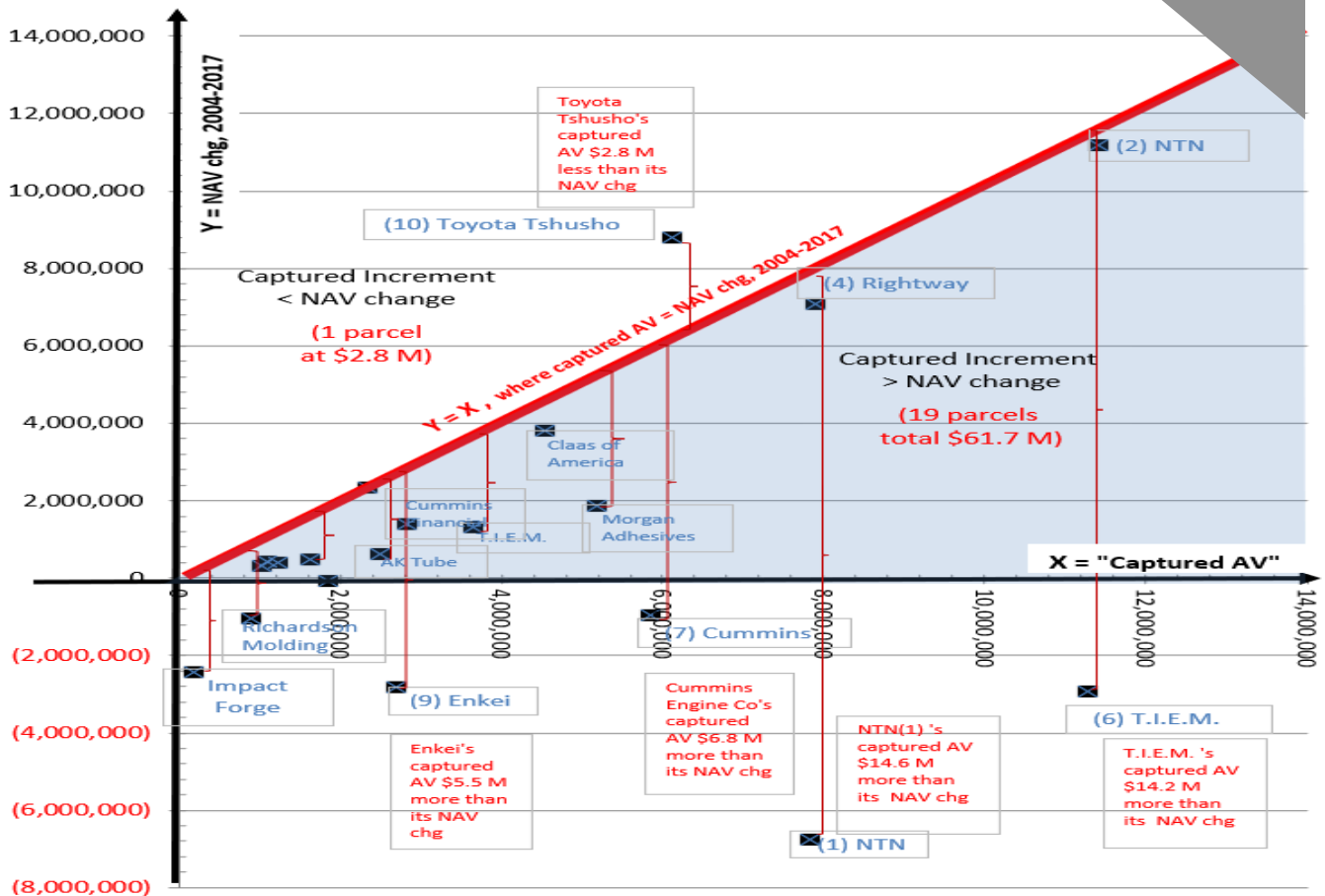


# INDIANAPOLIS

## Review

Fall 2022

'AFFORDABLE'  
HOUSING WON'T  
COME FROM D.C.  
Jason Arp p. 23



## Lifting the Veil on TIF

"How did undermining local government's tax base come to be viewed as an essential tool in local government's economic development toolkit? In essence, that's what happened in the case we examined. Redevelopment commissions appear happy to count their riches and pursue their plans while local taxing units are blind to this, as are the local media and thus the general public." — Tom Heller

*“When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security.”*



Vol. 33, No.4, Fall 2022

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## A FUTURE THAT WORKS

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- Exalt the truths of the Declaration of Independence, especially as they apply to the interrelated freedoms of religion, property and speech.
- Emphasize the primacy of the individual in addressing public concerns.
- Recognize that equality of opportunity is sacrificed in pursuit of equality of results.

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## Wednesday Whist

### Roe vs. Wade and 'Moral Standing'

The central question for beginning-of-life and end-of-life controversies is moral standing, also called “moral status” and “moral consideration.” The concept refers to the duties owed by moral agents to another entity or, conversely, an entity’s claims that can be made on moral agents. Most philosophers agree that human beings have full moral standing, meaning that each individual human being is owed all duties — and owed those duties equally. Other beings, for example, rabbits, lack full moral standing. We would feed a rabbit to a starving child but not a child to a starving rabbit. Rabbits do not have full moral standing.

Yet, animals have some moral standing. We cannot do to dogs and cats whatever we wish. They have some intrinsic value and interests with which we should not interfere. The law recognizes those interests. We punish people if they abuse dogs and cats. Animals can make claims on moral agents. A recent issue of *New Yorker* reported that animals have appeared in court, including Happy, an elephant from the Bronx Zoo, and Justice, a horse in Oregon whose owner treated him badly.

In Florida, a lawsuit was filed by Lake Mary Jane to prevent development. Does a lake have legal or moral standing? Can duties be owed to an inanimate object?

However that case is resolved matters little to animate objects as noted above. The jury is in: Animals have interests that the law protects.

For decades, strong environmentalists have argued that natural objects, especially animate entities, have moral standing. One environmentally concerned philosopher said in 1981, “every organism . . . has a good of its own which moral agents can intentionally further or damage by their actions” and that moral agents should preserve an organism’s “existence throughout the various stages of the normal life cycle of its species.” Another philosopher said in 1985 “inherent value, then, belongs equally to those who are the experiencing subjects of a life.”

Of course, if those strong environmental positions are accepted, then abortion should be banned, excepting the unnatural pregnancies resulting from incest or rape.

How did the Supreme Court handle the concept of moral status in *Roe vs. Wade*, the 1973 case that made abortion viable? It implicitly recognized the issue of moral standing but then ducked the issue: “Texas urges that, apart from the 14th Amendment, life begins at conception and is present throughout pregnancy, and that, therefore, the State has a compelling interest in protecting that life from and after conception. We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man’s knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer.”

Two glaring problems exist in that passage. First, resolving when life begins is not a “difficult question” at all. As a matter of scientific fact, conception is a natural process which begins a life, whether it is a rabbit, a dog or a human being. What is at stake in the abortion question is not whether there is life but what duties, if any, are owed that life, whether the life process involves a rabbit, a dog or a human being.

The second problem is that the Court is unaware it had answered the “difficult question.” If *Roe vs. Wade* had stood, then speculation would have ended. As moral philosopher Baruch Brody observed in 1975, to rule that abortion is permissible as an exercise of the woman’s right to privacy “the Court must presuppose that the fetus is not a human being.” The moral standing of the entity in the womb has already been established.

Is it any wonder that abortions, in the years subsequent to *Roe vs. Wade*, have morphed into “partial births,” a euphemism for the arrival of living, breathing human beings?

Is it any wonder that the Court wanted to revisit *Roe vs. Wade*?

— *Richard McGowan, June 20*

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# Lifting the Veil of an Indiana TIF

*Tax increment financing is 'free' only for the local officials who don't have to face popular displeasure over rising tax bills.*

Thomas Heller, a Columbus resident, writes on Tax Increment Finance and other fiscal issues. The author was principal and founder of Regional Analytic Sciences in Seattle, Washington, and has held positions dealing with state-level public policy, including those with the Washington State Department of Transportation, the Washington State Senate and Parsons-Brinckerhoff, an international transportation consultancy. *Nota bene: This is pre-pandemic research; otherwise access to data would have been difficult or impossible.*



## Introduction

The experience of Columbus, Indiana demonstrates that TIF is all about capturing revenue. TIF offered a mechanism to capture and divert, for upwards of 25 years, tax receipts from general local government purposes and apply them to other uses (“redevelopment”) advanced by appointed (unelected) redevelopment commissions. Whereas TIF was supposed to capture property tax revenues from new economic development, TIF in Columbus eroded — indeed excavated — the property tax base (AV) existing prior to TIF and capturing a burgeoning revenue stream from it. TIF coincided with a 30 percent rise in Columbus’s property tax rate in a mere seven years, an increase falling predominantly on commercial and industrial property now that state ‘circuit breaker’ tax caps have insulated other property classes. Any growth in Columbus’s regular property tax base was further suppressed via tax abatements and assessment adjustments,

compounding TIF’s impact on local government finances. (Signals of significant tax base erosion by TIF were found in other Indiana communities, too.) Columbus’s redevelopment commission will accumulate \$40 million in unearned, diverted tax revenue in each of two TIFs; none of its excess TIF capture has been restored to local taxing units. (A third TIF has recently been declared.) Its TIF performance was further muddled by inattentive debt management, such as ignoring \$2.3 million savings available from redeeming outstanding debt, in favor of simply refinancing existing bonds and issuing more debt to do so.

## Mitch Daniels, Inc.

The election of Mitch Daniels as governor of Indiana in 2004 brought a sea-change to the role of state government in shaping local economies and the well-being of its people. A long series of initiatives were unleashed, from raising highway speed limits to adopting Daylight Saving Time. Aggressive tactics extended to creative financing (e.g., lease of the Indiana Toll Road) and economic development (formation of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and a host of new economic development-focused tax credits.) Elimination of the business inventory tax spurred explosion of the logistics industry, aided further by additional tax credits. Local government reforms were advanced, including property tax caps and elimination of township government.

One major effort initiated early in the Daniels administration was to open the playing field for tax increment financing (TIF), although not particularly visible or widely heralded. Previously, the use of TIF in Indiana was confined solely to “blighted” areas and aimed at directing investment into local public infrastructure (e.g., rebuilding streets and roads, fixing failed water or sewer systems). In the traditional view, this was the necessary blocking-and-tackling by which struggling communities might pull themselves out of a spiral of economic decay, offering the hope of jobs for its citizens and a return of commerce and industry to afflicted areas, since private investment could not — and would not —

undertake the risk and cost associated with investment in blighted areas. But blocking-and-tackling was both expensive and risky. What if the hoped for economic revitalization didn't show up? A more all-encompassing effort was believed necessary to attract new private investment. This entailed quality-of-place community investments and less-confined boundaries.

The “blighted area” qualification for establishing a TIF district was greatly relaxed in 2005, the first year of Daniels’ eight years as governor. Relaxation was simply accomplished by enlisting a text editor to find in the state law books each instance of “blighted area” and replace it with a much broader standard: “area needing redevelopment.” The era of TIF in Indiana was about to burst upon the scene.

This broader standard enabled TIF districts to encompass not blighted areas, which would prove valuable in heightening a community’s ability to boot-strap a plan of redevelopment. History tells us that attracting private investment to a blighted area is an extremely speculative undertaking. Loosening TIF boundaries improved the likelihood of attracting new investment as well as the prospects for paying off debt incurred in the effort.

### Narrative: An Essential Tool in the Toolkit

On its surface — and since its invention — TIF offers local communities a financing mechanism whereby taxes that flow from newly-developed properties can be “harvested” so to pay off the cost of public investment undertaken to spur desired economic growth in the local community. “But for” TIF, it was said, such economic development would not happen because of laggard national economies or local market conditions. The catalyzing public investment can range from infrastructure to make undeveloped sites “shovel-ready” to most any improvement that can claim to enhance a community’s “quality-of-place” and its prospects for economic growth.

TIF, however, is not the only means American communities have crafted to address challenges financing needed capital projects. Every instance,

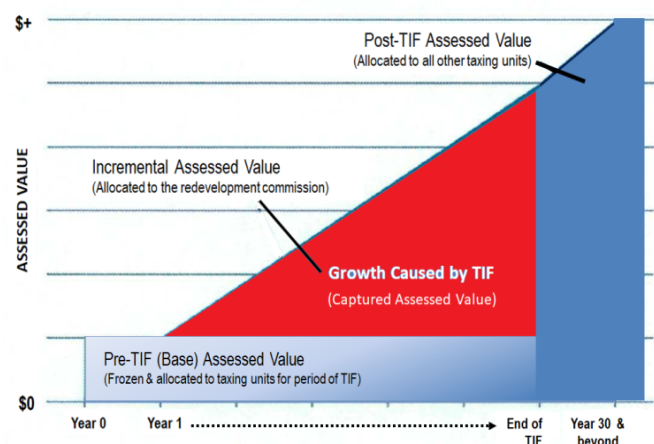
though, is constrained by provisions of state law and state constitutions. The author can personally attest to witnessing two civic leaders discussing this subject almost 30 years ago in another state, one confidently declaring to the other that he “had looked into TIF and concluded we don’t need it.”

In the eyes of its champions and practitioners in Indiana, however, TIF is proclaimed as essential — indeed, the central tool in the economic development “toolkit.” State and local economic development organizations have embraced TIF and over 700 TIF districts now exist in the state.

The theory and method of TIF is easily portrayed graphically (Figure 1). After a geographic boundary is decided and declared, a TIF district captures all the taxes produced from increased property values (incremental AV, area shown in red) within its boundaries, typically for the next 25 years. None of that increment is shared with local taxing districts (city, county, school, library). The captured new taxes are available to repay costs incurred in constructing local public improvements aimed at stimulating economic growth within the TIF district. Specialized consultants and attorneys advise local redevelopment commissions in creating TIFs, including the issuance of bonds to finance ‘catalytic’ public improvements.

But the rapid spread of TIF in Indiana has not come without concern and criticism. A Ball State

**FIGURE 1: The narrative: How TIF is supposed to work.**



University study<sup>1</sup> in 2016 found little or no economic growth associated with TIF. A similar econometric study<sup>2</sup> in 2017, commissioned by the Indiana Economic Development Association (IEDA) and advised by knowledgeable consultants and attorneys, examined why communities may adopt TIF as an economic development tool.

This work first takes issue with the latter study, especially its finding that “TIF does not appear to be used as a revenue capture tool.” Two central premises of TIF are examined and tested. The paper closes with a list of anomalies uncovered in this examination but which remain unexplained pieces in the puzzle that is TIF in Indiana.

### TIF Is About Revenue Capture

On its face, a claim that TIF isn’t about revenue capture is puzzling. The TIF mechanism is designed to work by and through capture. Its aim is to finance new public investment (and thereby spur economic growth) by capturing the increase in taxes that flow from new private investment attributable to the up-front public investment.

Revenue capture is TIF’s life blood. The history of TIF in Columbus provides ample evidence

Columbus (population 46,850) is home to Cummins, a Fortune 200 manufacturer of diesel engines and related power solutions. Cycles of economic expansion and contraction in Cummins’ principal market (North American heavy-duty trucks) at times have wracked the fortunes of the local economy, its workforce and the community. In the early 1980’s, forward-looking individuals embarked on efforts that could dampen the community’s over-reliance upon one large employer. An industrial park (Woodside), carved out of woodlands southwest of town simultaneous with the launch of an

aggressive industrial recruiting campaign, has successfully lured multiple Japanese Tier 1 and Tier 2 auto parts manufacturers over the past three decades.

This served not only to counter-balance the cycles of Cummins’ diesel engine market but also brought the community an abundance of good-paying jobs for a local workforce not particularly high-skilled. In the late 1990’s, concern that Cummins’ main engine plant could depart to elsewhere further sharpened the community’s commitment to economic development.<sup>3</sup> Columbus established its department of redevelopment and empaneled its redevelopment commission in the spring of 2003. The date closely coincides with issuance of building permits for two major expansions of manufacturing facilities at Woodside.

Also then under active review by the city was a commercial plat (Columbus Crossing) for 135-acres of farmland alongside SR 46 west of downtown, extending to the I-65 interchange.

These developments presented the prospect of a significant stream of new property tax revenue and both areas would soon be encompassed within a new declared TIF. Capture of this revenue by TIF was an attractive feature, revealed by the minutes of redevelopment commission meetings.

“When used inappropriately TIF is costly for overlapping units, taxpayers and potentially, for the TIF-enacting unit itself. TIF in Indiana is meant to fund infrastructure that promotes development. This has been made clear by recent legislation. TIF districts are meant to expire once the infrastructure bond is repaid. This causes an increase in taxable assessed value to overlapping units of government and lower property tax rates for taxpayers.” — *Larry DeBoer, Purdue University*

<sup>1</sup> M. Hicks, D. Faulk and S. Devaraj, *The Fiscal Impact of Tax Increment Financing in Indiana* (Ball State University Center for Business and Economic Research, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> P. Burnett, et al., *Analysis of Tax Increment Financing in Indiana* (University of Southern Indiana Center for Applied Research, 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Plant No. 1 moved to western New York State over Christmas shutdown in 2002.

The redevelopment commission was also focusing on utilizing TIF revenue to revitalize Columbus's downtown.<sup>4</sup> The redevelopment commission's financial advisor, Crowe-Chizek, noted "[there were] many opportunities, but preliminary focus is stimulating growth and development downtown." While Columbus' mayor said early that "it was more important to get the process right than to capture potential income at this point," the commission concluded by June 2004 they would be looking for potential revenue "to come early rather than later."

They acted decisively. Late in 2004, the commissioners declared a Central Economic Development Area (EDA) tax increment financing district (TIF), establishing 2004 assessments as its base AV, thereby enabling the redevelopment commission to claim all incremental property value and property taxes soon to flow from the manufacturing expansions nearing completion at Woodside and commercial development expected at Columbus Crossing. They drew TIF boundaries encompassing these parcels.

Any delay in declaring the TIF area would have set the *next* year's assessments (2005) as the TIF base. This would have lost much if not most of its immediate revenue-capture opportunity, because by 2005 the full, completed AV of NTN Driveshaft, Toyota Industrial Equipment Manufacture (T.I.E.M.) — and Menards would have slipped into base AV. Acting in 2004 avoided that, clearly indicating revenue capture as a central motive.

In early 2007, revenue capture as motive surfaced again when amendments to extend the boundaries of the Central EDA TIF were adopted by the redevelopment commission, adding 100 acres adjacent to the Woodside industrial park

and carving out four tax parcels encompassing Cummins Plant No. 1 to form a separate TIF allocation area. The Cummins TIF would additionally capture personal property taxes from \$140 million of machinery and equipment the company planned to spend on creating a light-duty diesel engine line.

Just as with its initial TIF, the redevelopment commission's 2007 action to amend TIF boundaries displayed 20/20 foresight: Facility expansion plans for both areas were already announced. The time simply was ripe for the redevelopment commission to once again deploy TIF's "net" and capture the new property taxes sure to follow. Revenue capture was top-of-mind.

### **TIF Revenue Is Only From New Investment?**

By all appearances, Columbus's Central EDA TIF exceeded expectations. According to a legislatively mandated report by Indiana's Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF), the TIFs in Bartholomew County (Columbus) displayed the most success in attracting new development of all Indiana counties: a whopping 513 percent growth in TIF assessed value in just five years, 2009-2014. (Figure 2). In sharp contrast, non-TIF property values had increased only 1.8 percent according to this DLGF report.

But upon closer examination, this signal of success proved deceptive. Its apparent success was instead the product of machinations of TIF math silently shifted existing AV from Base into Increment. The Woodside industrial park TIF was the poster child of this silent, behind-the-scenes math.

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<sup>4</sup> Columbus' downtown redevelopment plan envisioned a handful of strategic elements: creating more parking (via one or more parking garages); repurposing or replacing a 1970s-era enclosed shopping mall; constructing amateur sports facilities; and developing urban mixed-use residential close in to downtown. All but the sports facilities were realized. The 70s-era enclosed mall was replaced with two new multi-story office buildings providing modern workspace for many hundred Cummins professionals. Significant new street-level eateries to serve them were integrated into the buildings, the new parking garage and new nearby urban apartments built around yet another multi-level parking garage. Along with a new hotel in downtown's immediate vicinity, a thorough remake of Columbus' downtown was affected, bringing jobs, restaurants, coffee bars, retail services — and residents to Columbus' revived, "densified" downtown.



**FIGURE 2: Bartholomew County's apparent unparalleled success with TIF (source: 2014 DLGF Report on Redevelopment).**

County	Growth in Total Net Assessed Value, 2009 - 2014	Growth in Certified Net Assessed Value, 2009 - 2014	Growth in TIF Assessed Value, 2009 - 2014
STATEWIDE	2.06%	0.75%	22.44%
Adams	13.02%	12.56%	142.49%
Allen	-3.22%	-2.89%	-12.30%
Bartholomew	8.01%	1.79%	513.47%
Benton	56.17%	56.17%	166.55%
Blackford	9.01%	7.50%	316.85%
Boone	15.57%	12.30%	71.11%
Brown	1.27%	1.27%	0.00%
Carroll	16.12%	14.62%	66.75%
Cass	2.55%	0.93%	102.46%
Clark	-2.04%	-6.67%	31.31%
Clay	11.73%	11.99%	-8.33%
Clinton	12.95%	11.50%	N/A
Crawford	11.69%	11.73%	10.32%
Daviess	14.76%	11.79%	64.08%
Dearborn	-8.17%	-8.27%	-3.28%
Decatur	22.60%	12.65%	231.93%
DeKalb	1.10%	-1.49%	77.67%
Delaware	-0.36%	-2.18%	29.11%
Dubois	6.01%	5.96%	8.16%
Elkhart	-10.49%	-10.90%	-2.67%
Fayette	-4.01%	-4.01%	0.00%
Floyd	-1.44%	-2.04%	7.54%
Fountain	19.37%	19.10%	26.20%
Franklin	6.34%	6.20%	N/A
Fulton	10.21%	9.03%	N/A
Gibson	24.39%	17.68%	70.26%
Grant	1.43%	-1.90%	41.07%
Greene	22.42%	22.65%	16.23%
Hamilton	1.81%	1.05%	8.51%
Hancock	3.62%	1.38%	97.61%

At Woodside, two waves of Japanese investment in the 80's and 90's had already cemented its success. By the early 2000's, a third wave beckoned as announcements for the expansions of NTN and T.I.E.M. (approximately \$42 million total in construction permits) were greeted enthusiastically.

Alas, little additional new growth beyond those expansions was to follow (upper image, Figure 3). The absence of follow-on private investment seemed not to effect TIF performance, however; DLGF's figures showed it ballooning. Within 10 years, by 2014, over \$100 million in captured (incremental) taxable AV was reported at Woodside by 2014 — two and a half times the

value of building permits issued for NTN and T.I.E.M.'s major expansions.

But that TIF wasn't attracting additional new investment. Yet it was still capturing revenue hand-over-fist. What could explain that?

My previous IPR piece<sup>5</sup> traced what lay behind this puzzle.

A sample of 20 TIF parcels revealed that Woodside's taxable value (NAV) had risen only \$8.7 million since its formation, a fraction of the ~\$42 million stated construction cost for NTN and T.I.E.M.'s new facilities. Yet somehow the captured increment AV of those parcels had soared to \$83 million in that period, double NTN and T.I.E.M.'s declared construction costs. What could possibly explain this discrepant relationship?

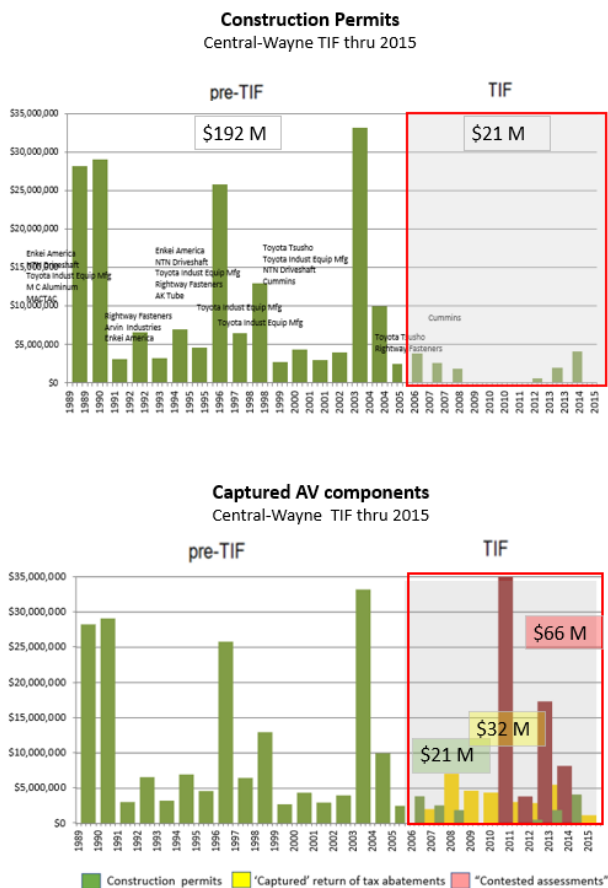
The answer was surprising. The rapid growth in captured AV traced to two factors: pre-TIF abatements rolling into taxable status (yellow columns in lower image, Figure 3) and "contested assessments" (red columns). Both were numbers entered by the county Auditor as adjustments in the TIF's annual neutralization filings. By TIF math, they combined to produce captured increment well in excess of NTN and T.I.E.M.'s investment. But they didn't represent genuine growth, the central promise and life-blood of TIF. The adjustments instead built large stores of excess increment AV, fattening redevelopment coffers with its associated tax revenue.

Indeed, contemplating the lower chart in Figure 3, these adjustments — particularly the contested assessments (red columns) — appear to have relocated, by a handful of years, the last peak of Woodside's economic development success. (Notice how remarkably similar the height of the last green column is to that of the first red column.) Shifting that economic success into the period following the TIF's formation would magically convert it into Incremental AV and divert its follow-on stream of tax revenue exclusively to the redevelopment commission. If this effect was intentional, behind-the-scenes manipulation of TIF is suggested. Indisputably, those contested assessments shifted a

<sup>5</sup> *Revisiting TIF (Indiana Policy Review, Winter 2016)*



**FIGURE 3: Woodside construction permits (Central-Wayne TIF through 2015) history (upper); captured Increment AV (lower).**



substantial amount of tax base away from the community's regular tax units.

### Base AV and Taxes Are Frozen?

Simultaneous with rapid growth in its captured AV, the base AV of Woodside's 20-parcel sample *declined* precipitously. Starting at \$118 million, it had shrunk by two-thirds, to only \$44 million. This

was the serious TIF base erosion my first IPR paper<sup>6</sup> had revealed. TIF base erosion seemed to march in step with adjustments entered onto annual TIF neutralization filings.

These neutralization adjustments caused precipitous decline in base AV. The adjustments also appeared to produce captured increment almost out of thin air, in amounts exceeding — by orders of magnitude — the value of new construction. This will be illustrated in following sections.

Erosion of base AV and taxes is contrary to TIF's principal assurances that TIF merely "freezes" base taxes and that TIF captures its revenues — incremental taxes — only from new development.

That was not the case here. Annual base adjustments of .72, .86, .67 and .94, compounded over four successive years, had whittled Woodside's base AV down to only 40 cents on its original dollar.<sup>7</sup>

Erosion of base AV was not unique to Columbus' TIFs. It was proliferating across the state. The graph of TIF neutralization factors in Indiana TIFs (Figure 4) resembles a cross-section of Niagara Falls. Two hundred TIF districts displayed adjustment factors indicating considerable base erosion. Most of them had been "zeroed out," converting all pre-TIF base to Increment, leaving nothing behind for local taxing units.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 4 presents TIF adjustment factors for Bartholomew County TIFs and those for three higher-profile, more populous Indiana counties. The other counties all display more extreme erosion in their TIFs than was found in Columbus. They also display significant levels of TIF-backed debt<sup>9</sup>: \$1 billion in Hamilton County (Carmel, Noblesville, etc.); \$750 million in Marion County (Indianapolis); and \$280 million in Lake County (Gary, Hammond, etc.).

<sup>6</sup> *Indiana's Wobbly TIF Law* (Indiana Policy Review, Summer 2013)

<sup>7</sup> The math:  $\$1.00 \times 0.72557 \times 0.8647 \times 0.67887 \times 0.94543 = \$0.40268$

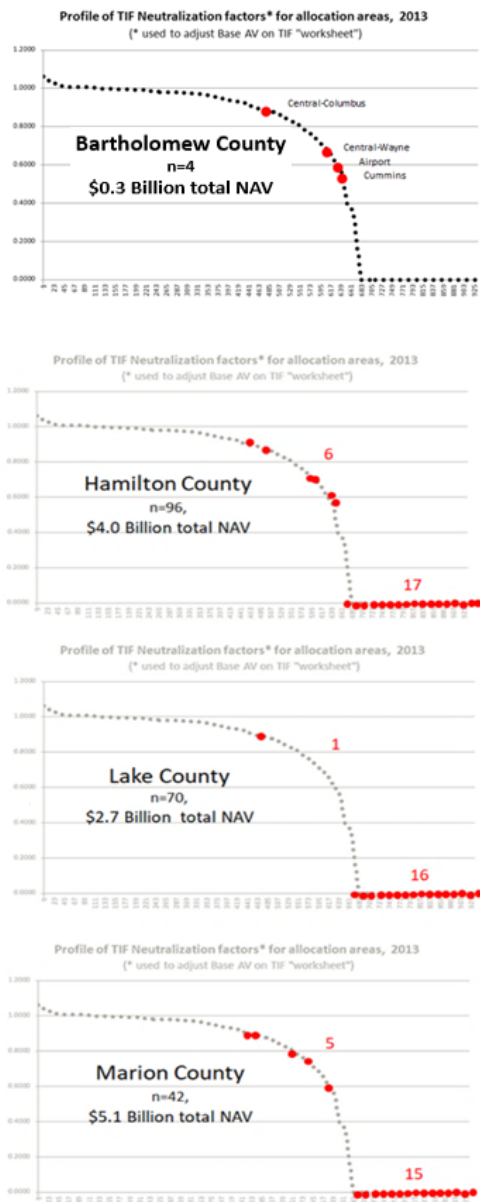
<sup>8</sup> A consequential feature of local taxation in Indiana — and its interplay with TIF — needs to be mentioned here. Under state law, local taxing units are permitted to collect a statutorily-allowed "maximum levy" each year which provides protection against revenue losses from year-to-year fluctuations in their AV tax base. When tax base declines, the maximum levy is achieved by (automatically) raising local tax levy rates. In Columbus, levy rates rose from 2.2% to 2.6% over four years of severe base erosion.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Local Government Finance, Report on Redevelopment (Sept 2014, Appendix K)

The erosion of base AV in Columbus' TIFs was most pronounced in the same period DLGF figures suggested great TIF success. Was there a connection between base erosion and the appearance of TIF success? Drilling down into the data would prove this true.

### Drilling Down: Base

**FIGURE 4: Base adjustment factors, 2013, TIFs in Bartholomew and three large Indiana counties overlaid on profile of factors in all**



### Erosion and its Factors

Erosion of TIF base AV is an abstract notion. It is difficult to communicate its real-world effect, namely diversion of out-sized amounts of tax revenue to redevelopment accounts — at the expense of local taxpayers. Focusing on the same 2009-14 time period DLGF's glowing report covered, a jaw-dropping effect becomes clear.

Over those years, the industrial properties in the Woodside TIF sample produced a cumulative increase of \$790,000 in taxes paid annually on real property in the TIF. (Figure 5, page 11, first column) But because the TIF's increment had been fattened by severely eroding its base, Columbus' redevelopment commission harvested almost four times that amount (Figure 5, third column).

The vast majority of that windfall came from the pockets of local taxing units. This result is directly counter to assurances of how TIF was supposed to work. Base taxes, supposed to be frozen, weren't. They were siphoned off and diverted to the redevelopment commission's bank account instead.

Since inception of TIF in Columbus, this diversion of tax revenue from badly eroded TIF base easily amounts to multiple tens of millions of dollars. This diversion will continue until the TIF expires fifteen years hence. This diversion is not a one-and-done event — it has recurred year after year. TIF is a one-way valve: once AV is captured, its associated tax revenue continues to flow into the redevelopment commission's bank account.

As the "Niagara Falls" graphic attests, base AV erosion has been common in TIFs across the state. Multiple hundreds of millions of local tax dollars likely have already been siphoned off from base taxes in communities across the state. All because the TIF mechanism enabled the erosion of base AV.

