

# INDIANAPOLIS

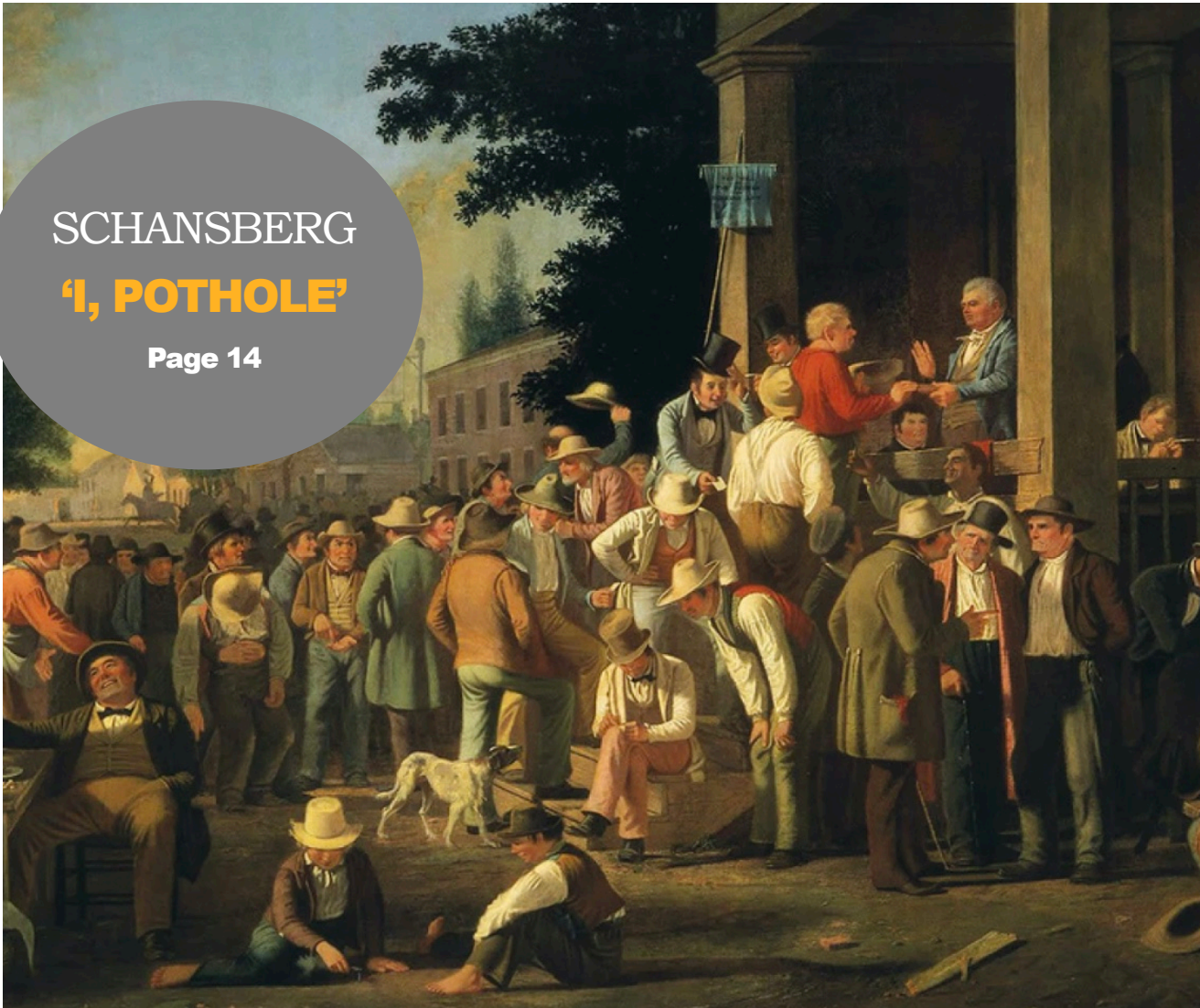
## Review

Winter 2024

SCHANSBERG

**'I, POTHOLE'**

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*"The County Election" George Caleb Bingham*

## How to Win an Election In 700 (or so) Sort of Easy Steps

Our expert has put together a detailed one-year plan for a local election campaign, including the intellectual hoops that you will have to jump through to win. He has assembled a collection of general approaches to the various aspects of a campaign. You can choose the approach you prefer, of course, but you had better make a choice — and the earlier the better. If you don't stand for something, you will stand for nothing, and voters will see that.

*“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.”*



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## A FUTURE THAT WORKS

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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.*

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# Wednesday Whist

## IU at a Crossroads

Indiana University will miss the turn. Indeed, the governor and his appointed trustees won't even see it — the turn away from being a hedge fund with a university attached and back toward being a learning and research institution. And if body language is indicative, IU will be one of the last to abandon the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) insanity that cheapens degrees and faculty standing.

Too bad, the students and alumni deserve better.

Indiana's best students, the ones who can command scholarships, have reason to head 690 miles to the east where the University of Pennsylvania is showing how it's done. Pressure from alumni there, disgusted by the congressional testimony of their president regarding campus anti-Semitism, got her booted from office.

IU had similar protests and its president botched her response similarly. Crickets.

Penn, in contrast, has drafted a new charter that says the university would abstain from adopting any institutional position on political issues. At the same time, it would ensure that individuals on campus are free to propose, test and reject "the widest spectrum of perspective."

Most important to this discussion is the charter's insistence that Penn's selection committees have one mission: to identify excellence — period — regardless of other factors including the melanin count of the applicants.

"The new constitution posits that an unambiguous, publicly understood commitment to excellence will give Penn a competitive edge in hiring and student admissions in the decade ahead," says Heather Mac Donald, an attorney

and commentator on higher education. "This seems commonsensical; testing such a hypothesis is long overdue."

But she rightly sees a trap. Donors who think a commitment to anti-Semitism training is a sign the problem is being solved will be wrong. More from Mac Donald:

"The problem is much deeper than anti-Semitism. And the college administrators are outfoxing the rebel alumni by adopting the rebels' definition of the issue. The problem is an entire anti-Western ethos that now dominates most of the humanities and social sciences and that in STEM is corroding excellence and meritocracy. Jews are today seen as the embodiment of that reviled Western civilization, rather than, as in the past, a threat to it."

Things will continue, then, much as in recent years, which brings with it a dire warning. If IU alumni don't follow Penn's lead, we will find ourselves in this situation: Science, technology, engineering and mathematics will become irrelevant. And what will matter, even after five decades of civil rights law, will not be the content of your character but the color of your skin.

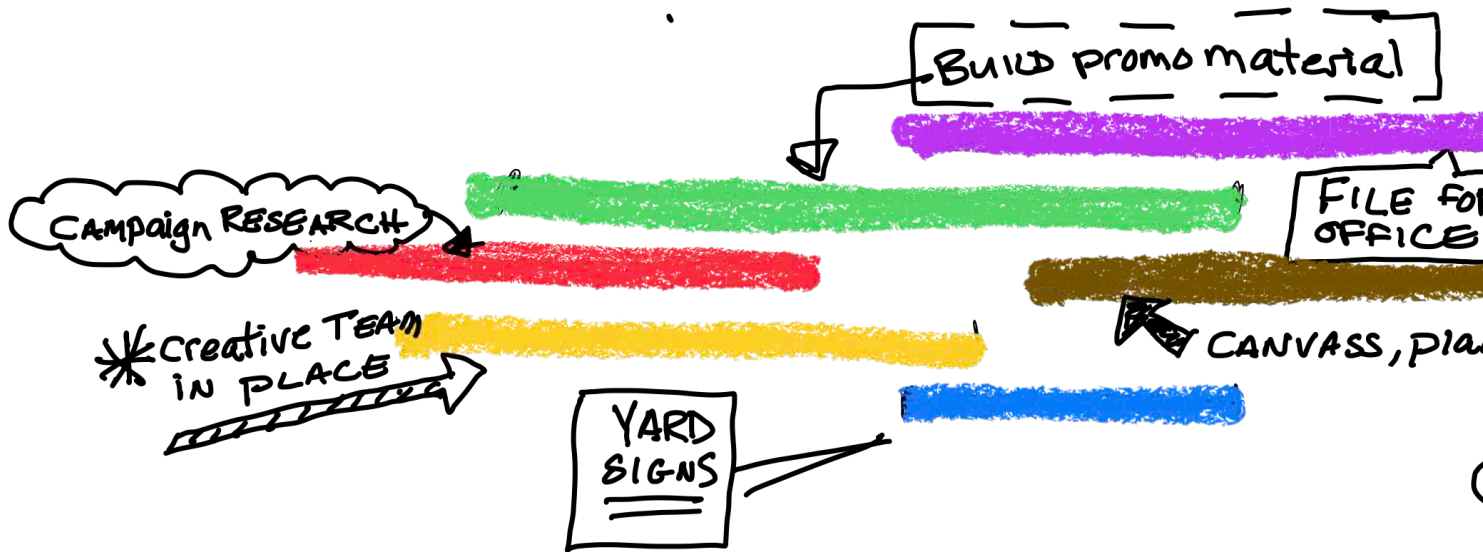
Those with darker skin, regardless of race, religion, nationality or status, will judge those with lighter skin as to their complicity in assumed oppression and colonization, their envy and resentment requiring the extraction of damages. There might be a social-justice score.

Those with lighter skin will be constantly calculating their risk associated with those of darker skin — subtle risks such as grandchildren being rejected by the best colleges or for the best jobs or for the most advantageous loans. But also corporal risks from an increase in predatory crime.

So, as socialism has lost its power to drive calamity, race consciousness steps in. The Devil couldn't have come up with a better plan. — *tcl*

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## How to Win an Election in 700 (or so) Sort of Easy Steps

*A political campaign at any level is complex, not everyone can handle the details. A good way to begin is with a Gantt chart in which a series of horizontal lines shows the amount of work done in certain periods of time in relation to the time planned. Download a Gantt template or just pencil one in on an envelope, but make one. Dennis Ganahl, this year's seminar speaker, put together a one-year countdown serving as a list of sequential tasks and considerations that can be incorporated into a custom Gantt.*

Dennis Ganahl, Ph.D, who delivered the presentation on micro-elections at this year's seminar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, has been managing political campaigns for 52 years. He is the founder and managing director of MO Tax Relief Now.



### The Gantt Countdown

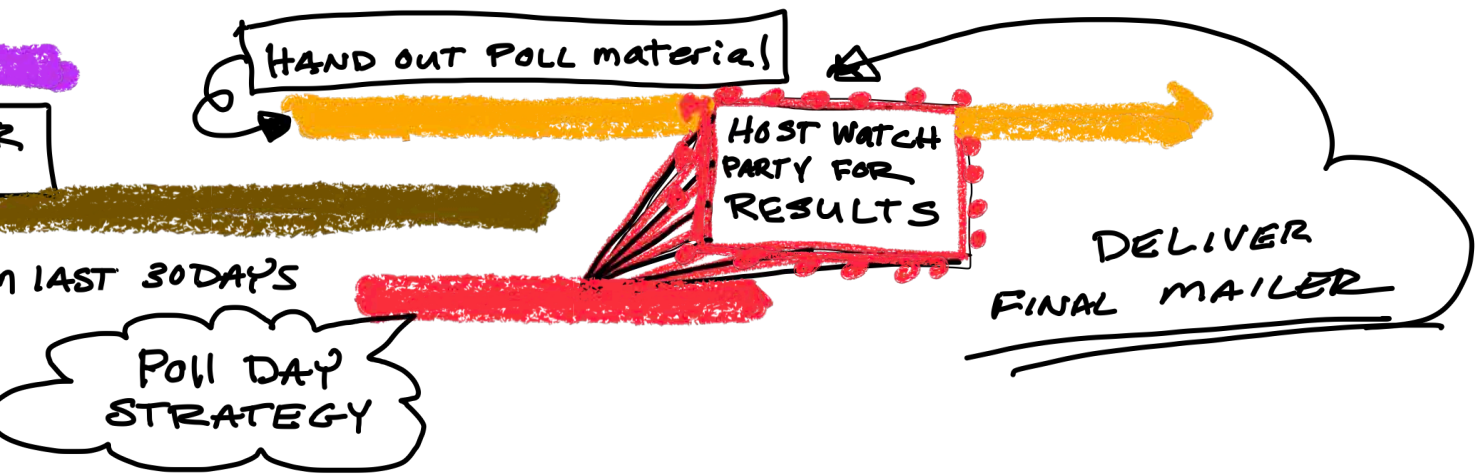
#### 365 Days to Go

- Clearly describe your values, and succinctly write out your five top issues and concerns. Make a list of politicians you admire, and list

the characteristics you like about them.

Visualize and write your story as a politician.

- Research upcoming political races where you are interested for the next two calendar years. List the offices, incumbents, and dates for election.
- Pick your targeted political office. Focus on one office.
- Create a printed calendar. Circle election day in red. Work backwards filling in key dates. You can also use an excel spreadsheet.
- Assess the viability of your candidacy. List your strengths which you will focus on improving.



Know your challenges. The bigger the challenges the more work will be required.

- Collect past election data. You need to know the vote totals by precinct and poll locations for the past several election cycles for the primary and general elections. Get voter data from the Indiana Secretary of State website or your county’s election commissioner. You can also use Ballotpedia [https://ballotpedia.org/Main\\_Page](https://ballotpedia.org/Main_Page).
- Go to the Indiana Secretary of State’s website to learn the laws governing candidates, elections and fundraising
- Go to Indiana Disability Rights to understand the laws for early voting in Indiana
- Contact the Indiana Secretary of State’s office to understand the rules and laws for soliciting, collecting, paying bills and reporting election donations and expenses. Note the dates when campaign finance reports must be filed with the state.
- Contact the Secretary of State to learn the laws about how to help voters register to vote in Indiana
- Check the time, date, and location to file for an office. It’s usually three to four months before the election. Mark the date. Be the first person in line to register as a candidate. Being listed on

the top of the ballot gives a candidate a vote advantage by one-to-several percentage points.

- Contact the Election Commission to know the dates when early voting is available. Note the dates and the primary voting date and the general election date separately on your calendar.
- Get a list of *all* registered voters in the election district you are pursuing from the local election official.
- Open your campaign bank account.
- Research Indiana Election Division rules to set up a PAC for your campaign. Set up your “Friends of ---” PAC fund so you can take contributions. Remember to keep scrupulous records and file timely reports.

**270 Days to Go**

- Take a week for reflection.
- Identify which issues are important to others. Talk to people.
- Look at other similar PACs’ records to identify possible campaign contributors. Arrange personal meetings and discuss which issues are important to contributors and explain your issues, ask for a donation.
- Toughen up — don’t be too sensitive. Remember 50 percent (plus or minus) of the people you meet will disagree with you.

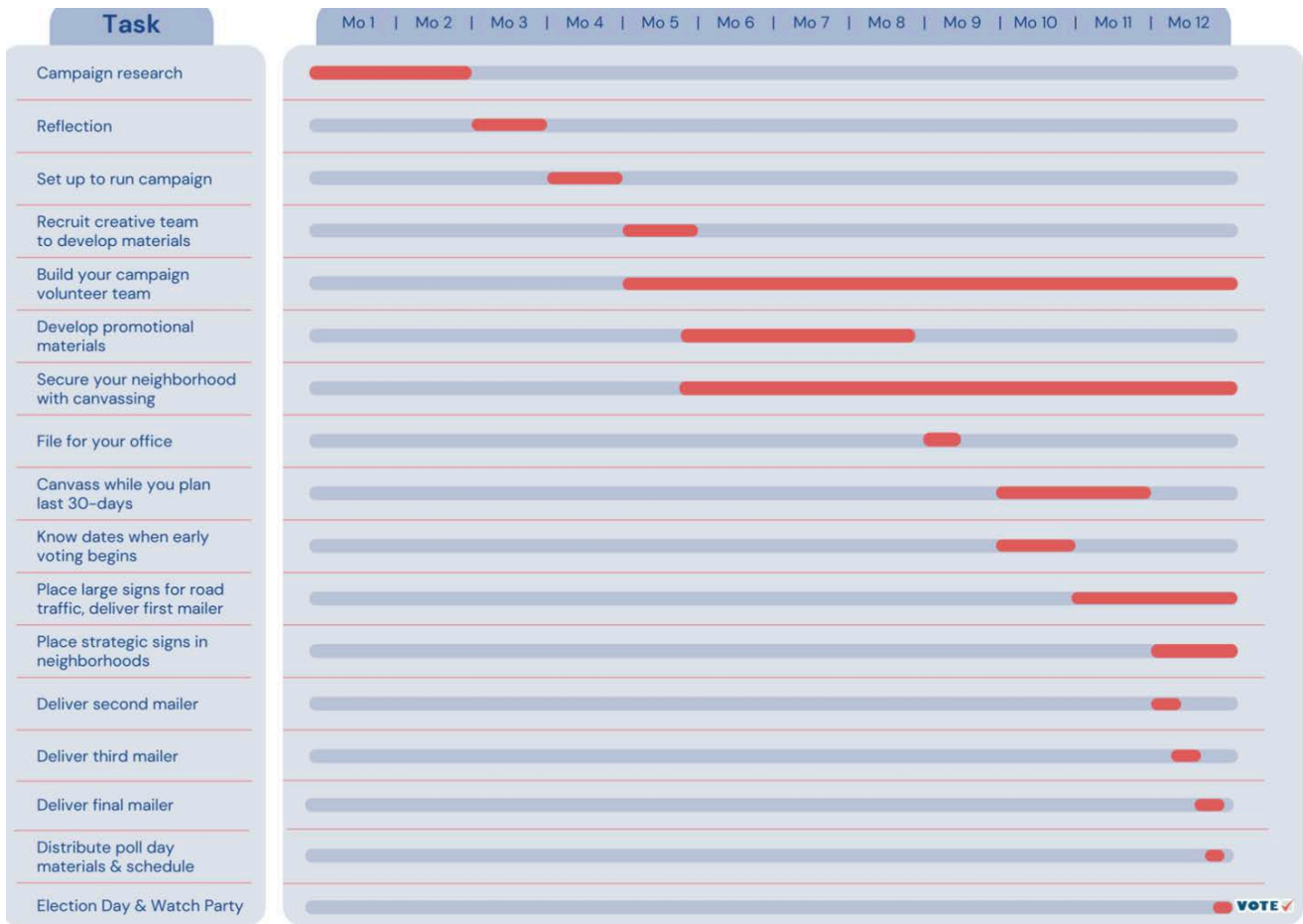


Chart: Denny Ganahl

- Print your business cards with a QR code that connects to your website if you have one.
- Start your Facebook page as a candidate.
- Open your personal account on Nextdoor or other social media that has local interaction. Make weekly postings of newsworthy articles and your opinions about them.
- Only respond to people who support your views. Don't get caught up in social media arguments with the opposition. Antagonizing candidates or people who support certain issues has become a profession with the advent of social media.
- Start recruiting and building your volunteer organization one person at a time. Host a candidate party to introduce yourself. Invite all of your friends, neighbors and new political acquaintances. Serve light refreshments and drinks. You can always get a free room at the public library or city hall. Collect names, access information, sign locations, and hours willing to canvass or on poll day.

