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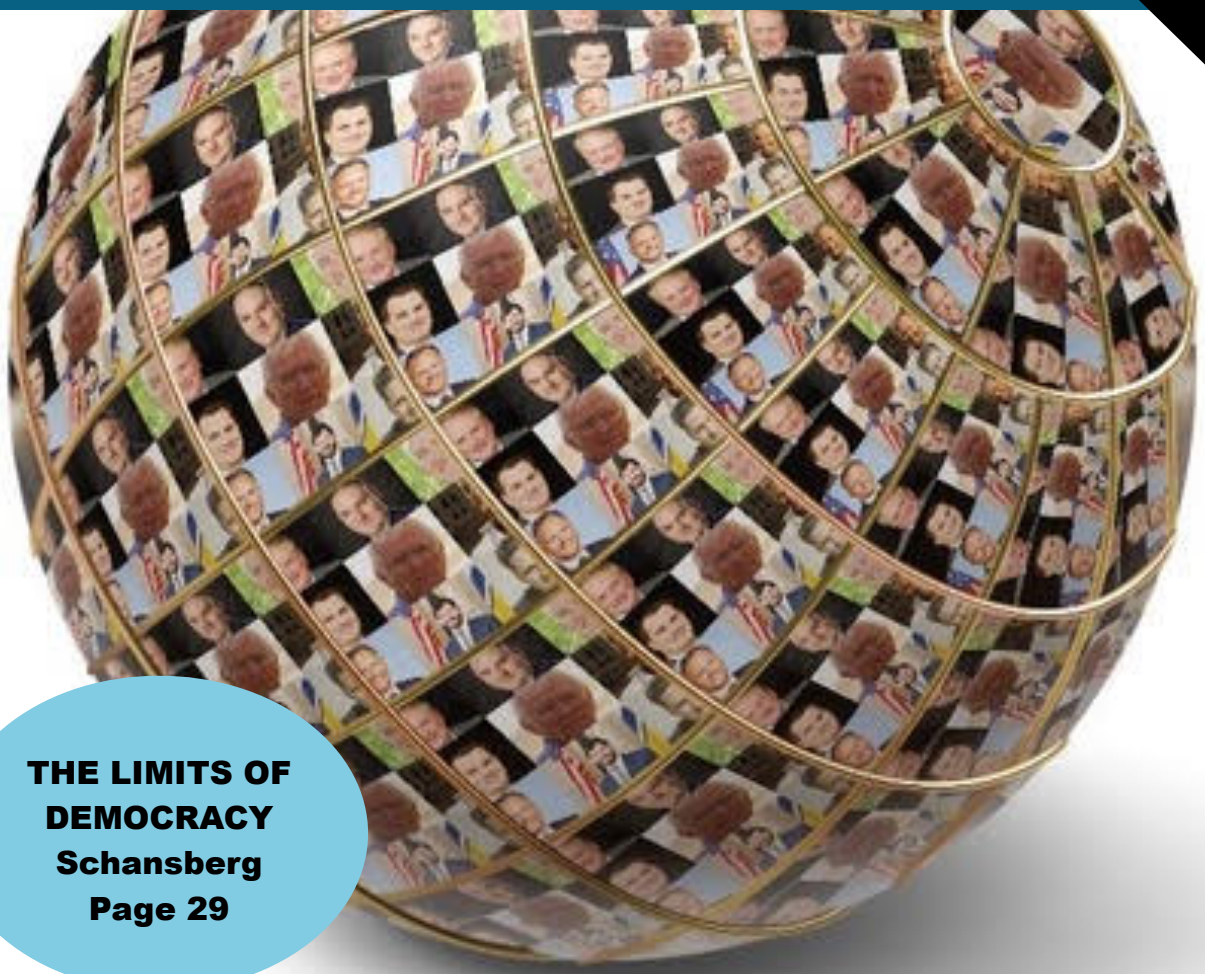
Review
Winter 2023

ANDREA NEAL on School Choice
Page 6



THE LIMITS OF DEMOCRACY
Schansberg
Page 29

The 2023 'Foothold' Councilmen

The foundation set out early this fall to find councilmen, although outside the majority, who create a personal sphere of good government around themselves, one where honest questions can be asked even if they make officialdom or party uncomfortable. We found nine. If you have one in your city, consider yourself fortunate. ***(Page 15)***

"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."

INDIANA POLICY review

Vol. 34, No. 1, Winter 2023

A FUTURE THAT WORKS

Our mission is to marshal the best thought on governmental, economic and educational issues at the state and municipal levels. We seek to accomplish this in ways that:

- 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.

The foundation encourages research and discussion on the widest range of Indiana public policy issues. Although the philosophical and economic prejudices inherent in its mission might prompt disagreement, the foundation strives to avoid political or social bias in its work. Those who believe they detect such bias are asked to provide details of a factual nature so that errors may be corrected.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Wednesday Whist

Education: Analogies to Real Life

James Gwartney has a thought experiment which illustrates why a system which features socialism and monopoly power is not a good idea. Imagine that government decides to operate all restaurants. Further, your geography determines your restaurant; you will eat at the government ("public") restaurant in your neighborhood. (To make the analogy more accurate, also assume home cooking — like home schooling, is costly.) What would the incentives be for the person who manages the restaurant? Why does the fact that the clientele is captive make a difference?

Of course, the economic incentives are not at all favorable. Consumers are likely to receive low quality food. In addition, costs (taxes and government spending) are likely to be artificially high and to increase further. But since customers still pay a "price" of zero for the service (government education is "free"), people are less likely to notice the relationship — the subsequent tax increases are much more subtle than price increases in the private sector would be.

In addition, you will be forced to eat the type of food your particular restaurant serves. If it's Mexican food and you don't like burritos — too bad. The point is not that Mexican food is "right or wrong" but that by definition, the menu will offend or disappoint someone.

The same is true in the menu of issues provided by government schools — whether to use corporal punishment, when to teach sex education, whether to use phonics, focusing on academics or building self-esteem, etc.

If you decide to eat at a private restaurant to get better quality or because your tastes and preferences differ from what your government school provides, you will have to pay taxes for the government restaurant as well as the prices at the private restaurant.

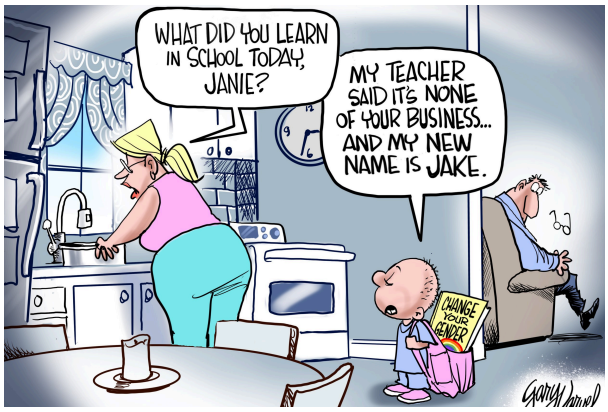
Clearly, your ability to do this would be a function of your income level. As such, restaurant and educational choice are restricted, especially for the poor. Many of you are probably wondering how the above can be true if the government (public) school you and your children attended was good. Or maybe you're thinking that other social factors are the primary explanation of the problems with contemporary schooling, especially in the inner city. While family structure, crime, drug use, etc., are important, they are also more difficult to change. Much can be done by simply changing the structure and incentives in the market for education.

An analogy to marriage is instructive. From a strictly economic perspective, compared to dating, marriage is not a very good institution. The trouble is that marriage limits competition and thus, discourages incentives for good behavior. Often, after the wedding, people gain weight, don't buy flowers or shave as often, etc. These are behaviors which would probably not be tolerated in a dating relationship. Why the difference? Because when a couple is just dating, there is still substantial competition.

If the incentives are "all wrong," how does a marriage work? It can still be successful if the spouses behave as if there is competition. To generalize, if a bad institution has "good" people, it can still function well. But if a bad institution has "bad" people, its deficiency will be revealed.

Again, the same is true of government schooling, particularly in the inner cities. With the decline of the family and the increase in crime, illegitimacy, etc., the bad institution (socialistic and monopolistic schools) is revealed. Since those factors have not declined as much in the suburbs, the institution still works fairly well (although at higher costs than necessary, etc.).

Furthermore, anecdotal evidence will never solve this debate. Well into the future, there will be many people who are perfectly satisfied with their government schools. On the basis of their experience, they will be unable to understand why systematic reform is necessary. It is only when the debate moves to discussing institutions that the need for dramatic change becomes evident. *— Eric Schansberg*



A Call to Action: Educational Freedom for Hoosier Families

Andrea Neal is a nationally published author, an adjunct scholar with the Indiana Policy Review Foundation and a former member of the state Board of Education. This work is based on her keynote address to this year's seminar. Her latest book, "Pence – The Path to Power" is available online from Indiana University Press or at a bookstore near you.

"Sunk-cost trap refers to a tendency for people to irrationally follow through on an activity that is not meeting their expectations. This is because of the time and/or money they have already invested. The sunk-cost trap explains why people finish movies they are not enjoying, finish meals that taste bad, keep clothes in their closet that they've never worn and hold on to investments that are underperforming."

— Lucas Downey, "Sunk-cost Trap," Investopedia, Sept. 18, 2022

To Lucas Downey's definition of the sunk-cost trap, let's add one more vexing example: why taxpayers keep funding schools that fail to educate children. Despite decades of educational reform initiatives enacted at both state and federal levels, America's schools are not getting better. They are getting worse. Parents' satisfaction with their children's education has dropped from 51 percent in 2019 to 42 percent today.[1] The organization Stand Together reports that 81 percent ›of families give education a C grade or lower, and two-third of students are "disengaged" by their senior year of high school.[2] And it's not just declining test scores that frustrate parents. In many communities, gender ideology, social justice curricula and left-wing political indoctrination have taken the place of grammar, Great Books, scientific method and Socratic questioning. Our schools are hopelessly adrift.

One promising reform remains to be tried if only we can muster the boldness to embrace it: educational freedom. Not a limited school-choice program as exists now in Indiana but a true free market in which schools compete for students, and parents choose what is best for their families, with options ranging from home schools, to special needs and vocational programs, to traditional college prep and classical academies.

This is what Milton Friedman pushed for in 1955 when he wrote his landmark essay, *The Role of Government in Education*. He observed that "Government has appropriately financed general education for citizenship, but in the process it has been led also to administer most of the schools that provide such education.

Yet, as we have seen, the administration of schools is neither required by the financing of education nor justifiable in its own right in a predominantly free-enterprise society."[3]

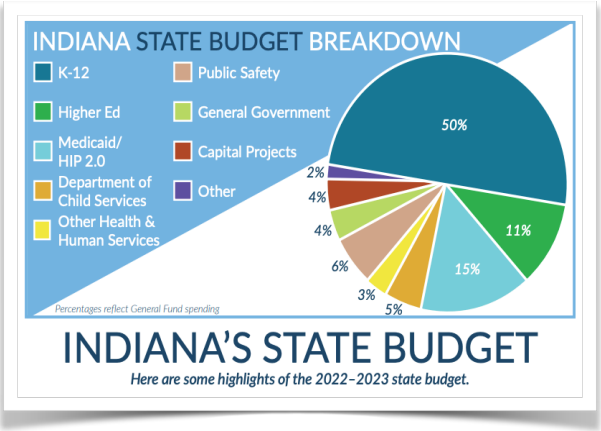
Friedman presciently worried that government control of schools would lead to political indoctrination of children, and he blamed lack of consumer choice for low achievement and declining test scores. The Indiana Policy Review Foundation took up the mantle in "Indiana Mandate, an Agenda for the 1990s," in 1992. Stuart Butler, then director of domestic policy

[1] Lydia Saad, "Americans' Satisfaction With K-12 Education on Low Side," Gallup, Sept. 1, 2022.

[2] Stand Together, "Issues with the American Education System," standtogether.org, 2022.

[3] Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," Rutgers University Press, 1955.

studies for the Heritage Foundation and a policy advisor for the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, envisioned a system "in which the finances of a school system are driven by the enrollment decisions of satisfied or dissatisfied parents."[4] One can only wonder how our schools might be faring today had Friedman's idea been implemented when first proposed or in subsequent decades. Our students have lost ground due to policymakers' unfounded loyalty to the public school system as it now exists.



Source: Indiana Senate Republicans

70 Years of Failed Reform

"Why leave something as important as the education of one's child in the hands of the government?" That question was posed by Future of Freedom Foundation President Jacob G. Hornberger. He stated what is obvious to critics of the system:

> "Public schooling is one gigantic socialist system, and everyone knows the type of shoddy products and services that socialism produces. Like other socialist systems, the state centrally plans the education of hundreds, thousands, or millions of people . . . The textbooks, curriculum and class schedule are selected by the government."[5]

The system is based on conscription, and families can only opt out if there are state-approved alternatives in place.

For decades federal and state legislators have lurched from one reform idea to another in an effort to make it work, and they have met with nothing but failure. Many date the modern reform movement to the 1955 release of Rudolf Flesch's "Why Johnny Can't Read," which documented a national literacy crisis. His book coincidentally came out the same year Friedman wrote his groundbreaking essay. In the years since, thousands of essays and articles have been published with the predictable title, "Why Johnny Still Can't Read."

Almost 25 years later, the U.S. Department of Education was created under President Jimmy Carter and established a massive new bureaucracy to intervene in affairs traditionally managed by the states. A spinoff of the old Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the agency's mission was "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access."[6] Three years after its formation, Ronald Reagan tried unsuccessfully to get rid of it.

Reagan was president in 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued "A Nation at Risk," the report card that bemoaned the state of America's public schools. The report warned that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."[7] In response, the education bureaucracy grew larger.

It's hard to keep track of all the reform laws enacted by Congress and the state legislature since A Nation at Risk. In 1987, under Robert Orr, Indiana's first "education governor," the state

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[4] Stuart Butler, "What Makes Some Educators So Sure That Parental Choice Will Improve our Schools?" Indiana Mandate – an Agenda for the 1990s, Indiana Police Review, 1992.

[5] Jacob G. Hornberger, "Separate School and State," The Future of Freedom Foundation, June 30, 2021.

[6] "An Overview of the U.S. Department of Education," ed.gov, May 14, 2018.

[7] The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk – The Imperative for Educational Reform, April 1983.

implemented the A+ program, the ISTEP test and performance-based accreditation. Over the next 30 years, Orr's concept of school accountability underwent constant revision, sometimes at the whim of state legislators but often to bring Indiana into compliance with federal mandates. In 1994, Congress passed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Five years later, Indiana Public Law 221 established a new performance-based accountability system and gave schools labels like "exemplary progress" or "academic probation," later replaced by A-F grades. As a result of No Child Left Behind, passed in 2001 under George W. Bush, Indiana modified Public Law 221 to meet new federal conditions. This ushered in the era of AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress). In 2007, Indiana adopted Core 40, to add rigor to the high school diploma. Now lawmakers are poised change it.

Money Does not Mean Success

The Common Core State Standards Initiative came into being in 2010, largely due to the outsized influence of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which bankrolled the initiative. The idea was to standardize what students should learn at every grade level in all 50 states. Over the objections of some leading math and English scholars, Indiana followed the crowd, slightly reworked the criteria, and rebranded them as College and Career Ready Standards. Next came the Every Student Succeeds Act passed by Congress in 2015, a new and allegedly more flexible version of No Child Left Behind. In 2019, the ILEARN replaced the ISTEP exam in Indiana, and new end-of-course assessments were adopted at the high school level.

This is what is meant by a sunk-cost trap — throwing good money after bad, doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Since 1970, nationally there has been a zero percent improvement in K-12 outcomes, despite a 150 percent increase in per student spending.[8] Although the teachers' unions insist the opposite, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy has surveyed the data and concluded that money does not equal success. "The bulk of the academic research suggests that there is no statistically meaningful correlation between school spending and student outcomes. In cases where the correlation is positive and statistically significant, the effects are quite small — suggesting that even large increases in spending are likely to translate into only small academic effects, on average."[9] Yet every budget year, the priority for public education is more money. And that's not just the union's priority. The Nov. 21, 2022, news summary from Chalkbeat Indiana announced, "Spending more on schools and making high school more relevant are top of mind for Indiana lawmakers heading into the 2023 session, legislative leaders said." As is always the case, these expenditures occur without any guarantee of return on investment.

Indiana taxpayers spend plenty on education. Not only are K-12 schools the state's single largest budget item, but the most recent biennial budget set record levels of spending, with per pupil expenditures averaging $10,256.[10] As a point of comparison, tuition and fees at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis, a well-regarded parish school in the Indianapolis archdiocese, is $10,690.

Declining Test Scores in Indiana and the Nation

Despite historic funding nationally and in Indiana, there can be no disagreement about academic achievement trends. Andrew Coulson, director of Cato's Center for Educational Freedom from 2005 to 2015, laid reading, math and science scores against per pupil costs of a K-12 education and created the now iconic chart of diminishing returns on investment. More recent evidence can be found in American College Test (ACT) composite scores, which dropped this year to their

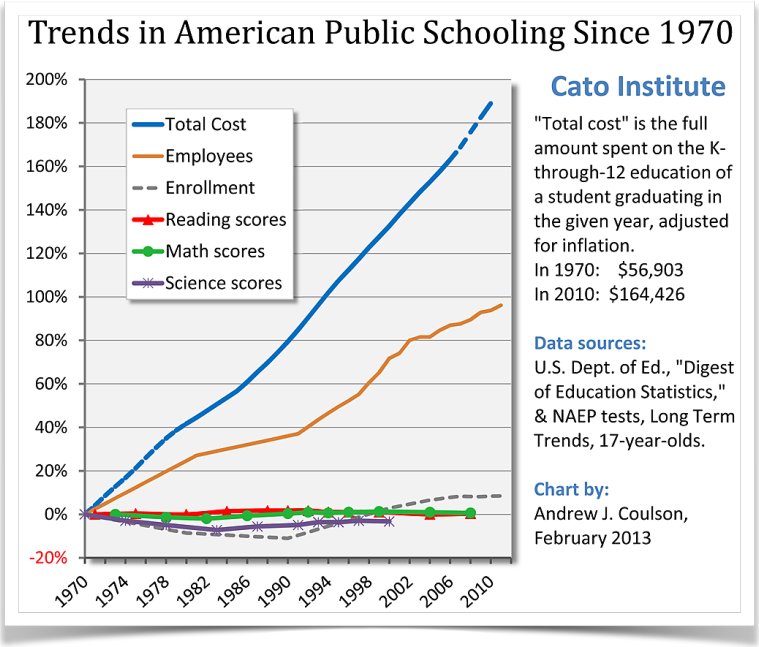
[8] Stand Together.

[9] Ben DeGrow and Edward C. Hoang, "Literature Review," Mackinac Center for Public Policy, April 14, 2016.

[10] Indiana State Budget Agency, 2021-2023 As-Passed Budget; Indiana Senate Republicans; Education Data Initiative, June 15, 2022.

lowest level in three decades. The ACT is designed for the 10th, 11th and 12th grade levels and is used by many colleges as admissions criteria. Exam-takers from the Class of 2022 averaged 19.8 out of a possible 36 total points on the test, the first time since 1991 that the national average fell below 20.

"There is no way to sugar coat these ACT results," Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, said. She noted that the data reflect "substantive holes in student knowledge and abilities."[11] Though the COVID pandemic exacerbated the situation, these trends preceded the shuttering of schools and shift to online learning.



The Indiana trends are no less concerning. Math and language arts scores on the ISTEP and ILEARN assessments have fallen precipitously since 2011, with only 28 percent of students achieving proficiency in both. Another revealing data point is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's co-called report card. At both fourth-grade and eighth-grade levels, math and reading scores not only dropped last year but have fallen from their highs. This is especially notable considering that math and reading have been a singular focus of our elementary schools since No Child Left Behind pushed the adoption of performance-based evaluations of schools and teachers. In 2002, 32 percent of Hoosier fourth graders failed to demonstrate basic skills in reading. In 2022, 37 percent did. Among eighth graders, 23 percent scored below basic literacy skills in 2002 compared to 30 percent in 2022. Math results were mixed. At the fourth-grade level, scores remained stagnant, with 23 below basic skills in 2000 and 22 percent in 2022 while the percentage of Eighth Graders failing to achieve proficiency in math rose from 26 percent in 2000 to 34 last year.[12]

Impediments to Improvement

The sociological causes of student failure are complex and controversial and cannot be captured by results on standardized tests. Family breakdown, poverty, the scourge of drugs and addiction and declining moral values all have something to do with school discipline issues and low achievement. Daniel Buck, one of the country's most insightful education commentators, made the following disheartening comment, which reflects the perspective of many in his profession: "The longer I teach, the more I think schools will not improve as long as families continue to decline societally."[13] This decline is worthy of policymakers' attention at all levels of government and transcends the mission of the public school.

It is also difficult to quantify the impact school consolidation has had on the learning environment in Indiana. As a result of the Indiana School Corporation Reorganization Act of 1959,

[11] Asher Lehrer-Small, "ACT Scores Fall to Lowest Level in 30 Years," LA School Report, Oct. 17, 2022.

[12] 2022 Mathematics and Reading State Snapshot Reports, The Nation's Report Card, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics.

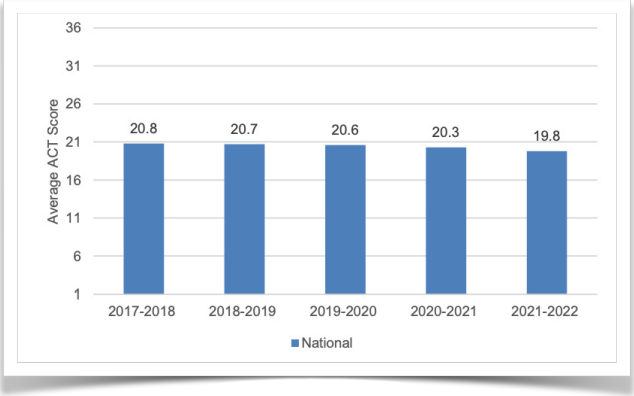
[13] @MrDanielBuck, Twitter, Oct. 13, 2022.

most small and small-town schools closed. The goal was to increase efficiency and reduce overhead, but the bulk of research has found neutral or negative impacts on learning. One analysis by Indiana University researchers showed that small schools perform better than large ones, and for obvious reasons. "A lot of research suggests that building relationships is important to student achievement. Common sense would tell you it's a lot easier to build relationships with small schools than with large school corporations," one researcher noted.[14]

It is tempting to throw up our hands and say, let's be satisfied with the status quo. Public schools, such as can be found in Brownsburg, Carmel and Southwest Allen County, routinely score well on standardized tests, and community members often express satisfaction with their own school systems. The state now has 112 charter schools, including Signature in Evansville and Herron High School and Paramount Cottage Home in Indianapolis, which have won national recognition. Pockets of excellence can be found across Indiana, and efforts should be made to replicate these programs.

However, in a free, self-governing society, accepting the status quo is not an acceptable or moral response. We owe it to all children — not just the top third or half — to ensure access to quality education. Thomas Jefferson rightly noted of Virginia law, "By far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness."[15] The Indiana Constitution uses similar words, promising in Article 8, Section 1, "Knowledge and learning, generally diffused throughout a community, being essential to the preservation of a free government; it shall be the duty of the General Assembly to encourage, by all suitable means, moral, intellectual, scientific and agricultural improvement."

Average Composite Scores: 5 Years of Testing. Source: ACT



'All Suitable Means'

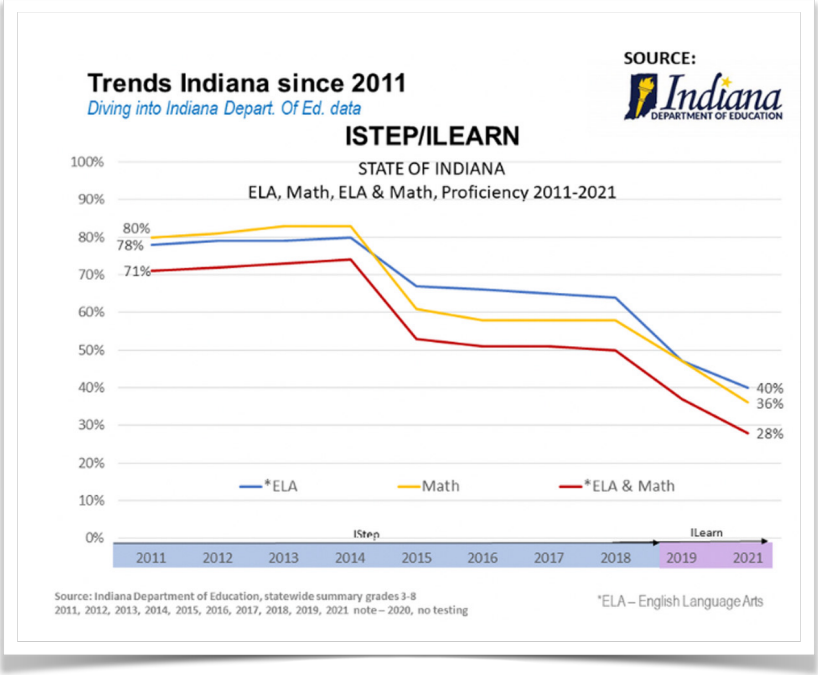
Our schools are called to promote the diffusion of knowledge and learning through "all suitable means." This should include freedom of choice. Arizona, Florida and West Virginia have led the way, and other states are looking seriously at this. With super-majorities in both chambers, Indiana Republicans have no excuse to avoid the issue. After all, Indiana was a pioneer of school choice, thanks to the pioneering work of J. Patrick Rooney of Golden Rule Insurance, who funded scholarships for low-income Indianapolis children to attend private schools.

The success of his program eventually led to the state's adoption of a variety of choice initiatives. Today, 21 percent of Hoosier students take advantage of some form of choice: public charter or magnet schools, home schools, inter-district transfer and vouchers to help pay private school tuition of students whose households meet certain income criteria. As of this year, Indiana also offers an Education Savings Account program (ESA), although limited to students with special needs to be used to pay for private school tuition or individualized services. Unlike vouchers, which function as scholarships, ESAs allow parents to apply allocated state dollars to a variety of education-related expenses.

[14] Danielle Rush, "IU Study Finds Few Benefits in Indiana Public School Consolidation," Indiana Economic Digest, October 16, 2010.

[15] Extract from Thomas Jefferson to George Wythe, Aug. 13, 1786.

The Time Is Now



Lawmakers could fund ESAs in the upcoming session using state dollars, but eventually will need to address the fact that 30 percent of school funding continues to come from local property taxes ($3.7 billion in 2021). A reworking of the funding formula to ensure statewide equity is in order, and the time is now, said Robert Enlow of EdChoice. “Twenty percent are taking charge. Society is failing the other 80 percent.”[16] Model legislation can be found in Arizona, where parents choose between a public-sector school or an ESA account, worth about $7,000. Families can use that money for private school tuition, home school curriculum, online academies and micro-schools.

These are smaller learning communities, often created by parents and tailored to the specific needs of a student or group of students. School-choice advocates are calling Arizona’s law the “new gold standard” for student freedom. West Virginia, which had record low NAEP scores this year, has launched a program similar to Arizona’s, called the Hope Scholarship, which gives parents about $4,300 per child to use for private school tuition or other education related expenses. That program is currently open only to public school students and not existing homeschoolers or children already enrolled in private schools. Earlier this year Florida dramatically expanded its private school-choice program through what is called a Family Empowerment Scholarship, and these will be available to more students every year.

Unlike our current voucher system, educational accounts should have few strings attached. A reasonable requirement for a school to qualify for ESA dollars would be proof of core curriculum, a condition similar to what Friedman recommended in his 1955 essay. Schools should not have to submit to state mandated tests or other accountability measures. Nor should home-school environments be micro-managed. No school should have to jump through regulatory hoops – including accreditation — to be eligible for ESA money. In a free market, the parents decide where to spend their money.

Critics will cite the sentence in Article 8, Section 1, of the state constitution, coming directly after the knowledge and learning language, which says the general assembly shall provide for a “general and uniform system of common schools, wherein tuition shall be without charge.” While this verbiage poses problems for those who wish to separate school from state entirely, it should not affect the expansion of Education Savings Accounts.

If challenged in court, the same reasoning given in Meredith vs. Pence would apply. In that 2013 decision, the state supreme court upheld the state voucher program, noting that school choice “does not replace the public school system, which remains in place and available to all Indiana

[16] Robert Enlow interview, August 4, 2022.

school children, in accordance with the dictates of the Education Clause."[17]

If expansion of ESAs is popular and successful, many public schools will close due to dwindling enrollment. It may make sense down the road to amend the state constitution to eliminate the problematic "common school" language. This would allow Hoosiers to realize more fully Friedman's vision of a system that is financed by taxpayers but administered by the private or non-profit sector.

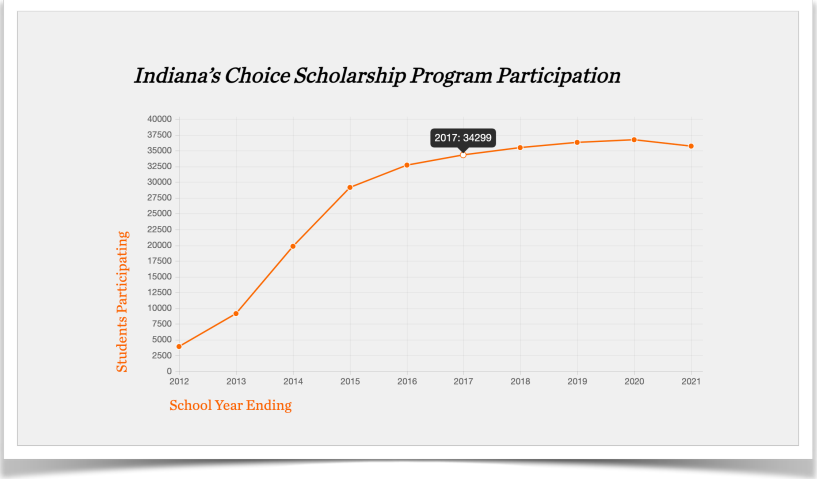
Wouldn't it be better if our Constitution explicitly guaranteed a high-quality K-12 education for every Hoosier child, using "all suitable means" to bring that about? Thinking long-term, the popular and effective public schools would survive and thrive in a free-market environment without state control. This could occur by transferring their management from elective school boards to publicly-held not-for-profit corporations, much like the Green Bay Packers of the NFL. Communities opting for such a system might find they have far more say in local educational matters than they do now.

End the Monopoly

Lawmakers should bring free-market forces to bear on the rest of the educational monopoly, as well. The Indiana Policy Review has written many times about structural impediments to improvement, including collective bargaining, teacher certification and other bureaucratic red tape that stifles innovation. The Fordham Institute has noted that "Indiana's teacher unions have been a larger presence in state politics than their counterparts in most other states."[18] Our collective bargaining law dates to 1973, and initially covered not just salary and benefits but hours, working conditions, curriculum, teaching methods, class size, school calendar etc. In 2002, Charles Freeland wrote for The Policy Review a significant analysis of the negative effects of collective bargaining on school quality. He observed that collective bargaining and exclusive representation, with its one-deal-fits-all approach, penalizes the best teachers and rewards the worst.

Since then, there has been only modest reform. In 2011, Gov. Mitch Daniels signed a law restricting bargaining to salary and benefits, which did give schools more flexibility to be creative in some areas, but not in the most impactful, which is negotiating contracts for the vast majority of Indiana teachers. Two years ago, legislators passed a law that requires teachers who choose to join a union to annually submit a request to school administrators to have union dues withheld from their paychecks, and to confirm that request in a separate email message. That kind of tweaking is hardly worth the effort.

In January 2022, Larry Sand of the Heartland Institute called for the abolition of teacher unions.[19] His idea goes much too far as it fails to recognize teachers' First Amendment right of free association, but at a minimum schools should be



Source: EdChoice

[17] Meredith vs. Pence, 984 N.E.2nd 1213 (Ind. 2013).

[18] Amber Winkler, Janie Scull, and Dara Zeehandelaar, "How Strong Are U.S. Teacher Unions," Thomas B. Fodham Institute, October 2012.

[19] Larry Sand, "It's Time to Abolish the Teachers Unions," The Heartland Institute, Jan. 4, 2022.

required to negotiate with multiple bargaining units and individual teachers. Lawmakers moved in that direction last year by creating temporary adjunct teacher jobs outside of collective bargaining to address the teacher shortage, but for reasons that are not entirely clear, school districts aren't using this option. Six states – Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Arkansas – expressly prohibit collective bargaining, and Indiana should join them.

Eliminate Teacher Licensing

Another bold idea, recommended by Joy Pullman, executive editor at The Federalist, is the end of teacher certification. She notes, "Teacher certification programs have long been proven to have zero connection to teacher quality or raising student achievement . . . The students who enter college intending to major in education typically score below-average on college entrance exams, and this has been true since the 1950s."[20] The example is often cited of the Eli Lilly chemist unable to teach high school chemistry because he doesn't have a license. The Transition to Teaching program has made it easier for career changers to enter the profession, but that was a program of limited impact. Ending teacher licensure would not only create a more competitive hiring environment but would address the teacher shortage. It also would have the very desirable side effect of weakening the influence of the schools of education, which are factories of mediocrity and progressive pedagogy.

At a minimum, schools should be required to negotiate with multiple bargaining units and individual teachers.

Legislative Predictions

The Indiana General Assembly does not appear inclined to make bold moves. It has a history of passing programs of limited or negative impact. Speaker Todd Huston has said reinventing high school is one of his priorities in the 2023 session so students can receive high school credit for holding jobs. This is the wrong priority. Under a free-market system, there could and should be high schools that are vocational in nature, but, as Aaron Renn noted in a recent American Affairs essay, "Indiana's K–12 education system should not be an outsourced training department for the state's low-wage employers. Instead, the focus should be on ensuring children have a foundation of literacy and basic math skills."[21]

For too long, the legislature has relied on Indiana's employers to dictate education policy. As just one example of the business sector's influence, last session lawmakers passed a bill to reduce the number of academic standards teachers must "teach to" to a more manageable number. In principle, the law's call for "clear, concise and jargon free" standards makes good sense. (Many previously objected to the jargon in the Common Core standards to no avail). Hoosiers should be deeply offended that that the state's new standards are to be based largely on what "businesses and industries" deem important.[22] This over-reliance on the employer perspective dates back at least to 1998 when Governor Frank O'Bannon formed the Education Roundtable to advise him unofficially on education matters. Over time, the roundtable's opinion became policy, trumping even the views of the State Board of Education. The roundtable thankfully was dissolved in 2015.

The Purpose of Education

Please may our lawmakers hear the words of Larry Arnn, president of Hillsdale College, on the purpose of education. He wrote:

[20] Joy Pullman, "Media Engineers Hit Campaign from Secret Recording," The Federalist, July 8, 2022.

[21] Aaron Renn, "Indiana under Republican rule," American Affairs, Winter 2021, Volume V, Number 4.

[22] House Enrolled Act No. 21.

> "In our day, many think of education as filling empty heads with the trendy notions of the times. Indeed, elites tend now to think that is all that it has ever been. Instead, education has a timeless and much more demanding purpose. It properly develops the mind and improves the heart of students . . . For all the vexation there is about curriculum, and without denying the serious thought that it requires, the outlines are surely simple. The fundamentals of human reasoning require the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Students need to understand the fundamentals of the natural world as well as have a wonder-filled grasp of its complexity, detail and exuberant variety. The humanities, too, are neither superfluous nor decorative. They are the stuff whereby we become most fully human, whereby we 'stretch out' toward ourselves at our best and truest. Thus history, literature, music, the arts, philosophy — here we see what we really are."[23]

This is what the framers of the Indiana constitution envisioned when they called for schools dedicated to moral, intellectual and scientific improvement.