### Hidden Result of TIF Base Erosion: Increased Property Tax Rates

Property tax rates rose by 30 percent — from 2.0 percent to 2.6 percent — in Columbus the six years

following creation of its TIFs.<sup>10</sup>

These higher tax rates resulted from Indiana’s “maximum levy” law, which worked to make up for — in effect, to replenish — the diverted revenue. It automatically causes property taxes to float upward. Every \$1 of tax revenue lost through TIF base erosion is made up by higher local tax rates. While this “insulates” all the local taxing units — schools especially — from losing base AV, tax caps (“circuit breakers”) enacted by the state, owners of commercial and industrial property feel the full impact of the 30 percent higher tax rates caused by Columbus’s TIFs.

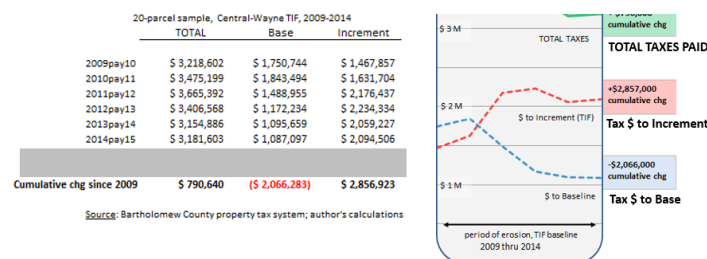
Tax cap/circuit breakers disguised the effect of TIF-related tax base erosion from the general public, especially residential property owners whose tax bills are capped. This helped cloak the effect of TIF and also provided a wide-open playing field — a green light if you will — for members of the local economic development community to accelerate use of TIF as a means to capture “free” revenue. That revenue is “free” when those who benefit from it — the redevelopment commissioners and local mayors — — don’t have to face popular upset from rapidly rising tax bills resulting from quick, deep erosion of pre-TIF base AV.

In Columbus, TIF base erosion probably is more accurately described as “excavation,” as Figure 6 depicts for the TIF created at Woodside industrial park.

### A More Realistic Illustration

The benign, theoretical assurances of TIF proved inaccurate in Columbus. A different illustration is called for, one that more accurately depicts the real

**FIGURE 5: History of taxes paid and assignment to Base and Increment, Woodside TIF.**



practice of TIF here. It would allow for the possibility — if not probability — of marked erosion in base AV, flushing it away from local taxing units and depositing it into the bank account of local redevelopment commissions.

Two differences stand out between the narrative and Fig 6’s real illustration of TIF: a) the prospect/reality of substantial base erosion; and b) the greater scale of AV at TIF start-up.

Erosion cannot occur without a supply of AV already present when TIF boundaries are drawn. In Woodside’s TIF, erosion was the principal reason DLGF data provided a false signal of success.

A large initial supply presents an opportunity to excavate base AV and thereby significantly benefit local redevelopment commissions. As the old adage goes: the secret to making a small fortune is to start with a large one.

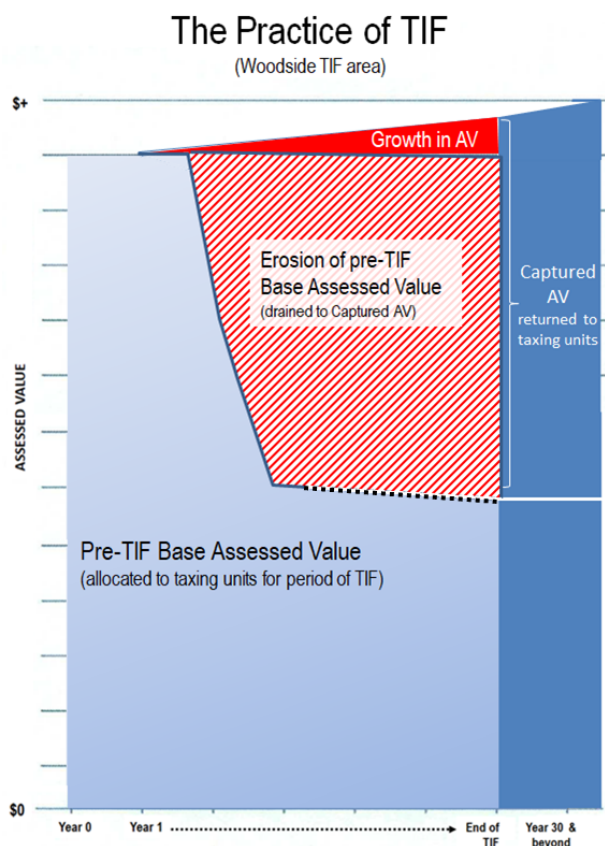
So, how did this erosion happen? Two “how factors” would emerge.

### “Contested assessments”: How factor #1

“Contested Assessments” (abbreviated here as CAs) were central to base erosion in Columbus. They were a clever device. A line-item adjustment entered onto 1040-like TIF neutralization filings, their effect was nearly undetectable, virtually untraceable and invisible to the naked eye. They also were very effective in accelerating TIF revenue capture.

The existence of contested assessments didn’t surface in IEDA’s analysis; they had eluded a diligent team of PhDs despite research guided by professionals highly conversant with the ins and outs of TIF and its underlying math. CAs were well-

<sup>10</sup> Figures cited are sum of levy rates for local units (county, city, school, library, township and SWMD); excludes local school general fund levy rate (replaced by state funding in '09), five local welfare and two state levies similarly removed from local property tax levy in '09.

**FIGURE 6: Excavate: How this TIF really worked.**

hidden. Finding tangible evidence of them proved vexing.

CAs worked through annual TIF neutralization worksheets that served as a fulcrum for TIF's math. Each year, the worksheet calculated a factor to adjust a TIF's base AV; that factor served to leverage increment AV out of base AV. In Woodside's case, over just four years, CAs had eroded the TIF's base AV to a mere 40 cents on the dollar, in the process capturing substantial excess revenue. Figure 7 is Woodside's 2010 worksheet; its \$36 million in CAs and resulting 0.72 base adjustment factor for that one year is noted. Worksheets for subsequent years served to compound this erosion.

CAs helped Columbus' TIFs emit a false signal of success. But they hadn't yet pinpointed them. What were they? Where were they? I had already compiled an assessment history for Woodside's TIF area so I examined it more closely.

Eyeballing parcel-by-parcel histories, however, failed to reveal the \$66 million total CAs filed on

Woodside's neutralization forms. I couldn't detect any hint that CAs were anything other than very large numbers entered on annual neutralization filings.

Were they simply phantom numbers? Where was tangible evidence connecting them to excess TIF revenue capture?

The Auditor's office wasn't any help. They didn't have any back-up for the \$66 million filed as "contested assessments" over that string of years (Figure 8). My public access request turned up nothing. I was on my own.

A couple of high-value parcels in Woodside — NTN and T.I.E.M. with facilities built in the 1990's — did show significant write-downs of their assessments (\$10 million for T.I.E.M. and \$5 million for NTN) but that fell far short of \$66 million that had so severely eroded Woodside TIF's base AV and boosted its captured AV. The \$66 million, equivalent to about three factories the size of NTN and T.I.E.M., was nowhere apparent.

### Evidence of CAs: Excess Captured Increment

I couldn't locate CAs searching parcel-by-parcel, but might they be discovered in the aggregate? Would my sample's aggregate change in taxable AV equal the captured (increment) AV carried in the county's TIF accounting?

Gathering the data and graphing it produced the answer. Since inception of the Woodside TIF, a \$67.7 million difference had built up between the sample's change in NAV and its captured Increment (sum, third column of Figure 9), an amount virtually identical to the CAs entered on Woodside's neutralization worksheet over a mere four successive years.

The county's TIF accounting showed older high-value properties — properties developed well before creation of the TIF — were carrying extremely large values for Increment (captured AV), well beyond any change in their NAV. TIF indeed had captured AV that didn't belong to it. Figure 10 graphically plots these values, revealing substantial deviation between parcel captured AV and change in NAV.



**FIGURE 7: TIF neutralization worksheet, Central-Wayne TIF, 2010.**

Department of Local Government Finance  
County Auditor's Certificate of Adjustment to the Base Assessed Valuation of TIF Districts

Identify the specific allocation area if more than one allocation area is located in the county.

TIF District: Central - Wayne Township  
County Name: Bartholomew County

Contact Information:  
Name: Chris West Financial Advisor: Cowen Henshaw LLP  
Address: 240 West Street, Suite 100 Address: 21 West Market Street  
City/State/Zip: Columbus, Indiana 47201 City/State/Zip: Ellettsburg, Indiana 46124-3375  
Phone: (817) 379-1510 Phone: (317) 282-2377

1. 2010p2011 Gross Real Estate Valuation\* of the allocation area: \$180,827,190  
2. 2009p2010 Gross Real Estate Valuation\* of the allocation area: \$177,796,800  
3. Divide line 1 by line 2 and carry to 5 decimal places: 1.01987  
4. 2010p2011 Gross Real Estate Valuation\* of the county: \$4,884,803,485  
5. 2009p2010 Gross Real Estate Valuation\* of the county: \$4,290,204,499  
6. Divide line 4 by line 5 and carry to 5 decimal places: 1.13972

\*Any contested amount of assessed value subject to appeal should not be included in the gross assessed value of real estate.

\*Amounts do not include non-taxable and government exempt property.

7. 2010p2011 neutralized net base assessed valuation of the allocation area: \$128,484,660  
8. Lesser of line 3 or line 6: 1.01987  
9. Line 8 multiplied by line 7 = tentative new 2010p2011 neutralized base assessed value: 128,484,660

Determination of Adequate Potential Captured Assessment  
(This calculation will be specific to each allocation area within the county.)

1a. Amount of potential captured assessment in 2009p2010:  
Amount of net assessed value 2009p2010 minus 2009p2010 neutralized base NAV: \$32,123,734  
2a. Abatement reductions, if any, in pre-measurement values, scheduled to roll off in 2011: \$4,307,040  
3a. Real Growth, estimated in net assessed value first assessed for 2010p2011: \$6,707  
4a. Total of line 1a plus line 2a = Adjusted incremental NAV: \$36,430,774  
5a. 2009p2010 net tax rate of the TIF district: \$2.3006  
6a. Estimated 2010p2011 tax rate: \$2.3006  
7a. Tax revenue without measurement line 4a divided by line 5a: \$800,585  
8a. Tax revenue on real growth line 3a divided by line 5a: \$277  
9a. Total estimated tax revenue without measurement line 4a plus line 8a: \$800,132  
10a. Amount of estimated captured assessment in 2010p2011. Line 9a divided by line 5a times 100: \$36,430,640  
11a. 2010p2011 total net real estate assessed value of the TIF area (no deduction for base assessed value): \$164,720,780  
12a. Line 10a minus line 11a = 2010p2011 net assessed value of the TIF area (do not include assessed assessed value on real growth shown on line 3a): \$36,430,640 **\$36 M**  
13a. Line 10a minus line 11a = tentative new base net assessed value: \$36,430,640  
14a. Lesser of line 9 or 12a = 2010p2011 base assessed value, but not less than \$0: \$36,430,640  
15a. Line 14a divided by line 7 = final neutralization factor (factor multiplied by old parcel base = new base assessed value): 0.72022 **0.72**

The amount of potential captured assessment valuation of the specific TIF district will depend on whether Line 9 or Line 12a is used in determining Line 13a. (A) If line 9 is used, the potential captured assessment is line 10a minus line 13a. (B) If line 12a is used, the potential captured assessment is the amount on Line 11a. (C) If line 13a is a negative number, it must be adjusted to zero in order to continue the calculation.

What is the potential captured assessment?  
(A) Line 9 is used for the base assessed valuation for March 1, 2010: Line 10a - Line 9  
(B) Line 12a is used for the base assessed valuation for March 1, 2010: \$ - 36,430,640

\*The amount indicated in either (A) or (B) is the amount shown as a minus amount in the certification of assessed valuation in those taxing districts containing the specific TIF district.

15. What is the potential tax increment revenue for 2011? \$880,132

I, Barbara J. Hackman, Auditor of Bartholomew County, certify to the best of my knowledge that the above base assessed valuation calculation is true and complete for the tax increment finance allocation area.

Dated this 26th day of October, 2010.  
Barbara J. Hackman County Auditor (Signature) Barbara J. Hackman County Auditor (printed name)

(Please submit the completed form to: Budget Director, Department of Local Government Finance, for action)

SEND COPY TO GOVERNING BODY OF DISTRICT

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE  
CERTIFICATION OF TIF INFORMATION

District Name: Central-Wayne Twp.  
The base assessed valuation adjustment, as certified, has been approved by the Department of Local Government Finance this 26th day of October, 2010.  
Paul E. Boley Commissioner, Department of Local Government Finance

This was the 'Eureka' moment. It evidenced that CAs had played havoc with TIF and confirmed my suspicion that merely entering them in TIF neutralization filings worked to flow an equal

amount of base AV into TIF captured Increment. They had been draining base AV — and fattening redevelopment accounts — all these years.

Like a cancer spreading to lymph nodes, Woodside's \$66 million of CAs had lodged in every Woodside TIF parcel to one degree or another. Their effect was most pronounced for larger-valued parcels and most exaggerated for parcels whose assessments had been written-down.

The role of CAs in eroding base AV — and boosting captured AV and taxes — was indisputable. But exactly where they came from (that is, how they had been entered into the TIF neutralization filings) remained a mystery. As reported above, the county Auditor's office was unable to substantiate any of them. And their new system hadn't retained the underlying relevant data.

CAs were basically invisible; a special test was necessary to tease them out. Even then, only their shadow could be observed. But the shadow evidenced their existence — at least in TIF's math if nowhere else. They produced vastly more revenue capture than TIF's core premise would ever have allowed.

### Abatements Turned Into Write-Downs: How Factor #2

My examination didn't end there. The sample of Woodside TIF parcels yielded yet another feature invisible to the naked eye. A simple test illuminated it. I layered non-taxed (invisible) AV atop taxed (visible) AV, distinguishing between abated AV and reduced (written-off) AV.

This test revealed that as AV previously sheltered from taxation by abatement was 'rolling off' as scheduled into taxable status, a nearly equivalent amount of AV was simultaneously reduced (written-down). One form of non-taxed AV had been converted into

**FIGURE 8: Contested assessments, Columbus TIFs.**

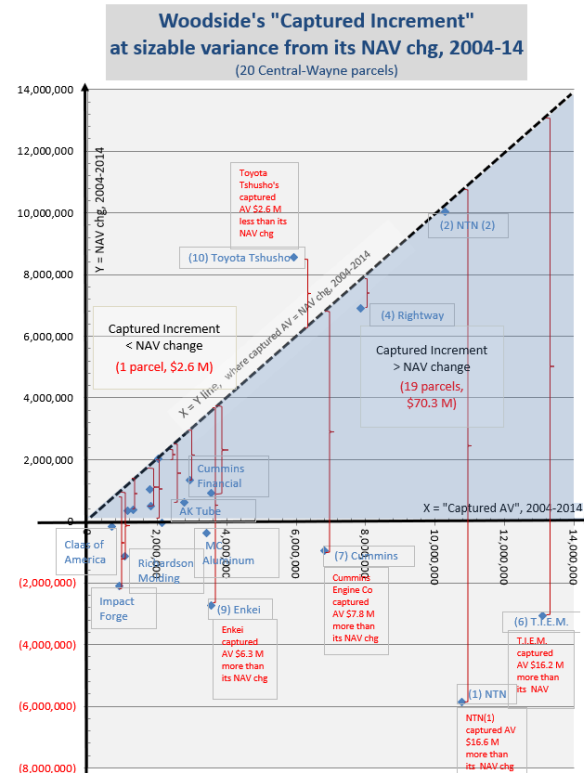
"Contested Assessments" for two allocation areas		
	Central -Columbus	Central -Wayne
2010p11	\$ 16 M	\$ 36 M
2011p12	4	4
2012p13	14	17
2013p14	19	8
	\$ 53 M	\$ 66 M

**FIGURE 9: Captured Increment and real NAV change, Woodside TIF parcels.**

	X	Y	Var
	2014 Capture	NAV chg,**	X - Y
	Increment*	2004-14	(excess capture)
1 NTN DRIVESHAFT INC	10,775,717	-5,857,620	16,633,337
2 NTN DRIVESHAFT INC	10,299,876	10,032,070	267,806
3 CUMMINS INC	1,136,317	346,930	789,387
4 RIGHTWAY FASTENERS	7,847,624	6,919,840	927,784
5 RIGHTWAY FASTENERS	2,028,295	2,023,400	4,895
6 TOYOTA INDUSTRIAL E	13,105,196	-3,064,888	16,170,084
7 CUMMINS ENGINE CO I	6,818,518	-962,100	7,780,618
8 MORGAN ADHESIVES C	3,409,573	-396,002	3,805,575
9 ENKEI AMERICA INC	3,548,533	-2,738,900	6,287,433
10 TOYOTA TSUSHO AMER	5,918,802	8,556,400	-2,637,598
11 ARVIN INDUSTRIESATTI	3,559,399	909,740	2,649,659
12 AK TUBE LLC	2,765,925	616,070	2,149,855
13 M C ALUMINUM AMERI	2,143,400	-52,580	2,195,980
14 TOYOTA INDUSTRIAL E	1,807,437	487,900	1,319,537
15 IMPACT FORGE GROUP	898,548	-2,086,240	2,984,788
16 CLAAS OF AMERICA	693,403	-162,300	855,703
17 KAMIC	1,782,898	1,019,520	763,378
18 RICHARDSON MOLDING	1,066,760	-1,133,520	2,200,280
19 CUMMINS FINANCIAL I	2,948,998	1,320,400	1,628,598
20 HOME NEWS ENTERPRI	1,312,560	356,918	955,642
	83,867,779	16,135,038	67,732,741

\* per PVD TIF Assignment page  
\*\* computed from PVD Parcel Information page

NTN and T.I.E.M. (yellow) each display captured increment \$16 million in excess of their post-2004 NAV change. Another \$30 M in excess captured increment attaches to Enkei, Morgan Adhesives, Richardson Molding, Cummins Engine, MC Aluminum, Impact Forge, AK Tube and Arvin

**FIGURE 10: Plot of Captured Increment vs. real NAV change, Woodside TIF parcels.**

Significant variation is evident between captured increment and NAV change in the 20-parcel sample. A dot lying off the 45-degree diagonal reveals the extent captured AV deviates from NAV change for each sample property. The largest deviations are for manufacturing properties that received sizeable write-downs in

another form. Abated AV never made it into taxable status; it was written off. (Figure 11)

In practical terms, *time-limited* tax incentives granted to attract industry were transformed into *permanent* reductions in tax assessments. Functioning with CAs as a ‘one-two punch’, this transformation hastened base erosion, exaggerated TIF AV capture and accelerated excess revenue capture.

At every turn, the redevelopment commission’s bank account seemed to gain ever more money. All while NAV and gross AV was suppressed.

Transforming Woodside’s abatements into assessment reductions explains Woodside’s paltry \$8.7 million rise in gross AV noted earlier. But how did the TIF simultaneously capture 10 times that amount as Increment AV?

I had heard TIF likened to “tax abatements on steroids.” Plotting the invisible on top of the visible brought home that remark’s significance.

Abatements, it seemed, had become only a first step in the economic development game. Subsequently following them up with assessment write-downs would extend the abatements

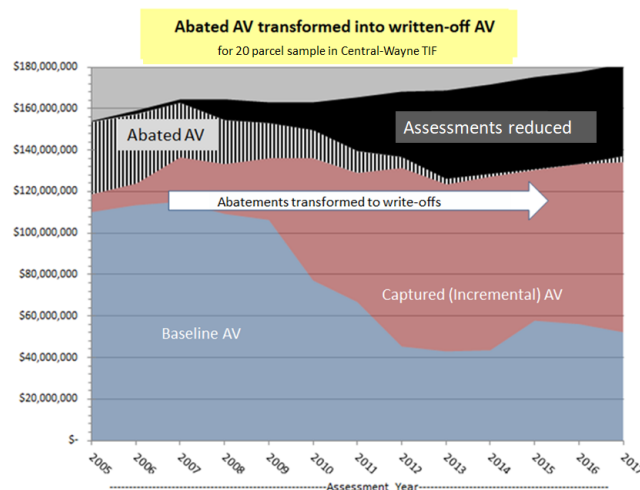


forever. And, by TIF math, they further inflated excess captured AV. The parcels receiving assessment reductions displayed the largest deviation between NAV change and captured increment.

Because the transformation of abatements to assessment reductions occurs in untaxed territory — the “invisible spectrum” — it is not a mechanism of TIF per se. TIF works only with taxable AV.

Nonetheless, the effect was the same as TIF: denying tax dollars to local governments that had granted time-limited abatements with the patient expectation at some point in the future they would begin receiving those taxes. Assessment write-downs dashed that expectation. Transforming abatements into permanent assessment reductions can be viewed as just another expression of unbounded forces that have championed economic development all across Indiana.

**FIGURE 11: Abatements transformed to reduced assessments, Woodside TIF.**



<sup>11</sup> The summary data presented here covers the full life of the TIF through 2017. The \$58 million decline in base AV differs from the \$66 million of base erosion earlier traced to “contested assessments” over four years. The difference owes to a >1 base adjustment factor applied in 2015 after 109 parcels, not previously tagged as TIF in the county’s system, were included in the TIF.

Permanently-abated taxes never reach the table for any public purpose. Once-promised future revenue is pocketed and removed from play before the next hand is dealt. It just leaves a loss to be dealt with by local taxing units — and by not-so-favored taxpayers asked to make up for the loss, on whom higher levy rates will inevitably fall.

#### **Bottom-Line: Woodside’s TIF Revenue Mostly Taken From the Pocket of Others**

A tally of the Woodside TIF area’s performance since its formation is presented in Figure 12.

Eighty percent of its captured AV came from eroding its base AV: \$58 million of \$73 million<sup>11</sup>. In just four years, severe erosion had swapped that AV from base into Increment.

At the current 2.6 percent property levy rate, \$58 million in excess captured AV translates into \$1.5 million a year in excess tax revenue capture. Multiply that by the decade and a half left in the TIF and you’ll get an idea of the scale of reward produced by the undetectable, untraceable and invisible forces underlying erosion of base AV.

An added \$1+ million per year of excess tax revenue is likely also being captured in the TIF’s other lobe encompassing downtown and the commercial strip out to Interstate 65. This suggests that for the two lobes, over \$2.5 million in excess tax revenue is being harvested annually by the Central EDA TIF in Columbus. Upwards of \$40 million in excess tax revenue could yet be captured before the TIF times out.

The redevelopment commission appears blissfully unaware of this bonanza. Unaware also are the local taxing units, the local newspaper and thus the general public. Add to that list most of the legislature, too. As early as 2013, DLGF

determined<sup>12</sup> that significant base erosion was “inherent in the (...) TIF neutralization worksheet”<sup>13</sup>. With key legislators and a handful of TIF specialists, a statutory amendment was crafted to prevent flushing away of even more base AV.

But the legislature did not provide a remedy for what already had occurred<sup>14</sup> and, given TIF’s function as a one-way valve, will continue to persist. There will be no restoration of past and future unearned gains. A conservative estimate is that, by the time current TIFs expire, as much as two billion dollars of excess tax revenue will have been captured statewide by past base erosion.

Was IEDC, Indiana’s economic development agency, unaware of the glitch that had produced excess revenue capture principally by eroding TIF base AV? Or was it an exploit, not a glitch? It’s not hard to imagine some highly-motivated individual sitting down and devising methods by which TIF base AV could be milked, under the radar, for the

benefit of local redevelopment commissions. Like base erosion did in Columbus, it could produce a bounteous source of “free” money.

Given the possibility of out-sized rewards to redevelopment commissions, an observer might ask whether these undetectable, untraceable, invisible features were accidental – or engineered to achieve a specific purpose. They certainly had an effect, one consistently favoring one purpose above all others.

## Concluding Remarks

How did undermining local government’s tax base come to be viewed as an essential tool in local government’s economic development toolkit? In essence, that’s what happened in the case we examined.

Redevelopment commissions appear happy to count their riches and pursue their plans while local taxing units are blind to this, as are the local media and thus the general public.

The takeaway from this examination boils down to:

- TIF is all about revenue capture
- TIF eroded local taxing units’ tax base
- TIF captured revenue from pre-TIF development
- TIF hasn’t restored eroded tax base to local taxing units

And almost nobody knew this was happening.

Once upon a time, far away in another state, one co-chair of a governor-appointed blue-ribbon commission candidly remarked to the other: “I’ve looked into TIF and concluded we don’t need it.” ♦

## Summary statistics, 2005-17

20-parcel sample of Central-Wayne TIF area

### \$15 m increase in Net (taxable) AV (+11%)

- +\$ 35 m abatements rolled-off into taxable status
- \$ 3 m new abatements granted
- \$ 44 m assessment adjustments (write-downs) granted
- +\$ 27 m assessment increases (Rightway, Toyota Tsusho, Claas, Kamic, Cummins Fin'l)

### how was that +\$15 m NAV change allocated?

-\$58 m decrease in TIF Base AV

+\$73 m increase in TIF “captured AV” (Increment)

<sup>12</sup> “Using the (...) neutralization worksheet, it was very possible for a TIF district’s base assessed value to significantly decrease over time, even to the point of removing all base assessed value.” (Report on Redevelopment, Department of Local Government Finance, Sept 30, 2014, p 38)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p 12

<sup>14</sup> “The Department notes that the change in the TIF neutralization worksheet in 2013 did not provide for any correction for prior decreases in base assessed value.” (*Ibid*, p 39)

## Epilogue

*This examination would not be complete without mention of items encountered in the course of the work, items that can further illuminate the full mosaic that is TIF. They fall into two categories: debt management and administrative anomalies.*

*Debt Management* — The Columbus Redevelopment Commission failed to avail itself of the opportunity to redeem its 2007 bond issue, at no penalty, at its 10-year mark. Redeeming the bonds would have produced \$2.3 million savings in scheduled debt service. One month into a new mayoral administration, however, bond counsel Barnes & Thornburg presented a plan to simply refinance that debt, taking advantage of now lower interest rates. The local media dutifully echoed the touted \$684,000 savings promised by the bond counsel, overlooking that refinancing the \$7 million in outstanding debt required borrowing \$9 million. Also overlooked was the commission had sufficient uncommitted cash on hand to redeem the bonds and reap \$2.3 million in savings. There's no record that redemption was presented as an option to the redevelopment commission. This was costly and inattentive debt management.

Of course, the bond underwriter, bond counsel and the commission's financial advisor were sure to harvest \$182,000 in fees for professional services in issuing the new bonds. They'd have received no fees in a redemption. They knew what side their bread was buttered on.

*Administrative Anomalies, 109 Newly-Discovered TIF Parcels* — When I noticed a new, long-term stay hotel wasn't showing up in the TIF accounting, I asked the redevelopment commission why it wasn't.

Eventually, my interest prompted the county Auditor to review whether all parcels in the declared TIF boundaries were fully identified and properly accounted for. They weren't. The review determined 109 parcels within the TIF were missing. Jarringly, among the missing parcels was one containing the pair of new downtown Cummins office buildings standing as evidence of the transformation of Columbus' downtown. All these "newfound" parcels summed to over \$100 million in assessed value. \$70 million of that were two new hotels west of downtown and three warehouses (logistics centers) at Woodside.

*Three-Minute Assessment Write-Down* — When I was probing the TIF carved out for Cummins, I came across a neutralization filing indicating the assessment of its long-standing Plant No 1 had suddenly been reduced by \$10 million. I checked the assessment records in the Auditor's property tax system but found no corresponding change in its AV. When I journeyed upstream from there (i.e. to the Assessor's office), I stumbled onto a reduction of its assessed value in that amount. It existed for only the briefest of moments — three minutes — before being returned to its prior value.

The lower assessment's short lifespan, nonetheless, was long enough for it to be used in the TIF's 2011 neutralization filing — and 'capture' for the TIF \$13 million (approximately 50 percent) of the facility's pre-TIF AV. Ever since, that three-minute write-down has produced \$340,000 annually of captured tax revenue for the Cummins TIF, helping pay down debt created to finance equipping the facility.

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## LEXICON

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### ‘Building Blocks’ of Property Taxation

**Taxing Units** – The county; its municipalities (towns, cities); local school corporation; public library; townships; others (e.g. solid waste management district)

**Assessment(s)** – The basis of all annual property tax billings and historically the foundation of local government revenue/budgets. For every taxing unit, the total value of taxable property, when multiplied by these units’ levy rates, produces the dominant share of money to finance local government budgets.

**Tax Base** – The property tax base; the sum of all taxable property value. Termed “certified net assessed value (NAV).” From year to year, a taxing unit’s tax base is subject to variation. The tax base is subject to change from general economic and market conditions as well as by property-specific decisions such as the granting of abatements, the formation of TIF districts and administrative adjustments through assessment appeals.

**Abatement** – The reduced assessment of a property’s taxable AV granted by local fiscal body. Abatements are time-limited and typically granted to attract investment to a community. Abatements are distinct from write-downs or adjustments to assessments resulting from a property owner’s appeal to the assessor and/or the local Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals (PTABOA) or state court.

**Maximum Levy** – The state statute enabling every local taxing unit, each year, to grow their property tax collection (levy) by up to the six-year average percentage change in state personal income. Should a loss or reduction of property tax base occur, the unit’s tax levy (budgetary resources, revenue) will not automatically decline, recognizing the unit’s continued public function and responsibilities. Instead, the unit’s tax rate may be adjusted upward, subject only to the maximum levy ‘cap’ established by the six-year

**FIGURE 13: Local news coverage, 2002-12.**



From left, Brook Tuttle, president of Columbus Economic Development Board; Columbus Mayor Fred Armstrong; NTN President and Chief Executive Officer Richard Spaniol; Rich Spaniol, president of Columbus area Chamber of Commerce; and Shiro Toyomatsu, president of Toyomatsu Corp. USA, participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for NTN Drivshaft on Monday.

**NTN begins expansion**

**Menards set for opening**

**Forklift manufacturer begins \$9.8M expansion**

**City to return property taxes to Cummins after 20 years**

**TIFs collect millions for reinvestment**



**City investments produce rich returns**

**2011 ISSUES**

**BUILDING BLOCKS**

Downtown Development			
Project	Value	Year	Notes
Project A	\$10,000,000	2010	Completed
Project B	\$5,000,000	2011	In Progress
Project C	\$3,000,000	2012	Planned
Project D	\$2,000,000	2013	Planned
Project E	\$1,000,000	2014	Planned
Project F	\$500,000	2015	Planned
Project G	\$250,000	2016	Planned
Project H	\$125,000	2017	Planned
Project I	\$62,500	2018	Planned
Project J	\$31,250	2019	Planned
Project K	\$15,625	2020	Planned
Project L	\$7,812	2021	Planned
Project M	\$3,906	2022	Planned
Project N	\$1,953	2023	Planned
Project O	\$976	2024	Planned
Project P	\$488	2025	Planned
Project Q	\$244	2026	Planned
Project R	\$122	2027	Planned
Project S	\$61	2028	Planned
Project T	\$30	2029	Planned
Project U	\$15	2030	Planned

Conservative approach paying off

average percentage change in state personal income.

**Assessed Value (AV)** – A proxy for tax base; a metric considered an objective of government, reflecting the health and wealth of a community and signifying greater capacity for public services, municipal budgets, etc. Unlike net assessed valuation (NAV), gross AV is unadjusted for deductions, abatements and TIF districts.

**Net Assessed Value (NAV)** – The taxed value of property in a taxing unit, after adjustments for abatements, deductions, tax caps and property value ‘captured’ by TIF. Once each taxing unit’s aggregate NAV is certified by the state, its NAV becomes the basis on which each unit’s local levy rates are determined for the upcoming year.

### Features Added by Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

**Allocation Area** – A geographic area declared to be a TIF “district” in which all subsequent increase (Increment) in taxable assessed value (NAV) is “captured” for a specified period (typically 25 years), and annual tax revenue from captured NAV is allocated exclusively to local redevelopment body to be utilized to finance public investments believed beneficial for and necessary to spur follow-on private development, thereby increasing a community’s tax base. (*Nota bene: Tax bills on properties situated within allocation area do not display this allocation.*)

**Economic Development Area (EDA)** – A specified geographic area, declared and delineated by action of local government, within which properties proposed for development may be granted multi-year tax abatements on real and/or personal property for a specified period of years (generally ten years for real property; six years for personal property). EDAs are typically established in advance of — and separately from — TIF districts. EDAs define the territory within which municipal governments may directly grant abatements to proposed developments. TIFs have

no power to grant abatements and are governed by an appointed redevelopment commission.