### 240 Days to Go

- Find and hire a website designer. Volunteers work just as well.
- Start a website, which allows you to collect addresses of people to email your group.
- Find and hire a graphic artist. Volunteers work just as well.
- Find and hire a copywriter. Volunteers work just as well.
- Start writing copy for your brochures based on the feedback you're receiving from people when you meet with them. Don't forget the issues you first identified along with your values.
- Print your leave-behind card based on what you can afford
- Find and hire a social media activist. Volunteers work just as well.
- One hundred-and eighty-day Countdown (Six months)
- Design and build candidate's website



- Design a leave-behind piece for door-to-door canvassing

### 150 Days to Go

- Start door-to-door canvassing. Continue until Election Day.
- Secure your neighborhood, first. Walk door-to-door, and progress in ever-widening circles of surrounding neighborhoods. Recruit and schedule others to join you. It's more fun to do as a group. Depending on the size of your district, you need to do it daily for a couple of hours.
- Ask people for their vote
- Ask for email addresses
- Ask for yard sign placements. Ideal locations include corner lots at intersections, and subdivision entrances,
- Ask for money donations
- Ask for help with door-to-door canvassing, and ask for help on poll day
- Identify leaders of nearby grassroots organizations, clubs, churches, and community leaders. Reach out to them.
- Get your volunteers to host meet and greet coffees in neighborhoods. Ask for donations.
- Collect lists of people's names who think similarly to you and believe similarly.
- Create budget for campaign
- File for your office on the first date for filing. Be the first in line. Make a splash on your social media outlets. Take photos and post them on Facebook and Nextdoor

### 75 Days to Go

- Develop promotional materials
- Yard signs (use at polls also)
- Inserts (use as mailers also) in newspaper
- Send out every-other-week campaign email updates. Ask your supporters to forward them to neighbors, friends and family.
- Post social media announcements with photos of voters you are meeting. Be sure and get permission to use their photo.
- Plan your 6" x 11" front and back mailers. Schedule them backwards starting with the last one which should be delivered within four days

of election day. Determine the number you can afford to mail.

- Build your poll-day worker strategy. Plan your poll day schedules so every poll has a worker all day, at a minimum key polls must have workers during the morning and evening.
- Visit each poll site to plan your sign placement strategy. Put your sign on the direct path to the election poll 25 feet before the entrance. Signs must be placed at each poll in strategic locations by the time polls open.
- Collect names of volunteers who will work the polls on election day. Ideally, each poll should have someone all day saying hello to people, thanking them for showing up to vote. Offer to answer any questions. Poll workers should be holding your yard sign.

### 60 Days to Go

- Place large signs on major roads 30-days before people start early voting

### 30 Days to Go

- Put yard signs in neighborhoods in yards at intersections and the homes of opinion leaders 30-days before election poll day
- Deliver first mail piece (for early voters)

### 21 Days to Go

- Deliver second mail piece

### 14 Days to Go

- Deliver third mail piece
- Newspaper ad (reaches the most people)

### 7 Days to Go

- Deliver last mail piece
- Radio call-in shows or ads (Need to run multiple ads a day or so before election day)

### Election Day

- Deliver mail piece at the polls. An effective Polling strategy can increase your vote total by 1-5 percent.
- Host a Watch Party for your campaign's volunteers. Be sure and thank everyone for their support and help. Remember this is the beginning of your movement whether you win or lose. You need to build a team.

## Strategy and the Rules of Engagement

*Now that you have begun your campaign's Gantt chart, you will need to sit down and think long and hard about what you're up to — what you stand for, what you intend to accomplish and how you are going to accomplish it. Yes, your ideas will matter. Dr. Ganahl has run dozens of campaigns from neighborhood micro-campaigns to statewide legislative races and referendums. What follows are the intellectual hoops that you will have to jump through to win your election, a collection of general approaches to the various aspects of a campaign. You can choose, of course, the approach you prefer but you had better make a choice — and the earlier the better. If you don't stand for something, you will stand for nothing, and voters will see that.*

1. *Define Your Platform:* Clearly articulate your stance on key issues that matter to your constituency. Develop policies and positions that address local concerns.

2. *Know Your Constituents:* Understand the needs, preferences, and concerns of the people in your area. Engage in conversations, attend community events, and conduct surveys to gather valuable insights.

3. *Build a Strong Team:* Surround yourself with dedicated and capable individuals who can help with campaign strategy, outreach, communications, and logistics.

4. *Campaign Strategy:* Develop a comprehensive strategy that includes fundraising, outreach, advertising, and grassroots efforts. This might involve door-knocking, organizing town halls, creating a website, and using social media.

5. *Fundraising:* Secure the necessary funds for your campaign. This can come from personal savings, donations, and potentially public funding, depending on local laws.

6. *Compliance and Paperwork:* Ensure that you comply with all legal requirements for running in your locality. This may involve registering with election authorities, filing financial reports, and adhering to campaign spending limits.

7. *Communicate Effectively:* Craft a clear and compelling message that resonates with your audience. Be authentic and transparent in your communication.

8. *Leverage Technology:* Use digital tools, such as social media, email campaigns, and online

advertising, to reach a wider audience and engage with voters.

9. *Participate in Debates and Forums:* Showcase your knowledge and positions in public forums to demonstrate your credibility and ability to address important issues.

10. *Door-to-Door Canvassing:* Connect with voters directly by going door-to-door to discuss your platform and listen to their concerns.

11. *Engage with Local Media:* Establish relationships with local journalists and media outlets. Offer yourself for interviews and provide press releases about campaign milestones.

12. *Volunteer and Community Engagement:* Encourage supporters to volunteer their time and actively engage with the community. This can help build a strong network of advocates.

13. *Stay Resilient:* Be prepared for challenges and setbacks. Maintain a positive attitude, adapt your strategy when needed, and continue engaging with voters.

14. *Get Out the Vote:* Ensure that your supporters actually go to the polls on Election Day. Implement effective GOTV strategies, such as providing transportation, sending reminders, and organizing events.

15. *Compliance with Election Regulations:* Adhere to all election laws and regulations, including campaign finance laws, to avoid any legal issues.

*Remember, winning a local election requires dedication, hard work, and effective communication with your constituents. It's also important to be genuine and authentic in your interactions.*

## Build A Strong Campaign Team

You have to care about your neighborhood in order to build a team that can win political contests. It takes time and patience. In the end, count on doing most of the work yourself. These experiences lead to self-actualization that isn't possible otherwise.

When you build your neighborhood organization, there are many advantages over out-of-town professional campaign workers. A neighborhood organization can be more efficient than paid workers or shipped-in college student canvassers who move in to your campaign territory. Unless a political party or other political organization has targeted your race or precincts as a priority for some reason, you won't get resources or help from others. Building a team to engage in a long-term plan maximizes your neighborhood's potential for more than a last-minute candidate campaign.

### The 50/50 Rule

**Fact:** You must be the most dedicated person in your endeavor, otherwise you will fail. Count on doing half the work by yourself, and your volunteers doing the other half. Volunteers aren't as committed, and since they aren't paid, they aren't required to work. They are less likely to follow through on their commitment because of other things in their life come up and take precedence. Expect to lose at least half of your volunteers for every event you plan.

Recruit twice as many volunteers as you need to ensure an adequate number of volunteers will show up. Phoning them the night before helps your turnout, but expect half. Also, don't burn out your volunteers doing stuff that takes you little to no time to do. Use them for heavy lifting projects.

Over the course of the campaign, you may find a few excellent volunteers committed and willing to go above and beyond the normal expectations. These people may become candidates in the future. Take time to teach them if they show interest.

## Find Productive Volunteers

The most direct source of volunteers is to contact people already active in groups with a history of political action. Create a list of people involved with organizations you know or have heard about. Reach out to them and ask to speak a few minutes at their meeting. Here are some possible opportunities for recruiting. You must be willing to tell your story many, many times. Don't drone on and on, stay upbeat, and motivate people. Close by asking for volunteers to help you make a difference.

- Former Campaign Contributors
- Neighborhood Associations or HOAs
- Fundraising Groups
- Church/ Religious Organizations
- Women's Organizations
- Minority and Ethnic Groups
- Youth Groups
- Trade Organizations
- Service Organizations
- Youth Groups
- Republican Activists
- Personal Friends and Family
- Senior Organizations
- Civic Organizations
- Pro-Life Groups
- Professional Groups
- Political Junkies
- Veterans Groups
- Republican township and party leadership

### Keep Your Volunteers Motivated and Working: Build a Positive and Passionate Culture

It's a challenge to build and maintain a volunteer team that is happy and active. Learning how to motivate and direct people requires leadership and people skills. Buy a copy of "How to win friends and influence people" by Dale Carnegie. It'll pay for itself many times if you read it and employ Carnegie's time-tested techniques.

The first step is to build relationships with your volunteers. It takes time and effort to learn about

them and their families. If someone feels like they aren't appreciated and respected they won't work for you and worse, they will talk badly about you to others. Constantly, tell volunteers how important they are and how much you appreciate their help. They are invaluable.

*Show your appreciation* – Volunteers need to feel appreciated and recognized. Give out certificates of appreciation or other small gifts like coffee gift cards.

*Listen* – Since they are interacting with the general public, volunteers are a great source of insider intelligence. Take time to listen to their suggestions, then take action.

*Take time to have fun* – If it's not something people will have fun doing, they won't do it. If they see it as drudgery, they won't come back. Electing someone to public office is serious business. Being a volunteer needs to be fun and people must feel the passion. Listen to your volunteers.

Include everyone who offers their time – Find something to do for everyone who volunteers. Campaigns can turn into an "us versus them" situation. Don't let cliques get started like "Insiders versus the other volunteers," "People who have been around longer and people who just came on board," "Volunteers who have been working together for years versus new recruits."

*Don't burn them out* – Volunteers may be given too much responsibility too early, or you may be relying on the same volunteers for every project.

*Can't lose/ Can't win* – Volunteers don't want to waste their time if the campaign seems like a sure thing or a lost cause.

*No Growth* – Volunteer work can't always be tedious: there are enough interesting assignments to go around.

*External Opposition* – When a person volunteers, their entire family, is impacted. Appreciate what people and their families are doing for you.

*Avoid Internal Conflict* – No one wants to work in a place that is full of tension.

## Canvassing

Door-to-Door canvassing is a highly targeted and extremely effective technique.

Voters can really identify with a campaign if their neighbors or other individuals are on their doorsteps describing the candidate or issue directly to them.

## Canvassing Kit

1. Talking Points: Relaying a targeted and unified message is the most important part about contacting voters. Keep on the talking points. Don't stray away from them.

2. Walk Lists and Maps: In your packet include a walk list. This list includes the address of the targeted voters you will meet. The route you take to get to each household will be plotted on a map.

3. Literature/Brochure: Give literature to distribute to each targeted voter.

4. Question Slips: If a volunteer is unable to answer a question, have them fill out a Question Slip and let the voter know that someone from the campaign's headquarters will follow-up.

5. Tally Sheet: As you are canvassing a community, keep track of the voters with whom you speak by utilizing a tally sheet and tracking code.

6. Volunteer Badge: Use a volunteer badge to identify the person as a volunteer for the campaign.

7. Early Vote/Absentee Ballot Eligibility List/ Voter Registration: You should inform each targeted voter of the eligibility requirements for voting early. It is also a good idea to have Voter Registration forms on hand if you get the opportunity to register a new voter.

8. Ride to the Poll Form: If a voter decided he/she would like to vote early and requests a ride to the County Voter Registration Office to do so, have him/her fill out the attached Ride to the Polls Form.

9. Legal Rights of a Canvasser Memo: In case a volunteer runs into any problems with the

authorities while canvassing they should know their rights and contact you.

10. Encourage Volunteers to Bring Water and a Snack

### Training Canvassers

Canvassers always need to be trained before they go out canvassing for the first time. This should include some role playing to allow the volunteer to become familiar with the script and the marking system the campaign has created. Volunteers should be instructed on appearance and behavior. Dress nicely, no foul language, no standing in flowers, etc. Warn canvassers about possible dangers like dogs.

### Recommendation and Rules for Canvassers

1. Wear comfortable shoes.
2. Look presentable when you go door-to-door.
3. Keep your partner within sight.
4. Never go into anyone's home. Just thank them and move along.
5. If someone has a question and you do not immediately know the answer, make a note and get back to them with the answer.
6. Remember to record as much voter information as possible.
7. Never put literature in mailboxes or mail slots even though it may seem like a good idea. It is actually against the law to do so.

### How to Write a Script for Canvassing

#### 1. Identify Yourself

“ \_\_\_\_\_ (voter), my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I’m a volunteer for \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate), who’s running for the state house. May I speak with you for just a moment?”

#### 2. Talk about the Candidate

“We’re helping \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate), because, \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate), is an honest candidate with a good record of helping the consumer. We think \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate), is one of the few candidates we can trust these days.”

#### 3. Ask the Question

“We’re conducting a person-to-person campaign because \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate) \_\_\_\_\_ wants to make sure the people know where \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate) \_\_\_\_\_ stands on the issues. Is there a particular issue you’re concerned about or any other question you’d like to ask?”

#### 4. Offer Brochure

“Have you made up your mind about the election, \_\_\_\_\_ (voter) \_\_\_\_\_?” [If yes, determine preference and conclude conversation appropriately. If no, continue.]

“I’d like to leave this brochure with you, \_\_\_\_\_ (voter) \_\_\_\_\_, to tell you more about \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate) \_\_\_\_\_. Please consider voting for \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate) \_\_\_\_\_ on Election Day. \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate) \_\_\_\_\_ will be a great state representative. Thanks for your time. ♦

# Eric Schansberg

*If a pothole is daunting, what about a national healthcare system or dozens of more complex matters?*

Eric Schansberg, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the foundation, is professor of economics at Indiana University Southeast. This is reprinted with permission from the fall 2021 issue of the *Cato Journal*, all rights reserved.



## 'I, Pothole'

I am a pothole — an ordinary road hazard and a bane to all who drive. Messing with you and your vehicles is my vocation; it's what I do.

My genealogy is compelling enough. I come from a common road — built with dirt, six to twelve inches of #2 gravel and #57 gravel with lime dust — which is compacted at each stage. Then, add an inch or two of asphalt base, before a layer of finishing asphalt to complete the work.

But over time, roads wear out. If the road is not well — constructed, trouble comes quicker. Without inspections, developers have an incentive to skimp on long — term road quality — and may succumb to this temptation. Even with the best roads, the ground can shift, especially if built on sand, and the weight of traffic inevitably takes a toll. But most of us potholes start with moisture, especially ice. Road salt is a mixed blessing: it's tough on the roads, but it reduces the damage to roads from moisture and ice.

One vulnerable area is the asphalt seam or "crown" — the peak of the road that allows water to drain off. Sometimes, the edge of a road lacks a solid foundation. And the driving lanes of a road receive the most weight. So, I can show up anywhere. Street departments try to prevent me through road maintenance — for example, "crack sealing" using hot rubberized asphalt and polymers. Those stripes may not look pretty, but they prevent me from showing up.

"Because I'm small and local, I seem simple to fix, but I'm not. Given this, imagine how difficult it is to fix large, national, complex problems."

All that said, at the end of the day, I'm only a hole in the ground. The more fascinating story is about the efforts to fix me and my friends. It is more of a mystery than you might expect. Sadly, people overlook this—and then, miss the larger lesson: Because I'm small and local, I seem simple to fix, but I'm not. Given this, imagine how difficult it is to fix large, national, complex problems. Me and my story may seem mundane. But as the clever and wise G. K. Chesterton once observed, "There are no uninteresting things, only uninterested people."

I, Pothole, simple as I may appear, merit your wonder and awe — a claim I will explain. In fact, if you can understand me and efforts to fix me — no, that's too grand to ask — if you can become aware of the miracles that this represents, you will have less faith in the efficacy of government activism and be able to promote the freedom and prosperity that are under attack today.

I have a profound lesson to teach. And I can teach this lesson better than a pencil or a missile, an elementary school or antitrust enforcement, because fixing me is seemingly so simple. It may be simple, but no single person on earth knows how to do it. This sounds incredible, especially when you realize how many potholes are fixed every year.

As you know from the popular parable of the now — prominent pencil, innumerable people are involved with fixing a pothole. Consider just one aspect of the remedy: my family tree includes asphalt — the production of which requires hundreds of people in an average company. Now contemplate what efforts went into making the places where they work, the clothes they wear, the coffee they drink, the tools, machines, and computers they use. Think of all the cars they drive to get there and of course — don't overlook the avenues with their potholes. (They also use roads to receive the inputs they use and to transport their final product!) As with the pencil, it's obvious that no single person knows how to do

all the things required to fix a simple problem like me.

But let's take this discussion down a different road. How does a pothole get fixed? Imagine that you run the relevant department for the local government and are in charge of maintaining the city streets.

The first problem is identifying the location of the potholes. How do you get this information? The most common method is for your workers — and other government workers in the public (e.g., sanitation workers) — to report what they find. You'd love to have more input from your friends and neighbors. But they probably figure that someone else will report a problem. You have a website and a phone number for citizens to report their concerns. (And it's important for us to keep a good paper trail — to show that you've done your due diligence to prevent tort claims!) But the point is clear: finding all the potholes is easier said than done.

Second, you need to prioritize which potholes to fix first. How many people are affected by the pothole? What is the severity of the damage and danger caused by each pothole? Your top priority is preventing car damage (and avoiding lawsuits). So, more severe potholes are highest on the list. But it's also important to deal with higher traffic areas where potholes can get worse more quickly. For lower — priority jobs, it's first come, first serve.

Another complication is "pothole season." In the late winter, you have many more potholes, making those decisions even more challenging. And ironically, potholes are more difficult to fix in the winter, since you need the ground to be above freezing. You can use a "cold patch," which can be done even when it's freezing or wet, but it's a costlier option. You can also use a propane torch to dry out and warm up a pothole, but that's costly too.

When you're not in pothole season, you can use more time and resources for road maintenance. And if there aren't enough potholes to fix on a given day, it may not be cost — effective in terms of asphalt, machine usage, machine

rental, and so on. It's important that you achieve economies of scale to be relatively efficient.

When should you fix them — with implications for disrupting traffic and imposing on workers: during the day or at night, on weekdays or weekends? For example, it's not smart to fix potholes in front of the courthouse during the week. It's better to do this at night or on the weekends.

Third, to fix the potholes, which skills are required (or at least useful) in your employees? The skill level of workers may seem unimpressive, but you need them to be able to do many jobs, since your work varies throughout the year. Your workers may do three or four different types of jobs in a day and you cross — train them to be effective at a handful of tasks. So, you want them to be able to learn quickly and to be self — motivated. Beyond that, not just any worker will do. For safety reasons, they must be diligent and detail — oriented. Since some manual labor is involved, they must be willing to get their hands dirty — and ideally, they're good with tools and machines.