Conclusion

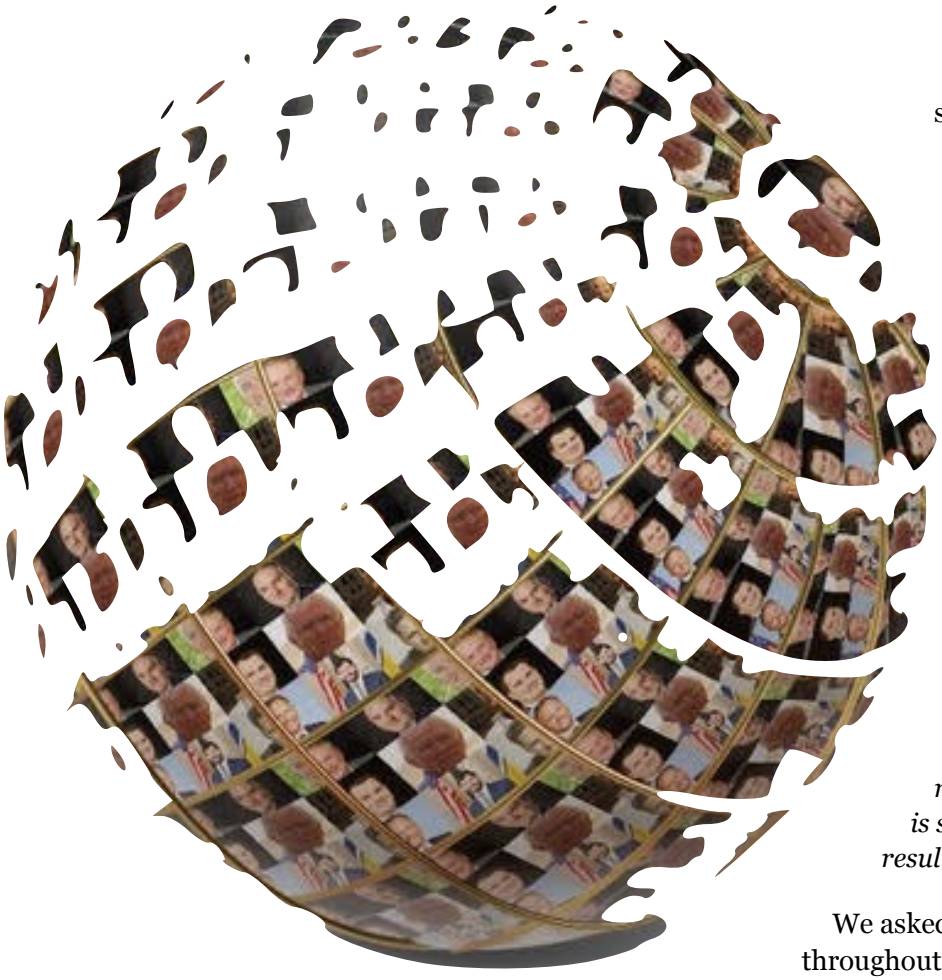
Indiana finds itself with a historic opportunity to go full throttle free market. "There has never been a better moment for education freedom," the Heritage Foundation said in its most recent educational ranking of the states.[24] Progressive pedagogy coming out of the ed schools – and the unions — has finally been exposed, thanks to the Covid pandemic. The Zoom lessons revealed just how bad our public schools are: the weak lesson plans, woke lesson plans, bad teaching, grade inflation and overemphasis on social justice, identity and sexuality. A free market doesn't mean these things will go away. And, yes, these things are ubiquitous in the elite private schools as well. One example comes from Project Veritas, which, in early December, exposed a queer sex education program given to 14- to 18-year-olds at Frances Parker School in Chicago. It does mean that parents who like progressive schools can choose them; and parents who value traditional education – based on classical values — can choose that.

True choice as envisioned by Milton Friedman allows a family to use public educational dollars as they see fit – few strings attached. Friedman suggested that a reasonable string would be "a minimum required level of education."[25] This would allow poor families to escape failing public schools and frustrated middle-class families to flee schools that focus on progressive values. It would ensure home-schooling families have the resources they need and aren't penalized for their choices and wealthy families can continue to do what they've always done. This may be the one reform that can save our educational system. It may be the rising tide that lifts all boats. ♦

[23] Larry P. Arnn, "Teaching and the Noble Work of Education," thclassicalclassroom.com, July 27, 2022.

[24] Heritage Foundation, 2022 Education Freedom Report Card.

[25] Friedman.



The 'Foothold' City Councilmen

Piecing Together a Sphere of Good Government

The foundation scoured the state for councilmen and councilwomen who defy the get-along, go-along attitude that characterizes so many of our local government bodies.

As part of its "Foothold" project, the foundation set out early this fall to find councilmen, current or recently serving, who, although outside a majority, create a personal sphere of good government around themselves. We were looking for councilmen unafraid to ask honest questions even if it makes officialdom or party uncomfortable. More specifically, we wanted to profile those Indiana councilmen in whom we see at work the principles of our mission statement, to wit:

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; and recognize that equality of opportunity is sacrificed in pursuit of equality of results.

We asked a group of correspondents from throughout Indiana (foundation members, local editors, political party staff and even library research desks) to suggest names in the state's 25 most populous cities plus a few smaller ones chosen at random.

Again, we were looking for the councilman or councilwoman who on occasion might stand on principle as a lone vote against the get-along, go-along attitude that characterizes so many local government bodies. We would ask them just three questions:

- Why do you think you won election?
- What is your philosophy of government?
- What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

In 14 cities (Gary, Hammond, Lafayette, Greenwood, Kokomo, Elkhart, Mishawaka, Lawrence, Columbus, Portage, New Albany, Richmond, Goshen, Michigan City) our correspondents could not think of a name that fit the Foothold criteria.

Nonetheless, we began with a fulsome list of 29 names in 16 cities.

In three cities (Bloomington, Anderson and Valparaiso) one or more of the suggested councilmen had voting records or had made comments that were at odds with the mission statement. In addition, several could not be reached by phone to verify non-responsive email addresses ("full" answering machines). That was an answer of sorts as we were looking for councilmen who were accessible.

One or more councilmen in Indianapolis, Westfield, Carmel, Noblesville, Hobart and Crowns Point did not respond to either phone messages or emails over a five-week period — another kind of answer; our councilmen needing to be accountable.

One or more councilmen in Jeffersonville, Fort Wayne, Sellersburg, Muncie and Martinsville said they would try to answer our questions but never got around to it, another kind of answer.

We ended up with nine and we are proud to introduce them to our membership. Despite taking politically difficult positions, they all have experienced success — a fact that discredits advice from the typical political consultant.

Their approaches to city government are as impressive as they are varied. Their philosophies are thoughtful and sincere. If you are fortunate enough to have one in your city, offer him encouragement and support. *— staff*

Eli Wax of South Bend

Eli Wax, who represents the 5th District for the South Bend City Council as its only Republican member, was elected in a caucus vote. Wax has a law degree from the University of Maryland.

Q. — Why do you think the caucus elected you?

A. — The office I hold was previously held by Jake Teshka and became vacant when he won election for Indiana State Representative in November 2020. I ran against a few other conservative republicans including Clifton French, who runs a local news website, and Jason Kring, who at the time of this writing is running for election for County Council. It was a close race, and I won in a run-off.

I ran on the idea that, for this office, it isn't sufficient to have the right values and political views, but that it is also necessary to have the ability to effectuate those views. As the only Republican-held seat in the South Bend Common Council, to be effective, the council member needs to also have the experience and ability to work positively in an adversarial environment with those whom he may disagree. My experience as an attorney advocating and negotiating for my clients' best interests against the opposition taught me how to be effective and persuasive while working in a way to encourage movement in my clients' direction. Again, it isn't enough to be right, it also requires the ability to work with others with whom you may disagree to get the results necessary. This is especially true when being in an 8-1 minority. I think this message resonated with the caucus voters.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government

A. — At heart, I am a conservative with libertarian leanings. On the local level, I believe that, first and foremost, we have a responsibility to be good stewards of our residents' tax dollars. This means prioritizing spending on public safety and critical infrastructure, such as police, fire, EMS, streets and utilities, rather than expanding government and creating new programs and departments. Additionally, while some limited regulation is necessary, it is critically important that we keep government out of the way of private growth and individual liberty, rather than trying to micromanage our city from the top down.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — Being outnumbered 8-1, I have a lot of lonely votes. Many of those have been on unnecessarily partisan resolutions, such as calling on the Indiana State legislators to pass new gun laws, or calling out other states' Republican legislatures for "voter suppression." While standing alone on those votes wasn't fun, I wouldn't describe it as being particularly difficult.

There was one vote, however, that does stand out to me as being particularly difficult. South Bend was amending its MWBE law, which provides special treatment and consideration for minority- and women-owned businesses in contracting with the city. The other members of the Council, who supported the bill had sincere and well-intended goals in supporting it. Despite having a large minority and female population, almost none of the local businesses, especially in certain building and contracting sectors, are owned by minorities or women. While I concur with my colleagues in their sincere desire to see more minority and women businesses succeed and develop, I believe the law in question is both wrong and unconstitutional. The 14th Amendment requires that before municipalities make race-based regulations they must first attempt to fix disparities through race-neutral solutions such as streamlining the contracting processes so that emerging businesses have more opportunity to compete with well-established larger businesses that are in a better position to deal with burdensome regulations and processes. In addition to the constitutional aspect, I believe that reducing red tape and regulation provides better outcomes for everyone than increasing regulations to achieve a desired result. While my conviction on the issue was strong, because of the nature of the subject, being the sole opposition to that bill was quite lonely.

Contact Councilman Wax at ewax@southbendin.gov.

Don Schmidt of Fort Wayne

Don Schmidt, who formerly represented the 2nd District for the Fort Wayne City Council, was last elected in a landslide in 2003, winning by 38 points. He lost four years later by only 13 votes out of a total 9,115 cast. Schmidt has a BS in Mechanical Engineering and an MS in Mathematics from Purdue University.

Q. — Why do you think you won reelection in 2003?

A. — I believe people saw me as someone who did not try to straddle the fence on issues, but someone who studied an issue, articulated a position and then voted accordingly. Being fearless of criticism allowed me to speak boldly on issues, which I considered an asset.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government?

A. — I follow the philosophy of Ronald Reagan and Milton Friedman, where less government is better than more government, regulation should be as minimum as possible and fiscal prudence should always be preferred over proliferate spending.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — I did not have really difficult votes personally, although one of the most controversial was when I voted for a Democrat to be council president during Republican control of the council. He was the better choice over the "next in line" Republican. All of the pressure came from the party chairman. It should be noted that the last year of Democrat control of the council, two Democrats felt I deserved to be president and voted for me over the objections of their fellow Democrats.

When the County Option Income Tax (COIT) was proposed in 1988 I was one of only two council members who voted in favor (an atypical vote for a fiscal conservative) as it went down to defeat. My favorable vote was predicated on a last-minute agreement with the mayor to change the bill to give

permanent property tax relief to homeowners. The change, however, came too late for the majority of the council to communicate with their voters. It was the very next year when the COIT was enacted that most realized that the positive property tax relief I added was the right thing to do.

Contact former Councilman Schmidt at donjschmidt@comcast.net.

Russ Jehl of Fort Wayne

Russ Jehl, unopposed in the last election, represents the 2nd District for the Fort Wayne City Council. Jehl has a BA in Financial Management from Hillsdale College.

Q. — Why do you think you were unopposed?

A. — Although the district I represent is competitive, I don't think anyone ran against me in the Republican primary because I have a strong history of fiscal conservatism. In the general election, I believe no one ran against me because of my track record of pushing for infrastructure upgrades, which are important to preserving strong neighborhoods. Although I might be more conservative than many of my constituents, they see me fighting for them and they appreciate it.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government?

A. — Thomas Jefferson said, "The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government." The role of city government is plainly defined, making the object of local government clear: We are charged with providing top-notch police, fire, water, roads and parks. These are the prerequisites for a strong local economy.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — I co-sponsored legislation that took on our city unions and ended collective bargaining for non-public safety employees. I believe Fort Wayne was the first Indiana city to do so. The management of the city is now rightly the responsibility of the elected officials, not the unions. The vote was contentious with a lot of hyperbolic language, personal attacks and fear-mongering. Several years later, the city is in a much better financial position, remains a wonderful employer for which to work and is receiving great recognition. This year, Fort Wayne was named by WalletHub as the third best-run city in the country and number one in Indiana.

Contact Councilman Jehl at russ@russjehl.com.

Tony Green of Carmel

Tony Green, who represents the Southwest District for the Carmel City Council, was elected in 2017 in a Republican caucus vote to fill a vacated seat. He has since been elected by popular vote. Green is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, flying 33 combat mission in Afghanistan.

Q. — Why do you think the caucus elected you?

A. — My message was being independent and transparent.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government?

A. — Smaller, less regulated government. Government expenditures should generally be for needed public services and investments in infrastructure.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — I voted against the city's budget twice. The vote was 6-1.

Contact Councilman Green at agreen@carmel.in.gov.

Fred Glynn of Hamilton County

Fred Glynn was first elected to the Hamilton County Council in 2014. He has represented District 1, which includes nearly all of Carmel and the western edge of Fishers.

Q. — Why do you think you won your election in 2014?

A. — I ran as a fiscal conservative and outworked the competition.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government?

A. — Limited, fiscal restraint, low taxes.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — Voting down the public safety training center in 2015.

Contact County Councilman Glynn at glynnfm@gmail.com.

David Giffel of Fishers

David Giffel, who represents the Southwest District for the Fishers City Council, was elected last year in a Republican caucus vote to fill a vacated seat. Giffel has a BS in Marketing from Louisiana State University.

Q. — Why do you think the caucus elected you?

A. — I won because of years of relationships developed with others on the GOP Precinct Committee.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government?

A. — I believe in individualism and taking personal responsibility for yourself as much as humanly possible. I also believe in the principle of subsidiarity, holding that what can be done at a lower level in a social system shouldn't be done at a higher one. On a city council, this principle facilitates a broader range of solutions, quicker and more informed decision-making, and greater involvement of more citizens. As a result, there is less chance of one bad decision causing a system-wide failure and there is less opportunity for moral hazard. Today, for example, the federal government takes far too much of our hard-earned money and controls far too many social issues.

For me, the primary role of city government is protecting the people from crime and fires. I tend to be a data-driven decision-maker and mainly want to keep my city attractive and provide good quality of life in its neighborhoods.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — The most challenging was a recent vote to raise a local food-and-beverage sales tax by 1 percent in order to build a new 8,500-seat event center. It would be a tax that I know will never end unless future leadership wants it to end. An event center would be expensive, and the cost is estimated at $170 million with an annual bond payment of $9.7 million. Finally, I was not fond of the intentional fast-track approval.

Since the 2014 elections, our mayor and local developers have been executing a plan to make our city's downtown a more urbanized area. The mayor's vision is to create a vibrant city center that is a more dense, vibrant, walkable place where someone can work, play and shop. Most of our residents will still need to drive to this area, no differently than a mall.

The main reason behind developing this area would be to attract more 2- and 3-percent assessed value properties. However, given the current Indiana tax laws, our mayor believes that the city's suburban growth model, given the projected increase in personnel costs, would have a "net operating deficit of $22.5 million by 2040, not a sustainable fiscal condition."

The food-and-beverage sales-tax increase would pass with or without my vote so I decided to reach out to constituents, trying to determine how hard I would fight for or against it. I sampled neighborhoods with a self-stamped return-envelope survey, a targeted text campaign, an online poll from my email list and face-to-face conversations with random residents at our local Farmers Market. My total population reach was about 7,000, with about a 12 percent response rate.

I found a slight majority of my constituents did not mind paying a few extra dollars annually to have another entertainment option in the downtown area. We are blessed to be successful enough to earn our way to live in our city, one of the wealthiest communities in Indiana. We held a public hearing and only one person showed up to speak against the tax. I received a handful of emails for and against. Since most people didn't seem to object, I began due diligence on the financial viability.

The event center would be financed with four different sources of taxes because it is an amenity, not a self-sustained business. The city would share revenues from: operations, repurpose a cumulative capital levy; profit enjoyed by the privately owned utility from a recently purchased sewer company; and the sales tax increase.

Forecasting beyond three years is difficult. However, reviewing the food-and-beverage taxes in other Indiana cities, I speculated that by 2035 the sales tax alone would surpass the bond payment. (One city councilor attempted to pass a sunset on the tax. However, the bonds sold will be connected to the sales tax so this amendment would be somewhat worthless.)

Undoubtedly, the location would attract new development and is in a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district. Moreover, the TIF funds could help pay the bond should Biden's Inflationary policies send the economy into a downward spiral.

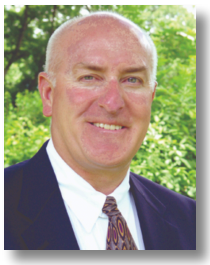
I was fortunate to be able to discuss the event center with the CEO of Meridian Entertainment, an expert whose business advises event centers and manages shows. He believes our center would be competitive in the region and good for the city's long-term growth, keeping us a high-quality community.

A related consideration is that the city will need to address congestion soon. However, I believe that given our high growth, we should be able to recover the "repurposed" cumulative capital fund, freeing up any levy required to fix most of our congestion without a tax rate increase.

Finally, when any business is deciding whether to locate in a community, the owners look at amenities that would attract good employees. The event center would create a buzz for the city and be a regional destination spot.

Being new to the council and considering the information gathered from my hours of due diligence, I decided to trust the mayor and vote a painful "yes."

Contact Councilman Giffel at giffel@comcast.net.



Ryan Cummins of Terre Haute

Ryan Cummins, the owner of a family business and the only Republican on his council, won his last city council election by a three-to-one margin despite being roundly outvoted at the council table in his first term and being picketed at his home by police and fire unions. Cummins, a former Marine artillery officer, has a degree in Forensic and Investigative Science from Indiana University.

Q. — Why do you think you won reelection to the city council?

A. — I wasn't surprised that I won. I had spent the previous four years on the council in a significant minority as the only elected Republican in any city office. Because of that and the fact that I was confident in my principles, I was covered extensively by local media as the sole opposition to "business as usual" in local government. I was surprised, however, by the margin of victory. It was heartening to realize that while I stood by myself quite often in the debate and subsequent votes, there were quite a few more people quietly standing behind me in support. The vote totals showed that.

Again, the coverage gave me substantial name recognition, which is good when running in an election but far from the deciding factor. I believe the deciding factor in most voters' minds was that they knew I would take a stand, that I would ask the questions that needed to be asked regardless of the way things always have been done.

An example was when I questioned the use of tax abatement as an economic-development tool. Property tax abatement was handed out by my city (and most local government across Indiana) like candy at Halloween. While the boilerplate language supposedly had parameters and safeguards, the reality was that there is no rhyme or reason to how abatement was awarded to a petitioner. I am certainly in favor of lower taxes but not when lower taxes for one (an abatement petitioner) is offset by raising taxes on other property taxpayers. This is a feature of our property tax system, more so before property-tax caps but still a result even in the era of constitutional caps. Add to this the fact that empirical studies from across the nation (several cited in this journal) show that these types of eco-devo schemes do not create jobs in a community, do not increase prosperity, do no create wealth. This needed to be questioned vigorously. Those who advocate for this and other schemes must be forced to defend them.

I won because the majority of candidates — nearly all? — typically demonstrate their ability and intention to "go along to get along." I believe a large number of voters recognize this, more so in local elections, and would readily support a principled candidate who demonstrates knowledge and the courage of his convictions. During one debate on the council when I raised my hand to be recognized, one of my more ardent opponents interjected, "Oh, we don't need to hear from Ryan. We know what he will say." He meant it as an insult, that I wasn't good at this political game. I took it as a supreme compliment because he recognized a consistent adherence to my principles. It was one of the nicest things any of my colleagues ever said to me.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government?

A. — I would sum it up as a philosophy of the individual over "the state." Said differently and stealing a line from the mission of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, I believe in "the primacy of the individual when addressing public concerns."

Toward the end of my second term on the city council, then Sen. Richard Lugar came to town on some sort of public-relations tour. As the only elected Republican in the city, I was invited to a presentation by the senator. At the end of his short talk, he asked if anyone had questions. I certainly did. I stated that it is impossible for the typical Hoosier to know and understand the details of all the legislation he would have to vote on, legislation that would often directly affect his constituents. Given that, what were the principles that guided the senator when the time came to raise his hand and vote "yes" or "no."" Lugar was a

seasoned politician and immediately launched into a spiel about the common good, "Hoosier values," doing what's right and a lot of other meaningless nonsense. He expounded for over 10 minutes, and he really didn't say anything of substance. When he was done, my friend who was sitting next to me chuckled a little, leaned over and whispered, "Geez, this guy is a staunch Republican? Barack Obama or Nancy Pelosi could have given the same answer."

So I will answer the same question I posed to the senator. The principles that guide me when the time came to vote yea or nay are as follows:

• Limited Government — which I define as a government that only does what an individual can morally and ethically do. That is, an individual can protect their life, their liberty, their property. As such, a government can morally and legitimately do this also and no more.

• *Property Rights* — The human right to property, to the fruits of one's labor is paramount and must be upheld by government.

• *Free markets* — The free and voluntary exchange between a person or persons is where the needs of Hoosiers can and should be met.

• *Personal responsibility* — An expectation that each person will accept responsibility for themselves, their family and as many of their neighbors as their ability and property allow.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — In two terms, eight years on the city council, I was on the short end of well over 200 8-1 votes (I count the occasional 7-2 vote in this total) so it is hard to say what was the most difficult. If I were to zero in on the toughest votes, it would be when it came time to vote on public-employee compensation.

In the private sector, more specifically in for-profit business, compensation is determined by productivity, sales and profits. In other words, by tangible measurable parameters. Most folks seem to think that the boss sets compensation. I suppose that is true in a purely technical sense but the reality is that the customer is far and away the driving factor in what an employee makes in compensation. One caveat, if a private business's customer base is all or nearly all in government, this is probably not true.

In the public sector there are no sales, no profits, and measures of productivity are often a matter of opinion. The result is that addressing compensation becomes emotional and personal. Anyone with any amount of life experience quickly understands that making substantial decisions based on emotion, on feelings, on passions, almost always leads to poor and costly outcomes. That pretty much describes the results when setting public-employee compensation.

It is true that government cannot be run like a business. The incentives are completely different. As a council member, I had to make sure I approached this difficult situation with a different mindset. I approached public employee compensation from the point of view of a customer. Doing this causes a whole different set of questions to come into the discussion.

As a customer buying a night out, purchasing a car, hiring a contractor, paying for legal advice, you directly or indirectly ask a number of questions: Is this a good value? Can I get a better deal elsewhere? What do I have to forgo if I buy this? Is the higher price option worth it? Should I even be interested in buying this? Will it benefit me in the short term? The long term? And a thousand other questions related to whether I want to make this exchange.

As a council member, I looked at it as the person who was purchasing the services of a police or fire department, a city engineer's abilities and expertise, a municipal IT professional, and so on for all those folks I represented. It led to expecting, in fact demanding, answers to the questions regarding these purchases the same as I would be asking the car dealer, the home builder or the lawyer. Did it lead to satisfactory answers? Hardly ever, maybe never. In eight years I voted yes on a salary ordinance barely a handful of times. I voted no most often because I did not get the answers I expected and demanded as the

purchaser. To say it was difficult would be an understatement. I stayed true to my principles and look on my time on that council with satisfaction in the job I accomplished.

Contact former Councilman Cummins at rjcusmc@msn.com.Josh Bain of Indianapolis

Josh Bain, who represents the 20th District for the Indianapolis City-County Council, was unanimously elected in a 2020 caucus to fill a vacated seat. Bain is a graduate of Indiana-Purdue University Indianapolis.

Q. — Why do you think the caucus elected you?

A. — I have been an active member of the community since I was in high school. From an early age I felt God was calling me to public service, and I have been blessed that God has opened many doors for me whether it was working at the Indiana General Assembly or working on campaigns with the House Republican Campaign Committee. I was that 16-year-old who would show up to community meetings and town halls, an early involvement that demonstrated my commitment to my community over the past decades.

Q. — What is your philosophy on government?

A. — While I have always had a healthy respect for our system of government, it has grown stronger since taking office. The separation of powers and the distinct responsibility of each branch created by our Founding Fathers that runs from our federal to local government is vital to our process. I am a conservative Republican, and that does mean that there are partisan battles that have to be fought for the values in which I believe. But I am also a partisan for the branch of government in which I serve. The legislative branch is the policy-making branch of government, and policy-making is a constitutionally strong power that has been diluted and passed off to other branches. I believe the legislative branch needs to be reconstituted at every level. That doesn't mean there won't be conflict within the branches, and I think robust and vigorous debate between them is a good thing, a constant and ever-present tug-and-pull. I believe most of the systemic issues we have in our government today can be easily fixed by returning to the specific roles and responsibilities of our balanced system of government.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — When I was elected to the Indianapolis City-County Council, it was during a contentious time in our city with most of the discussions surrounding law enforcement. Proposal 237-2020 was a restructuring of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department's (IMPD) General Orders Board. I viewed it as removing authority from IMPD leadership to activists appointed by a political body. It was on that night that I realized the meaning of Winston Churchill's quote: "There's something going on in time and space, and beyond time and space."

There were many protesters there at the full council meeting. Many had to be dragged out by Marion County Sheriff deputies as they were throwing things, screaming and shouting and resisting arrest. As all of that was unfolding, I felt for the first time in my tenure on the Council that there is a constant spiritual battle being fought on our behalf and God allowed me to catch a glimpse of it. Although I didn't physically see that spiritual side of the fight, I did feel it in my spirit, and that spiritual battle was as real as the mob that came down to disrupt the Council meeting.

Contact Councilman Bain at joshbain@rocketmail.com.

Jason Arp of Fort Wayne

Jason Arp, who represents the 4th District for the Fort Wayne City Council, won reelection this year despite being targeted by monied special interests benefiting from downtown redevelopment. The local newspaper spent two years doing all it could to prevent his reelection. Arp graduated from East Carolina University with a BS and BA in Finance.

Q. — Why do you think you won reelection?

A. — Despite being outspent three to one, I had a track record in my first term of pursuing truth and staying faithful to my initial campaign pledges as evidenced by my voting record and public commentary. I communicated this message by extensive door-to-door campaigning, the ultimately reason I won.

Q. — What is your philosophy of government?

A. — My philosophy of government is "minarchy," defined by the Mises Institute as a political ideology that accepts the role of a minimal state. The economist Ludwig von Mises believed courts, police, armies and laws are necessary for the protection of private-property rights. Without these rights there can be no capital formation. Outside of these basic roles, the government begins to infringe on markets and take on the role of an interested party, weighing in on behalf of those who ingratiate themselves to those in power.

Q. — What was your most difficult and perhaps loneliest vote?

A. — I voted to strike down the ordinance that regulated sexually oriented businesses (strip clubs, specifically). The ordinance was enacted a couple years earlier, by a more Republican council. The ordinance violates the private-property rights of the owners, the privacy of the employees and the customers, in addition to creating a new set of rules and codes of conduct that were in no way within the base role of government, this was an example of a council and a mayor earning social-moral points by picking on an unpopular group of property owners. The philosophical argument was not the difficult part. The difficulty arises in the social stigma of standing for the rights of even the immoral. Many friends and supporters were the most vociferous in opposition to my legislative action to strike the ordinance. Thankfully, my wife was supportive and I was able to proceed. My attempt failed 4-5 (myself in favor, the other four Republicans against, three Democrats for and one against). Although this may have cost political capital, I'm confident I did the right thing, namely fighting to preserve private-property rights against the do-gooders in government.

Contact Councilman Arp at jasonarp99@gmail.com.

The Foothold Project

"You're going to have to save the country yourselves one town at a time. Donald Trump isn't going to save it. Ron DeSantis isn't going to save it. There's not a snowball's chance in hell that a GOP majority in Congress is going to save it." — John Daniel Davidson in the Dec. 20 Federalist

THE STATE POLITICAL PARTIES keep carefully updated lists of persons who want to get into office, stay in office and advance in office. We are interested in another kind of list, one made up of simply good citizens willing to do what they can, even run for office, to set their city and state right but not necessarily make a career out of it. Rather, they are needed to add their in-office civic experience to local groups in order to continuously identify new campaign challengers and help them enter the fray. We call them "Footholders." If you are such a person, we are looking to expand our list. Write the foundation at director@inpolicy.org.

Political Notebook

How to Win a Local Election

Dr. Dennis Ganahl, a longtime friend of this foundation, a retired newspaper publisher and a journalism professor has developed a reputation in a highly specialized niche of campaign consultation — the hyper-local election. He has lost only one of dozens of such elections ranging from president of a neighborhood association to state legislator. His strategy: "Think global, act local." Ganahl most recently led a campaign that won a legislative primary against a Republican machine while being outspent 10:1. His candidate went on to win the general election this November against labor interests, again being outspent 3:1. Ganahl, fittingly, is also an author of political satire. His latest is about hillbillies, UFOs and Bigfoot entitled "Don't Shoot. We Come in Peace." But we asked him to put on his most serious hat and keep a notebook during this last campaign on what worked and what didn't. Here is his checklist. You can contact him at DennisGanahl.com.

What to Do

- ☐ Make politics your hobby. Being a political activist requires time and commitment.
- ☐ Remember, no matter how ridiculous some issue seems almost half of the people believe it's true.
- ☐ Learn to speak up. An activist can't be docile in today's political climate.
- ☐ Learn the organizational network of your local and regional political party. Meet the people, and stay abreast of their activities. Go to their meetings.
- ☐ Get experience. Become a volunteer in someone else's campaign before you become a candidate.
- ☐ Become an opinion leader in your neighborhood. Participate in your neighborhood's social media and meetings.
- ☐ You should consider running as a neighborhood trustee as your first office.
- ☐ Build your campaign outward starting with those families nearest to you, and then in ever-expanding outward rings.
- ☐ Build a network of like-minded voters. Create an email chain, and meet regularly to talk about the issues.
- ☐ Plan your campaign before registering for office, preferably more than a year out from election day.
- ☐ If you're the candidate plan on working harder than anyone else.
- ☐ You need a ground game: door-to-door canvassing, yard signs and poll workers.
- ☐ Spend at least 10-20 hours each week working on your campaign. Ten hours minimum.
- ☐ If you're the candidate plan on knocking on constituents' doors three to four days each week beginning three months before election day.
- ☐ Ask voters questions, then listen to what they say. Don't defend or argue. Listen.
- ☐ Take notes. Use your notes to write your campaign's collateral materials like handouts, mailers, yard signs and business cards.
- ☐ Plan to spend your own money for your campaign. Set a budget. The less money you spend the harder you must work.
- ☐ You must raise donations. Ask neighbors and supporters for campaign contributions regularly. Your political survival requires resources and money.
- ☐ If holding office isn't your style, start a movement. Become a proponent for an issue you support.

- ☐ Keep voters' records and reports. Know how many votes you need to win a campaign.
- ☐ Make friends with the record-keeper of the voter election commission.
- ☐ Interview every candidate before you agree to work on their campaign. Ask the hard questions. Make sure the person has characteristics you value before committing to work on their campaign. This is a list of characteristics you might find important. It isn't rank ordered.
  - ☐ The candidate should be engaged and involved in civic activities and affairs.
  - ☐ The candidate should share your values.
  - ☐ The candidate should have no outstanding court cases or debts, and should personally live within a budget.
  - ☐ The candidate should be spiritual (not necessarily religious).
  - ☐ The candidate should be politically savvy.
  - ☐ The candidate should have a history of voting regularly in spring, summer and fall elections.
  - ☐ The candidate should have served as a leader of some group in some capacity.
  - ☐ The candidate should enjoy interacting with people socially.
  - ☐ The candidate should have a long history of holding regular job(s).
  - ☐ The candidate should be pleasant and have an easy-to-be-with personality. You should feel comfortable with the person.

What Not to Do

- ☐ Don't register to be a candidate unless you enjoy talking and interacting with people.
- ☐ Don't count on other people to do what you know must be done.
- ☐ Don't waste your time talking to your opponent's supporters and workers.
- ☐ Don't try to convince voters to change their minds. If you don't agree with them, thank them for their time and walk away.
- ☐ Don't be intimidated by bullies and bullying tactics. By the way, bullies are on both sides of the aisle.
- ☐ Don't trust everyone, even those in your own party, to be focused on your or your constituents' best interests.
- ☐ Don't forget the first priority of powerful institutions, like political parties, is their own political survival. You are way down the list.
- ☐ Don't send too many emails to your network. Nobody wants to hear from you every day. Monthly emails are sufficient unless you're in the heat of a campaign, then weekly is required.
- ☐ Don't give up. Nobody wins every campaign. It may take several campaigns to win.
- ☐ Don't be shouted into silence. Speak up. It's your duty and obligation.
- ☐ Don't wilt when someone attacks you. Stand up for yourself.
- ☐ Don't let the political class tell you when you should run for office. Run when it suits you.
- ☐ Don't spend your time repudiating other people's attacks. Ignore them.
- ☐ Don't respond to attacks on social media. It's a tar trap. It takes your time and doesn't yield any gain.
- ☐ Don't rely on the traditional media to report your story or the truth.

New Political Trends

- Organize your campaign to urge voters to get to the polls early so they don't forget to vote.
- You need an absentee-voter strategy. Teach voters how to vote absentee and how to vote early. Use handouts to give directions for voting early and on how to vote absentee.
- Clearly define important issues early. Again, give directions for how to vote early and absentee. Don't wait until the last week to hit your message strategy hard. It's too late by then because an increasing number of voters are voting early.
- Late voters were a no show after 5 p.m. in the fall general election polls.

Thumbnail Strategy for a Campaign

1. Plan every campaign in advance. You need 6-12 months advance notice.
2. Every election is decided by the middle 20 percent of voters. You must turnout your base of voters and add 12 percent at a minimum.
3. Ask for help. Develop a launch team.
    a. Follow the Ryan and Gross Diffusion Theory of Innovation (1943). Organize opinion leaders that support you.
    b. Look for opinion leaders. Surround yourself with like-minded people who are opinion leaders in their communities, which includes neighborhoods, clubs and friends.
    c. Build a campaign team of volunteers with diverse skills and talents who will work together and be focused on the goal.
        i. Campaigns are stressful. You need people who have good interpersonal communication skills, and who are motivating and complimentary to each other.
        ii. A team must have common values.
        iii. A team must be reliable and willing to work.
        iv. An effective team must have assigned duties.
    d. Expel toxic people from your campaign if they don't or won't change their behavior.
    e. Every campaign must start with a voter analysis and a detailed map of the district.
    f. Get voter records for the past 2-4 election cycles from the election commission.
        i. Know how many voters to expect at each poll site for primary and general election cycles for off-years and presidential years.
    g. Get a large map of the district so you can track your canvassing and locate the poll locations.
    h. Use your yard signs as your poll/survey of voter awareness and preferences. Your yard signs need to penetrate the neighborhood's streets. Main streets aren't as helpful as neighborhood signs.
4. Ask for money from everyone. You'll need it.
5. You need an intensive door-to-door campaign. Voters must be found in their own neighborhood at their front door, and then at the polls on election day. You must have a personal contact strategy for canvassing and meet-and-greets.
6. Develop customized messages for voters. Don't use your party's general election jargon. Your messaging strategy, what you say, must be developed personally when you're knocking on doors and talking and listening to voters at their front door.
        i. In a primary election, you must delineate yourself from a similar candidate from the same party.
        ii. In a general election, natural party lines are already drawn, you must delineate your message for uncommitted voters.
7. You must have an effective strategy for poll sites on election day.

   a. Have volunteers scheduled for each poll all day long. You must have the rush hours covered (open until 10 a.m.; 11-2 p.m.; 4 p.m. to close) at a minimum.
   b. Volunteers should be trained on how to answer questions, how to dress. They need to be provided collateral materials, at least a business card. Volunteers should hold yard signs.
   c. You need yard signs strategically placed at each poll so voters see them on the way to vote.
   d. An election watch party gives a campaign a sense of closure and binds your team together. It doesn't have to be extravagant, but you need food and drink. Remember to thank everyone during the evening. Public thanks is a must.
8. Win or lose, your next election begins the day after the election. Say thank you to all of your voters and helpers. Use an ad, social media or any method you have available to say thank you.

Closing Thoughts

- It's not what you say, it's how you say it. Co-opt the opponent's own words and use them to your advantage. Example: Don't talk about fiscal responsibility. Talk about focusing your efforts on the kids.
- Identify the three to four main issues your constituents discussed when you canvassed their neighborhoods. Use these main issues in your campaign pieces and ads. Every election district has different priorities. Don't use national issues as your default issues. Your neighborhood might be more concerned about police protection or education reform than election fraud.
- In a primary election, speak directly to the issues that are important to your local party regulars. You need to separate yourself from a like-minded primary opponent.
- During the general election, demonstrate your ability to be moderate on issues to attract middle-ground voters. This doesn't mean change your opinion. It means be less dogmatic in how you express them.
- Use command headlines like "Vote for change," "Make a difference," "Quit complaining and vote," and "Hold your school district accountable."
- Be inclusive (see, you can use the word as well). Be team-focused. I like words like, "Together, let's hold our school district accountable." ♦

Eric Schansberg

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The Limits of Democracy

There's an old saying that democracy is the worst form of government, except for all of the others. Or putting it another way: The best form of government is a benevolent and knowledgeable dictator, except for the problem of finding a good and wise leader. Whatever democracy's strengths, they are relative not absolute, and they are contingent on context — namely, the people being governed, the people governing and the underlying institutions.

Regardless of political bent, most people have high hopes for democracy, at least if they can manipulate the levers of governance. Even if they can gain control, is the hope warranted? Rational ignorance and irrational ignorance undermine the likelihood of effective policy. Media segregation along ideological lines — following the confirmation biases of consumers — leads to more dogmatism and tribalism than political knowledge and wisdom. From there, a reflexive defense of democracy and popular support for more democracy may lead the majority to defend suboptimal institutions that produce less economic and individual freedom. As such, proposals for less democracy — and more limited government — may reduce the politicization of life and improve policy outcomes.