**Economic Development** – The sweeping, all-purpose qualification for 1) municipalities to form EDAs and grant abatements and 2) local redevelopment commissions to expend or obligate (e.g. via bonds) the “captured” (incremental) tax revenue of a TIF.

**Increment AV and Base AV** – The two pieces (components) of a TIF district’s total taxable property valuation. Increment AV is that related to new development spurred by public improvement(s) undertaken when the TIF is initiated; it is commonly termed “captured Increment” since it is kept for exclusive use by the local redevelopment commission. Base AV (or “baseline”) is the tax base located within the boundaries of the declared TIF prior to its formation; that tax base remains shared among all established tax units unlike the Increment AV. Base AV is widely considered to be frozen for the duration of the TIF (upwards of 25 years) but can be significantly eroded — even excavated — by means not readily apparent, as revealed in this examination.

**Excess TIF Revenue** – Accumulated tax revenue, allocated to local redevelopment commission from taxes collected on properties within TIF boundary, in excess of the actual increase in Net AV on those properties since formation of TIF. A result of erroneously completed annual TIF neutralization filings, specifically the improper entry of contested assessments (CAs) for four successive years before the General Assembly amended neutralization language, preventing continued practice. Excess TIF revenue collection is indicated by seriously eroded year-to-year (or “zeroed out”) TIF base neutralization factors. Such factors transferred base AV directly into Increment AV, leading to the diversion of excess tax revenues (referred to as unearned revenue) from established local taxing units and into redevelopment (TIF) accounts instead.

**Contested Assessment (CA)** – An entry on the state’s required annual TIF neutralization



form, the math of which served to directly transfer, dollar-for-dollar, the full amount (typically tens of millions of dollars of AV for manufacturing facilities) of assessments contested by property owners out of Base AV and into Increment AV. Over four years, \$119 million of contested assessments were entered onto TIF neutralization forms for two Columbus TIFs. Despite a statutory amendment in 2013 that prevented further excavation of existing tax base by TIF, these contested assessments continue to produce substantial unearned annual tax revenue for the local redevelopment commission.

**Neutralization** – The annual, mathematical adjustment of each TIF’s base AV via a form (a worksheet) established jointly by the State Board

of Accounts (SBOA) and the Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF). The worksheet computes an adjustment factor (a multiplier) applied to previous year’s base AV for purpose of distinguishing genuine new growth from the effect of annual reassessment. Contested assessments (explained above) were found to explain unusually low annual adjustment factors (i.e. between 0 and 0.7) which served to transfer large sums of taxable property over four years out of the tax base of local units and into the TIF’s claimed Increment. Example: the TIF Base AV of properties within Woodside Industrial Park alone was reduced by sixty percent — \$66 million — via four successive annual TIF neutralization factors. ( $0.72 \times 0.86 \times 0.67 \times 0.94$ )



# 'Affordable' Housing Won't Come From Washington, D.C.

Jason Arp, for nine years a trader in mortgaged-backed securities for Bank of America, was reelected last year to his second term representing the 4th District on the Fort Wayne City Council. He is the designer of the legislative scoring system, IndianaScorecard.org, and an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation. A version of this essay first appeared in the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette.



In the 26th chapter of Ludwig von Mises's magnum opus, "Human Action," one finds a discussion of a builder vexed by the absence of prices and therefore unable to objectively determine the optimal mix of methods and materials to construct a house. Mises writes: "The paradox of 'planning' is that it cannot plan because of the absence of economic calculation. What is called a planned economy is no economy at all. It is just a system of groping about in the dark."

Today we find ourselves lurching toward that world where the government sector operates without regard to price, scarcity or calculation simply because it has been given the power.

A case in point: The Fort Wayne City Council is considering participating in the financing of a low-income housing project at the site where a previously approved housing project failed. The new project's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) was approved 3-2 by the Redevelopment Commission at its last meeting. This \$3.3-million TIF bond is part of a capital stack of \$42.8 million that includes \$19 million in Tax Credit Equity, a \$0.5 Million Federal HOME loan, a \$5 million READI grant and a bond of \$19 million dollars to go with the developer's equity, which is made up of a \$1.95 million deferral of half of the \$3.9-million development fee.

This menagerie of financing tools buys the developer \$3.8 million of site work, \$0.8 million of architectural and engineering work, \$28 million of construction costs, \$5.25 million of "soft costs," nearly a million dollars in appliances and finally the \$3.9-million fee, half of which was pledged as "equity."

When the dust settles there should be a set of apartment buildings with roughly 215 low-income units available for rent. If one were interested (which apparently no one is) the cost is roughly \$200,000 per unit — a princely sum for a 1,000-square-foot apartment unit in Fort Wayne.

Unlike the builder in Mises's analogy, we still have some comparative prices with which to perform basic calculation. Consider the newly constructed "Ventry" in the southern portion of incorporated Aboite Township. This complex is roughly the same size (180 units) and type of units. The apartments are between 1,000 to 1,250 square feet each renting for over \$1,000 a month, many of which include a private garage. The complex includes a community swimming pool and club house. According to data from the county assessor's office and information from the auditor's office, the Ventry appraises at about \$17 million and cost about \$16 million to build. That is less than \$90,000 per unit.

Bluffton Park, an 87-unit apartment complex in south Fort Wayne, recently sold to a New Jersey investor for \$8.5 million. That comes to \$97,700 per unit. Both of those projects sell their units for a far sight less than the project that council is considering.

So it begs the question of why piles of federal, state and local money are pouring into a low-income housing project where the price per unit is more than twice market-rate comparables. Part of the answer is that the people making the decisions never looked at actual comparable property prices. They didn't care; they're not making market-based economic calculations.

You also need to understand that the decision-making is not being made in Fort Wayne. This all began in Washington D.C. These types of housing projects are the result of the 1986 Tax Reform Act

and the creation of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. This program spans multiple federal agencies, state and local government departments as well as non-governmental not-for-profits.

The U.S. Treasury Department and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development each have a hand in administering the program. The Internal Revenue Service is tasked with carrying out Internal Revenue Code Section 42 while the Treasury's Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) is involved regulating the investment in the tax credits by financial institutions. Banks are strongly encouraged to participate in the LIHTC by the relaxation of capital ratios, depending upon the level of investment of CRA (Community Reinvestment Act) eligible assets. Larger banks have entire divisions devoted to community-development banking where LIHTC plays a big role. CRA, of course has its own regulators, the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the previously mentioned OCC.

The Treasury uses a formula to distribute the credits to states each year. The state then has its own process for meting out the credits to developers, who sell them to the banks or other financial institutions that might have a need for tax credits. In Indiana, the state's LIHTC program is handled by Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority or IHCDA. Indiana's program is called Rental Housing Tax Credit (RHTC), because it never hurts to throw in another acronym.

And yes, all this complexity comes at a cost. There are a number of law firms and financial advisory firms that specialize in helping developers, investors and municipalities navigate a complex regulatory environment. The second largest item on the expense ledger (a full 12 percent of the total) are those "soft costs."

This is the amount said to be needed to "land" the project and pay for the insurance, compliance, regulatory and application fees. This is where the courtiers and bureaucrats take their cut. Nearly a million of this goes to IHCDA, Civil Rights Enforcement Agency (CREA), and green building

compliance. Another \$3 million goes to bank fees and interim financing and the last million of the \$5 million goes to other legal fees and project administrative costs.

This still doesn't explain why the actual construction prices (even excluding the developer fee and soft costs) are nearly 80 percent higher per unit than those incurred in a nearly identical project completed a year ago. The developer predictably blamed inflation, which may be responsible for 20 to 40 percent of the increase according to the Census Bureau's Construction Price Index and depending on when purchasing arrangements were made. That still leaves, after excluding the impacts of inflation and the exorbitant soft costs, a 40 percent price differential.

This is where local participation matters. With this being a Redevelopment Commission project (TIF), the city Community Development apparatus is involved in selecting vendors. This process can be rather opaque when not subject to competitive bidding but there is no incentive to hold costs down. Favored vendors end up winning big contracts. Often, members of the city's Economic Development Corporation have connections with the firms that win these types of contracts.

Ultimately, we end up with less housing than there would have been without all the red tape. The market will meet demand where it is and do so in a sustainable fashion, where the products are constructed using materials and methods that fit the budgets of the consumers without imposing undue costs on society. But since the CRA was launched in 1977 we've seen a continuous uptick in the need for subsidized "affordable" housing, which never seems to meet the demand.

Conversely, we see multiple examples here in Fort Wayne where attempts to construct anything privately is held up by a variety of barriers erected by local, state and federal government.

Building codes in Indiana vary by county, and some counties more or less exclude outside contractors, though they may be licensed in neighboring counties or even do projects in the

largest counties. The building commission board consists of the same entities that play such a dominant role in the economic development corporation board.

Rent subsidized by the federal government has diminished over the years because of the difficulty of complying with the inspections and audits by the local Housing Authority or with the parameters of the particular programs that impose rent regulations. At the same time, landlords are left to apply for rate increases and can only hope they get them. Their own costs increase, in the mean time, and their incentive to stay in the market decreases.

Rather than asking for more help from Washington, Fort Wayne would be wise to minimize government interference in housing markets, allowing charitable institutions to fill gaps and provide assistance for those who are truly unable to make market rents. Von Mises and history tell us that supply and demand at all price points will meet in equilibrium. ♦

## Resources

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/lihtc.html>

[https://www.census.gov/construction/nrs/pdf/price\\_uc.pdf](https://www.census.gov/construction/nrs/pdf/price_uc.pdf)

<https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/what-low-income-housing-tax-credit-and-how-does-it-work>

<https://www.in.gov/ihcda/developers/red-compliance/>

<https://www.nhlp.org/resources/how-the-lihtc-program-works/>

<https://westmontadvisors.com/tax-credit-advisory/how-to-calculate-the-low-income-housing-tax-credit-lihtc/>

[https://www.federalreserve.gov/consumerscommunities/cra\\_about.htm](https://www.federalreserve.gov/consumerscommunities/cra_about.htm)

# Schansberg

Eric Schansberg, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the foundation, is professor of economics at Indiana University Southeast. This is an expansion of an essay distributed earlier by the foundation.



## Be Careful Assessing the Abortion Law

**B**all State economist Michael Hicks recently wrote an op-ed expressing concern about the economic impact of Indiana's new restrictions on abortion — particularly on colleges and businesses. He predicts “far fewer” students from a “substantial decline” in out-of-state students and a reduction of in-state students — as well as “fraught disadvantages” for businesses.

People make decisions based on the perceived benefits and costs of those choices. When the benefits or costs change, then behaviors become more or less likely. Hicks is correct to note that reduced benefits or increased costs will tend to deter behavior. But by how much — and what other economic concepts are in play?

One key question is “elasticity”: How much will behavior change when benefits and costs shift? Choosing a college — and even more so, choosing a business location — are complicated decisions. To what extent will a change in this one factor move the needle for decisions in either realm?

Will Indiana high school graduates be willing to pay out-of-state tuition rates — even those who might want to seek an (in-state) abortion? Will grad students from across the world avoid strong, reputable programs in Indiana and risk damage to their career prospects? Will small or large businesses routinely leave or avoid Indiana because of this? Most important: If we had abortion regulations that were slightly more permissive, would it make any significant difference? (It's a sacrificial, Molechian fantasy to think we'd have few if any restrictions.) It's difficult to imagine.

Another consideration: short-run versus long-run responses. I'm not sure about Hicks' claim that we now have the strictest laws in the country. But even if so, how long will this be true? Within a year or two, Indiana will be one of many states with restrictive laws. (Other states will choose a much-more permissive route, even taking money from taxpayers to subsidize consumers from other states.) Perhaps there will be an impact in 2023, but it will be reduced as other states pass their own restrictions.

This reminds me of a debate in Indiana a decade ago: those who thought liberalized labor laws would be a panacea for Indiana's economic development. Sure, it helped, but only “at the margin.” The fact is that people and businesses make their decisions based on many factors — and in-state abortion access and labor laws are just two of those many factors.

And there are potentially positive effects: Perhaps universities will become (or be considered) more moderate, leading more parents who are socially conservative/moderate to send their kids to college. Perhaps we'll attract more pro-life people who tend to raise more children in two-parent households, helping an array of social outcomes and long-term demographics. Perhaps we will attract small and large businesses whose owners value Indiana's stand for life and the vulnerable.

All this said, my biggest problem with Hicks' essay is that it displays a tin ear toward the morality and justice issues inherent in this policy debate. (It also ignores the impact of Roe and Casey as poorly decided court cases and the cost of avoiding democracy by relying on federal courts instead of state legislatures.) I can understand the reluctance to discuss this: as economists, we try to avoid mixing positive analysis (what is) with normative opinions (what should be). But it seems unavoidable here.

Imagine the public response if I penned an op-ed about the end of slavery in a state as a drag on that state's economy: The cost of labor will be higher, I might argue, increasing production costs. This will increase prices for consumers and tend

to drive businesses from the state, reducing our economic well-being. And so on. At the end of the day, the potential financial implications of ending slavery and legal abortions are interesting and perhaps noteworthy. But they pale next to the morality and justice concerns.

Many reach the pro-life position through science and/or religious beliefs, aiming to defend the most vulnerable in our society. Others say they are uncertain about when life begins, so we should allow people to err on the side of choice for one party and ending the life of another. At least for those who rely heavily on science, even if this ends up costing Hoosiers some students and some business, this sacrifice would seem to be worth the financial loss. — *Aug. 18*

## The Great Society

I got to meet Amity Shlaes when she spoke at a University of Louisville Center for Free Enterprise event last September. I had enjoyed her book on the Great Depression, “The Forgotten Man.” She gave me a signed copy of her book, “The Great Society,” and I’ve been looking forward to reading it too.

The work is thorough, but I don’t think the time period, the subjects or the writing are as compelling as “The Forgotten Man.” I can certainly recommend the book for those interested in public policy in general — or poverty and welfare in particular. It would also appeal to people who are interested in the era running from the mid-1960s into the 1970s. But I don’t think the book’s coverage will appeal to most laypeople.

For similar reasons, I don’t intend to “review” the book but will provide bullet points for interested readers:

### Poverty

- Nixon dramatically increased War on Poverty spending. (In many ways, Nixon was more “liberal” and more “LBJ” than LBJ.) I learned this from Charles Murray’s “Losing Ground” decades ago but from Shlaes I learned that the extent was enough to worry Dems that he was stealing the issue from them.

- LBJ somehow claimed that the War on Poverty did not represent “a handout or a dole . . . We know — we learned long ago — that answer is no answer.” (124)
- Shlaes (6) provides a nice passing remark about how government typically works: measuring (and valuing) inputs over outputs. Why? They’re easier to measure and provide a far-more-flattering picture.
- Daniel Patrick Moynihan was deeply concerned that government welfare monies went mostly to bureaucrats — and that a patchwork of federal-state programs and taxes led to disincentive problems (317) and “notches” (325). He promoted Universal Basic Income (UBI) as an alternative, along with universal Medicaid (318). He made progress on implementing UBI (along with Milton Friedman), but ended up proposing an add-on instead of a replacement (342) and the legislative effort failed anyway.
- A detail I didn’t know: Mollie Orshansky’s poverty line estimate for a family of four in 1963 was \$3,128. The poverty line was drawn a few years later at \$3,000 (108).
- Shlaes throws hammers at “urban renewal.” Twice, she quotes James Baldwin’s famous line that it equated to “Negro removal” (72, 237). The Santa Monica Freeway cut through “the most prosperous, best kept and most beautiful Negro owned property in the country” in West Adams (138). Eminent domain ended up trashing Black Bottom (236). She’s particularly rough on the projects in St. Louis at Pruitt-Igoe: It was for mothers only (fathers had to leave); it had means-tested rent disincentives; and provided terrible economic and social results (239-245).
- Shlaes revisits the academic debate over the economic and sociological woes of African-Americans. The somewhat-competing, somewhat-overlapping theses were jobs and families. Both can easily be laid at the feet of welfare policies (163).

### Macro

- A key story in American Macro history: the domination and optimism of Keynesianism and



faith in big-government solutions. Shlaes describes this and adds more meat to the bones — the economy seemed unstoppable (with so much growth). They believed that regulation and taxes were largely independent from economic outcomes (26). The same optimism extended to efforts to battle poverty, along with perceived abundance (97) and progress in many other areas, especially science (180).

- Another key story in American Macro history is the emergence of Supply-Side Economics. I always tell the story about Ronald Reagan and 91 percent marginal tax rates in Hollywood. Shlaes tells another Reagan story: He received a 25 percent pay raise from General Electric that made little difference to his standard of living, given inflation and taxes (37).

- The Dow flirted with 1,000 for a long time, but did not pass it until 1982 — the end of the Reagan/post-inflation recession (10). Broadly, there was significant pessimism about America and the American economy — from the mid-60s until Reagan. In this period, it manifested as steady outflow of gold and even runs on gold (9-10)

- LBJ wanted to fight international trade deficits through a two-year moratorium on tourism outside the western hemisphere (264).

### Miscellaneous

- The federal government was allowed to unionize (but not collectively bargain) in the 1960s. This led to pressure allowing the same (and more) at the state/local level (48-49).

- She cites tough LA cops — as did Radley Balko in his strong book on the militarization of the police (139).

- Mayors initially saw federal efforts as a "power grab" (153), but were successfully bribed by federal monies (155) before the efforts were eventually federalized (231).

- I did not know about Sen. Everett Dirksen's pivotal role as a thorn in the side to LBJ's legislative agenda, especially in trying to reverse Right-to-Work (197-198).

- LBJ referred to liberals/Lefties as "beards"! (287)

- Shlaes reflects on the limits of history in general and the history of the War on Poverty in particular. Texts and history books have focused on Civil Rights and Vietnam, rather than economics. The result: coverage in "non-narrative, non-economic kaleidoscope fashion (15-16). Pursuing "the great man" approach to history, they have tended to beatify JFK, celebrate LBJ as a man of action despite consequences and vilify Nixon even though he ironically extended LBJ's failures. — *Aug. 23*

### The Children of Men

I like to read fiction and believe that it helps to keep me healthy mentally and spiritually (since I read so much non-fiction). Among types of fiction, I enjoy dystopian literature — perhaps because it edges into non-fiction so easily. I had heard of P.D. James but I had never thought about reading her, until reading a review of "The Children of Men" by John Miller in National Review.

James was a prolific mystery writer, so "Children of Men" was a departure for her. According to Miller, it was the only book when she did not earn an advance but it generated more correspondence and controversy than any of her other books. (There is a 2006 movie but reportedly it's not particularly faithful to the text — although I don't see how you could do that.)

"Children of Men" is a really good book — if not a classic alongside Huxley's "Brave New World," Orwell's "1984," Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451," Zamyatin's "We," Koestler's "Darkness at Noon," Vonnegut's short story "Harrison Bergeron" or works by Ayn Rand (e.g., "Atlas Shrugged" and "Anthem").

The premise is that nobody can have children anymore. (The opening sentence is arresting — and at least for me, confusing for a minute: "Early this morning, 1 January 2021, three minutes after midnight, the last human being to be born on earth was killed in a pub brawl.") Worldwide infertility has occurred for reasons unknown to



them or at least to us — and how this would change people and society. Imagine a world where playgrounds are completely obsolete. Imagine the changes in demographics and finances that would result from a dramatically-aging population. Imagine the hopelessness that would often emerge.

“Children of Men” is 30 years old now, but surprisingly prescient — in addition to sobering — as a reflection on many aspects of our current moment. (The book takes place in early and then late in 2021, 25 years after the world's final birth in late 1995. This explains the attention given to it last year.)

The work has parallels with a wide array of anti-human public policies, social trends and pseudo-religions: declining fertility, abortion, euthanasia, population control, eugenics, birth control, treating animals as children, environmentalism, efforts to muddy gender, and cultural and political pressures to diminish traditional family structure. While the book goes much further, this is what good art often does — extending the point to make a point.

It is not explicitly Christian, but emanates from and echoes a Christian worldview. The religious references are interesting: The title comes from the sobering Psalm 90. The characters display a wide range of religious faiths — from the modernist “skeptic” to the pious. And finally, what requires a spoiler alert before I give you the last few (amazing) sentences: The final paragraph includes an explicit religious reference: “From some far childhood memory he recalled the rite . . . It was with a thumb wet with his own tears and stained with her blood that he made on the child's forehead the sign of the cross.” — *Aug. 23*

## A Disastrous, Immoral U.S. Debt

**I**t's always more fun to spend money than to make it. And it can be tempting to borrow or steal money instead of earning it. What's true in our private lives is true with the government as well.

Politicians are known for exaggerating the benefits and downplaying the costs of public policy. Spending and debt are great examples. Enjoy the benefits now; get the media to trumpet them in the news; and brag about them in the next election cycle.

The costs? Let's spread them out across the population so they're difficult to notice. (A \$1 billion federal program usually harms the economy and benefits a politically powerful interest group, but it only costs \$3 per person.) Better yet: let's make future taxpayers pick up our tab.

The federal government spends an incredible amount of money these days — about \$6 trillion per year (\$18,000 per person). It raises a ton of money in taxes (about \$4 trillion per year or \$12,000 per person, but not enough to pay for all of that spending. The result is large annual budget deficits and an increasing national debt — now, more than \$30 trillion (\$90,000 per person). And none of this includes other federal liabilities, such as Social Security, Medicare and government pensions.

As with our personal finances, there are limits to debt — or more precisely, what investors are willing to lend. As debt increases, the perceived risk increases. The borrower is more likely to default — or in the case of the federal government, to use inflation to “pay back” the debt with cheapened dollars.

When investors get nervous about risk, they will insist on higher interest rates or will be unwilling to lend at all. The government increasing risk is obviously dangerous — and a default would clearly be damaging — to anyone with wealth (especially the elderly) and the economy.

The debt is also undemocratic. For all of our supposed passion about democracy, this point gets no attention. Who are we to take resources from those in the future — to pay for our stuff today? They get no vote in the matter; they do not give their consent. Taxation is troubling enough, but what is the morality of imposing debt and higher taxes on the future?

Until recent years, deficits and debt were mostly a war-time concern in the U.S. Under threat, governments will spend and borrow, often leading to post-war financial and economic troubles. (Germany after World War I is the classic example.) A cousin of this: President Reagan ran modest budget deficits in the 1980s at the end of the Cold War. With the fall of the USSR, President Clinton and a conservative GOP Congress gave us smaller deficits and even a tiny surplus or two.

But the last two decades have brought bipartisan profligacy. The last four presidents have been spendthrifts. A feckless Congress has given us a terrible budget process, independent of which major political party is in charge. The federal government can't do much effectively, except spend money. The outcome: tremendous deficits and a mounting debt.

In February, a bipartisan group of 18 U.S. Representatives wrote Nancy Pelosi and Kevin McCarthy asking them to address the issue. That's a promising start, but even their prescriptions were vague. What can we do?

The most powerful and realistic approach would be to freeze federal spending. (Don't fall for the term "spending cuts." In D.C. this only means to reduce the rate of growth of spending.) The deficit would fall quickly, as tax revenues rise with inflation, increased productivity and population growth. Even more important: investors would know that we were treating our spending and debt addictions seriously.

Or maybe we should end the Congressional pension if they don't fix this. Why should our elected officials get another retirement income after working merely five years in D.C. — ironically adding even more to the debt— especially if they can't handle this basic function properly?

The stakes are too high — for the country, and as is often the case, for the marginal in our society. We can no longer afford the rampant spending and our immoral, dangerous and undemocratic debt. — *June 21*

# Pay-to-Play: Private Prosperity vs. State Favoritism

**Nickolas Roberson**, a research assistant for the foundation, is a junior at Wabash College majoring in Philosophy, Politics and Economics with a double minor in Religion and Classics. Roberson is a prominent brother of his fraternity, Phi Kappa Psi, serving as its treasurer and Student Senate representative. He also serves as chairman of the Crawfordsville-to-Campus community service committee, vice president of fundraising for College Mentors for Kids, as well as a member of the Pre-Law Society.



*“The American Republic will endure until politicians realize they can bribe the people with their own money.” — Alexis de Tocqueville*

Since, 2017, executives of one construction, engineering and development firm have donated \$909,400 to an Indiana Political Action Committee (PAC).<sup>1</sup>

It is the tip of the iceberg. During that same period the political candidates and PACs organized in the state amassed \$238 million in contributions, with candidates receiving \$101 million and PACs receiving \$138 million.<sup>2</sup>

It will be argued here that those donations subverted valuable institutions of private enterprise and free markets in favor of pay-to-play schemes.

How does this happen?

In the case of the construction firm, the PAC donated to a myriad of mayoral campaigns throughout Indiana, specifically Evansville, Carmel, Fishers, Lawrence and Indianapolis.<sup>3</sup>

Fort Wayne, because it operates a check register system that allows access to such payments, stands as a particularly handy example of pay-to-play.

A Fort Wayne councilman, Jason Arp, detailed the system in “Better Angels: An Eco-Devo Alternative” in the fall 2017 issue of The Indiana Policy Review. Arp found that both engineering and law firms scored a high correlation between campaign contributions and municipal contracts.

In other Indiana cities, the pay-to-play mechanism may be hidden. But again, there are likely to be donations that subvert private, natural prosperity for favoritism in municipal contracts.

This is in conflict with centuries of experience demonstrating that the institutions of private enterprise and Adam Smith’s “spontaneous order” create beauty in both human nature and faculties, producing an ever-increasing GDP per capita. It lifts individuals out of poverty and encourages free markets that are both innovative and achieve optimal costs, quantities and qualities.

But at the same time, a capability to cheat and subvert exists in our economic nature. Here is Frederic Bastiat in his classic work “The Law,” demonstrating the duality of economic man:

“Man can only derive life and enjoyment from a perpetual search and appropriation; that is, from a perpetual application of his faculties to objects, or from labor. This is the origin of property. But also he may live and enjoy by seizing and appropriating the productions of the faculties of his fellow men. This is the origin of plunder.”

Where does Bastiat’s ideal actually work? What examples of private, natural prosperity exist today for comparison with Indiana’s pay-to-play system? We don’t have to look far. Indiana’s manufacturing and industrial growth is being

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<sup>1</sup> Transparency USA, DPBG Political Action Committee Payees: <https://www.transparencyusa.org/in/pac/dpbg-political-action-committee-6203-political-action/?cycle=2017-to-now>

<sup>2</sup> Transparency USA, Indiana Finance Summary: <https://www.transparencyusa.org/in/?cycle=2017-to-now>

<sup>3</sup> Transparency USA, DPBG, op. cit.

outpaced by neighboring Ohio, a state following a more time-tested economic strategy.

Joel Kotkin writing in the June 26 issue of *City Journal* argues that what is drawing manufacturers to Ohio is its central location, business-friendly atmosphere and "long-standing industrial culture."

Kotkin quotes the manager of an Ohio company making natural-gas compressors:

"We are still at the edge of the farming areas, and people have a strong work ethic. People here think building stuff is better than selling insurance. On a decent salary, you can live a good life in central Ohio."

But Kotkin doesn't mention Indiana. Moreover, Indiana's manufacturing growth measured out to be only one to two percent annually from 2009 to 2019, whereas Ohio's was two to three percent over the same period.<sup>4</sup>

A primary factor for Indiana's poor showing is its subsidized "press-release economics" promoted by the last three governors. Some argue that the political focus on high-profile ribbon cuttings rather than longterm growth has hurt our state's potential.

What should Indiana have done instead, how much better would we have been with an alternative, hands-off economic strategy?

Examples can be found in the cities of Hong Kong, China, and Gurgaon, India.

Hong Kong ranks as the freest economy in the world according to the Index of Economic Freedom. Lawrence Reed, past president of the Foundation for Economic Education, writes that there exists "relatively little corruption . . . respect for the rule of law and property rights . . . an uncomplicated tax system with low rates on both individuals and business and an overall tax burden that's a mere 14 percent of GDP (half the

U.S. rate) . . . no government budget deficit and almost non-existent public debt."<sup>5</sup>

What is more impressive is how Sir John James Cowperthwaite, Hong Kong's Financial Secretary, accomplished this. His simple explanation:

"Over a wide field of our economy it is still the better course to rely on the nineteenth century's 'hidden hand' than to thrust clumsy bureaucratic fingers into its sensitive mechanism. In particular, we cannot afford to damage its mainspring, freedom of competitive enterprise . . . in the long run, the aggregate of the decisions of individual businessmen, exercising individual judgement in a free economy, even if often mistaken, is likely to do less harm than the centralized decisions of a Government; and certainly the harm is likely to be counteracted faster."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in Gurgaon, India, there is no government at all. The city is entirely privatized, the result of a zoning oversight. Free markets dominate, not only in common industries such as manufacturing but also in roads, sewage systems, security and even fire departments. Todd Krainin of *Reason* magazine explains:

"As India stepped back from socialism in the 1990s, foreign investment bypassed Delhi, and poured into Gurgaon. When General Electric set up shop, hundreds of multinationals followed. Soon Gurgaon was generating middle-class jobs by the hundreds of thousands. Today, it boasts an absurd 30 percent annual GDP growth and the third highest per-capital income in India."<sup>7</sup>

Most recently, Estonia, until 1991 part of the Communist Bloc, has shown the West how economics is done.

Estonia's first prime minister says he began his reforms after reading Milton Friedman's

<sup>4</sup> Ken Voytek, "Where Manufacturing Is Growing (and Where It Is Not." NIST (Manufacturing Extension Partnership), Nov. 19, 2020. <https://www.nist.gov/blogs/manufacturing-innovation-blog/where-manufacturing-growing-and-where-it-not>

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Reed, "The Man Behind the Hong Kong Miracle." Foundation for Economic Education, Feb. 10, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Todd Krainin, "Gurgaon: India's Private City." *Reason Magazine*, Dec. 15, 2016.

bestseller “Free to Choose.” Today, Estonia is considered a high-income country by the World Bank. Its purchasing power has increased 400 percent over the last two decades. Life expectancy has moved from 66 years in 1994 to 77 years in 2016.

In summary, our example of a construction firm’s nearly \$1 million in donations to political candidates and PACs represents the opposite of

what we know to work — a microcosm of a much larger and corrosive system but one perfectly legal in the eyes of government here. Indiana’s pay-to-play system, rather than allowing markets and private enterprise to run free and provide optimal prosperity such as in Hong Kong, Gurgaon and Estonia, subverts time-proven institutions, hindering our long-term natural growth and prosperity. ♦



# Morris

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## Tracking 'The Big Lie'

(Aug. 22) — All this mindless partisan taunting across the political divide really is becoming tiresome, isn't it?

If there is a hint of fresh air in the garbage heap known as social media, it is the occasional sign that the snarkers themselves might wearying of the game.

Consider the recent Big Lie goof by hapless Republican State Rep. Jim Lucas.

He thought it would be a hoot to take a swipe at Democrats about all the misleading nonsense he detected in Washington these days, so he played the always handy taint-them-with-the-Nazis smear.

He posted this ubiquitous call-out to Nazi propagandizing on his Facebook page:

Joseph Goebbels: On the "Big Lie"

"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State."

The reaction was swift and predictable.

"After running against Jim Lucas for a while now, it's hard to surprise me anymore," said his Democratic legislative opponent Chad Harmon. "This is a sitting Indiana state representative quoting a Nazi."

"We are shocked and horrified that an Indiana lawmaker would make such a statement about Hitler's chief architect and purveyor of hate speech, ultimately leading to the murder of over 6 million Jews in the Holocaust," said a response from the CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center. "Hate propaganda was the driving force behind the Holocaust, and these seeds of hate are being planted today in the United States."

Various news outlets, who troll social media for outrage these days rather than actually reporting news, duly reported the controversy and quoted both sides, usually without context, background or any hint of analysis. Lucas took down the quote and made the obligatory tour of the Holocaust museum without actually apologizing, and an editorial cited "the gravity of his irresponsibility."

Now, anybody with two brain cells left knows Lucas was not praising the Nazis. He was using them to make a political point about the dangers of the truth getting buried under believable lies. Naturally, it's the other side guilty of that, not his side. And when those at the Holocaust museum rail about hate speech, it is fair to presume they don't think it's liberal Democrats who are spreading it.

Much usual reaction to such a contretemps is that all involved are either rather dim, in which case they should not be believed, or deliberately trying to mislead us, in which case they should not be trusted.

But I sense a third option here. It was all so perfunctory, as if they were just going through the motions, and the controversy seemed to blaze and then die so quickly. Might they be at the point when they're finally seeing the futility of endless take-no-prisoners venom?

Or perhaps that's just wishful thinking on my part.

The funny thing about the whole fiasco is that Goebbels almost certainly never said such a thing in the first place — you can find the quote on hundreds of thousands of Web pages, but never with the citation of a source.