How many workers do you need? A small "cold patch" is a one — worker job — pouring the mix into the hole and smoothing it out. But most jobs are for two (or more) workers. At the least, you usually need one (or more) to fix me and one to deal with traffic. Larger jobs could still be done by one person, but safety concerns and greater accountability usually mean that it's better to have two on the job.

Fourth, what materials will you use to fix the potholes? What sort of machines and tools would be helpful? What is the rate of depreciation, maintenance, and breakage in those tools and machines? For tools, you need trucks and "hot boxes" (small trailers to keep the asphalt within a certain temperature range), tampers (hand and gas), asphalt rakes, shovels, heavy brooms, blowers, an air compressor (to dry out narrow fissures), Rosebud heating nozzles, propane torches, skid steers (e.g., Bobcats), rollers with a milling head attachment.

For materials, you need asphalt and “binder” (which binds the new asphalt to the existing road materials). When temperature is an issue or you need a quick fix, you also have “hot patch” and “cold patch” options. (It’s perhaps surprising that it’s easier to have a more effective fix for deeper potholes, since there’s more surface area for the binder to attach.)

All of this assumes a modest pothole. If there is a problem with the foundation of the road, you’ll need to remove the asphalt and the flawed foundation, cutting and replacing the section as necessary — to deal with the root causes. In this, you’re a lot like a dentist. (And don’t forget: if you’re going deeper, be careful not to hit a gas main, electrical wires, or a water pipe!)

Fifth, what are the prices of the inputs to production: the labor of various skills, the capital of various types, and other inputs? How do you balance your budget, trying to maximize social well — being within the revenues you have been granted by the government? There are so many factors to weigh as you maximize road quality while watching costs.

Sixth, how are the above answers changed by differences in climate? (Arizona is not the same as Vermont.) Not much, except for differences in temperature and precipitation, variance in the quality of road construction, and various state regulations. What about weather? Aside from cold patches and hot patches, potholes can’t be fixed when the ground is wet or freezing. Underlying road conditions are relevant. And as we’ve seen, there are some important trade — offs between short — run fixes, long — run fixes, and cost.

Seventh, when can the private sector provide better quality and/or lower cost? Maybe you shouldn’t be fixing potholes at all — or maybe you should fix some types of potholes and outsource the others. You’re likely to privatize bigger jobs for paving, potholes, striping, engineering services. You simply cannot achieve the economies of scale to be as efficient. Sometimes, you can handle the job, but it doesn’t make sense for some smaller cities to own paving machines. Renting is smarter

given that the work is seasonal and the machine is expensive and high maintenance.

And finally, what role does technological advance and changing market conditions have in changing all of the above? Even if I understand the world of potholes perfectly today, my understanding will become increasingly obsolete, soon enough.

Although millions of people have a hand in fixing me, none of them know more than a small bit of what is required. This “knowledge problem” is a key facet in the field of Austrian Economics. In the context of markets, we have innumerable, subjective, and diffuse bits of information embedded in the preferences of consumers (often modeled as demand curves).

We have the wide array of variables that face producers — the prices of output and inputs, technology, incentivizing workers, etc. (often modeled as supply curves). And these two cooperate in markets through the challenges (and transaction costs) of communication and transport.

To credit Leonard Read’s classic example, “I, Pencil,” it’s amazing that there are usually about the right number of yellow #2 pencils in boxes of ten on the shelf of the local box retailer in February and in August.

Thankfully, the person running the Street Department can be successful because the pothole problem is relatively simple in terms of the knowledge required. While the list of questions regarding a pothole is daunting, it is manageable for someone who gains expertise in such things. It may not be done well, but it can be done well — with sufficient experience, managerial skill, wisdom, and knowledge.

What about more complicated matters — for example, a national health care system. What do government bureaucrats need to know to effectively run everything from allergy shots to cancer, from routine check-ups to Medicare, from cheap prescriptions to innovative research, from the rural poverty of Appalachia to the elites on the coasts? Well, we don’t have nearly enough time to get into all of that. But the point is clear enough:



the “knowledge problem” is staggering for more complex matters and as we extend from local to state to federal governance.

Another concern is the question of motives and how they play out in different contexts. In the context of the market for asphalt, it’s astounding that few of those involved—the worker in the oil field and the person who produces the coffee he drinks, the salesperson and the clerical staff, the CEO and the janitor—perform their tasks to please people per se. Their motivations are mixed—from putting food on their table to buying a boat, from sleeping well at night to impressing their friends. A competitive market harnesses these motives to get people to serve customers (and society) effectively.

In political markets, these concerns are generally greater. It’s certainly possible that the primary aim of the bureaucrat is maximizing

social well-being. Even if not, it’s possible that political pressures will curtail deviations from the ideal. But it’s also possible that we’ll see cronyism and graft, inefficiency and red tape, budget-maximization and over-spending. Of course, these worries are exacerbated by the high level of monopoly power in most government endeavors.

The lesson I have to teach is this: Even when government is a constitutional, ethical, and practical means to some end—on paper—be wary of the knowledge problem and the motives question for politicians and bureaucrats. In contrast to the foibles of political markets, have more faith that free people will respond favorably to the Invisible Hand of economic markets. I, Pothole — though seemingly simple — offer the miracle of my maintenance as testimony that this is a practical faith—as practical as the sun, the rain, and the roads. ♦

## Maryann O. Keating

*Adam Smith refers to a “natural wage” for any given skill and effort level; we might think of it as an equilibrium wage “all other things being equal.” In typical Smith fashion, he neither ignores personal physical and intellectual abilities nor emphasizes them unless relevant. He trusts markets to naturally discern talent and excellence.*

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### Adam Smith on Differential Returns on Labor

Equal opportunity is of greater concern than equality of outcomes. Nevertheless, economists study wage inequality intensely. Actually, Adam Smith admits that his chapter on wage differentials is overly long. His chapter consists of two parts. Part I deals with natural and therefore inevitable wage inequalities and Part II, with policy-driven attempts affecting the return to labor (Wealth of Nations, Book I, Chapter X, “Of Wages and Profit in the different Employments of Labour and Stock”).

Smith does not concentrate on wage disparities deemed to be “too big.” He provides examples of households’ combined income due to full and part-time labor plus ownership of capital. Recent U.S. 21st Century experience is more in line with Smith as compared with a mid-20th household living on income from a single wage earner, with little or no financial assets or government transfers. However, Chapter X focuses specifically

on wage differentials because Smith thinks that the average return to “stock” [capital assets] is more uniform across industries.

The lesser mobility of labor, according to Smith, does not preclude an efficient labor market.

If in the same neighborhood [all other things being equal], there was any employment evidently either more or less advantageous than the rest, so many people would crowd into it in the one case, and so many would desert it in the other, that its advantages would soon return to the level of other employments. This at least would be the case in a society where things were left to follow their natural course, where there was perfect liberty (Part I, 1).

Smith refers to a “natural wage” for any given skill and effort level; we might think of it as an equilibrium wage “all other things being equal.” In typical Smith fashion, he neither ignores personal physical and intellectual abilities nor emphasizes them unless relevant. He trusts markets to naturally discern talent and excellence.

More recent economic texts refer to the demand for labor as a “derived demand” recognizing marginal productivity in combination with capital; this departs from a labor theory of value. Similarly, Smith does not write that a person should be guaranteed a wage reflecting their position in society or personal talents. Rather, free persons must first enter the labor market of his or her choice and accept or reject the salary offered. Furthermore, Smith emphasizes that the size of the market and location affect cost one’s return to labor and capital.

Therefore, Smith’s chapter may be viewed as one advising young persons and their benefactors on the realities of career choice.

First, the wages of labor vary with the ease or hardship, the cleanliness or dirtiness, and the honourableness or dishonourableness of the employment (Part I, 2).

It is obvious to most that someone collecting trash in harsh weather will earn more than one selling shoes at the mall. Generally, less accepted

is the fact that those in, for example, the arts earn but a “scanty subsistence.” Smith attributes this to the fact that in an advanced economy, the number of people who pursue these activities for pleasure makes more people “follow them than can live comfortably by them.” It is difficult to earn a living doing something that many consider a hobby or not their “sole principal employment.” Note, however, that Smith has no objection to those willing to substitute satisfaction for reduced compensation.

Smith offers an example of the premium earned by catering to a difficult clientele. There is “scarce any common trade in which a small stock yields so great a profit” as that of proprietors willing to expose their capital, labor, and property in operating hotels and bars.

Secondly, the wages of labor vary with the easiness and cheapness, or the difficulty and expense of learning the business (Part I, 5).

Wage differences between skilled and ordinary workers vary with educational expenses and the practice needed to acquire dexterity. This financial return, according to Smith, must be received “in a reasonable time, regard being had to the very uncertain duration of human life.” He observed that mechanics, carpenters, and manufacturers earn a slight wage premium over those who learn their trade remotely on the family farm or in producing homemade items. Nevertheless, Smith maintains that the steadiness and superior earnings of journeymen in service are “no greater than what is sufficient to compensate the superior expense of their education.”

Consider a current situation in which university graduate students in economics and the liberal arts generally are awarded a stipend plus tuition. As such, their lifetime compensation is likely to be less than other students entering riskier professions that require going into debt or paying out-of-pocket expenses. Smith notes, “The pecuniary recompense, therefore, of painters and sculptors, of lawyers and physicians, ought to be much more liberal [generous]: and it is so accordingly.”

Thirdly, The wages of labor in different occupations vary with the constancy or inconstancy of employment (Part I, 11).

Smith observed that the day wages of low-skilled masons and bricklayers in London were somewhat higher than those of house carpenters. In seasonal work, Smith explains, what is earned “must not only maintain him while he is idle, but make him some compensation for those anxious and desponding moments which the thought of so precarious situation must sometimes occasion” Today, we observe higher annual salaries earned in careers peaking at an early age with limited duration.

Fourthly, The wages of labor vary according to the smaller or greater trust that must be reposed in the workmen (Part I, 17).

Smith indicates that irrespective of the industry in which they are employed, prudent and honest traders may be rewarded with a personal premium. However, he attributes the persistent higher earnings of most physicians and attorneys, educational expenses aside, to the perceived value in entrusting to them one’s health, fortune, and reputation.

Trust is an issue in certain other occupations. Smith notes that those entrusted with large amounts of someone else’s capital or precious assets, like jewelers, earn a premium in addition to that awarded for their skills.

Fifthly, the wages of labor in different employments vary according to the probability or improbability of success in them (Part I, 21).

Note: In some cases in listing the five characteristics, the “t” in “the” is capitalized and in others “t” is not. In quoting Smith, I prefer to keep his notation and spelling)

Occupational choice is influenced by the probability of financial success. Smith refers to lotteries in analyzing this decision. An ordinary return is relatively certain in some fields. However, he says that if a parent pays for a child “to study law, it is least twenty to one if ever he [or she] makes such proficiency as will enable him [or her] to live by the business”.

Smith poses a provocative question. Does the compensation received by a tedious and expensive legal education of one successful student equal the total loss for the “more than twenty others who are never likely to make anything by it?” Probably not, he answers, because financial returns in law “as well as [in] many other liberal and honorable professions are, in point of pecuniary gain, evidently under-recompensed.”

Why then do reasonable persons crowd into fields such as medicine, law, poetry, and philosophy? Smith hypothesizes that considerable part of the reward must be the satisfaction of being associated in some way with “what is called genius or superior talent.” Ultimately, he notes, we enter into risky occupational lotteries, where the average return far exceeds the median, because each of us tends to be overconfident in our personal abilities and good fortune!

Consider the greater total amount bet in gambling in a given year as compared with that spent on private insurance. In the choice of careers, young people are particularly attracted to the dangers associated with a life of adventures. Smith observed the large number of young men of dexterity and skill joining the navy. The navy at that time offered a small probability of earning a fortune along with the risk of great hardship and danger. Smith argues that a sailor’s pay “may not perhaps always exceed the difference between his pay and that of the common laborer,” because his free lodgings at sea cannot be shared by family.

A better explanation for the current “exorbitant rewards” earned by athletes and stage performers is required than the one given by Smith. He suggests that while the public generally agrees that their talents are agreeable and beautiful they are “by no means so rare as is imagined.” Their high wages, according to Smith, are in part a reward for the “discredit” of the public for their willingness to employ their talents in this manner. Certainly, there is an opportunity cost in becoming a public figure. However, we now tend to justify performers’ prestige and premiums to markets identifying superior talent and audience preferences. It is too early to predict

how signing “Name, Image, and Likeness” contracts for certain students will ultimately affect their prestige, educational expenses, and future compensation.

Labor markets are dynamic and result in the displacement of workers and wage disparities for similar skills. Smith admits to being somewhat puzzled by the consistently higher wages earned in newer industries, considering the lower variability in established industries producing necessities. He hypothesizes that speculation in newer products and a futures market in agriculture result in “accidental variation in demand” could be responsible along with “fashion and fancy.” Presently, changes in worker demand due to production augmented by artificial intelligence may be considered accidental, but government intervention in the electric vehicle race is not. In both cases, the 2023 United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA) work stoppages, attempting to boost wages and increase worker protections, could hasten worker displacement.

In Part II, Smith turns his attention away from natural factors affecting wages towards “. . . the policies of Europe, by not leaving things at perfect liberty, occasions other inequalities of much greater importance.” If Smith exhibits any bias in this chapter it is that poorly thought-out labor policies impose costs on the less influential. Three tools are used by policymakers’ intent on interfering in labor markets.

First, by restraining the competition in some employments to a smaller number than would otherwise be disposed to enter into them; secondly, by increasing it [the number of workers entering into a particular industry] beyond what it naturally would be; and, thirdly, by obstructing the free circulation of labor and stock, both from employment to employment and from place to place (Part II, 2).

We consider first the potential of policy to restrain labor entry into a particular industry. Assume that certain traders and organizations of workers hope to limit the supply of their goods and services coming to market thereby raising

price, profits, and wages. Smith argues, “The exclusive privileges of corporations [crony capitalists] are the principal means it makes use of for this purpose (Book II, 4).” He describes towns in the past in which governments were altogether in the hands of traders and artificers who created legal monopolies which Smith refers to as “corporations”. The interest of such trusts or syndicates is to prevent markets from being overstocked. Each group is eager to have government enforce their preferred regulations. Admittedly if several traders in a geographical area are successful in doing this, they must accept paying higher prices to other locals also attempting to do the same in limiting output. However, these policy induced higher-than-average returns to capital and labor hold whenever they trade with outsiders in the countryside and from distant regions.

Smith argues that the public loses when the number of entrants into any particular line of work is limited. Undoubtedly, If an industry can effectively raise the prerequisites for labor entry, the returns to present workers and their instructors will be higher than average. Smith uses traditional apprenticeships to demonstrate the point. Relating this to our times, suppose that the accounting profession, for example, could increase the number of credit hours required for entry and gain government support that all public accountants be certified. This would result in upward pressure on the wages for both accountants and their instructors.

Regulating the number of apprentices permitted by each firm and specifying years of service restrain competition. In Europe when Smith wrote, seven years seemed to be the established apprenticeship term. Smith includes universities as one of the original and primary organizations requiring students to study under a master for seven years. He argues that such regulations hinder an apprentice’s return on his or her skills and are a manifest encroachment upon just liberty.

Smith poses several more objections to mandated apprenticeship regulations. Long

apprenticeships do not protect the public and, he thought, actually create in young persons an aversion to work. Those who experience sooner rather than later career satisfaction and wages are more likely to conceive a relish for working. Smith writes that for most trades, specialized knowledge and insights can be transmitted in a few weeks whereas judgment and discretion are acquired only through practice. Mandated apprenticeships benefit masters and effectively increase the expense of education.

In the recent past, U. S. occupational licensing has increased. In 1950, 90 occupations were regulated under 1,670 state laws. By 2022, the number of regulated occupations grew to 220 consisting of 4,836 laws (Julia R. Cartwright, “False Directions,” *Law and Liberty*, September 7, 2023). Do government mandates, as compared with the adoption of voluntary standards, ensure quality and protect the consumer? Smith writes:

As it [a regulation on entrance] hinders the one from working at what he thinks proper, so it hinders the “others” from employing whom they think proper. To judge whether he [or she] is fit to be employed, may surely be trusted to the discretion of the employers whose interest it so much concerns. The affected anxiety of the law-giver lest they should employ an improper person, is evidently as impertinent as it is oppressive (Part II, 12).

Smith points out that competition decreases wage premiums for easily acquired skills and compensation associated with individuals and firms associated with certifying attainment. Any current trend away from college degree requirements will put pressure on universities to offer training at competitive rates. In the United States in 1971, a Supreme Decision (*Griggs v Duke Power*) prohibited tests with a disparate impact used to screen potential employees. An unintended consequence is the ubiquity of a degree requirement, an artificial requirement leading to a wage disparity between those with and without a college degree (Graham Hillard, “Is Disparate-Impact Theory Constitutional?” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 2023).

Smith also considers how policies unnaturally increase the number of workers in a particular industry. One tool available is to subsidize entry. Smith writes:

“It has been considered as of so much importance that a proper number of young people should be educated for certain professions, that, sometimes the publick, and sometimes the piety of private founders have established many pensions, scholarships, exhibitions, bursaries, etc. for this purpose, which draw manly more people into those trades than could otherwise pretend to follow them (Part II, 34).”

Smith maintains that large groups majoring in the liberal arts at public expense earn very paltry salaries. He viewed these fields as crowded with indigent people educated at public expense; this was the case even when schools differentiate between students and recognize talent. Before the advent of the printing press, scholars, according to Smith, were undistinguishable from beggars. The only employment available was in teaching or in communicating acquired curious and useful knowledge to private groups. On the other hand, in ancient times, before publicly subsidized education, the rewards to eminent teachers may have been considerable. The lifestyles of Plato and Aristotle suggest an above-average degree of affluence.

Smith concedes that the public on net gains important benefits from the output of the large number of available scholars, trained at public expense, who accept less-than-average income given their skills. However, he laments that these benefits would be higher if schools and colleges were more “reasonable.”

Finally, how does government policy act to affect labor entry and exit between industries and from place to place? Smith does not address the effects of government redirecting the amount of credit available to preferred industries and away from disfavored ones. Also, he does not discuss immigration or emigration policies and their effects on local wages. He does suggest that it is often more difficult for a poor person to pass

through artificial local restrictions in seeking higher wages than national boundaries (Part II, 58).