Rational Ignorance

Public Choice economists point to the foibles of political markets in general and democracy in particular — for example, the disproportionate power of interest groups in some contexts ("tyranny of the minority"); the unjust exercise of power by the general public ("tyranny of the majority"); the problems caused by any system of government where people are fond of using power to take others' resources; and so on. In a word, it turns out to be difficult to have an optimistic view of the general public, the elites in political markets, and those who work diligently to influence the process.

One of the most powerful observations from Public Choice is that political activity often features concentrated benefits and diffuse costs. Even when the costs are much larger than the benefits in aggregate, the costs are smaller per person. This subtlety makes their occurrence quite likely. Voters have little to offer in political markets: a modest voice, perhaps a bit of money, and a single vote (Gelman, Silver, and Edlin 2012). So they are "rationally ignorant and apathetic," and will tolerate diffuse costs if they even notice them. Interest groups will passionately pursue such laws and engage in mutually beneficial trade with politicians and bureaucrats. Those engaging in political activity are further motivated to come up with "good stories" for government intervention: rationales for why benefiting themselves at the expense of others is (supposedly) good for the country and the economy. It's easy to imagine and document the misuse of government power to enrich some at the expense of others.

Kolko (1963) provides a useful example of this flaw in democracy, arguing that business leaders, rather than "reformers," were the chief catalysts behind the Progressive Era's regulation of business.

He observes that important business interests could always be found in the forefront of agitation for such regulation, and the fact that well-intentioned reformers often worked with them — indeed, were often indispensable to them — does not change the reality that federal economic regulation was generally designed by the regulated interest to meet its own end, and not those of the public [Kolko 1963: 59].

Some people are paid to be knowledgeable about politics and others treat understanding policy as a serious hobby. But, otherwise, the

implications of this model are largely independent of education, income, or other factors. For example, the more educated are in a better position to learn about politics and public policy (or anything else), given their advantage in overall knowledge, greater capacity to process information, and stronger ability to think critically (an income effect of sorts). But learning about any given thing has higher opportunity costs for them (a substitution effect of sorts). In any case, the underlying incentives are similar: because most voters have little to offer in terms of influencing political outcomes (their vote is not decisive in a majority voting system), the costs of becoming knowledgeable about politics and public policy are usually far too high to indulge seriously.

Brennan (2016: 30) reports the stability of political ignorance despite more education and lower-cost information over time. But some groups are relatively impressive in terms of political knowledge: educated, wealthy, those living in the West (the South fares poorly), GOP voters, middle-aged (ages 35–54), male, nonblack and those who generally favor less government (pp. 33–34). Citizens are more likely to know more about civics and politics when they don't get most of their information from social media (Mitchell et al. 2020).

As knowledge increases, citizens who are male, have more education, have job security and live in regions with greater income growth are more likely to be pro-free market (Caplan 2007: 28, 154–56). Fortunately, citizens are more likely to vote with higher income, education and age (p. 157). But relatively impressive knowledge (compared to others) does not imply objectively impressive. And none of this lends itself toward much optimism about governance, even in a democracy.

Public Choice Economics and the Media

Even though most people are "rationally ignorant" about politics and public policy, they still have some incentive to acquire low-cost information that is perceived to be relatively accurate. Consumers will tend to acquire more information when the costs of information are reduced (e.g., lower price or greater access) and the benefits of information are greater (e.g., if life becomes more politicized or one has a greater financial stake in learning about a topic).

The benefits of information include perceived accuracy. But, with limited information in hand, consumers' sense of accuracy may not be objective or accurate. Another complication is that consumers want other benefits from the media — for example, entertainment and affirmation. They find greater enjoyment when information is more consistent with beliefs they already hold. They value news and opinions that affirm confirmation biases or media delivery that lampoons an opposing view (Mullainathan and Schleifer 2005; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006).

The demand for media inputs is derived from the preferences of consumers. The media are certainly interested in providing what consumers want — namely, some combination of accuracy, affirmation and entertainment, or what Munger (2008) calls "truthiness." In this sense, the media are responding to consumers and trying to maximize profit, and shouldn't be "blamed" for what they produce, any more than WalMart should be criticized for satisfying customers so well.

As with other businesses, members of the media are pursuing profit and compensation, along with other utility-maximizing goals. On the former, media owners are also interested in other streams of revenue (e.g., advertising) where there may be tradeoffs with what consumers want. Given the nature, influence and stature of "news," the potential role for self-actualization is greater than with many jobs.

Within the media, there are owners, news-producing employees (journalists, editors, radio show producers, TV show hosts) and other staff. As one is closer to "producing news," the non-monetary benefits are higher. As a counter example, those selling ads or subscriptions would not receive as much satisfaction as those writing stories or editing content.

The media may be driven by a desire for influence and status, discovering and presenting

truth, undermining corruption and working for justice, and so on — even if it militates against profit. So, depending on their audience, employees and owners may find it beneficial or painful (personally or professionally) to provide slanted information to consumers (Baron 2006; Besley and Prat 2006).

The media are concerned with revenues and costs. They want more viewers and face tradeoffs between costs and quality — and price and quantity demanded. They desire to draw consumers away from alternatives, such as watching Netflix or playing board games. Whatever consumers want, there can be tradeoffs for media providers between those wants (e.g., accuracy, entertainment, affirmation) and advocacy. Aside from an inability of consumers to assess accuracy, it is difficult to imagine the media deviating much from consumer preferences.

In recent decades, media have proliferated — from cable TV and satellite radio to "social media" and blogs. But the slow historical evolution of media is a fascinating topic. Stromberg (2004) describes the role of radio from 1920 to 1940 as a relatively efficient mechanism to "educate" voters and promote voter turnout, especially in radio-heavy markets. Gentzkow (2006) describes the impact of TV on voting up to 1970, as consumers substituted from radio and newspapers. Coverage of issues shifted from local toward national, and media focused on information were "crowded out" by entertainment. As a result, voter turnout decreased, especially in local races and off-year elections. Gentzkow attributes 38 percent of the drop to TV. All of this was despite the availability of lower-cost information and hopes of "greater democracy" as a result, especially with advances in civil rights, income and education.

With better information, more competition and technological advance will result in lower prices and higher quality, including greater accuracy. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) find far greater accuracy when the information conveyed is relatively objective — for example, on stock prices, sports results and weather reports. In contrast, news coverage varies significantly on more complicated topics such as taxes, war and "climate change." When topics are debatable and complex, consumers are more interested in subjective coverage, and the media are willing to provide that service.[1]

As such, we would also expect competition to encourage segregation within media sources: workers and owners providing information that is pleasing to them and to certain consumers. Given highly imperfect information among consumers, more competition may easily result in more slanted coverage and segregation among media sources (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006). If "quality" is somewhat (or highly) subjective, then we would expect different media to arise, satisfying demand in certain political niches.[2] One painful irony follows: more media providers and more available information may result in less knowledge and far less wisdom.

It's also worth noting that the incentives in media mirror those in politics. For citizens, politicians and interest groups, there is a bias toward policies with obvious, concentrated, near-term benefits and subtle, diffuse, long-term costs. Likewise, reporting on politics might easily fall prey to this same calculus — from standard ignorance of the more subtle consequences or biased agreement with the political goals at hand. Coyne and Leeson (2009) address the relationship between the media and government (and other powerful social institutions) — with the potential for the media to be a constraining watchdog or a subservient lapdog. Besley and Prat (2006) model the ability of government to capture media and

[1] As Caplan (2007: 102–8) notes, ignorance does not necessarily imply impressionable rather than skeptical or cynical. When a topic (e.g., climate change) is beyond one's knowledge, one can imagine skepticism toward "political solutions."

[2] A related question is: Why have media segregated within various delivery methods? In practice, the left dominates newspapers and TV, while the right dominates talk radio. Groseclose and Milyo (2005) find widespread "liberal" ideological bias in newspaper and TV by analyzing media citations of think tanks. Lott and Hassett (2004) find pro-Democrat bias in newspapers from 1991 to 2004. Presumably this result is connected to time spent by consumers on reading, driving and watching TV. Does it also correlate with education or other variables?

influence outcomes. For progressives, journalists ("muckrakers") are supposed to be helpful in unveiling economic privilege, political corruption and social injustice. With capitalism, media competition and media segregation, that hope may be unjustified (Boettke 2020).

Irrational Ignorance

Democracy seems to align rulers and those they represent, at least in contrast to dictators who have more latitude to execute their preferences. It could be that democracy mostly gives people what they want. Caplan (2007) rejects that belief on theoretical grounds, through survey data, and by reporting behavioral inconsistencies. Democratic outcomes face many and varied complaints. Even casual observers know that matters are more complicated. Self-styled "liberals" often act in a stunningly illiberal manner. Christians point to "the Fall" and worry about the pursuit and exercise of power by sinful people. The influence of postmodernism has led to an increase in moral relativism, identity politics and the pursuit of power.

Do politicians shirk from what the public wants? There are reasons to expect agency problems between representatives, those they represent, and what is "socially optimal." Democracy can be exploited by interest groups and politicians in opposition to a rationally ignorant general public. Within the slack created by highly imperfect information, there is room for interest groups to engage in trade with politicians. Beyond that, monopoly power within political markets and high transaction costs (preventing beneficial trades) may also lead to political inefficiency. In contrast, Wittman (1995) argues that democratic markets are generally "efficient" compared to other forms of governance, including economic markets.

Caplan (2007: 8) extends the usual Public Choice framework by arguing that voters also practice "irrational ignorance." Voters are generally ignorant — and rationally so — not knowing much about politics and public policy. But they can also be "irrational" in their ignorance — not knowing, but thinking that they know (more than they do). Rational ignorance implies random errors that are corrected through the "miracle of aggregation" over many voters. But systemic errors by voters on policy comes from misunderstanding policy and not knowing that one is wrong.

Caplan (2007: 10–13) points to four common biases: anti-market, anti-foreign, make-work and pessimism. He notes that students routinely enter economics classes with these systemic errors and it is difficult to correct them. Or as Brennan (2016: 121) describes his five-year old: "He is merely ignorant, while [students are] mistaken. Keaton might not understand much about economics, yet at least he's not a mercantilist."

Hersh (2020) describes "educated" people thinking they're deeply engaged, while getting their information by scrolling through Twitter feeds. But information (especially when biased) may not be knowledge or wisdom. And this sort of ignorance can easily lead to dogmatism — when politics are practiced as a casual hobby or a type of tribalism, with an emphasis on the abstract merits of a few policies, an attraction to politicians who pay lip service, and a greater value placed on voting and talking versus knowing and doing. It's troubling when people combine ignorance with certainty and passion. Irrational ignorance explains this overreaction. Judges may be an important exception. If rationally ignorant voters are correct and confident that political affiliation is a proxy for the sort of judges they would want appointed, then party-line voting may be quite rational.

Elites are more prone to imagine that they know more about fields outside their expertise, particularly when compared to those who have less education. While elites have greater knowledge in specific fields, their knowledge about public policy may not be much greater than non-elites, and they may be more prone to an unwarranted confidence — thinking they know more than they do. Moreover, from another perspective, if the "unwashed" are more aware of their ignorance, they will have more "known unknowns," while the elites may have more "unknown unknowns." Ignorant people may not

be as bad as overly confident smart people when it comes to public policy issues.

Given ignorance and what should devolve toward apathy, why do so many people vote — and why do so many invest (lightly) in political information and then act dogmatic about politics? We've already described ignorance of one's ignorance, a reliance on propaganda or confirmation bias, and responding to the peer pressure of one's tribe. Another possibility is enjoying psychic benefits from political activity, akin to sports fans with their team: a spectator sport with some opportunities for cheering, voting and talking trash.[3] In any case, it's difficult to imagine such an approach yielding impressive policy outcomes.

Populism and Democracy

Populism is a social and political response of ordinary people to cultural pressures and public policies. Populism can be the apex of self-government in politics. Populists may revolt against government regulations imposed by those in power. By exercising political self-governance, they may enhance the ability to self-govern in economic and social spheres. But populism can also fall far short in this regard. It can be driven by failures of effective self-governance — from ignorance and envy to paranoia and xenophobia. And, in practice, populism often works to diminish civic and economic liberties, reducing self-governance. "Rights" don't turn out to be inalienable if they can be reduced or eliminated by 51 percent of one's neighbors in a democracy.

Populists are drawn to elected representatives as a manifestation of "the will of the people." But populists also dislike and distrust "the elite." So the elected can also be "enemies of the people," along with unelected targets in the political realm: judges, bureaucrats and experts. This is exacerbated when moving from local and state to national and international. Still, populism requires political leaders to pursue political reform. So populists are prone to follow charismatic leaders who promise a dramatic change in course — for example, Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in our times. Ironically, many "populists" were quite happy to have President Trump win the Electoral College in 2016 despite losing the popular vote.

The pursuit of change always involves dissatisfaction with the status quo and some hope that an alternative will be better. Populist activity always implies the belief that change is within reach through political or social activism. As concerns increase and hope about populist solutions declines, dissatisfaction can extend into a sense of powerlessness and despair. Populist frustrations cover an array of issues. Sometimes the concerns are valid; sometimes they're not. At the least, they are driven by a perception of undesirable outcomes for common folks, foisted on them (or ignored) by elites.

Problems with Populism and Democracy

Following Riker (1982), democracy has three conditions: significant citizen participation, substantial social and economic liberty and equality before the law. Voting is often imagined as the central act of all three. Representation has adequate turnover to hold leaders accountable since they fear reciprocity. From there, a liberal democracy avoids a tyranny of the majority through an effective constitution. This typically manifests itself through a multicameral legislature with separation of powers, an independent judiciary, federalism, term limits and regular elections.

But, if populism and democracy are supposed to embody the will of the people, they fall short for many reasons. First, the supposed link between populism and democracy is reductionistic, assuming a firm connection between political preferences and policy outcomes. Most broadly,

[3] It's also possible that voters know they're wrong, but still enjoy it, given other stronger preferences. If one can't change the outcome of elections or policy, it's reasonable to exert one's preferences, ideology and beliefs. Caplan (2007: 14–16) calls this "preferences about beliefs" — seeing preferences as both a cause of choices as well as an end in itself. It is "instrumentally rational to be epistemically irrational" (p. 48); it feels good to indulge biases when there are only weak incentives to overcome.

there are no definitive criteria for judging either government or what constitutes "the general welfare." More specifically, as Riker (1982: 197) argues, "knowing that tastes change does not tell us anything about how politics change . . . . We need to understand how tastes get incorporated into political decisions." Related: strategic voting is inherent to the system, but difficult to observe and assess (Black 1948; Riker 1982: 145–56). And, given the existence of political leaders, we must understand how they control the political agenda, which is difficult to model but an important consideration in explaining democratic outcomes (Riker 1982: chaps. 7–8).

Second, the attractive principles of majority voting assume only two choices, which is rarely the case. Often, people imagine that they have two choices, but that's only after an arbitrary and flawed reduction of choices — for example, the primary systems of the two major parties. That "we force ourselves into a binary choice should not obscure the fact that we really start out with many alternatives and that we can never be certain that our institutions have narrowed the choice down to the right pair for us to choose between" (Riker 1982: 41).[4]

Third, the conditions under which majority rule is clearly best are extremely rigorous. For example, if subjective benefits have "equal intensity," then majority rule can yield the highest net benefit. But with heterogeneous preferences majority rule can easily lead to net social harm. And, with sufficient interest in a single issue, a voter may support a candidate or a party, even if he is opposed to them on all other issues. As a result, voting is not likely to be a true sum of voter preferences (Buchanan and Tullock 1965: 236).

Once one abandons the rule of unanimity, there is no significant difference between alternative rules. Lippman (1926: 404) notes that democracy's only method to decide is counting heads: "All that can be said is that there are more of them." And there is certainly nothing ethically magical about 51 to 49 decisions: "The rule of the majority is the rule of force. For while nobody can seriously maintain that the greatest number must have the greatest wisdom or the greatest virtue, there is no denying that under modern social conditions, they are likely to have the most power."[5]

Ultimately, populism fails as an ideal. "Populism as a moral imperative depends on the existence of a popular will discovered by voting. . . . Populism fails, therefore, not because it is morally wrong, but because it is empty" (Riker 1982: 239). Unfortunately, all of this points toward a level of government that is suboptimal and excessive.

Given that a majority vote rule allows voters on the winning side to gain benefits with only a fraction of the costs, the gap between private and social marginal cost always bends toward more government. Or, from another angle: voting often creates negative externalities. And there is potential for a "spiral effect," where interest groups lead to more government and more government leads to more interest groups (Buchanan and Tullock 1965: 286–87).

Moreover, populism can constrain democracy and work against liberalism if it manifests itself as tyranny in the name of the people — for example, refusing to submit to elections. As such, populism can even put democracy at risk. Legutko (2016) compares the more obvious flaws of communism to the more subtle flaws of "liberal democracy" to help readers understand contemporary Western politics.

It turns out that certain modern manifestations of both are often driven by similar

[4] Perhaps counterintuitively, stronger political parties may be helpful to democracy in a low- information environment. Rosenbluth and Shapiro (2018) compare two strong parties to a marriage — and weaker parties to a "hook- up." In the latter, voters can express preferences but then have little idea what they'll get.

[5] Lippman (1926) was initially puzzled by William Jennings Bryan as a lawyer in the Scopes Trial after seeing Bryan as a science-promoting presidential candidate. But then he noted that Bryan was utterly consistent; he valued democracy and majority rule as the ultimate in equality. He "applied it absolutely at Dayton, and thereby did a service to democratic thinking. For he reduced to absurdity a dogma which had been held carelessly but almost universally." For more on populism and Bryan, see Frank (2020: chap. 2).

motives, mechanics and machinations. Often "democracy" turns out to be a cover for interest groups and politicians to rule in "the best interests of the people."

As such, democracy may well be the best form of government, all other things equal. But outside of other crucial factors — notably, a limited government with effective levels of federalism, a constitution that promotes liberty and threshold levels of individual morality in both private and public matters — its efficacy may easily be swamped by other considerations (Holcombe 2021).

Populism, Antipopulism, Paranoia and Apocalyptic Theories

With its focus on powerful external forces, populism can extend to a fascination with apocalyptic and conspiracy theories. Christianity is famous for its apocalypse in the book of Revelation. But secular eschatological concerns are dominant today — from Covid-19, "climate change," and income inequality to QAnon and economic dislocation from globalization. These are fed by ubiquitous social media, suppliers of contentious politics and 24/7 cable "news." Desperate times and high stakes increase apprehension, tension, rhetoric and a loss of civility — most notably as "political correctness" has extended into illiberal "cancel culture."[6]

Hofstadter (1952: 3) describes "heated exaggeration, suspicion and conspiratorial fantasy" throughout American political history. He details examples from Masons and central banks to Catholics and communists, movements he aligns with populism and nativism. He argues that this tendency has increased since the 1930s, as more political power has accrued to people in faraway places — and as both society and economics have grown more complicated and competitive. This echoes Cohn (1957) who argued that apocalyptic theories emerge in contexts with rapid social and economic change. People, particularly if struggling, tend to feel dispossessed by the powerful, including the media, politicians and eminent figures in the culture.

When you don't understand the complexities of life and see correlations that look like cause and effect, superstition and narratives seem like logic and explanations. Secrecy and independence tend to foster a conspiratorial outlook toward the appointed and unelected, the Federal Reserve and judges, the Deep State and the United Nations.

Hofstadter (1952) links this to populism, but antipopulism provides another form of apocalyptic thinking. Walker (2013) cautions against seeing such paranoia as fringe. Rather, it is a broad, potent force, even among the educated. As such, he describes Hofstadter's view as "anti-populist anxiety . . . elite hysteria" (p. 22). Many want to "spread democracy" and "make the world safe for democracy," but they also worry about where democracy and populism might take our country. Frank (2020) points to the "pessimistic style" of an eternal, antipopulist war on reform. Here "populist" is an insult of the respectable and highly educated: "a one-word evocation of the logic of the mob: it is the people as a great rampaging beast. . . . It is a battle of order against chaos, education against ignorance, mind against appetite, enlightenment against bigotry, culture against barbarism" (Frank 2020: 2–3).[7]

Most of the political focus today is left versus right, "liberal" versus "conservative," or Democrat

[6] The stakes are also higher because of "identity politics." Joustra and Wilkinson (2016: 108–11) argue that the "politics of recognition" have become "a key feature of our political discourse today. . . . The politics of equal recognition are central and stressful. This bleeds over into debates about politically correct language, because at its core, much of the politics of recognition is not just about what the law says about me, but what society says about me."

[7] Frank (2020: 9–13, 19–31) details the invention of the term "populist" by the People's Party in 1891 on a train in Kansas, based on common enemies of rural/urban labor — greedy bankers, corrupt politicians, railroad barons and commodity traders. Its slogan: "Equal rights to all; special privileges to none." But populism always had two meanings: "There was Populism as its proponents understood it: a movement in which ordinary working people demanded democratic economic reforms. And there was Populism as its enemies characterized it: a dangerous movement of groundless resentment in which demagogues led the disreputable. . . . This is how the Establishment welcomed the Populist revolt into the world, and this is pretty much how the establishment thinks about populism still" (p. 13).

versus Republican. But the primary split may well be populist versus antipopulist, elites versus deplorables, unwashed rubes versus refined and educated, reliance on experts versus fallacy of authority, and a fear of losing control versus being controlled. In current terms, one might think of this as Trump supporters and anti-Trumpers — and even, "anti-anti-Trumpers" (those who are not fans of Trump but are more disturbed by his "elitist" opponents). Landes (2011: 229) notes that there is no need for the elites to condescend toward the non-elites: "The question is not whether elites exist, but how they interact with commoners, not whether elites grow corrupt, but what mechanisms a polity builds in for correction."

Frank (2020: 2–7) satirically describes this opposition to populism as "the common folk have declared independence from the experts, and along the way, from reality itself." The "tragic flaw" in populism is that the "ideal of government of, by, and for the people doesn't take into account the ignorance of the actual, existing people."

Progressives and Populists

The relationship between progressives and populists is more complicated. Progressives are relatively optimistic about government activism. They want to regulate economic activity, shaping policy to reach social goals. In this, they assume a relatively benevolent and knowledgeable government — at least when it's under their control. They also hold a high view of populism, local governance, elected judges and other forms of direct democracy (e.g., referenda, recall and voter initiatives) — at least in theory. The average citizen should have more influence over government. If so, the government will be more responsive to the direct voice of the people. This will lead to energetic grass-roots movements that hold leaders accountable — as people call for reforms against special interests, machine politicians, political bosses and corrupt governance.

But this outcome requires a general public that is educated on policy and politics. Those who would exercise democracy must be competent, knowledgeable and driven by the general welfare. This leads to a Catch-22. How do you achieve such reforms when people are not (yet) smart enough to help you reach those goals? An attractive option is to give power to a knowledgeable and (hopefully) benevolent governing elite in the meantime.

Centralized decisionmaking by trained experts and reduced power for locals might be better for now. But they also make government more isolated from the people and more prone to abuses of power. And this militates, at least in the short-term, against the quest for democracy. Another practical concern: as population increases with less direct representation — and as globalization increases — the ability and perceived ability to influence politics will decrease. While progressives claim to want government by the people, it easily devolves into elites and experts controlling policy with condescension toward the non-elites and populists.[8]

Too Much Democracy?

Oakeshott (1955: lxiv) described politics as "a second-rate form of activity . . . corrupting to the soul and fatiguing to the mind." Voting is not particularly valuable for most individuals, especially in comparison to other civil liberties. Life would be better if we could spend no time on politics. And it may actually disempower people if it distracts them from this reality, so that they ascribe inflated importance to politics in general and voting in particular.

Legutko (2016) notes that communism and liberal democracy have produced intense politicization. Ironically, one prominent goal of democracy is to make life more political by increasing the quantity and level of participation.

[8] Codevilla (2020) argues: "The Progressive critique adds a moral basis: the American people's indulgence of their preferences . . . has made for every secular sin imaginable: racism, sexism, greed." In its earliest appearances, this was the engine behind eugenics and Prohibition. In later times, it has moved into other forms of policy paternalism, "political correctness," and "cancel culture."

Talisse (2019: 4) describes this as "a dimension of democracy's trouble that has been overlooked, perhaps because it is constantly in view."

Democracy is often imagined as a 0/1, when it is a matter of degree. In terms of process, it ranges from pure (e.g., ancient Athens, the New England town meeting and cantons in Switzerland) to tempered through various approaches to republicanism. In terms of outcomes, its decisions range from unanimous to majority rule. However, whatever its merits, governance is still about using coercion as a means to try to accomplish policy goals.

Democracy is not a uniquely just or effective form of government. It is clearly correlated with good outcomes, but, even if the relationship is causal, better government might be achieved by reducing (or increasing) the level of democracy. A recognition of democracy's weaknesses and subsequent interest in "weakening democracy" is usually interpreted as a call to dictatorship. But less democracy could lead to less government activism and, thus, more markets and more freedom.

Respect for democracy can devolve into "democratic triumphalism" (Brennan 2016: 7) — a form of idolatry that sees its benefits but ignores its flaws. Caplan (2007: 186) quotes presidential candidate Al Smith from 1928: "All the ills of democracy can be cured by more democracy." Many people are "fundamentalists" with respect to government activism in general and democracy in particular. For them, faith in government and democracy is not falsifiable in practice.

Given rational and irrational ignorance, faith in democracy and government activism is difficult to sustain. The good news is that each individual has little impact; no one's vote is decisive. The bad news is that the outcome of majority rule can be costly. Most importantly, voting as a negative externality raises questions of ethical legitimacy. As Brennan (2016: xiii) notes, how one votes is more important than that one votes.[9] When should largely ignorant people be encouraged or even allowed to use the machinations of government to encourage the use of force?

A Call to Epistocracy?

Even if democracy is the best system in a given context, outcomes might be improved by reducing democratic participation at the margin. While populists will probably not find this palatable, this may be a way forward for antipopulists, progressives and others.

Jones (2020) describes politics as a type of production and reasons that its process could easily be tweaked to improve outcomes. In this, he is similar to Murray (1988: 55–58) who would argue for the importance of a "threshold" level of democracy, with incremental gains from there. Or consider Jones's argument as a version of the Laffer curve, as public policy analysts look for bliss points within democratic governance.

Observers have long seen the pros and cons of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy — and suggested that the best strategy might be a mix. Hoppe (1995) describes monarchy as ownership with the efficiency advantages of property rights, in contrast to democratic leaders as a set of caretakers with free-rider problems. The Founding Fathers treated all political systems, including democracy, with great suspicion and devised a complex political system to mitigate its weaknesses. As such, our system of government is a balance between monarchy (through the presidency), aristocracy (through the Senate and the judiciary), and democracy (through the House). As such, there could easily be "too much" democracy (descent into mob rule), just as monarchy can devolve into tyranny and aristocracy into oligarchy.

Jones (2020) details troubling democratic outcomes that are seemingly fixable:

[9] The framework of Brennan's (2016) book is in his description of three types of citizens: ignorant Hobbits; irrational Hooligans; and tolerant, well- informed, analytical Vulcans (pp. 4–5). Along progressive lines of thought, he notes that democracy might be embraced as "aretaic" (to educate and enlighten); instrumental (to reach ends); and/ or intrinsic (as an end to itself) (p. 7). He cites John Stuart Mill's hopeful hypothesis that political participation would make people smarter and nobler. Unfortunately, the educational gains are minimal at best. And the data, even with the greatly increased availability of information, are not promising (pp. 24, 30).

opportunistic behavior of senators near elections, bloated spending, pork-barrel projects and presidential trade and disputes resolved for elections in swing states. He recommends more independence from political influence by fewer elections, independent central banks, unelected judges, appointed regulators and officials and educated independent people in charge of tax policy.[10] Caplan (2007) advocates voter competency exams (as with a driver's license), not encouraging (or subsidizing) the practice of voting, and encouraging economists to continue doing what they can to educate people at the margin. Brennan (2016) argues for less democracy and more "epistocracy" — a greater degree of government by elites. He argues for knowledge tests, the use of a lottery to give fewer voters more power and greater incentives to get educated, and epistocratic veto power for knowledgeable people to unmake bad laws.[11]

Of course, any such proposals will run into charges of elitism, disenfranchisement — and these days, racism, sexism and the like. But Brennan notes that politics is not inherently expressive or symbolic, unless it is explicitly connected with a nasty ideology such as racism. Moreover, inherent dignity is not necessarily connected to unequal participation in professional life. We readily acknowledge the expertise of doctors, plumbers and hairdressers. Even if we value "equality" in terms of voting to some extent, when should we allow incompetent people to have power over others? The legitimacy of authority often presumes some degree of paternalism, but Brennan argues at the least for "anti-authority" — that people should not give me power over others, especially if they're not competent. Unease with this concern opens the door to other voting restrictions based on competence. Alternatively, an equivalent move would be toward a regime of administrative law led by experts and bureaucrats — in which voting is largely a show.

Conclusion

James Scott (1999) argues that four conditions are required for an overweening state. First, is his original topic of study: "the administrative ordering of nature and society." Modern technology and activist government put this in easy reach. Second, is "a high-modernist ideology": confidence about progress through science, technology and governance. This is consistent with progressive ideology, including its anti-populist bent and a comfort in using democracy to capture power. Third, is an authoritarian state willing to use the weight of government to enforce its preferred visions of life. The growth of government makes this increasingly likely — along with Scott's fourth condition: a weakened civil society (family, religion and civil organizations) is helpful for the state that wishes to implement its plans.

Democracy may be the best form of governance available to us, but it can easily yield suboptimal outcomes. That is especially true with a progressive ideology, a populism focused on restricting trade, good intentions captured by special interests, or idolatry toward the state. Democracy, to be socially viable, must be bounded by what F. A. Hayek (1960) called "a constitution of liberty." Without limited government — with effective levels of federalism, an independent judiciary, and a constitution that promotes liberty — the mixed blessing of democracy can become a dog's breakfast of inefficiency, corruption, incompetence, and injustice.

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[10] Jones (2020: chap. 9) cites Singapore as a compelling example, with great outcomes despite 50 percent less democracy. He also discusses "algocracy" — government by data and algorithm, a cousin of epistocracy and Progressive Era emphasis on technocracy, elites and objective and knowledgeable agents. California's passion for democracy is noteworthy here too. Under progressive Governor Hiram Johnson in 1911, California embraced heightened democracy (including referenda, recall elections and initiatives) as a counter to railroad monopoly, monopsony and cronyism. Democracy increased with Proposition 13 in 1978. Since then, California has added winner-take-all primaries, super-delegates, open primaries and allowing felons to vote.

[11] Brennan (2016) notes the importance of informed consent in the context of medical ethics (pp. 78–85); the good (but grossly inadequate) intentions of King Carl the Incompetent (pp. 144–47, 243); voting as a negative externality (don't subsidize it; consider regulating and limiting it); and arbitrary age restrictions (why should an ignorant 18- year- old be allowed to vote when a knowledgeable 17-year-old cannot vote?).

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'Irreversible Damage' by Abigail Shrier

"Irreversible Damage" is a must-read for those interested in understanding transgenderism, especially its contemporary manifestations. Abigail Shrier focuses on claims about transgenderism in children and interviews experts, social influencers, parents, counselors, activists, people who are happy with their decision to transition, and those who regret it profoundly.

The catalyst for Shrier was free speech and defending others' rights to disagree with the establishment on this topic. Since publishing the book, her interest in free speech has become more personal — as her work has been attacked. (For this reason, I expected the book to be less measured, but was pleasantly surprised.) In this, she is in good company: an array of academics and advocates who have been criticized, crushed, and cancelled for holding reasonable, alternative views of the science involved.

Much of the opposition comes from valuing ideology over science. Shrier discusses the hubbub over Lisa Littman and her famous PLoS One article in chapter 2. And she devotes chapter 7 to a litany of other scientific "dissidents": experts in their respective fields who ended up on the wrong side of the ideology that dominates for now — if not the wrong side of history (or certainly, science). The rabid response against those with dissenting views is more about bad religion and fundamentalism than liberal values or a respect for science.

Devaluing science is evident in other ways. The usual scientific and bureaucratic requirements to permit drug and surgical treatment are overlooked (164-165). The biology of male and female is quite clear but ignored. Shrier discusses the ease with which coroners can pick out adult males and females by skeletons: different size, sex-specific morphology, foreheads, mastoid regions, jaws, pelvis, and leg angles into the pelvis (162).

The standards for medicine differ as well. Some advocates compare the relevant trans surgeries to breast reduction or enhancement (175). But even there, biological function is not

compromised or destroyed (173). Its prevalent use among teens is unusual, when plastic surgery is usually reserved for adults. And the ethics of plastic surgery usually require many more questions to be asked than advocates of transition want for teens.

All of this has obvious connections to a range of other ideological issues: the prevalence of asexuality (23) and the denigration of motherhood (208) in the culture — and its alignment with anti-human philosophies and policy positions such as anti-population, birth control, abortion, and eugenics. All of this has an impact on lesbians: "Gender ideology puts transgender individuals into direct conflict with radical feminists who believe sex is the defining feature of one's identity." (150-151) More famously, it has an effect on all women and young girls, especially athletes who may be forced to compete with biological males (151-152).

Ideology aside: the greatest value of the book is distinguishing between modern and "traditional" transexualism in five crucial ways. It is now:

1) much more prevalent (vs. exceedingly rare);

2) predominantly female (vs. male);

3) mostly emerging during puberty (vs. apparent from early childhood);

4) connected to peer groups (vs. random); and

5) often "treated" aggressively (vs. often resolving by adulthood).

All of these provide at least weak evidence for peer effects as a primary factor. In any case, transexualism is clearly different today — whatever the reasons (xxi, 26, 32).

On those who might be labeled "old-school" trans adults, Shrier reports: "Their dysphoria never made them popular; more often than not, it was a source of unease and embarrassment...they didn't want or need mentors; they knew how they felt...They do not need to be celebrated for the life they have chosen...That so much trans activism claims to speak in their name is neither their fault nor their intention. They have very little to do with the current trans epidemic plaguing teenage girls." (xix) "For many classic sufferers of gender dysphoria, celebration of their trans identity is anathema." (146) [She also offers some history as well, including an exception to this rule: Christine Jorgenson, the original "Caitlyn Jenner" (147-148).]

Another important connection: because gender dysphoria typically emerged in early childhood, parents were aware that their children were different from an early age. These days, parental influence and input are assumed away — in deference to the teenager's self-diagnosis (xxiii). This gets to the strangest and most disturbing aspect of this topic: psychologists and counselors frequently rely on their clients to analyze themselves (ch. 6). As Shrier notes, professionals are required to offer "respectful" and "supportive" care. But advocates want much more than this, including full acceptance of a teenager's self-diagnosis. Shrier asks the reader to imagine treating anorexia, race, or any psychological condition in the same way (99-101).

The assumptions required for a heavy reliance on self-diagnosis are somewhere between dubious and laughable: 1.) adolescents know who they are; 2.) transition has little or no cost, harm, or risk; 3.) gender identity is immutable; and 4.) suicide becomes more likely without transitional treatments.

This approach also ignores that teens often test boundaries with parents and society, take unfortunate risks without a mature ability to weigh benefits and costs well, and face a wide range of negative peer effects (107-120). All that said, Shrier still proceeds cautiously here: None of this is "a reason to proscribe all identity alterations or body modifications for teenagers," but it should be "cause for hesitation." (111)

In all of this, Shrier believes that there are real problems at hand for these teens, particularly for young women. She argues repeatedly, powerfully, and poignantly that it is really tough to be a girl going through puberty (1, 3, 144, 209), especially today with social media (4-5, 18). But she notes the oddity — if not the perversity — of letting struggling people self-diagnose. "Her distress is real. But her self-diagnosis, in each case, is flawed

— more the result of encouragement and suggestion than psychological necessity." (xix)

There are psychological factors (or temptations) at hand: "it satisfies the deepest need for acceptance, the thrill of transgression, the seductive lilt of belonging." (xxiv) Or more broadly, it may rarely be about gender, per se, at all (211). Proponents and practitioners also seem to be body-obsessed in a way that doesn't seem healthy (55b).

Sociology and peer effects are also involved in a way that at least mimics what we see in epidemiology (25). The "epidemic" could be caused by a benevolent form of acceptance that allows the condition to safely emerge. But other more-troubling hypotheses are at least as compelling in explaining "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" or ROGD (26-27).

"Psychologists who study peer influence ask what it is about teenage girls that makes them so susceptible to peer contagion and so good at spreading it. Many believe it has something to do with the ways girls tend to socialize...Girls are much more likely to reply with statements that are validating and supportive than questioning... [This] can be a productive and valuable social skill...But it also leads friends to take on each other's ailments...co-rumination, excessive reassurance seeking; and negative feedback-seeking" — all intensified by social media (35-36).