And why would he say it? Propagandists always insist they're telling the truth and their enemies aren't. Why would you brag about being the purveyor of a Big Lie?

Adolf Hitler himself concocted the idea of the Big Lie, but aimed it at Jews, whom he blamed for trying to discredit German activity during World War I, using it as an excuse for his insane attempt to eradicate them. And when Goebbels referred to the concept, he was accusing the British, specifically "Churchill's lie factory," of lying big and sticking to it, "even at the risk of looking ridiculous."

Try this as an experiment.

If I said, "Tell me about the Trump Big Lie," what would your reaction be?

My guess is that a great number of you would immediately think of the Big Lie, concocted by Democrats and spread by their allies in the media, that Trump conspired with Russians to steal the 2016 election. And another great number would think of the Great Lie, concocted by Trump and spread by his allies in the media, that the 2020 election was stolen from him.

Or perhaps I'm being too cynical and most of you are getting tired of the nonsense, too.

Personally, if I wanted to stir people up about truth and lies and the reality that always seems just out of reach, I wouldn't throw out a false Joseph Goebbels quote. I would choose a fake quote from Mark Twain, who never, not once in his whole life, said, "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes," despite what Google might have told you.

Maybe he should have. He wrote good, honest fiction that didn't pretend to be anything else.

There is more to say, but it occurs to me I should make plans. I need to call a lawyer, make sure my sidewalk is clear for all the protesters and store up my social-media-response energy.

I can see it coming: Insensitive, irresponsible columnist downplays Holocaust and defends infamous Nazi.

## The Cool Kids' Table — Updated

(Aug. 15) — The Indiana Business Journal has named its "Indiana 250", a list of "the state's most influential and impactful business and community leaders."

Alas, I did not make the list, despite having spent a long career penning insightful, eloquent editorials and columns designed to convince people of something or persuade them to do something (little smug grammatical pedantry thrown in for free). How can someone ready to pounce unmercifully on every minor public official's misstep not be influential?

Takes me back to high school.

Remember the cool kids' table in the cafeteria? All those in the lower tiers of peer approval wanted to sit there, though none would have dared to do so without an invitation.

Exactly why everyone wanted to sit there, and more important, be seen there, was a mystery worthy of an Abbott and Costello routine.

*"I really want to sit at the cool kids' table."*

*Why?*

*"Because that's where the cool kids sit."*

*But why do they sit there?*

*"Because they're the cool kids."*

*But why are they cool?*

*"Well, just look where they're sitting."*

A few years later, in a college sociology class, I read historian and social theorist Daniel Boorstin's classic "The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America," and it became much clearer to me.

In times past, he noted, people became famous for some achievement, skill or talent. They wrote a book or explored the jungle or committed murder. But the revolution in communications severed greatness from fame, which degenerated into mere celebrity. Boorstin described a celebrity as "a person who is known for his well-knownness."

That phrase gradually morphed into “famous for being famous” and an apt description of the celebrity-worshipping culture of the next 50 years was born.

Since Boorstin’s 1961 book, that culture has speeded up and absorbed everything in its path.

Once upon a time, celebrities would pop up on the Johnny Carson show one or two at a time and hold the nation enthralled for months on end. Today, Tik Tok videos stream by in clips mere seconds long, and hordes of social media “influencers” come and go overnight. By the time an eager public catches on to the latest “thing” to emulate, it’s gone.

Somehow, I think the folks at the Indiana Business Journal have something a little loftier in mind. They are spotlighting those who used to be called “movers and shakers,” people who get things done in the state, irrespective of whether Hoosiers might actually want them done.

There is the entrepreneur in Fort Wayne who is creating a little music and real estate empire. There is the attorney who has been a driving force in the pro-life movement that recently energized the General Assembly. There is the former U.S. congressman who still patrols the political corridors. There are luminaries from business and industry, charities, the health and education sectors, law, finance and “community leadership.”

Notably absent are “elected officials,” who, we are told “were not eligible.”

Wonder why that is.

Could it be because they are not the influencers? They are, instead, the influenced.

Most of those on the list must work with or around those elected officials to get their moving and shaking done. You might say they work the system if you like their efforts or that they game it if you don’t. The point is that there is a system, and it sets the rules, however obscure or labyrinthine, that must be acknowledged.

It can get a little tricky, of course.

One of the 250 most influential is the CEO of Eli Lilly and Co., which has gotten some adverse publicity in the aftermath of the restrictive

abortion provisions recently passed by the General Assembly.

The company, one of the state’s largest employers, says the near-total ban on abortion will “hinder” its ability to “attract diverse scientific, engineering and business talent” and warns that it may now have to “emphasize expansion plans outside Indiana.”

That after-the-fact posturing is all very well, critics say, but why didn’t Eli Lilly make its objections known before the vote was taken, when it might have made a difference? As a matter of fact, if its position was that strongly felt, why did it give millions of dollars to Republican-sponsored groups who fought so hard for the abortion legislation?

Of course, the company also gave hefty amounts to Democratic groups. You have to keep your options open if you want to have the rules and regulations approved that favor your position. If you come down too hard too soon on one side of a controversial issue, you will alienate a certain portion of those in power. That’s the way the system works.

So, a prime rule of being an influencer – which you’re not likely to see on TV or Tik Tok – is that to use your influence is to lose it. You may be proud to be known as an influencer, but be very careful when you actually try to influence.

Abbott and Costello would understand, and the kids at the cool table nod their heads in approval.

And remember, you read it here first.

## Abortion, Going Forward

*(Aug. 8)* — Can the legislative process still work more or less as intended, with lawmakers balancing competing interests and arriving at a solution that the majority of the population can at least live with if not enthusiastically endorse? Or have we become so divided as a nation that neither side wants to concede anything to the other?

We might get a clue to the answer in the next few years as state legislatures grapple with the Supreme Court’s tossing of *Roe v. Wade*.

The biggest complaint against the landmark 1973 pro-abortion decision was that it preempted the robust debate that was beginning to take place on the issue in statehouses across the nation.

This view was especially prevalent among those on the right, who pointed out, correctly, that since the Constitution made no mention of abortion, the court was claiming for the federal government a decision that should have been left to the states.

But even strong abortion-rights advocates had their qualms.

In a 2013 interview, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg complained that *Roe v. Wade* short-circuited the development of a political groundswell that was building at the state and local level not only on the issue of abortion but on all phases of women's rights. "Roe seemed to have stopped the momentum," she said.

At the time *Roe* was decided, there was abortion on demand in four states, and it was illegal to one degree or another everywhere else. But the movement for what Ginsburg called "women's rights" was starting to encourage discussion of the issue.

Each side today seems convinced that, had the legislative process continued, its view would have been the one ultimately endorsed.

We will never know. And we can't pretend that the process will merely take up again from the point where it was stopped, without taking into account all that has happened in the last 50 years.

The issue has been polarized to the point where two incompatible extremes have dominated the debate. The left wants it to be nothing but a woman's issue, no matter how far along the pregnancy is. The right wants it to be a fetal-life issue, no matter how early in the pregnancy.

But the American people are somewhere else.

In poll after poll, there is a strong majority for abortion to be allowed in the first trimester. A smaller majority, but still a majority, thinks they should not be allowed in the second trimester. Another strong majority thinks they should be forbidden in the third.

It is pointless to wonder what this means on a national scale. The U.S. House and Senate are not going to cross their respective aisles and hammer out a federal abortion law that matches the national mood. Nowhere is our polarization set in stone more than in Congress.

So, we are left looking at the state-level debates.

In Red State Indiana, the General Assembly has just become the first state post-*Roe* to enact a near-total abortion ban. That bucks the consensus of the Hoosier populace, which skews more pro-life than the rest of the nation but is still somewhere between the two extremes. Will enough voters react against that legislation to make a significant difference in the legislative makeup?

Meanwhile, in Red State Kansas, voters sent a strong message in a statewide referendum by overturning an attempt to take abortion rights from the state constitution. Will that state's legislators, in crafting new legislation, take into account that clear expression of voter sentiment?

And what about the flip side?

With *Roe*'s removal, the focus in the near future will be on pro-life legislatures and how voters react to their restrictions on abortion. But pro-choice legislatures in other states will also begin to flex their muscles, and the same voter-lawmaker dynamics will be in play there, too.

In Civics 101, the way it should work, at the state level if not the national, is that legislators and voters will interact enough to find some common ground. It will be messy, contentious, at times even ugly, but the end result will be something we can agree on, if grudgingly,

Perhaps that would have prevailed had the legislative process not been interrupted. But can it happen now?

What do you think?

No matter where you are on the pro-life, pro-choice spectrum, do you believe there are competing interests that should be taken into account? How far are you willing to go to accommodate them?

What can you live with?

## America, What Will It Be?

(Aug. 1) — Is America, both as a nation and a concept, coming to the end of the road?

As a firm believer in the country's foundations of individual liberty and natural rights, I certainly think not. But I recently ran into three ideas — all in one morning's perusal of the news, each more radical than the last — that make me wonder if that is still the majority opinion.

1. Andrew Yang, convinced that Americans are dissatisfied with the extremism of both major parties, has gathered together a bunch of semi-prominent former Republican and Democratic office-holders to form a third party called Forward.

I suppose that's better than a party called Backward or Let's Stay in Place, but it's rather vague and noncommittal, isn't it? No specific platform or policy proposals have been announced, but the group's manifesto claims a commitment to “moderation” and “centrism.”

How would this work, exactly? Even if Americans hate both left and right radicalism on abortion, gun control and climate change, just what are the moderate, centrist positions on such issues, and how will Forward determine them? Just wait for the latest Gallup poll and adopt the majority public opinion? A high school sophomore with a cheap laptop could handle that.

Third parties have never done well in America. Ross Perot's Reform Party did the best when his presidential bid garnered 19 percent of the popular vote. But he didn't win a single elector, and there's no evidence his bid affected the race's outcome.

For better or worse, we're stuck with two major parties with strong, divergent views of what this country stands for. Any attempt to split the difference seems doomed to failure.

2. The calls for a constitutional convention of the states seem to be gaining momentum, according to a panicked article from Business Insider, which warns that “conservatives are now

pushing an unprecedented convention to rewrite the U.S. bedrock text since 1788.”

The usual way to amend the Constitution (used for all 27 current amendments) is for a two-thirds majority of Congress to propose one and three-quarters of the states to ratify it. But under Article 5 of the Constitution, two-thirds of state legislatures could call a convention to propose amendments, which would then need to be ratified by three-quarters of the states. So far, 19 of the required 34 states have signed on (Indiana being one of them, in an effort led by former State Sen. David Long).

Business Insider may be right about the momentum — according to a new poll from Convention of States and the Trafalgar Group, only 6.7 percent of Republican voters oppose the idea of an Article 5 convention. And almost 67 percent of Americans support such a convention addressing four specific issues: term limits for Congress, term limits for unelected federal officials, federal spending restraints and constraining the federal government to its constitutionally mandated authority.

I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, Washington is clearly out of control but will not voluntarily relinquish power, so it's a logical option for states to simply take it back. On the other hand, a convention would not necessarily be bound by the issues it was called for (witness the original constitutional convention), so who knows what havoc might be wreaked?

3. There is growing support for outright secession. According to a poll from Bright Line Watch a year ago, 37 percent of respondents indicated a willingness for their state to leave the union. “Republicans are the most secessionist in the South and Mountain regions, whereas it is Democrats on the West Coast and Northeast,” the group wrote. “In the narrowly divided Heartland region, it is partisan independents who find the idea most attractive.”

While there is a certain attraction to letting Californians and Texans lead the way to two separate countries, the United States would not be so easily divided. There isn't such a clear



demarcation line as there was between the North and South preceding the Civil War. There are liberal and conservative conclaves everywhere, so we'd more likely end up with a patchwork of smaller nations as in Europe.

And the consequences for the rest of the world are unimaginable. American exceptionalism propelled us to superpower status, a force for good that would sorely be missed. The Constitution doesn't address secession and most scholars argue that, short of an actual bloody conflict, it could never happen. But the mere fact that so many discuss the idea seriously is a troubling sign.

A third party. A constitutional convention. Secession. Are we really so divided in this nation that one of those options is our only way out?

Charles Krauthammer once wrote that he gave up medicine to start writing about politics because the world was on the brink of either a wondrous new era or a horrendous calamity, and getting our politics right would make all the difference.

I agree, and would add that it will make all the difference in what happens to our country, too.

But politics is – or should be – a participatory exercise. We have the best system ever devised for keeping power out of the hands of the few and giving voice to the governed, if only we'd consider using it at least as much as we complain about it.

And for what it's worth, I think we should start talking more to each other about our commonality and listening less to those so invested in our differences.

## Government Transportation

*(July 25)* — Now that I am old enough to embody a Duke Ellington song – “Don't Get Around Much Anymore” – I guess I should be grateful that government is willing to expend so much time, effort and money to aid my mobility.

Mayor Pete, the transportation secretary who has moved to Michigan ahead of a suspected second run at the White House, seems absolutely giddy about high gasoline prices because that will speed us further along on his goal to put us all in

electric cars. He speaks ecstatically of the billions the federal government will commit to a nationwide network of charging stations.

Meanwhile, in Fort Wayne, Councilman Geoff Paddock wants to spend about \$900 million, with an 80-20 federal-state funding split, to build a rail line from Chicago through Fort Wayne to Columbus, Ohio. There will be billions and billions available for national railway expenditures, depending on whom we send to Washington in the next few years. Never mind that this is a vast, sprawling country, not a tiny, compact one like Japan.

But while all that money is being proposed to nudge my distance traveling, there seems to be a counter-effort to keep me close to home. The current mayor, who is seeking and will probably win an unprecedented fifth term, has committed millions to riverfront development and commercial and residential projects in order to herd Fort Wayne residents downtown, whether or not they want to go.

Not that we're expected to walk, unless of course we choose to. If we don't want to take a municipal bus, the city has interlaced downtown streets with oh-my-God-look-out! bike lanes, and there are scooters that can be dropped off almost anywhere after they are used.

I'm not just an old coot mooning for the days of self-reliance, when my father moved our family to Fort Wayne in a not-so-gently-used Chevrolet, or when I pedaled my Schwinn around the back alleys near my house, or when a buddy and I hitchhiked to Goose Lake, Mich., for a rock festival.

And I'm not naïve enough to suggest that government stay out of the moving business. The history of transformative transportation projects in this country – from canals and the intercontinental railroad to construction of the interstate highway system and subsidies for airport infrastructure – has been a story of public-private collaboration, with mad visionaries and humorless functionaries working side by side, producing along the way fraud, waste and enough honest graft for everyone.

But I am idealistic enough to wish that more thought would go into these grand schemes and that better reasons were behind them than some bureaucrat's idea of how we should live or some politician's declaration of what the "settled science" dictates.

If government is to be involved, let it be in support of what people have already decided to do, not the determining factor in making them do it. After we have discovered the beauty of autonomy through automobiles, then build the highways.

And "settled science" is an oxymoron. All knowledge is subject to challenge, with old hypotheses falling under the weight of new facts. Politicians who jump into the scientific process are trying to affix a permanent solution to a problem that may or may not be revealed through evolutionary exploration.

When I ponder government and travel, I usually end up thinking about NASA, how thrilling that we set foot on the moon, and how sad that our efforts just stopped once that goal had been met.

Eventually, we're going to leave the confines of this planet. As much as I admire the efforts of people in the private sector such as Elon Musk, I doubt we'll get very far without some kind of government involvement. But we'll need an interstellar superhighway, not some former mayor of a small Indiana town trying to figure out where to put the charging stations.

## A Not-So-Special Session

*(July 18)* — Indiana legislators are gearing up for a special session set to begin July 25 and last at least a couple of weeks. We should urge them to reconsider and just stay home.

The session will cost Hoosiers about a quarter of a million dollars, and it's hard to see what we'll get for the money.

Two subjects are slated for consideration, and not much good is likely to come from either one.

First up is another proposed round of tax refunds for taxpayers to be paid out of the state's

surplus, which was embarrassing at \$2 billion and now stands at about \$6 billion. Gov. Eric Holcomb wants to send \$1 billion of it our way.

Ordinarily, that would be good news if no other reason than the state has no business stockpiling more money than it needs to operate. But the country is in the midst of a crippling inflation, and an infusion of cash will make matters worse, maybe to a lesser degree than the billions in spending proposed by the Biden administration, but problematic nonetheless.

Inflation happens when there is too much money chasing too few goods. That's just supply and demand. Nobody has any good ideas about increasing the supply of anything, so adding to the demand will increase inflation — Economics 101.

Then, there is abortion, added to the agenda when the Supreme Court scuttled *Roe vs. Wade* and sent the issue back to the states. And where is the Republican supermajority on the issue? It's hard to say, since they've been talking about it in secret.

Indiana already has enough restrictions on abortion to be described as a right-to-life state. It is well-known that lawmakers have wanted to add even more restrictions, but do they still, or have they gotten skittish because of the horrific story of a 10-year-old rape victim brought to the state from Ohio to have an abortion?

If they back off, they will anger the pro-life faction. If they don't, they will further energize the pro-choice crowd. Either way, they will have created the impression of rushing into a decision with little discussion or debate.

Abortion is a deeply personal issue for most people, and anything the General Assembly does will upset a great many of them. Is it something that should be dealt with in a couple of weeks, or should it wait?

There can be good reasons to have a special session.

Legislators made a valid point when they complained of not being able to call one themselves in the middle of the pandemic. That left the governor completely in charge of the state's response, with no input from the branch of

government closest to the people his actions affected.

But special sessions should be reserved for emergencies. What we have now is one issue that has been a matter of dispute for decades and another for which the proposed remedy would be anything but a solution.

And of course, legislators won't be confined to those two issues. Once in session, they can consider anything they want to. One Democrat has already suggested "opening up the budget," and wouldn't that be fun?

The General Assembly will have a long session next year, at which it will consider about 1,500 bills and enact a two-year budget approaching \$50 billion.

"No man's life, liberty or property are safe while the legislature is in session," said Gideon Tucker in a pithy observation often attributed to Mark Twain.

Let's urge the legislature to wait until January for the anxiety to begin so we can enjoy the rest of summer and autumn in peace.

## The Court and Balance

*(July 11)* — Make it so.

Thus commands Jean-Luc Picard, captain of the starship Enterprise, whenever an emergency arises for which there are only weak options in response. He selects the one that, in his view, offers the best hope of success and orders his crew to get it done.

No debate is invited, no questions to be asked. Don't bother him with the details. Just, "Make it so." More often than not, this being cinematic fiction, it ends well and they all speed off to the next crisis at warp speed.

That's what we want in our all-too-real lives these days, isn't it, a commanding leader to study the options for us, make up our minds and give us our orders?

Those who have studied past democratic efforts, especially those who have read Plato's "Republic," might say we yearn to be ruled by a wise, kind, all-powerful philosopher king. But

philosopher kings being in short supply, and the study of history a suspect endeavor, the most we can hope for is a wise, kind, all-powerful captain who will steer us to a safe landing.

But as loyal Star Trek fans know, occasionally another captain will show up, drunk on authority and/or as crazy as an outhouse rat, whose "make it so" will lead to unmitigated disaster while the hapless crew members blindly go about their assigned tasks. Only if the crew comes to its senses and rebels can catastrophe be avoided.

That's the thing about letting power accumulate in one place — you might get someone wise and kind, and you might get a raving lunatic.

Why don't more people understand that about the Supreme Court?

For better or worse, and for a lot of reasons, the court has become the one unfettered member of our system of checks and balances — its edicts to "make it so" subject to no debate, questions not appreciated.

And adherents of the political left for years — decades, really — not only liked such focused power but encouraged it, because at the court they got all the things they wanted but could not get through the legislative process. But now, when conservatives have finally succeeded in getting a court majority, they view the court as a profound danger to our whole way of life.

Listen to Marc Ash, former executive editor of Truthout, who demands that Americans "must join hands and challenge the legitimacy if this rogue court. The corruption of the Supreme Court ultimately means the downfall of the rule of law in America."

To which the rational response is, "Hey, pal, you asked for it, you got it. You created a monster, and it turned on you."

To be fair, conservatives were just as distrustful of the court when they weren't getting what they sought and the other side's rogues were bringing about the ruin of the rule of law. People want what they want when they want it, never mind the sovereignty they abdicate in the process and where that power settles and accumulates.

And that is such a dangerous frame of mind for a supposedly free, self-governing people.

Alexander Hamilton in Federalist No. 9 talked of the “sensations of horror and disgust” at the distractions with which the early republics of Greece and Italy were continually agitated “and at the rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of anarchy and tyranny.”

It was chiefly because those republics did not benefit from advancements in the science of politics: “The regular distribution of power into distinct departments; the introduction of legislative balances and checks; the institution of courts composed of judges holding their offices during good behavior; the representation of the people in the legislature by deputies of their own election . . . They are the means, and powerful means, by which the excellence of republican government may be retained and its imperfections lessened or avoided.”

Furthermore, state governments would be “constituent parts of the national sovereignty,” allowed to retain “certain exclusive and very important portions of sovereign power.” Not only would power be fragmented within the federal governments but further diffused by sharing it with states. Nobody could get what they wanted when they wanted it just because they wanted it.

If that Hamilton isn’t convincing enough, try another one, Democratic U.S. Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana, who went off on Col. Oliver North back during the Iran-Contra scandal, for not having faith in America’s democratic traditions.

He did not question North’s patriotism in participating in the clandestine arms-for-hostages deal but noted that our government is not devoted to a particular objective “but is a form of government which specifies means and methods of achieving objectives.”

A few, he said, “do not know what is better for Americans than Americans know themselves.”

And what exactly has the Supreme Court done in the waning days of this controversial term? Whether you admired or abhorred its specific decisions, you should acknowledge that it has

done the best we can hope for from an institution with unchecked power: Diffuse power by spreading it around.

In the abortion case, it gave up its own power, sending decision-making back to the states and their voters. In the EPA case, it took power away from a body of unelected bureaucrats and told Congress to do its job. In the gun case, it said everyone in authority had to operate within limits set by the Constitution.

You are more than the crew on this spaceship of state. You are ultimately in charge, and whether it warps into disaster or victory is up to you. You don’t even have to rebel. All you have to do is be an engaged citizen.

Make it so.

## The Last of the ‘Keepers’

*(July 4)* — Know what I will miss most about newspapers when they’re finally gone forever?

The way people ordered extra copies when a cousin got married or a child made a noteworthy high school sports play, how they framed the clippings and put them on the wall for friends to see or cut them out and pasted them into a scrapbook to impress other relatives with.

The clippings became artifacts of family life, precious memories one generation could pass on to the next as a way to say, “We were here, we did this, and it mattered.”

Do people still get so excited when they “make the paper” and all they have to share are pixels dancing across a glowing screen?

Somehow, I doubt it. The question occurred to me as I thought about the artifacts in my own life, the remnants of human craftsmanship that connect me to the past.

The shoebox of old photographs, many in black and white, that can be sifted through on rainy afternoons and take me back to places thrilling to visit, long-dead relatives frozen in a moment of joy and hopefulness, younger versions of me with people who drifted into and out of my life.

The stack of eight-track tapes belonging to my father, along with the portable player that can be

brought back to life with a battery replacement the next time I want to hear the music that moved a Kentucky coal miner transplanted to Indiana.

My special fountain pen and my brother's special watch.

The pen is a Montblanc, an extravagant purchase when I really couldn't afford the cost. It writes no better than a \$1 Bic, but, oh, it is a magnificent work of art.

The watch is a Rolex, given as a bonus when my brother met a difficult goal for his company. It keeps time no better than a drugstore Timex, but it is such a fine example of exquisite excess that my brother has put it in his will.

How many people still accumulate such artifacts today? We take and share photos with our phones. The music is downloaded to our ears, no interface required. Our timekeeping and writing are moving online, along with our deep research, mapmaking and direction finding, measuring, voice recording, calendar keeping, health monitoring and on and on and on.

And as the electronic dots slither through cyberspace, what will they leave behind?

There are numerous archeological digs in Indiana where we can see evidence of the ancient civilization known as the Hopewell, learn about their complicated social life, discover their amazing travels across the continent, try to understand the path from their times to our own.

And while we visit statues of famous Hoosiers – Anthony Wayne in Fort Wayne, William Henry Harrison in Indianapolis, Abraham Lincoln in Wabash – we can study their life and times to see how we can emulate their virtues and avoid their mistakes.

As long as the statues still stand, of course, before we remove them because they depict flawed human beings who do not measure up to modern sensibilities.

Little wonder that we want to ignore our history these days, or at least erase the parts of it that we don't want to think about. We can easily do that when we are erasing our own history as we go, determined to live in the eternal now. When

future historians try to decipher our life and times, what evidence will they find in our ruins?

There is a favorite story I tell about my mother.

When I first started as a journalist, a wet-behind-the-ears reporter in Wabash, my mother in Fort Wayne got a subscription and clipped every article I wrote, even the three-paragraph ones of no consequence whatsoever.

Later in my career, when I moved back to Fort Wayne and wrote for the paper my parents had always taken, I asked her if she still cut out my articles.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "the good ones."

I like to think this column would be one of the ones she considered a keeper. At least I'd know it still existed somewhere, even if only as a bookmark in her browser history.

Out there in the cloud that is beginning to cover all.

## The Legislative Remedy

*(June 27)* — In the aftermath of two momentous Supreme Court decisions last week on guns and abortion, emotions are running high and, indeed, starting to turn ugly.

Perhaps it is a futile suggestion, but could we possibly step back, take a breath and consider the court's actions a small victory for federalism?

The Founders' concept of government tried to put most decision making in the hands of the states and the people, limiting the federal government to specific, carefully spell-out duties.

For decades now, there have been loud complaints – either from the right or the left, depending on which side felt most aggrieved at any given moment – that too much power was in the hands of career bureaucrats, an ever-expanding administrative state and the Supreme Court's "nine un-elected justices who serve for life."

The court's two decisions diluted that power at least a little.

In the gun case, the court merely struck down the "proper cause" required by some states for citizens to "bear arms" outside their homes, such



as a demonstrable need for self-defense. For no other constitutional right, the court said, must citizens show a special need. Something is either a right or it isn't,

Requiring a reason for any citizen to exercise a right is very different from preventing some citizens from exercising that right for a rational reason, such as having a felony record or a history of domestic violence or dangerous mental instability.

As the court itself has noted, in the words of Justice Antonin Scalia, the ability to bear arms is “not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.” Setting limits on those manners and purposes is properly left up to the states.

In the abortion case, the court did not “ban” the practice. It merely returned authority to the states that it had arrogantly taken for itself nearly 50 years ago in 1973’s *Roe v. Wade*. There was nothing in the Constitution, the nation’s history or its laws that justified the court taking over the issue, let alone acting as a super legislature and defining the conditions under which abortions were permissible.

Even liberal abortion supporters such as Ruth Bader Ginsburg called the *Roe v. Wade* decision foolish, and none of the dissenters in the current case could cite a reason for their position except *Roe v. Wade* itself. States had vigorously debated the abortion issue before 1973 and will resume doing so now.

Some states, under *Roe*’s influence, have gone to one extreme, approving even late-term abortions for any reason or no reason at all (and there was a failed attempt in Congress to go the same route). Perhaps some states, including Indiana, will be tempted to go too far the other way, outlawing all abortions, even to save the life of the mother.

Contact your legislators.

Indiana already has some of the most lenient gun laws in the nation and seems pretty much in tune with the wishes of its residents. But perhaps

the General Assembly went too far last year in abolishing the requirement for a carry permit.

Contact your legislators.

Courts should consider the law and the Constitution. We should never demand they mirror public opinion. In our republican system, legislators aren’t required to follow the public either, but they do try to stay somewhat in step with it.

Keeping the decisions that most affect our lives as local as possible does not guarantee outcomes we will like. Indeed, the occasions when city, county and state units of government have been spectacularly wrong are too numerous to mention.

But those officials are most likely to know the challenges and opportunities experienced by their constituents, and citizens are in a better position to be informed about the issues and have a much better chance of making our case when public servants get it wrong.

We can’t fire the Supreme Court, and the bureaucrats and functionaries of the administrative state labor away in glorious anonymity. But when it comes to our elected officials, we can always throw the bums out, and the more we put in their hands the better off we are.

## My ‘Not You’ Nickname

*(June 20)* — Not you, Leo.

For a few years, I heard that so much that I proudly adopted the nickname Not You Leo.

That was during my tenure as editorial page editor of the *News-Sentinel*. I was also one of the girls in the credit department of Fort Wayne Newspapers, parent company of that newspaper and the *Journal Gazette*.

I know some of you are cringing right now at my use of “girls.” But, really, a label is only a derogatory epithet when it is used against a group by those outside of it. When it is adopted by the group itself, it becomes both a term of endearment and a declaration of solidarity.

Not that it always works out as planned.

Remember the Dixie Chicks?

They were a successful country band whose members apparently decided that popularity conferred geopolitical wisdom. In 2003, during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, one of them stood before an audience in London and declared, about George W. Bush, that, “We’re ashamed that the president of the United States is from Texas.”

Remember George W. Bush?

It turns out the band was merely ahead of the curve on its dislike of the war in Iraq, but Bush at least kept enough of the electorate to win a second term, while the Dixie Chicks were nearly wiped off the country-music map. As station after station dropped them, they lost superstar status to become just another moderately successful band.

Undeterred from their mugging by political reality, band members decided to go full Cultural Awareness and dropped “Dixie” from their name – you know, the whole “symbols of the Confederacy, we must never speak positively of the South” fit of historical amnesia. If they were truly ashamed of George W. Bush, any hint of being seen through the wrong Civil War lens must have brought on deep self-loathing.

Now, they’re just the Chicks.

And that’s supposed to endear them to music fans?

If “girls” makes you cringe, then “chicks” should make you absolutely crazy. They might as well call themselves gals, broads or dames.

Shouldn’t they really be the Women? Of course, in these days, when Supreme Court nominees are grilled on their transsexual sensitivity, even that term is problematic. The Persons, maybe?

But perhaps I’m wrong, being judgmental as an outside observer of their journey. When those of us at Fort Wayne Newspapers decided to become the girls, after all, we were doing it more for the way we saw ourselves than for how we wanted others to see us. I did not barge into that group uninvited, just so you know. I was admitted by one of the members with whom I had become friends during our participation in the company’s bowling league.

We had dinner out several times a year, to celebrate Christmas and each other’s birthdays. During those outings, the talk turned, as it inevitably does when members of one sex congregate, to the failings of the other sex. Dinner after dinner, I was treated to complaints about male laziness, male insincerity, male ego and on and on.

The complaints were almost always capped by some version of, “Men are scum,” followed by a quick apologetic sop to me, “Not you, Leo,” which, over time, led to Not You Leo.

For a while, I was mildly offended. I was admitted to the opposing camp, but only at the price of hearing that my kind was generally not appreciated. But I had also heard enough female-bashing in my male gatherings to finally understand that the other girls were just engaging in much-needed venting while in safe, accepting company. It was indeed a privilege to be included.

Perhaps this is my way forward in our divided times.

White people are untrustworthy; not you, Leo. Libertarians are just fascists in disguise; not you, Leo. Heterosexuals are hateful; not you, Leo. People who pick on the Dixie Chicks are misogynist apologists for racism; not you, Leo.

I was not always a Leo, by the way. I was born Leonard, but I never really cared for the name, so I adopted a nickname in high school – yes, I admit it, both for the way I saw myself and the way I wanted others to see me. I didn’t feel like a Leonard, which seemed a dull and ponderous name – not the sort of person who would become one of the girls. Leo felt cool.

As far as I know, I’m the most famous Leo Morris there is. There once was a very cool Leo Morris much admired in certain music circles as a jazz drummer in New Orleans. But he converted to Islam and changed his name to Idris Muhammad.

Which is worrisome. You never know if someone who adopts a new name for religious reasons is going to be like a Cassius Clay and become the greatest in his field or like a Cat

Stevens and say it seems perfectly natural if a jihad is declared against Salman Rushdie.

So I am generally wary of such people.

Not you, Idris.

## Opinion Moves to Page One

*(June 13)* — I just came across a statement so indefensibly foolish that it is hard to fathom how it showed up in print.

“Readers don’t want us to tell them what to think. They don’t believe we have the expertise to tell anyone what to think on most issues. They perceive us as having a biased agenda.”

That was a statement from a committee of editors at Gannett Co., publisher of USA Today and 250 daily newspapers across the country (15 in Indiana, including the state’s largest, the Indianapolis Star). They recently announced a dramatic change in their editorial pages, which are to be printed much less frequently and will stop carrying things like syndicated columns and editorial cartoons. Even space devoted to letters to the editor will shrink.

