty begins at the local level. There is nothing more fundamental than the principle that a man's home is his castle. Trump's career-long willingness to trample this right tells you everything you need to know about his bogus Tea Party sideshow.

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