Contemporary culture also has an impact. Intersectionality is one angle: "upper-middle-class white families, seeking cover in minority identity...they overwhelmingly come from progressive families..." (31) Notably, ROGD'ers are disproportionately white (90 percent). As one professor notes, "Of all of these badges of victim status, the only one that you can actually choose is trans." (154)

There are many other contributing factors. Shrier provides a subset in her preface: "Our cultural frailty; parents are undermined; experts are over-relied upon; dissenters in science and medicine are intimidated; free speech truckles under renewed attack; government health care laws harbor hidden consequences; and an intersectional era...encourages individuals to take cover in victim groups." (xxiii)

But there are others too: In a pharmacological society, pills are an attractive option (19, 150a), including testosterone (discussed throughout the book). Shrier points to a "modern-day obsession with mental health, medicating everyone toward the optimal level of happiness..." (31) Another quick "fix" (that may never satisfy or end): surgery (176). Government-subsidized health insurance provides an additional subsidy for drugs and especially surgery (180). Add to this the capitalistic work of "influencers" (ch. 3) — those who attract an audience on social media, gaining popularity and money. Schools often oppose parents (chs. 4-5) — yet another occasion when the government school's monopoly power is deeply troubling. Anti-bullying is the top stated concern — or a preferred cynical strategy — depending on whose wielding it.

Parents, counselors, and doctors are in a rough spot here. In particular, what's the cause/effect with suicide? Suicide rates are high among trans youth, but that could be cause and/or effect (51). And Shrier documents how kids, sympathetic authorities, and influencers often use suicide as a weapon — a brutal and cynical strategy against caregivers and especially parents (52, 55, 103).

Unfortunately, suicide as a strategy undermines those who are actually struggling with suicide — one of many ways to know that this topic cannot be primarily about mental health (theirs or others). Another indication: the hypocrisy in heavily weighing subjective feelings that are consistent with trans ideology and utterly denigrating those whose subjective feelings change. If the top priority were mental or physical well-being, both would be celebrated.

Detransitioners are the strongest manifestation of this phenomenon. Shrier documents some of the nascent blooms here, including groups like the Pique Resilience Project. In each case among those she interviewed, "they were definitely trans — until, suddenly, they weren't. Nearly all of them blame the adults in their lives, especially the medical professionals,

for encouraging and facilitating their transitions." (201-202)

Shrier ultimately compares the contemporary trend in transsexualism to other damaging fads that have plagued young women over the years: the Salem witch trials, nervous disorders in the 18th century; the "neurasthenia epidemic" in the 19th century — as well as anorexia nervosa, repressed memory, bulimia, and cutting in our times (xix). She also compares the trans movement to a cult (xxi) — with its highly subjective claims (many of them metaphysical or at least transphysical); non-falsifiable propositions (192); claims of salvation and the only path to happiness; "love-bombing" for potential adherents (185-186); shunning those who disagree; and ostracizing those who leave (191).

Irreversible Damage is a passionate but balanced critique of the latest social problem faced by young women. If you're interested in understanding the moment or ministering to the movement's members in the short-run — or in the long-run as the trend fades and the regrets increase dramatically — Shrier's book is a great resource.

'In the Year of our Lord 1943' by Alan Jacobs

The year is 1943. America has entered World War II in full force and Germany is on the defensive. In the minds of many, the war was all but won. But what would we do with the victory? In The Year of our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis, Alan Jacobs describes the work of five prominent Christian thinkers — Jacques Maritain, Simone Weil, T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, and W.H. Auden — on this question.

The question might seem simple enough. But usually the focus was what we were fighting against — opposing the Germans and the Japanese. This presupposes an objective critique of the opponent (really easy with those villains!) and also a replacement by something better (easy, but often assumed and undefined).

So, what were we fighting for? What way of life were we trying to preserve, improve, or inaugurate? This angle leads to less comfortable inferences. Protecting consumerism, American Civil Religion, libertine immorality, virulent racism, and so on — all prominent features of American culture. Are these worth the sacrifice? At least in the minds of these (and some secular) thinkers, the Western democracies would win the war, but were also "some considerable way along the path to losing the peace." (199)

Another troubling angle: Jacobs opens his first chapter with American sympathy for Germany, if not Nazism (5). This may surprise us, but it should not, given universal and contemporary considerations. First, people generally have little understanding of economics and current events — and perhaps moreso then, with less education and limited media options. So, an easy but sobering embrace of poor policies or bad actors is quite common.

Second, socially and politically, "progressivism" including eugenics was popular and perceived (proudly) as "scientific." In fact, Germany patterned its eugenics laws after American efforts, starting in Indiana in 1907. And discrimination against all sorts of people (including Jews, women, and the disabled) was quite acceptable in America at the time.

Third, in terms of politics and economics, there was a growing penchant for statism, increased faith in the efficacy of government, and less faith in markets and market outcomes. This is a time marked by the Great Depression and the supposed success of Keynesian economics and the New Deal. We were optimistic about the use of our military, the American Way, but ironically, also more open to world governance structures.

In that time, at least until things were obviously ugly, why wouldn't one at least sympathize with Germany (if not applaud them), after the nastiness of World War I and its aftermath?

Given the moral failings in America and his own personal relativism, Auden went through a crisis of faith where he asked how we had the right

to demand or even expect a more humanistic response. "Even granted the evil of Hitler, can we be sure that our ways are necessarily superior?...How righteous is our cause? And if it is righteous, what makes it so?" (10-12) Not "positivism or pragmatism." (16) Auden noted soberly, "We come much closer to Hitler than we may care to admit. If everything is a matter of opinion...force becomes the only way of settling differences." (17)

Auden couldn't answer the question well, without a reference to Christian faith (6). His conclusion: "Only an appeal to something eternal, absolute, and good — like the God of St. Thomas or the 'nature of human beings' described by Aristotle — would permit one to answer the Nazis." (7)

But what role had religion played in getting Europe to this point? In particular, should one blame particularly-nasty forms of nationalism on its sins of omission or commission? Churches had often been complicit — by compromising with secularism and patriotism. Christian thinkers were convinced that Europe's troubles stemmed from a gradual erosion of focus and unity in religion. As such, they saw the primary solution as reversing these causes (28-30).

This led to "a pressing set of questions about the relationship between Christianity and the Western democratic social order...whether Christianity was uniquely suited to the moral underpinning of that order." (xvi) An emphasis on "liberal instrumentalism" had put such questions on the back burner. But is that where they belonged? "That willingness to defer ultimate questions as the price to paid for getting along with one another, had left the democratic West unable to generate the energetic commitment necessary to resist the military and moral drive of societies that had clear answers" to questions of purpose, until it was late in the game at best (33-34).

Stunde Null and the Response of the Church

In his afterword, Jacobs uses Jacques Ellul's work and two key German phrases: Nachkriegzeit (the night after the war) and Stunde Null (zero hour) to revisit the relevant questions. "What does faithful presence look like at the moment the clocks are all reset?" (197)

Some Christians would choose an insular approach to building up the church. Some turned to politics — reaching for powerful mechanisms of social gospel and political change. For Ellul, neither pietistic aloofness nor political assimilation was valid (198). "There is certainly nothing wrong with the United Nations, and prefabricated housing can be very useful indeed. But the world does not need Christians to say so...the first and most vital task of Christians in time of war was prayer." (199)

In contrast to Jacobs' five thinkers, a more-political approach was then enunciated most forcefully by Reinhold Niebuhr as "Christian realism." I'll leave this discussion to interested readers (52-56). But in a word, his view emphasized the value of political pragmatism. Neibuhr was worried about the temptations and other costs of this approach — in light of original sin, etc. And he didn't imagine politics in utopian terms, along the lines of post-millennial statists at the turn of the 20th century. But ultimately, he saw a low priority on politics as unrealistic and impractical.

Again, this debate occurred in a time of high faith in government activism. So Neibuhr's optimism is more understandable in the post-war era. Now, such a position is far more difficult to hold on pragmatic grounds. Jacobs addresses the concerns from an historical angle: the evidence from Augustine and Constantine (79-81) and even a sympathetic reading of Herod at the time of Jesus (83-85). And for Christians in particular, Jacobs observes that we "often fail to keep technique under such judgment and submission." (200)

Of course, these are not simply questions for the West after World War II. In our time, with the explicit impact of Christianity fading, changing social norms, and less access to power in political realms, what is the best way for the Church to move forward — from doubling down on old

strategies to a renewed emphasis on discipleship with Jesus and various expressions of "the Benedict Option"?

In his review of Jacobs' book in Harpers, Christopher Beha asks today's Democrats — or really, those who define themselves largely as opponents of Trump or the GOP — what they will do if they "win the peace"? The answer for them — and for most in the GOP in opposition to Democrats — is not particularly clear.

Beha's observation is a wonderful example of Jacobs' thesis. What do you do when you gain power and win the peace? Beha and Jacobs come to similar conclusions about the most effective engagement with the culture — not through politics, media, and the battles at the intersection, but in daily lives and community that have purpose and actually move the needle one life at a time. ♦

Maryann O. Keating

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Adam Smith and the Public Debt

In March 2020, the U.S. government faced a serious public-health issue, Covid 19. It responded by running large government deficits, adding to the public debt. Two and a half years later, the United States is experiencing long Covid 19 economic effects. Adam Smith addresses unanticipated government expenses like these in "Of Public Debts," the final chapter in An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations, published in 1776.

In ordinary years, Smith writes, a sovereign country can balance tax revenue with government expenditures and, at times, even accumulate a surplus. He quickly adds, however, that extravagant increases in public debt occur when officials high and low are given to lavish or imprudent expenditures. Therefore, "The amassing of treasure can no longer be expected, and when extraordinary exigencies require extraordinary expenses, he [the Sovereign] must necessarily call upon his subjects for an extraordinary aid."

The lack of prudence in good times requires contracting debt in moments of immediate distress. In such an exigency, the government cannot wait for the gradual and slow return of new taxes and has "no other resource but in borrowing." Smith argues that certain residents, if they choose, are in a position to advance large sums of money to the government. They will do so provided they have the support of the government for private contract enforcement and faith in receiving the principal and interest due. In a state where property rights are protected, the government can count on its subjects "to lend it their money on extraordinary occasions."

The ability to borrow for unexpected expenses such as war, for example, delivers the sovereign "from the embarrassment which this fear and inability [to finance] would otherwise occasion." Government officials are "unwilling, for fear of offending the people, who by so great and sudden an increase in taxes, would soon be disgusted [with the expenses]." Besides, it is not known "what taxes would be sufficient to produce the revenue wanted."

Advancing money to the government crowds out the private accumulation of capital stock. Smith says that though creditors will regain what they advanced to the government, the nation will experience loss from forfeited capital stock and from the burden of repayment. Nevertheless, Smith argues that public debt in times of crisis, unlike a sharp increase in taxes, could enable the public to somewhat sustain the stock of private capital needed for production in the short and long run. He cautions, however, that wars are prolonged when financed through debt. Those far from the front experience little inconvenience from increased taxes as they enjoy "a thousand visionary hopes of conquest and national glory, from a longer continuance of war."

Smith suggests that increasing the public debt becomes addictive, "The progress of the enormous debts which at present oppress, and will in the long-run probably ruin all the great nations of Europe, has been pretty uniform." He observed that following a crisis any residual, or what economists call the "peace dividend," is likely never used to pay down the public debt. "When national debts have once been accumulated to a certain degree, there is scarce, I believe, a single

See Leo Morris, "Fixing Our Pretend Money" on page 10.

instance of having been fairly and completely paid."

What follows in Smith's chapter "Of Public Debts" is a discussion of the types of financing instruments employed and the methods governments resort to when the size of the debt becomes unsustainable.

Financial Instruments Used By Governments to Fund Deficits

Most public debt bears interest from the day on which it is issued. Smith categorizes public debt as either backed by anticipated tax revenue or mortgaged to a particular stream of government revenue.

Treasury notes held by the public, or what Smith refers to as Exchequer bills, pay interest and can be traded in secondary markets. At maturity, they are redeemed at face value. Consols, which Smith refers to as perpetuities, pay a steady stream of interest indefinitely. If it is reasonable to anticipate the certainty of future tax revenue, these instruments retain their value and thus allow the government to contract large amounts of debt.

When the public is unwilling to hold notes backed by anticipated general tax revenue, the government can mortgage for several years or in perpetuity some particular stream of public revenue. For example, usage fees could be transferred to bond-holders for having financed public infrastructure.

Smith considers the government's practice of "borrowing of its own factors and agents" as "paying interest for the use of its own money." For example, the Bank of England would advance funds to the government at interest. At present, the Federal Reserve Bank in the U.S. remits interest earned on its holding of government bonds back to the Treasury. Therefore, a better example of government borrowing from itself is represented by the "trust fund" of the Social Security Administration. Annual Social Security payroll contributions over and above payments made to recipients are held in Treasuries, used to finance current federal government deficits. The assumption is that this "trust fund" backed by general tax revenue will be available to pay Social Security recipients when payroll contributions fall short.

When market rates of interest drop, the refinancing of government debt should yield a surplus in the federal budget. Smith refers to this bonus as a "sinking fund." He notes, however, "A sinking fund, though instituted for the payment of old [debts], facilitates very much the contracting of new debts."

Smith considers yet another government option in raising funds for deficit spending, i.e. selling annuities for life or a set number of years. "In 1693, an act was passed [in Great Britain] for borrowing one million upon an annuity of fourteen percent or 140,000 pounds a year, for sixteen years. In 1691, an act was passed for borrowing a million upon annuities for lives, upon terms which in the present times would appear very advantageous." Even at these good terms, Smith notes, the Exchequer procured few purchasers.

The problem with annuities, according to Smith, is that the real value of an annuity begins to diminish from the moment it is granted. Generally, those that advance money to the government do not wish that their fortunes should end with themselves plus another, such as a widow or widower, "whose age and state of health are nearly the same with his own." Smith, therefore, would view the involuntary aspect of Social Security as a benefit only for those, "who have little or no care for posterity" and to whom "nothing can be more convenient than to exchange their capital for a revenue, which is to last just as long and no longer than they wish it to do."

Adam Smith's readers should keep in mind his primary concern in writing The Wealth of Nations: an accumulation of capital stock that combined with labor will increase the productivity and economic wellbeing of a country as a whole. As such, he warns "the practice of funding has gradually enfeebled every state which has adopted it." He is particularly sensitive to the distribution of the burden of national debt. Lenders to

government may have a general interest in the growth of private capital but not necessarily a particular interest. On the other hand, the public, postponing an increase in taxes to meet a current crisis, may be unaware of the long-term cost and loss caused by unnecessary and excessive government spending.

Smith briefly addresses the case in which public debt is primarily held internally rather than subject to international payments. He says, "But [even] though the whole debt were owing to the inhabitants of the country it would not upon that account be less pernicious." The crisis is realized when tax revenue is insufficient to service internal or external public debt without crowding out the private investment needed to sustain production.

Smith expressed confidence in England's system of taxation. "But it ought to be remembered, that when the wisest government has exhausted all the proper subjects of taxation, it must, in cases of urgent necessity, have recourse to improper ones."

Improper Responses to Burdensome Public Debt: Devaluation and Inflation

The obvious economic solution to managing public debt is to raise tax revenue and/or reduce government expenditures, but this is easier said than done. Smith writes, "When national debts have once been accumulated to a certain degree, there is scarce, I believe, a single instance of their having been fairly and completely paid." To avoid bankruptcy, he indicates that the burden of the debt is relieved "frequently by a pretended payment."

A "juggling trick" of this kind, Smith explains, involves debasing a country's currency by devaluation and inflation. By this means:

"It occasions a general and most pernicious subversion of the fortunes of private people; enriching in most cases the idle and profuse debtor at the expense of the industrious and frugal creditor, and transporting a great part of the national capital from the hands which were likely to increase and improve it, to those which are likely to dissipate and destroy it."

If a domestic currency is convertible into precious metals, debasement results from adulteration of coin content or devaluation, both of which allow the government to retain enough bullion to meet its debts. For example, on one day in 1971, to meet its commitments to certain countries for gold, the U.S. devalued the dollar from $35 to $70 per ounce.

At present, the U.S. dollar is convertible neither internally nor externally to gold. The U.S. dollar also is not fixed in terms of other currencies; hence, it fluctuates in value. Up to this point, the dollar has not experienced much depreciation; it has maintained its value in international markets with respect to most currencies. This, no doubt, is due to its role as a major reserve currency.

Many countries, however, are committed to a fixed rate between their own currency and that of another country or a basket of currencies. To service international debts with scarce foreign reserves, a government may devalue its currency. This immediately reduces the ability of residents to import and potentially increases export revenue by making domestic goods more attractive internationally.

The value of the dollar is supported neither with metal nor another currency. As a at currency, the dollar is backed exclusively by the productive capacity of the country and trust in the U.S. government to maintain its value. To do this, the government must refrain from monetizing its debt. Monetizing debt occurs when a central bank, such as the Federal Reserve, passively increases its holding of government debt, essentially increasing liquidity in the system to finance public spending.

In this case, the government borrows money from the central bank to finance its spending instead of selling bonds to individuals and other private entities. An ongoing increase in total spending results in inflation, a continual increase in the general price level. Such inflation reduces the value of outstanding public and private debt. This is the "juggling trick" condemned by Smith.

Remember that Smith was open to government financing deficit spending in emergencies. His concern was rather with continually increasing the public debt and its long-term burden. At the conclusion of “On Public Debts," he notes the lack of revenue remitted to Great Britain for services rendered to its colonies. He says, “The rulers of Great Britain have, for more than a century past, amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic. This empire, however, has hitherto existed in imagination only.” He goes on to say that rulers should awaken the people if their dreams cannot be realized.

It is foolish to believe that the expenses incurred by the U.S. government during the pandemic will somehow fade away. Even if the absolute size of the national debt persists, increasing it will further destroy the loss of capital needed to maintain and increase real output. Debasement of the currency through inflation is not a solution. As Smith says, this will only subvert funds from industrious creditors. The U.S. should acknowledge realistic and ethical means for dealing with existing government debt to maintain the ow of anticipated tax revenue in order to meet its commitments. — *Sept. 5*

Dick McGowan

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ESG Investing, Virtue and Policy

My wife and I often disagree on political issues. She tends toward Aristotelian thought and toward Platonic thought. Aristotle's book, "Politics," analyzes structures of government and argues for a democracy, more or less. Plato's dialogue, "The Republic," stresses the character of those who would rule. The dialogue concludes by opposing "the philosopher-ruler," the person of wisdom and beneficence, to that of a tyrant, in whose character power and self-interest are intertwined.

Aristotle's government invites all voices to be heard. To paraphrase his "Politics," "a dinner with many people at the table will have a diversity of ideas."

In an ideal world, the best political arrangement is to have a good structure with rulers or leaders who are wise and attentive to the many voices of the governed.

Alas, we do not live in that world, an observation fairly apparent in the popular Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investing movement, the one that has been in the news lately.

The Sept. 4 USA Today had a half-page article focusing on ESG matters; the Indiana Business Journal had articles on ESG investing on Jan. 8, 2021, May 19 and July 29 of this year. Not to be outdone, the Wall Street Journal of Sept. 1, 2022, had a piece on the "ESG Investing Giants," namely, Blackrock, State Street and Vanguard funds.

Those companies pressure publicly traded companies and their boards to incorporate ESG goals in their policies and practices. Unlike Aristotle's notions, Blackrock, State Street and Vanguard Funds do not seem to listen to all the voices of the people who would be affected by ESG policies. As well, the companies are not, in structure, democratic inasmuch as the CEO and a limited number of other people direct the company's actions and set its goals. Aristotle would frown.

It is likely, though, Plato also would frown, especially with regard to the CEOs of those companies. Do they live their lives in a manner consistent with the energy preservation that environmental considerations would direct them to lead? Do they conserve energy so others may have and use resources or are they self-indulgent and profligate in the consumption of energy?

According to the New York Post, one CEO has an 8,500-square-foot house in Aspen, Colorado. The house has eleven marble fireplaces and a garden. However, the CEO does not live there. He has a house in North Salem, New York, because he works in New York City.

The house in New Salem sits on 250 acres. The property also has a barn, a two-bedroom guesthouse, a pool and a cabana. How much energy does it take to build a house with 11 marble fireplaces? How much energy do two houses consume? These are rhetorical questions whose answers are "a lot" and "a lot," respectively. That CEO's environmental footprint is enormous.

This is not to criticize people who own a lot of property and houses for personal use. If the CEO produces a large environmental footprint, his right to property allows him to do so.

It is also worth noting that North Salem is 76.3 percent white, with 7.6 percent Hispanic making up the second largest group. That is more "diverse" than Aspen, where whites constitute 85.5 percent of the population and Asians, the second largest group, constitute 4.7 percent of the population. The CEO does not live shoulder-to-shoulder with people in the trenches and who are "diverse." He has chosen the homogeneity of living with people like himself, similar in

appearance and in economic strata. Again, that is his right.

Given the data, though, an Aristotelian is likely to conclude that the CEO expects to create policy for voiceless people to follow. And a Platonist is likely to conclude that the CEO is self-indulgent and inconsistent, tending more toward tyranny.It is an inconvenient truth that a leading ESG leader on Wall Street is energy profligate and prefers white homogeneity. A leader is more likely to succeed if the individual's conduct and stated goals align. — *Oct. 14*

Like It or Not, Savages Are Savage

(Aug. 31) — Colleges and universities often appear to work on knowledge elimination. For instance, Critical Race Theory is usually taught with no mention of the ubiquitous presence of slavery through time and across cultures. Students would have a better grasp of history if they knew that Muslims had a thriving slave trade in Africa over 1,500 years ago or that indigenous populations in America practiced slavery.

Were that sort of knowledge made more readily available to students, they would likely think in terms of the greater humanity and not in racially or ethnically charged pieces of humanity.

Knowledge elimination of America's indigenous populations is obvious, at least as their history is handled by Indiana University and its administration. As IU put the matter: "The First Nations Educational & Cultural Center and the Office of the Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Multicultural Affairs are proud to support Native students in their pursuit of community and success at Indiana University. One way that campus partners can help promote a welcoming and informed community is by offering a land acknowledgement statement as part of an official welcome at the beginning of public meetings, presentations and gatherings."

The Cultural Center and Office of Diversity, Equity, and Multicultural Affairs provided a model for recitation before events or classes:

"We wish to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous communities native to this region, and recognize that Indiana University Bloomington is built on Indigenous homelands and resources. We recognize the Miami, Delaware, Potawatomi and Shawnee people as past, present, and future caretakers of this land."

The land acknowledgement, as written, suggests that European settlers took land from pacifistic and peaceful indigenous populations; it does not address the state of affairs before European settlers "took over" the land; nor does it address the U.S. government's reneging on contracts.

An article in Scientific American stated "prominent scientists now deride depictions of pre-state people as peaceful." The article quoted Harvard's renowned Steven Pinker: "Quantitative body counts — such as the proportion of prehistoric skeletons with ax marks and embedded arrowheads or the proportion of men in a contemporary foraging tribe who die at the hands of other men — suggest that pre-state societies were far more violent than our own."

The Canadian Government said in its article, "Warfare in PreColumbian North America": "Despite the myth that Aboriginals lived in happy harmony before the arrival of Europeans, war was central to the way of life of many First Nation cultures. Indeed, war was a persistent reality in all regions though, as Tom Holm has argued, it waxed in intensity, frequency and decisiveness."

Nebraskastudies.org repeated the statement by Canadian government and Scientific American: "There were many Native American tribes living on the Great Plains, competing for scarce resources. Of course, the various tribes came into conflict with each other." The article discussed the "Conflicts Among the Tribes & Settlers," but the first two sentences declare that tribes fought each other long before settlers arrived.

In fact, warfare among indigenous populations has been well documented for decades. Douglas B. Bamforth in the British journal, MAN, observed in 1994 that "archaeological data suggest that high casualty warfare was endemic in at least some

parts of the Great Plains for hundreds of years prior to Western contact."

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's "Encyclopedia of the Great Plains" had this to say:

"Intertribal warfare was intense throughout the Great Plains during the 1700s and 1800s, and archaeological data indicate that warfare was present prior to this time. Human skeletons from as early as the Woodland Period (250 B.C. to A.D. 900) show occasional marks of violence, but conflict intensified during and after the thirteenth century . . . villages were often destroyed by fire and human skeletons show marks of violence, scalping and other mutilations."

Tribes didn't fight each other merely to fight. Scientific America noted that "Some conflicts were waged for economic and political goals, such as gaining access to resources or territory, exacting tribute from another nation or controlling trade routes." Tribes fought for territory and control of the land. As thisisindiana.com said, "Many different Native American tribes have inhabited present-day Indiana over the span of thousands of years."

Oxford Reference's "Native American Wars" notes that "On the Western Plains, pre-Columbian warfare — before the introduction of horses and guns — pitted tribes against one another for control of territory and its resources, as well as for captives and honor. Indian forces marched on foot to attack rival tribes who sometimes resided in palisaded villages. Before the arrival of the horse and gun, battles could last days, and casualties could number in the hundreds."

Prior to the arrival of Columbus, Native Americans warred on one another — without the help or encouragement of "outsiders" — and a big reason was for territory, property, land. For centuries, different tribes inhabited Indiana until they were driven out by other tribes or by choice.A thorough 'land acknowledgement" would recognize that taking land from others is a human problem, not just a European-settler problem. And for many indigenous populations, the U.S. government's reneging on contracts is the issue.

Is a Pregnant Woman a 'Mom'?

(May 10) — The Supreme Court appears prepared to visit the abortion question again, as well it should, for Roe vs. Wade and Planned Parenthood of PA vs. Casey are linguistic nightmares with serious implications for the viability of abortion. The Court's language in both cases shows the Court's confusion, or perhaps its ignorance, regarding the procedure of abortion.

A person need only read the first sentence of the syllabus for Roe vs. Wade to see the Court's confusion: "A pregnant single woman (Roe) brought a class action challenging the constitutionality of the Texas criminal abortion laws, which proscribe procuring or attempting an abortion except on medical advice for the purpose of saving the mother's life." Did the Court in 1972 understand that a "pregnant single woman" is not a mother yet? In fact, what is precisely at stake in Roe vs. Wade is a pregnant woman's not becoming a mother.

By using the term "mother" in referring to the plaintiff, Roe, the Court suggests that pregnancy itself means a pregnant woman is 'with child,' as the popular expression has it.

The Court's use of "mother" instead of "pregnant woman" was not isolated to the syllabus describing the facts of the case. The Supreme Court held that "State criminal abortion laws, like those involved here, that except from criminality only a life-saving procedure on the mother's behalf without regard to the stage of her pregnancy and other interests involved violate the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which protects against state action the right to privacy, including a woman's qualified right to terminate her pregnancy." Again, the use of the phrase, "mother's behalf," implies that the entity in the womb is a child — and children have rights, most importantly, the right to life.

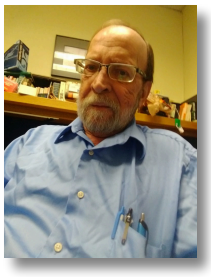
The Court also held that "For the stage subsequent to viability the State, in promoting its interest in the potentiality of human life, may, if it chooses, regulate, and even proscribe, abortion except where necessary, in appropriate medical

judgment, for the preservation of the life or health of the mother." Once more, the Court suggests that a pregnant woman is a mother. Maybe the Court is confused about the procedure of abortion, which, as everyone knows by now, prevents a pregnant woman from becoming a mother.

Planned Parenthood vs. Casey reaffirmed Roe's holding that "subsequent to viability, the State . . . may, if it chooses, regulate, and even proscribe, abortion except where it is necessary, in appropriate medical judgment, for the preservation of the life or health of the mother." If a pregnant woman has an abortion, though, then she is not a mother. The Court's language is wholly inappropriate for the procedure of abortion.

The Court upheld Roe by adding "Furthermore, it cannot be claimed that the father's interest in the fetus' welfare is equal to the mother's protected liberty." But in what does a pregnant woman's liberty consist? In not becoming a mother, though the Court does not appear to notice that. Anyone who reads the two cases attentively might be left wondering if the Court's members understand the difference between a pregnant woman and a woman who has given birth to a child. However, there is little to wonder about regarding the Court's implicit message that a pregnant woman, a "mother" in the Court's lexicon, is carrying a child. ♦

Leo Morris



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FTX and Our Pretend Money

Came across this amusing story the other day: "According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter "is home to around $700 quintillion" worth of precious metals — that's $100 billion for every one of the seven billion people on Earth."

Of course, the story is a bit outdated; the Earth now has eight billion souls, so we're only talking $87.5 billion, not a nice round figure, but not chump change, either. It's still amusing, though – rather than astounding or breathtaking – if you just consider basic economics.

You don't even have to get into the weeds of supply-and-demand calculations. You just have to remember that "Twilight Zone" episode in which the crooks stole $1 million in gold and had the "escape plan" of going into suspended animation for about 100 years. They awoke on schedule but then killed each other off while lugging the gold through an unforgiving desert, never to learn that they came to in a time when gold was manufactured and therefore plentiful and pretty much worthless.

When the supply is low, the value is high. As the supply increases, the value comes down. If that $700 quintillion worth of ore could somehow be mined and distributed equitably, it would be worth about as much as the billions in crypto currency FTX CEO Sam Bankman-Fried "owned."

You remember gold.

For a good while there, it backed our currency. The amount of currency was limited by the amount of gold the government possessed, taking the supply of money out of imperfect human hands. "We have gold because we cannot trust governments," Herbert Hoover said.

But Franklin Roosevelt, believing in the perfectibility of humans and the divine right of powerful government, forced all Americans to convert their gold coins, bullion and certificates into U.S. dollars. And Richard Nixon, who never encountered a bad Democratic idea he didn't want to make worse, severed the final link between gold and currency.

Which means we, and therefore the rest of the world, live with a fiat currency, backed by nothing and able to fluctuate wildly based solely on the government's willingness to print or borrow whatever it thinks is needed. So, we have an economy too complex to understand and a national debt over $30 trillion no one wants to think about.

Our money has value only because we think it does, and we think it does only because the government says it does and we have faith in the government's word. If we lose that faith, our money becomes worthless.

Not a lot of that "money" is actual currency that we can see and touch. I saw another interesting article recently. Of all the trillions of dollars in the world economy, only 8 percent is actual, physical, hold-in-our-hands cash.

This should not shock you. Just think about how many of your interactions actually involve hard currency as opposed to the ones involving adding and subtracting numbers on screens. If they were making that "Twilight Zone" episode today, the crooks would wake up with $50 million in $100 bills and not be able to give it away as birdcage lining.

I grew up poor, so I still put a lot of faith in cold, hard cash. I have a bank account and debit and credit cards that enable me a lot of economic freedom in my daily life. But if I don't have $100 in folding money on me, I feel like a vagrant on the road, lost and hoping some good Samaritan will offer me a hot meal.

I simply cannot fathom the trust people have in crypto currency, which never was anything but

numbers on a screen, backed not by a faith in government and our institutional history but wishful thinking that people could be counted on to keep doing what they promised to do.

It's that "let's pretend" attitude that enabled FTX to do stupid things like issuing its tokens to a hedge fund it owned, in essence balancing its books by loaning money to itself.

There is also a lot of "let's pretend" when it comes to the national debt. One of the reasons it has been allowed to get so big is that no one really thinks it is real money. It's just numbers on a screen that can be added to or subtracted from with no actual effect in the real world.

Some of that money is owed to foreign governments, of course, so that could have foreign policy implications down the road, to say the least. And if we don't pay attention, the government might even go the FTX route and just loan money to itself, by, for example using the Social Security trust fund to buy Treasury notes.

Nah. That would just be crazy. — *Nov. 21*

Principles Are Why We Vote

(Nov. 14) — There is an old joke whose origins are unknown but which you have probably heard in more than one movie or TV show. P.J. O'Rourke borrowed it for the title of one of his cynical books about politics:

Don't vote – it just encourages them.

But that really is our function as members of the electorate in a representative democracy, isn't it? We don't have a pure democracy in which the majority always gets its wishes. We elect people to act on our behalf.

But what does it actually mean for them to act on our behalf? If we can't expect them to give us just what we want, we can but hope that they will act on their consciences. We might end up liking it or not. As The Boss says, we lay down our money and we play our part.

But we have encouraged them.

Indiana has long been a deep-red state, and in this election cycle it went even redder, with even stronger supermajorities in both legislative chambers. We have encouraged our lawmakers to do whatever they want to with no meaningful input from anyone, friend or foe. Democratic stalwarts in Indiana have good reason to be discouraged.

But overwhelming numbers aren't necessary. Democrats have had a tie in the U.S. Senate for the last two years and a razor-thin majority in the House, but that was enough for them to pass an "anti-inflation" act that included far-reaching climate legislation with costly and potentially devastating implications. Republican stalwarts in America have good reason to be discouraged.

Statehouse Republicans have no reason to re-evaluate their actions; we have not encouraged them to. Neither do Democrats in Congress; by refusing to turn them out in that imaginary "red wave," we have encouraged them to keep doing what they have been doing.

Perhaps it is time for us to re-evaluate what we have been doing as voters. Whether we are discouraged or not, we are getting what we chose. It is all on us.

Despite what we might have gleaned from our civics lessons, we don't really vote as members of a republic, trusting our representatives to act in good faith. We vote as small-d democrats, wanting politicians to do our bidding. We might not be single-issue voters, but we vote on the things important to us, and the politicians encourage us to do so. They ask us – directly or through pollsters – to tell them what we want, so they can then tell us what we want to hear, on inflation, crime, abortion, the border.

But then they vote, not just on those issues but on all others as well, based on their world view, just like it says in the civics books. We have empowered them to do what they wish, whether they are voting their consciences or not.

Do not vote for the party, the trite warning goes, but for the person. But it's the party that rules, and the party has a philosophy.

If there is a great disconnect in this country, it is not the red-blue divide. It is that we pretend to live in a republic but behave as if we live in a

democracy. What causes the disconnect is that the politicians pander to our day-to-day concerns but govern based on their long-term views. They have a philosophy, and we don't.

But we don't know what those philosophies are, do we? Do we really know what Statehouse Republicans think, except for platitudes about "a state that works" and "respect for ordinary Hoosiers?" Do we really know what Democrats in Congress think except for platitudes about "fairness for all" and "respect for ordinary Americans?" Forget about limited government; none of them believe that anymore. It is just a question of what they would use government for.

We don't know because we haven't made them tell us. We are encouraging the wrong things in them.

There is another joke, inaccurately attributed to Mark Twain but sounding more like something Will Rogers might have said: If voting mattered, they wouldn't let us do it.

If we want our votes to matter more, perhaps we can start by grounding them in a core set of principles about what we want in a state and in a country. So, the next time we vote, the question should not be, "What will they do?" but "What do we believe?"

Then we can ask them the same question.

Change: (It's) a Mixed Bag

(Nov. 7) — Those who have tried to define conservatism's affinity for tradition have searched everywhere from the seminal writings of Edmund Burke (the future is built upon the past) to the musings of William F. Buckley Jr., who urged us to "stand athwart history yelling Stop!"

Me, I prefer a regional expression that had been around for awhile and then was popularized in the 1970s by Bert Lance, Jimmy Carter's hapless OMB director: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Change isn't inherently bad, but change that isn't really needed will probably create more harm than good.

Consider "Jeopardy!," the game show often mentioned here, which has upset this most ardent fan with a quite unnecessary upheaval.

No, not the decision to rotate Ken Jennings and Mayim Bialik as hosts, although it is hard to imagine any two worse emcees. Since Alex Trebek selfishly died on us, we can probably cut them some slack on that one.

It's the annual Tournament of Champions, the 2022 version of which is in its second and concluding week.

For years and years, the tournament has had a reliable format. In the first week, the 15 biggest winners of the season compete in groups of three for the quarter-final round. The five winners and four runners-up then go on to compete in groups of three for the semi-final round. The three winners of that round go on to the finals for a two-game showdown.

You see how elegantly simple it was? Each contestant in the final round had to overcome exactly the same hurdle to get there, by beating four other people in two separate rounds.

But this year, they have decided to "improve" the format.

They added six more contestants – who doesn't want to see even more trivia-worshipping geeks going head-to-head? But having 21 competitors screws up the math for a two-week format. So now the have six quarter-final rounds. And those six winners are joined in the semi-final round by the season's top three winners, who were given a bye for the quarter-finals.

That's right – they only have to beat two other contestants in one round instead of the four in two rounds the other six contestants had to endure. All "Jeopardy!" contestants are equal, but some "Jeopardy!" contestants are more equal than others. It's Nerd Privilege is what it is. When even the ultimate celebration of useless knowledge discards the level playing field, how can it be anything but an outrage?

But then, November is a good month for outrages. We've just gone through the yearly Daylight Saving Time insanity of celebrating the folly that humankind could improve on the sun in

creating a well-ordered universe. This is also the month for elections, in which we replace some self-serving politicians with other self-serving politicians. Later, we will celebrate Thanksgiving, which was probably originally held in October, but moved to November by President Lincoln for some reason and now is on the fourth Thursday of the month after President Roosevelt's aborted attempt to move it back a week to create a longer shopping season.