Just the facts, in other words. Straight-ahead coverage of the news with no haughty pronouncements from on high about “what it all means.”

Well, now.

The editors are certainly right that people perceive a bias in the press but — I hate to break it to them — it has zero to do with their editorial and op-ed pages.

What people object to is not opinion honestly labeled and presented but the pretense that news is being reported to them objectively and evenhandedly when in fact it is riddled with narrow-mindedness and one-sided preconceptions. The media, including newspapers, have a narrative in service to an agenda, and information that does not serve that narrative is diluted, slanted or just outright omitted.

Go back and read the first sentence of this piece again.

It was strongly stated, with no qualifications or hesitation, begging to be affirmed or refuted by reasoned argument.

It was an opinion, at the top of a column by someone with an agenda, offered to you (presumably) in print or online in the editorial or op-ed section of a newspaper. You might end up agreeing with it or disagreeing with it, but you should not be offended at having encountered it.

I can’t speak for all editorial page editors but, having worked as one for 30-some years, I can honestly say I never tried to tell readers what to think. I offered them something to think about. Before every round of candidate endorsements (Gannett is doing away with those, too), I wrote an editorial telling readers we hoped they used our opinions as just one source among many in making their voting decisions.

I felt I was doing my part to elevate the conversation, offering good arguments to generate better ones, to create a debate that would help us all sort through the clutter to glimpse at least a part of some greater truth.

I was also trying to assure readers that those of us at the newspaper knew the difference between a fact and an opinion and would do our best to keep them separate.

And, finally, I was trying to remind reporters of their obligation to readers. All of us have prejudices and preconceptions and, try as we might, we can’t always keep them at bay, no matter how “fair” and “neutral” we try to be. But the effort needs to be made by those claiming to present the news to others. The “news” means all of it, not just the parts its disseminators agree with.

The demarcation between facts and opinion has all but disappeared today, and citizens seem increasingly comfortable with following the particular mix that mirrors their own beliefs. “Confirmation bias” is no longer a cognitive danger to be avoided — it is a comfort actively sought. We no longer bother ourselves to see the other side, to challenge assumptions, to weigh claims and counterclaims, to think instead of react.

We don't need less opinion. We need more forthright opinion, honestly expressed rather than lurking in disguise.

Gannett might hope it is helping vanquish the perception of bias from its readers. It is not. It is reinforcing that perception.

### On-the-Job versus Diploma

*(June 6)* — I did not go to college because I wanted to.

I went first of all because it was expected of me. I had good grades in high school, and that meant, according to the prevailing custom, you were supposed to continue your studies, especially if you would be the first one in your family to attempt postsecondary education.

And I went second of all because I thought I had to. Journalism at the time had joined the ranks of professions enamored of credentialism, the excessive reliance on a 4-year or better degree to weed out the riffraff from among job applicants. Without that piece of paper, you might as well go stand in line at the warehouse recruiting office.

So I toughed it out and got that degree, which meant, among other things, giving three years of my life to the Army, using the GI Bill to finish at Ball State what I had started at Indiana-Purdue Fort Wayne.

Then started my career and discovered, on the very first day, how useless my college degree was.

Everything we did in school was one thing at a time. One story, one research project, one paper, then you got your grade and moved on to the next task. On my first morning at the Wabash Plain Dealer, I was given four story assignments that were due by noon that day.

Welcome to the real world. I learned more in my first week on the job than I had in four years of college. All that degree had done was get my foot in the door. Much of what I learned was from the city editor, relic of a bygone era who had started life as a car salesman and sneaked in the newspaper back door while the degree hall monitor wasn't looking.

I wonder if I would still feel the same pressure today and make the same choice. Journalism as I knew it is falling apart, and no one knows quite how the pieces will fit back together. Will our future Twitter scribes and YouTube news readers still be required to obtain that foot-in-the-door piece of paper?

Many other professions seem to be giving up the degree requirement.

According to career coach Ken Coleman, in 2017, 51 percent of job listings required at least a 4-year degree. However, by 2021, that number declined to 44 percent, a 7 percent drop. He said he can see the number dropping to 25 percent in the next five years.

"On-the-job training is replacing the college diploma," Coleman told The College Fix. "To put it simply, the 'knowledge' that comes with a degree isn't relevant to the job."

I'm not recommending against going to college. That is an individual's decision. But this is surely a good trend.

No, I don't long for the days when all professionals, including doctors and lawyers, got their start by merely apprenticing with those already on the job. There needed to be a way to accumulate and disperse specialized knowledge.

But somewhere along the way, our institutions of higher learning seem to have lost track of their mission.

Their goal was not just to train students in a profession, but also give them a well-rounded education in the ways of the world. Graduates were supposed to be grounded not only in their careers but in life as well.

Colleges today specialize in training students for jobs they can't get while piling mountains of debt on them and providing amusing classroom diversions like "Rock and Roll as Poetry," "the Klingon Language" and "A Study of Walking."

I blame me.

Or at least members of my generation.

Thanks partly to the GI Bill and especially to Vietnam-era college deferments, thousands of

Baby Boomers who shouldn't have gone to college did so anyway. Many of them lingered on to run the joints, transforming their shallow, hedonistic anti-establishment philosophy into institutional orthodoxy.

To other members of society, to paraphrase (to make it family friendly) a line in *Animal House*:  
"You screwed up. You trusted us." ♦



# Franke

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## Quo Vadis, Conservatism?

I should know what a conservative is. I am one, but I am not so sure anymore I can provide a coherent definition which would cover all of us. Something is happening across the conservative landscape for sure.

There was a time when an intellectually focused conservatism was a new movement. Barry Goldwater's "The Conscience of a Conservative" was mandatory reading, as was William Buckley's "National Review." The ideal was limited government and optimized personal freedom. We all agreed on policy options such as a balanced budget through reduced federal expenditures, a strong national defense for the containment of communism, and personal morality. Sure, the libertarians among us sometimes seemed more akin to the radical left but they were viewed mostly as youthful naivetes. At least we had a common foe to focus our attention. Those of us college students in Young Americans for Freedom confronted or were confronted by the anti-war radical left nearly every day.

Perhaps the fissures in conservatism were already there, just obscured by our quotidian battles with the left. And perhaps Ronald Reagan deserves the credit, or blame, for exposing these cracks. His challenge of Gerald Ford at the 1976 Republican convention inspired many conservatives who sensed that there could be a nexus of conservative philosophy and practical campaign platforms that would move conservatism from the back benches to majority status. Those were glorious years, the 1980's, but they faded soon after Reagan relinquished the helm.

As an aside I think this validates the Great Man of History thesis wherein great events require great men to trigger them. In my opinion Reagan, along with Winston Churchill, was one of only two lions of the twentieth century. Each stood resolutely against evil, sometimes alone, and prevailed.

I was only a detached observer during the Clinton and Bush years, my attention being family and career oriented. Even so, it was obvious that something was changing in our public discourse both in the departure of civility in debate and increasing stridency in voter attitudes. This was the first time I heard the term "not a true conservative" to disparage Republican candidates for office. I wondered who became arbiter of everything conservative with authority to purge heretics from the movement.

My subsequent research into the various ideological rating systems found that individuals could score higher or lower on a given scale based on that scale's focus. There was one for life issues, for Second Amendment rights, for whatever issue that group made its priority. There is even one now, compiled by this foundation's Jason Arp, concerned with property rights voting in the Indiana General Assembly.

The American Conservative Union actually had a ranking level necessary to be branded a true conservative but it was based on that organization's determination of what was most important and most easily sorted into a conservative/liberal absolute. Interesting perhaps and somewhat useful due to its expansive range of issues, but the question remains: Who gets to decide what "true" conservatives believe on what set of issues.

Things aren't getting any clearer. As a case in point, one of the academic deans at my erstwhile campus of employment went on a rant about "neo-liberals" during a meeting. I had never heard that term and afterward asked my boss, the chancellor, what it meant. He said, not unkindly, that I was one. Great.

It took an hour or two of research to learn that the term describes those who believe in the power

of the free market in preference to governmental intervention. I don't see anything "neo" about that but it must be getting enough traction to arouse the ire of big-government types and other statist like my academic friend, who clearly used the term to disparage. Adam Smith just won't stay down no matter how hard they try to sweep him into the dustbin of history.

This episode convinced me it was time to arise from my intellectual torpor and begin serious reading of current conservative intellectuals and propagandists to learn what they actually believe and how they differ on significant policy issues.

My reading turned up another use of neo-liberal, this time in the foreign policy sense. Neo-liberal foreign policy as practiced by Barack Obama set ethical standards as the measuring stick for which nations to support and which ones to oppose internationally. The opposite group, neo-conservatives, were exemplified by the foreign policy of George W. Bush which put American national interests above all other considerations. I suppose Donald Trump would be on the extreme wing of this definition with his America first initiatives. I don't have the slightest idea how to classify Joe Biden's inchoate foreign policy spasms.

What both share is the need for a theoretical justification for an interventionist foreign policy, for better or worse. That really didn't help advance my learning. America, as a nation, has drifted back and forth on this scale and oftentimes ended up somewhere in the middle. Maybe that is part of our problem or perhaps our strength as the only superpower still standing.

If I were pushed to classify myself, it would be as a classical liberal in the mold of Adam Smith and John Locke. I was an undergraduate economics major, so the Smith connection made sense because he reconciled for me my libertarian flirtation with a practical understanding of governmental limitation in the real world.

Locke came to me in a more deliberative manner. I took a political theory class which involved reading the ancients (Plato, Aristotle) alongside the Enlightenment thinkers (Hobbes,

Locke, Rousseau). Locke stood out for me in a way I didn't immediately understand. Eventually I realized it was his influence on our Founding Fathers and their work in drafting the Constitution. Why it took me so long to see the obvious is a question I prefer not contemplate.

Still, I couldn't get enough of libertarianism in those days even though it conflicted with the majoritarian conservative attitudes on social issues. Social conservatives back then—and this attitude is being resurrected now—viewed the government as a legitimate instrument for enforcing moral lifestyles according to the norms of western civilization.

Social conservatism has now been repackaged as "common good" conservatism. In its current reincarnation its proponents argue that the power of government is appropriately applied to maintain the highest community standards of morality as a means of preserving our culture. I may have oversimplified this but its genesis appears to me to be a return to the natural conservative fear of barbarism's dictating its standards, or lack thereof, to the culture at large. One need only watch cable news to understand why this movement is gaining traction among conservative intellectuals.

This is hardly an original conservative reaction to a collapse of civilization, at least as we understand civilization to mean in a western Christian context. It isn't all that much different from George W. Bush's "compassionate" conservatism, by which he appeared to mean that government intervention (read: spending) was justifiable if directed toward a cause with conservative values.

But isn't this simply doing the wrong things for the right reasons? Or is it a practical admission that's the way things work in twenty-first century America where the government is the 800-pound gorilla in the room and it isn't leaving? If the gorilla refuses to go on a diet, at least it can be trained to do more efficacious things. The problem is that the 800-pound beast is still in the room.

This is where my latent libertarianism awakens. The Indiana Policy Review's Eric Schansberg helped me sort this out after reading his book "Turn Neither to the Right nor to the Left: A Thinking Christian's Guide to Politics and Public Policy." I once asked him if a Christian could be a libertarian. His response, which I take the liberty of exaggerating here, was how can a Christian not be a libertarian? Libertarians should not be libertines. Libertarians, at least those of us not in the extreme wing, believe that one is required to do the right thing without the coercion of government. The motivation resides in the individual's free will to do what is right by way of his neighbor without governmental coercion. This is personal, not corporate.

Allow me to take one of Schansberg's points and restate it in a less elegant way. Christ commanded us to do good by our fellow man. He did not tell his followers to lobby the Romans to pass a law to tax others to do this good. He simply said, and I paraphrase here: "You, serve others."

What amazes me is that progressivism in its purest form as developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century believed mankind could be perfected into a prelapsarian Adam and Eve. It is we conservatives, or classical liberals, who don't buy this and therefore look to social institutions such as the rule of law to maintain boundaries on private actions. Self-interest, rather than being an anathema to public good, actually leads to this favorable outcome when everyone's individual self-interest is stirred into society's brew, according to the Gospel of St. Adam Smith at least.

This is the point of departure between the common good conservatives and the classical liberals. It isn't that they imagine a different society. They just see a more practical and effective path to getting there.

The New Criterion recently published a critique of common good conservatism by Kim Holmes followed by seven responses from its adherents. What Holmes argues, and I applaud him for this insight, is that the philosophical battle is between natural rights (classical

liberalism) and natural law (common good conservatism). The argument is whether these two universalities are compatible or inherently in tension.

The common good conservatives, and keep in mind that they are mostly Roman Catholic, argue from both Aristotle and Aquinas in good scholastic disputation that only a just government is a good one. In Enlightenment language it is an argument from the derangement inherent to the state of nature over against one from social contract theory. At least that's my reading of it. After all, who wants to live in a Hobbsian world where life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" when Rousseau's ideal society is achievable?

Ryan Anderson, in his rebuttal to Holmes, summed this thinking up quite well. "But it's a mistake to equate America with rights, freedom, and liberty without any mention of morality, virtue and goodness." He also credits America's founding to, in part, to what he calls "Protestant political thought." Perhaps I am oversensitive on this but it is instructive to understanding the underlying theological differences that inform our political debate, at least on the right.

It is not surprising that this movement has its genesis among Roman Catholic conservative thinkers. If one surveys the various doctrinal differences among Christian denominations, it is Roman Catholicism that is most legalistic about sanctification through its sacrament formerly known as penance and its command to make satisfaction to fully realize atonement. Evangelical Protestants are not far behind in this understanding so it is no coincidence that social or common good conservatism should find a welcoming home amongst this group as well.

One can sense an ideological throwback to the Pilgrims and their Mayflower Compact. Who is opposed to a moral society constraining ungodly behavior? Well, almost everyone in today's brave new world so it is not difficult to sympathize with these moralists. But, begging forgiveness for quoting Latin once more, "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?"

To be fair, common good conservatism is not advocating a theocracy in New England Puritan style. They support religious freedom, which to their thinking is not the same as morality indifference. I'm not sure they use this politically incorrect term, but this sounds a lot like promulgating the Judeo-Christian ethic as the law of the land. Few would argue with that when such ethic is properly understood in a civil context. Or, as Daniel Moheney wrote in *The New Criterion*, "Religious liberty should not be confused with moral indifference or relativism."

That's where the abstract rubber meets the concrete road. While my personal philosophy tends toward Platonism, I am not sure how realistic Plato's concept of the philosopher king would play out today. Benevolent despots throughout history have been more despotic than benevolent. History is replete with instances of well-intentioned rulers becoming drunk with power, even Christian ones. Lord Acton's quote about absolute power is spot on.

My issue with common good conservatives, or at least one of several issues, is that they tend to lump libertarians together with classical liberals. This may be an accurate taxonomy to an extent, but not when the excesses of the extreme libertarians are laid at the doorstep of classical liberalism. How many classical liberals, as opposed to the most anarchic of libertarians, support same-sex marriage, surgical solutions to gender dysphoria, unlimited access to abortion and so forth? Few, in my limited experience.

Both common good conservatives and classical liberals claim John Locke and, to a lesser extent, Edmund Burke as their muses. Perhaps. If either man were alive today, I don't know how he would align himself. Good luck with corralling Burke. I still can't quite figure him out. But Locke is easier to predict. Despite the common good conservatives' assertions, I have a difficult time imagining him serving as grand marshal for their parade. One can't help but notice the relationship between today's common good conservatism and the "compassionate" conservatism of the Bush administration. It is easy to see why George W.

was both loved and hated by conservatives based on their priority list of political issues. Given that the federal government is huge in fiscal and regulatory power, the operating principle is to direct some of those funds to groups which support conservative principles such as pro-family organizations. Is this a situation of doing the wrong things for the right purposes? Certainly if you believe in limited government but certainly not if you are a pragmatist who begrudgingly accepts government for what it has become.

While this may be a stretch, the same thinking is evident at the state and local levels when governmental officials distribute economic largesse from the public fisc to entice businesses and developers to locate facilities in their districts. The ideological argument may not be used in these situations but the end result is suspiciously familiar—a favored class of citizens and taxpayers benefiting at the expense of everyone else. At least the funds are being spent for a good purpose, or so they say.

This "common good" approach, using the term in its general rather than specific sense, throws traditional fiscal conservatism out the window. Its proponents may argue that they spend less than progressives, but that argument harkens back to the old Rockefeller wing of the Cold War Republican Party. First Barry Goldwater and then Ronald Reagan disabused us of any pretense that such policy prescriptions were conducive to limited government and to electoral victory. One might see the Rockefeller wing as incipient RINOs but how is that helpful? RINO is too much a hurled epithet, uncomfortably similar to the progressive reduction of all serious debate to name-calling.

Then there is Donald Trump, ignored at one's own peril. Trumpism is the ideological cat set among us conservative pigeons. I don't think Trumpism deserves to be a wing in the conservative mansion as it has no philosophically coherent platform other than hero worship. What defines Trumpism other than his demand for absolute loyalty to everything his self-absorbed brain concocts?

(I realize the above statement will raise the hackles of those Trump supporters who consider themselves philosophical conservatives. I know many of them and respect their ideals . . . other than their apparent visceral support for everything Trump says. They are being played by one of history's most extraordinary egos, subject to being discarded at his whim. Just look at how many of his executive officers and advisors were cast aside for a sin no greater than not slavishly jumping to his every command. But then for Donald Trump, that is the original sin. Still, he speaks to the frustration felt by many conservatives and can rally a crowd wherever he speaks.)

My taxonomy of conservative's branches is hardly complete. I haven't touched on those who focus on religious liberty, such as the Acton Institute as the think tank and the Alliance Defending Freedom as the action arm for this priority. And there are those, not nearly enough of them, who see property rights as the foundational principle for true liberty. This foundation, through Jason Arp and others, attempts to fill that void.

If I may interject a personal reflection, my thinking on natural rights sorts them into a bifurcation between freedom of conscience (abstract thought) and freedom of person (concrete things). It is no coincidence that the two issues mentioned in the paragraph above neatly fit one into each bucket. I tend to overthink things at times, probably being guilty of that here, but it does help unclutter the jumble of my mind.

Left behind in all this is old-fashioned mom-and-pop conservatism is what Catherine Pakaluk called "common sense" conservatism in a Heritage Foundation interview. This is nothing more or less than main street instead of Wall Street, what working and middle class people believe and how they live their lives—holding jobs, buying homes, getting married and raising families, going to church and attending patriotic parades on holidays. Is this merely a throwback memory of something that no longer exists or is the Nixonian silent majority biding its time until the next election?

While mostly visceral, common sense conservatism is rooted in the received wisdom passed down from generation to generation of Americans. Yes, this is what western civilization is all about. And these people vote.

And so we must face the question that opened this essay. Quo vadis? Where are we going as conservatives?

First, we must accept the reality that conservatism has fragmented into multiple tendrils, each focusing on a narrow aspect of the overarching conservative creed. No, fragmented is not the right word. Articulated is a better one to use out of respect for the deep thinkers who have formulated these positions. The issue is whether these disparate priorities can all fit under a single tent, one that is faithful to conservatism and at the same time offers a workable electoral coalition which can affect our national direction.

I can't recall a time when there was an ex cathedra conservative manifesto, a creed of belief statements to which one must subscribe completely and unconditionally. This is a good thing if our democratic polity is to function as the Constitution constructed it.

Once again, we can look to the past for insight. The Roman Republic's highest rank of public service was censor, senior politicians elected to review the voter lists and reclassify those who failed to meet their rank's current requirements, both financial and ethical. Both our words census and censor come from this dual responsibility—take the count and sanction those who fall short of the standards. Roman citizens could be "busted in rank" if their financial status or moral behavior failed the grade as determined by the censors.

The inner urge to become a self-appointed censor is a strong one, and not just within conservative ranks. The Left is in a worse position than the Right on this. Liberalism, in the modern sense, has lost its intellectual resilience to finely nuanced solutions to the major issues of the day. I hardly ever agreed with liberals back in my college days, but I could discuss topics with them and frequently find at least some common ground.



Not so today. The Cold War Liberal has gone the way of the dinosaur.

The extreme progressive wing of the Democrat party has issued its manifesto of required beliefs and woe to the faint-hearted who try to hold onto earlier, non-woke opinions. Just look at the major flip-flops done by Democrat politicians on nearly every issue. Once held moderate positions have been quickly abandoned in an attempt for these party leaders to stay ahead of their followers who are rushing off in an ever-leftward direction. It's hard to claim leadership when you are always trying to catch up. Their motivation must be fear, fear of being left out when the revolution succeeds, but theirs is not an enlightened reading of the history of revolutionary movements. Revolutions always end by eating their own young; just ask Robespierre and the other French Jacobins who ultimately found themselves facing the business end of their favorite guillotine toy.

Chilton Williamson, in an essay published in "Modern Age," called the left's intellectual bankruptcy "a politics of desperation" based on its insane insistence on doing the same thing over and over while exaggerating the expected results. He, in a creative moment, tagged this as "a whelp of despair."

Is conservatism as both a philosophy and a political movement best served if it is guided by an extensive manifesto requiring strict adherence by its followers? Here is the dilemma in that: What makes for ideal theory doesn't always make for good public policy, good in the sense that it can attract a majority of the electorate. Our republican form of representative democracy demands a legislative coalition to pass appropriate laws and to allocate public funds. This means compromise on details while preserving the common understanding of overarching principles. For better or worse, that is the way our system is designed to work. If you don't like that, blame Madison, Hamilton, Adams, et. al.

The Founding Fathers, in their unsurpassed genius, understood this. Our Constitution is a brilliant compilation of practical compromises upholding higher level principles. The Electoral

College, for example, was just the last significant compromise reached at the convention, but the compromise which finally allowed adoption of the final document. Without this compromise along side the other ones previously reached, the delegates would have gone home empty-handed.

The present-day fissures in conservative philosophy are a threat to our movement but only if we let our differences cancel our commonalities. Let the other side exhaust itself purging heretics through ever more stringent tests of ideology purity. We agree on so much and have so much to offer our nation. This is a critical time. We can't afford to waste it.

So which would we prefer: ideological purity or political effectiveness? Or can we refuse the dilemma and develop a methodology which advances both? Can all conservatives reach a consensus on a few overarching principles of the highest order? I think so, but only at a philosophical level. Unfortunately, elections are not competitions between philosophers or conservatism would surely win every time. Philosophy must be explained to the citizenry in terms of concrete policy options and legislative agendas. We can all agree in principle on religious liberty, property rights, free markets, etc., but can we maintain that agreement when our sleeves are rolled up to make what Otto von Bismarck described as legislative sausage? Our track record on that has not impressed.

I don't presume to offer the formula for achieving electoral unity but achieve it we must. The very soul of our civilization depends on our facing the progressive barbarians and forcing them to stand down. Or at least to relegate them to cultural and political irrelevancy everywhere other than in the fever swamp of their own minds.

Perhaps we have reverted to the same existential threat of the darkest days of our War for Independence, Thomas Paine's "times that try men's souls." Paine looked optimistically to the "birthday of a new world" which would bring advances in liberty to all mankind. The new world we are facing today is friendly neither to liberty nor to any of conservatism's core principles.

Bill Buckley quipped that, “A Conservative is a fellow who is standing athwart history yelling ‘Stop!’” Now is that time. At least we can all agree on that. The salient question is: Can we stand shoulder-to-shoulder on the ramparts of our civilization and face down the barbaric horde? The left-wingers of my college days used to chant, “All the world is watching!” It still is and, I pray, not liking what it is seeing today.

If we are true to our label of conservative, we need to act quickly while there is still something left to conserve. To quote Thomas Paine once more, “the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.” We conservatives can triumph if we recognize our true adversary. Hint: It’s not each other. If only we can keep that in mind. — *Aug. 25*

## The Warts of Democracy

**I**s the United States a democracy? According to a strict definition of the term, the answer is “no.” Citizens don’t vote on proposed legislation, with the exception of infrequent ballot initiatives and perhaps in some small New England towns. We vote for people to represent us when they vote on legislation. That makes America a republic or, and I concede this point, a representative democracy.

So most of us would answer the question in the affirmative. We are as much a democracy as any other nation in the world, even if imperfect in our application of the textbook definition.

That said, why do so many of our politicians charge their opponents with being threats to democracy? We heard this for years, as many Democrats and not a few Republicans claimed that the election of Donald Trump was such a threat. The inconvenient fact that he won the 2016 election because he received more Electoral College votes than did Hilary Clinton simply moved their target to our faulty Constitution.

The operating principle here appears to be: “Democracy is under threat whenever our side loses an election.”

And give Donald Trump credit, something I am generally loath to do, for simply turning that argument back on his opponents by claiming

election fraud to explain why he lost in 2020. They may be strange bedfellows, but they are fellow travelers in their lack of allegiance to our constitutional structures.

What is the single most important characteristic of a democratic form of government? Surely it is the expression of the will of the people at the ballot box. Democracy, in its simplest sense, is about voting. We either trust our fellow citizens or we don’t. Hurling irresponsible charges of “illegitimacy” whenever the wrong candidate wins does not advance a democratic polity. Rather, such reckless hyperbole erodes its very foundation.

There is a reason we are not a pure democracy, and not simply that it would be ponderously inefficient for a nation of our size. The Founding Fathers recognized the need for checks and balances to guard against a tyranny of the majority. Hence, they established different election procedures for the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Most critically, they assured that our judiciary would be independent of and removed from political pressure. Disagreeing with the Supreme Court’s decisions is one’s right under the First Amendment; it does not make the Court illegitimate nor does it justify political attacks bent on reducing or removing its independence. Threatening individual justices or the Court as a whole is the true threat to our democracy. Conservatives didn’t understand that in the previous decade and Progressives don’t understand it now.

We have John Adams, among others, to thank for this balance of power. While not attending the Constitutional Convention of 1787 due to his foreign posting as ambassador to England, his influence was in the room. It was he who midwived the Massachusetts constitution which served as a model for others. The more I read about the period, the more I appreciate Adams despite his curmudgeonry.

The question of how much democracy is good consumed much of the debate during the 1780’s leading up to the 1787 convention. The existing

state legislatures tended to be captured by temporary majorities of special interests that passed self-serving laws. James Madison, who served briefly in the Virginia legislature, was beside himself with the lack of altruism among his fellow representatives.

I have the historian Gordon Wood to thank for this new insight. His most recent book, “Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution,” is a travelog through the decades of the 1770’s and 1780’s as the great thinkers of the day wrestled with defining the role and structure of a government created to advance liberty. He made me realize that my understanding of the issues of the day was rather shallow.

Our system is one of majority rule, even when election results are not to our liking. At the same time the rights of all are protected from a tyranny of the majority. The Constitution draws the line past which the majority dare not go. That line of defense is our court system, as unpopular as it is with one side or the other. That unpopularity among the powerful attests to its fidelity in performing its constitutional function.

Our national discourse would benefit from a ratcheting down of the “illegitimacy” rhetoric. Democracy is about elections, about winners and losers. When the people speak through the ballot box, that’s just pure and simple democracy as it is meant to work.

As long as I am referencing presidents low on my ranking scale, I must add Barack Obama’s response to Republican criticism during the early years of his administration. “I won. Get over it.”

A better quote comes from a losing Democrat candidate in a California Senate primary election. “The people have spoken, the b\*\*\*\*\*s.” — *Aug. 24*

## The Government We Deserve

‘D’emocracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.”

These words of George Bernard Shaw, not someone I am in the habit of quoting, certainly fit

the travesty that is our national political scene today. Consider the most recent headlines. We have an ex-President on a crusade to punish every Republican officeholder who fails to show proper obeisance to his mania about having his reelection stolen. Does he even know which party is his? Pogo’s pithy comment that “we have met the enemy, and he is us” describes this fiasco to a T.

We also have a Speaker of the House whose overweening dream is to hound said ex-President to his grave and beyond by creating a farcical star chamber in the guise of a bipartisan congressional committee to serve as her executive arm. Am I the only one who is reminded of the Queen of Heart’s court in “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”?

Then we have an ex-President wannabe who sees political redemption in her erstwhile opponent’s problem. She certainly can resonate with the “election was stolen from me” mantra. Let’s call her a modern Phoenix rising from her self-assigned purgatory although we should recall that the bird of mythology tended to self-combust.

Life is imitating art, or at least literary references.

Surely we can do better than this.

What happened to the Franklin Roosevelts, Dwight Eisenhowers and Ronald Reagans who nurtured our national psyche during their tenures? Regardless of one’s political persuasion, each of these presidents led from a position of strength possible only because they continually reminded us of what we could be as a nation. Theirs was not an agenda of blame, incitement and retaliation. They offered hope in difficult times. Americans took pride in our country rather than suffering embarrassment from the conduct of our national leaders.

I confess to looking backward with much too much fondness but who can gainsay me?

We were warned by James Madison in the Federalist Papers about this. The potential destructive evil as he saw it was excessive factionalism. By that he didn’t mean the broad political parties that we have today. Rather, his concern was with small groups that would splinter

to the point of making a national consensus impossible. The question of the day was whether the new nation would be too big to be effectively governed as a republic.

Madison's response was to trust in the citizenry's propensity for individually pursuing self-interest to the point of reaching a common good. His political marketplace of ideas reflected Adam Smith's concept of self-interest in the marketplace of economic transactions. Madison hardly expected the new national government to be one of angels . . . quite the contrary . . . so warned against a government that could not control itself.

Which brings us 235 years into the future. Can the Hobbsian leviathan which is our national government control itself? I fear not. My natural skepticism has advanced (deteriorated?) to cynicism.

Has the FBI become the enforcement arm of the Democrat party? It's not just the recent Trump subpoena which gives rise to this question; that will take eons of court time to sort out. The whole 2016 election interference by presumably neutral civil servants in high FBI positions is chilling at best, frightening at worst. If there is a state worse than fright, then I don't want to get there.

Our Founding Fathers tried to model the new government on the Roman Republic example. It offered more than a few organizational constructs worth emulating. Yet that model republic collapsed into dictatorship after a century or more of private political vendettas played out as public prosecutions. Once a politician left office and lost his legal immunity, his enemies lined up to ruin him politically and financially. Eventually the provincial governors learned to return to Rome only at the head of an army, and decades of civil wars ensued.

I pray that we don't have an American Caesar preparing to cross a modern day Rubicon. That can't happen in America, or so we like to assure ourselves, but who would have predicted the uncivil war still being fought in our major cities? This is not the America where I was raised nor one I want my grandchildren to inherit.

Going back to the Shaw quote above, I find it hard to swallow that I am partly responsible for the embarrassing quality of our national leaders . . . I and 250,000,000 of my fellow adult citizens. As unwelcome as the thought is, we have only ourselves to blame if Shaw knows what he is talking about.

Permit me one more George Bernard Shaw quote and then I will relegate him to the dustbin of my memory ash heap.

"The longer I live, the more convinced am I that this planet is used by other planets as a lunatic asylum."

Politically incorrect but still spot on, as my inner curmudgeon tells me. Please prove me wrong. — Aug. 17

## What Happened to Summer Vacation?

**M**ost of the public and parochial schools in my area started back up this week. So what, one might ask, until one looks at the calendar and realizes it is the second week of August. What happened to summer vacation?

No one of my acquaintance thinks this is a good idea, a handful of totally exasperated parents excluded. It isn't just we geezers who think summer runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day. There is something yin-and-yangish about having these holiday bookends on either end of the best time of year for school children.

I admit to being cloyingly nostalgic at times, but summers were essential to our maturation process. Despite what the professional educators may have thought, our educational development advanced apace during these three months. We had all day to figure out how to spend our time in mostly safe and creative ways. Whatever structure defined the day, we determined it ourselves. Our mothers' calling us to come home for lunch was the only adult supervision we needed.

There were a few adult-organized activities such as youth baseball and vacation Bible school, but these were the exceptions. Now, it seems kids' entire days and weeks are subsumed with specialty summer camps, 12-month travel sports

teams and other expensive activities under close adult supervision. Kids aren't kids anymore, just harried little adults.

Then there was the summer family vacation ritual. Load up us kids into the sedan or station wagon and head off along a route carefully planned by our parents. We didn't have video players or iPads to entertain us. We would count dairy cows on our side of the car in cutthroat competition with our siblings on the other side. When stopped at a railroad crossing, we counted boxcars. Maybe that's why our generation's math skills are superior to those of each succeeding generation, or so we tell ourselves.

Yes, it was a different time. Moms for the most part didn't work outside the home so we actually had more adult supervision than we cared to admit. Whoever's yard we were playing in, their mom was the boss. I feel sorry for today's kids who can't run next door to play with the neighbor kids without their parents (or single parent) worried for their safety.