Smith confines himself to policies affecting residents within a particular nation-state. However, job displacement is a concern, and economists differ on the advisability of using tariffs and restricted immigration to maintain resident workers’ standard of living. Most, however, admit that job displacement is a concern. One study indicates that losses due to displacement from higher paying jobs are minimized in those countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, in which the welfare payments are most generous (Bertheau Et Al, “The Unequal Consequences of Job Loss,” *AER Insights* 2023, 5(3), 393-408). This suggests that government might play a role in aspiring to a degree of wage equality across domestic industries. Writing in 1776, Smith believed that after 400 years it was time to lay aside all endeavors to bring under strict regulation, of what nature seems incapable. He adds by quoting Doctor Burn, “...if all persons in the same kind of work were to receive equal wages, there would be no emulation, and no room left for industry or ingenuity. (Part II, 60).”

Consider that in some countries with large rural populations, workers need permits to relocate into urban areas. Residency requirements are no longer a mute issue even in the United States. Days-in-state requirements to avoid higher income taxes affect labor mobility, particularly for those working remotely. Smith’s extensive treatment of British poor laws gives credence to the old joke that welfare is covered in some states by issuing a bus ticket to another! While Smith does not specifically refer to mandates requiring local officials and police officers to live within a designated district, he does discuss clandestine residency.

Smith argues that employers rather than employees are more effective in getting the government to enforce their preferred policies regarding labor mobility. Physicians and lawyers forced to sign non-compete clauses would agree with him.

Smith writes, “I shall conclude this long chapter with observing, that though anciently [in the past] it was usual to rate [regulate] wages over the whole kingdom...these practices have now gone entirely into disuse (Part II, 60). Smith, nevertheless, observes how employers collude and lobby for wage ceilings, which they themselves, when convenient, violate by paying in kind rather than cash. He does not address organized labor or government mandated wage floors. However, he writes, “The complaint of the workmen that it [wage regulation] puts the ablest and most

industrious upon the same footing with an ordinary workman, seems well founded (Part II, 61).

The distribution of national income between wages and profit varies between time and place. However, variations in the return to labor across industries persist in nations both rich and poor and in economies that are advancing, stationary, or declining. Smith maintains, the proportion between wages in different industries remains the same, and cannot be altered, at least for any considerable time. ♦

# Dick McGowan

*Right and wrong depend on culture;  
the context of society provides the  
standards for judging the difference.*

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## Locke, Property and Virtue

On a trip to Edinburgh, Scotland, we visited the grave of Adam Smith, said to be the ‘father of economics’ and staunch defender of capitalism and free markets. The epitaph on his headstone listed his important writing: “Here lies the author of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*,” as though Smith thought that ethics took pride of place over economics. In that thought, Smith was merely following another thinker whose work is seminal to the foundation of free markets, namely, John Locke.

Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government* has been widely used to justify free market arrangements and, given its strong defense of the right to private property, to justify limitless acquisition of property. However, Locke also intimated that rights ought to be restrained by reason. Locke used a classic philosophic device, a ‘state of nature’ argument, one which supposes that no government exists. Locke argued that in a state of nature, there is “a state of liberty.” However, he adds, “it is not a state of license...The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one; and reason, which is that law,” teaches restraint. (section 6) This passage, alone, may suffice to show that Locke believes that the virtue of temperance ought to play a role in an individual’s exercise of rights, including the right to property. The idea of temperance for the sake of others is a recurring idea in *Two Treatises*, though that idea is not normally associated with

Locke. For that matter, the idea of limiting property through virtuous restraint is not usually found in business education, at least as exemplified by several widely used business ethics textbooks. That is both a shame as well as a misrepresentation of Locke’s thought.

Locke’s view of property, as found in his *Second Treatise of Government*, distinguishes property from monetary wealth. He clearly limits the former in a state of nature but allows inequality of property by “voluntary consent” once government is formed. Yet many people chide Locke, believing that Locke allowed for unbridled acquisition of property. For example, a 2014 article in the *Journal of Political Inquiry* stated, “Simply put, he [Locke] seems to justify the unlimited amassing of the earth’s fruits.” The article also said, “While Locke approached his theory of property from a well-intentioned perspective,” Locke advocated “for unlimited accumulation of wealth.” In short, Locke is often put on the ‘woke’ heap of history. A more correct understanding of Locke would have individuals living a more virtuous and accountable life. A life of that sort is more what Locke had in mind.

Locke also believed in government being founded in reason, perhaps he believes the limitation may be borne through government. Chapter, “Of Property,” begins with the famous state of nature, wherein no government has been formed and “no such thing as money was anywhere known.” (49) “Of Property” purports to show that the right to property is prior to the formation of government, but that, nevertheless, restrictions on property existed. However, the chapter also suggests that once gold and silver became objects of value and people tacitly agreed to the use of money for exchange, greater inequality in possession of property became accepted.

Locke begins “Of Property” by suggesting that ‘property,’ in its most immediate sense, is land. Locke says that all the earth and its contents belong to “men in common” (26) and that land can only be considered an individual’s own once “he has mixed his labor with [land]” (27). Locke



states, “Whatsoever then he [man] removes out of the state that nature has provided” (27) also constitutes property, i.e., the fruits of a person’s labor, following his famous ‘labor theory of property’ as established in the Treatise’s first chapter. There, Locke defends labor as a means for acquiring property by saying labor is inarguably a person’s own, and mixing labor with nature is mixing something of the self with it. The result is tangible property.

Later in the chapter on property, Locke states that “from the consent of men,” money may be used as a means of exchange. (47, 50) His initial and primary understanding of property is as a tangible asset, namely, land and the material products that originate in labor.

It might be noted that Locke’s idea of property is akin to the world of the seventeenth century. In his time and in his understanding, with the discovery and charting of the new land that became known as ‘America,’ land and resources were seemingly endless. Although his work has clearly transcended time, he could never have imagined the age in which we find ourselves, an age where resources and land are limited. For example, he wrote that there was land enough “to suffice double the inhabitants,” (36) as though there would never be a scarcity of resources. Further, and again consistent with his day and age, Locke was devout and used religious ideas in his essays—almost unheard of in today’s secular, philosophical publications. Thus, Locke’s writing reflects his attitude about the earth in claiming that the earth was divinely given to man, e.g., “God, who has given the earth to men in common...” (26) Locke continues to say in the same sentence, “[God] has also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience.” (26) What does Locke have in mind by ‘best advantage and convenience?’ He answers the question in the third section of the chapter: men are allowed property “at least where there is enough and as good left in common for the others.” (27)

It would have been helpful had the Second Treatise been more detailed and precise in

explaining how that property limitation is executed. Locke states that “keeping in the bounds set by reason . . . , there could then be little room for quarrels or contentions about property.” (31) Locke intimates that men will share property willingly and freely, allowing reason to guide restraint. Later in the chapter, Locke says of a person, “it [is] a foolish thing, as well as dishonest, to hoard up more than he could make use of.” (46) Again, Locke makes the point that excessive property is unreasonable, therefore immoral. For thinkers like Locke, who saw people as inherently good, property disputes and distribution thereof would be cordially arranged for the best.

Locke also believed in government being founded in reason, perhaps he believes the limitation may be borne through government. He explains “that the increase of lands and the right employing of them is the great art of government,” opening the door to government to decide on matters pertaining to property. (42) On one hand, Locke believes individuals will use property morally, i.e. people will take what they can use and not waste property. On the other hand, he sees the “art” of government to employ land with “honest industry,” as though government is somehow responsible for honest industry regarding property. (42) In a different section of the chapter, he almost blends these two claims, saying that “by consent... [people came to] agree on limits between them and their neighbors, and by laws within themselves settled the properties of those of the same society.” (24) Hence, Locke believed individuals produce or create government; agreed upon by individuals in participatory or democratic fashion.

In short, Locke restricts property in the state of nature, by an individual’s reason, and after government is formed, by individuals’ consent. The restriction on property in a state of nature is plainly stated: “It will perhaps be objected to this that ‘if gathering the acorns, or other fruits of the earth, etc., makes a right to them, then any one may engross as much as he will.’ To which I answer: not so.” (31) Locke cannot be clearer: in a

state of nature, where reason must be followed, people cannot engross endless amounts of property. The limit to property is established by 1) what an individual can use and 2) “where there is enough and as good left in common for the others.” He observes that “this measure did confine every man’s possession to a very moderate proportion” (36) with the consequent equality in tangible property.

Locke also allows for restrictions on property after a government is formed. He observes that the “since gold and silver, being little useful to the life of man in proportion to food, raiment, and carriage has its value only from the consent of men...it is plain that men have agreed to a disproportionate and unequal possession of the earth, they having, by a tacit and voluntary consent, found out a way how a man may fairly possess more land than he himself can use.” (50)

If Locke is correct, then, there are limits in the state of nature such that each person might have a “moderate proportion” but in a state where government exists, inequality may exist by “voluntary consent.” In other words, the amount of property a person has is limited by reason in a state of nature or by consent of people after government is formed.

We wish to be clear, at the risk of being laborious. Locke’s Second Treatise does not say a person can have unlimited property. Property can be had “At least where there is enough and as good left in common for others.” (Locke, 17) The responsibility is upon the individual and the individual’s judgment.

Though the Second Treatise is quiet about government’s placing restrictions on the acquisition of property, the treatise is nonetheless clear that restrictions on the acquisition of property exist. The ‘natural right to property’ is restricted by reason and, after the formation of society, any property a person may acquire might be limited by consent. The twin impulses in Locke, to strongly defend the right to property but also to limit property “made it possible for Locke’s theory of property to be used by many different groups-among them advocates of a wide

distribution of land and socialists basing a criticism of capitalism upon the labor theory of value,” as one author observed. (Peardon, in Locke, xv).

Certainly in America, we observe free market advocates relying on Locke’s ideas to oppose any intrusion into anyone’s fairly acquired property. As such, an enormous disparity in property is allowed even if Locke’s writing restricts property to a “moderate proportion.” Again we note, Locke lived in a different world, one that had not yet experienced the Industrial Revolution.

If Locke is correct in stating that ‘liberty is not license,’ with its stressing reason as the guide for the exercise of liberty, including the exercise of property rights, then Locke’s ideas invite reflection about the acquisition of property: how exactly can property be restricted? The Second Treatise does not explicitly answer this question except with the vague “what is useful.” Further, given Locke’s claim that “the preservation of property [is] the end of government,” (138), it appears that government is not the answer to limiting or restricting property. Preservation is different from acquisition. On what basis can Locke’s strong position on property rights and his clear restrictions on property be reconciled?

We believe the answer lies in Locke’s Christian proclivities and Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. The answer points toward virtue and an individual’s character. Locke intersperses Christian sayings and includes numerous references to the Bible. He was well aware “that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mathew 20.23) and that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, but with God, all things are possible” (Matthew 20.24) The Second Treatise, informed as it was by the Christian tradition, could provide a defense of a person’s “moderate proportion” but also a defense of inequality so long as the rich person uses good fortune with God in mind, for example, on behalf of the less fortunate.

The injunction of reason as the guide to property restriction also suggests a view

reminiscent of Aristotle, that “a self-controlled man...follows right reason.” (NE 1119a20) For Aristotle, the use of reason can lead to a virtuous life, including virtues associated with material goods, i.e., property. To the Aristotelian virtue of generosity, i.e., proper giving to and taking from others, there corresponds the vices of extravagance and stinginess (NE 4.1); to the virtue of magnificence, i.e., giving on a larger scale, there corresponds the vices of vulgarity and niggardliness. (NE 4.2) In Aristotle’s estimation, all people, rich and poor, ought to exhibit the virtues of generosity and magnificence in keeping with their individual circumstances. If people have great abundance and are vulgar in its display—think bling and gaudy accoutrements—they err. If people cling to their possessions, they are either stingy or niggardly. Aristotle believes proper character allows for difference in property but only to the extent that people take others into account. Locke might say that virtuous behavior with regard to property allows for “enough, and as good” for others.

But that is up to the individual and the individual’s circumstance.

In other words, individuals must be virtuous in owning property. It is as though Archbishop Desmond Tutu was channeling Locke when he stated, “I have rich friends and I have poor friends.” Archbishop Tutu and Locke would have the rich and poor individual use property virtuously.

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## Is Disparity a Choice?

(*Nov. 16*) — About a month ago, the Indianapolis Star reported that “One of Indianapolis’s most popular charter schools is expanding to create an all-girls STEM-focused K-8 school.” Inside Indiana Business said “the school, called Girls IN STEM Academy . . . will open in partnership with the Girl Scouts of Central Indiana, Every Girl Can STEM and Purdue Polytechnic High School.”

The likely impetus for such a school was educational data regarding undergraduate majors by sex. The National Center for Education Statistics showed that in 2011, 73,833 men and 14,896 women majored in engineering and engineering technology, or 83 percent men and 17 percent women. In 2021, men were 75.8 percent of engineering and engineering technology majors to women’s 24.2 percent. Majors in computer science and information science broke down into 78 percent men and 22 percent women. For mathematics and statistics, men constituted 58 percent of undergraduate majors.

Hence, a STEM school exclusively for girls, Title IX notwithstanding.

A thinking person might then ask are there other imbalances by sex in other fields? Well, yes. Data for 2021 show that undergraduate majors in biology and biomedical sciences were 65.8 percent women, not quite the same imbalance as in engineering and engineering tech, but still a considerable imbalance. Communication and communication technology majors were 63.9 percent female to 36.1 percent male. However, women comprised 82.8 percent of education majors and 72.5 percent of English language and literature majors.

For health professions and related programs, 84.8 percent of undergraduate majors were woman. Were a person to look at nursing schools, the person would see an even larger disparity favoring women. The largest disparity between the sexes among the majors listed in the National Center for Education Statistics was for family and consumer sciences, where women were 88.2 percent of the majors. That area of major study had only 22,15 majors, a fraction of the 268,018 majors in health professions and related programs.

Female majors in psychology and in public administration and social service professions were 79.8 percent and 83.3 percent, respectively. As for visual and performing arts, 63.2 percent were female. Those majoring in the liberal art and sciences showed a similar imbalance: 64.4 percent female

The undergraduate area of legal professions and legal studies shows women at 55.5 percent of the majors whereas physical sciences and science technology majors were 55.4 percent men.

Many majors had a roughly even distribution between men and women. For example, business majors were roughly equal, with 53.4 percent men and 46.6 percent women. Data on majors in homeland security, law enforcement, firefighting, and related professional services had women at 52.2%. The least disparity in major areas was for park, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies

inasmuch as the 54,294 majors had a disparity of .01 percent.

Given the data above, maybe there should be boys-only charter schools, again, Title IX notwithstanding. The boys-only charter schools could get men ready for the fields of education, or nursing, or family and consumer sciences, or biology and biological sciences, or the liberal arts and sciences, or health professions and related fields or psychology. For that matter, maybe Indiana and every other state should look at the totality of majors and recognize the disparity in undergraduate students inasmuch as 60 percent are female. Instead of creating girls-only schools, maybe educators should worry more about educating boys and young men.

Perhaps, along the way, government leaders in Indiana and every other state could reflect on the data regarding linguistic attainment. Research shows more adept linguistic attainment in girls compared to boys, and as one researcher noted, “The results showed that girls are slightly ahead of boys in early communicative gestures, in productive vocabulary, and in combining words. The difference increased with age.”

Maybe, just maybe, the choice of a major reflects the disparity in linguistic development between boys and girls. Given their linguistic proficiency, one “that increases with age,” young women are able to choose majors and occupations that utilize that proficiency. Young men have less latitude and bunch up in majors and fields that require less linguistic proficiency.

Like the STEM fields, Title IX notwithstanding.

## Terrorism, War and Diversity

*(Oct. 18)* — My family has felt the horrors of terrorism. Years ago, when the First Officer of Egypt Air Flight 990 piloted the aircraft into the north Atlantic while repeatedly muttering “I rely on God,” 217 people perished. Among those who were killed in this perfidious act were two of my relatives, an uncle and a cousin.

Years after that, and three weeks before he left Indianapolis to do humanitarian work in the Mideast, my son’s friend, Peter Kassig, visited.

They sat in Tyler's living room talking about Peter's upcoming trip and the aid that Peter hoped to bring to the Middle East. But in 2014, terrorists, thugs in other words, captured Peter, tortured him and beheaded him.

May he rest in peace.

President Barack Obama, noticing the increasing violence in the Middle East, had this to say: "Lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ." His remarks accurately recount what occurred several centuries ago.

Today, when we look back on the Crusades, begun by Pope Urban II in 1095, we think appropriate descriptions of that warfare involve words like "immoral," "savage," "barbarian." The words are appropriate for many of today's acts — beheading people who do humanitarian work, burning people alive in cages, kidnapping hundreds of girls and abusing them, members of Hamas riding hang-gliders to bomb young people at a music festival.

Did Shakespeare have the correct understanding of war when he wrote that "fair is foul and foul is fair" (Macbeth I.i). May "All is fair in love and war" be correct?

If we revisit President Obama's words, we know he got the matter right: the Crusades are a blot on the history of Christianity in the same way terrorist behavior stains Islam. President Obama's intuition is correct and longstanding: thinkers have, for ages, thought that rules apply to warfare and violence.

The philosophical work on the "Just War Theory," especially the thought of Augustine (354-431), has several components. *Jus ad bellum* (justice in going to war) requires a just cause, i.e., a clear aggressor, demands war as a last resort, expects the likely good outweighing the harm, and is fought with the right intention, where the goal is peace and stability. *Jus in bello* (justice during the war) requires discrimination, in that non-combatants and non-military sites are not permissible targets; the

inevitable harm caused to the non-involved is outweighed by the greater good of violence's use; and only force sufficient for the military objectives is used. The ideas found in the West regarding the permissibility of using violence are commonplace and universal.

The Hinduism of India, found in the "Bhagavad Gita," offers rules to govern violence — cavalry can only fight cavalry, chariots can only fight chariots. Non-combatants, the wounded and the defenseless must be respected. Sikhs must heed the words of Guru Gobind Singh that "When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail, lawful is the flash of steel." War can only be a last resort. The Quran says "If anyone slew a person unless it be for murder or corruption of the land, it would be as if he slew the whole people," (Quran 5:32) suggesting the primary use of jihad in the Quran involves "exerted effort" for the sake of spiritual development, not for the slaughter of innocents.

As is obvious by the events in Israel, the classical tenets of Just War Theory are no longer followed. Further, as my colleague, Mark Franke, correctly observed this week, students, professors and administrators on many college campuses did not condemn the inhuman and genocidal savagery of the Hamas terrorists, as if the students, professors and administrators are disgracefully ignorant of Just War Theory and are indifferent to savagery.

Yet, campuses today are all about diversity, inclusion and equity. To make "diversity" work, though, people must recognize other people as beings like themselves, as beings worthy of "dignity and respect," to quote Kofi Annan. If there is to be peace in the Middle East, people who live there must recognize the essential humanity of their neighbors. The indiscriminate slaughter of people by Hamas adherents represents their inability to see people who are diverse as human beings. Is that wise? Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said, "We need to revolutionize our religion . . . We ourselves are bringing it to perdition."

He is correct. The philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain argued that terrorism is moral nihilism. She is correct, too.