At least we have good, old reliable Veterans Day on the 11th day of the 11th month, right where it should be.

Of course, the knuckleheads in Washington tried to change that, too.

In 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, an attempt to turn four of our holiday festivities into three-day weekends, and it was decided that Veterans Day should be the fourth Monday in October. But states balked and kept celebrating it on Nov. 11, so Congress relented in 1975 and put the celebration back where it belonged.

Don't mess with history, right? Actually, the reason it is celebrated on the 11th day of the 11th month (and, technically, at the 11th hour) is because that was when the armistice was agreed to between Germany and the Allied Forces of World War I. In fact, it was called Armistice Day until 1954 when, with millions of Word War II and Korean War veterans milling around, it became obvious that the "war to end all wars" had not exactly lived up to its billing.

It is "Veterans" Day, without the apostrophe, by the way, as opposed to the apostrophed "Mother's" Day, "Father's" Day and "New Year's" Day. The idea is that the day belongs not just to one veteran or even all veterans but to the nation as a whole as it honors those who have served.

On the other hand, Anna Jarvis, who lobbied for Mother's Day, insisted on that punctuation because she wanted the singular possessive to highlight that the day should be dedicated to each family honoring its particular mother. Presumably, the creators of Father's Day held the same view. I have no idea in the world what that apostrophe is doing in New Year's Day – does it mean the day belongs to the new year instead of the people celebrating it?

Apostrophes have a way of showing up where they're not needed, as in when people think it's a way to pluralize words – "Don't fight like cat's and dog's," for example, or "I have more photo's to put in the album." Because it is so often seen on signs for fruits and vegetables — potato's $150 a pound, pick your own apple's here – it is often called the Grocer's Apostrophe.

I could have said "it's" back there instead of "it is." The best use for the humble apostrophe is to form a contraction, turning two words into one: I'm for I am, won't for will not, would've for would have and so on.

This can be carried too far, of course. "Ain't" started out as a contraction for "am not" but now can stand for is not, are not, has not, have not and, in some dialects, even do not, does not and did not. It makes no sense at all, so naturally there are calls for an overhaul.

I think I will withhold judgment on that until I have decided if I will be comfortable with the change.

Downtown — A City's Quandary

(Oct. 31) — Should we give up on "downtown" as a concept whose time has come and gone, admit that trying to keep it on life support is a futile effort?

I don't know the answer to that question. Perhaps there isn't one, at least one that is knowable before a lot of other people ponder it.

I ask it not as a penny-pinching conservative or a cynical pragmatist but as a country boy who has always regarded cities with awe and wonder.

I was 12 when we moved from rural Kentucky to Indiana, and to my eyes, Fort Wayne was a vibrant metropolis pulsating with vigor and energy. To this day, I sometimes have to catch my breath when I round a curve on the highway and see a city skyline, and it makes me feel the way pioneers must have when they rounded a bend in the river and saw mountains pointing to the sky.

I have this romantic notion of city centers as places where weary travelers find rest, merchants and the arts thrive and friendly neighbors gather to celebrate the communal solution to isolation and loneliness. But it's a hard notion to hold on to.

Only a few years after my family's arrival came the great downtown panic. Two malls – Glenbrook on the north side and Southtown on the other – were stealing all the customers, and inner-city retailers were suffering. Could we end up with a ghost town in the heart of the city?

Of course, the complaints had it backward. The customers didn't follow the shopping. It was the other way around. People fled to the suburbs, and the retail trade followed them.

It was just one of the upheavals downtowns suffered throughout our history as residents adapted their lifestyles to social stresses and advancing technology.

In the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, industries started moving to outlying areas where land was cheaper and taxes were lower; improving transportation helped them move goods, and the telephone allowed them to keep in touch with faraway customers.

The Great Depression hit at the end of a building boom in the cities, so many vacant properties were demolished in favor of revenue generators like parking lots. As the economy recovered, space was at a premium, so rents soared.

Automobiles and the highway system created a great exodus, and all the services and institutions people needed followed the flow, creating hubs of activity all across urban areas. Why go far when everything was near?

What highways and telephones started, the Internet and online shopping have accelerated. People work and shop from home, video chat with friends and have online visits with their physicians and accountants. The few things we still went out to do came to a halt during the pandemic, and a lot of them still haven't come back. Many won't.

It's been a long, long process of decentralization, and public officials keep trying to herd us back together into huddled masses, and I wonder, to what end? We keep dispersing, and they have spent billions of dollars in an endless effort to redefine and revitalize inner cities.

As I write this, Fort Wayne officials are getting ready to celebrate the opening of a mixed-use facility they have engineered out of an abandoned General Electric facility downtown. I have been in and around that area for all my Fort Wayne time, and for the life of me I can't see it succeeding. It's a depressed area that will still look like a depressed area, so how often are people going to be thrilled about going there to shop or have a bite to eat?

Even if it works, what will be the point? The money people spend there would have been spent elsewhere in town. There are only so many shopping and entertainment dollars to go around. Why invest so much time and energy to concentrate them in one area?

I do know that answer – because the romantic notion I have is shared by most other people. We all see downtown as a symbol of a successful city – if it is vibrant and exciting, the city is working. If your city has a local TV newscast, what does the station use as a background photo for its closing credits? The downtown skyline. If that symbol disappears, what will replace it?

An even better question might be: Does congregating satisfy a deep human yearning, or did we congregate only because we needed to?

Now that the need has gone, will decentralization become the norm? If we need central gathering places, and downtowns don't work, where will we go? Will the spaces even be physical? Can we still thrive as an increasingly virtual society?

I can't see around the next bend. It won't be a mountain or a skyscraper, but I hope it is something more than a shape in the digital mist.

Déjà Vu or a Full Brain?

(Oct. 24) — Most of you have undoubtedly experienced déjà vu, that eerie sense that something you have never encountered before is nonetheless somehow familiar.

Most of you have undoubtedly experienced déjà vu, that eerie sense that something you have never encountered before is nonetheless somehow familiar.

My apologies. I know that was just a cheap joke, but I couldn't resist.

Humor provides a needed escape valve when we are overwhelmed with the dreary "Groundhog Day" feeling of living through the same events again and again, as happens every election campaign season. Isn't that Republican candidate saying the same thing another Republican said four years ago, and isn't that Democratic talking point awfully familiar?

Different politicians with fresher faces, but saying the same old things about the same old issues. It's déjà vu, to paraphrase Yogi Berra, over and over.

It can generate a spooky mind set, but with an annoying, shrug-it-off kind of low energy that quickly dissipates.

Not so jamais vu, the opposite of déjà vu, which means "never seen" instead of "already seen." It's that sense of unfamiliarity with something that we should know very well.

I was going to work one very ordinary day several years ago when I suddenly didn't recognize the area I was driving through and had no idea why I was there. My confusion was fleeting, but for just that moment I was absolutely terrified. Was this the first sign of dementia?

It gave me a new appreciation of what my Aunt Edna had been going through in her bout with Alzheimer's. There was one particular family gathering when people were talking casually and making jokes. She laughed at every one, but just a beat behind everybody else, pretending she could follow what was going on but not quite pulling it off. How often every day was she terrified as she felt her mind slipping away a little piece at a time?

Happily for me, that brief lapse of cognitive ability was a one-time thing and not a preview of coming subtractions.

That does not mean, however, that I am always firing on full synaptic cylinders.

I have reached the age when my brain is constantly under siege by presque vu, the weird cousin of déjà vu and jamais vu, and which means "almost seen." That's when you know something but you can't quite call it up at the moment. You know, it's on the tip of your tongue but will go no further.

Some people call them "senior moments," "brain freezes" or, more vulgarly, "brain f — s" (imagine explosive bodily sound here).

I call them Jeopardy Chokes.

There was one episode of "Jeopardy!" when the final correct response was, "Who is Sidney Poitier?" I knew it, could see his face and even have named you some of his top movies. But I could not think of the man's name. On another occasion, the proper response was, "Who is Stevie Nicks?" Again, I could have told you she was in Fleetwood Mac, even sung the first lines of some of her solo hits, but could not say her name if my life depended on it.

Here's what I think happens.

Your brain can hold only so much stuff. When you reach a certain age, it's full, and for every new thing you learn you have to get rid of something that's already there. It's that simple. Go ahead and tell me your birthday, but I'll probably forget your name in the process.

You'd think this would be self-regulating, with a boost from the aforementioned déjà vu. You hear candidate Flopsy say something stupid, and it crowds out the fact that you heard the same stupid thing from candidates Mopsy and Cottontail. But that's not the way it works. You hear Gov. Beavis make the same empty promise made by Gov. Butthead two administrations ago, and it makes you forget the four-digit ATM PIN you've been using for 20 years.

Thank goodness for Google. Because I know how to look stuff up, I don't actually have to remember anything new and risk losing some of

the mental flotsam and jetsam already circling around in there.

How lucky the younger generations are. They came of age at a time when they could find anything online and have been able to go through their whole lives without actually knowing a single thing.

There's probably a vu for that, but I really don't have room for it.

Yes, Politics Is a Joke

(Oct. 17) — In preparation for the upcoming general election, how about an awful political joke?

What's the definition of a presidential pork sandwich?

Answer: a slab of Benjamin Harrison between two slices of Grover Cleveland.

OK, you were warned it was awful. But, consider a little background, which has the added benefit of explaining Indiana's contribution to the election integrity most voters take for granted today.

Grover Cleveland won the presidential election of 1884 by the slimmest of margins, despite opposition reports that he had dodged the draft and fathered a child out of wedlock.

But his policies – which today we might call "conservative" though he was a proud Democrat – were popular with voters, who were especially impressed with his integrity and reform proposals, and he seemed destined to win a second term.

So, supporters of Hoosier Republican candidate Benjamin Harrison, whose many pork barrel projects gave us the first $1 billion federal budget, did the only sensible, logical thing they could in 1888 – they set out to steal the election. And by most historical accounts, they probably did.

It was going to be a close call in the electoral college where it counted, so they set out to make sure they won Cleveland's home state of New York and, just for good measure, Harrison's Indiana. Republicans took New York by appealing to protectionists, who liked the high tariffs supported by Harrison.

Here in Indiana, they used a different tactic.

For most of U.S. history until then, elections had been raucous affairs, with voting very much a public event, everyone knowing exactly who voted for whom. Sometimes, the vote as crude as having all the men for one candidate moving to one side of the room and all the ones for the other candidate moving to the other side.

By 1888, there were printed ballots, but ones easily manipulated by politicians such as those backing Harrison. Here in the Hoosier state, the scales were tipped by the "blocks of five" scheme devised by W.W. Dudley, a former U.S. marshal and treasurer of the Republican National Committee. In those days, the parties in each ward of each state printed their own distinctive ballots, which made secret voting all but impossible and fraud easy to commit.

In an incredibly indiscreet memo to his party, according to Smithsonian magazine, he instructed his "floaters" (those in charge of buying votes) to divide into blocks of five "and put a trusted man with necessary funds in charge."

Though Cleveland won the popular vote, Harrison took the electoral vote 233-168. If Cleveland had taken his home state, he would have won the presidency. Losing Indiana didn't mean much for Cleveland in the long run, but there were far-reaching consequences.

Nationwide outrage at the vote selling led to calls for reform and the adoption of the Australian style of secret balloting. In a single year, 1889, according to Smithsonian, nine states adopted the Australian method, including Indiana. By the 1892 election, citizens in 38 states voted by secret ballot, and Cleveland won his second term convincingly.

By now, all you lovers and haters of Donald Trump (there seem to be few Americans in between) are wondering if history will repeat itself.

Trump certainly wants to do what Martin Van Buren, Millard Fillmore, Ulysses S. Grant and

Theodore Roosevelt attempted but only Cleveland accomplished, winning another term while out of office.

On the plus side for Trump fans is the fact that Joe Biden's presidency certainly equals Harrison's in its awfulness. On the other hand, Cleveland's second term was so awful it almost destroyed the Democratic Party and led to longtime Republican ascendancy.

Awful, all the way around. Welcome to politics. There is no punchline to that joke.

Thoughts on a Mayor's Arrest

(Oct. 9) — Here's how it happens.

You have a drink with your meal at a favorite restaurant, then drive home with no problem.

Then, sometime later, you're at another restaurant, and you think, well, one drink was no problem. What can be wrong with two drinks?

And if you can drive safely with two drinks, you reason another time at another restaurant, why can't you handle three?

So it goes, on and on, until one rainy Friday night when you hit a tree on the way home from the Rib Room and get arrested for driving drunk – an offense that many still call a DUI (driving under the influence), though in Indiana it's officially called an OWI (operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated).

And the clearest thing you remember from the emergency room, where they are working on your dislocated hip, is a police officer leaning over you and saying quietly, "Don't worry, sir, it's just a misdemeanor."

That's the way it happened to me, at least.

I have no idea if that's even close to how it happened for Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry, who was booked into the Allen County Jail for OWI early this morning following an accident. But I'm willing to bet he's feeling many of the same things I was more than 20 years ago.

The first is a selfish burst of righteous indignation that simply because of who he is he is all over the news for something that wouldn't even rate a mention for the average person. I was a newspaper editor at the time of my citation, and my bosses did not want to be accused of covering anything up, so my charges were front-page news. For at least a couple of days, I was the hottest news story in town, and how many people can say that? I wouldn't be surprised if the mayor goes to bed every night for a week roundly cursing the media.

Underneath that is a sense of embarrassment bordering on shame about how one's good name might be tarnished by the lapse in judgment, and a little trepidation about how it might affect the future. In my case, I feared that I'd be fired, and I'm forever grateful I wasn't. In Mayor Henry's case, he will worry about how his re-election chances will be affected. Not much, I suspect, but he can't help but wonder.

There is, at some point, even a sense of relief that it wasn't worse. After my publicity, I lost count of how many people tried to cheer me up with some version of, "There but for the grace of God . . ." In other words, they had done the same thing but had never been caught. But I said my own version of that to myself, "Thank God I wasn't crippled and didn't kill anyone."

But the strongest emotion of all is simply shock that such a thing could have happened. How do respectable, responsible people get themselves in such a pickle?

By lying to themselves

You tell yourself you don't have a problem even if you drink every night, because, after all, you always get up the next morning and go to work. You tell yourself you don't drink too much even when there are nights you can't totally remember. You tell yourself you aren't a drunk driver, no matter how many drinks you have how many times before you get behind the wheel.

According to FBI statistics, the average person who gets a first OWI has committed the offense 80 times before being cited. The first time I read that, I scoffed, but now I believe it. One drink here one night, two drinks there the next. It adds up.

If you don't get caught, you will probably keep doing it as long as there are no consequences,

until there are consequences, of one kind or another. If you do get caught, you have a choice, to own it or not, to learn from it or not.

I took it as a wake-up call, but not immediately, I regret to say. I stubbornly thought I could keep drinking, but only in moderation. But every time, one drink became two, which became three, the same pattern repeated over and over. Moderation is difficult when you take that first drink and like it so much you don't want to stop. I finally realized that the only solution for me was to not drink at all.

I'm not here to lecture the mayor, to presume I know whether he has a drinking problem or not or what he should do about it. He has publicly apologized for his actions, praised Fort Wayne police for their professionalism and said he will accept whatever punishment is deemed appropriate. It sounds like he's owning the experience and willing to learn from it. It was, in a word, classy.

And I'm not preaching "don't drink" to anyone. It's your life, you lead it.

But I will say – to the mayor and to anyone else who might pay the slightest bit of attention – don't ever have another drink for the rest of your life unless you are where you need to be for the night and don't have to get behind the wheel. There might not be "for the grace of God" for you or someone else.

Gambling Is a Fickle Game

(Oct. 3) — Suppose I told you I spend a lot of time putting out bids in hopes of winning a contract.

You might think I was a construction engineer, planning to cash in on the hefty contribution I made to the mayor's re-election campaign. If you have a darker turn of mind, you might suspect that I moonlight as a hit man for the mob.

But, no, I'm just an old man who plays bridge, whiling away Wednesday afternoons with other wheezy codgers who hide grins over secret hoards of trump cards and harrumph morosely at yet one more piece of evidence that this sad, old world is nowhere near the way it used to be, by God.

Oh, once I was a rebel. An outlaw. A renegade who disdained societal norms, a heretic malcontent who thumbed his nose at authority.

I played poker.

Oh, not often. Just now and again in the college cafeteria, in Army barracks, with co-workers in somebody's family room. And not for much. We called them nickel-dime-quarter games (what inflation even way back then required us to rename "penny-ante games"). There was usually a three-raise limit, table stakes often topped out at $20, and you might end up the evening winning or losing enough for lunch the next day.

Still, we were skirting the edges of acceptable behavior and flirting with disaster by flouting the law. Good thing I quit before I got caught.

Because we all know what Indiana legislators think about gambling.

They loathe it with every fiber of their being, detesting the way it preys on human weakness, tempts the desperate poor with hopeless dreams of wealth, tears down the very moral foundations of a decent society.

Or so a handful of them always harrumph morosely, right before they vote with the majority to, you know, once again increase the state's involvement with organized gambling.

According to figures released in June, Indiana collected $689 million in gambling tax revenues in the 2021-22 fiscal year. The state's casinos contributed their share, but a lot of the revenue came from the relatively new sports-betting operations, which tempted Hoosiers to make more than $4.43 billion in wagers for the fiscal year. Indiana own Hoosier lottery will contribute $334 million to state coffers this year. If the state also allows online casino gambling, studies show it could add another S469 million a year.

Billions and billions gambled by Hoosiers, and the numbers will just continue to grow.

Still, lines must be drawn.

Poker is a card game, which is defined by the state as a "game of chance," which means it is

illegal unless sanctioned by the state. If you play in one of those $20 limit, family room games, you could be found guilty of a Class B misdemeanor, punishable by up to a $1,000 fine and 180 days in jail. If you host the game and take a small percentage of, say, every fifth pot as reimbursement for the refreshments you provided, it could be a Class D felony. But let's not go there.

Oh, and those football and basketball pools you bet on in the office? Also illegal. Ditto the bingo game your church runs, unless it is approved by the state, a permit is secured, a fee is paid and the rules are strictly obeyed (no prize over $1,000). Penalties can be levied at $5,000 per violation.

It seems unlikely that Indiana prosecutors would go after such piddly little crimes, and we can imagine they would be laughed out of court if they did. But the point is that they could if they wanted to. The law is there, in direct contradiction to how the state actually runs these days, and providing direct evidence of the moral high ground lawmakers have abandoned.

The law is an ass.

Charles Dickens wasn't the first author to pen that, but his use of it in Oliver Twist made it famous, in a lament by a man incensed by the fact he could be charged for a crime his wife committed, and being told that he was even the more guilty party because "the law supposes your wife acts under your direction."

At least lawmakers can be asses, especially when they forfeit the right to lecture us on right and wrong.

Indiana: Home of Good, Eclectic Music

(Sept. 26) — When I was a newbie reporter at the Wabash Plain Dealer, I started hearing about a young woman named Brenda Webb, just a few years out of high school and beginning to make a name for herself as a country singer. Since she was the younger sister of superstar Loretta Lynn, it was the consensus that Brenda just might make it.

And so she did. She grew up to become Crystal Gayle, who had more than a few No. 1 country hits.

Later, after I had moved on to the Michigan City News-Dispatch, I began a series of annual pilgrimages to Bill Monroe's bluegrass festival in Bean Blossom, just outside Nashville in Brown County. Like Gayle, a Kentucky transplant, Monroe had lived in Northwest Indiana while perfecting the new form of music called bluegrass.

How many other states can boast of being home to the creator of a whole new genre of music?

In Wabash, I still listened to LPs, along with AM radio my first source of music. My collection grew as my tastes changed.

For example, in my last days in the Army, my crowd (a disreputable bunch at Fort Hood, Texas) listened to a lot Led Zeppelin, Jefferson Airplane and Janis Joplin. Out of the Army and back in Fort Wayne, I ran with a gentler crowd (i.e., including women), so I heard a lot of James Taylor, Carole King and Cat Stevens.

By the time I got to Wabash, I had discovered cassettes, which made hearing a lot of diverse music while driving one of life's joys – the lack of inventive album covers to turn into wall coverings being a major drawback. My musical tastes expanded to include the big band and jazz, a smattering of salsa, a little country (thank you, Brenda).

At some point in Michigan City, I discovered CDs and I listened to, well, practically all of it. I mostly avoided rap (not musical enough), and a little bit of opera went a long way (much too musical), but I liked some of everything in between. You might find me listening to Muddy Waters' great "Hard Again" blues album one day, Dvorak's "New World Symphony" the next.

These days, I praise the virtues of Alexa, the voice of Amazon's Echo smart speakers. If you are also an Amazon Prime member, you have access to a couple of million songs, and Alexa can call up whatever music you're in the mood for.

You can say, "Alexa, play the hits of (pick a year)," and suddenly you will be transported back

to high school. You can ask her to shuffle Leonard Cohen songs or even to play a Leonard Cohen station, which will deliver Cohen and also artists like him. You can ask her to play a favorite song, such as Glenn Campbell's heartbreaking "I'm Not Gonna Miss Her," then say, "Alexa, play more like this." The other day, I was thumbing through a book of beat poems and asked Alexa to play a bebop station for my mood music.

Through Alexa, I have lately been happily discovering the range of music from Indiana.

When most people think of musicians from this state, the list probably begins with Michael Jackson and ends with John Mellencamp. But there are so many more.

Wes Montgomery, one of the most influential guitarists of his time, whose improvisational licks influenced everybody from Jimi Hendrix to Pete Townsend. He died much too soon, at 45 of a heart attack in 1968.

Hoagy Carmichael, whose songs such as 'Stardust," "Georgia on My Mind" and "Heart and Soul" have become classic standards and whose tunes are featured in so many of those old black and white movies.

Cole Porter, whose witty lyrics reinvented the American songbook for a modern era, often overlooked as a composer of equally sophisticated melodies.

Axl Rose of Guns N' Roses, Mick Mars of Motley Crue and David Lee Roth of Van Halen, who put so much energy into rock that we almost didn't realize it was a dying form.

Freddie Hubbard, an extraordinary jazz trumpeter; J.J. Johnson, groundbreaking trombone player; Joshua Bell, a child prodigy on violin who made his Carnegie Hall debut at just 17.

And on and on.

Indiana may not have the distinction of representing a specific genre, as Nashville does for country or Mississippi and Chicago do for blues or New Orleans does for Cajun and zydeco. But it has contributed much to this country's musical landscape and helped crowd out the noise of the universe with much more structured and pleasing sounds.

Maybe not rap, maybe not opera, but a little bit of everything in between. However you choose to listen to it,

It's Benton 'No,' Kinsey 'Yes'

(Sept. 19) — Go away, Thomas Benton. We don't want your kind around here. Welcome, Alfred Kinsey. You are one of us.

So it goes in the swamp of 21st century culture. Or perhaps we are just witnessing the moral vacuum in one prestigious university.

Thomas Hart Benton was a renowned painter, along with Grant Wood a member of the Regionalist school of American art, which advocated forays into areas considered cultural wastelands such as the South and Midwest.

He was also very much a political progressive and throughout his life strongly denounced racism, says Henry Adams, who has written four books about Benton. One of the first articles Benton published was a 1924 essay containing a vigorous condemnation of the KKK.

The Klan at that time was an equal opportunity hate dispenser, advocating the denial of rights to African Americans, Catholics, Jews and immigrants with uniform fervor. It was also huge in Indiana. It had more than 250,000 members here – about a third of all Hoosier white men – including the governor and more than half of the state legislature.

Public opinion finally turned against the KKK after an aggressive investigative series by the Indianapolis Times, reporting that resulted in the group's leader, D.C. Stephenson, being convicted of the rape and murder of a young schoolteacher.

Stephenson's testimony ending up bringing down both the governor of the state and the mayor of Indianapolis, both of whom had forged close ties with the Klan, and the Times won the 1928 Pulitzer for investigative reporting.

When state leaders a few years later decided to memorialize that dark chapter of Indiana history,

they turned to Benton. He responded with an epic series of murals that were installed in 1941 in the auditorium at Indiana University Bloomington.

One of the panels shows a white nurse treating both black and white children. In the foreground are a reporter, photographer and printer, representing the power of the press in bringing racial injustice to light. Lurking in the background, behind the beds, are sinister figures of some Klan members.

You'd think it would be art celebrated by today's social justice warriors. It shows that racism can be defeated by decent behavior, but that evil still stands ready to spring, and that full awareness can make all the difference.

You would be wrong. In 2017, a group of IU students circulated petitions and organized protests seeking removal of the mural. "It is past time that Indiana University take a stand and denounce hate and intolerance in Indiana," one of the petitions said.

These students were either too ignorant to realize that the mural was taking just that stand, or so fragile that the mention of any unpleasantness, even as a byproduct of denouncing it, was too much for their delicate sensibilities. Whichever it was, it provided an opportunity for the university to introduce these young minds to a little critical thinking.

But the university chose a different path. At least it did not remove the murals or, even worse, destroy them (so some at IU bragged), but it did stop using the building for classes and closed it to public traffic, thus sparing students the trauma of having to see the awful artwork every day.

So much for academic and intellectual courage.

Alfred Charles Kinsey was an Indiana University professor and founder of what became the famed Kinsey Institute that studies human sexuality. To say his books "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male" (1948) and "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female" (1953) were influential vastly understates the case. Today's liberated sexual ethos, in which almost everything is tolerated and hardly anything condemned, can be traced back to Kinsey's work in general and those two books in particular.

He was also a libertine with omnivorous and gargantuan sexual appetites. He had sex with numerous men and women; he and his wife had swapping parties; he filmed sexual escapades in his attic. His opinion was that we start seeing sexual activity as common or less common rather than right or wrong and that ignorance, superstition and repressive morality keep people sexually unfulfilled.

He had this attitude not just about adults, being meticulous in documenting the "pre-adolescent experiences" in orgasm" for children between the ages of 2 months and 15 years. He claimed the research came from interviewing several adult males who recorded their experiences with younger boys, but it turns out it all came from one man, a serial child molester whom Kinsey never reported, let alone judged.

He had other well-documented flaws in methodology, which led him, for example, to grossly overestimate that 10 percent of the population is homosexual and to assert that children's sexual experiences could be positive if only society did not so condemn it.

It might be considered too judgmental these days to call Kinsey a freak or a degenerate. But surely we can admit that he was not a dispassionate researcher, merely compiling facts and following them to whatever conclusion was warranted. He had an agenda. He sought confirmation of his own sexual adventurousness and, lo and behold, found what he was looking for. At the very least, we should not hold him up as a paragon of the objective, scientific method.

But Indiana University does not see it that way. It has just unveiled a new statue of the man. The current director of the Kinsey Institute praises Kinsey's "extraordinary legacy" of "endless scientific curiosity," and IU's president boasts that the institute is "a trusted source around the world" for "information on critical issues in human sexuality."

So much for academic and intellectual enlightenment.

Members of the statue demolition squad have gone from Confederate generals to figures as diverse as George Washington and Columbus, Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, demonstrating the wretchedly excessive danger of judging history through the lens of today's debates.

But they got one thing right. Whom we choose to ignore and whom we choose to commemorate says a lot about us.

The Military Trust Gap

(Sept. 12) — After a year and a half of trying to balance full-time college with full-time work, I had had enough and quit Indiana-Purdue University Fort Wayne.

That made me eligible for the military draft, a true government-induced hardship, all you college-loan whiners. But I had a plan to thwart the draft board.

"You cannot have two years of my life," I thought triumphantly as I headed for the recruiting office. "I will enlist for three years."

Not too bright.

Do you see what I just did there? It's called humble bragging, the art of seeming to make a self-deprecating remark while in reality extolling one's own virtue.

It's a little trick I learned in the Army during those three years as I tried to juggle two equally compelling needs.

In school, I had shared the desire of all students to fit in with the group, which meant not straying too far from the norms of my peers. We all tended to dress alike, sound alike, behave alike. But it was a collegial collectivism, and individual eccentricities were tolerated, even celebrated, up to a point.

In the Army, I was suddenly confronted with rigidly enforced conformity to the group, no deviation allowed. It is central to the military culture, after all, that the team and the mission always come before personal needs and wants. The self is broken down and reassembled as one part of a coherent unit that obeys all orders immediately and without question.

Which makes individual eccentricities difficult to maintain and impossible to exhibit.

So, we hardy band of warriors found a way follow the creed, but in a passive-aggressive way.

Never volunteer for anything. Look busy while doing absolutely nothing (more art than science). Always take the opportunity to complain among ourselves about the stupidity of the latest orders and the lack of intelligence of those giving them. Deliberately violate the dress code in such an obvious way that two or three other violations will be overlooked.

Of course, our officers knew all this and undoubtedly even fostered our quiet rebellions as a way to maintain unit cohesion. Nothing fosters camaraderie – the urge to always do your best for your fellow soldiers and have their backs as you know they will have theirs – as sharing a common misery.

Maintaining that delicate balance between autonomy and interdependence is the best thing I learned in the Army, because getting the mix right is the only way to find true loyalty, the kind that admits to a shared purpose but also a respect for the individual's worth.

It's the kind of loyalty the citizens of a country should have, and it strikes me that America might be the toughest country in the world in which to find the right mix. We are the ones who project a collective vision to the world of a free and forward-looking people but insist on the fundamental rights of each individual. We have always threaded our way between selfishness and selflessness, not entirely at ease with either.

I wonder where people absorb that lesson today, if indeed many do.

Certainly not as many learn it in the military as they used to.

A local TV station just did a story on the Army's Indiana recruitment woes. There are apparently about 120,000 individuals between the ages of 17 and 24 eligible for enlistment in the Fort Wayne area. Last year, only about 170 went

into the Army. And it looks as if it will be lucky to enlist 120 this year.

All military branches are struggling with recruitment goals, but the Army most of all. With just a few weeks left in the fiscal year, it has reached only about 52 percent of its goal and will likely end up as many as 15,000 recruits short.

Some observers point to quality of the talent pool as the main problem. The Army chief of staff has testified before Congress that only 23 percent of age-appropriate candidates are eligible to serve, the rest failing to qualify because of obesity, drug use or criminal records. Of those eligible, only 9 percent have any interest in the military at all, a majority saying they fear emotional, psychological or physical problems if they join.

Some point to the armed forces themselves as the problem. The small percentage of those most inclined to serve are moved by the sort of traditional values associated with soldiering. How many really want to go into a woke military that preaches critical race theory and lectures recruits on the proper use of pronouns for the transgendered?

Recruiters are getting desperate. Signup bonuses of up to $50,000 are being offered to tempt those eager to join the civilian job force. The rule against visible tattoos is being lifted. The idea of waiving the requirement for a high school diploma is being toyed with. The Army even has a pilot program to offer remedial camps to tackle recruits' physical problems and educational deficiencies before they even get to basic training, sort of a military pre-k.

I wish them well, I really do, but I have my doubts. Who will convince these young people that the military is worth considering? Among the target age range for recruits, only 13 percent have a parent who served in the military, down from 40 percent in 1995. Fifty years ago, more than 70 percent of members of Congress had served in the military, but now it's down to about 17 to 18 percent, according to former Lt. Col. Alan West. And we've long since stopped expecting our presidents to have served.

We have always undervalued the military in between armed conflicts, and that is probably natural – a suspicion of a large standing army was part of our founding. But today we have a dangerous indifference to the military bordering on contempt.

I don't know if anyone can unlock the secret to making the military more desirable or trusted or reigniting the young's interest in the military. But certainly it is dangerous for there to be such a wide gulf between those who live under the protection of the Constitution and those who pledge to defend it.

In my humble opinion.

The Lesson of the Bowser Pump

(Sept. 5) — Two pictures of Indiana.

The first picture, from the past.

Sylvanus Freelove Bowser was born in 1854 just north of Fort Wayne and, except for a short stay in Kansas, lived in that city for his whole life.

According to a 1963 issue of Old Fort News, Bowser was one of 13 children and had barely a year of formal schooling, his manual labor being needed to help support the family. He married in 1876, fell into debt and lost his house before suffering a nervous breakdown. Unable to cope with work for more than three or four days at a time, he became a traveling salesman.

Then, one day in 1885, he drew a day's supply of water for his wife before heading off on his sales route. There must be a better way, he thought, than to haul up water in a bucket from a deep well. So, he came up with a pump that dispensed water through a flexible hose from a 50-gallon storage tank housed in a wooden box.

Bowser had a sudden insight – could this pump also handle kerosene, which grocery stores sold from wooden tanks in basement corners? So, he went out and sold the idea to his customers and ended up with five orders for a product that did not yet exist.

Three months later, Bowser, his brother and his nephew completed the first pump, which was

delivered to Jake Gumpper, a Fort Wayne grocer from whom the broke Bowser needed credit for groceries. The self-contained unit could dispense a precisely measured amount of kerosene easily and safely, and the places where they were located became known as filling stations.

And in the next few years, the pumps began dispensing gasoline as the nation's long romance with automobiles took hold. In the early days, motorists had to search far and wide for the fuel. Some cars even had compartments for storing cans of the stuff so that drivers would not be stranded on the road somewhere.

Bowser made modifications to the pump so it could be placed outside instead of indoors, and filling stations became gas stations, which became service stations, which became the convenience stores we see today every few miles on every interstate in the country.

He was the right man with the right idea in the right time and place. Before the Great Depression wiped him out, the barely educated traveling salesman had amassed a fortune of $4 million, about $82 million in today's money.

The second picture, from the present.

The federal infrastructure law from last year dedicated $7.5 billion – $5 billion for the states – over the next five years to develop a nationwide network of 500,000 high-volume, rapid charging stations for electric vehicles.

Indiana gets $100 million of that, and will face the same difficulties as other states in getting in tune with the plan.

For example, from Route 50, a site dedicated to state and local governments: "Currently, many vehicles use different connections to attach to chargers. Plus, charging companies have used proprietary payment methods, rather than the pay-at-the-pump system drivers of gasoline-powered vehicles are used to. Charging stations sometimes even use different units when setting prices, with some using kilowatt-hours like an electric meter on a house and others to relying on minutes the vehicle is hooked up to the charger."

Other questions abound. How will private investment be incentivized? The state won't want to run the charging stations, and it will cost about $100,000 to install one. How will electric vehicles be taxed to make up for the lost gas tax revenues as internal combustion engines are replaced? Will the cost of an electric vehicle come down so they are affordable to the average consumer without a federal subsidy?

Indiana also has a problem not faced by every state. Its preliminary plan calls for most Hoosier motorists to be no more than 35 miles from a charging station and rural residents no more than 50 miles. Furthermore, 60 percent of the stations would be in disadvantaged or rural areas. But that's not good enough.

"Few of those communities are racially or ethnically diverse," complains one of the groups challenging the plan for being too beneficial for white communities.

The government says there will be 27 million electric vehicles on the road by 2030. Clearly, we are looking at one of the most ambitious programs in history that will take a coordinated, efficient and sustained effort by private business and all levels of government. The federal share alone is said to be at least twice what is already dedicated.

Currently, electric vehicles account for about 5 percent of the market. In Indiana, it is less than 1 percent.

That's it, two pictures of Indiana.

I will leave it for you to decide what they mean.

College Debt, Exacerbated

(Aug. 29) — Having an educated populace has always been seen as a necessary component of our constitutional republic. Citizens need more than the basic knowledge to earn a living; they also need to understand their civic rights and obligations as members of a self-governing community.

A free, public education has therefore been one of the benefits we expect from government, at least up to a point. In my lifetime, that has been to the high school level. I presume most of you who made it out of 12th grade did so without

accumulating massive debt or forcing your parents to both take third jobs.

It has been argued in recent years that, because of the growing demands of technology and the increasing complexity of a new world order, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient in the modern workforce. If that is so, then shouldn't government be involved to some degree?

Both points – the need for college and the advisability of government involvement – are debatable, of course. But, for the sake of argument, let's assume they are true.

How should the government proceed?

There are two obvious choices.

The first would be to subsidize college, the way we have previously subsidized education at the lower levels, through a combination of local, state and federal funding mechanisms.

Tuition would be low enough to draw most students who wanted to go. The minimal (relatively) tax burden would be offset by graduates entering the workforce and growing the economy. All options for high school graduates – college, military, trade school, immediate entry to employment – would be equally available People would have the enormous freedom of choice this nation is so proud of and could determine the paths that best suited them.

Easy, effective, eminently defensible.

Then there is option 2.

Come up with a scheme in which the federal government creates a quasi-public agency to funnel money to banks with which to make student loans, and on which they can make a profit. Colleges will have a steady and growing stream of new students, and a cut of the profits. Naturally, this will enable them to increase their tuition costs.

College suddenly goes from a public good to a profit-making enterprise, and a never-ending spiral begins. Tuition increases, which requires students to borrow more money, which pushes tuition up, which . . .