There is something to be said for unstructured, non-programmed play. children can't be creative anymore. It boggles the mind what we could pretend to be given whatever sticks, rocks and our dad[s garden tools were to hand. Imagination is a wonderful, liberating thing; I fear we are robbing our children and grandchildren from developing theirs.

So where did we go wrong? It is easy to cast blame on politicians, teacher unions, school boards and any of the other usual bands of suspects. As much as I would like to do that, the real culprit is air conditioning.

During my childhood in the idyllic 1950s, air conditioning was something we heard about but hardly ever experienced. Our automobiles, homes and, yes, our schools operated quite effectively without and we survived. That's what basements were for; we headed down there when the temperatures got too high.

My family was fortunate to live on a wooded street with plenty of shade. Later we moved into the country, the term we used for the agricultural

areas of the county. There was always plenty of breeze to enjoy and, of course, a lot of shade trees near the house. If you were never in air conditioning, you didn't feel overheated when you left it.

Air conditioning has a lot to answer for. Not only has it stolen nearly a month from kids' summer, it also allows Congress and all those Washington agencies to function all year long. The cynic in me is convinced that has not made things better for our nation.

In addition to being a cynic, I also plead guilty to being a hypocrite. I am writing this in an air-conditioned lounge, having driven here in my air-conditioned truck. When I finish, I will drive back to my air-conditioned home. Yes, I'm spoiled now so I need to find something else to blame. And I did.

The real culprit is the Anglo-Saxon calendar that was followed by our cultural forebears in the early Middle Ages. Their summer ran from approximately May 7 to Aug. 7 when the harvest began. The summer solstice, June 21 or thereabouts, was the middle of summer and is still celebrated as the Midsummer festival across northern Europe.

So the next time I hear people complain about school starting in early August, I will tell them we are just being faithful to our Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage. They can blame Beowulf or Alfred the Great or King Arthur and the knights of his roundtable.

But I still don't like it. — *Aug. 10*

## Children Still Read Real Books

I was in the checkout line at my local branch library the other day, standing behind several youngsters slowly doing their own checkouts with minimal mother assistance. One librarian caught my eye with an "I'm sorry about this" glance to which I responded, "This makes my day."

Think about it. Here were about a half dozen elementary-age students checking out books. Not reserving time to use the library's computers. Not



whining impatiently to go home to play Xbox. But checking out books. Lots of them. To read.

Of course this triggered memories from my childhood in the idyllic 1950s. My memory may fail me on this, but I don't recall a system of branch libraries back then. All we had was the downtown Carnegie library. I don't think I ever was inside it, as downtown Fort Wayne was visited only rarely on shopping trips.

I loved to read back then, a habit I have never been able to kick. I still read way too much but now forget most of it within moments of finishing the book. Yet I can't think of any better way to spend my free time.

Back then, prior to the American disease of conspicuous consumption, one could find things to read only by going to a library. No eBooks or Kindles or digital downloads for us hearty souls; we actually read real books printed on paper and bound inside hardback covers. The only issue was to obtain books.

I attended a small Lutheran grade school with a small library populated by books on long term loan from the county library. As hard as it is to comprehend in our brave new woke world, the government used to be friendly to religion back then even to the extent of assisting children in parochial schools.

There were several series of books in our library. One, a series of biographies set apart by its light blue covers, was my favorite. For some obscure reason I best remember a biography of James Oglethorpe and his founding of the colony of Georgia. Another series was entitled "Your Were There" or something similar, putting the reader on scene at important historical events. Most memorable for me was the edition on the battles of Lexington and Concord. Blame these two series for my lifelong fascination with history.

Summers could be a problem as I no longer had access to the school library. Fortunately for me, the public library had a fleet of what were called bookmobiles. These were trucks of sorts which had shelves of books. The bookmobile came to the end of our street once each week. I couldn't wait. In fact I would sit at the intersection on the

designated day waiting. I would also ask to be taken to my grandmother's house on the day her street got the bookmobile visit. I was not a normal child, but then that admission surprises no one who knows me.

I was really fascinated with the checkout process. Each book had a pocket inside the front cover with a card giving the title and author of the book. The mobile librarian extracted that card and placed it in an offset arrangement with another card which was stamped with the return date. Both cards then were photographed with the patron's library card by some huge camera contraption to record the book and borrower.

I have one traumatic memory from my bookmobile days. After checking out my armful of books at the front of the vehicle, I stopped on my way to the entry door at the back to look at a book which caught my attention for the first time. The librarian immediately chastised me for pulling the book from the shelf after checking out. My psyche was damaged forever. If I ever become a serial killer, that mean librarian is to blame.

My reading addiction must be inheritable as my pre-teen granddaughter is an avaricious reader just like her grandfather. When she stays overnight with us, we must insist she turn off the light in her bedroom or she would stay up all night reading. Needless to say, I am proud of that girl.

One of the best programs in schools these days is Accelerated Reader. Children are incentivized to read and are rewarded for doing so. The Fort Wayne TinCaps, our minor league team, gives free tickets to schoolchildren who meet reading goals. My congregation's school gives an award to the child in each grade who reads the most. That certainly meets the definition of healthy competition.

I am willing to stand in line for as long as it takes if a youngster is in front of me checking out real books. It gives me hope for the future. And dare I say it, hope for an educated future. — Aug.

3

## NIMBY Is Alive and Well

**N**ot In My Back Yard (NIMBY) demands recognition as a universal truth with claims both on natural law and natural rights. Its logic is unassailable. It must be, based on the number of people who claim Bill of Rights level protection under it. No one has offered a refutation acceptable to the NIMBY choir.

Unless one appeals to common sense. But then, we are speaking of the political arena where common sense is generally not welcome.

Recently the NIMBY creature was forced out of hibernation by a decision of the Allen County Commissioners about the location of a new jail. Yes, those insensitive politicians picked somebody's back yard for the jail. Not literally, of course; the site is a large, county-owned field currently being used as a training range by the Sheriff's Department. It is also located next to a major solid-waste landfill. More about that later.

Truth be told, there is no significant residential housing in the immediate vicinity. This is agricultural ground being redeveloped into light manufacturing and warehousing facilities. True, there is a school a half mile down the road, not exactly backyard but close enough to be introduced into evidence.

This is not the part of the county where I live so I can take a cavalier attitude about the location. It's not even in my township, let alone my backyard. That's a fair cop.

My point is that there is always someone opposed to locating almost anything if it is close to their neighborhoods. These people have legitimate complaints about such land use's negative impact on their property values, the major source of accumulated wealth for most.

The irony of the situation is that we citizens demand a high level of tangible services but don't want to be visually reminded of them. We love sausage; we just don't want to see it made. Take that landfill mentioned above. It faced substantial protests when first proposed. Think about it: If we don't have landfills, what happens to all the garbage we wasteful consumers put curbside each

week? It must go somewhere, and we can't use New York City's former solution of dumping it in the ocean offshore of New Jersey.

This reminds me of an issue decades ago when a farmer requested authority to add a cattle feedlot to his operation. Note that he was a farmer in agriculturally zoned land. Some houses had been built individually along this road and several of these homeowners contested the farmer's petition. Their irrefutable argument? We don't need feed lots; we can buy all the beef we need at the grocery store. I rest my case.

The same opposition has been seen when utility companies propose running electricity transmission lines near housing. You can count on NIMBY to show up, front and center. None of the protestors are willing to cut back their electric service to avoid the required transmission improvements. Just put the line somewhere, anywhere else.

The more libertarian among us would argue that this is to be expected when government is given excessive zoning powers, or any zoning authority at all. Just look at Houston which continues to grow at a phenomenal rate despite a lack of zoning ordinances. As a case in point, the city is currently building its third interstate bypass loop around the urban area due to unrelenting growth.

A limitless set of examples of this can be found by doing an internet search of one's local news archives. Somebody wants to build something and others will oppose it. Perhaps that is the nature of a representative democracy in which citizens have the right, some would say the duty, to involve themselves in governmental decision-making. One can see the wisdom of Adam Smith, John Locke, James Madison and other Enlightenment thinkers in constructing a polity where civil discourse among competing interests is encouraged and channeled appropriately to outcomes advancing the common good. See Federalist 10 for Madison's take on this.

But back to Allen County's new jail. This issue has been on-going for several months as a federal court ruled that the current jail was overcrowded

in violation of inmate rights. The current jail, itself a replacement for the one I recall seeing as a youngster, is downtown near the courthouse where criminal trials occur. Why we need to continually build larger jails is a question for another time, as is what rights prisoners should have.

The three Fort Wayne city councilmen who are protesting the site selection arguably are doing their duty to represent their voters. If every other elected official takes the same attitude about his district, what then?

NIMBY at work. We must build a new jail, just not anywhere near me. I wonder if the shoreline of New Jersey is still available? — *July 27*

### The Idylls of Suburban Life

We are fortunate to live on a cul-de-sac in a suburban neighborhood, just on the edge of the city limits. We are quite friendly with our neighbors, most of whom have lived here for a long time.

Just the other night, the wives gathered in our family room to plot their next neighborly social extravaganza so we husbands repaired to the patio to field test a new local bourbon I received for Father's Day. It passed, judging by the miniscule amount left in the bottle.

The conversation among us is worth the price of admission. One neighbor is a retired Army colonel who spent much of his career in Europe so he is a walking travelog for the sights not usually seen by tourists. Another is an IT security specialist and consultant with the FBI. Sometimes I think I am the only resident without a security clearance.

But mostly we talk about the challenges of home ownership, particularly our never-ending warfare with the critters who claim squatters' rights in our backyards.

Ours is a wooded subdivision with a golf course wending its way around the houses. My backyard is bordered by a small, wooded thicket, home to all sorts of wildlife, including the occasional deer or even a passing coyote. Our favorite itinerant, sometime resident is a red fox. Or perhaps it is the

family of red-tailed hawks seasonally nesting in the trees.

What will never reach favorite status is the horde of chipmunks which disrupts our sylvan existence. I hope no one from PETA is reading this, but we do whatever we can to "encourage" them to decamp for safer environs.

One neighbor live traps them and then takes them to a local park for release. I don't think he takes them far enough as I am willing to swear that sometimes they get back here before he does.

We all feed the birds, competing for bragging rights on the quantity and quality of our freeloading feathered friends dining on our dime. One unfortunate bird got its tail feathers caught in a chipmunk trap. The neighbor was chasing that poor bird across the backyard, trying to release it from the trap, while the bird hopped along as fast as it could. Who needs cable TV when you can watch this sort of drama, or should I say comedy, from your own yard swing?

Moles are also a species not welcomed by us homeowners. My first summer, as I was nursing along a freshly planted yard, saw the convening of a mole convention resulting in tunnels everywhere, visible and destructive for my expected crop of bluegrass.

I borrowed several traps and had no little success in reducing the mole population. The problem was that apparently I only snagged the intellectually deficient ones. The escapees bred a master race of progeny to challenge me the next year. Even shoving a garden hose down into their runs had no effect, and I never could find where the water eventually came out. It reminded me of the movie "The Secret of NIMH." At least my electricity stayed on.

Squirrels are also a major nuisance. We have spent millions of dollars, almost, securing our bird feeders from these pesky varmints. One neighbor, who grew up in Berne, availed himself of the country boy solution—a .22 caliber. I would be sitting on the patio and suddenly hear a "pop" followed by a "plop." I'm not a lawyer so I won't go into the number of city ordinances violated but neither did I feel the compunction to call 911.

One day I saw his wife drive down the cul-de-sac at a high rate of speed, something totally out of character. Minutes later I saw my neighbor walking down the street, rifle on shoulder and followed by his son-in-law with a shovel. Wisely, I waited for their return to question this parade. It seems his wife hit a squirrel in the street without killing it and wanted him to put it out of its misery. The squirrel somehow recovered and fled the scene, in the animal version of hit and run. About 15 minutes later a city police car came slowly down the street looking into every yard and open garage. I did not offer to turn state's evidence.

Muskrats from the many golf course ponds may be scariest for the faint-hearted. A neighbor lady, when hearing another resident complain about one cowering in her garage, responded this way: "Close the garage door and select your weapon of choice." This is suburban life in the raw.

We are not a cruel lot but the balance of nature must be preserved. We are simply helping out when the foxes, coyotes and hawks become overwhelmed with their responsibilities. That's our story and we are sticking to it. — *July 30*

## Virtue's Disappearance in our Public Character

In 1993, William Bennett published an impressive anthology of essays, fables, poems and other writings titled "The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories." This is an excellent reader for children of all ages, especially for bedtime stories. Adults may think this book below them but I would still encourage reading it and thinking deeply on the morals taught therein.

Here's the problem: One can only pursue virtue if one believes in natural law and objective truth. Note, though, that one's choice to believe or not has no relevance to the existence of these eternal truths. Reality is not something created in the psychic self; it is transcendent to human thought. Only the most self-absorbed can supererogate to themselves the authority to decide this. Arbiter of

the Universe is a title that comes by self-anointing. Leave God out of it, or so they think.

The ancient Greeks had a word for this: hubris. We still use that word because no other civilization has come up with a better one. "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." I have never discovered who first wrote this, but it must have been one of the Greek playwrights. I asked a friend, a professor of theatre, but he couldn't find it. I'll credit Euripides until someone proves differently.

The Greeks saw virtue as the practice of temperance, prudence, courage and justice. One certainly sees a dearth of those characteristics in today's public discourse, despite what the social justice warriors claim for their motivation. And while I lean more Platonic than Aristotelian in my thinking, Aristotle had it right about virtue being the opposite of vice. Vice to Aristotle was an extreme of either deficiency or excess. My corollary to Aristotle's premise is that a deficiency of virtue leads invariably to excess, and not excessive good.

Bill Bennett had a clear concept of the manifestations of virtue in his book's organization. Each chapter focuses on a distinct facet of the virtuous life: self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty and faith. Compare Bennett's list to St. Paul's from Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Just coincidence? I think not.

Would that we all align our thoughts, words and actions with these lists. Virtue would prevail.

Instead, we have "values."

I spent my career in higher education administration and was subjected to an unending parade of lectures, seminars and consultant presentations about the importance of helping students determine their own values. This followed the situational ethics mantra which was all the rage among my generation of college students back in those heady days.

The underlying premise for this exercise, although seldom acknowledged back then, was



that values were personal and therefore subjective. That left no room for acceptance of any universal or objective truths to establish the basis from which these values would be drawn. Natural law has no place in this philosophy. Unless, now get this, one subjectively chooses values in the belief that they are objectively universal. I subjectively declare universal values, but only for me. Huh?

If young people could clarify their own subjective values, we were told, they would lead a self-actualized lives of worth and satisfaction — Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs satisfied. Everyone happy, everyone fulfilled . . . at least in his own mind. But what happens when my personal values conflict with yours in such a way that one or the other must desist? Without a standard of universal truth, who decides? The strongest? The fittest, as social Darwinists would prefer? Or simply survival of the nastiest as our current societal norms endorse?

There must be something better. There is: virtue.

In his impressive analysis of classical liberalism, “The Conservative Sensibility,” George Will made a poignant comment about our current fixation on values with this statement: “Adolph Hitler had scads of values. George Washington had virtues.”

If virtue is to be denied, the virtuous must be brought down. And so it is today with George Washington and others of his stature.

Our first president is no longer an icon; he just can’t pass woke muster. Certainly he was not perfect but who is? That is the sorry condition inherited from our first parents. Still, any reasonable person can see Washington for what he was and what he did. One need not subscribe to the Great Man of History theory to recognize his uniquely essential contribution to our independence and new government.

Let the current mob dismiss him for his past sins. Going back to George Will, he also reminds our current morality judges who haughtily dismiss everything past that in a few decades or centuries,

they will find themselves as the morally deficient and canceled past. Hubris in spades.

Those pesky Greek gods are still at work. —  
*July 13*

## Detours Around the Education Train Wreck

**I**t seems all the news about our schools is bad, really bad. One can understand why parents are alarmed over their children being indoctrinated with critical race theory and trans-whatever by unaccountable educators.

It’s not a simple matter of objecting to these curricular abominations; it is also a realization that this is being done in dark of night, so to speak, in the hope that the parents are asleep. No wonder parents are demanding answers at local school board meetings by freely exercising their First Amendment rights to petition the government. Domestic terrorism, indeed.

The contempt with which too many prominent educational elites view parents is antithetical to our American creed as a self-governing people. It is no wonder parents are voting with their feet when school choice is available.

Private and parochial schools historically have served as an alternative to public schools. Often this has a religious motive, the desire to raise one’s children in the faith while also providing an appropriate civic education. In my hometown of Fort Wayne, there used to be a close working relationship among the public, Roman Catholic and Lutheran school systems. Respect and cooperation formed the operating principle. For example my small Lutheran elementary school did not have a gymnasium so we were allowed to use the one at the neighboring public school.

The columnist and movie producer Dinesh D’Souza, an early adjunct scholar of this foundation, spent a week in Fort Wayne back then researching a commissioned article for this journal entitled: “Fort Wayne: The Last Salvageable Public School System.” One of his points was that the cooperation between the public and private school systems had made both better. Again, it is a feature that has been lost.



My sense of things now is that the respect between the two is gone and whatever cooperation which still exists is due to federal funding regulations for things like special education. Indiana's attendance-based funding for public schools, compounded by an effective voucher program, certainly poisoned what remained of this relationship. It's all about the Benjamins.

The home-schooling movement continues to gain in popularity. I haven't figured out a way to determine how many Hoosier children are home-schooled but the number who withdraw from their local public schools each year gets the attention of local superintendents. Student leaves; state dollars head out the door.

Throw charter schools onto the burn pile and combustion occurs. It does not matter that charters are public schools because tuition support follows the child, hitting public school balance sheets where it hurts most.

Another educational alternative which is getting traction these days is the classical model.

I suspect most people equate the classical model with making their children learn the Latin language. For classical purists Latin is the foundation of the curriculum. Even though most consider it a dead language, its progeny are alive and well in our vocabulary and grammatical structures.

However, these purists overstate their case by attributing much too much to Latin, at least in my opinion. Sure, Latin has contributed more vocabulary to modern English than German has, especially when the Norman French words are counted as Latin derivatives, but this does not reflect our everyday usage. Some linguists argue that 70 percent of commonly used English words are Anglo-Saxon. English is classified as a Germanic language, not a Romance one.

Once one gets past the Latin lightning rod, there is much to like in what the classicists are trying to do. Theoretically based on the medieval trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric, this approach uses many tried-and-true methodologies to capitalize on a child's natural abilities to learn at given stages of development.

Instruction during the grammar stage, ages 12 and below, relies heavily on absorption of facts — multiplication tables, memorized lists, dates, etc. When I heard this during a presentation, I recognized it as exactly the way I was taught in a Lutheran school in the 1950's. We memorized and recited daily. I can still recite the list of U. S. presidents, English kings and books of the Bible. I would be able to do the same with a map of the world, identifying nations and capitals, except for the fact there are now almost 200 of them compared to the mere 100 of my school days.

Once past the grammar stage, the child progresses to the logic one in which he puts these facts together and forms conclusions. Finally the rhetoric stage trains the older child in making effective argumentation to inform and to persuade.

This appears to be a sound model to follow but there are criticisms of classical education. The one I hear most often is that it deemphasizes science. This causes some parents to shy away if their children are headed toward technical or scientific careers.

Still, there is much to like in the classical approach but one need not worship at its altar to reclaim the best of its theory. It is in large part a return to traditional education, both in its philosophy and its methodology. It can be an effective alternative to the ever more progressively woke public schools.

The classical advocates just need to talk less about Latin if they want parents to listen to the rest of their spiel. Overselling can be as ineffective as underselling. — *July 6*

## The Crack in our Liberty Bell

Those of my age remember how we waited impatiently each week for "The Wonderful World of Disney." Each episode included a short film series featuring one of America's historical heroes. Children were allowed to have American heroes back then.

Daniel Boone, the Swamp Fox Francis Marion, Texas John Slaughter, Davy Crockett — what a

lineup for a young boy who was rapidly developing a love for history.

Each series had its own theme song. Davy Crockett, the King of the Wild Frontier, was memorialized for his historical and apocryphal deeds of daring. I still remember the line about how he “patched up the crack in the Liberty Bell.” I didn’t know it had a crack but found that factoid interesting at the time. Little did I realize then that the bell would have a more personal meaning for me later in life.

I can assure you that the bell does have a crack in it. I saw it during a family visit to Philadelphia. Tourists must queue up and then move at a snappy pace by it in order to keep the line moving. This is the famous bell from the Founding Fathers era that served until the 1876 Centennial when it was replaced by a new, larger bell cast by the Meneely Bell Company of Troy, New York.

Why is that replacement bell important? My wife is a Meneely from Terre Haute, a branch of the family which moved westward until settling in Ohio and Indiana. In addition to the Vigo County clan, Meneelys settled near Frankfort in Clinton County and around Brazil in Clay County.

The Clinton County connection is intriguing in that multiple sons in the family were baptized with a middle name of Clinton. Coincidence, of course, but of such is history made. The family located at what was then Meneely Station, subsequently renamed Avery Station. I have never met any of the Clinton County family nor has my wife. And I would like to know why the Averys trumped the Meneelys in naming rights.

Descended myself from several large German Lutheran farm families in Allen County, I never thought of my wife’s family as large but they are well known in Terre Haute. Her father and uncles were good athletes back when high school basketball was king. Whenever I would make the rounds with my father-in-law, everyone knew him. I guess he was the Norm Peterson of Terre Haute.

My wife’s ancestor John Clinton Meneely was a brother to Andrew Meneely who apprenticed at the first bell foundry on the continent, then

founded the Troy Bell Foundry and eventually started the company which bears the family name. Her cousin Nick has been doing the research on this but has yet to certify all the connections. No matter. There is a connection, certainly, and with that comes bragging rights.

The original bell was patched several times but unsuccessfully. That’s why a replacement was ordered from the Meneely Bell Company. While it hardly qualifies my wife for membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution, it is a source of pride for her . . . and for me as a Meneely in-law.

So what happened to the Meneely Bell Company in Troy? It folded in 1951, the year I was born. (Another historical coincidence? Let’s hope so.) In its heyday it furnished bells for churches, public buildings and university chapels. The bell at West Point is a Meneely bell, something my wife pointed out when we visited that academy, as is the original bell for Emmaus Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne where our children were baptized.

The replacement Meneely bell still hangs in Independence Hall, a short walk from the shrine exhibiting its predecessor with its impressive crack. Family connection or not, visiting both sites is a rewarding, near-spiritual event. It reaches pilgrimage status for those of us who stand in awe of the great things done by the greatest American generation. This is not 1619 Project territory; rather it is a reminder that we are proud possessors of a priceless heritage if I may steal a phrase from the preamble to the constitution of the Sons of the American Legion.

I feel sorry for those who see America as the greatest evil ever inflicted on our planet. Theirs’s must be a miserable existence, living in a self-created world of guilt. No wonder they blame everyone else; it excuses their own culpability. Transference, I think, is the psychological term for that but then I got a D in my undergraduate psych course.

I stand with Sir Walter Scott who said it best in his poem “The Lay of the Last Minstrel”:  
“Breathes there the man, with soul so dead, Who

never to himself hath said, This is my own, my native land!”

I can only add: Happy birthday, America. —  
*June 30*

### Jimmy Carter Days Are Here Again

**T**he bane of retirement is trying to live on a fixed income. At least that is what everyone who is retired believes.

I used to chalk this up to geezer whining. I am one, so I know their whining when I hear it.

No more. We fixed-income types have a real complaint these days.

Inflation is at its highest point since 1981 and heading higher. Those of us with long memories, when the memory synapses are actually firing, can recall how bad things were back then. Ronald Reagan had just taken office after defeating Jimmy Carter in part due to a recession with high inflation, something that contemporary economic theory said wasn't supposed to happen. They had to invent a new term for it: stagflation. We're hearing that word again these days, so beware.

My first exposure to the concept of inflation was in a high school economics class. Back in that Keynesian utopia, a little inflation was thought a good thing because it allowed wages to rise and modest price adjustments to occur. It also helped federal tax revenue as there were no inflators to kick in on the tax brackets.

So far, so good . . . until we got a student teacher one quarter who told us that “inflation is the cruelest tax of all.” I wasn't quite sure what he meant but I filed that statement away.

Then I discovered Milton Friedman in college. Sixty years ago nearly everyone was a Keynesian, except for Friedman and friends at the University of Chicago. Since I was flirting with libertarianism at the time, Friedman's focus on individual liberty drew me to him and his monetarist school of thought.

As an aside I must mention that there was a Marxist professor in my university's economics department. He told me privately once that he and I were the only ones in the class who didn't buy that Keynesian stuff. He didn't say “stuff.”

Friedman's genius was obvious to me but his arguments weren't always easy to follow, given that much of what he wrote was for an academic readership. That changed with “Free to Choose,” cowritten with his wife. My favorite Friedman book is “Money Mischief,” written in 1991 but still the best history of U.S. monetary policy which can be understood by the layman. I reread it at least every five years. I'm halfway through it again as I write this.

I recently got up close and personal with today's inflation while on a family trip to Massachusetts for a niece's wedding. I calculated that the 2,000 mile drive cost about \$150 more in gas this year than it would have last year. The two nights at a hotel each cost \$170 rather than the typical \$120 I am used to paying for a mid-range facility.

Fortunately I don't do the grocery shopping for Franke Family Inc. My wife is the purchasing department; my role is accounts payable. Still, it doesn't take my minor in accounting to tell me that she is replenishing her grocery debit card more frequently these days.

But I think what shocked me into recognizing where things have gone is having the gas pump shut off before the tank was full because it reached \$100. We've come a long way from my high school days when I routinely pulled into a filling station to get a dollar's worth, enough to get me through the week.

At least I now know whom to blame. Our Excuser-in-Chief assures us that the fault is Putin's and the war in Ukraine. Or it is the evil oil companies. Or it is Covid. It certainly is not the binge spending in Washington or the \$6 trillion the Federal Reserve “printed” to finance it. What would Uncle Milton say about this? “Inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon.” A rather pithy statement from a Ph.D.

Friedman's incisive indictment of governmental mismanagement of the money supply was true when he wrote about it decades ago and even more so now. Despite what the proponents of modern monetary policy want us to believe, budget deficits and government

borrowing do matter. Read “Money Mischief” if you don’t believe that.

That may seem like just one more esoteric economic theory and out of the control of us hoi polloi . . . at least until our purchases are rung up at the cash register. Then we get a practical primer in economic theory where it hurts most—in the pocketbook.

Speaking of my pocketbook, that gas-pump shock mentioned above went to outrage when my American Legion post raised the price of beer by a quarter. \$2.00 for a single beer! Maybe I can economize somewhere else in the budget so that I still can make my semi-weekly visit to the post.

I think I’ll ask my wife to buy fewer groceries.  
— *June 22*

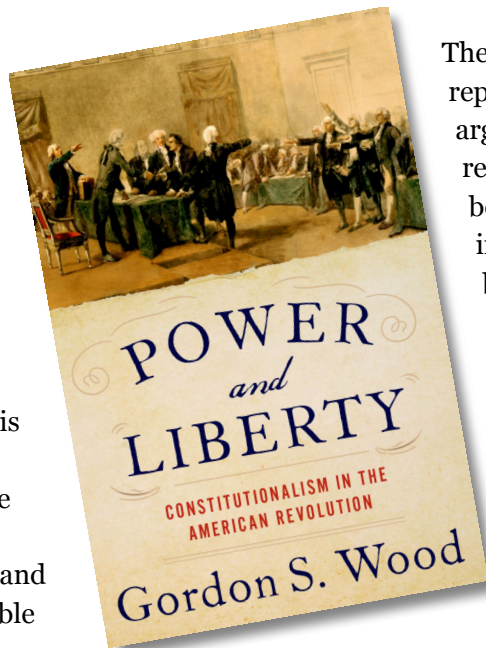
# The Bookshelf

## Power and Liberty

Of all the historians currently writing about the Founding Fathers era, and there's a lot of them, my favorite is Gordon S. Wood. He is a prolific author for this era and a good one as evidenced by his many recognitions such as the Pulitzer and Bancroft prizes. And he is enjoyable to read, even when he is being controversial.

"Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution" (Oxford University Press 2021, 188 pages plus notes, \$18 hardcover at Amazon) is his latest book. His focus is more why the Constitution came about than how, although he provides more than a few interesting anecdotes about the Constitutional Convention. The book is well-organized and follows a logical progression beginning with the earliest conflict between Great Britain and her American colonies.

The first chapter, "The Imperial Debate," is the best in my opinion. He carefully and in detail explains three philosophical issues which lay at the root of this debate. One is the concept of sovereignty, the principle that only one person or body can be sovereign. It cannot be shared between, in this case, Parliament and colonial legislatures. This presented a conundrum for the patriot side, which eventually arrived at the inconsistent solution to proclaim the King as sovereign. Note that these patriots considered themselves Whigs, supporters of Parliament, as opposed to Tories, supporters of the crown. (Think how these designations were stood on their head by the time of the War for Independence. This issue will reappear at the Constitutional Convention.)



The second concept is virtual representation. This was the British argument, that the colonies were represented virtually in Parliament because its focus was the common interest and not constituency based. Given that only one man in six could vote in Britain, this was an essential understanding to acknowledging the legitimacy of the House of Commons. While Wood doesn't buy this argument for America then or now, he asks some uncomfortable questions. If citizens does not vote for the

winner in an election, are they truly being represented or is it virtual? I never considered that question before reading this book.

One other philosophical issue that the colonists addressed was the source of their rights. Did they have the rights of Englishmen as determined by acts of Parliament? Or were their rights inherent to their humanity as natural theorists were positing at that time? Thomas Jefferson put paid to this argument by using the adjective "unalienable" in the Declaration of Independence.

Wood continues the history lesson by moving to the development of individual state constitutions. The role of the governor, should a state even establish such an office, was central to their constitution writing. One thing all the colonies agreed upon was that they did not want a cabinet-based government, one where the executive officers sat in the legislature. Our Constitution's separation of powers principle came from these state-level debates. The most significant development at the state level was the assertion that a constitution was above ordinary law, one brought about by the people and not by legislative act. Again, this paved the way for the process of ratifying the new Constitution by special assemblies and not state legislatures.

These two chapters set the stage for the rest of the book, which moves to recounting the issues



(some would call it the crisis) of the 1780s as the Articles of Confederation appeared to be irrevocably broken. The convention itself is covered in one chapter, which it shares with the ratification period. There is a chapter on slavery that suggests it was not as prominent an issue as many today assume, given that most colonists thought it was dying a natural death. In his debunking of the 1619 Project's unsupported claim that Americans sought independence out of a fear that Britain was going to abolish slavery, Wood in a recent article forcefully asserted that he knew of no colonist who thought this. This is typical Gordon Wood, always willing to advance a politically incorrect position if his scholarship leads him there.

Wood then moves on to the emergence of the judicial branch from its notoriety earned during the colonial period as nothing more than an arm of the King and toward a symbol of the people's will over against usurpation by the legislative branch. Judicial review of legislation, a concept repugnant to early revolutionary thinking, established itself over time. Wood ties this development to the concept of sovereignty, discussed above, as the *sedes doctrinae* of constitutional government. The process continued, of course, into John Marshall's tenure as Chief Justice and continues today resulting in a two-hundred-year compilation of constitutional law, something Wood claims as unique to America. He concludes the chapter by citing Alexis de Tocqueville who saw the lawyer class as America's aristocracy, the dike against any floods of excessive democracy.

Finally Wood discusses the evolution of a society dominated by "dynasties of families" as John Adams called them into one of much clearer delineation between the public and private spheres. These ruling families felt a moral obligation to offer public service and support the public welfare. This changed but, like most everything else that Wood discusses, only over time. It was the Constitution's clause about the sanctity of contracts which provided the basis for

the principle of property rights as personal and natural to emerge, something Wood claims is unique to the United States. The consequence of this division between public and private resulted both in property rights as we have come to know them and also in an expanded, more energetic government — a two-edged sword indeed. The intersection of private rights and public authority has been left to the judiciary to sort out.

Wood ends with a parable-like story of Rhode Island, settled by what he calls "misfits and oddballs" from other colonies. The rise of the middle class of merchants and artisans can be found here more so than elsewhere. While Madison may have decried the political power of "middling" men, their pent-up economic power was just waiting to be unleashed in a free market economy as opposed to the repressive mercantilism of the mother country. They accomplished this in part through the issuance of paper money, something abhorrent to Jefferson, et. al., and therefore proscribed by the new Constitution. The state responded by chartering private banks which functioned under no such proscription. The Rhode Island system was just an "exaggeration" of what was going on elsewhere — vibrant economic activity and political corruption. There is a moral here, but I'm not sure I got it.