## Censorship

(Aug. 29) — With turmoil rising in 1780s France and a revolution in the near future, the royalty and the wealthy plus the clerical hierarchy — in other words, the 3 percent of the population who held power — drafted edicts to limit the spread of ideas. They censored the press. In another time, Hitler had his Kristallnacht. In current day China and today's Russia, governmental censorship on the free flow of ideas diminishes any possibility of either country's millions of people to gain liberty. In China, one of my students doing missionary work could not share a Bible with people. She was told she'd be imprisoned. A person reading the New Testament (a banned book in some schools) can see how people with new ideas were treated.

And long before that era, philosophers with their critical minds and analytic capability, were treated poorly. The Pythagoreans were persecuted and killed; Socrates committed state-ordered suicide by drinking hemlock, and Aristotle fled Athens, "Lest Athens sin against philosophy again."

Therefore, the flap in Fishers regarding library books is old hat, to use an old metaphor. The Star reported that "Social conservatives' control of Fishers' library and school boards has led to controversies that are now bleeding into city politics," as though a sense of decency and respect for the maturing minds of children is not on the liberal agenda. And really, censorship is a non-partisan policy. Nor is it merely an Indiana problem.

The famous "To Kill a Mockingbird" was challenged in Waukegan, Illinois, and Verona, New York., for the use of a derogatory word referring to blacks. In 1981, the book was challenged by Warren Township because it "represents institutionalized racism under the guise of good literature." Schools banned the book in Santa Cruz, California; Glynn County, Georgia;

Muskogee, Oklahoma; and as late as 2006 in Brentwood, Tennessee. The book was banned due to racial slurs that "promote racial hatred, racial division, racial separation, and white supremacy." Brentwood was only following the 1995 treatment of "The Color Purple," which presents a "negative image of black men." Other books, such as "The Perks of Being a Wallflower," were banned because the content included drug use.

A brief look at the location of the towns mentioned above suggests that social conservatives are not the only people who challenge the books found in a school library. In fact, among the 100 most banned books are "Of Mice and Men," "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," "The Great Gatsby," "The Grapes of Wrath," and "Ulysses." George Orwell's "1984" has also been banned as well as Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse Five."

Of course, it is not only library books for young people that gets censored. People have been fired for using the word "niggardly," which means "reluctant to give or spend; stingy; miserly." An aide to D.C.'s mayor lost a job for using the word. The mayor realized his mistake and brought the person back. While the word sounds like a racial slur, the slur and "niggardly" do not even have the same root, let alone meaning.

And the elephant hiding over there in the corner is the uncensored use of the racial slur being sung by "hip" pop groups. If the racial epithet can get a book banned by a library, what's to be done about so much pop music? Young people ought not get mixed messages from people in authority or they will learn to distrust authority. And the people who are in the best position to give consistent messaging and thus, provide stability to maturing minors are their parents, not some school board or library board. While institutional boards may make good decisions, the people who influence children the most are their parents.

Parents, liberal and conservative, normally want children to be exposed to ideas in an age-appropriate way. The people most responsible for

what children read are their parents. They must be aware of what their children are reading. Schools are responsible for children, too, and should introduce age appropriate literature of all types. That does not mean scrubbing the library. Introducing “banned” books at the right age can help students understand the world as it is and offer young people some capability to reason through different ideas. In fact, enhancing students’ capability to reason is why colleges often invite diverse speakers to their campuses.

However, when colleges and universities do invite speakers to campus, people — deans, administrators, and students and others working on knowledge elimination — often shout down the invited speakers. There is no question that the speakers are age appropriate for a college audience, it’s just that many do not want anyone to hear the ideas of the speakers.

Social conservatives have no monopoly on censorship. Censorship is non-partisan.

## A Word About the Homeless

*(Aug. 23)* — People who are homeless have recently been the focal point of attention, especially in Los Angeles. Los Angeles City Council voted 11-3 to ban homeless encampments within 500 feet of schools and day care centers. Of course, being in California means the action drew a protesting mob that brought city council business to a halt. Other encampments, like the one near the L.A. freeway, were simply cleared out — despite the lack of sufficient shelters to house the homeless people.

But that is only L.A. companies are fleeing San Francisco due to the unhoused “street” people.

On the other side of the country, New York City Mayor Eric Adams is up to his elbows in problems associated with the homeless population. New York City faces a crisis in housing with the influx of people crossing the border illegally and heading to the Big Apple. Mayor Adams pleaded publicly for more monetary support to alleviate the problems attendant upon a large, homeless population. In June, he used his executive power

to end the 90-day shelter rule with the intention of getting more beds for migrants.

Here in Indiana, the situation is not so dire although the plight of the homeless is getting attention. The Fort Wayne Journal Gazette ran articles regarding homelessness on March 9, March 18 and May 31 this year. A few months ago, the Indianapolis Star reported that Indianapolis “is using \$650,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act to fund a six-person outreach team who will help people experiencing homelessness in the Mile Square connect with support services as well as interim and permanent housing.” A year ago, the Star reported that “black residents continue to be disproportionately affected by homelessness in Marion County. Despite making up nearly 30 percent of the overall population, black individuals accounted for 56 percent of the homeless population, and increase from last year’s 54 percent.”

That kind of disparity is certainly worth noting, however, it is not the only disparity. And, in a genuine surprise to me, the Star noted that “more individuals experiencing homelessness were male than other genders, with about 62 percent identifying as male, 38 percent identifying as female, and 0.3 percent identifying as another gender identity.” The data regarding the male-female imbalance approximates national data: 70 percent of the homeless population is male and 30 percent is female.

Digging deeper into the data, though, shows the abject destitution of the male, homeless individuals. Were a person to combine the number of sheltered and unsheltered female, homeless individuals, that number would be smaller than the male unsheltered population. In 2022, the female homeless, sheltered individuals numbered 65,808 and the unsheltered were at 61,044, a combined total of 126,852 homeless, female individuals. The number for unsheltered, male individuals was 151,297 individuals. In fact, there were more sheltered female, homeless individuals than unsheltered female, homeless individuals. For men, it was the other way around — more unsheltered than sheltered.

I suspect that were the numbers reversed and the female homeless population was more than twice the males, there would be a strong and vocal outcry. My suspicion is based on the history of deaths of despair. When women suffered an increase in deaths of despair, only then did people become attentive. However, men were about four times more likely to suffer a death of despair, a fact which went little reported.

It is good that Indiana policymakers are attentive to the homeless population even if men, especially black men, will benefit. Policy to help the homeless follows a corporal work of mercy, that is, sheltering the homeless, and corresponds with the culturally universal obligation to be charitable.

The policy also follows the Hoosier sense of hospitality, a reason why Indiana is among the 10 states with the lowest homeless population rate, at 8 per 10,000 people. The highest rate among states ought to come as no surprise — California with 43.7 homeless people per 10,000 people. Rounding out the top five states are Vermont, at 43.1, Oregon at 42.3, Hawaii at 41.4, and then New York at 37.7. The numbers pale, though, in comparison to Washington, D.C.'s 65.8 homeless individuals per 10,000 people. (The 2022 data may be outdated already, given the influx of homeless people crossing into the United States at our southern border.)

Various organizations are doing the admirable work of helping the less fortunate among us, including Indianapolis's own Wheeler Mission. The CAUF Society (Cold And Uncared For; <https://caufsociety.com/>) has a wealth of information and tips for charitable action concerning homeless individuals. As noted previously, it is good to help the homeless even if men might be the primary beneficiaries.

### Where Are the Platonists?

(*Aug. 7*) — When I taught ethics, I had several challenges. For one thing, unlike students in France, American students took no philosophy courses in high school. Students leave high school with reasoning skills that do not align well with

the critical analysis philosophy courses demand. Students, even bright students, rely too much on memory for knowledge acquisition and cognitive growth.

I should know. After a stellar high school G.P.A. that got me admitted to a very selective college, I performed poorly as an undergrad, relying on memory to master the material.

But it has ever been thus. Plato had to contend with students and people like me so he wrote a dialogue, "Meno," showing the difference between knowing something by way of memory and understanding something by way of investigation. The dialogue, like most of Plato's dialogues, asks a 'ho ti esti' question, a 'what is it' question. Socrates asks Meno, "What is virtue?"

Then, similar to Plato's famous "Republic," it addresses cognitive and moral growth.

The dialogue's namesake, Meno, thinks knowing is a function of memory alone. Therefore, Meno's method of learning involves listening to the Sophists, the alleged experts of ancient Greece. Socrates must show him that memory alone is insufficient. His approach to Meno begins with a math problem involving the square root of two. Meno says the problem is impossible to solve.

However, Meno's slave boy, with lots of help from Socrates, solves the problem. Socrates draws a 2 x 2 square and coaxes the slave into connecting lines from the midpoint of each side to the midpoint of the adjacent sides. The result shows a square whose area is the square root of two squared.

To get past the problem of Meno's slave solving the problem while Meno did not, Socrates invents a solution that preserves Meno's dignity and "explains" the slave's solving the problem. Socrates asks Meno, "Did he ever get an education?" "No" replies Meno. Socrates then says, "He must have been born with the knowledge; learning must be a matter of recollection." Meno quickly agrees.

Later in the dialogue, Socrates tells Meno a story about the famous statues of Daedalus. "They are so life-like that they run away. To keep their value, they must be chained down." Socrates adds,



“Opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long.” Socrates continues. “They run away from a man’s mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason.” Then Socrates says, “That process is recollection, as we agreed earlier.”

Meno agrees but does not understand the point. First, he remembers poorly inasmuch as that was not what they talked about. And two, the process is not about memory but reasoning.

I used to show what’s at stake in class when I told my students, “It’s like Hank Aaron breaking Ruth’s home run record when he hit his 713th homer.” No one objected because my students respected my knowledge of baseball history. “Wait, that’s wrong, it was homer number 714.” So 714 went into their heads as knowledge.

“Well, that may be wrong, too” I said. I offered them a way to chain down home run number 715, (baseballreference.com) so they could “work out the reason” for themselves. I hoped that they would become more critical about what entered their minds as knowledge and do their own research regarding claims, wherever they appeared.

If we look back to ancient Greece, though, we can observe that cognitive development is the same now as it was then. Learning follows the same patterns today as it did then, only now we can document those patterns. Researchers such as Lawrence Kohlberg and William Perry have charted the patterns that are found across cultures.

If I put my mind to the situation at all, I’d say human beings are more alike than different. However, if I were Meno I’d listen to the mob and not think at all.

### The Data on Men’s Health

(July 31) — The January-February issue of the AARP Bulletin had an article on heart disease stating that “for decades, women were underrepresented in clinical trials” and “women’s health is still understudied.” The article directed

the reader’s attention to the alleged plight of women regarding research and knowledge of heart disease. Readers of the article were likely to infer that men constituted the majority of research subjects during investigations into heart disease.

That is an inference without evidence.

Apparently, the government of Indiana bought into that incorrect idea. Indiana has an Office of Women’s Health. The office states that “we believe that every woman should have access to free, up-to-date, and reliable resources to find out information about her health.” The office “wants to ensure that each woman and girl in Indiana is aware of her own health status, risks, and goals, and can achieve optimal health through access, education, and advocacy.”

Type “Indiana Office of Men’s Health” into a search engine and no government website appears. The lack of an Indiana Office of Men’s Health belies the data: Indiana’s CDC figures for 2018 of life expectancy at birth for women is 79.3 years and for men it is 74.4. If life expectancy and mortality rates dictate need, men’s health is more in need of resources from the government. The “health status, risks, and goals” of each man and boy appear to be less important to the government of Indiana.

In the defense of Indiana’s government, our leaders are simply following the crowd, even if the crowd has not done its homework. The popular narrative holds that research on women’s health is neglected and therefore, that women’s health is understudied. Hence, an Indiana Office of Women’s Health is needed but not a corresponding Office of Men’s Health.

If a person were to “follow the science,” what would the person discover? Is ‘women’s health still understudied? The National Institute of Health’s famous site, PubMed contains data on medical research. For instance, a person can search for “clinical trials with women as subjects” and see that the PubMed database contains 182,815 entries. The corresponding entries for “clinical trials with men as subjects” has 137,962 entries as of a Jan. 25, 2023, search.

PubMed enables narrower searches for entries over a designated period and a specified topic. For example, a person could limit the search to the last several decades, for articles from 1970 to 2023, specifically involving clinical trials on coronary heart disease with women as subjects. PubMed would show 46,570 entries whereas a corresponding search over the same period specifying coronary heart disease with men as subjects would show 42,435 entries. If the database of PubMed is reliable, more research has been done with women as subjects, not men, regarding coronary heart disease.

The data on coronary heart disease is consistent with another narrower search, one investigating the other leading killer, namely, cancer. A broad PubMed search under “cancer in women” would show 357,555 entries while “cancer in men” would show 111,042 entries.

A person “following the science” about scientific research would be hard pressed to justify the claim that women are understudied. It may have been true at one time that women were understudied but, again, if PubMed is reliable that time has passed.

Anyone skeptical of the data in this essay can replicate the investigation. That is a cardinal rule in scientific experimentation. If an experiment cannot be repeated or replicated, it is worth little. PubMed allows people to see the data for themselves, enabling them to “follow the science,” not the story.

Unsubstantiated popular narratives help no one. Failing to care for men and boys has knock-on effects; an unhealthy male population will have negative consequences for everyone, including women.

### One-Way Environmentalists

*(July 21)* — My friend, a professor of architecture and design, was a member of his small, Ohio town’s planning council. The council tackled the problem of energy loss by the town’s drafty domiciles, especially trailers. The committee wondered what to do about it. “We should tear them down and replace them with

more energy efficient structures,” one person said. “We are losing too much energy in those places.”

My friend said, “Look at how many people are living in those structures. The trailers have just a bit more than one-thousand square living feet and, often, five people are living in one of them. That’s less than three hundred square feet per person. That’s an efficient use of space and energy.”

On the other hand, there are very public leaders of the environmental movement. One captain of the ESG movement has two houses totaling over 12,000 square living feet. Hollywood’s outspoken and strong environmentalists include Jane Fonda, who has a 6,700 square foot house in Hollywood and a 9500 square foot house on 23,000 acres in New Mexico. The Hollywood list of strong environmentalists also includes Leonardo DiCaprio, who has a house in LA, one in NYC, and an island near Belize. The lot of them appear wasteful or gluttonous regarding resources, especially energy. At least the last two do not make policy for others though they do influence culture.

Politicians are different; they do make policy for people to follow. An environmentalist in the Biden administration, which advocates strong environmental policies down to the level of discontinuing gas stoves, has two houses. One house has six bedrooms and five and a half baths in a 4,780 square living foot house. The second house, the one used for daily living when he’s not working in the White House, has 6,85 square living feet, three bedrooms and four and a half baths. That government official is inordinate in his use of resources, especially energy, compared with the five people in a trailer.

Yet, the one in the Biden administration pursues environmental policy that would require the folks in the trailers to change their living arrangements. Banning gas stoves and requiring non-washing dishwashers for the sake of the environment would not rearrange that politician’s lifestyle, a lifestyle wildly inconsistent with the administration’s professed views. The lifestyles of all the folks above also demonstrate that whatever

policies are enacted, the environment will not improve much unless and until leaders realize that policy does not always solve problems associated with the environment: pollution and resource depletion.

Certainly the policy on carbon credits will not solve the problem of pollution. The air does not get cleaner with an organization's or person's buying carbon credits, "entitlements" to pollute. Pollution will continue to exist but some entity need only pay more to pollute. Resource depletion, especially for lithium, will not go away when all the batteries from EVs need to be replaced. Windmills, in addition to killing birds, present another environmental problem: where do broken windmill blades go?

Maybe policy should follow John Locke's counsel. He wrote that people were allowed property "at least where there is enough and as good left in common for others." Regarding property, Locke wrote that a person "does a foolish thing as well as dishonest to hoard up more than he could make use of." Were environmental policy to follow Locke's advice, consumption and pollution would ease through responsible use of property — a boon to environmental improvement. No whopping big houses for anyone, let alone two of them.

However, policy that would prohibit the excessive use of resources, especially energy, would likely limit property — not that political leaders, ESG 'financial' advisors, outspoken Hollywood celebrities, and D.C. politicians would approve. They appear perfectly content with their extravagant use of energy and resources while making policy decisions at a micro level. They probably think, "Let the 'deplorables' suffer. We don't have to rearrange our lifestyle. We are obliged to make policy, not follow it." Can a dacha in the lake district be far behind?

Policy that intrudes on people's lives at the level of a kitchen appliance ought to be followed by everybody. Better still, just get rid of such policies.

## Ignoring Crime Patterns

*(July 12)* — June was not a kind month for Indiana. Shortly before Father's Day, two very young children were fatal victims of child abuse. Then, to end the month, Trooper Aaron N. Smith died after being hit by a stolen car in which two people were fleeing police. Smith was setting up stop sticks when the car diverted its path, crossed lane lines, and struck Trooper Smith.

The driver of the car has been "charged with murder, resisting law enforcement and operating a vehicle while taking a controlled substance resulting in death," reported the Indianapolis Star. The Star also quoted a statement from the Indiana National Guard: "Judging by his membership in the Guard and State Police, he had a desire to serve his community, state and nation, and he will be missed."

The Indiana National Guard understands the matter correctly. Police officers do serve the community, often at great risk, and, sometimes, at great sacrifice. According to FBI data, between 2010 and 2019, 511 police officers have died a felonious death. Of that number, 485, or 94.9 percent, were men, and 26, or 5.1 percent, were women. The 511 officers feloniously killed involved 442, or 86.5 percent, white officers, and 55, or 10.8 percent, black officers, as well as 14, or 2.7 percent, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Pacific Islander officers.

In 2020, 46 police officers died a felonious death and in 2021, that number grew to 73 deaths. The number of felonious deaths of police officers in 2022 decreased to 60, a number still too high for dedicated people who serve their communities while putting their lives in peril.

As to those who commit the felonious assaults that result in an officer's death from 2010-2019, the largest disparity was between men and women. Offenders numbered 537 with men constituting 523, or 97.4 percent, of the offenders. By race, whites numbered 303, or 56.4 percent of offenders while blacks were at 199, or 37% of the total. American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Pacific Islander constituted 20, or 3.7 percent and

in 15 cases, the race went unreported. The offender numbers do not match the population cohorts.

The demographic data, as reported by the Census Bureau, shows that in 2019, America's population was about 60 percent white, 18.5 percent Hispanic, and 12.2 percent black. Women represented 50.4 percent of the population and men, therefore, were 49.6 percent of the population. The fact that men compose 97.4 percent of those who killed police officers is a disgrace, a shameful comment on how we educate and raise our young men. Men need be more like police, who use their strength to protect and serve people.

Whites, by population percent and percent of felonious offenders, align closely, with not much of a disparity. Blacks do have a disparity between

percent of population and percent of felonious offenders. Yet, the Chicago Tribune in 2015 wrote "There are no simple conclusions or trends that can be gleaned from the database alone, but it provides context that based on the raw numbers, officers are no more likely to be killed by black offenders than white offenders."