Before long, students nationwide have accumulated a breathtaking $1.75 trillion in debt. Not only do graduates have crushing burdens that will haunt them for most if not all of their working lives, the promised good-paying jobs after graduation seem increasingly elusive.

And along comes a president who conceives the brilliant idea to forgive $10,000 in debt for some students, and $20,00 for others, a "solution" that does an amazing job of making just about everyone mad.

It angers:

Students who don't qualify for the forgiveness or for whom it won't be enough (the average student loan debt in Indiana, for example, is $30,000). `

Students who have already made enormous sacrifices to pay off their loans.

Students who never went to college.

Americans who have other debts, such as mortgages, they are struggling to pay off without government help.

Working-class citizens who know they will be paying the taxes to bail out their better-educated neighbors.

Liberals who think the forgiveness doesn't nearly go far enough.

Conservatives who argue that it is foolish to "spend" $300 billion to $1 trillion more of nonexistent government money over 10 years (depending on who is estimating) when the national debt is already $30 trillion, just adding to the inflation already threatening American households.

Even those who will benefit the most from the forgiveness will likely end up resenting the whole thing – years of debt-induced anxiety followed by years of envy from those who see them as more privileged.

The most frustrating part of the whole plan, which should anger everyone else, is that it exacerbates the problem it claims to solve. Debt forgiveness, even at this level, will just encourage colleges to again increase tuition, which will . . . well, you get the point. It is akin to solving the medical cost crisis with more government intervention, when government intervention that

masked the cost of medicine to consumers helped create the problem in the first place.

So, government again, when it sees a problem, discards the obviously best solution and makes the worst possible choice.

I don't know which is more terrifying – the thought that the people we send to Washington don't know what they are doing, or the possibility that they do. ♦

Mark Franke

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Student Loan Redux

The student loan crisis is back in the news and will get much more attention now that the election is past.

The very real questions about the unsupportable rise in the cost of college, the amount of borrowing which occurs and the abysmally low graduation rates are still unanswered. Maybe they will get answered someday, right after Social Security is made solvent and Middle East peace occurs. Right.

Meanwhile there is still $1.7 trillion outstanding in loan balances, most of which are non-performing in a traditional banker sense due to a federal decision to suspend payments during Covid. This is euphemistically called a "payment pause." And Covid must still be here since payment obligations remain in abeyance, the political rationale being to blame the Supreme Court.

And maybe never for about 43,000,000 borrowers who are in line for $10,000-20,000 in forgiveness courtesy of Uncle Sugar, or should I say Uncle Joe. The pre-election announcement of this forgiveness was curious as to timing, but then we are a polity that expects the government to provide a full suite of "free" benefits so one really should not blame politicians for doing exactly as we demand.

Projections of the real cost of this forgiveness run from $300 billion to $500 billion and perhaps higher. Despite the voodoo economics emanating from our current financial masters in Washington, it is real money that must come from somewhere. I suspect the dollar printing press is going to overheat.

If you think I am being uncharitable in my characterization of federal accounting practices, consider this. When the Obama administration determined to federalize student loan originations in 2010, we were assured that this would result in a $114 profit over the next 25 years. Why would they think this? Previous to the federal usurpation of student lending, commercial banks were making the loans and, no surprise here, making profits on that business line.

So the government federalized a profitable program with visions of sugarplum profits dancing in its head. Instead, the Government Accounting Office found that the program generated a loss of $197 billion. That's a mere $311 billion dollar mistake. Even Everett Dirksen of "a billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking real money" fame would see that as significant.

This should be an object lesson for any proposal to have the federal government do what can be or is being done in the private sector. Don't count on the lesson being learned.

The economics of this is horrendous, even before the government determined to "pause" collection activities. But this is more of an ethical issue than an accounting one. It's not just about the Benjamins.

The cardinal rule of government programs is to pick winners and losers. They can't give all these bennies to everyone so some get a check and the rest are handed the bill. Think about all those who won't receive this benefit: those who paid off their loans; those who attended less expensive colleges to avoid borrowing; and those who never attended college. Suffice it to say that they are not happy campers.

I have the good fortune of retaining connection in retirement to my former profession. I began my career in higher education administration in student financial aid, during an era when student loans were private arrangements between a bank and a student. Eventually the federal government expanded the program to cover all students and provided the necessary incentives for banks to lend to young people with no credit history. That's

a story for another day but it worked, at least in terms of federal policy to make college appear affordable to all who wished to pursue post-high school degrees.

Last week I attended the monthly meeting of financial aid professionals from colleges in northeast Indiana. Much of the discussion centered on the administrative nightmare they live through daily as federal "guidance" on this is typically byzantine. Disruption, now as back in my financial aid days, is the watchword for federal program administration.

I asked the group about the ethical aspects of the forgiveness offer. They found it abhorrent. Their reasons were the same as I hear everywhere. The descriptors I've heard run from political pandering to poor policy to outrageously unfair.

And so we are back to the economics. One thing any student in Econ 101 learns is that people respond to incentives. What is the incentive here? Financial aid professionals will tell you that the incentive is to borrow excessively and depend on some future administration to forgive it all.

A colleague at The Indiana Policy Review once wrote that governmental borrowing is the ultimate case of taxation without representation. We borrow the money today and our children and grandchildren will be taxed to redeem the government bonds tomorrow.

That's where economics and ethics intersect. Or should I say collide head-on? — *(Nov. 23)*

The Continuing Service of Veterans

It is heartwarming to hear the number of people, children included, who will go up to an elderly person wearing a military cap of some kind and say, "Thank you for your service." I hear it myself when I am wearing something displaying the Sons of the American Legion logo. When that happens, I explain to them that it was my father who served in World War II and the Korean War. I am serving his memory.

There is hope for America when one considers how we treat those who sacrificed for our freedom. But the future may not be as bright as we patriots are wont to think.

Veteran service organizations — the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and AMVETS being among the largest — are facing many of the same challenges as other religious, charitable and community organizations face. In a word: volunteers.

I am most familiar with the American Legion, privileged to serve as a Sons officer at multiple levels. Our local posts are struggling to maintain membership as veterans age. Even we Sons, mostly descendants of World War II veterans, have passed into retirement age. Somebody must do the work and there seem to be fewer and fewer of us.

The same can be said of every other not-for-profit organization where I serve. Something significant, whether demographic or cultural, has negatively affected how otherwise good citizens see their obligation to help their fellows in need. Too busy is the response heard most often. I get that, trying without success to keep up with my kids and their families. Priorities have shifted, and not for the better.

Why does that matter to veterans? Allow me to use the American Legion as a case study.

The Legion exists for three purposes, at least as I see it. Yes, it provides a social outlet for its members to associate among friends. My local post offers the best reasonably priced menu of any restaurant in Fort Wayne, and this at the pronouncement of my wife who tends toward being a food snob.

More important is the Legion's dedication to advancing Americanism among the citizenry through its programs. Scholarships are offered, awards given to heroic first responders, Boys and Girls State conferences teach leadership skills to high school students, school children are instructed in flag etiquette, and foundations are supported to aid child medical costs. This is only a representative list of its service projects.

And there is the mutual support offered to veterans in need. Honor Flight participants in Fort Wayne are served breakfast at the Waynedale

post before departure, a breakfast requiring a 3:00 a.m. muster time for the volunteer kitchen staff. The Buddy Check program encourages vets to stay in contact with other vets who need friendship. Twenty-two veterans commit suicide every day but this number is falling, no doubt due to the efforts of the buddy checkers. Operation Comfort Warriors provides assistance to wounded service members. Again, these are just examples.

All these programs are funded primarily internal to the American Legion. We have scads of fund-raisers within our posts and the occasional open house for the public. This is not Las Vegas style gambling; everyone knows the proceeds go to one of the Legion's designated charities.

And therein lies the existential challenge to the American Legion and its sister veterans service organizations. We all need volunteers to make these fundraisers successful. Volunteers come from members and new members come from young people who support the mission. One would think this would resonate with current veterans of our modern wars but it doesn't. Is it a generational thing? Is there something about military service today that differs dramatically from that of our fathers? Is patriotism dying a death of a thousand cuts?

It might be a combination of all these things. "The times they are A-Changin'."

Somehow the Legion and its sister organizations must figure out how to connect with current service members. This may not be as easy as it sounds; I offer one anecdote to illustrate.

A close friend died and was to receive a military burial. This involved a flag presentation to the family by a local reservist unit. The American Legion sent an honor guard to play Taps. When I explained this to his grandchildren at church prior to the funeral, two of them…in uniform…asked me if the Legion was "those people in the funny caps." I can imagine their reaction when they saw me at the gravesite wearing mine.

And this from active service members.

I don't know the solution to this problem. What I do know is that it portends a world unanchored from its heritage, from that which makes America John Winthrop's "city on a hill."

Let's hope those children who thank veterans for their service are the way out of this accelerating descent. — *(Nov. 4)*

The Politics of Epithets, Name-Calling

"O, wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!"

This quotation from a poem by Robert Burns is clear even if written in a Scottish-English vernacular. He speaks to a universal human inadequacy — seeing ourselves from the other person's point of view. This can be quite humbling should we actually succeed, especially if we come to realize the impression we are making.

The same applies to opinions. However, seeing the other side is not the same thing as accepting the validity of that opinion. There was a time when intelligent people of goodwill could disagree and remain civil, even friendly. I am rapidly losing hope of ever seeing those days again.

What reduced me to brooding about this again was an op-ed published last week in my local newspaper. It wasn't the opinion expressed; after all, it was on the opinion page and this newspaper is proudly liberal/progressive. I actually enjoy well-reasoned, well-written pieces by those of a different philosophy. This piece wasn't that.

When one reads that Republicans are led by "con artists, swindlers, sycophants and cowards" one does not expect an incisive analysis of policy differences to follow. To the extent that any reference to Republican policy comes forth in the column, it is with the description of "abusing the poor and weak." The rhetorical tool of ad hominem attack comes to mind and is attested by the columnist's naming names, although Donald Trump was referenced indirectly as the "grifter in chief." At least that insult had some cleverness to it.

This has become par for our social discourse. Hurl epithets with increasing velocity until one hears only cheers from the hometown crowd. Twenty-four-hour news channels, which seem to exult in their lack of journalistic professionalism,

deserve much of the blame here but that doesn't excuse us for goose-stepping in their parades.

It is not my intent to argue that Republicans are holy angels while Democrats are angels of the fallen variety. Partisans on both sides withdraw ever more into cocoons of their own making surrounded by self-validating friends of similar orthodoxy. To an extent this is only normal human behavior, to live by and socialize with those of similar backgrounds and with a high propensity to see things through a similar lens. Journalist Bill Bishop called this "The Big Sort" in a book by the same name.

It is the demonization of the other side that has intensified in the last decade or so. This is not new to American history; one need only consult newspaper columns of the 1790s to read some rather nasty stuff. But there is a different, more worrisome intensity in the epithets of today. Thomas Jefferson's calling John Adams "monarchical" doesn't have the same level of vitriol evident in Robert Reich's labeling Ron DeSantis a fascist. At least Jefferson and Adams reconciled once away from public office and resumed their famous friendship. They even managed to die on the same day.

As I read the column in my local newspaper, I noted the writer's bill of indictment against Republicans: calling opponents "stupid"; engaging in "divisive tactics of culture warfare"; embracing "insidious threats of violence"; and so forth. There may be some truth in these charges but a quick scan of news reports would suggest that the same is certainly true of Democrats.

Most incredulous was the writer's assertion that the Democrat party is one of "so many divergent views" in contrast to the meek acquiescence of the Republican group thinkers apparently following a "grifter" Pied Piper. Don't tell that to those on opposing sides of the philosophical debate between classical liberals and common good conservatives, fighting a battle of ideas to animate the conservative movement going forward.

It's not my intent to engage in a schoolyard name-calling contest. We have endured too much of that already. Remember when losing candidates would graciously concede and then become the loyal opposition? Are Donald Trump and Stacey Abrams the new norms for angry, resentful, rage-driven election losers?

If I see hope at all, it is that our local politics haven't descended into this abyss. If anything, I wouldn't mind seeing more spirit in policy debates. I confess to occasional flights of irrational optimism yet I continue to believe that, here in northeastern Indiana, there is a higher standard of decency, honor and courtesy. City elections are just a year away so we will see if my faith is misplaced.

Can America become once more the model republic envisioned by the Founding Fathers? Can we encourage stimulating public discourse without rancor, enmity and hostility? Perhaps, if we all, myself included, kept this holy exhortation in mind:

"[F]irst take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." (Matthew 7:5 ESV) — Oct. 19)

The Blame Game as National Pastime

So what do you think about . . .? Before you even finish the question, expect to hear a litany on everything that is wrong with our country and who is to blame. Granted, there are a lot of things going wrong these days as we geezers are well aware. It just isn't the 1950s anymore.

Sure, things are bad or at least seem to be worse than any time in recent memory. Inflation is the highest since the Carter administration, especially at the gas pump and the grocery store checkout. Murder and other crime rates are rising precipitously in most of our major cities. Our southern border situation is almost impossible to understand by us Hoosiers. Employers can't find employees at present but soon will be laying off workers when the recession's effects take hold. And then Hurricane Ian laid waste to thousands of Florida homes and businesses.

The typical discourse at any gathering is incessant whining about how bad things are. Do

people really enjoy these conversations? How did we get a societal urge for self-administered doses of disgruntlement? Can we not be happy unless we are, well, unhappy? Do we take some perverse subconscious pleasure out of this macabre self-flagellation?

So what is the solution to all these problems that monopolize our social discourse? The answer almost always is to find someone to blame. How does that help? Am I the only one who finds it disturbing that the blame game has become our national pastime?

Slowly but surely, America over the past few decades has devolved to a society of victims and victims need someone to blame. This excuses us from taking at least a modicum of personal responsibility for our own problems.

I might wonder if I just hang around with the wrong people but a quick glance at today's news headlines quickly disabuses me of that notion. It's one thing for a bunch of friends to spend their time together griping about the state of the world but it is a whole order of magnitude worse when our national leaders do the same thing. How about trying to solve these problems?

I realize solutions are neither simple nor obvious. Nor are the best solutions guaranteed to be the most politically popular. That's why our political leaders get paid the big bucks, maybe not in public salary but in limitless ego-stroking and other perquisites.

It wasn't always this way. There is an anecdote, perhaps apocryphal, about an agreement between President Ronald Reagan and Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker at the beginning of Reagan's first term of office amidst 14 percent inflation. Reagan reputedly told Volcker to get inflation under control and that he, Reagan, would take the political fallout when a recession followed. It worked.

But not these days. I try really, really hard to avoid becoming a cynic but I am fighting a rearguard action. When it comes to that group of grumpy friends, I tend to limit my time with them if I can't redirect the conversation to something more positive. Fortunately my closest friends love to talk about more pleasurable things like baseball and grandchildren.

Speaking of baseball — and I just had to work it in since I am writing this on the first day of the playoffs — there is an old story that has a moral which fits this situation. When Bobby Bragan was hired by the Milwaukee Braves to replace the fired Birdie Tebbetts, he found two letters inside the manager's desk with instructions to open for advice in an emergency. When the Braves went into a losing streak, Bragan opened the first letter and found these words: "Blame everything on me." That worked until next season when another losing streak occurred. Bragan opened the second letter which read: "Prepare two letters."

Many of our current political leaders must have received the same set of two letters. They certainly are following the first letter's advice to blame someone else. With an election just around the corner, maybe it is time for these politicians to read the second letter.

While Nov. 8 may make things better, it will only be at the margin. No President or Congress can change our collective attitude about our duties as parents, employees and citizens. We have every right to demand better of our political leaders but it will ring hollow unless we demand better of ourselves.

I will be only one of approximately 150,000,000 voters next month so will my vote really make a difference? It will to me. More important is my daily vote about how I will think and act that day. It is one vote against a total of one. That doesn't leave anyone else to blame for my bad decisions.

Although my wife does exercise a frequent veto when it comes to my choices. — *(Oct. 12)*

I Wish I Had Said That . . .

Oscar Wilde: I wish I had said that.
James McNeill Whistler: You will, Oscar, you will.

I have mixed feelings about Oscar Wilde. He was witty, sure, but one senses that he was more impressed with himself than others were. Perhaps I am being unfair, but then Whistler's retort

suggests that Wilde's contemporaries felt the same. Were some of Wilde's bon mots, shall we say, recycled?

With a pervasive and ubiquitous internet recording at warp speed everything anyone says in our brave new world, I doubt we will ever hear an original quip again. No matter. I still find time well spent reading what others have to say. What I hope to find is not an original quote but a quote that stimulates an original thought in my mind.

Recently my daily reading of the Wall Street Journal offered me three opportunities for, if not original rethinking, at least fresh thinking on something already filed away in the dusty attic that serves with increasing defectiveness as my memory. The topics were mathematics and history, subjects I love but never studied in any formal sense.

"I had a bad attitude [about math in school]. I was a type of math punk." This quote comes from a review of Alec Wilkinson's book "A Divine Language" and describes my formal math education as well. I needed special permission from the dean of the business school to graduate with a major in economics although I had never taken the required calculus course. I proceeded to score in the 98th percentile on the graduate admission test's mathematics section even though it was mostly trigonometry, another college class I never took. Bragging? Hardly. Embarrassed is more like it, especially after having to ask in a grad school quantitative class if zero were an integer. The professor refused to answer.

So I was definitely a math punk and suffer daily because of it. At least now I know what I was. For penance I will reread Euclid's Elements but won't try to solve his fifth postulate. And I will look for the Fibonacci sequence in the ineffable beauty of creation and pause to wonder about its perfectness.

But I still won't take any college math classes.

"History is the teacher of prudence." This one I found in the Journal's weekend interview with Renaissance historian James Hankins. While I hated math courses, I loved the history ones…at least until I got to college and suffered through the two most boring classes imaginable. I quickly changed majors, the first of several times to do this, but never lost my love for reading history.

When I think about the future, I look to the past. Nothing that is happening today is brand new. The human race has always had a self-destructive gene. If you disagree, please point out a century, nation or people that was exempt from inducing its own ruin.

Hankins' insight is incisively brilliant. We may study history but generally focus on the great events and the great people. I am guilty of this. Even when reading about failure or evil, and there is a lot that in human history, I never really considered that misery results from a lack of prudence. Think what a healthy dose of prudence would do for our vicious discourse today.

"Aspiring to a data-driven life risks leading us to focus too narrowly on what can be measured, rather than what matters."

This quote, taken from another Journal book review, brings back memories of my professional life when the data-driven movement was still new. While I collected a lot of data and got quite proficient at database queries, I tended to use the data as validation for tentative decisions already made. Sometimes it prevented a bad decision but mostly it simply confirmed something I had deduced from observation tempered by decades of managerial experience.

A colleague's mantra was "I need data!" That may have worked for him, serving in a staff advisory role, but I was a line manager who need intuition most of all. Fortunately, I had enough of it to generally arrive at the right decision. Also fortunate was the fact that my boss, the university chancellor, was forgiving of mistakes if you immediately owned up to them and corrected them. Most fortunate was that I had good department directors and staff who knew their business and freely spoke their minds.

Whether the data obsession came out of Deming's Total Quality Management school, I don't know, but it was useful when not worshipped. I trusted my staff's intuition and my

boss trusted mine. So is management an art or a science? Both, but the art is what counts.

Americans Are Foreign-Language Illiterates

Americans have a reputation, well deserved, of being language agnostics. Maybe that is the wrong characterization but I can't think of a better term.

In our defense English has become the lingua franca of the world, most everyone's first or second language. Note the irony in my choice of words, resorting to Italian to describe English. But then English is a borrower language, importing words from Latin, Norman French and German to construct our basic vocabulary and grammar. Recently one can sense more Spanish words in daily use. I'm sure there are others contributing too.

Maybe that is the problem, partially at least. Since our language has so many parents, it is no wonder American English gives the appearance of being randomly constructed by a grammar tornado. Do we even have pronunciation rules? Try teaching a first grader to read. I have served as a volunteer tutor at that level so I know how difficult it is for these youngsters. Eventually they figure out that the exceptions are the real rules. Take irregular verbs, please, to misquote Henny Youngman.

Still, there is no excuse for our deemphasizing foreign language classes in high schools and colleges. Learning a language can be tough. It is mostly memorization, another skill our schools have deemphasized. Why memorize anything when one can simply Google it on a cellphone? I find that attitude pedagogically irresponsible and ultimately destructive.

I confess that I avoided a foreign language in college, in part due to my having taken three years of Spanish in high school. A successful placement test was my friend back then but now I'm not so sure. I could have taken another language at a time when I still was able to learn one. Now it's too late for me.

I like to listen to college lectures through the Great Courses series, especially on subjects I never studied formally. One on linguistics informed me that it is extremely difficult for someone over the age of 50 to learn a new language. I decided to field test that theory and unfortunately proved it true.

Since my retirement nine years ago I have attempted to learn or relearn the following languages: Spanish, German, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Things didn't turn out quite like I had hoped.

One would think that my previous competency in Spanish would have come back easily. Wrong. My feeble attempt to order lunch at a Madrid café did not turn out well. When I asked the waiter to speak more slowly, he interpreted it to mean provide service more slowly.

I thought German would be easy to pick up, having heard my grandparents' generation speak it amongst themselves. Wrong again. For an English speaker to learn an inflected, gender-based language is not a simple task. I embarrassed myself in Wittenberg when I asked for another beer using the feminine indefinite article. The bartender was one of very few English speakers in the former East Germany and got a good laugh out of my asking for a "girly beer."

I have tried several times to learn Latin using Wheelock's study guide, all to no avail. I gave up on Hebrew when I got to its equivalent of verb conjugations, and it only has seven. Greek is my current frustration as I am auditing a class on the Gospel of John at Concordia Theological Seminary here in Fort Wayne. I write this as I just left class after flunking my first test which was based mostly on Greek vocabulary. I'm fairly sure I got at least a few questions right…I hope.

Yet I am not discouraged. I may not be conversationally literate in these languages but I have developed a simple vocabulary that helps me appreciate the derivation of many everyday English words. I find word studies fascinating, especially as meanings change over the centuries.

So I love the study of languages even if I can't learn them now that I am in my dotage. I find the

hour profitably spent when researching the origin of English words even if I can't remember the results of this research the next day. And I eagerly read books on language and grammar whenever one shows up on my local library's new additions shelf.

One book I read recently was "The Word Hord: Daily Life in Old English" by Hanna Videen. Our Anglo-Saxon forebears' Old English was much more Germanic than today's modern English. Yet I was amazed at how much has been handed down over the centuries. A recent study found that 70 percent of our most commonly spoken words are from this Anglo-Saxon base.

Is studying a foreign language fun? No. Is it worthwhile? Definitely. For the sake of our children and grandchildren, will someone please convince our educational establishment of this inconvenient truth?

A 12-Year-Old Tackles Inflation

"I hate inflation."

I could have heard this from my wife when she returned from the grocery. I could have said it myself at the gas pump. It could have been the topic of conversation at one of several monthly get-togethers with groups of retired friends.

Instead, it was my granddaughter who made this pronouncement one day last week while I was driving her and her brother to school.

Ah, a teachable moment.

I could have offered a lecture on the quantity theory of money from classical economics, drawing out the formula in magic marker on the auto's windshield. I could have quoted my favorite economist, Milton Friedman, whose succinct statement that "inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon" is one of my favorites from him. I could have discussed the irresponsible expansion of the Federal Reserve's balance sheet to cover Congressional profligacy and the resulting time bomb just waiting to explode.

But then she is only in sixth grade.

So I punted.

Why do you hate inflation, I asked.

Because everything I want to buy costs more now, she replied. Please understand this is a girl who sells lemonade along the street to raise funds, which she uses to buy stuff for herself and for others. An incipient capitalist with a generous heart she is. Miserly she is not.

Next question: Do you know why we have inflation?

Yes. Dad told me it was because the government gave a lot of people free money which they spent, causing prices to go up.

It isn't fair, she said, since she didn't get any of the free money.

This child understands economics better than all the occupiers of Capitol Hill and 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. At least she has a working knowledge of cause and effect. Actions result in consequences, something she apparently comprehends better than the residents of the District of Columbia.

Note that she pinpointed two phenomena that infect our American ethos. She recognizes that the government's giving people "free money" doesn't result in good things for everyone else. She works hard making and selling lemonade, ofttimes baking cookies to offer at her stand. Why should she work for her income while others just wait for a check to arrive in the mailbox, courtesy of Uncle Sugar?

Note also that there is a whiff here of the envy that we Americans cultivate against our neighbor. We daily live out Aesop's fable about the dog with the bone that sees its image reflected in the water and immediately wants that other bone. And there is a commandment or two about covetousness. Such envy is contrary to my granddaughter's nature and upbringing; she wasn't coveting the free money others got but simply observing what doesn't make sense to her adolescent brain.

This caused me to recall my high school economics class, my first exposure to the discipline I've come to love. We had a student teacher, poor man given what high school students inflict on student teachers, but he said something I have never forgotten. "Inflation is the cruelest tax of all."

His profound statement resounds 55 years later. It is so much easier for our political masters to inflate the currency than to raise taxes. Both are evil to a free-market libertarian like me but with inflation they can delay the day of reckoning. It is nothing more than the childhood game of kick the can, the winner being the kid who kicked it furthest down the street. The current gang of kids playing in our nation's capital have become quite adept at winning this game. Or so they think.

I have no idea how the November elections will turn out. Abortion supporters are energized after the recent Supreme Court ruling, Donald Trump is like a Phoenix bent on repeated self-immolation, and our Gaffer-in-Chief outdoes himself every time he opens his mouth in public. But one thing I know based on our electoral history: People vote their pocketbooks. And my pocketbook is depleting even faster now than just a few years ago. We need a solution.

My modest proposal is to send the President, Vice President and all 535 members of Congress home to hold real jobs. In their place let's randomly select a roomful of pre-teens and ask them what we should do. They might decide to spend the entire federal budget on Xboxes and the like, but my sense is that they will do mostly prudent things. And they won't have to worry about pleasing major contributors or securing interest group endorsements.

The fact that I am even suggesting such an alternative is at once frightening and depressing. Have things really gotten that bad?

After listening to a 12-year-old decry our state of affairs, I think I know the answer to that question.

The Treasure of our Constitution

I don't usually give Congress credit for passing useful legislation. Bills that run to a thousand pages or more just can't prove beneficial, especially when our elected representatives admit to or even brag about not reading them.

An exception to my cynical appraisal of congressional mischief is its designating every September 17 as Constitution Day. No, it is not a federal holiday which gives everyone a paid day off work. Nor are there ubiquitous parades and ceremonies to mark the anniversary of the Constitution's signing. About the only requirement is for colleges that receive federal funding, which is all of them except Hillsdale and one or two others, to commemorate the day in some educational manner. The hope, unfortunately misguided, is that our next generation of leaders will know and appreciate the powerful simplicity of the best governing document ever written.

It isn't working. One need only listen to all the demands for its reinterpretation, modification or outright rejection. Abolish the Electoral College because the wrong candidate was elected. Ditto for the Supreme Court for its failure to rule the way some vocal and politicized group demanded.

Even the Bill of Rights is subject to an ideological guillotine. Free speech and the free exercise of religion have come under attack when citizens choose to exercise their rights independently of the received wisdom coming from their political betters. And forget about the Second Amendment.

After these two can you list the other eight? Due process, trial by jury and self-incrimination may come to mind, but what about quartering troops in peacetime or common law suits? They just don't generate the level of heat as the first two. I think that's a good thing in a perverse sort of way.

What gets lost in this fevered discourse are the two most important amendments: the Ninth and the Tenth.

The Ninth states: "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."

Why do we need such an amendment? Does it imply that our rights are granted by the government rather than being inalienable and held to be Creator endowed? If the government can guarantee them, then can it take them away? Thomas Jefferson may have thought this answer

to be self-evident but many people today believe and act otherwise, at least to the extent that they argue these rights can be limited or curtailed for cause.

But then who determines if the cause is righteous? A currently favored majority political party? This isn't Great Britain, where its constitution appears to be whatever the House of Commons declares it to be…today. The checks and balance system written into our Constitution is meant to protect against a tyranny of the majority. Give John Adams credit for preaching that sermon.

Perhaps the answer lies with the Tenth Amendment which declares that "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

This echoes our nation's Anglo-Saxon heritage rather than the Latinized one pervasive in Europe. It is the people who hold residual rights, voluntarily surrendered to government for limited purposes. Note that it concludes with the phrase "the people." Now think about the opening words of the Preamble to the Constitution: "We the People." Coincidence? Probably, but then it gives pause for thought.

The Roman legal heritage of our European fellow nations takes the opposite view of this. Citizens are granted the right to do certain things by their government. The premise behind this is obvious: Government is the source of our freedom as defined by it. Read Dan Hannon's "Inventing Freedom: How the English Speaking People Made the Modern World" for an insightful discussion of this significant difference in these two political philosophies.

So if basic rights are natural and endowed by God, how important is a constitution designed to be protected from the current electoral majority? Quite important, if one reads the Founding Fathers. The dysfunctional Articles of Confederation and the multiple defects of the state constitutions provided the impetus to construct a document meant for that generation and their "posterity" as the Preamble gives it.

The distinction was clear to them: there is ordinary law as determined by the legislature from time to time, and there is fundamental law that arose from the people themselves and not subject to legislative whim. For more on this critical distinction, read Gordon Wood's "Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution."

I am a Son of the American Legion based on my father's service in World War II. The preamble to our constitution begins with the words: "Proud possessors of a priceless heritage." That heritage is inscribed in the timeless words of America's constitution. May we never lose sight of that. — *(Sept. 14)*

The Virtue of Pestering

Fort Wayne, my hometown, has a telephone service that residents can use to ask questions, request city services or report situations which require attention from city departments. I've never used this service but I have a friend who contacts the 311 folks daily.

Of course he is a retiree with plenty of free time on his hands. The city isn't the only recipient of his well-intended advice; I am sure he calls the local media outlets when he detects insufficient coverage of his favorite newsworthy entities such as the Fort Wayne TinCaps, our local minor league baseball team.

In fact, it was through the TinCaps that I met him. We both have season tickets and sit across the aisle from each other. He doesn't deny TinCaps management his gratis advice either. The head groundskeeper, the concession manager and even the team president benefit from his keen observations about everything going on around the ballpark. It may be my imagination, but most team staff seem to quickly head in the opposite direction when they spot him bearing down. So far I haven't seen him sitting in the dugout offering advice on pitching changes but who knows?

The hobby horse he has been riding ever since the TinCaps resumed play after the Covid shutdown is their cashless policy at the concession stands. Now this policy makes management sense

if one thinks it through. There is no handling of paper money and its potential for spreading the virus, no need to make change and no requirement to mount a cash-counting operation at the end of the night. What irritates him most is that the team can now charge sales tax on top of the sale price rather than absorb it. Digital transactions don't care how many pennies are included.

This is quite logical to me, an undergraduate economics major with a master's degree in business. Not to my friend, who finds this decision diabolical at best. When informed that nearly every public event venue has done this, he clearly sees conspiracy at the highest level. So he has been boycotting the concession stands for the past two seasons. He has been known to smuggle in bags of peanuts, somehow never being caught by security at the gate. They are too focused looking for weapons and alcohol and entirely missing this real and present danger to team profitability.

Still, he means well. One can't gainsay his ideas or suggestions. They make sense and more importantly make things better for all of us.

It's not that he is unusually opinionated; after all, he is even older than I and we geezers have earned the right to have strongly held opinions about everything, the more negative the better. Since we became non-productive contributors to the economy, sucking the Social Security trust fund dry, our only value to the youngsters in charge is to assertively point out how they can do things better.

He does have one character flaw, though. He is a diehard Cincinnati Reds fan. This is still America so that is his right, but he assumes my only role in life is to keep him posted on the Reds score on nights we are sitting at Parkview Field watching the TinCaps. He can't do it himself because he doesn't own a cellphone. We all have to take a stand against the evils of modern society and that is the hill he intends to die on. That, and using a credit card to buy peanuts at the concession stand.

I write this as the TinCaps wind down their home season for 2022. I won't see much of my friend until next season and I will miss his running commentary on all my defects as a husband, citizen and baseball fan. He has even threatened to have my seats moved to the Treetops section, a bunch of metal bleachers high above right field radiating intense heat from being in direct sunlight. Given the awe in which he is held by team management, he might just pull that off.

At least he can continue to pester the 311 line throughout the winter. There will be streets that need plowing in addition to all the year-round deficiencies he detects. He should stay busy.

Medieval English towns had officials called beadles who were responsible for order. Maybe Fort Wayne can hire my friend as town beadle. He would drive around all day, scouting for broken streetlights, unfilled potholes and anything that offends his sense of propriety. He could have a direct line to every city office and department without having to go through the 311 switchboard. The city would be in spic-and-span shape without doubt. I just wouldn't want any of the long-suffering 311 operators to lose their jobs when their contact volume plummets. — *(Sept. 7)*

The Student Loan Bailout

Politicians used to "encourage" favorable votes from citizens by tapping kegs of whiskey at the polling sites. The stakes are higher these days as our representatives in Washington D.C. think much bigger both in dollars and constituents. The other difference is that those kegs of whiskey came out of the candidates' pockets while their twenty-first successors have the federal treasury on call.

President Biden's determination to forgive billions in college student loans gives a whiff of whiskey kegs and the cynic in me argues the purpose is the same.

In the interest of full disclosure, I began my career in higher education administration as a financial aid officer, entering that profession just at the time student loan eligibility was being expanded to include nearly all students.

That's not my only connection to this program. I took my first student loan of $500 from a local

bank, the only requirement being that I move my checking account from a competitive bank to this one. That was the incentive for commercial banks to make student loans back then. The loans were not all that profitable but the hope was to develop new, lifelong customers. I am still with the successor to that bank more than 50 years later. The incentive worked in my case.

Once Congress acted to open up the federal student loan program in 1978, many banks appointed specialized loan officers to generate as much business as possible. It became profitable for them so long as the federal government absorbed much, but not all, of the risk. The government set the interest rate and subsidized interest costs while the student was in college and for nine months after graduation.

That was the business plan and apparently it worked quite well. Large national banks invested marketing funds to attract both borrowers and the financial aid professionals who could be influential in recommending specific lenders. Money was being made, enough for the federal government to covet this largesse.

Washington's solution was simple: change the federal law to require all government subsidized loans to be made directly by the government. Taxpayers were assured that the program would be run at a profit.

Except, it wasn't. First the government now became responsible for providing the loan capital required for each year's loan advances to students. Since the government was in a budgetary deficit mode, it had to raise these funds in the bond market. Then it was discovered, to the amazement of all big government types, that the program was being run at a deficit, not a profit. It seems the accounting procedures used to project the profit were suspect, so much so that if used in commercial banking there probably would have been fines imposed.

The goal of the student loan program in its many incarnations was to encourage college attendance for low- and middle-income students. That it did, but with several unintended consequences. First, many students started college using loans but never graduated. They left with debt but without the enhanced earning power which usually comes with a college degree.

Second, colleges quite effectively used loan accessibility as part of their student recruitment efforts. Net tuition cost, the actual amount paid at registration by the student or parents, could be held quite low. Reminding students that they would have to repay these loans wasn't all that effective no matter the good intentions.

One can argue, with economic theory in support, that these extra dollars shifted the demand curve for college enrollment resulting in higher prices charged. College administrators have always denied this but their protests ring hollow. Economics 101 debunks this quite handily. The recent suggestion that colleges should be billed for their share of the forgiveness cost may be tongue-in-cheek but doesn't completely miss the mark.

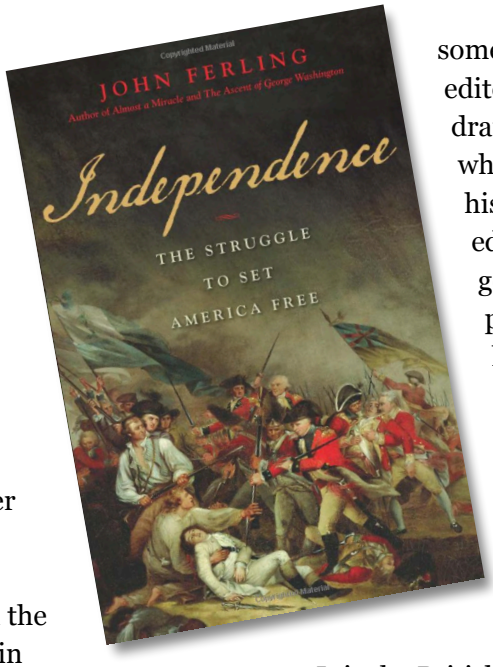
The loudest objection being heard is that there is an inherent unfairness in the Biden proposal. It benefits a small portion of the population at taxpayer expense. Left out of the handout but in line to be hit with the subsequent tax bill are those who attended low-cost colleges to avoid borrowing, those who attended part time while holding full time jobs for the same reason, those who chose not to attend traditional college in favor of immediately entering the workforce, and most significantly those who fully repaid their loans. These voters may be lining up at the other party's whiskey kegs come November.