Wood compiled this book from a series of lectures he delivered to the law school at Northwestern University. Would that I could have attended those, but reading the printed versions is almost as rewarding. Even when he doesn't fully convince me, I find him so enlightening and stimulating that I cannot but help contemplating the brilliance of our founding documents.

*Recommendation:* Best book I've read all year.

## American Rebels

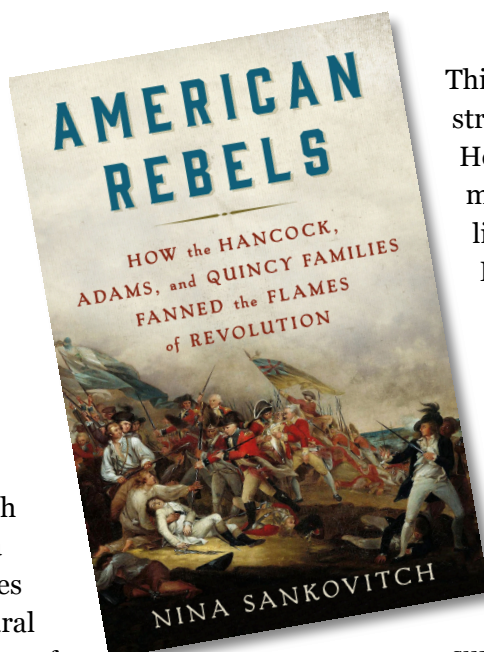
When one thinks of colonial Boston in the years leading up to our War for Independence, events such as the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party come to mind. Also coming to mind are familiar names such as John Adams, John Hancock and several members

of the Quincy clan. One can be excused for assuming their mutual connection was due primarily to their involvement in these historic events.

Not so, writes Nina Sankovitch in “American Rebels: How the Hancock, Adams, and Quincy Families Fanned the Flames of Revolution” (St. Martin’s Press 2020, 349 pages plus notes, \$18 hardcover through Amazon). In fact it goes back to a much earlier time as these families all resided in Braintree, then a rural town south of Boston and now part of its extended metropolitan region.

This book is more of a social history of these families than a traditional account of pre-revolutionary Boston but there is plenty of that too. Sankovitch, who contributes to the Huffington Post but we will let that slide, begins with an account of the founding of Braintree and its evolving social structures as these families became more and more connected through multiple interactions, not least of which was intermarriage. The Quincys, in particular, were quite prolific in the marriage game. The era covered begins in 1744 with the funeral of a beloved minister, John Hancock’s father, and continues on until 1776. Sankovitch moves easily between family histories, including everything from births to illnesses, and the larger stage in Boston.

Sometimes, unfortunately, she departs from historiography for hagiography as she attributes noble motivations for violent and destructive acts. Apparently destroying private property, whether East India Company tea or the private residence of Governor Thomas Hutchinson, can be justified in advancing a holy cause. Loyalists were “shunned . . . verbally pelted and abused . . . their homes were fired into, their cattle driven off, their horses painted colors.” Today is not the first time in our history when holding “unwoke” views came with a real cost.



This is something I have been struggling with for some time now. How do we reconcile the two events mentioned above with a classical liberal belief in property rights? Does Samuel Adams belong in our pantheon of heroes or was he a nothing more than a domestic terrorist? (However, see Mark Puls’ “Samuel Adams: Father of the American Revolution” for a more sympathetic interpretation.) Is it OK to foment an urban riot against persons and property in support of a righteous cause? Does

the end justify the means?

I think I know how Sankovitch would answer these questions and, in her defense, she does emphasize the peaceful protests and boycotts which were much more common and received greater public support than the violent ones. What she fails to do, in my opinion, is to show any empathy for the loyalists who wished to somehow remain subjects of King George but with full rights of citizenship. Many, if not most, became patriots (or rebels, depending on your perspective) once the shooting started. Incredible political ineptness on the part of Parliament and King George’s tone-deaf ministers provided the credibility needed by the radicals, perhaps excusing their extremism in the minds of many. The times, they were a-changin’ and therefore fraught with risk and even danger as liberty-loving citizens were faced with difficult decisions. Sankovitch provides insight into how these three extended families came to grips with it, even at a heavy personal price for many of them.

*Recommendation:* My wife liked it better than I did.

## The Word Hord

Perhaps I have been spending too much time learning about the classical model for education. While informative, I am getting tired of

hearing about Latin as the source of two-thirds of our English vocabulary. While technically true if Norman French words are attributed to Latin, it overstates our reliance on Latin words in our everyday speech. I have seen linguistic studies that suggest 70 percent of common speech is Old English in origin. In other words we twenty-first century sophisticates speak much like our Anglo-Saxon forebears did 1,000-plus years ago, at least in terms of the origin of our favorite words.

Hana Videen, holder of a doctorate in Old English from old Oxford, started a hobby tweeting one Old English word a day. Eventually she decided to release a book with this collection of words organized around everyday life in Saxon England. “The Word Hord: Daily Life in Old English” (Princeton University Press 2022, 270 pages plus notes \$18 hardcover through Amazon) is the result. The book’s title is evocative in itself; an Anglo-Saxon “wordhord” was just that — a memorized collection of stories which could be sung or “unlocked” in Old English usage.

Videen begins with a much needed primer on the alphabet in use at the time. Most of our current letters were there, with reasonably consistent pronunciations over the centuries, but there were several runic symbols which could serve as letters or concepts.

Her organization of the book helps the reader follow a logical progression through a day or week or year in the life of this hardy race. She explains the origin of day and month names, which I knew, but also the season-naming system the Saxons used. Their months were named for the primary weather patterns which occurred during that three-month period. What I found most interesting was to learn that the Anglo-Saxon seasons began about six weeks earlier than ours.

So summer would start in early May and end late August, which aligned quite neatly with the agricultural calendar. It explains why June 21, which we mark as the start of official summer, is still called Midsummer Day in Great Britain.

Videen cites translations of Biblical texts and religious poems and stories for most examples. This is due, no doubt, to the fact that these were a religious people with few secular written pieces.

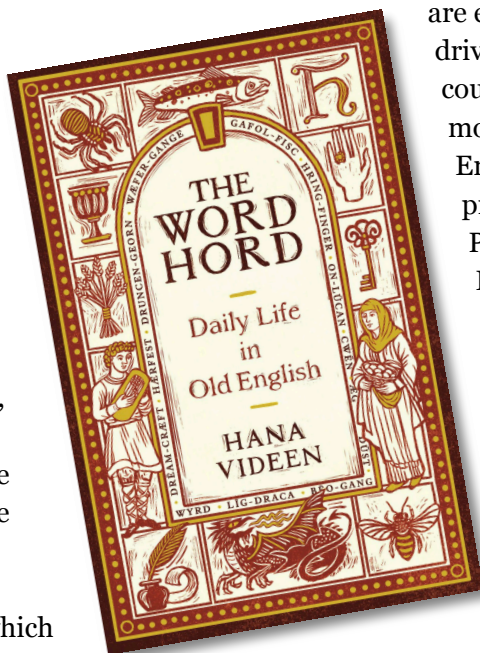
Or perhaps it is only these texts that are extant. Years ago on a long driving trip, I listened to an audio course in linguistics which focused mostly on the development of the English language. I still recall the professor’s recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in Old, Middle and Modern English. The Old English version was almost unintelligible yet several words were recognizable. By the Middle English era of Chaucer, all words could be recognized but some had archaic pronunciation.

An exception to the religious predominance is the epic poem “Beowulf.” While not an

Anglo-Saxon himself, our eponymous hero’s story was recorded in Old English. I’m sure these original English felt at home with this Norse hero who was an ethnic cousin.

One of the most useful features of the book is Videen’s inclusion of a glossary at the end of each chapter. This glossary, or “hord,” gives the spelling, pronunciation and meaning of each word discussed in that chapter. A collection of these hords is worth the price of the book.

Old English was a Germanic language, with inflections and gendered nouns. Much of that has been lost over the centuries. Or maybe discarded is a better verb, at least to my way of thinking. Modern English is a grammatical and linguistic mess, perhaps because it has become a polyglot language at least in vocabulary. But behind this verbal miasma lies one more thing for which we





owe thanks to those Anglo-Saxons of Dark Age Britain — a rich vocabulary which can create even richer images, both concrete and abstract. It had to be, or else those ballad singers would not have been able to unlock their wordhords.

*Recommendation:*

Fascinating and a must read for anyone interested in our language and its history. After reading a library checkout, I bought a personal copy.

### Hamilton's Blessing

Sometimes, reading an older book helps with perspectives on current issues. One such is John Steele Gordon's "Hamilton's Blessing: The Extraordinary Life and Times of Our National Debt" (Walker and Company 1997, 214 pages). One wonders if Gordon had a particularly clear crystal ball when writing this book, given his prediction of where our national debt was headed.

As one would expect, Gordon begins this short book by recounting quite favorably Alexander Hamilton's financial plan for the new nation. I admit to partiality on this subject as it was the focus on the last paper I wrote as an undergraduate economics major. Gordon explains with easy-to-understand prose why Hamilton's plan was essential to the survival of the United States. I especially liked his characterization of the Hamilton versus Jefferson debate over the key components of this plan — bond redemption to current holders at face value, a national bank, assumption of state debt, etc. — with a forest (Hamilton) and trees (Jefferson) analogy.

The book provides a cogent history of the national bank in all its manifestations over the decades. When it functioned well, it was a key factor to economic growth and stability. Gordon attributes one of the causes of the Great Depression to the death of Benjamin Strong in

1928, leaving the Federal Reserve Bank of New York leaderless and rudderless at the most inopportune moment and resulting in a downward spiral in the money supply.

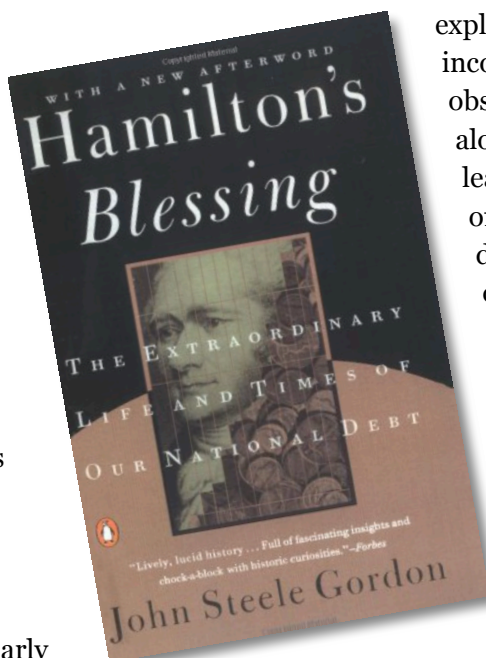
Gordon also does a stellar job of explaining the politics of the federal income tax, making the intriguing observation that it was fought out along Marxist lines in the world's least Marxist state. His chronology of the federal tax code is depressing at best. Apparently only Washington politicians fail to comprehend how changes in the tax code produce changes in taxpayer behavior along Laffer Curve lines.

He addresses Keynesian economics like a coroner doing an autopsy, explaining how it can't possibly work as Lord Keynes theorized. Its

allure is, quite simply, that it gives prestige and importance to economists and theoretical cover for bad economic decision-making by Washington. Gordon quotes James Madison, pithy for once, as to why this is so. "Men love Power."

Gordon is not shy in advancing his opinions on a number of issues, still relevant 25 years after his writing. He dislikes political action committees intensely, calling them "legalized bribery." He loves the idea of a flat tax but concludes it can never be implemented as it would eliminate the ability of elected officials to dispense favors through the tax code. One can't help but see this as the flip side of Gordon's legalized bribery. The only question is who is bribing whom?

The book concludes with a table of national debt since 1792 but unfortunately ending in 1995. It is instructive that the most fiscally prudent years tend to be ones in which a Democrat occupies the White House but Republicans control Congress. On a negative note this same table documents that the current era is the only



one in our history in which the national debt has increased without there being either a major war or an economic depression.

Gordon sums things up nicely this way: The national debt, viewed by Alexander Hamilton as a sign of fiscal strength when carefully managed, “has become nothing more than an escape valve for political pressure.” Or this description: “A drunk wrestling with alcohol.”

And so Gordon shows no confidence that the United States can control the national debt, having written this in 1997. Time has proven him prescient, alarmingly so.

*Recommendation:* Useful concise history of our national debt. Too bad nobody listened to him back in 1997.

## Prince Albert

I have spent more hours than profitable trying to understand the British constitution. John Adams is to blame. He cited this as the ideal constitution for a representative government, modeling the Massachusetts state constitution on it. Its influence can be seen in the U. S. Constitution as well. The problem is that the British constitution is not written; rather, it is a series of laws passed by Parliament such as the Habeas Corpus Act of 1679 and the Bill of Rights of 1689. These acts were what Adams had in mind—a careful balance of power between King, Lords and Commons to prevent tyranny. We see that balance in the separation of powers among the President, Congress and Supreme Court.

A. N. Wilson in his “Prince Albert: The Man Who Saved the Monarchy” (Harper 2019, 390 pages plus notes, \$10 hardcover from Amazon) focuses his biography on the role Albert played as Prince Consort during a transitional period when the monarchy was being relegated to a symbolic but non-political representative of the nation-at-

large. It was during his wife Victoria’s reign (the subject of an earlier biography by Wilson) that the crown was progressively divested of real power and reduced to a figurehead status. The British constitution, unwritten as it was and is, changed to reflect this devolution.

While Wilson’s focus is the evolving role of the monarchy, he does not ignore the family dynamics at play. Beginning with Albert’s rather dysfunctional minor but semi-royal Saxon family and progressing through an oftentimes stormy

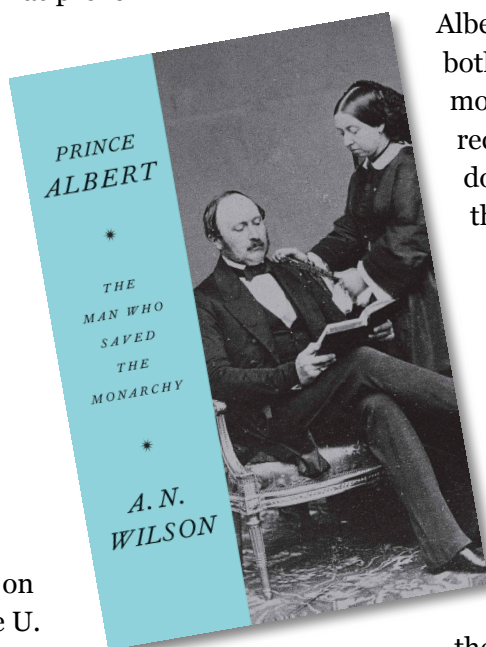
marriage with Victoria, he emphasizes Albert’s role as a steadying influence both in the home and in the monarchy’s official presence. The recent PBS miniseries “Victoria” documented this relationship for the early years of the marriage.

Albert was both an autodidact and a polymath. He would interest himself in a rapidly changing series of public initiatives and had the organizational ability to rally support among disparate politicians and business leaders. Even though his official role was ambiguous at

the time, he gained the respect of the British ruling class for his intelligence and altruism in addressing the kingdom’s issues.

Wilson continually refers to Albert as a liberal but clarifies that this is in the nineteenth century context, much closer to an Enlightenment classical liberal than to a twentieth century one. He also provides insight into how a patriarchal family can function when the wife is queen, something Prince Philip also deftly handled over nearly 75 years. Hint: It isn’t easy.

One thing that struck me was Wilson’s assertion that party politics didn’t really exist in Great Britain during the early years of Victoria’s reign. Sure, there were Whigs and Tories but they were not parties as we have come to see them today. Instead there were coalitions around





principles and leaders that split voting blocks issue by issue. Victoria, with Albert's input, used this protean alignment in Parliament to have significant influence in her choice of prime minister. Once these alignments solidified later in the century, she lost this influence (although this occurred after the book closes).

It was after Albert's death that the final nail was hammered into the crown's sarcophagus and the complete emasculation of the House of Lords occurred. A European history professor at my former university of employment once said that the British constitution is whatever the House of Commons decides it is. John Adams would not be happy with this development, subjecting constraint on government to the whim of the current majority. In that respect Albert probably did the best he could to retain the public image of the monarchy while watching its power slip slowly away.

*Recommendation:* Decent biography and even better case study of nineteenth century British politics.

### Fat Boy and the Champagne Salesman

Maybe it's because I took a graduate business degree but I am intrigued with the manner in which organizations work, be they commercial and governmental or religious. When this interest intersects with my love for German history, I will read almost anything I can lay to hand. That includes the Nazi period and its blessedly dysfunctional government.

Hitler's management style was to divide and conquer, setting up competing fiefdoms led by ambitious lieutenants. The most fascinating of these paladins was Herman Göring, both the most powerful man in the Third Reich after Hitler and yet the least influential as time proceeded. Former business journalist Rush Loving Jr.'s "Fat Boy and

the Champagne Salesman" (Indiana University Press 2021, 132 pages plus notes, \$20 paperback through Amazon) shows Göring at his most active and least effective moment when trying to stop Hitler from invading Poland in 1939. His *bête noire* in this case was Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, the former champagne salesman referenced in the title, who schemed to harden Hitler's stance by assuring him that Britain would not respond to the invasion. He guessed wrong.

Göring, for all his boisterous conduct and avaricious thievery, was truly frightened of a war with Britain given his wounding in World War I. He tended to believe Prime Minister Joseph Chamberlain's warnings that, this time, Britain would not stand idly by. Ribbentrop, who styled himself as an expert on all things British since he had exported wine to that nation, did all in his power to undercut Göring's influence with Hitler as part and parcel of the sinister backstabbing that was the daily routine in the German chancellery.

Loving gives a highly readable account of the back-and-forth communication among the two foreign offices, their respective embassies, governmental functionaries at high and middle levels, and well-meaning private intermediaries. It is so well written that one cannot help but feel the suspense mounting by the hour even though the ending is known.

Göring could be charming and persuasive, using these traits right up to his preordained end at the Nuremberg trials. The state secretary in the German foreign office predicted that, if Hitler started the war, they would all hang . . . and Ribbentrop would be the first. He was, deservedly so.

*Recommendation:* If the byzantine side of politics is of interest, read this book. Or if you just want to know how close World War II came to not starting, at least not on September 1, 1939.

— Mark Franke



Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

# The Outstater

## No 'Fascists' Allowed

(Sept. 2) — In the 1980s, a friend spent four years in Joe Biden's presence — Biden as a puffed up junior senator and my friend as a lowly aide on the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee. I asked him what he thought of the president's speech last night.

He was as impressed with Biden now as he was then. "A failed son of a used-car salesman way over his head," was his characterization.

What does he think of Biden's earlier assertion that half of the American public (those who voted for Trump) is "fascist," and last night a "threat to democracy" and a threat to "the very foundation of our republic"? Or of the White House press secretary's contention that an "extremist" is anyone who strays from what a majority of Americans believe?

The friend warns us not to take any of that lightly. Biden holds some stupid ideas in his hair-plugged, senescent noggin, many of them simultaneously canceling and conflicting, but they are always dangerous.

First, it is easy to prove what the president said is fallacious. The late Angelo Codevilla did that wonderfully a couple of years ago in his must-read essay, "The Original Fascist":

"Any realistic notion that fascism was something that transcended Italy should have been put to rest in 1934 at a conference on "International

Fascism" held in Montreux, Switzerland. Few attended. Nothing came of it. In short, fascism was a reality limited to Italy. But fascist Italy was first to enact the disempowerment of legislatures and the empowerment of the administrative state that is now the Western world's standard of government."

Codevilla went on to argue that the most historically accurate emanation of Mussolini's ideology is found in the American Democrat Party, first in the New Deal, which in its time was dubbed "fascism without billy clubs," and more recently in Elizabeth Warren's Accountable Capitalism Act, which would require corporations to enroll in a legal scheme in which government could force them to serve politically defined stakeholders.

OK, Biden may know that Republicans are not by definition or analysis fascist. It wouldn't matter to him. He is a student of the Lyndon Baines Johnson school of politics. "I know he doesn't have sex with a pig," Johnson is said to have said of a political rival, "I just want to hear the sonofabitch deny it."

And here is where things get dangerous. If a president, braced by U.S. Marines in an official public address, can label large groups of Americans a threat to democracy he can also call them treasonous. That is an extrapolation carrying some heavy grief. Under U.S. Code Title 18, in fact, the penalty for treason is death or, to the point here, forfeiture of the right to hold office.

One can hope that the judiciary even in its present state would prevent such a usurpation. History, however, is not encouraging in that regard. Ask Louis XVI and 17,000 of his subjects sentenced to death on the charge of high treason by the French National Convention — on a majority vote, by the way, all perfectly democratic and legal.

Last night we moved closer to all of that. The quiet part was finally said out loud and the 2024 debate was defined, to wit, "Are Republicans fascists or not?" — or, in LBJ-speak, "Do they or do they not have sex with pigs?"

That, however, is just politics. So far. But given what my friend knows about the man Biden, would his regime put last night's words into action? Would he move to their logical conclusion of creating, say, a Committee of Public Safety (or perhaps a special branch of the expanded IRS) to line us up before the modern socio-political equivalent of a guillotine?

"In a heartbeat," the friend replies.

## Another Stack of Stuff

*(Aug. 29) — It is required in my so-called profession to have a stack of papers on your desk of items you found interesting at one time but items that never justified 600 words. Here's mine to date. — tcl*

- ✓ The tweet of the week: "Corn Pop tried to warn us all."
- ✓ From the Mises Institute: "What causes poverty? Nothing, it's the original state, the default. The question is what causes prosperity."
- ✓ So, the universities and the federal government conspire to sell useless degrees at ever inflated prices and it is the hapless borrowers who are at fault? And couldn't the bankruptcy courts have sorted this out? Don't the schools have endowments that could be tapped?  
It has started. Certain cheddar cheese puffs list "cricket flour" in the ingredients.
- ✓ The Indianapolis Star's "public engagement editor" tweeted what she described as the "heartbreaking" story of her friend's granddaughter, a volleyball player at Duke. Members of at least one opposing team whispered a racial slur whenever she was about to serve. OK, that's life in Division I sports. The question (asking for a friend) is can one get one's own granddaughter into Duke on a full scholarship, regardless of test scores, if she is alright with being called names during athletic competitions?
- ✓ With university admissions declining, diversity eating its own, and student loans becoming problematic, has anyone noticed that Mitch Daniels always bails at just the right time.
- ✓ Could it be that mortgage "red-lining" tracks crime boundaries?
- ✓ Mark Helprin of the Claremont Institute, mocking professed Catholic Nancy Pelosi and others: "I'm personally against discrimination against homosexuals, but I think it's a decision that should be left up to a woman and the Islamic State."
- ✓ A GOP candidate for Indiana governor would establish a \$100-million fund to subsidize adoptions. Sadly, this would only add to the adoption bureaucracy, which, as anyone who has gone through the process knows, is abominable. And economists tell us that such funds tend to be underfunded, meaning that government agents are left in charge of awarding a scarce commodity, in this case adoptable children, to the politically approved. If Christianity wasn't such a nonstarter, the churches could handle this and we wouldn't have to elect another posturing fraud.
- ✓ For the monarchists in the membership: "A republic has no affection for its subjects. A king may be ill-advised and act wrong, but a republic never acts right, for a knot of villains support each other, and together they do what no single person dare attempt." — Lord Horatio Nelson
- ✓ The state of the union is just this: You can be indicted for holding classified documents that you have the authority to classify while your jailers need not show what the documents document because, of course, the documents are classified. An expert in such matters, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, put it this way: "Show me the man and I'll show the crime." Or more broadly, George Orwell in "1984": "Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered."

- ✓ And the disparagement, "fascist," gets thrown around loosely these days. Here is how its inventor, Benito Mussolini, defined it: "Everything in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state." Do the reading.
- ✓ The Roman Emperor Constantius II had to ban Jews from buying more Christian slaves.
- ✓ Submitted for the "2022 insipidity Award" is the announcement earlier this summer by a local mayoral hopeful: "I need all 260,000 people in Fort Wayne involved. It's not about me. I'm not running because I want to be mayor. I'm running because I want to make a difference. You know? I want to include everyone." Do we need to say that he is a well established Republican?
- ✓ The Associated Press gleefully reports that the leadership at the Federal Reserve has become its most diverse ever: "There are more female, black and gay officials contributing to the central bank's interest-rate decisions than at any time in its 109-year history." Hmmm.
- ✓ Waiting for the results of a Washington investigation? Following the Challenger disaster, the presidential Rogers Commission took four months to find the culprit among four suspected contractors. Only 13 minutes after the disaster, however, Morton-Thiokol's price on the stock market sank while the other three stabilized.
- ✓ Here's a tip for the Indianapolis Star's newly formed Pulitzer Prize-minded gun-safety investigative team: From March of 1998 to May of this year, 96 percent of mass shootings occurred in "gun-free" zones. Will they make the connection?
- ✓ And does this suggest a crime-fighting strategy? Two percent of all U.S. counties account for half of the nation's homicides and, depending on location, as many as 95 percent of the victims are black or Hispanic.
- ✓ Remember the random Afghans that Gov. Eric Holcomb so warmly welcomed to Indiana last

year? Surprise! The Department of Defense reports that it has not been able to keep track of those that might be risks to national security.

- ✓ Relatedly, the successful candidate for Indiana governor this next cycle will be the one with the yard signs reading, "I Am Not a Soft-Headed GOP Retainer."

## Argument by Emotion

(Aug. 21) — Regular readers know that last year this page banned the use of "hypocrisy," a perfectly innocent word of the most respectable Greek origin. Why? This generation of politicians has rendered it meaningless.

Our work, however, is not done.

We on the copy desk of life are trying mightily to eliminate what grammarians call "modal verbs." These are verbs used to express modality (properties such as possibility, obligation, etc.) They are used to tell others what they "should," "shall," "may," "might," "ought," "need," "could," "had better," and "must" do.

Sadly, most of what comes across our desk even from the national conservative press not only uses modal verbs profusely but makes arguments that depend heavily on modality for their rationale ("Trump must be reelected"). That is, they use only emotion rather than ask penetrating questions that might point to actual solutions. Cartoons in the New Yorker have a modal tone.

That is not to say modal verbs might not be useful in a different time, a different situation. When, for example, you are teaching your teenager to warm up pizza and the oven begins to smoke and flame you might say something like, "You should read the directions before you put the pizza in the oven." Or in the negative, "Maybe you shouldn't try that when you're home alone."

That is a situation where everyone is more or less headed in the same direction (eating pizza) and the task is framed in easily definable absolutes (oven temperature, time setting). But as



a nation, most agree, we are not in such a situation.

Rather, modal verbs are misused to imply intellectual or moral superiority and feed the delusion that anyone actually cares what the speaker or writer is saying. My profession, editorial writing, is a notorious abuser in that way.

Here's a little research project: A search of the digital Indianapolis Star (always a ready example for society heading in the wrong direction) for just two basic modals, "should" and "must." Here is what you get:

- "Republicans pushed through Indiana abortion law, now they must address fallout."
- "Indiana senators must protect kids from harmful online content."
- "Five questions the Colts must answer to become a contender in 2022."
- "Legislators must provide support to women and families."
- "As abortion remains center stage in Indiana, renewed focus should focus on maternal and infant mortality and policies to save lives."
- "Instead of acting shocked and offering trite platitudes, politicians should take action against gun violence and end mass shootings in Indiana."
- "Indiana lawmakers should advance pro-life culture with gun-control legislation."
- "Indiana lawmakers must listen to all voices on abortion during special session."

You get the idea. None of the inexperienced journalists throwing those modal verbs around had any intention of actually doing anything even though they describe a society on the verge of ruin. Nor did they put forward any concrete, untried ideas about what might be done by others.

My example of moment is the rising plea that we "must" do something about affordable housing, the most popular lament being that rents are too high and we "should" do something about them.

We all share the emotional reaction to a rent or mortgage increase (they are somewhat the same

thing, by the way). But what would be helpful is for the editors to dry their tears of sympathy long enough to look into what actually happens when you "must" do something about high rents, i.e., impose rent control.

New York City is the model for that. It has had stabilized rents for decades now. The New York Post reported recently that rent control is working in the sense that the rent on a one-bedroom apartment has been stabilized at \$1,725. But it is not working in the sense that the broker's fee on signing the lease for that same apartment is \$20,000.

People who want to do something about affordable housing have no grasp of how affordable housing is made. It is not created by government fiat or project but by reducing the costs of a free market for providing it. That must be understood.

Oops.

## Squaring the Roundabout

(Aug. 19) — The roundabout, a traffic design to control intersections, is being used more frequently here these days. Yes, they are stylish. Paris has had roundabouts for a long time but they were originally incorporated into the city's spoke-and-wheel street design so that Napoleon could better position his cannons to level any crowds of unhappy citizens — a different but not unrelated matter.

For roundabouts still have a political element if not a military one. Some see them as a microcosm of how government works — or doesn't.

The recent death of U.S. Rep. Jackie Walorski and three others in a head-on crash at a rural roundabout on State Road 19 near Nappanee has focused public attention. Some great reporting by our friend Margaret Menge raised questions about whether the daylight accident in good weather with a competent driver was the result of the roundabout design or at least confusion stemming from the design.

Now, sloppy policy doesn't usually kill people (at least at the local level) but when it does it is rarely a member of Congress. The sensational



nature of the accident and the details in Menge's article argue to me that the Walorski crash deserves a closer look.

Nobody but nobody in officialdom sees it that way. The incentives all run toward treating the roundabout as an inarguable good, not a congresswoman-killer. The reason for that we will get to in a moment, but first know that we cannot turn to any independent authority other than the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), which, as all such departments, is politically captured and won't be raising serious questions.

What, for starters, are roundabouts meant to accomplish? Their claim to smoothing the flow of traffic is suspect, depending as it does not only on an optimum traffic load but from equal directions in specific time ranges. Besides, the heavy work in traffic flow was done some time ago with improvements in road surfaces, tires, brakes, transmissions and the internal combustion engine.

Nor does improved safety hold up to a common-sense review. If you apply game theory to the context of an intersection you realize that safety will be affected by complexity, the number of options a driver must navigate to avoid a crash. In a four-way stop or a traffic light, the options are just three— the stop, the go and the always tricky left turn. But if all the players get those right, things go well.

Not so with a roundabout and its confusing lane and yield directions. Once in a roundabout, the danger is constant and real of edging into the wrong lane at any time, being unyielding when you should be yielding, crossing what you do not recognize to be a center line, all of which is multiplied and complicated by others who may be entering the roundabout simultaneously and from surprising directions, negotiating the same options with greater or lesser skill and confidence. Consider this explanation from an Indianapolis traffic engineering firm:

"Roundabouts are circular intersections, but not all circular intersections are roundabouts. Roundabouts generally have an outside diameter of 100–200 feet while traffic circles, also called

rotories, may have outside diameters of 500–1,000 feet. On a roundabout, the circulating traffic on the circle has the right-of-way, and the approaches must yield to circulating traffic. On traffic circles, the traditional right of way rule for unsigned intersections applied so the circulating traffic had to yield to the traffic trying to enter, which filled up the circular roadway while reducing the exiting capacity. In modern roundabouts the exiting traffic has the right-of-way over vehicles trying to enter and only yields to pedestrians in the crosswalk."

Got that? And they call that safer?

So why are roundabouts or traffic circles considered a motorist's Godsend, such an inarguable good? Because a roundabout can cost as much as two million dollars, that's why, excluding engineering, the purchase of additional right-of-way and utility relocation — twice as much as even a signaled intersection with turn lanes.

And that, dear friends, is blood in the water, new money, for those who hang around meetings of the State Budget Committee. For doubling the dollars of any line item instantly creates a new rent-seeking industry, complete with its own team of legislators, department heads and as much rationale and media support as money can buy.

Roundabouts don't cost, they save, you have been told, the more the better. Anyone who questions that will be buried in piles of data collected by — you guessed it — those who have a vested interest in roundabouts or their agents. There is no competing lobby or independent research for cheap and arguably safer four-way stops and traffic lights.

And those who would protect the motorist's interests at INDOT or in the pertinent legislative committees have other things on their minds such as perfecting society, expanding departmental budgets and who is going to get elected for what — different kinds of roundabouts entirely.

## An Army of One

(Aug. 16) — People who work in powerful places — metropolitan newsrooms, Capitol Hill offices, etc. — will tell you that when three or four letters arrive complimenting a story or complaining about a vote, it is noticed. Most of us aim too high in our civic involvement. We can make a big difference way below what the consultants tell us is critical mass.