The Tribune got it wrong. Patterns do exist: Men commit felonious death of police officers far beyond their percent of the population and blacks commit felonious death of police officers beyond their percent of the population. In the same way men are overrepresented compared with women for felonious deaths of police officers, blacks compared with whites are overrepresented.

Recognizing patterns when patterns exist would help prevent the deaths of people like Trooper Aaron N. Smith. May he rest in peace. ♦

# Mark Franke

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## After Modernity, What?

(Jan. 8) — The history of western civilization is generally divided into three epochs, if memory serves from my junior high world history class. This classification scheme was retroactively applied by historians trying to make sense of why things changed so dramatically at certain points in time.

The first epoch, antiquity, covered the thousands of years between the first historical record and the “official” fall of the western Roman Empire just prior to A.D. 500. The current epoch is called modernity, beginning with the Renaissance and Reformation around 1500 or a little earlier. Everything in between got the non-original name of the Middle Ages.

The important thing about this taxonomy is not the dating which is hardly as precise as we like to think. Rather, it is the fundamental changes that occurred to the whole of civilization in the west. If one compares lives about 100 years before the divide to that of 100 years after, it is clear that something big had happened, although probably not noticed by those who lived through the transition.

I find the medieval period the most fascinating of the three so when the historian Dan Jones came out with a survey history of the entire Middle Ages, I had to read it. “Powers and Thrones: A New History of the Middle Ages” is long; after all, it has a thousand years to cover, but it is well written and hard to put down.

Jones’s thesis is that several events or developments occurred throughout the Middle Ages to prepare mankind for modernity. It is the confluence or accumulation of these

developments which set a point of no return, a point of no going back to the way things were.

Jones ends with a question he deliberately does not answer: Are we today living through existential and fundamental changes similar to that experienced by our late medieval ancestors?

Consider each of Jones’s developments that brought in modernity and ushered out medieval life.

First is the invention of the printing press. No one would have heard of Martin Luther if it hadn’t been for Gutenberg. We live in a communication revolution every bit as structural with the internet, email, social media and 24-hour cable news. Check box 1 with a big X.

Next, the discovery of America reoriented Europe away from the East and toward the West. We now live in a global community but are looking outward toward space travel and other planets. This may be restricted to astronauts and billionaire dilettantes right now, but only 90 men sailed with Columbus. Check box 2 but with a lighter X.

Jones’s third development was the fracture of the church due to the Reformation and the concomitant weakened political power of the papacy. Today that fracture is nearly complete as church attendance in the West is at an all-time low. A study of the world’s nations shows nine of the bottom ten are in Europe, with only Communist Cuba breaking into that list. Check box 3.

Fourth, demographic changes across Europe were the result of the Black Death and other pandemics. Europe’s feudal agricultural economy was shattered with political power shifting across class lines. Covid certainly wasn’t a medieval style plague but it has contributed to a fundamental change in our employment and educational power structures. Check box 4 but lightly.

Finally, Jones points to humanism as a new philosophical standard, upsetting medieval scholasticism and other traditional thought systems universally accepted by most everyone. Today we have a progressive attack on western values with Nietzschean nihilism as the orthodox

philosophy. Our emphasis is totally on the individual, not larger affinity groups (identity politics as the exception which proves the rule.) Check box 5 with an extra-large X.

That is my synthesis of Jones's thesis. I didn't need an antithesis to move my dialectic to the end point.

Jones, however, adds two more developments to his list of 21st century tipping points: mass migrations of displaced people and climate change. The so-called barbarian invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries get much of the blame for that first epochal shift although not much in the second. But it is worth noting that the Little Ice Age began in the late Middle Ages, a multi-century change in climate that left recurrent hunger due to colder and wetter growing seasons.

So are we living through the end of modernity as a historical epoch? We can't possibly know that from inside history. One hundred years from now our progeny, standing outside our history, can better answer that question.

The more important question is whether the new epoch will be an improvement on the current one. Advances in medicine, agricultural production and travel safety can't be gainsaid. The same doesn't hold for me, at least in morality, philosophy and theology. Families and communities were anchored in a feeling of belonging, something we have lost . . . or voluntarily surrendered.

Maybe I pushed Jones's conclusion way beyond where he wanted it to go. Even if not, I fervently hope my analysis is wrong.

Michael Anton, a research fellow at Hillsdale College, once wrote that these changes that "new gods might do the trick but their introduction would seem to require a cataclysm." I regard the woke revolution to be of cataclysmic proportions. Its true believers certainly have new gods in mind.

I should take some comfort in the assumption that those who live during epochal transition don't notice it. The problem is that I more than notice it; I can't stop seeing it everywhere.

## Holiday Post Office Woes

*(Jan. 2)* — Since Christmas is always a busy time of year for our mail system, I spent some time reflecting on the changes that the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has undergone during my lifetime. Forever stamps has to be the best idea the Post Office has implemented, although one wonders why it took so long to figure that one out. USPS also deserves credit for its Informed "Deliver" software which not only tells you what will be delivered today but also any packages working their way to your home.

The customer service personnel are for the most part friendly and courteous. For example my housing subdivision has been blessed with the same mailman for over 20 years. He knows us by name and by sight, at least us retirees who frequently greet him at the gang of mailboxes on our street. His attitude toward customer service is tops; he frequently will bring our mail to the front door if there is a package that won't fit into our standard size mailboxes. And I mean all our mail for that day, not just the oversized package. He harks back to an earlier, simpler, friendlier time.

But not all the way back to my childhood when stamps were three cents each and there were two deliveries per day. We aren't going back to the 1950s (sadly enough) but we can look at the increase in stamp prices to get an insight into what is happening to our postal service.

According to the Consumer Price Index, general inflation has exceeded 1,000 percent during my lifetime. That means things today cost more than eleven times what the same things cost in 1951. That's a serious economic problem for a lot of reasons but let's narrow down our analysis to just the Post Office, which consistently blames inflation for its rate increases.

If the price of a first-class stamp would be priced in 2023 dollars to equal its three-cent cost in 1951, it would be 35 cents. The next increase will take it to 68 cents, nearly double what can be attributed to general inflation. And it's not just letter stamps. I changed my preferred shipper to

UPS from the USPS with a California retailer because the UPS costs were only about one-half of those charged by the Post Office after recent rate increases. Being the most expensive option in a competitive market doesn't usually turn out well. Between the other package delivery companies and the replacement of personal letters by email messaging, the Post Office is in a very competitive situation indeed.

Inflation can't be blamed for it all. Maybe it is the high wage costs involved in maneuvering my Christmas stamp order around the state of Michigan. That was not a non-sequitur. Consider this case study:

I ordered stamps directly from the USPS website on December 16. On December 19 the order was received at a Kansas City distribution center and I was told to expect delivery on Dec. 21. Good enough, but they didn't arrive.

When they still had not shown by Christmas, I used the USPS tracking tool to figure out what had happened. I learned that they had been shipped to Traverse City, Michigan, and arrived there on Dec. 24. Why Traverse City? I can't comprehend how that can exist on any delivery line between Kansas City and Fort Wayne.

It gets better. On Dec. 26, after allowing for the federal holiday, the stamps were sent on to Grand Rapids, Michigan. They arrived there the next day and then made the trip to Indianapolis. They were gradually triangulating on my Fort Wayne home. Was Toledo next?

No. Indianapolis immediately sent them back to Grand Rapids, making the round trip within one calendar day. Perhaps it was for insufficient postage on the shipping envelope?

Eventually I was alerted of a Dec. 30 delivery but the stamps actually arrived the day before. It took Fort Wayne only eleven minutes from arrival to loading on my mail carrier's truck.

The whole journey took 10 days. The Pony Express and its horses could have done it in eight days given its standard of 75 miles per day.

I should state that this is unusual. Past experience has seen delivery in two or three days and I should allow for the Christmas delivery load.

But why send them to Traverse City, and why did Indianapolis send them back to Grand Rapids? Perhaps there is an explanation other than Murphy's Law. If so, I would love to hear it if only to satisfy my curiosity.

But I will put the best construction on this and be thankful for the Forever stamp policy. At least my wife can use these stamps next Christmas.

Or maybe I should have asked for my stamps to be shipped through UPS.

## Here's Some Hope for 2024

*(Dec. 26)* — The first Advent candle is called the candle of hope, the hope of the faithful that God will fulfill His promises. Hope is also a theme for the new year, at least for those who make a list of New Year's resolutions with the expectation (read: hope) that they will conform to them for 366 days.

Maybe hope is what America needs now more than ever. Thirty minutes or less of watching cable news will challenge even the most optimistic among us. We are a nation at war with itself; we obsess with any differences we can assert against "them."

It is hard to be an optimist these days. I avoid slipping into total pessimism by detouring into skepticism, a belief system for me that expects bad but still hopes for good. I have to be careful, though; full cynicism is at the door awaiting its chance.

Is it reasonable to hold out hope that A.D. 2024 will be better than 2023? My discussion group talked this through at our December meeting. Even though America is bent on descending into woke hell, this group of conservatives still found reasons for hope.

Yes, we did spend some time bemoaning the state of affairs but our Socratic methodology, mildly enforced, led us to list what we thought were the reasons for our malaise. Only after clearly delineating with specificity could we see our way forward to a handful of changes we could make. Our ideas are ambitious but achievable . . . if we make the effort.

We decided the key to our solutions is to restore those American institutions which have declined due to conscious assaults by those who despise western civilization. Here is our list, ordered by organic level: the family, the neighborhood, religious and civic organizations and the larger community.

Even though I remember little from my high school biology, I can see a structural metaphor from that discipline. The atom is the most basic building block, followed by the molecule, then the cell and finally the organism. Simplistic, I admit, but I was never very good at science. The point is that one must care for the most elemental building blocks for the structure to remain strong.

No doubt that is why the family, the atom in my metaphor, has been subjected to such vicious attacks by those determined to recreate American society the image of their nihilistic philosophy. I don't need to rehearse the data about the number of children born out of wedlock, raised by a single parent or perhaps neither, and consigned to a life of poverty and little opportunity. Just compare outcomes of children raised in traditional, two-parent families. The data leave no room for intelligent debate.

Next, consider the neighborhood. One of our group commented that a drive down a residential street will find all garage doors closed. No one is sitting outside welcoming neighbors to stop to talk. Kids are not playing in back yards because they are inside playing video games. Good luck finding multi-family barbecues on Saturday evening. Granted, these are exaggerations but the thesis holds.

Now look at the status of our social institutions. One of our group reported that in my hometown of Fort Wayne weekly church attendance had dropped from 50 percent to nearly 10 percent. How active is your local Kiwanis or Lions club? Is the local school's PTA meetings well attended? You know the answers as well as I.

It is no wonder that our communities are wracked with rancorous divisions. How can a community be healthy if its structure is rotting? Perhaps we should spend less time worrying

about elections and focus that time on repairing those things closest to us.

One member suggested something so simple that, if I were in a cartoon, a light bulb would have appeared over my head. He asked what is the common denominator among all of us, regardless of status or background?

Gathering together over food.

Even in the most dysfunctional families, they still eat. Social time with neighbors is enhanced by sharing a meal. Church potlucks are as American as baseball, and the service clubs meet around breakfast or lunch. We have to eat; why not make it a communal activity?

Bringing people together will strengthen the family, the neighborhood and our civic institutions. If that happens, how can our communities not recover as well?

Before I am accused of being a Pollyanna, I don't expect peace on earth and goodwill to men to prevail in 2024. But, if we can all make the effort to spend more time with our families, our neighbors and others of our acquaintance, how can things not improve?

Plus we all get to eat more while socializing with those we most treasure.

How can that be a bad thing?

Happy New Year!

## Christ May Be Back into Christmas

*(Dec. 18)* — I have noticed two differences this December compared with last year.

First is how fast it is passing. Perhaps it is the unusually warm December here in Indiana, fooling us into thinking it is still November. The climatologists blame it on El Nino but that is too complicated for my non-scientific mind to comprehend.

For me as a Christian, the season of Advent is a special time for slowing down for reflection and repentance. Instead somebody hit the calendar's accelerator. I am writing this just a week before Christmas Day, wondering when Advent is going to start. Needless to say, I have not faithfully followed my usual Advent devotional rubrics.



Which brings me to the second difference. Remember the anti-Christmas dictate that one must say “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas”? There may be a reaction developing against that nonsense, at least based on my small but significant sampling during the past week. When someone such as a store clerk or package delivery man wishes me “Happy Holidays,” I respond with “Merry Christmas to you.” Nearly all of them immediately responded with their own “Merry Christmas.” My study won’t be published by any academic journal but it does give me hope.

One more data point can be found at the Post Office. I went into my local one to get more Christmas stamps with a religious theme. All sold out. So I went to another with the same result. There were other secular stamps but nothing with the Holy Family, wise men or Christmas star. Fortunately there are still some to be had at the USPS website. Unfortunately, some of our cards are going to arrive late but better late than with stamps displaying Frosty the Snowman.

The campaign to remove God from the public square has seen substantial success. Manger displays have been disappearing from public buildings, even non-governmental ones. A trip through any subdivision will show more blow-up Santas and reindeer than lighted mangers.

The assault on Christmas has been fought on many fronts. The most inane example was President Joe Biden’s 2021 declaration of a National Day of Prayer, a declaration that somehow failed to mention God. To whom, or Whom, were we to pray? To Biden’s credit his 2023 declaration did invoke God’s “continued guidance, mercy and protection.”

Our public figures, going back to the Founding Fathers, have been careful to mention God even if in a rather generic manner. Our Pledge of Allegiance is to “one nation under God” and our currency states “IN GOD WE TRUST.” A quick review of presidential inaugural addresses informs me that they all brought God into it, some more than others, but all did. They also all took their oath on a Bible, frequently a special family one.

America was founded by Christians on Christian moral principles, principles built into

western civilization. These principles are foundational for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Remember that it was a Congress populated by Christians that adopted what became the First Amendment, guaranteeing free exercise of religion to all including non-Christians.

Consider this: December 25 is a paid holiday for nearly all workers, those of non-Christian faiths as well as no faith. It is still Christmas, Christ’s Mass, on the calendar. Even Congress, which can prime itself for all sorts of legislative mischief, hasn’t the hubris to enact a law changing the name to Mid-Winter Day or something equally anodyne.

Even if Christ has been disappearing from His birthday, much of His message remains. Gift-giving, despite its gross commercialization, is part of our culture. Yes, it probably has pagan origins but Christians adopted the practice as a remembrance of the Magi’s gifts to the Christ Child. The Magi’s star is recalled by the star that tops many of our Christmas trees, even if the reason for this has been forgotten.

The spirit of Christmas, one of peace and love, is referenced secularly as well as religiously. Too bad it doesn’t last past December 25, in part because the advertisements begin focusing us on St. Valentine’s Day shopping. Note the Christian antecedent for that holiday, too.

The money changers have returned to the temple with a vengeance.

We are a blessed society, blessed with financial wealth and leisure time. It is unfortunate that Christmas shopping and bowl games take precedence over religious observance. But not for all of us, as imperfect as we may be.

So we Christians wish each other a Merry Christmas and offer the same blessing to our non-Christian friends and fellow citizens. Christ’s sacrificial love extends to all and His followers are empowered to offer that to all in His name.

Even if we can’t assure peace on earth, we can show goodwill to all.

Merry Christ’s Mass!

## The Lost Art of Conversation

*(Dec. 11)* — Conversation, that lost art of genteel people discussing whatever in an enjoyable context, should be on the endangered species list. It's a rare day when I find a group and topic appealing enough to claim my sustained attention.

That sounds snobbish, I know, but I don't mean it to be. The fault is mine as I refuse to change with the times. We've become a society of 24-hour news, social media, memes and soundbites. Perhaps it's my age; I have difficulty keeping up with what's happening now, that expression itself dating me.

Refusing to keep up, I blame my slowing mental processes as I age but even I don't buy that excuse. Instead, I have developed a theory that it is my lack of interest in or knowledge of today's popular conversational topics at the root of my dystopian outlook.

This theory, like others, requires systematic testing in laboratory conditions. But as I am too lazy to do that, I instead constructed my own field test to determine the most popular discussion subjects. Where do people tend to talk the most and the longest? I could only think of one place — I asked the bartender at my local American Legion post. Here is her list of what she hears most often:

Politics — This came as no surprise as number one on the list. I have lost all interest in politics, not knowing whether to treat it as high comedy or low tragedy as if we are stuck in a Shakespearean play. I do screw up the courage to vote every May and November but, truth be told, I often vote for the least objectionable candidates. All bad candidates are not equal; some are truly dangerous threats to my life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Sports — This was a close second and supports my thesis. I don't have any interest in sports (except for the divinely ordained one of baseball, of course). I try to show interest, if only to know when to nod sagely when someone pronounces an opinion that is meaningless to me. I find it impossible to follow any team that did not exist in

1959, the year before the world began its descent into cultural barbarism. When I think about how much disposable income is spent on professional and college sports, let alone non-disposable income appropriated by taxing authorities to provide the infrastructure for all those palaces of competition, my mind flashes back to imperial Rome and its public spectacles as soporifics for the mob.

Gun laws — This was an American Legion post, so Second Amendment rights are high on the list of the liberties these veterans fought to preserve. I don't own a gun and didn't even know the local gun-carry laws until the bartender explained them. The right to do something, by definition, inheres the right not to do it so I support Second Amendment rights in the abstract at least.

TV shows — This wasn't on her list, but while I was writing this several additional members showed up and immediately compared notes about their favorite series on one of the ubiquitous streaming services. Make this prosecution exhibit four. I watch almost no television, agreeing with Newton Minow's indictment of it as a "vast wasteland" of senseless violence, mindless comedy and offensive advertising. When I do watch, it is at my wife's instigation since she sees shared TV watching as a marital obligation.

Note that religion did not make the list. This is a sad commentary on our increasingly secularized society, one that neither needs nor wants God in charge. And how is that turning out for us?

I find solace in the past, seeing (or imagining) a simpler, purer time when one needn't run at full speed to barely keep up. I fantasize about being a member of the Algonquin Round Table in the 1920s, where wit was the coin of the realm. If they couldn't be serious, at least they could be clever. We, meanwhile, are reduced to loving or hating Donald Trump in 30 seconds or less.

The complaint is mine so the solution must be mine as well. In this I have been helped by a group of like-minded friends. I wrote this as the Indiana Policy Review held its annual winter seminar in

Wabash. We focused largely on the practical, that which is needed in Indiana to promote liberty and happiness among the citizenry. The Declaration of Independence served as our Greek chorus, constantly reminding us of the philosophy of the founders and its eternal applicability to a free republic.

Given the seriousness of the topics under discussion, I refrained from channeling Dorothy Parker of Algonquin fame. Thomas Jefferson would have been better but I fall short of his eloquence.

And the best part of the weekend? Sports were hardly mentioned.