And that $500 loan I took in 1969 to pay spring tuition? It was the first of several for my wife and me. After we married as undergraduates, I wasn't sure how we could repay the $4,000 we borrowed between us. We did, as quickly as possible. The loans were good investments for us as we both pursued professional careers and are comfortably retired now.

Maybe the Franke family can get a share of the $300,000,000,000 plus on offer. Oh, I forgot. Students who repaid their loans don't qualify. — (*August 27)*

The Bookshelf

Power and Liberty



Why did the 13 colonies revolt in 1775? What caused a political dispute to escalate to a military one? Was this simply a Clausewitzian example of war as politics by other means? Having recently read Gordon Wood's excellent "Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution" (reviewed in the fall journal), I couldn't stop wondering about this. Surely it didn't have to happen this way.

When in doubt, read another book. I first tried "Lexington and Concord: The Battle Heard Round the World" by George Daughan. I finished it but do not recommend it as it is more hagiography than historiography with saintly patriots standing up to demonic idiots in London. I exaggerate but not by much. So I turned to an historian I have read before — John Ferling.

Were the two sides irreconcilable? Was war inevitable? Ferling answers yes to both in "Independence: The Struggle to Set America Free" (Bloomsbury Press 2011, 362 pages plus notes, $25 hardcover at Amazon). His "yes" was somewhat qualified with the opinion that Great Britain could have simply conceded to the colonists' demands in the mid-1760s but, even then, history would have marched on.

Ferling's book is as much a character study as a straight recounting of events. His hero is John Adams, too often relegated to second string status by other historians. He is less generous with Benjamin Franklin, seeing him as an opportunist who only came over to the independence camp after his imperial office-seeking was put to rest once and for all. Thomas Jefferson seems somewhat petty in his outrage at the editorial corrections made to his draft of the Declaration. (Since when has a writer truly appreciated his editor, present writer and his editor excepted?) John Dickinson gets a partially sympathetic portrayal as one of the final holdouts for reconciliation; Joseph Galloway a less sympathetic one, although his story is against the backdrop of internal Pennsylvanian politics between the royal and proprietary factions regarding the colony's charter.

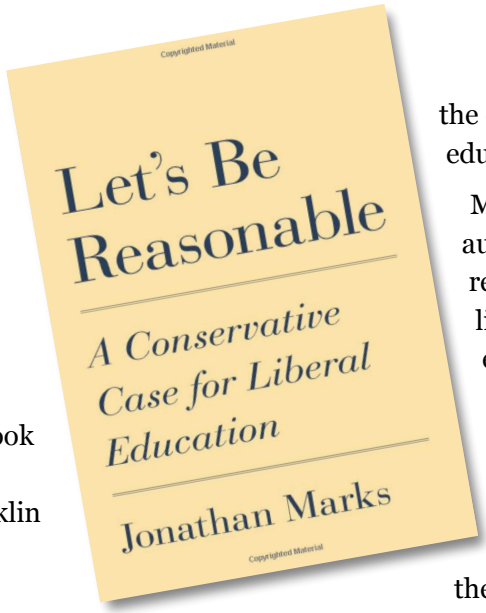
It is the British who receive the most negative characterization, especially Lord George Germain and King George III for their stubborn determination to chastise the colonists into subjection. To be fair to them, Parliament overwhelmingly supported this approach. One can't help but feel that each side of the Atlantic talked past the other perhaps intentionally given the radicalism of some colonists and the intransigence of the British ministry.

Ferling's discussion of the drafting and adoption of the Declaration of Independence is interesting, not least given this foundation's dedication to this document inside the front cover of each quarterly Journal. The document is quintessential Jefferson in its introduction, then becomes a laundry list of non-specific charges against King George included for what today would be called political talking points, and finally concluding not with Jefferson's prose but with text of the original congressional motion for independence introduced by Richard Henry Lee. It served its contemporaneous political purpose and still animates us today.

Returning to our original question about the inevitability of it all, Ferling quotes Adams as saying that independence needed several years of germination among the people before the politicians could move forward. He was probably

right but one does wonder what might have been. (For an unusual counterfactual history on this, see "The Two Georges" by Richard Dreyfuss and Harry Turtledove.)

Recommendation: Ferling is not my favorite historian for the Founding Fathers era but this book tells the story well and fairly. Unless you are a Benjamin Franklin fanboy.



Let's Be Reasonable

One must be careful how one uses or understands the terms liberal and conservative these days. I am a classical liberal, which means I am a modern conservative. I admire the value of a liberal education, but I like it for its traditional (i.e., conservative) values about Western Civilization.

"Let's Be Reasonable: A Conservative Case for Liberal Education" (Princeton University Press 2021, 181 pages plus notes, $15 hardcover at Amazon) by Jonathon Marks is more than a case for the liberal arts in today's curriculum although that is there as an overarching theme. The book is also his defense of academia today as not irretrievably lost to wokism and other left-wing ideologies. He asserts, and one dearly hopes he is right on this, that real learning can and does take place for the vast majority of students who simply don't make the headlines for egregious totalitarian behavior; the majority is too busy going about their business of learning.

There is a caveat to this and it is an important one. This Generation Z silent majority is quite silent, perhaps as a survival instinct. Don't question the left's "pieties" out loud is the watchword. The same goes for non-radicalized faculty, even from the moderate left. Marks provides more than a few anecdotes to support his case, perhaps too many in a law of diminishing returns sense. But then I am perilously close to the conservative mentality that higher education is lost past redemption.

Most of the book is focused on the author's conception of reasonableness as the touchstone of liberal education. His chapters entitled "The Importance of Being Reasonable" and "Shaping Reasonable Students" enjoy 78 of the book's 182 pages. He is passionate about that, no doubt. Reasonableness is anchored in the ability to read, listen, think and draw rational conclusions. Marks argues for the classics as one would expect. Socrates gets a lot of mention but so does John Locke. The obvious conclusion is that there are no obvious conclusions, at least not without some hard work to get there. If you want diversity, think centuries and long-gone cultures rather than simply skin color. In many ways this is the standard argument for liberal education.

He concludes with a case study on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement as an example of the extreme left's anti-liberal tactics to get its way by screaming, or what Marks calls "scorched earth tactics." He insists that in no case whatsoever has the BDS movement been successful in changing a college's investment policy. He uses this as a priori proof for his conclusion that non-reasonable, non-logical arguments will not carry the day on most campuses.

I find it interesting that Marks refers continually to two works he considers foundational for understanding what is amiss in higher education: Allen Bloom's "The Closing of the American Mind" and William F. Buckley's "God and Man at Yale." Both might seem dated, written in 1987 and 1959 respectively, but not to Marks given how often he references them. Each was incisive in its observation of campus ideological conditions at the time of its writing and certainly prescient in foreseeing what was coming.

His prose is quite readable and he can turn a distinctly non-academic phrase when needed, like this one: "[Our educational] ideas are long on sex education and short on how to educate the kind of creature who falls in love." He quotes numerous extremist academics who are determined to destroy what they see as a vast right-wing conspiracy to control the universities and ironically then criticizes conservatives for wanting to see the same destruction because of left-wing ideological control.

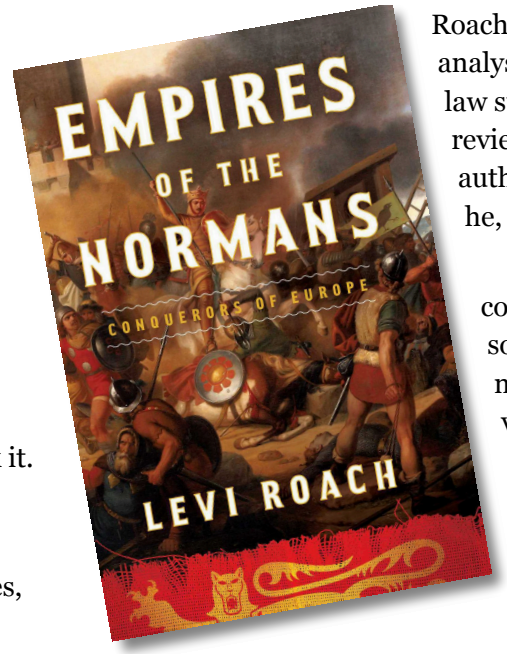
The book is mostly a sequence of anecdotes that serve to support Marks' case for things really not being so bad on our campuses. In that sense it is repetitious especially as the same characters reappear frequently. Still, it held my interest.

So is Marks correct in his anecdotal evidence that most students have open minds if challenged appropriately? News reports of campus shenanigans would suggest otherwise but then we all know how low national news purveyors have sunk. Marks argues from a career at liberal arts colleges so he has street cred . . . at least for the streets where he lived. He remains optimistic, so long as students can be engaged as reasonable persons.

Recommendation: Worthwhile for conservatives who have given up on higher education and even for moderates who want to survive it. I hope he is right.

Empires of the Normans

I should come clean up front and admit to a visceral dislike of the Normans. To my prejudiced view they are nothing more than freebooting pirates who killed their way to a European crown or two and left nothing I find positive in their wake. But I am willing to rethink it.



"Empires of the Normans: Conquerors of Europe" (Pegasus Books 2022, 238 pages plus notes, $28 hardcover at Amazon) by Levi Roach was sitting on the new books shelf at my local library so I thought, "Why not?" Roach is currently on the faculty of the University of Exeter and has previously written on Dark Ages Britain, a subject I find fascinating but largely inaccessible to all but the serious student.

Roach begins with the early Norsemen who were granted by the king of France, under duress of course, land in what became known as Normandy. Their less-than-peaceful interactions with their French neighbors is well documented but not easy to follow unless one is familiar with all the contemporary French place names. More maps would have helped.

An informative part of the book follows as William the Bastard undertakes his invasion and pacification of England. What I did not realize is that there was significant Norman influence in England prior to the Conquest; Edward the Confessor was half Norman through his mother, the source of William's claim to the English throne. Roach admits William's claim was spurious but effectively pressed militarily and then validated through propaganda.

William's plan was to supplant the Anglo-Saxon nobility with his own men, a task legitimized in part by frequent rebellions among the remaining Saxon earls. I wish Roach had gone beyond a military analysis and addressed how Norman law supplanted Anglo-Saxon. But a reviewer should never criticize an author for not writing the book that he, the reviewer, wanted.

Roach continues the Norman conquest saga by going to southern Italy, where Norman mercenary bands assisted in the various civil wars there until eventually they had carved out an impressive kingdom. They were not satisfied with just that, of course, and began

raiding eastward into Byzantine lands. The result was that much of the First Crusade was undertaken by Norman nobles and armies. Being Norman, they immediately squabbled among themselves and with the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos.

The narrative continues into Iberia, Wales and Ireland but the storyline is basically the same. They were descendants of Vikings so what should one expect? The exception is Scotland, where Anglo-Normans were invited in and settled peacefully albeit with a nice set of perks. They contributed to the Scottish royal bloodline, the diluted Norman genes continuing even now in Charles III.

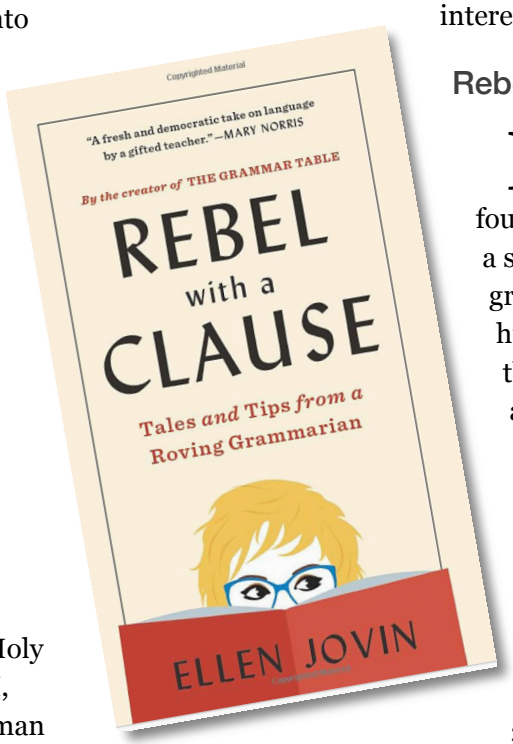
The last great Norman according to Roach was the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, who much preferred his Norman kingdom centered on Sicily to his German inheritance. His contemporary reputation as Stupor Mundi (Wonder of the World) was much higher than his historical one has become. But he does put an effective bookend on Norman aggrandizement.

Roach describes Norman kingdom building as "opportunistic land grab[s] under papal license." They were careful about that; public relations were important politically even back then. I would call them pre-Clauswitzian, using warfare whenever political maneuvering didn't deliver the goods fast enough. One must acknowledge Norman military proficiency and, to a lesser extent, their governance. Unless one lived in a neighboring land.

What the Normans left as a legacy was their ability to integrate into the cultures of their subjects. Within two centuries, the Normans of 1066 had morphed into English in every respect. Is it correct to say the conquerors became the conquered?

Recommendation: I learned quite a lot about the extent of Norman influence across Europe and the Middle East. Worth the read if you are interested in medieval history.

Rebel with a Clause



I have read some unusual reasons for writing a book but I think I found the strangest of all. Ellen Jovin, a self-described therapeutic grammarian, set out with her husband on a tour of all 50 states in the Union with the purpose of answering people's nagging questions about English grammar. She set up a "Grammar Table" in a public setting and took on all comers. And she had plenty.

"Rebel with a Clause: Tales and Tips from a Roving Grammarian" (Mariner Books 2022, 374 pages, $22 hardcover at Amazon) is an account of the questions she took and the answers she gave. Each short chapter (there are 99 total) relates her conversations with the public and the healthy debate that often ensued. At the end of each chapter is a short quiz, often with an ambivalent answer.

She begins with the debate over the Oxford comma, the one preceding the words and/or as the last item in a list. I personally don't use it as I don't like commas in general, using them only when absolutely grammatically required or to pause the reader (as in this sentence). Apparently some people get quite exorcized over its use or absence.

Other grammatical contretemps she covers include farther/further, split infinitives, ending sentences with prepositions, past participles and a host of other linguistic rules that bring back those teeth-gnashing tests in grade school.

I found Jovin much too grammatically liberal for my taste. I try to write in the King's English and speak it as best I can. Maybe this is due to my third grade teacher who was not a native Hoosier. The first thing he did was stop us from pronouncing wash as "worsh." He also docked us for saying ain't. I still see him over my shoulder every time I commit a grammatical faux pas. But then I still use the subjunctive mood.

I give her credit for addressing the I/me/myself misuse. "Me and somebody" is perhaps the most common grammatical mistake in everyday speech. It could drive me crazy but I have learned to grit my teeth and suffer in silence every time I hear it. That third-grade teacher will never leave my consciousness.

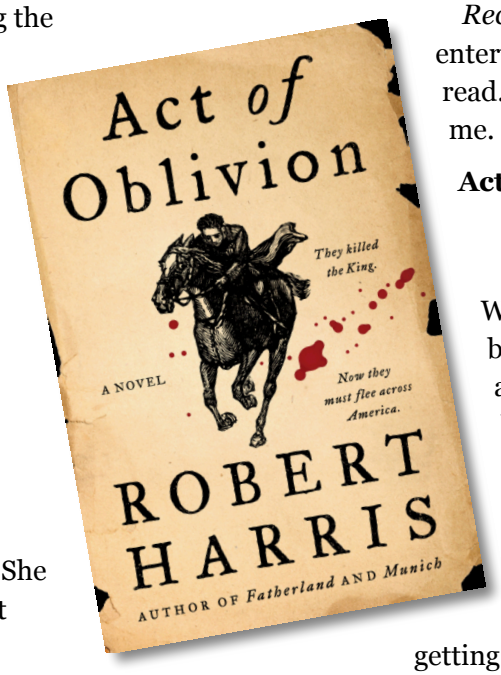
Jovin is of the school that is comfortable with changing grammar in recognition of commonly used speech patterns. She went on and on about our current neurosis with gender-inclusive pronouns. I will never give in to using plural pronouns like they when the antecedent is clearly singular. This was not a problem for anyone until the cultural barbarians made it a cause celebre. Perhaps it is just a recognition of our decreasing literacy. I get it; I just don't like it.

The number of grammatical issues covered by Jovin is impressive indeed. I mentioned only a few of them here. Much of the book brought back memories of all those grade school language classes which, in my day, were taught with rigor and exactness. These memories were mostly good and I am not ashamed to admit I really enjoyed diagramming sentences, to which Jovin only gives a passing nod.

Political correctness aside, I still enjoyed this book immensely, keeping it bedside to read several chapters last thing every night.

And whatever other enjoyment I received from reading this book, I left it with a new word I had never heard before: floccinaucinihilipilification which means estimating that something has no value. Once I figure out how to pronounce it without getting tongue-tied, I will find a way to work it into my everyday conversation. Appropriately, given the topics on which I tend to hold forth.

Recommendation: Interesting, entertaining and educational. Easy to read. Maybe best left for nerds like me.



Act of Oblivion

Historical fiction has a role to play, perhaps several. Written well it can help fill in the background of historical events and persons. A good writer will bring the characters more alive than straight history, adding their thoughts to their recorded words and flesh out the physical setting. And this may have the positive effect of getting more people to read and appreciate history.

One successful historical novelist is Robert Harris. The title of "Act of Oblivion" (Harper 2022, 463 pages, $25 hardcover at Amazon) refers to the name of the law passed by the restoration Parliament to deal with those who were directly involved in the arrest and execution of King Charles I. Those who signed his death warrant were to be arrested and executed while the lesser rebels were to be pardoned. The context of the story is the flight of two of the regicides to America and their pursuit by a fanatical royal official.

The story moves effortlessly between New England and London, and backward and forward in time. The plotline of the chase is interrupted frequently to recount the final days of King Charles, including his trial and execution, and

continues to the Commonwealth period and Oliver Cromwell's increasing lust for personal power.

Howard does an admirable job of getting inside the heads, if you will, of the key players in the unfolding drama. One learns of the ambivalence of the American Puritans about hiding the regicides while putting on a reasonable front of loyalty to the crown. Differences among the New England Puritans are emphasized, from the most rigidly orthodox to the apostates who left Boston to settle other areas such as Connecticut and Rhode Island. One can't but sympathize with them as they wrestle with their consciences while assuming more than a little risk to hide the fugitives.

The reader also suffers with the fugitives' families left behind in England as they constantly move from house to house to avoid royal detection. Communication was extremely limited between husbands and wives to avoid detection by royal spies and informers. Harris paints a picture of grief, abandonment and angst in these separated families.

Regardless of one's opinion about the English Civil War and the fate of Charles, this book gives the partisan a glimpse of the other side and the suffering of its adherents. In this sense at least, it succeeds in telling a compelling story of what humans endure during turbulent times. It may, one hopes, propel the novel-loving reader to a more serious history of the period, perhaps to a writer such as C. V. Wedgwood or Antonia Fraser.

Recommendation: Worth the time for lovers of history and lovers of good novels. The same can be said for most of Harris' work. *— Mark Franke*

Backgrounders

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.

The Bread and Circuses Return

(Sept. 25) — Sometime between the reign of Nero and Marcus Aurelius, the Roman poet Juvenal coined the phrase panem et circenses, or bread and circuses. This was the practice of appeasing the masses with a powerful combination of entertainment and free food. By the Pax Romana, the practice was over 300 years old as the trappings of democracy (like a senate and courts) devolved into an empire ruled by an almighty Caesar.

The phrase was in the forefront of my thoughts recently. I had had a few discussions about an article a friend sent me by retired U.S. Sen. Phil Gramm and John Early, formerly a researcher at the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The writers expanded upon analysis of "income inequality" provided by the Congressional Budget Office. It showed that there was not nearly as much variability among the three lowest income quintiles as generally believed. And their conclusions went well beyond that.

In fact, they stand in stark contrast to the prevailing narrative of the disadvantaged. The lowest quintile had an average household income of $7,000, the fourth quintile $32,000 and the third (middle) earned $67,000. But when you adjust for transfer payments and taxes, the leveling is dramatic. The lowest quintile shoots up to $49,000, the fourth to $50,000 and the third (middle) to $61,000.

The cumulative impact of tax and entitlement legislation squashes any variation in net income for the bottom 60 percent of Americans. This destroys the financial incentive for working and doing well. The impact is even more severe when you factor in that the lowest quintile is dominated by single-adult households. When you adjust for this, the members of the fourth quintile (almost all holding jobs, by the way) actually bring home less income per capita than those in the fifth quintile (largely unemployed).

Lightbulb moment: This is why firms can't find workers and why the dining room at your local McDonald's is so often closed.

This realization occurred about the same time that I attended the monthly meeting of the Fort Wayne Redevelopment Commission. The two pertinent items on the agenda were first a modification of the funding for the downtown municipal baseball park and second the initiation of a project to create a government-subsidized grocery store in an area deemed low-income using federal data.

The ball park was subject to new regulations from Major League Baseball regarding additional locker-room facilities and lighting. The baseball park is often lauded as a success of local government and a good deal but its financing boils down to taxes funding 100 percent plus the ball club keeping the majority of the ticket sales and concessions. The Redevelopment Commission voted 3-2 to allocate more tax money from a TIF district to cover the club's new costs (the circus part of the bread and circuses).

The second vote was to take possession of donated property for the purpose of creating an "urban grocery." This would be an attempt to address the so-called "food dessert" issue, the idea being that if a census track is deemed low-income and the residents are more than a mile away from a grocery then the residents are in a food dessert.

My neighborhood, which is 3.5 miles from the nearest grocery would not qualify because the area is not low-income. But keep in mind there is a Kroger only 2 miles from the location of the

proposed urban grocery, a joint venture between the city and an ostensibly not-for-profit group.

The way this is supposed to work (the bread part of the bread-and-circuses) is that people in the designated area will be able to walk to this grocery and "purchase" food with an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, an electronic system that allows them to pay through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

So here we are, nearly 2,000 years since Juvenal, managing bread-and-circuses and a society in decline similar to Rome where more and more residents are simply declining to work. At the same time, we are seeing an astronomical rate of drug overdose and suicides among males age 18-45. Perhaps that is linked with the institutional destruction of the value of work, and then trying to gloss over all of this with subsidized entertainment in a stadium.

It may be a stretch, but this focus on the triumvirate of income equality, bread and circuses seems to get at the core of our troubles.

Richard Moss, M.D., a surgeon practicing in Jasper, Indiana, was a candidate for Congress in 2016 and 2018. He has written "A Surgeon's Odyssey" and "Matilda's Triumph," available on amazon.com. Contact him at richardmossmd.com or Richard Moss, M.D. on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The 'Obergefell' Decision

(July 26) — With the overturning of Roe vs. Wade in the recent Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization opinion, the Supreme Court ended the recognition of a constitutional right to abortion and returned the matter to the states, where it has always belonged. With this, it is reasonable to reconsider the Obergefell decision of 2015, which legalized homosexual marriage throughout the land. Obergefell vs. Hodges, decided June 26, 2015, in a split 5-4 decision (Anthony Kennedy joined with the four liberal justices), determined that same sex couples had a fundamental right to marry based on the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.

Here too, as in Roe vs. Wade, unelected lawyers in black robes, functioning as a supreme legislature, acting against our nation's history, culture, and traditions, imposed upon the land, the fifty states and their democratically elected legislatures, and more than 300 million people, a mandate to redefine the most fundamental institution in society.

What was at issue here, however, was not due process or equal protection, which our constitution guarantees, but redefining an institution that in five thousand years of human history, has always required sexual complementarity. The decision undermined all notions of federalism, states' rights, the Constitutional order, and basic democratic practice. The nature of marriage is not mentioned in the Constitution. Deciding its definition is not a power of the federal government. It is left to the states and the people. This is not government by law or democratic process but by judicial decree.

No body of five unelected lawyers, regardless of the status of that body, even the Supreme Court of the United States, should have the power to decide and redefine for a nation the nature and definition of an institution, especially one so unalterably crucial to that society. In Loving vs. Virginia, in 1967, the court properly decided that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional based on the equal protection clause, thus allowing interracial marriage. In that decision, there was no attempt to redefine marriage. It simply removed an unconstitutional impediment to interracial marriage, a violation of the 14th amendment; but it did not alter the nature of marriage nor the requirement for sexual complementarity.

"Gay marriage" is not a "right" but a distortion of a sacred and critical institution, that of marriage. Beyond that, the notion of "gay marriage" is irrational, an oxymoron. Gays cannot marry because they are sexually the same. Whether they love one another and plan to

spend the rest of their lives together does not matter. Marriage cannot be twisted, bent, or folded to suit personal preferences. A proper understanding of marriage falls outside the realm of "rights," for it is a descriptive term, a matter of logic, natural law, and biology.

Marriage, by definition, is between opposite sexes and must be as such. Sexual complementarity has always been a requirement of marriage, and the reasons are not difficult to fathom. They are rooted in biology, and we are, in the end, biological creatures.

All of our organ systems, digestive, cardiovascular, pulmonary, and so on, are complete within each of us, save one: our reproductive system. This one system requires a mate of the opposite sex to complete. The marital act, indeed, is defined as coitus. Marriage is consummated by coitus, the union of reproductive organs, between a man and woman. That this must be is self-evident. Members of the same sex cannot perform the marital act. They cannot marry.

From marriage and the marital act comes the world and all that is within it: civilization, history, culture, science, and so on. Without the marital act, there are no children, and the universe of relationships that arise from it: parents, children, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, grandparents, and grandchildren; it is through the institution of marriage that total strangers are joined to form new families and relations. It is how the two houses of humanity, male and female, unite to bring children into the world.

The traditional, married family is the domestic unit upon which society depends; without it society cannot function and will eventually collapse. New life cannot issue from the "union" of individuals of the same sex; it is for this reason that traditional marriage is sanctified and given special legal and moral status.

To recognize gay marriage (and all other "models" that would follow) would blur the significance of traditional marriage, desanctify and weaken it, and render it just another life style choice. Already a battered and weakened institution, marriage should be bolstered and upheld, privileged and elevated. While gays enjoy the right to free speech, due process, and equal treatment before the law, there is no "right" to transform fundamental institutions to suit elite tastes or enhance gay self-esteem. Society must tolerate gays but is not obligated to endorse their activities or goals.

But leftists support gay marriage. They see society as an oppressive, patriarchal, "heteronormative" oligarchy and seek to tear it down. Traditional married families, furthermore, are autonomous islands that generally perform well enough without government assistance; as such, they thwart the leftist agenda.

Liberalism thrives on social failure and collapse. It feeds on broken families and dysfunction. The destruction of the family has been a long-standing project of the left: the sexual revolution, feminism, gay marriage, and now, of course, transgenderism, are tools to overturn the traditional family and the civil society in general.

But with the Left and its media appendage, it is always about narratives, long-term goals, and the seizing of power. Beneath the smiling patina of the charming news host or glib politician, the façade of tolerance and broad mindedness, leftists pursue their radical agenda with grim single-mindedness, censoriousness, and, when necessary, violence. Indeed, the homosexual agenda (along with its counterpart, "feminism," and, more recently, transgenderism) is but another arrow in its quiver by which to undermine society, to fracture and uproot its time-honored institutions, and, particularly, to chip away at that great bulwark against collectivism, the traditional family.

Obergefell was also an assault not just on Christianity but all faiths, our culture, and on American civilization, which is based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. It was an attack on common sense, federalism, separation of powers, and the constitutional order. We live in a post-constitutional age, under attack by the progressive (regressive) Left that seeks to flip our culture on his head, and to undermine the two great

impediments to centralized government, the traditional married family and the church. These are the twin pillars of the civil society, which stand between the individual and the central government.

Obergefell was another salvo of the sexual revolution and its war on the family and Christianity. Abortion, radical feminism, gay marriage and now transgenderism are all of piece.

But five leftist judges cannot redefine marriage. It remains a union between a man and a woman, an organic institution based on nature and biology that precedes the political order. Its purpose is to civilize the mating process and to provide the best environment for children to grow in. It is about creating new life. It is not about validating the adult relationship of your choice or satisfying elite opinion.

We must defend traditional marriage. It is time to overturn Obergefell.

The Glory of a Marching Band

(May 20) — For many years I had listened to the recitals and drills occurring in the distance, at the High School, just two blocks from my home. It was in the evenings, of course, after school, with the sun setting, glittering twilight fading into inky darkness, and the often chilly temperatures of early autumn descending upon the tormented students, marching stoically if not deliriously into the long night.

I heard the truncated blasts of the winds, the blares of the brass and the staccato of percussion, loud and abrupt, stopping and starting, shifting and adjusting in interminable reiterations, in some manic pursuit of an unattainable vision, to pluck the platonic ideal from the ethers, and magically transform this rabble into a silvery, mellifluous, marching band; it seemed a Sisyphean task from which no good could emerge, only frustration.

Above the din was a voice from Mt. Olympus, emanating from a Zeus-like figure, the director, ensconced upon a mechanical perch, as if upon some cloud encrusted peak, hurling flame and thunder, scolding, hectoring, commanding his young minions to hasten or slow, play louder or softer, demanding yet better performance from his weary foot soldiers in the quixotic quest of excellence.

I came to observe the maneuvers on many occasions, lured by the sound and fury, the evolving (and, yes, improving) renditions, the glorious misery of the students shivering in noble endeavor, with my two young children at the time, 10 years ago, convinced that I would never subject them to such chaos and tribulation, when they came of age.

I could not imagine then what possible reward could justify the prolonged agony, the incessant exercises, the competitions and recitals, the unending bus rides, the grand effort and machinery and force of numbers required to produce so elaborate a display. Little did I realize then that, as ineluctably as summer passes into fall, that, indeed, my young children would too blossom into adolescence and join the ranks of their storied colleagues, to participate in one of their town's most historic and splendid institutions, one even serving as drum major for two years.

Or that my wife and I and two other young children, the same age more or less as their older siblings when I had foolishly indulged my knavish skepticism earlier on, would attend slavishly its every performance, fascinated, uplifted, now drawn to it, to marching band, awe-struck and rapturous, unable to resist its spell, deny its charm, more than an enthusiast or fan, rather a zealot or fanatic that simply could not get enough.

I too now found myself preparing burgers at district and football games like other band parents. I too involved myself in fundraisers. I too followed the progress of the band, the weekly report from the principal, the bombastic ruminations of its quirky but beloved leader (the band director), marking my calendar, and checking my schedule, my life no longer my own but an appendage of the marching band, to which I swore unflinching fealty.

I monitored the steady evolution of the program, the tightening and refinement of the execution, the wondrous integration of music, marching, and sparkling color guard, the ordered, frenetic, but poetic movements, the shimmering flags and leaping butterfly figurines, the exquisite and soothing musical interludes interwoven with triumphant crescendos, the ever changing contours of the marchers and guard, converging and reforming in dazzling shapes, angles, and textures, darting and dividing artfully, like black and gold estuaries merging and separating in perpetually evolving archipelagoes, resisting the entropic tendencies, and channeling the energy, sound, and motion, into a glorious synergy, a magnificent unity infinitely greater than the sum of its rapidly shifting parts. What exaltation!

Their performance at State was its best. I was convinced of their inevitable triumph. Then, I watched in despair when, in an inexcusable lapse, two judges on the field delivered unto our lions a fourth place rank, falling behind bands our team had defeated handily only a week before. The disappointment was profound. I had become identified with the band. Their unjust loss was my own, and, in truth, I am still in mourning.

Yet the memory of the season, the exhilaration of the band's performances through the year, lingers. Indeed, I find myself reliving the moments through videos and photos, as if unable to relinquish it, almost wishing it could go on, despite my many other obligations. I no longer cared. Such had become my attachment to the hardships and travails of the band. I had come full circle.

There really is nothing like it. The effort required to render order, symmetry, and beauty from some 175 odd teen-age marching musicians and dancers, delivering some eight minutes of unparalleled joy, mixing magically the subtle and the flamboyant, the nuanced and the majestic, the lyrical and the resounding, is nothing less than inspirational.

Marching band brings forth the best of republican virtues: initiative, discipline, teamwork and devotion to a cause greater than oneself. It is from such high-minded pursuits that great citizens emerge. I applaud the Jasper Marching Band, its students, band-parents, staff and band directors.

It is, perhaps, in our small towns, tossed and scattered across the heartland, where we have our greatest opportunity to salvage the American republic. Here, we hold fast to the formerly mainstream verities of hearth and home, faith and family, God and country. Here, we cling to the customs and mores of a commercial republic, based on the principles of liberty, limited government, and private property rights. We uphold such quaint notions as sacrifice, dedication, and the pursuit of one's dreams, all nurtured in an ambience steeped in the Judeo-Christian ethos, family, church, civic associations, and community.

We recoil from the sixty-year assault on our culture and civilization by the Left, and its noxious ideologies such as critical race theory, radical feminism, and transgenderism. We shudder at the horrendous damage and moral anarchy that has culminated in widespread illegitimacy, dysfunctional families, welfare dependency, drug addiction, and criminality. We are aghast at the relentless indoctrination of our youth in our entertainment, films, social media, and, especially, our schools and woke churches. Yet, there remains an appetite to stand athwart the cult-Marxist wave and preserve our way of life.

At the national level, it appears we are broken, hopelessly divided between two competing visions, but we may succeed on a local level, and, perhaps, at a state level, in certain red states. It is locally, though, where we can attend school board meetings, petition our county commissioners, and lobby our city councils. Locally, we are best positioned to defend our beliefs, and preserve the sanctities and traditions that bind a community and a society, and allow a people to thrive and flourish. ♦

Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

The Outstater

"Fires will be kindled to testify that two and two make four. Swords will be drawn to prove that leaves are green in summer." — C.K. Chesterton

An Electorate Gone Bad

(Nov. 10) — Let's quit kidding ourselves. The reality of Nov. 8 is that with universal suffrage, civil rights gone amok and the Great Replacement we are at the mercy of a bone-headed electorate with ever larger factions of narcissistic youth, entitlement warriors, women against families, unassimilated immigrants, embittered single mothers, the Biblically illiterate, Shakespeare deniers, union-programmed public employees and the sexually confused.

The best analysis I have read so far is from Scott McKay writing in the American Spectator under the headline, "Maybe America Hasn't Suffered Enough":

> "There are so many utterly horrid Democrats who will remain in office after this election that it should be offensive to average Americans. It's tempting to fall into the trap of believing there must be wholesale corruption in American elections, but the problem with going there is that there must be proof before it's actionable. Until some is presented, we'll have to deal with something very unpleasant. Namely, here's the truth that we on the Right are going to have to accept: The American electorate in 2022 is awful."

This may be temporary, maybe not. Right now, though, these people will vote for a turnip if it promises to make life more miserable for hapless white, middle-class, middle-aged, cisgender males on which are assigned all manner of imagined evils of Western Civilization.

So understand just this: They didn't elect John Fetterman because they were unaware he was bent on destroying this society. No, that was the point; he is their in-your-face poster boy.

The Democrats strategists, you see, have a secret weapon — envy. They spray it on every speech and program. The midterm campaigns dripped of it. Republican strategists, knowing that they and all men are susceptible to envy — they perhaps more than most — seemed powerless against it. "Democrats had a strong night, and we lost fewer seats in the House of Representatives than any Democratic president's first midterm election in the last 40 years," taunted Joe Biden this week.

He has a point. McKay adds that voters don't prefer Mitch McConnell over Chuck Schumer — "or, if they do, not by a lot."

That is a new political world. The electorate itself has held until recently what could be called the Christian view, that is, envy is a sin and it must be forgiven and resisted and should never be institutionalized in government policy. It wasn't so long ago that the ethicist and cleric Richard John Neuhaus could write:

> "The American people have proven themselves to be stubbornly un-resentful of the rich. In the view of many, this is a chief reason why more candidly socialist proposals have never gained much of a popular constituency in this country, in sharp contrast to, for example, developed societies in Europe."

Not any more. Our choices at the ballot box increasing are choices between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. This election was a field day for envy with Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi crisscrossing the nation spouting their petty resentments, trying hard to move us a step closer to getting the government we deserve.

And Indiana has its own champion of envy in Rep. Andre Carson with his unworkable ideas on equal pay for "equal" work, ideas unchallenged by either the media or the Republican Party. (There's no need to bring the ineffectual Eric Holcomb or the corrupt House Republican Campaign Committee into the discussion at this time.)

The psychologist and author Jordan Peterson explains envy's pernicious appeal:

> "There is a dark side to it, which means everyone who has more than you got it by stealing it from you. And that really appeals to the Cain-like element of the human spirit. 'Everyone who has more than me got it in a manner that was corrupt and that justifies not only my envy but my actions to level the field so to speak, and to look virtuous while doing it.' There is a tremendous philosophy of resentment that I think is driven now by a pathological anti-human ethos."

The economist Ludwig von Mises noted that this is so even when the resultant policies are disastrous to those who support them:

> "Resentment is at work when one so hates somebody for his more favorable circumstances that one is prepared to bear heavy losses if only the hated one might also come to harm."