Eighteen years ago a friend emerged from a coma. He had been there for 10 days, thought to be dead at one point. When he recovered he asked why he had been spared. He decided that while he was waiting for the answer he would promise that in every remaining day he would do something useful for his fellow man.

My friend wouldn't mind if I gave you his name but he also would say it is unimportant. He is a journalism professor, author and former newspaper publisher. He has a nearly unbroken string of successes in a variety of campaigns, some political and others civic, ranging from neighborhood street projects to state legislative races.

For that is the form his promise has taken — hundreds of micro-campaigns over a span of almost two decades. On any given day he is working on one or another. He does not presume to explain the high success rate of those campaigns, but I will.

His campaigns begin with involvement in an interest group of undetermined size and focus. It may be trying to secure adequate child care for a university campus or the election of an honest man to high office. He identifies in this larger group as few as a dozen or so who “get it,” that is, who understand how the world works as opposed to how we wish it would work, who understand what men and women can and cannot do to improve things.

My friend keeps close contact with this smaller group and builds relationships in irregular, casual meetings. Members of his group may be unaware they are members of his group.

When a consensus forms as to what needs to be done, he “activates” the group and launches the next campaign. Again, it could be anything under the general heading of “Helps Mankind.” My friend will have three to four of these groups going at any one time.

Now, here is the secret: Each of these groups is organized around the assumption that no matter how committed its members say they are to the cause, or how willing they say they are to “doing whatever it takes,” my friend will end up with most of the work.

And that's fine with him. This ensures that each of his campaigns is known by at least several and sometimes all of these characteristics:

1. A concentration of energy at the decisive place and time.
2. The certainty that every effort is directed towards a clearly defined, decisive and attainable objective.
3. A readiness to seize, retain and exploit the initiative.
4. The confrontation of those opposed at a time, at a place, or in a manner for which they are unprepared.
5. The allocation of minimum essential energy to secondary efforts.
6. Placing those opposed in a position of disadvantage using the flexible application of effort.
7. Ensuring that for every objective there is unity of effort under one responsible person.
8. Never permitting an opponent to acquire an unexpected advantage.
9. Preparing clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise communications to ensure thorough understanding.

Some of you will recognize those as the nine principles of the U.S. War College. Note that they have nothing to do with war in themselves but everything to do with thinking. My friend may or may not see himself applying these principles but this is my explanation of his success and not his.

You also will notice that none of the principles mentions anyone attaining a position of sinecure or being recognized as any sort of leader or expert or gaining a reputation for do-goodedness — nothing, in other words, that would drive a normal campaign.

My friend's name is rarely mentioned. He goes about the work of gathering facts, sending letters (and follow-up letters) to those who can influence a solution, setting up meetings to repeatedly ask that action be taken, and so forth. He does it so well that his campaigns are often mistaken for large, well-funded operations staffed by an army of activists.

There is no army. But know that if you are a professional politician, a featherbedding bureaucrat or anyone gaming the system you don't want to attract his attention.

## Sudden History

(Aug. 8) — Despite what consultants say, some of us suspect that politics happens all of a sudden — bang, it's on your doorstep, it was this way right up until it wasn't.

For instance, one day in the early 1960s it was not OK for an able-bodied man to receive welfare. The next day it was OK, changing everything. And it wasn't that long ago when we were arguing about whether to relax the cadence of our alma mater's marching band to accommodate the pace of female musicians. Now the commanding general of the U.S. Air Force intends to sexually balance the commissioning of fighter pilots. Big change.

This status quo ante was famously described by the late M. Stanton Evans as rule by an evil party and a stupid party. "Occasionally, the two parties get together to do something that's both evil and stupid," he said. "That's called bipartisanship."

Up until now the formula for winning election certainly has been bipartisan. It is to amass a campaign fund three to four times that of your opponent, craft policy statements that can be muddled, promises that can be reneged, then overwhelm the voters with media buys, billboards

and yard signs, finally pandering to ethnic groups and interest blocs.

So, are things about to change? Are voters getting wise to this game? Will the guys with fewer yard signs start winning?

Alright, my evidence for electoral calamity is skimpy and anecdotal, and it may apply only at the most local level, but here goes . . .

For three decades, Indiana's Religious Right has taken in millions to fund the most professional lobbying and campaigning organization that its money could buy. It told donors it was building an unassailable moral supermajority. But last week, on the day that counted, it did not have the votes to satisfy its core conviction, i.e., that life is sacred without exception.

And on the Democratic side, the examples are too numerous to list. The turn toward ethnic identity, woke classrooms and socialism are not playing well in the Biden era. Ask Terry McAuliffe.

That all happened rather suddenly.

In the last general election cycle, a councilman in my city won re-election despite being censured by his own party and dismissed by the local newspaper. His opponents, representing crony capitalist interests, raised \$100,000 against him — all for a district council seat. Elsewhere, a friend, a former newspaper publisher and longtime political observer, called from Missouri to report that his candidate in a GOP primary for the state legislature won in a landslide last week after being outspent 10-to-1. His analysis of the election:

"Local conservative voters have had enough. They accept they're unable to hold federal officeholders accountable because money still matters in federal campaigns; the amounts are too staggering. Conservative voters simply vote for the best of the worst statewide and federally. These same conservatives, however, frustrated by do-nothing politicians at home, are becoming laser-focused on local elections that actually make a difference in their lives."

His cites two other winning political campaigns in his state over the last four months. The leading newspaper there pooh-poohed the results as the work of rich, white, Trumpian racists. “Conservatives know this is a media lie,” the friend says. “It’s much more nuanced. Conservatives don’t trust liberal media and they’re suspicious of ersatz media like Fox. Local conservative candidates understand they must win their elections without a political press that supports them.”

And the friend’s candidate did not need expensive tracking polls or high-paid consultants: “We visibly monitored our campaign’s growth by monitoring the number and placement of yard signs. It was interesting to note that few of our opponent’s signs penetrated our neighborhoods. Overwhelmingly, he relied on locations provided by wealthy land developers wanting TIFs and lobbyist influence, and he illegally placed hundreds upon hundreds of signs on public thoroughfares.”

My friend realizes that the election industry, the PACs and the lobbyist class will call his victory a one-off, but he disagrees: “The signs are clear, local conservatives aren’t sitting back to be abused and forgotten. They’re protesting in a very civil way — at the election box. They’re observing globally and acting locally.”

The consultants in both parties will be working hard this next cycle to prove my friend wrong. If he is right, though, there’s not much they can do about it.

## The ‘Creative’ Class

(Aug. 5) — Our leadership, if that is the right word, has committed tens of millions in cash transfers, tax breaks and bonded loans to making Fort Wayne more attractive to young urban professionals. Yuppies we used to call them.

It seems to me we have spent little on anything else these last few decades. We have luxury apartments with indoor parking attached to a sports stadium, a river walk, a splash pad, outdoor theaters, boutique hotels, a state-of-the-art convention center and city blocks full of richly

appointed bars and cute little shops — all of it built with artificial subsidies or incentives of one sort or another. Finally, we have established TIF districts to capture tax revenue from previous, less magical developments.

We came to be enthralled by the vision of pop economists such as Richard Florida, author of “Cities and the Creative Class.” They advised that highly educated Yuppies would bring wealth and notoriety to what otherwise would be just another drab, workaday Midwest city. Milton Friedman doesn’t know anything, they said. You don’t have to wait for market forces to do their work.

Moreover, we were told that the best of the young men and women who would fill our executive suites require impressive cultural and entertainment venues. So we have an art museum, curated by the most avant-garde of the most avant-garde; a couple of renovated music halls, both of them historic; a national-class ballet troupe, a racially diverse philharmonic orchestra and a school-lunch formula that conforms to the Biden administration’s transgender guidelines. Finally, we have a fine example of Soviet-era girder sculpture.

Our leaders are proud of all this, and rightly so for the concerted effort alone. But there was a darker thought, something not said out loud. Was it too much to hope that an influx of hip young adults might bring about a reset, a replacement, a better class of electorate, a citizenry more appreciative than the grumbling mass of unstylish, ungrateful louts with whom City Hall has had to deal heretofore?

Whatever, we have built it and we are ready for them to come.

So where are they?

We know the answer thanks to a new demographic mapping tool. It uses federal tax data linked to recent decennial censuses, plus American Community Survey data and address information from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The analysis covers children born between 1984 and 1992, measuring their childhood locations at age 16 and young adult

locations at age 26, and It all is put together in an easy-to-use web site, [migrationpatterns.org](http://migrationpatterns.org).

The average young adults migrating to my city are from . . . drum roll please . . . whence they've always been from. The average of those moving to Fort Wayne came from less than 66 miles away.

Please recall that our county boundaries are historically set so that citizens can make a round trip to the county seat in less than a day's buggy ride. That means after all those tens of millions of dollars we are now drawing from only 46 miles farther out, thanks not to municipal branding but to the internal combustion engine.

We can break it down further to learn from where the young adults are coming that can afford the advanced degrees that Richard Florida has told us are essential for our prosperity. These would be from families whose parents are earning in the top 20 percent.

Again, the great majority of them, 76 percent, come from nowhere. They are already here — born, bred and settled. The thought occurs that maybe these are the young persons that the leadership should be working to “attract” by supporting or at least staying out of the way of the businesses already here — you know, so they could employ more creative young adults. Balance that knowing that regardless of the millions spent in their name, 32 percent of this prized group leaves Fort Wayne anyway.

Where my city is making headway is in the influx of young adults of families earning the lowest 20 percent. This is a migratory group not included in Richard Florida's demographic ideal. A large number of one subset of this group, 28 percent, comes from outside Indiana entirely, mainly from southern California and southern Texas.

Much the same is true of Indianapolis, a city using the same “Creative Class” strategy. It loses 36 percent of its young adults from families in the top 20 percent. And 9 percent of its in-migration is from that same subset from southern California and southern Texas. Another group accounting for 7.8 percent of the subset comes from Chicago and New York City. Fully 41 percent of these poorer

young adults coming to Indy is from outside Indiana.

Those figures give a different meaning to that “replacement” theory. It is true that these young adults, poorer and from more distant points, may defy Richard Florida's predictions and turn out to be as creative as prescribed. It is unlikely, though, that they are being attracted by our subsidized high-end venues and amenities. And we can only hope that they stick around long enough for their children and grandchildren to help pay for the subsequently higher taxes and lower bond ratings.

## Celebrating Mad Anthony

*(July 12)* — Fort Wayne is the most politically incorrect of places. The gasoline pump and television were invented there. It is named after a killer of Native Americans.

Yet, a handsome statue of Gen. “Mad” Anthony Wayne on horseback stands defiantly in the city's downtown park — unmolested so far. And this Friday, July 15 each year, the city honors its namesake, however ignoble he is thought to be.

The celebration will be modest, Polite company doesn't defend General Wayne anymore. Several years ago a New York Times reporter, a Pulitzer Prize winner no less, came to town to cover the celebration. He seemed intent on profiling its organizers as racist bumpkins. His story was published without actually finding any racists and only a few bumpkins. Most of us just kept out of quoting range.

But this is the pattern. The general is to be denigrated one way or another. We are told that he drank too much. He may have pinched a serving wench or two. His finances were a mess. At the Battle of Fallen Timbers he is said to have shouted the order, “Bayonet the damned rascals!”

Disrespectful, to be sure, but what is most unforgivable about Mad Anthony is his victory. The general, in an hour-long battle, made it clear that even a confederation of 1,500 warriors from the most powerful tribes, all in alliance with the always treacherous British, could never defeat the white devils.



Anthony Wayne, serving wenchies aside, knew his warfare. He got his nickname not for an emotional disposition but for courage in battle. Using classic military tactics dating back to the Roman legion, he outsmarted and outfought the native chiefs. It was the first victory of the nascent U.S. Army.

This, historians agree, was pivotal. A peace treaty was signed. The northwest was opened to settlement, for better or worse. A handful of U.S. soldiers and only 40 Native Americans had died, numbers that must be compared with the thousands who would have fallen had the war continued. Only three years earlier a force led by the same tribal chiefs had massacred and tortured an ineptly led U.S. expeditionary force of 1,000 soldiers, including the accompanying wives and children.

Please know the opprobrium surrounding Mad Anthony has little to do with the man himself. Those offended by his day see it only as a symbol of the sin of this nation's founding. In their minds the general stands in damning contrast to a romanticized Native American who, it must never be said, drove off, massacred or enslaved the previous "native" Americans who massacred those before that, and so on back. Ridiculous.

Nonetheless, Mad Anthony Wayne Day is unlikely to last. The statue will be removed or melted down (save the horse). The consensus among the elite is that the man, once a national hero, is now a civic embarrassment.

But the consensus is wrong. The historian Gordon Wood is right that we have raised a generation without balance or perspective. He says that if the young are taught that "racism is and always was the dominant ideology" then we cannot be surprised that as adults they live in self-loathing and despair.

Is this how nations end, convinced they are unworthy of their own existence?

If so, Mad Anthony Day should be designated a national day of prayer, the more fervent the better.

## One Man, One Vote, Once

*(July 9)* — As my generation slides into its new role of sitting on park benches feeding pigeons, I worry not so much about which direction the country is headed as whether anyone still knows what makes its wheels turn.

Indiana's race for Secretary of State has caught my attention in that regard.

The one candidate, the Democrat, is out of central casting. An attorney, her resume includes service as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, deputy chair of the Indiana Democratic Party and former deputy attorney general.

The Republican, with a masters degree in business from Purdue, has taken a more nontraditional route, kicking around in various political offices. His campaign biographer tells us he has "helped coordinate and staff agricultural, business and chamber round tables, meeting with car dealerships and county clerks across the state." He was in military service at some point and in some capacity.

Let us assess.

Can we be impressed with claims of military service anymore? The "service" generally turns out to have been clerical despite plenty of medals and a combat designation. Yes, but a lieutenant colonel? Please, anyone who has actually served in the military knows there are lieutenant colonels who can't be trusted to drive across town.

Ditto for education. Graduate and law schools have dumbed down their requirements to the point a degree conveys no reliable information as to intelligence or ability. It may mean nothing more than the candidate's sex or ethnicity qualified him, her or them for admittance and scholarships denied others.

How to choose?

The Republican has one big thing going for him. His parents immigrated here from Central America, a place where free and fair elections are anything but certain. Election integrity being the job of the Secretary of State, he may be less inclined to take the process for granted, or at least he may want to see some ID.

In poetic irony, the Democrat, from pioneer stock and raised on a farm in Morgan County, seems confused about the function of voting itself. She thinks it is a philosophy.

“Today the Indiana GOP removed all references of DEMOCRACY from its platform,” she tweeted recently. “In the face of this rising authoritarianism, good people refuse to stand by and do nothing. Our better angels must stand up. Vote for me and safeguard our treasured democracy!”

The United States is in fact a republic and not a democracy. Why? Because the men who founded the country had read the history of Greece, Rome and the Enlightenment. They understood that pure democracy not only does not protect against authoritarianism, monarchy, autocracy, totalitarianism or whatever, it ultimately ushers them in. “One man, one vote, once,” has been the tragedy of the Third World.

Her “treasured” democracy, then, is only an arguably better system of political succession than the guillotine, and is only indirectly related — if related at all — to wise or constrained government. Bunker Hill was not fought over democracy but rather, in the extant, because the government, the Crown, was imposing gun control.

The Democrat, though, does make a good point: To stop authoritarianism we as individuals must stand up to it. That will involve a great number of her fellow citizens restoring allegiance to the particular set of principles that constitutes Western Civilization.

It is a position that her party has rejected. His party is still thinking it over.

## Be Ohio, Not Indiana

*(July 1)* — Some years ago I witnessed the rarest of phenomenon — a politician admitting he was wrong. The former mayor of my Indiana town, a Democrat who had been faced with an economic crisis in the closing of an auto manufacturing plant, told me privately he

would do things differently now. Republicans should listen to him.

The mayor was one of the first here to turn away from the so-called rust-belt industries toward the high-tech ones. Silicon Valley was all the talk then and our city invested heavily in a sexy-on-paper start-up. It lost a million bucks, which was big money back then and something of a civic scandal (we still had functioning newspapers).

What the mayor would have done instead was promote Indiana’s home-grown workforce of skilled machinists, men and women with family values and a strong work ethic. “We could have become the Switzerland of America,” he said.

That was before Mitch Daniels and Mike Pence perfected what came to be called “press-release economics.” They discovered that you don’t have to agonize about whether an economic prospect is genuine or fits Indiana’s workforce or infrastructure. You don’t even have to worry about costs to future taxpayers. Just get a deal signed and a press release mailed.

Do I simplify? Maybe, but not much. The GOP establishment has adopted this strategy as its new mercantilism. Eric Holcomb took it global with trips to China and Europe. Indiana’s economic policy seems to be to replace workers here with workers from somewhere, anywhere else.

It is no accident that Indiana is not mentioned in Joel Kotkin’s article, “Heartland Manufacturing Renaissance: Why Middle America is poised to lead an industrial comeback.”

A former columnist for the New York Times, Kotkin is the author of several books on the subject. He stresses supporting the middle class and families with traditional suburban development, which may explain why he is a former columnist for the New York Times.

He is particularly impressed with our neighbor to the east. It turns out that Ohio went in the direction that my Democrat mayor had suggested decades before. “The technology may be new,” Kotkin says, “but what’s drawing these manufacturers to Ohio is something more

traditional: its central location, business-friendly atmosphere and long-standing industrial culture.”

He notes that Ohio is listed in the leading group of states for the fastest industrial growth. Indiana is not.

The manager of an Ohio-based maker of natural-gas compressors that employs 1,400 in little Mount Vernon is quoted saying this: “We are still at the edge of the farming areas, and people have a strong work ethic. People here think building stuff is better than selling insurance. On a decent salary, you can live a good life in central Ohio.”

If that makes sense to you, it is discouraging that the leading and only Republican candidate for Indiana governor is a master of that ersatz press-release economics. He is considered an expert in developing urban properties with other people’s money, applying a formula of public-private partnerships that has the hapless taxpayers as the “public” part and special interests as the “private” part.

Moreover, he was director of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation at the time that similar Ohio institutions were outstripping us. And a point scored by Ohio promoters during that time was that Indiana retained a tax on business property, a tax the GOP gubernatorial candidate has fought to maintain.

Again, discouraging.

Yes, the candidate himself sees it differently. “I have spent the last decade focused on tackling Indiana’s greatest challenges and implementing conservative solutions that get real results for the people of Indiana,” he said in his campaign kick-off last month.

You’ll have to make up your own mind whether his campaign is sincere or merely more of the same, whether it will lead to a midwest manufacturing renaissance. Me, I’m trying to talk my old mayor into making a run for it.

## Sen. Young to the Ramparts

(June 26) — Allow me a short note on Sen. Todd Young’s vote against the Second Amendment.

OK, the senator’s staff would be quick to correct me on that point. He didn’t actually vote against the Second Amendment. He voted in favor of “bipartisan safe communities.” Specifically, he voted to allow government to deny the right to own guns to those it judges mentally ill or immature or without the proper paper work.

“If you are a law-abiding citizen and have not been adjudicated as mentally ill, your Second Amendment rights will not be affected in any way,” the senator promised in advance of this weekend’s signing of the bill into law by Joe Biden.

The problem I have with the senator is that he considers every word in that sentence negotiable. It does not mention, for example, that “law abiding,” “adjudicated” and “affected” include extended background checks for gun purchases, clarification (tightening) of Federal Firearms License requirements, funding for state “red flag” laws and other supposed crisis-intervention programs, plus expanding criminalization of what the government may redefine as arms trafficking and straw purchases,

So, Senator Young isn’t against you owning a gun to defend yourself or your children against either mass murderers or tyranny. He is merely shoring up the mechanisms for the government to take that away.

My reservations about career politicians such as Todd Young were ably expressed several years ago by the columnist Mark Helprin:

“Although most political and ethical issues present opportunities for nuance and compromise, some do not. When politicians engage in doublespeak, they attempt to rob democracy and reason of the element of choice, something that otherwise they inappropriately and promiscuously endorse in an effort to evade moral clarity.”

And the senator is now counted among those who would not let any crisis (school shooting) go to waste. His vote authorized \$13 billion to “cure” mental illness (especially in rural areas, for some unexplained reason).

Mental illness, if Senator Young doesn't know, is the progressives' latest chimera. It replaces the old revenue-generating standby of urban poverty. Look up the list of new expenditures — they are just the beginning — and see if you can make a plausible connection to protecting the lives of children sitting innocently in school.

Todd Young is not the biggest spender in Washington, nor is he the most hypocritical. He does have a talent for threading the Washington needle. Reviewing his campaign positions it is difficult to find anything for which he is categorically in favor or against every time. When he last ran for election, for example, he had an A+ rating from the National Rifle Association.

Indeed, it is difficult to know who Todd Young is going to be next.

His campaign literature reminds us that he is above all a U.S. Marine, conjuring up the image of, say, Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima or the Chosin Reservoir. He says he will “fight” for us if reelected.

That may be true, as he defines it. But unlike our Rep. Jim Banks or Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida he did not exactly head toward the sound of gunfire during his decade of military service. And that is despite his being in a position to choose his own duty station. He took a recruiting billet.

The rest of his resume reads like that — appointed to this, chosen for that. We can wind this up by saying that the man looks good on paper. You wouldn't want him managing your constitutional rights, though.

## A Political Forecast You Can Bet On

*(June 23)* — What does it mean that Gov. Eric Holcomb was booed at last Friday's lead-in to his own convention?

Well, it means that the next couple of election cycles will be crazy wild. Moreover, the political and journalism classes have positioned themselves so far out of touch that they will be of little help preparing you for what is coming next.

So, as we often find ourselves saying here, you are on your own. We can offer, however, at least one “tell” to watch for.

Say there is a race between a challenger who can cogently explain our situation in solid economic or — better yet — common-sense terms against an incumbent who talks abstractly about “fighting” inflation and so forth. Bet on the challenger this next time around.

Specifically, if an incumbent makes an argument that some capricious factor is to blame (Trump, greedy capitalist, guns or other inanimate objects, white “supremacy,” climate change, Covid, Johnny Depp, etc.) he or she or them won't be affecting any solutions once you return him or her or them to office.

The typical incumbent today, having built a career on an advocacy media and political favors, hasn't needed to stay close to a constituency. But they now won't have a clue as to how to fashion a solution, indeed, they won't recognize a problem.

The nut of your analysis should be this: The political class can no longer count on the electorate being inattentive. The tired old stump speech about god, country and family (sort of) doesn't work when voters are paying \$6 a gallon for gas and transvestites are dancing in the pre school.

That prediction is based on changes in what economists call “rational ignorance.” During good times, it is not “rational” for voters to spend time getting the details of public policy or incumbent performance. During bad times, it makes more sense.

There is a caveat: It doesn't matter whether you vote — statistically anyway. But if any of the issues touch on a constitutional principle, the First or Second Amendment particularly, you will want to vote anyway so you can look your grandchildren in the face.

One more factor to consider: As the stakes are raised, attempts to fix elections will increase. This is a constant throughout the world, not just Chicago, Texas and Pennsylvania. In fact, America has been blessed with uncommonly honest

elections. You cannot count on that to continue. (It is no accident the GOP's nominee for Secretary of State, with family in Guatemala, understands that.)

Another constant is that no matter how bad things get, there will be a shortage of good people, especially good people willing to run for office. If you find one, do all you can to keep them upright.

One more, God willing, may just be enough.

## **We're All RINOs Now**

*(June 18)* — The chairman of the Indiana Republican Party used his address to the state convention this weekend to tell us that “the word RINO has got to go.” He was referring of course to the disparagement, “Republican in Name Only.” A similar warning regarding “infighting” was delivered by the leading GOP candidate for state treasurer.

It is interesting that their reception was described by WIBC-FM as “respectful but not universal.” Maybe the reticence had to do with context.

Indiana voters have given these fellows more than a decade as a supermajority without so much as a single Democrat standing in their way. And it's not as if they didn't know better. Prior to their taking office, the Indiana Policy Review Foundation had published a book collecting the policy recommendations of experts on a dozen issue groupings facing the Legislature at the time.

Its common-sense recommendations were commended by readers as wide-ranging as the editors of the Indianapolis Star, then an honest newspaper, and the Speaker of the House, then a Democrat. Its chapters included: tax policy, process, sanctity of life, better government, education, justice, human welfare, the environment, the workplace, special interests and the right of private property.

We would argue that the supermajority has made pathetically little progress in any of these areas, and indeed it has taken backward steps on the last two.

The power of special interests has increased to the point of mercantilism. The “economy” has been reduced to politically defined public-private partnerships and regional economic-development schemes, with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation as their cynical arbiter. Ask a shop owner or small manufacturer if he or she is feeling the love of a free market these days.

At the same time, the Republican leadership has been quiet on what we believe is the core of Republicanism, that is, the right of private property. Party leaders don't seem to understand its critical role in prosperity. It is only mentioned awkwardly in the draft of the 2022 platform. It is not included in the party's monographs on topical issues, “Women,” “Diverse Communities,” “Working Hoosiers” and so forth.

Fortunately, there is an independent measure of the issue. It is the [IndianaScorecard.org](http://IndianaScorecard.org), a ranking of legislators on how their votes affect private property. The GOP leadership scores badly.

The Speaker of the Indiana House of Representatives in this last session did not break 50 percent on the scorecard. Nor did the President Pro Tem of the Senate. And the governor . . . well, he still thinks the Chinese are going to help us.

These are the men whom the state chairman would shield from derision.

Is respect for private property the only definer of good Republican governance? It begins there, at any rate, and your morning coffee group would have no trouble sorting the good legislation from the bad on the issue. Again, it is the essence of being a Republican.

For it is property, unlike the various social-justice sympathies, that is the absolute on the political table. It is either being protected or it is being eroded. The late Tom Bethell broke it down for us in his book “The Noblest Triumph”:

“The great blessing of private property is that people can benefit from their own industry and insulate themselves from the negative effects of others' actions. It is like a set of invisible mirrors that surround individuals, households or firms,



reflecting back on them the consequences of their acts. The industrious will reap the benefits of their industry, the frugal the consequences of their frugality; the improvident and the profligate likewise.”

If members of your Republican delegation cannot demonstrate a working understanding of that, they have pinned the RINO label on themselves.

## Reimagining the Indy Star

*(June 13)* — Things are changing at the Indianapolis Star — dramatically and, to some of us, terrifyingly. They want us to accept it as “reimagining.”

Our Leo Morris has expertly alerted the membership to this latest and perhaps saddest reincarnation. I urge you to read his column. It explains how the Gannett Company’s historic decision to downgrade editorial pages is not as it might first appear, abject stupidity, but to hide an embarrassing dissonance.

That is, how could a newspaper be trusted if its editorial page was saying exactly what was being promoted on its front page? It couldn’t; readers would feel manipulated. But the editors already knew that. Here again is the statement Morris quoted from the Gannett committee of editors:

“Readers don’t want us to tell them what to think. They don’t believe we have the expertise to tell anyone what to think on most issues. They perceive us as having a biased agenda.”

Bingo!

Gannett, however, which publishes 15 newspapers here, decided to ignore this obvious flaw in its operational plan. Rather, it decided the solution was some slight-of-hand. It would downgrade if not eliminate the editorial pages (the “saying it out loud” part) and would concentrate on what it quaintly calls news (the “disguised distortion of reality” part).

But keep your eye on the pea. What happened to that “trust” part, the element that has driven journalism since Martin Luther and the first printing presses?

And just like that, It is gone — and Gannett could care less. Newspapers now make their money from institutional advertisers such as banks, hospitals and large corporate interests pursuing narrow agendas. Broad-based commercial advertising, which works to transfer the trust of a local newspaper to a community’s shops, restaurants, dealerships and stores, is minimal.

A great source of that trust was the assurance that issues other than those endorsed on the editorial page would be treated justly and objectively on the other pages.

Well, Morris had no sooner typed the last sentence of his column when the Star, a Gannett paper and the largest in Indiana, announced the next step in the same direction, this one more troubling than the first. The title of “Public Engagement Editor,” a politically correct invention of only recent vintage, was being “reimagined” by executive editor Bro Krift.

Now the newspaper would become not only untrustworthy but an agent of maleficence if you disagree with its view of truth, justice, history, law and the general direction in which mankind should be headed. Indeed, the new public engagement editor warns Indianapolis to “get ready.” She promises to pattern her style on the late civic genius John Lewis and make “good trouble, necessary trouble.”

Will that mean labeling anyone with whom she disagrees as a bigot or counter-progressive reactionary? Sounds like it. And good luck reading about any issue or idea that hasn’t occurred to the Star’s stable of sophomoric lockstep minds. Finally, if the Star calls you for an interview you would be wise to be otherwise engaged.

In sum, the Star has unleashed a myopic idealist on Indianapolis — a mediocre unelected one to boot — and given her the power to casually “shake things up and agitate the status quo,” in her words.

Our bet is that will include using the full weight of an almost 120-year-old institution to marginalize the recalcitrants and divide the city by identity (29 percent Black, 3 percent Asian, 10

percent Hispanic and so forth). And there will be “equity” and “intersectionality” galore. “No one person is just one thing,” she imagines in her reimagining.

What is unimaginable is why anyone would pay for such shallow-minded, self-righteous rubbish, or why a city of 800,000 stalwart Midwestern souls would abide it without raising up an alternate medium.

If we must reimagine something, let’s reimagine that.

## A Bolix of Good Intentions

(June 9) — The millionaire virtue-signaler in our city — every city has one — has a plan to save those stuck in the poorer part of town. He is going to do this, as close as the uninitiated can tell, by making it look pretty much like the better part of town.

I hope it works — I just have questions, that’s all.

To evaluate the \$15-million project — a virtual campus of compassion in the inner city — you must wade through a bushel full of social-justice catch words and concepts: “chronic” poverty, housing as a “tool,” “resource barriers,” “low-risk incubator spaces,” “care givers,” child-care providers,” “sustainability” and of course “social equity.”

There will be a building complex housing an early child care development center. There will be a comprehensive health clinic, project offices and a community workspace. There will be experts on call in the fields of mental health and physical care. There will be a pavilion with restrooms (and drinking fountains) where the city can distribute meals.

Finally, there will be something called “permanently affordable” housing.

So this will be a magical place indeed, a model not only for how to save our city but any city — the world even.

There is, however, a premise built into the plan that some would challenge. It is that opportunity

is “deserved,” that there is a new social crisis called an “opportunity gap.”

It is mentioned by both the head of the project’s fundraising arm and the chief economic officer: “Our community deserves a solution to looming opportunity gaps,” says the one. “We envision a supported neighborhood where residents flourish because they have access to resources they need and opportunities they deserve,” says the other.

I have known of opportunities that are earned, opportunities that are taken and opportunities that are missed. And I have learned at some cost that although my own opportunities may be blessedly constant my ability to meet them has varied greatly.

But I have never heard of opportunities that are deserved.

A “deserved opportunity” would seem an oxymoron. Its use here implies that those outside this particular community might have undeserved opportunities. And in that there is a whiff of envy, an attitude that has meant ruin for many human endeavors throughout history.

You should hope I’m wrong. You could feel more assured, however, if the organizers had included in their plans a commitment — even a sentence or two — regarding public safety, a willingness to hold all individuals in these neighborhoods to the rule of law, especially those who endanger life and property. You will need that if you hope to be prosperous.

Also, you could feel more assured if the organizers, some with political influence, would have thrown their weight into removing tax and regulatory burdens borne inordinately by the struggling inner city residents whom they would champion. Dr. Eric Schansberg, an adjunct of our foundation, has written a book on the subject.

For example, a task force could be formed that would include the community’s representatives on city council, plus an architect and engineer or two, to make up a list of government regulations that could be waived in the defined area.

The codes and “safety” regulations typical found in outlying counties are magnitudes more

relaxed than those in our city, where costly regulations are kept on the books despite having no demonstrable benefit. A heap of wealth — of opportunity — could be created by simply getting senseless government out of the way, perhaps \$15 million worth.

Those who doubt that should read the history of Sir. John Cowperthwaite and Hong Kong, where in 40 years using just such a strategy real wages increased by 50 percent and that supposedly “chronic” poverty dropped to 15 percent.

If only our local virtue-signaler could be as visionary, if only such a defunding of bureaucracy could be affected, if only for this particular corner of our city. What if as a result better jobs there allowed residents to upgrade and purchase housing and to attract the kind of resources that all neighborhoods need, and to do so dependent solely on their own abilities, hard work and talents?

Wouldn't that be a great opportunity?

— *tcl*



*"The Battle of Cowpens," painted by William Ranney in 1845, shows an unnamed patriot (far left) saving the life of Col. William Washington.*