### Quizzing a Candidate

*(Dec. 1)* — Since I am unemployed and unemployable, I am blessed with the luxury of deciding how I spend my time. That is not necessarily a good thing as I am a soft target for church and community related volunteer jobs. It's my own fault so I won't blame anyone else for the fact that my days are usually filled with meetings, volunteer work jobs and non-degree graduate school classes.

One obligation I have gladly undertaken is a monthly meeting with a group of like-minded thinkers who meet to discuss the significant issues of the day. By like-minded I don't mean automatons in ideology but rather others who wish to have considered, polite and intellectual discussions without any need for winning a debate or achieving one-upmanship.

Normally our discussions are focused on a predetermined prompt, called a "provocation" in our group, which ideally will focus our discussion. We are committed to the Socratic method, one that elevates questions over answers and theoretically leads us to a conclusion.

Sometimes that works better than others. For example last month the provocation was to use the Socratic method to develop questions to be asked of candidates for office that would commit them to a particular policy directive. It worked, sort of.

Consider these questions to be asked of candidates. What motivates you to serve in public office? How do you prioritize the needs of your constituencies over your personal opinions? What are your philosophical principles about society and government?

Now let's flip the coin to its other side and ask a question of the voters. How can we feel confident that our officials are trustworthy? How can we hold them accountable to their campaign statements?

Do you see how these questions are jointly harnessed to the same question of qualification for office-holding in our republic?

Our presumption, perhaps better described as our conceit, is that campaign questions tend to be softballs and the answers the same. It seemed to us that every candidate answer was a pre-scripted, twenty-second meaningless recitation of vapidities, devoid of any specificity or commitment to a policy position.

How do we get past that to force the candidate to actually make a position statement for which he could be held accountable? And from the voter's perspective, how can a complex issue be distilled enough that the answer would be understandable to the average voter?

We should have chosen an easier provocation, but there it was.

As we fearlessly sought to take this on, one of our group asked an inconvenient question. Can someone of principle be a politician?

Uh...

When in doubt, look to Ronald Reagan. We are conservatives, after all.

Reagan's advice was to have a core set of values and use them to inform all policy-based decisions. He was a principled man, one whose philosophies of life and government were finely honed over decades of public speaking. Even those who disagreed with his principles learned to respect his genuineness in applying them to the issue at hand.

Perhaps the 1980's were when we completely lost what remained of our innocence. Reagan's

“morning in America” morphed into the dusk of cynicism as we taught ourselves to mistrust all politicians and institutions. Or did we learn this mistrust from the politicians and institutions themselves, particularly a biased, unprofessional media? Whether it is the chicken or the egg, we find ourselves in a dysfunctional, dystopian society. The pressure on our republic as a government of the people, by the people and for the people is ratcheting up quickly.

Is the trend irreversible? Can we return to our perception of past Edenic innocence with mutual trust between politicians and voters?

Our monthly discussion group decided that it is possible, yet the task is daunting. For all the faults we see in our politicians, we as voters continue to reward their faulty behavior every election cycle. Until we become better informed as a citizenry, and this requires hard work on our part, we are in no position to demand more of our elected officials.

Rational ignorance rules. Too many don't really care until they personally feel the hurt. That's why grocery store inflation will be a key issue in the next election and the federal deficit will not, although even a superficial analysis would show the two to be interrelated.

Here is the conundrum: Why would anyone of deeply held principles run for office when there is no public forum to have a considered discussion of those principles and their reduction to specific policy actions? The more specific the candidate becomes, the more the opposition will collect points for negative advertising. Why risk it?

My group isn't giving up on this problem. At our December gathering we will consider it from a different perspective with the objective of developing a path forward. Time will tell if we find that path.

### Manchin Is no 'Moderate'

(Nov. 22) — Joe Manchin is hard to figure out. He likes to see himself as a moderate who thinks independently of party and ideology. Many desperately want to believe that.

His recent decision not to seek reelection as a senator from West Virginia has been spun to meet the interests, might I say delusions, of the never-Trump and not-Biden tribes.

Was it a principled decision driven by the insurmountable divisiveness in Washington, a climate in which he feels powerless? Perhaps. I hesitate to question another's motives so I will give his principles the benefit of the doubt, at least partially. I wonder, though, how much the political climate in West Virginia focused his attention. His quest for reelection may look more like Don Quixote than the knights of the Round Table. I am sure he can read the polls as well as anyone.

So the question being asked is if he will run for president as an independent or third-party candidate? This strikes fear into the hearts of Democrats who know the history of third parties, a history of serving as a spoiler to the major party the self-proclaimed independent left. But hope springs eternal, so there are other Democrats who think he will harm Trump more than Biden, preventing their political bete noire from winning.

I can read history too, so I tend to give higher credibility to the scared Democrats. That, however, may be for the simple reason that I don't see Manchin as remotely resembling a classical moderate.

How moderate is he? What do the facts say?

The left-leaning Axios calls Manchin the Senate's most conservative member but that is damning with faint praise if his score with conservative vote tracking organization's is any indication. The American Conservative Union scores him at 27 percent lifetime in his voting record. That's not conservative by any reasonable definition, although it may look that way to those who hang around the left end of the ideological spectrum.

Heritage Foundation's political action arm gives Manchin a 22 percent lifetime score but shows a 33 percent score for the current session. The same question holds: Is this shift from principle or from poll reading?

Looking at left-liberal-progressive side of his record, ProgressivePunch ranks him last among Democrat Senators with a 69 percent lifetime score. Note that this score tracks inversely with the conservative groups above. One might conclude that there is validity in these scoring systems.

One oddity is that ProgressivePunch reports Manchin to have shifted slightly to the left in the current session of Congress. Heritage instead sees him as shifting slightly to the right. These organizations don't track all the same bills but this is an interesting blip in the data.

These data would suggest that Manchin is not a true moderate, at least in the textbook sense. He is viewed as such by his own party; note his last place ranking with ProgressivePunch. One would expect a moderate to have voting scores much closer to 50 percent, but that may be an unrealistic expectation given the extremity of our political discourse.

So much for Manchin's moderation; what about his independence? Here again, he scores better than his peers but he still supports President Biden's agenda 88 percent of the time according to FiveThirtyEight, a website for data wonks. Is this an indication of party discipline or agreement with the President's agenda? Whichever, it argues against the claim of independence.

All this merely confirms what simple reflection observes. As people move toward either of the political extremes, the subjective mid-point appears to shift with them. Most people see themselves as moderately liberal or conservative so that increases the apparent extremism of those on the other side.

This is just my opinion but I've enough empirical evidence to hand in support. Just look at the media for example. How often do you read or hear terms like "right ring" or "extreme right" versus "left wing" or "extreme left." I am too lazy to go on the internet and do a count on these terms in the New York Times or Washington Post but I am confident of what I will find.

As just one data point the Washington Post described Kamala Harris as a "pragmatic moderate" when she was selected as Joe Biden's running mate, this being the same Kamala Harris who scored a perfect 100 on several liberal scales and zero on conservative ones. This says more about the Post's bias than Harris' ideology.

All of which brings to mind William Butler Yeats' haunting poem "The Second Coming" and these lines "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."

He wrote this in 1920. If he were writing today, I expect the words to be unchanged.

### Consent of the Governed?

*(Nov. 10)* — "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

These words of Thomas Jefferson can be found in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, immediately after the more recognizable "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Jefferson writes that it is to secure these rights that governments exist.

The argument of the day was that King and Parliament did not have the consent of the American colonists and therefore could be legally and morally rejected.

What constitutes the consent of the governed? In a representative democracy such as the United States, this consent is implied by the free election of one set of candidates over another in a democratic election. Until recently most people understood that democracy means elections and elections mean somebody wins and somebody else loses. The losers are expected to begin gearing up for the next election while presenting at least an appearance of serving as the loyal opposition.

What did not happen in the twentieth century, at least the half of that century in which I lived, was a claim by the losing side that the election winner was illegitimate. The first presidential election I followed was in 1960, my interest requiring that I stay up all night listening to the radio for a winner to be declared. Little did I know at the time that credible evidence was presented

to Richard Nixon that results from Illinois and Texas were suspect, although my ten-year-old brain did wonder why no results were reported from Chicago until the rest of the state's were in.

Not only did Nixon not contest the result, he received a prolonged ovation in Congress when, as sitting vice president, he counted the Electoral College votes and declared the election to be an “eloquent example of the stability of our constitutional system and of the proud tradition of the American people of developing, respecting and honoring institutions of self-government.”

When the Times Square clock signaled a new century, this proud tradition was its first casualty. Al Gore contested the Florida vote count all the way to the U. S. Supreme Court, allowing his partisans in politics and the media to declare George Bush “illegitimate.”

Unfortunately, this was not a one-off. Hillary Clinton refused to concede in 2016 and Donald Trump did likewise in 2020. Gore, Clinton and Trump should look to Nixon for a nobility that appears to have escaped them.

But this is just political elites whining, right? The problem is that this inflammatory rhetoric has affected the rest of us.

The University of Virginia Center for Politics recently released the results of a survey of voters which ought to alarm every lover of liberty, democracy and the Constitution. Consider these results:

Among Trump supporters 47 percent think Democrats are a threat to the American way of life and 38 percent consider violence to be justified to stop them.

Well, aren't they simply a “basket of deplorables” in love with their religion and their guns, still wearing MAGA ball caps? Except that the same question when asked of Biden supporters came back with 52 percent believing Republicans are a threat and 41 percent justifying violence to stop them. Note that both Democrat numbers are higher than those of the Trump Republicans. It gets worse. When asked if America should consider a different form of government,

one not democratic in essence, 31 percent of Trumpists and 24 percent of Bidenites said yes.

Does that frighten you as much as it does me?

Nearly half of our fellow citizens accept violence as a legitimate political act. We have a nation of putative Samuel Adamses just waiting to toss somebody's tea chests into Boston Bay.

As frightening as this appeal of violence is, it is perplexing that one-quarter think there is a better form of government than our venerable republic.

If not democracy, then what? There are other forms of government, to be sure. The Declaration is an indictment of monarchy but to my knowledge hardly any monarchies exist today outside the Middle East.

If kings are not an alternative, then what is? We have the historical lessons of 1917 Russia and 1933 Germany to suggest other options. The simple lesson to be learned is that authoritarianism is the only other choice to democracy. Inexplicably, a very large percentage of our fellow citizens are willing to make a descent into that hell.

Count me out.

I am in my twilight years but I have kids and grandkids. America today hardly resembles the America of my youth. I despair thinking about what it will be for them. A quick survey of the world today reinforces that despair and a study of history does nothing to mitigate this. Republican Rome and democratic Greece both fell to despotism.

Is America next?

## What's U.S. Foreign Policy?

*(Oct. 24)* — I learned something new the other day in a Wall Street Journal column: the term “cognitive-dissonance reduction,” a form of mental gymnastics used to fit inconvenient facts to the ideology.

I know what cognitive dissonance is, having run into the term in my undergraduate business school classes. Think of it as a propensity to always second guess your opinions, a mortal sin in the left-wing catechism.

It turns into a vile application when applied to the left's justification of Hamas' inhuman brutality against Israeli civilians and the Gaza residents used as human shields. The justification? They've got it coming to them, to trivialize a juvenile school yard excuse when caught by the teacher. Only this isn't grade school bullying; it is a crime against humanity and all that is decent. No matter.

These are Nietzschean anarchists taking his philosophy well beyond any limits he envisioned. Today's country club anarchists-you know them: the privileged children attending super expensive Ivy League colleges at mom and dad's expense-have looked into the abyss without heeding Nietzsche's warning. In fact they welcome the returned stare coming from the unspeakable abyss dweller. It validates their perverted logic.

So what is America to do about it?

The question drives right into the fissure between two schools of thought in our foreign policy strategy, between the realists and the idealists if I may simplify the positions. The realists look at international issues through practical and often short-term lenses. What is in America's best interest today? What is the impact on our military commitments and our balance of trade? I exaggerate somewhat but the thinking focuses on what helps the United States and, dare I say it, what resonates with the voting base.

The idealist focus is on America's role model status as a land of freedom and democracy. Our foreign policy should align itself with those nations which most resemble us and our ideals. Once more I exaggerate but this approach can look naïve to people who see threats at the border and unfair competition in the marketplace. And there is another voting base this appeals to.

Perhaps history can once again instruct us.

John Quincy Adams was quite successful as Secretary of State during the Monroe presidency. The Monroe Doctrine was actually the Adams doctrine but the boss always seems to put his name on a subordinate's work.

A colleague at the Indiana Policy Review pointed me to a speech Adams gave in 1821.

Adams provided the right mix of national self-interest and world moral leadership in this speech to the House of Representatives.

He stated that America's heart will always be with those peoples searching for freedom and independence but cautioned against taking on these foreign causes as her own. America should speak out and lead by example, being what as Ronald Reagan, borrowing from both John Winthrop and Jesus Christ, called "a shining city on a hill."

I found the most memorable phrase of the Adams speech to be his statement that America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy." The reason? This would change America's ethos from liberty to force. Might does not make right in Adams' thinking.

Where Adams can be faulted, perhaps unfairly, is that he could not conceive of a United States as the most powerful nation in the world. America was new, small and mostly friendless in the 1820's so his focus was understandably to construct a foreign policy informed by weakness and by America's fortunate isolation from direct European conflict. This worked well until World War I and subsequent recognition by the rest of the world that America was an economic and military powerhouse.

Not all will agree with me but I think Ronald Reagan among twentieth century presidents best understood how to balance our inherent love of isolationism with the expectation we must be the free world's policeman. William Imboden's book, "The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink," eloquently documents this. He didn't go looking for a monster; the evil Soviet empire was right in his face.

Adams' principles still stand today but must be applied in a different context from that of the post-Napoleonic world. Adams did not have to confront an empire whose dictator Nikita Khrushchev boasted, "We will bury you!" I doubt he could even conceive of a Hamas with a goal of exterminating a sovereign nation and its people.

What would John Quincy Adams do if he somehow awoke, Rip Van Winkel style, and found himself in Israel? Adams may insist that America stick to its shores and preach liberty, but he was too much the realist to do only that. The cognitive-dissonance reduction syndrome infecting the left wing today would not ensnare him. With an intellect like his, he would figure out a solution.

Unfortunately, I don't see a John Quincy think-alike in today's Washington D. C.

## They've Gone Too Far

*(Oct. 16)* — This time they have gone too far, so far that even their usual choir of apologists have distanced themselves.

The sickening images coming out of Israel are the epitome of pure evil. What compounds the horror is the response this is getting on certain elite college campuses.

This should have given everyone pause, including those who generally are sympathetic to Palestinian claims. Parachuting armed terrorists into a music festival for the sole purpose of beginning a "war" by massacring civilians is indefensible.

Then there are reports of the "execution" of babies and children, reports that now have been attested by photographs. Killing babies is not an act of war; it is murder.

I am a baby-boomer so I know of the World War II atrocities by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia only through history books. I do recall Pol Pot's butchery when he and his Communist fellow travelers secured control of Cambodia. Then there was Idi Amin in Uganda. I assuaged my conscience by convincing myself that these were aberrations.

So how can anyone, self-entitled college students included, paint these Hamas killers as the true victims? It is Israel which is responsible for this bloodshed, according to these youngsters. Apparently unfair treatment by a government absolves the self-anointed aggrieved of any response they choose to make. Babies, by

transference, are guilty and deserving of whatever they get.

This is a sick application of the "Devil made me do it" defense. It didn't work for Flip Wilson or for Eve in the Garden.

It is instructive that news reports of campus protests generally mention that the pro-Hamas demonstrators are masked. They may have convictions but they sure don't have the courage of those convictions.

Perhaps the only careful analysis of the situation these children have undertaken caused them to realize that there just might be repercussions for their contemptible actions.

And while we are speaking of courage and the lack thereof, the president of Harvard University was slow to rise to the occasion. After the 30 some student groups issued a joint statement holding "the Israeli regime wholly responsible for the unfolding violence," she needed two days to issue a university response condemning those who actually perpetrated the violence.

Was she not paying attention? Is she privately sympathetic to the anti-Semitism inherent in the student statement? Was she naively hoping these protests would get favorable treatment from a docile media?

My guess, and that is all it is, is that more than one major donor or powerful alumnus phoned the president's office in outrage. That's how private (and major public) universities work: the president's primary duty is fundraising. Alumni across the nation have not been quiet about the woke direction of their alma maters and are encouraging their peers to stop donating. Claudine Gay certainly is aware of that movement.

The reaction to this campus extremism has begun. One major law firm has already revoked an offer of a summer internship to a student who wrote a pro-Hamas article for the student newspaper. The Wall Street Journal reported that some corporate employers have announced they would not hire students who support the "It's all Israel's fault" narrative.

That's what it is: a narrative. It has no basis in facts or rational thought. Palestinian residents of



the nation Israel have been declared oppressed by upper class students in the United States and that means Israel must be the oppressor. Period.

I spent my entire career in higher education administration. I also attended college during the Vietnam era. There were disagreements and intense debates between left-wing and right-wing student groups. No one ever wore a mask and no speaker was shouted down. As an administrator I never was involved in a student disciplinary action over illiberal or uncivil political speech. But I worked at a university in Indiana and I have been retired for ten years. Maybe things have changed but I trust not, at least at my erstwhile campus.

Something clearly has gone wrong when students at the most prestigious university in the United States, or at least most prestigious in its own mind, can endorse a statement excusing these brutal murders. Excuse is the wrong verb; they just blamed the victim.

We have become a society inured to violence but this time it is different. All the Americans I've talked to are outraged at the brutality and bloodthirstiness of this attack. A national consensus might be achievable on this issue. Even Joe Biden has responded in support of Israel, no doubt to the Squad's consternation but then we hardly need or want them in a national consensus.

If my sense of American sentiment is correct, the evil of this situation may finally get us to stop viciously attacking each other and rally to support our allies who are facing a crisis.

And it is an existential crisis for the nation of Israel and its citizens.

### Our 'Leaders' — Chosen but not Liked

*(Oct. 9)* — "The government you elect is the government you deserve." Thomas Jefferson

Find someone who will speak positively about our government these days and you will have outdone the cynic Diogenes. He merely wanted to find a wise man; we are looking for a happy and contented one.

Fortunately we can let the Gallup Poll do our work for us. That organization conducts an annual

survey of a representative group of Americans to ask their level of confidence in the major institutions of our society. Confidence dropped again in 2023 in nearly all 16 institutions included. We are an unhappy people.

There were a few categories that saw slight increases, one or two percentage points. For example churches improved but only one percent. I guess we should be thankful for little things.

So long as we are celebrating one percent improvements, give Congress a round of applause. It improved from seven to eight percent approval. Yes, you read that right. Congress ranks last in public confidence. Ninety-two percent of Americans have little or no confidence in Congress as an institution and can you blame them?

Just look at what that august body did in the past few weeks. First there is Matt Gaetz and his scorched earth politics. Angry with Kevin McCarthy for not being conservative enough, Gaetz teamed up with the Squad and other lefties in the Democrat party—in this case being every single one of them—to send McCarthy to the back benches. Congratulations, Matt; you proved something although I for one can't fathom what.