My grandfather raised a family during the Depression. The son of German immigrants, he not only was denied U.S. citizenship during WWI he was required to carry a card that read "Enemy Alien."

Nonetheless, he was in the first generation offered Social Security but he refused to sign up, explaining in halting but prophetic English that it wasn't fair to the next generation and that he didn't see how it could work in any case.

The electorate has changed. We had better adjust our political stance accordingly.

More Trash In, More Trash Out

(Nov. 15) — I love the idea of recycling. It makes such illuminating public policy.

Recycling is good. I know that because people, some of them in high office, have been telling me that for the last 20 years. Indeed, they made it mandatory. What they did not tell me was that it made no sense.

"Americans who've spent the last few decades recycling might think their hands are clean. Alas, they are not," writes John Miltmore of the Foundation for Economic Education. "As the Sierra Club noted in 2019, for decades Americans' recycling bins have held 'a dirty secret,'"

That secret is that half the plastic and much of the paper did not go to your local recycling center but was sold to China. "There, the dirty bales of mixed paper and plastic were processed under the laxest of environmental controls," discovered the investigative journalist Edward Hume. "Much of it was simply dumped, washing down rivers to feed the crisis of ocean plastic pollution."

Why didn't somebody tell us that? Two decades. Not a word.

Well, we don't deal in motives here but we do deal in incentives. There was a lot of money to be made in mandatory recycling. Mandatory was the trick. One day you were a junk dealer, the next day you were a global empire.

Previously, they picked up your trash and hauled it to a dump (which, it turns out, we have plenty of land to accommodate). In fact, you didn't even have to pay; many of us did it ourselves.

Later you had to hire experts to sort, classify, wash and repurpose it each step of the way. Bureaucracies had to be set up to manage it at every level of government — very, very expensive, and profitable. If you didn't help there were fines and criminal penalties.

The people who got good at convincing you all of that was saving the earth are retired now living on the Gulf somewhere in beach houses. Considering the national wealth these men wasted for personal gain, they should be sought out and hung upside down from lamp poles. A lot of them would be politicians. There may not be enough lamp poles.

I love the idea of electric cars. What a wonderful world it would be if we could buzz around without emitting hateful carbon. A lot of people, some of them in high office, would make that mandatory . . .

I think you know where this is going.

Bon Voyage, Governor

(Nov. 5) — As his term-limited administration heads into its home stretch, Gov Eric Holcomb this year hastaken four thinly disguised overseas vacations, all couched as trips doing the people's business. But several have a globalist character, the antithesis of his job description. And last week, he announced he would attend a United Nations climate conference in Egypt, the tone of which would not go over well in a typical Hoosier town square.

As each trip is announced, Holcomb's office likes to assure us that it is "free," having been paid for by donations to the heavily political Indiana Economic Development Foundation. The governor doesn't think we know that he knows who contributes what to whom.

They think we're fools, don't they?

Democracy Unclothed

(Nov. 2) — The 911 call from the home of Paul and Nancy Pelosi got me thinking — no, not in the way you might imagine. It has to do with journalistic method.

My first breaking news story was a citywide, Keystone Cops-style chase involving a dozen suspects and victims in an early morning robbery and kidnapping at an all-night business. I was proud of how I was able to put together the myriad details and still make a tight deadline. Just drawing a map of the chase path was a heroic feat.

The self-congratulation ended when a radio station broke the real story. I had failed to ask the sheriff one thing. The "business" was more than it seemed and everyone but the officers was naked. It was a detail that added front-page color to an otherwise back-page account. Clothes matter.

Since then I have made it a point to ask my journalistic subjects — figuratively, mind you — whether everyone was fully clothed.

Beyond the police beat, the question evolved over the years. By "fully clothed" I now want to know whether the subject's political or social positions, however profound, respect the tenets of Western Civilization. It is a standard some of us insist on applying, a constitutional wardrobe if you will.

In this formulation, Gov. Eric Holcomb stood naked as he announced Indiana would welcome hundreds of random Afghans who had jumped on a military evacuation flight at the last minute. The governor seemed to think he was embracing Selma freedom marchers or Vietnamese anti-communists — a case of serious historical dissonance.

Most recently, I have been asking the question of political candidates, both Democrat and Republican, who stand at a podium asserting that the other side would destroy "democracy." Their exposition contains no understanding that the democratic process alone cannot protect liberty. A free press was supposed to help with that.

A reference point is Stalin's 1936 constitution — an inspiring document, guaranteeing direct election for public office, universal suffrage and every other civic freedom imaginable including prohibitions against racial and sexual bias. There was not a word about forced labor camps, shows trials, censorship bureaus or who was going to count the votes.

In all, it is sad to realize that for some taking elected office can mean nothing more than donning new clothes, invisible ones as it often turns out. "And so he held himself a little higher, and the chamberlains held on tighter than ever, and carried the train which did not exist at all," concludes Hans Christian Anderson's tale of the emperor's fine suit.

Which, staying with our nude theme, contrasts nicely with one of the cleverest stunts ever on late-night television: Louie Nye, at the very beginning of the streaking craze, on the Tonight

Show, running through a nudist colony fully clothed.

I feel a lot like Louie Nye these days.

Ukrainianism

(Oct. 27) — Why is a nice fellow like Mike Pence so worked up over a former Soviet Republic 5,000 air miles away? Let's start with the etymology.

In the 1940s, the editor of the Tulsa Tribune, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, popularized for Americans "Afghanistanism," a colloquialism originating in the British Parliament meaning concentrating on problems in distant parts while ignoring controversial issues at home.

"The tragic fact is that many an editorial writer can't hit a short-range target," Jones wrote. "He's hell on distance. He can pontificate about the situation in Afghanistan with perfect safety. It takes more guts to dig up the dirt on the sheriff."

Indeed, my very first editorial was a powerfully worded — courageous even — condemnation of Idi Amin, the cannibal despot of Uganda.

Nobody in my corn-belt readership knew anything about Uganda. Nobody, therefore, was likely to appear in front of my desk to confront me for the shallow and simplistic observations on which a typical editorial is built — or a political speech.

Which brings us back to Mike Pence.

In a fiery address last week to a friendly audience at the Heritage Foundation, Pence proclaimed that Putin "must be stopped" and Putin "will pay," adding "There can be no room in the conservative movement for apologists to Putin; there is only room in this movement for champions of freedom."

When I knew the man Pence back here in Indiana we both considered ourselves champions of freedom but neither of us could have found Ukraine on a map. It is hard for me to imagine that it has since risen to a level of importance in his mind that he would expend the treasure of his generation and the lives of our sons on a battlefield ruled by tactical nuclear weapons.

No, I suspect "Afghanistanism" is in play again.

Someone in the Pence organization has extrapolated to "Ukrainianism." They have figured out that this poor, distant, corrupt unitary republic would be a useful foil in a presidential campaign.

For a candidate making promises, it is a more tractable issue than the ongoing social and economic destruction of our own nation, and nobody can say conclusively that it is unimportant to United States interests.

The British humorist Stephen Potter, author of "The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship," contended that you can stop any discussion on foreign policy by interjecting at just the right moment, "But only in the South."

Afghanistanism-Ukrainianism works something like that. The mere mention freezes serious thought and shields the speaker from criticism. We feel stuck in the scene from "Wag the Dog" where Conrad Brean confronts the CIA agent: "And if you go to war again, who is it going to be against? Sweden and Togo?"

Incidentally, was Vietnam merely a way to divert attention from LBJ's social-justice disasters? Is Iraq all fixed now? How about Libya, Zambia, South Africa? One would have thought we would have resolved one or two of these faraway crises if only by chance.

Anyway, did we ever find out what was going on in Afghanistan itself? What the goal was? The strategy? What we were doing there? Why we left?

Sorry, can't tell you. Afghanistanism is always classified.

If 'Democracy' Fails, Then What?

(Oct. 18) — The week began with my county chairman sounding the alarm that "democracy" will be at risk in 2024. "He keeps using that word but I do not think it means what he thinks it means," to quote a meme of the great Inigo Montoya.

Let me pair that with another popular meme, "The Constitution was written to protect us from our government; it doesn't, so now what?"

The first reminds us that we can't count on being saved by the 2024 election. Democracy, as the Founders of this once-great nation understood it, doesn't work like that. It is not meant to impose my will or my party's will, not even to install a particular policy or to elect people who "look like me."

The original purpose was, as our second meme implies, to protect us from our own government not to guide our government. But if the 2024 ballot follows the pattern of modern politics, there won't be anyone on it who seriously wants to do that.

So you ask again, now what?

We can abandon the romantic notion that has held sway since passage of the 16th Amendment, that is, an election is anything more than a referendum on how to redistribute other people's property. We can quit pretending it is a simple matter of selecting competent people to "fairly" govern us, using force only when absolutely necessary.

Some believe that is merely a disguised autocracy, the historian Randall Holcombe being among them. From his book, "Liberty in Peril: Democracy and Power in American History":

"The Founders envisioned that in most cases the president would end up being chosen by the House of Representatives from the list of the top-five electoral vote recipients. Furthermore, there was no indication that the number of electoral votes received should carry any weight besides creating a list of the top five candidates."

The succession process, Holcombe argues, was not intended to be popularly "democratic" as we now think of it. He says we should feel lucky when such an election is even honest.

Before I scare you further with mention of "revolution," know that I use the word in the sense of revolving back to the original promise of citizenship, that is, the primacy of the individual in addressing public concerns. We can do that in peaceful ways — through education, through reforming our political parties and, yes, ultimately through limited election if we have been careful to choose candidates who are constitutionally self-constrained.

But that is going to take a while. In the meantime our resources are ill-spent trying to elect yet more people who, it invariably turns out, can't or won't protect what little liberty and treasure we have left after the Biden gang finishes with us.

Then what? Gather a few friends together for tea (Bohea is recommended) and for a closer reading of the Declaration of Independence. Oh, and you'd better make that a secret meeting.

At Last, a Law for Our Times

(Oct. 14) — A friend this week introduced me to Brandolini's Law, known on the Internet as "the bullshit asymmetry principle." First, though, some background.

Many years ago the foundation had the good fortune to commission a brilliant woman, a nationally known economist. We asked her to analyze the budget submitted that year by the Indiana governor at the time, the fiscally nimble Evan Bayh. The analysis cost $10,000, as I recall.

We were quite proud of the paper that resulted. The foundation had done its job, that is, to put the best mind on what had become a serious policy problem, in this case the increasingly fanciful numbers in state budgets. Her analysis suggested — proved, to my mind — that the governor was flat-out lying to the Legislature and to Indiana citizens. He was fixing the numbers.

So of course we wanted to share the findings with the statewide newspaper. An interview was arranged. The reporter was impressed with our economist and her analysis. An article was scheduled for the next Sunday's edition, the largest circulation day of the week.

New to public policy, we patted ourselves on the back. This is a simple game, we thought. You just gather the facts and let an untrammeled press do the rest. So I was unprepared for what I saw when I opened the newspaper. There was our economist's carefully cited article on one half of

the page. On the other half under the same sized headline was an interview with the governor's press secretary saying that our economist's numbers were "wrong."

No, the press secretary didn't offer anything to support that. Nor did the newspaper independently pursue the evidence that our economist had handed it, evidence pointing to fraud and malfeasance in the state's highest office. The reporter had merely called the governor's office for a statement. A casual reader would have seen nothing more than an honest difference of opinion on a boring topic between two equally credible sources.

That, I have belatedly learned, was a reverse application of Brandolini's Law, formulated a few years ago by an Italian programmer, Alberto Brandolini, while watching a political talk show. It reads in full: "The amount of energy needed to refute bullshit is an order of magnitude larger than that needed to produce it."

Indeed, the foundation's president at the time had to pull me aside a few days later to say in the kindest way possible that we wouldn't be commissioning such ambitious papers in the future. It made no tactical sense, he said, we couldn't afford it. "We on one side spend thousands of dollars when the other side only has to pick up the phone," is the way he put it.

Yes, I should have known better. A favorite philosopher around here nailed it 178 years ago.

"We must confess that our adversaries have a marked advantage over us in the discussion," Frederic Bastiat wrote in "Economic Sophism." "In very few words they can announce a half-truth; and in order to demonstrate that it is incomplete we are obliged to have recourse to long and dry dissertations."

Let me conclude by reminding the membership that my example of asymmetrical bullshit was from a time when journalism was journalism. Today, we wouldn't be able to get an interview. Nor would we want one.

Public-Private Cronyism

(Oct. 11) — If you question the shedload of economic-development projects in your city, you are a bad citizen, a naysayer. We are guilty, of course. The president of our local redevelopment commission said as much recently, publicly rebuking our city councilman.

The councilman, a former banker, had dared wonder if all the fiscal work-arounds designed to win a council majority weren't costing us control of our city.

Far from it, lectured the commissioner, a retired philharmonic administrator. He says we are building a showplace and it is all free, or at least it won't cost in a way that has political ramifications. And to make the naysayer label stick, he listed all the projects that have been built using tax increment financing, deferred taxation, bonding slight-of-hand and other arcanum in the economic-development bag of tricks:

A minor-league baseball stadium, for which the city has agreed to pay undeterminable maintenance costs while the baseball team collects determinable proceeds.

A historically designated shopping and office complex similar in design and financial structure to several that have gone belly up elsewhere, the tenants in this case being businesses and government offices that vacated existing space across town.

The renovation of a failed block of bars and restaurants, the third such renovation there in as many decades.

Grandiose multi-use projects near a new promenade along our muddy, high-banked river.

A distribution warehouse on the interstate that arguably would have been located here even without the city's generous incentives.

"He dislikes these things," he said of the councilman. "I wonder what he does like."

Exactly. We may never know. Councilmen rarely get a chance to vote on where proposed projects fit into a comprehensive set of civic priorities, if there even is a comprehensive set of civic priorities. Decisions are made for us ad hoc

by politically connected developers, architects, engineers, attorneys and contractors, all savvy donors to council and mayoral campaigns. Projects move forward not out of any proven civic need or on any logical timetable but rather when special interests happen to mesh.

These are what the commissioner calls public-private partnerships, a fanciful construct that assumes that "the public" (the government) and "the private" (the economy) can be combined innoxiously without turning your city over to autocrats.

So we don't dislike any of those projects intrinsically. Rather, we have become convinced that if our city is going to reach its potential this next decade it will have to start depending on the hard work, productivity and judgment of its citizens and not on fiscal gimmickry that plays into the hands of crony capitalists.

Finally, the commissioner Ignores that these projects carry what economists call "opportunity costs," i.e., the lost value of the next highest alternative use of the spent resources. That is, if you put all of your chips into a gussied-up abandoned factory, you will not know what else might have been created with those same resources or even in that same place. The yields and risks will be quite different. Businessmen consider opportunity costs an important and difficult calculation. Few politicians bother with it.

It is no accident, then, that none of the commissioner's projects was market-tested. Rather, they were of the build-it-and-they-will-come variety, with insiders guessing how many will come and determining what defines success.

There is a better way, a system centered on accountable, subservient governance. If a project is worthy of taxpayer support, put its real cost squarely in front of the electorate. And if after open debate its worthiness is still in question, which is the case more often than not, let the market sort it out in good time rather than jam consideration into the confines of an election cycle while pledging other people's money.

Otherwise this "free" stuff is going to bankrupt us naysayers.

The Food 'Desert' Scam

(Sept. 30) — It was meant to be a stirring summation of the decision to move forward on building a multi-million-dollar government-subsidized grocery in the center or her councilmanic district, one within walking distance of her downtrodden constituents.

She mentioned small children and healthy, fresh food to power their brains. She herself had witnessed a single mother laden with bags of groceries struggling to get off a city bus. She says it opened her heart to the inconvenience of long trips to get the basics of life, to escape a morally arid food "desert."

But there also was a whiff of assumption and resentment in her telling of "BMWs, Mercedes, regular Chevys, Cadillacs, you name it" filling the parking spots at grocery stores in other parts of town, places where people enjoy benefits she thinks are denied to her constituency. She told us how proud she was to grant them "the opportunity to have the choice to walk out of their front door and get groceries."

She alluded to the unfairness of using tax increment financing and such for downtown projects but not for projects in her district.

Mostly, though, she seemed to resent that another councilman, the lone vote against her magnanimity, had dared spell out his reasons a few days earlier in a letter to the newspaper.

Not that she addressed any of his arguments. Rather, she used her time before council this way:

"Anything we can do to keep that mother (on the bus) from making a two-hour grocery trip to get food for her baby is a win in my eyes. Others may not see it the same way, but our community doesn't always get what it needs without having someone spur a balance of equality and equity."

What hooey.

First, no children's brains are being damaged — not at least for lack of community compassion. As research cited in the hated councilman's letter attested, those in America's lowest income quintile can access, with government benefits and programs, the equivalent of $49,000 a year. That

does not take into account the city's expansive network of churches and charities.

Second, what kind of business plan envisions a full-service multi-million-dollar grocery store to meet the needs of foot traffic? Private corner groceries could handle that for a fraction of the cost. In fact, that was the case not so long ago.

Which brings us to the crux. There are no private grocers small or large in the designated area because investment there is not safe. Rule of Law has been abandoned. And now, in an unholy arrangement, the government pretends to be an investor — a grocer, if you will — on the condition that the council abdicates government's true and sole responsibility of protecting citizens and property.

So, that mother on the bus didn't lose the convenience of a neighborhood grocery store. Her leadership, her council representatives, lost it for her. Crime matters. It should have been the issue of discussion.

It went unmentioned that the last private grocers left the area not because the owners were racist, the go-to explanation for anything wrong. They closed the store because there was no support for prosecuting shoplifting and employee theft, critical factors in any grocer's bottom line. Also, grocery employees, who had to travel to work at all times of day, felt increasingly unsafe. On top of that, unthinking regulation and zoning, plus ruinous taxes on the profits of small businesses, didn't help.

The council could have done something constructive about all of that. But does anyone think that the new woke grocery, with no actual owner and an as yet uncertain, multi-level, ostensibly profitless management, will not experience even greater losses? And with youth told that working is neither cool nor necessary, how safe will it be to walk to a grocery or anywhere else? Will a flash mob care about a business's altruistic underpinning?

The saddest thing in the end was the view of that council table — Republicans, grown men, some of them eager to be thought "conservative," staring silently at their hands as this uninformed, envy-driven virtuecrat berated them for the supposed greed and selfishness of their constituents.

Identity politics aside, couldn't they have summoned the courage to cast a simple "no" vote against a patently bad idea, a vote in defense of those who elected them, at least those driving the "regular" Chevys?

Sitting in the chamber audience that night, an everyday hardworking citizen had a lot to think about. Black, white, hispanic or whatever, he must be excused for resolving to take his meager savings, pack up the family and get as far a way from such weak democratic representation as he could afford.

Trash In, Trash Out

(Sept. 28) — It is Hump Day but the mood is dampened by an Indianapolis Star story saying Indiana will be a humid, overheated dystopia in a few years. The state's largest if not most respected newspaper predicts increases in heatstroke and cardiovascular collapse as well as longterm organ and cell damage.

The warning is clear: If we don't reduce greenhouse gases to the level of a medieval village we are doomed.

But don't hook the oxen up to the manure spreader just yet. These people are a virtual Ouija board of stupid predictions. Let's look at their record on the most basic of the "save the planet" campaigns — waste recycling.

In my city, recycling each year consumes more than 15 percent of the trash bill. That has been going on pretty much since the first "don't liter" signs cropped up along the interstate six decades ago. Now we are told that if we don't comply with the relentless do's and don'ts of the recycling gods (no ceramics, mirrors, light bulbs, electronics, wires, hoses, toys, plastic straws, to-go lids, yard waste or holiday decorations) our farmland and oceans will be inundated with refuse.

Well, someone owes us an apology. Officialdom could have told us that the only waste we needed to worry about was the waste of

millions of dollars on the recycling flimflam. Even the tree huggers knew as much. This is from the New York Times 26 years ago in an article entitled "Recycling Is Garbage":

> "Clark Wiseman, an economist at Gonzaga University has calculated that if Americans keep generating garbage at current rates for 1,000 years, and if all their garbage is put in a landfill 100 yards deep, by the year 3000 this national garbage heap will fill a square piece of land 35 miles on each side. This doesn't seem a huge imposition in a country the size of America."

He estimated that the garbage would occupy only 5 percent of the area needed for the national array of solar panels proposed by environmentalists.

And if that 35-mile square still troubles you, Wiseman reminds us that the loss will be only temporary. "Eventually, like previous landfills, the mounds of trash will be covered with grass and become a minuscule addition to the nation's 150,000 square miles of parkland."

More recently, Richard Fulmer, an engineer writing for the Foundation for Economic Education, expressed similar doubts:

"Recycling resources costs resources. It must be collected, transported, and processed. This requires trucks, which must be manufactured and fueled, and recycling plants, which must be constructed and powered. All this also produces pollution — from the factories that build the trucks and from the fuel burned to power them, and from the factories that produce the components to build and construct the recycling plant and from the fuel burned to power the plant."

Fulmer says that if companies operating in a free market were allowed to profit from recycling where it was economically feasible then we could be confident that it is saving more resources than itself uses up. But when recycling is mandated by law there is no such assurance.

Back to hothouse Indiana, such calculations for climate change spanning centuries or even decades are inexact if not capricious. This, ironically, makes them more valuable to the save-the-world merchants. In 30 years, by the time it is learned that the doomsday editors, officials and ad hoc experts were profiting at mankind's expense, they all will be retired.

Where? Somewhere warmer, of course.

A Million Here, a Million There

(Sept. 23) — I am in the habit of "attending" local council meetings on my Mackintosh via our municipal television channel. The magical intersection of technology and democracy? Not really, more like malfeasance up close and personal on your laptop.

This week's meeting, however, saw a member of our foundation, Jason Arp, successfully challenge the promoters of a downtown development project, a $286-million gussying up of an abandoned factory. The issue before the council was whether to amend the terms of the revenue bond for the project. The developer had been surprised to learn he might need another $36 million or so.

There was the usual mumbo-jumbo from the developer and his attorney. They assured the council that the $36 million was just a private matter between them and their bankers. Nothing to see here, just move along . . .

But Councilman Arp had a question. He wanted to know why the banks wanted so much for the bond, the interest for which was set a full seven points above that day's Treasury rate. And that didn't include any money the banks might have required up front to even offer the deal, the terms of which were of course secret or as the attorney explained, "between the developers and their bank."

As it became clear that Arp, formerly a trader in mortgaged-backed securities for Bank of America, wasn't going to get a straight answer, he broke into the discussion to tell his fellow councilmen that the banks were sending them a message with the high interest rate.

"They think this thing is going to go bankrupt," he warned. That also explained why the mayor, a progressive but a savvy fellow with his eye on re-

election, had made clear he was not recommending passage.

The Council, a hodgepodge of apartment managers, wholesale food distributors, party operatives, race baiters and former football stars, would not be denied its ribbon-cutting. It voted 6-3 to amend the bonds without more ado. Or as another member of this foundation, the late Don McCardle, said, "If city councilmen are going to act like developers, we're going to have to elect smarter city councilmen."

Can a city reorganize as a constitutional monarchy? Asking for a friend.

The Generation Gap Widens

"Each new generation born is in effect an invasion of civilization by little barbarians, who must be civilized before it is too late." — Thomas Sowell

(Sept. 19) — I follow the Twitter accounts of Indiana journalists, many of them millennials. Hey, it's my job. I can tell you that they feel unappreciated. It's hard work and it's underpaid. They want the government, their union, somebody, anybody, to do something.

It doesn't occur to them that they themselves might need to change, to grow up. You will search their tweets in vain for awareness that they have broken the profession handed to them. Indeed, you won't find awareness that journalism is broken at all. That is despite readership numbers at the level you would expect to find polling for the severely disturbed and overly medicated.

There is an explanation. It is they don't know better. Their parents were members of a generation that didn't want to grow up, the infamous baby boomers, the ones who believed nothing was important if it happened before they were born.

That is not pop psychology, it is a clinical diagnosis. In the analytical work of Carl Jung, the "eternal child" describes an older person whose emotional life has remained at an adolescent level. For Jung, this person (or generation) would lead a "provisional life," or a life without absolutes, a life spent coveting independence and freedom, opposing boundaries and limits and tending to find any restriction intolerable.

Indeed, the professional standards of a journalism that had endured since Martin Luther first handed out pamphlets are dismissed. Instead, today's editors have installed new standards, which, in fact, are no standards — anything goes, all is new again.

How bad is it? Well, a writer for the New Yorker magazine being sued for defamation argued that even though she invented the quote wrongly attributed to the defendant, it was "something he would have said."

This new journalism might amuse the ruling class but common newspaper readers need trustworthy information on which to make life decisions on the margins of the economy and politics. That would take discernment and hard work on the part of editors and reporters. It would take adult supervision.

Even the comedians get it: "Other cultures figured out that older people are generally wiser," says Bill Maher. "The more days you live, the more things you know. When you're young you have beauty and when you're old you have wisdom. Only this dumb country wants to posit both wisdom and beauty in youth."

And there is a harsher explanation.

The Austrian sociologist Helmet Schoeck argued that one generation can be envious of an older one, and because of that try to cancel it. The baby boomers inherited unprecedented peace and prosperity — brought about by achievements (and sacrifices) that neither they nor millennials have so far been able to manage.

Schoeck says it makes sense in an obdurate way for them to throw everything out and rebuild on the whimsy of microchip games, social media platforms and slogans. "Build back better," one generation says. Another counters with "Make America Great Again."

But if all this analysis is too much, you can think of it as a simple trope: First there is a creative generation, then there is a mimic generation and finally there is a failed generation.

Let's hope that applies only to journalism and not to something actually important such as national defense, fiscal policy or family structure. Or are we beyond that?

Indy Crime and Overcoming the 'Envy Barrier'

(Sept. 11) — Although we outstate would rather ignore it, someone has to explain what has gone wrong with Indianapolis. This is in reference, of course, to the city's uncharacteristic inability to address a serious crime problem.

Indianapolis made international headlines in this regard recently. Three members of the Dutch Commando Corps, in town on free time after a nearby training session, were shot outside their hotel, one fatally, by local thugs, police say.

It is hard to imagine worse publicity, or more deserved. The crime rate there is now 45 per one thousand residents, one of the highest in the nation. The chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crime is one in 22. That is in a city that only a few years ago was dubbed "nap town." Something bad has happened.

Public safety, it must be said quietly these days, is important. It defines civilized society, linked to the Rule of Law and the right of private property, the two miracles of Western Civilization. It is why some places are livable and some are not, some prosperous and others impoverished. It obviously should be a top priority in the capitol of a state like Indiana.

Nonetheless, members of the ruling class there, for reasons that are not obvious, have refused to apply proven anti-crime strategies — i.e., targeted policing, color-blind prosecution, level sentencing, the certainty of incarceration.

Something is holding them back.

That something is what cultural anthropologists might call the "envy barrier," the inability to overcome political manipulation of man's inherent envy. It not only separates the undeveloped countries from the developed but it marks America's unhappy urban cores, manifesting itself specifically in the self-defeating Antifi and Black Lives Matter, and more generally in the new Democratic Party.

It is why cities like Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, cannot supply potable water, why some Chicago neighborhoods are unsafe at any time of day, why San Francisco is a drug-infested hell hole.

In a sentence, it is the observation that you can't govern a city effectively when you are trying to do something else entirely. Let the late sociologist Helmut Schoeck explain the politics of it:

> "It would be a miracle if the democratic process (by itself) were ever to renounce the use of the envy motive. Its usefulness derives, if for no other reason, from the fact that all that is needed, in principle, is to promise the envious the destruction or the confiscation of assets enjoyed by the others; beyond that there is no need to promise anything more constructive. The negativism of envy permits even the weakest of candidates to sound reasonably plausible, since anybody, once in office can confiscate or destroy."

Are the summer 2020 riots making more sense now?

Schoeck goes on to say that actually improving a community by ensuring public safety, enlarging capital assets, creating employment, etc., requires a detailed program, not merely punishing the envied or the supposedly privileged. "And the more precarious the state of a nation's economy at election time, the stronger the temptations for politicians to make 'redistribution' their main plank, even when they know how little margin is left for redistributive measures and, worse still, how likely they are to retard economic growth."

So, in the basest terms, go woke and go broke. When you elect politicians who ignore the duties of office to exploit the envy found in a constituency, sooner or later the streets become unsafe, the garbage doesn't get picket up, the lights go out, the toilets won't flush.

Those who love Indianapolis will try to make certain that the envy-driven are kept far away

from the policy machinery. They have gummed it up something awful.

Mencken's Revenge

(Sept. 6) — This is my mea culpa, and perhaps it is yours too.

When I began editing The Indiana Policy Review, when I first sat in the high-backed chair, I thought I would use our scholars' knowledge and wisdom to help public officials and political leaders think through Indiana's challenges. They could better see unintended consequences and avoid policy traps and snares. They would have on their desks credentialed resources that they otherwise could not access because of the time and energy constraints of practical governing. They would consider it a service, not a criticism.

Yes, you guessed it. Not too many years went by before I realized that Indiana officialdom wasn't interested in improving the situation of individual Hoosiers so much as accruing influence, power and sinecure.

I know, I know, it's an old story. A friend had to remind me of a famous quotation, "H.L. Mencken's revenge" he called it: "The state — or, to make matters more concrete, the government — consists of a gang of men exactly like you and me. They have, taking one with another, no special talent for the business of government; they have only a talent for getting and holding office."

Specifically, I had to come to grips with the fact that most municipal and state officials, while filling campaign chests with ease while winning reelection with acclaim, did not share what we had assumed was an inarguable common mission:

"To marshal the best thought on governmental, economic and educational issues at the state and municipal levels in ways that exalt the truths of the Declaration of Independence, especially as they apply to the interrelated freedoms of religion, property and speech, as they emphasize the primacy of the individual in addressing public concerns and as they recognize that equality of opportunity is sacrificed in pursuit of equality of results."

It was simply ignored. But to this foundation's credit it did not react as have so many of a certain political persuasion, that is, by capitalizing on the outrage, by chasing clicks and donations with constant alarms and flares. You know the type, daily promises to "save the Constitution" or "protect free speech" if you would send a dollar or two.

Instead, it focused on being a worthy chronicle of public policy, ruinous or not. The foundation's officers realized Indiana still had a good number of thinking people in positions of respect and influence around the state. If they were armed with the facts they might at the right time be able to turn Indiana around. That, at least, was the observation of the great historian Arnold Toynbee — that God works not with majorities but with individuals.

We also realized that our children and grandchildren would not need for us to tell them that idiocy had prevailed, they would be living in it. What they would need to know is what went wrong. They would need an honest chronicle for that. The political commentator David Cole has come to the same conclusion:

"Why would they need to read some pundit from 2022 wailing, 'A system that disfavors its best and brightest based on skin color is unjust'? They'll know that already. What they'll be asking is, 'How did people let it happen?' That's what'll interest them."

I have an example, just an anecdote really.

Several years ago I had the opportunity to sit down with a man who was just beginning a political career. He wanted to know the foundation's recommendation on economic policy. I was excited; this is how the foundation was meant to help.

I advised him to simply honor private property as an absolute. His face went blank so I threw in a quote from Ludwig von Mises: "If history could teach us anything, it would be that private property is inextricably linked with civilization." I had brought a book to give him, Tom Bethell's classic "The Noblest Triumph: Property and

Prosperity Through the Ages." I recommended links to our Eric Schansberg and Cecil Bohanon.

But what about public-privater partnerships, he wanted to know. He was enthusiastic about using tax and bonding options to fund economic-development projects and incentives — regional partnerships, splash pads, parking garages, hotels, stadiums, downtown renovation and the like.

There is no such thing, I had to tell him. Those are schemes, economics by press release. For when you say "public" in public-private partnership you mean the government, and when you say "private" you mean the economy. That vision is nonsensical. It has never worked.

In the end, he politely closed the meeting with, "I have no idea what you have been talking about."

So here we are. That fellow happens to be running for governor this next cycle, on the GOP ticket of all places. If he is elected, which I am told is likely if money is the measure, you will be able to tell your grandchildren why they can't find jobs in Indiana.

It will not be what I wished for them, but it is the best that I could do.

Civil Rights Rethought

(Nov. 28) — Hold on to your hat. we're going to talk about race. What would you think if your city council started all over on civil rights, dismantled its equity mechanisms and agencies, erased all references from the municipal code and operations?

Before you answer, know that we have reached a point where we don't have a classless society but rather two classes at each other's throats. The one is made up of the assorted, ever-expanding, intersectional and overlapping groups claiming victim status and demanding a special deal. The other is cisgender, able-bodied, fully employed white males with their supposed privileges.

That's not going to work. A system of social justice makes no sense that has ratcheted full circle to again allow individuals of one race to be treated as secondary or inferior.

But would we be returning to 1964 and the days of Jim Crow?

Many, many people have been taught that would be the case. Peter Wood of Boston College laments that this generation seems to have accepted "the terrible falsehood" that racism is and always was the dominant ideology here. If that stands, Wood warns, the American experiment "will hang by a thread and we would have no Lincoln to save it."[1]

Still, everyone in this foundation would vigorously oppose any change if they thought that Jim Crow or even separate-but-equal would be the result. Could we agree, though, on some policy going forward that would avoid the divisions now being sown?

Otherwise, we end up with social-justice system tied in knots. The civil rights bureaucracy cannot handle situations where there is a hitch in its simplistic black-white indices. Richard Samuelson, professor of government at Hillsdale College, in his essay "The Great Unwokening," outlines some problems with that:

- "What if, say, a black trans-lesbian brings a lawsuit against a disabled Polynesian immigrant?" Samuelson asks. "Without a reliable means of determining who is the 'up' and who is the 'down' group, the whole system, run by legions of enforcement bureaucrats, activists, and lawyers, hits tilt."
- "At Harvard, an Asian-American student must score 450 points higher on the SAT to have the same chance of admission as a black student with otherwise the same qualifications."
- "Twenty-seven percent of black students on elite campuses come from the immigrant community rather than descendants of American slaves. Black students at top schools are thus increasingly less likely to be descendants of the people whom legislators in 1964 had specifically in mind."
- "The great-grandson of an S.S. officer who fled to Argentina, and whose grandchildren moved to the U.S., would be listed as

[1] Peter Wood. "1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project," 2020.

'Hispanic' and benefit from affirmative action. But the great-granddaughter of a Jew he had killed would not."[2]

In addition, there is the question of where exactly in an individual's ancestral makeup does one race begin and another end. And are German indentured servants here owed some sort of reparation? How far do we go back — to the Norse enslavement of the Irish, to the Muslim enslavement of the Slavs, to Native American enslavement of other Native Americans, to the Roman and Greek enslavement of almost everybody? Candace Owens cites a time when slavery was the primary commerce involving an estimated one-third of the world's population.[3] Richard Epstein of the Hoover Institution notes that increasing intermarriage between individuals of different groups makes racial classification difficult. He cites David Bernstein's new book, "Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America":

> "As of 2017, 46 percent of Asian and 39 percent of Hispanic American newlyweds born in the United States married a spouse from a different category. That fluidity and the absence of any obvious classification principle makes self-designation the first step in the selection process. But it cannot be the last step, given the obvious risk that some Robert Leo will become Roberto Leon, solely to gain a prized position. Who will police these exceptions? Firms, agencies, courts?"[4]

And on what hard evidence? Are we going to need mandatory DNA testing to officially determine whom is more historically deserving than whom? Who belongs to which caste?

Samuelson has a better idea — from before Jim Crow, from before 1619 even. He shares Founder James Madison's admiration for London's Royal Exchange of 1571. There, Christians and Jews and Muslims interacted as equals in a sphere of commercial exchange. It is argued that the positive experiences and associations stemming from that free exchange eventually led England to be the first nation to ban slavery.

Madison's idea was to expand that sphere in the United States to include not just commercial contact but all social contact. Discrimination was to carry its own penalty in lost associations, lost opportunities and lost profits, just as the economist Thomas Sowell has shown that it in fact does.

Indeed, the British historian Daniel Hannan says what should be obvious: "The reason we have a word for racism, the reason we recognize that it is unjust, is that a combination of Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment traditions teach us to see the world that way."[5]

Again, after these last years of social experimentation and engineering, there is good reason to dismantle the "equity" mechanisms and agencies, erasing all references to race in your city's municipal code and operations. Who's for a reset? We can start with our own city councils, one town at a time.

Don't everybody raise your hands at once. — *tcl*

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[2] Richard Samuelson. *The Great Unwokening*. Claremont Review of Books, summer 2020.

[3] Candace Owens. "Blackout." 2020.

[4] Richard Epstein. *Dividing by Race*. The Claremont Review of Books, fall 2020.

[5] Daniel Hannan. *America is Not an Extraordinarily Racist Country*. The Washington Examiner, Dec. 19, 2022.

"The Battle of Cowpens," painted by William Ranney in 1845, shows an unnamed patriot (far left) saving the life of Col. William Washington.