Of course our national press (which has a confidence factor only in the mid-teens) bewailed the lack of moderate Republicans in the House but never got around to asking where the moderate Democrats were on this vote. They could have saved McCarthy if they wanted to and apparently Nancy Pelosi had promised something of that sort. Maybe her lack of follow through on that commitment led to the eviction from her private digs at the Capitol building.

But then what Pelosi did or did not promise doesn't matter to us because our attention is on the honorable Jamaal Bowman, who apparently thinks he is back in junior high school where pranks like pulling fire alarms are thought to be cool. Somebody needs to send Jamaal to the principal's office.

Maybe it's time for the principal to call a school assembly and remind this pack of juveniles that

they do have Constitutional responsibility to pass a new budget before the old one expires. The current budget law has been in effect for nearly 50 years but Congress has met its own deadline only five times, the last being 1997.

As a libertarian at heart, I like congressional gridlock since it prevents passage of expensive, onerous, anti-liberty laws. The budget is another thing entirely. Playing political Russian roulette every September is no way to run a railroad. Or maybe the analogy is appropriate since most railroads went bankrupt.

I am politically naive but I just don't understand how Matt Gaetz and his fellow travelers believe they can win a one minute before midnight battle over the budget. Please remind me of a government shutdown that wasn't blamed on the Republicans by the media. The Republicans can pass whatever they want in the House of Representatives but then their noble efforts will come to naught in the Democrat Senate and the Democrat White House. And the public will blame the Republicans because the media will tell it to.

No wonder Congress ranks last in the public confidence sweepstakes. But they have a lot of company in the underwater category. Only two institutions, small business and the military, scored above 50 percent. This ought to frighten all of us.

How long can a civilization survive if its citizenry has no confidence in its major institutions? If it falls, how will that come about and will we see the warning signs? Is our collective attitude a contributing factor, even an irreversible one? Have we met the enemy and he is us?

I think the comic strip Pogo was on to something back in 1970 when his creator Walt Kelly used that line to support Earth Day and its concerns about pollution. Not to belittle the dangers of excessive pollution but spiritual pollution is much more dangerous to future generations. We can attempt to return earth to a Garden of Eden but will we find ourselves as

unhappy with the situation as did our original parents?

This may be asking too much but can we accept our own responsibility for our role in selecting our leaders and not hold them to high standards?

Maybe H. L. Mencken figured this out.

## Ubiquitous Road Hazards

*(Oct. 2)* — Like nearly every other red-blooded American, I have dreamt about get-rich-quick schemes but to no avail. I wish I had been the genius who figured out that he could take free water, bottle it and then sell it at three bucks a crack. I was also too late with hula hoops, slinkies, soap-on-a-rope and pet rocks.

Genius is 99 percent perspiration and only one percent inspiration, if Thomas Edison is to be believed. I've paid my dues in perspiration and finally reached the one percent point as a can't miss idea hit me the other day while driving on the interstate.

I propose to secure the state highway department contract to supply those orange barrels that are everywhere. And I mean literally everywhere.

Try driving on any stretch of interstate highway without having to merge into a single lane of traffic because the other lane is blocked off by orange barrels. Note that I didn't mention construction zones; there are a lot of those too but the ubiquitous barrels don't need any construction project to show up unannounced.

That is perplexing in itself. The interstate that runs along my hometown has a lane closed off for miles with orange barrels and no work going on. Nor is there any obvious need for road work in that stretch.

When there is bona fide road work to be done, why does it take so long? One very busy intersection near my house has two lanes of traffic approaching from all four directions and with left turn lanes for each. All summer traffic has been reduced to one lane in each direction as vehicles are funneled into orange barrel tunnels. It might take three or four lights to get through. This is a

real construction site but with only infrequent work going on. The “Men Working” cautionary signs should be changed to “Men Working . . . Tomorrow . . . Maybe.”

So how do all these barrels get there? One almost wonders if they are dropped randomly by alien spaceships at night. If a Twilight Zone explanation won’t work, then they have to be manufactured somewhere. Has anyone seen the massive plant required to produce so many of them? Are all the plant’s workers sworn to secrecy? I certainly have never met someone who admitted to building those things.

I have nightmares about waking up to find half of my driveway blocked off by orange barrels.

There is money to be made here and now I need to figure out how to get some of the action. These being political contracts, my cynical inner self tells me to become an in-law of the governor or mayor. My wife will probably veto my doing that personally but I have dozens of cousins. Surely one of them has an available grandchild we can use as marriage material to improve the family fisc.

I shouldn’t be flippant about this situation. All the lane closures, interstate merges and road closures have a deleterious effect on our driving safety.

A neighbor was trying to enter an interstate reduced to one lane, from an entrance ramp shortened and with poor visibility. Trying to figure out whether to speed up or slow down to merge, or to stop entirely if on-coming traffic wouldn’t allow her in was one of those split-second decisions no one wants to make. She ended up clipping a barrel to avoid a collision. I don’t need to mention the body shop bill for that. At least she wasn’t hurt.

Driving has become more dangerous and it’s not all due to the orange barrels. Two friends have had their cars totaled by drivers who ran red lights. Fortunately neither suffered major injuries but what is going on? Why are we seeing more of this sort of thing? Are people not paying attention or do they just not care about traffic laws?

One more example: I nearly was run down at a pedestrian crossing on a corner with a four-way stop. I noticed the speed of the approaching car and determined that its driver had no intention of stopping. I would have been in the legal right but also in the hospital.

At my age I remember less and less but I do recall the emphasis placed on defensive driving in my driver’s ed class. It was a required class for us ninth graders at the township school. The course is no longer required and that township school has been demolished. So much for educational advancement.

If I have been unfair to governmental highway departments, road construction companies or school curriculum designers, I apologize. But the problem is real and probably rests with self-indulgent drivers who are focused on their own convenience (or their cell phones), and the other guy be damned.

After that last sentence, I probably should apologize again but I don’t think I will.

## The Trump Effect

*(Sept. 18)* — I will come clean up front: I am not a Donald Trump supporter. I will also come clean by publicly stating I voted for him in the 2016 and 2020 general elections but in neither primary. What choice did I have when considering the alternatives? The current state of affairs with Joe Biden and his administration validates my choice. And no defense is required for refusing to vote for Hillary Clinton.

Just the thought of having a rematch between Biden and Trump makes me despair for our republic. I think psychologists would define my mental state as cognitive dissonance. No matter which choice I might make, I will regret it. Economists call this buyer’s remorse, if I recall my college courses in that discipline.

My wife’s feelings are the same so you can imagine what family discourse is like leading up to election day.

When this situation comes up in conversation among friends, the conversation becomes less polite and friendships are stressed. Between my

MAGA and Never Trump acquaintances, enjoyable evenings are hard to come by.

My mental health is medicated by a group of friends who gather monthly to discuss issues like the Trump effect and other significant national policy questions. The reason I find these sessions restorative rests in the group's composition and its ground rules.

None of us knew everyone prior to our first meeting. A common friend facilitated the group for the sole purpose of finding a way forward through our national malaise. We come from varied backgrounds and professions. Everyone is well-read and intellectually rigorous. We all know that difficult questions require intensive study and open-mindedness when considering possible solutions.

The group attempts to hold our monthly discussions via the Socratic method. A Socratic purist would not be impressed with our application of the methodology. We seem to honor it more in the breach than in the observance yet we still can advance the debate in a semi-formal structure that pushes us toward a proposed solution, although in all honesty I must admit we don't always get there. I don't envy the month's moderator whose job it is to make it so.

Every month we select the next topic and assign a moderator. His job is to write the discussion prompt and assemble a relevant reading list. Yes, homework is required and watching Fox News or CNN doesn't count.

We are supposed to raise our hands when we wish to speak and the order of speakers is honored for the most part. The current speaker is not to be interrupted and a time limit of three minutes per comment is very occasionally enforced.

We routinely violate Socrates' idea of how to study a question and the Oxford debating society would just shake its head at our informality. Still, this is not the Saturday night cocktail party approach of one-upmanship and tossing hand grenades on the table. The topic doesn't change every 90 seconds and nobody is trying to prove a point, just presenting a persuasive argument for

or against the monthly prompt. This recalls my undergraduate days when we would stay up most of the night to solve all the world's problems. Undergraduate hubris is a force of nature.

So what about Donald Trump? Everyone in the group acknowledged Trump's commanding lead among Republican candidates and, for the most part, expected this lead to be unassailable. The more Trump is prosecuted (or persecuted, your choice), the more solid his base becomes.

Much of our time was invested in considering Trump's impact down ticket on senatorial and congressional candidates. Can a Republican candidate admit to not being a Trump supporter? Trump's track record in the 2022 midterm elections was not impressive so perhaps these candidates need not be overly defensive.

Biden's poll numbers continue to head south on nearly every issue, red meat for his opponent. But we saw in 2016 that Trump can't tolerate the other candidate getting any press coverage which his ego wants focused on him. As one of our group stated, "Trump sucks all the oxygen out of the room."

While we worried the Republican problem to death, we gave short shrift to the very real problems the Democrats have with their presumptive ticket. Can Joe Biden win if he actually campaigns or debates? And then there is Kamala Harris, who seems even more confused and confusing than her boss whenever she speaks. Napoleon's maxim to never interrupt your opponent when he is about to make a mistake is apropos for Trump, if he cares to listen.

If we came to any conclusion, it was to take a long-term view of the Republican Party's prospects. It is difficult now with all the oxygen having left the room, but a post-Trump party can be built by successful federal, state and local candidates.

Is there a young Ronald Reagan waiting in the wings? I sure hope so. ♦

# The Bookshelf

## Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

We Americans can be as self-absorbed as any. Our view of the colonial struggle with Great Britain is usually viewed primarily if not exclusively from this side of the Atlantic. What British perspective we find in our histories tends to focus on antecedents used by the patriots to justify their rebellion. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 is one example. What doesn't get much coverage are contemporaneous events that either influenced colonial ones or vice versa. Peter Moore in his "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Britain and the American Dream" (Ferrar, Straus and Giroux 2023, 512 pages plus notes, \$18 hardcover at Amazon) shines a little light into this dark corner.

Moore's setting is the personal and professional friendship between Benjamin Franklin and British printer William Strahan (the publisher of "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" and "The Wealth of Nations") with several interesting diversions into contemporaneous figures such as John Wilkes, Catherine Macaulay and Samuel Johnson. Moore attempts to weave a story centered on London into a tapestry of the struggle for individual rights. I don't think he was altogether successful in that but that does not subtract from the value of the book.

Take John Wilkes, for example. The Wilkes diversion is perhaps the best part of the book. Most Americans would not recognize the name other than from Abraham Lincoln's assassin. The original Wilkes, for whom Booth was named, was part rabble rouser, part scheming politician and part opportunist, all of which kept him as front-page news during the 1760's. How Wilkes enters Moore's story is through his publishing of a

partisan newspaper that used pseudonymous columns to attack the Tory government. One can trace the American partisan press of the 1790's to Wilke's mastery of the genre.

Wilkes was convicted of libel, removed from his seat in the House of Commons and declared an "outlaw" subject to immediate arrest. He fled to France and awaited an opportunity to return. He came back and managed to be elected to the

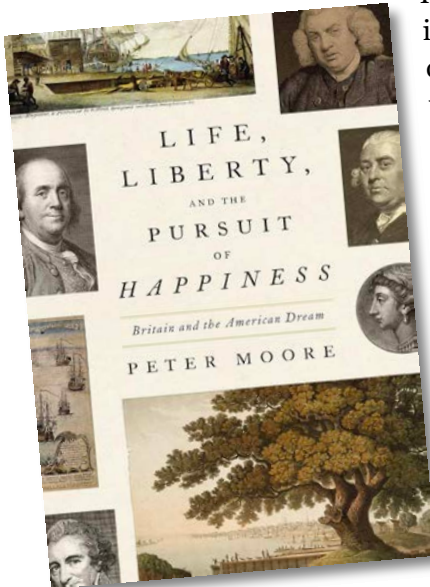
House of Commons and its legal immunities. His election campaigns were overrun with voter intimidation and outright violence, prefiguring Samuel Adams and the Boston Sons of Liberty. Moore describes the election as "a brawling, exhausting, drunken, elaborate, underhand, theatrical performance." I had to double check if he was speaking of 1768 or 2024.

Moore pulls no punches describing the newspapers of the day either. He indicts them for using anonymous narrators,

fictional letters to the editor and "satire, imposture and mimicry." Ben Franklin may have learned that art during his stay in London and his perambulations among the intellectual set of the city.

And that may be the underlying theme of the book: a chain of communication among Franklin and others that used printing, writing, reading and discussion to spread ideas and win support. It is no coincidence that Franklin was at heart a writer and printer. That's how his relationship with Strahan began and continued until the final break between Britain and her colonies.

Franklin had an ego, to be sure, and it was that ego which pushed him into developing powerful acquaintances both for the good of his fellow colonists and to advance his own career. Eventually this caught up with him when he released private Thomas Hutchinson letters he had obtained under less than pristine



circumstances. The famed session in the Cockpit ended any influence...or friends...that Franklin still had in England.

Moore provides a too brief discussion of the English concept of liberty, which Moore says “materialized out of the wild woods of Saxony a thousand years before” and was seen as a “rare and fragile thing.” What the colonists were asserting at the same time was no different. The concept of happiness as something to be pursued and not to be obtained by right receives several pages of attention. Moore allows us to trace this concept across the Atlantic, eventually finding home in the Declaration of Independence.

Moore’s account of the Boston Tea Party and British reactions to it leads one to see it as the tipping point in the deteriorating relationship between colonists and the mother country. What friends in Parliament the colonists had could not and would not support this destructive act. Whatever was on the negotiating table before, and it is optimistic to think much was still there, was swept off. A case can be made that is what Samuel Adams and the other radicals wanted.

The book ends with the start of the war and the drafting of the Declaration. Moore notes that Franklin and Strahan, who had become bitter enemies during the war at Franklin’s instigation, achieved a partial reconciliation after by agreeing to discuss anything but politics. One is reminded of the John Adams-Thomas Jefferson rapprochement in their later years.

All of this is quite interesting but somehow falls short of what I expected to read. That said, the book is worth the time spent if only to get a better sense of the broader English world in the eighteenth century. Our rebellion did not occur in

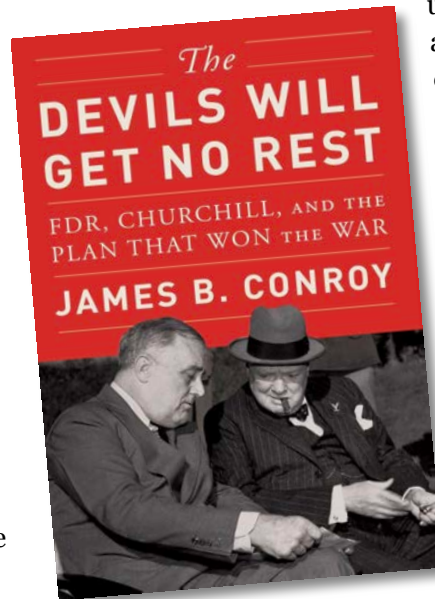
a vacuum; its progression was informed by similar events in England. The salient question is this: Why did political protest in America end in war and that in the mother country step back from the precipice? For all of Wilkes’ rabble-rousing and provocation of violent protest, he returned to the House of Commons and acted responsibly, more or less. Adams and other Americans took up arms. It was not within Moore’s writ to answer that question but he did a fine job of framing it.

### The Devils Will Get No Rest

Alliances are difficult things to bring off, even when all parties face existential threats. History is replete with examples of alliances based on mutual interest fracturing under stress. It took seven different coalitions under British leadership to finally put paid to Napoleon’s imperial dreams. Britain has a better than average record, though, in forging and maintaining wartime alliances, not least of which is its World War II partnership with the

United States. While its absolute necessity is obvious to us now, James B. Conroy’s recent book, “The Devils Will Get No Rest: FDR, Churchill, and the Plan That Won the War” (Simon & Schuster 2023, 333 pages plus notes, \$23 hardcover at Amazon), recounts the difficulty in bringing it off.

The book is a day-by-day account of the Casablanca conference, the first of ten major consultations the two nations undertook to keep a unified front against both Germany and Japan. Several themes focus the account with inter-service and inter-national rivalries always there, just under the surface if not always visible at the negotiating table. The issue of priorities was the purpose of the conference and dominated nearly every topic. The war in the Pacific was the elephant in the room. The American joint chiefs of staff were divided, with the Navy’s Ernest King and his Pacific focus fighting the Army’s George Marshall’s Germany-first orientation for war-fighting resources (men and materiel). King got



mother

no support from the Brits for his perspective but then neither did Marshall, who found that European theater priorities were seen quite differently by the British.

Another theme visited and revisited by Conroy was American preparation for the conference . . . or should I say lack of preparation. The British did their homework and the Americans did not. The British chiefs brought large staffs and volumes of carefully prepared strategic studies of the options they preferred. The American chiefs had what might best be described as ideas (my term, not Conroy's) but without any backup studies or data in support. This put the Americans at an immediate tactical disadvantage at the conference table. Post-conference America accounts used terms like "snowed under," "we were conquered," and "the British were smarter than hell."

The strategic thinking was different on the two sides of the Atlantic based on the military histories and cultures of the two nations. The British tended to be cautious, both due to their horrific casualties in World War I and to being the last German foe standing in Europe. Their strategy was to pressure Germany everywhere, slowly reducing the Nazi government's ability and will to continue the war. The American approach, in contrast, was use maximum force where the enemy was strongest. Go for the main chance, as it were. Think of U. S. Grant's overland campaign in 1864.

Conroy does a decent job of keeping these professional and sometimes personal differences forefront but controlled. Both sides knew what was at stake and the "peacemakers" in attendance kept the acrimony in check. An agreement on the main issues was reached by day five.

Hovering over everything were the personalities of the two leaders: Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Conroy presents two character studies that are true to the received wisdom on these political giants but sharpens the edges with anecdotes and observations. Working directly for either leader would have been a challenge for their senior generals yet both Roosevelt and Churchill deserve

credit for understanding the main objective of winning the war. But they, and their staffs, disagreed on the means to that end.

One other significant development at Casablanca was Roosevelt's announcing unconditional surrender as the only acceptable outcome. Historians have debated this ever since. Did it prolong Nazi resistance and extend the war needlessly? Was it the salient cause of the need for atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Did a prolonged war allow Stalin to take over eastern Europe? Conroy doesn't give this topic much space but he does conclude that such a declaration was necessary to keep the Russians on board as allies.

Conroy ends conference history with the arrival of Charles De Gaulle. His was an out-sized ego driven by a limitless belief in his own importance. Churchill's quote rings true even if apocryphal: "He thinks he is Joan of Arc, and I can't get my bloody bishops to burn him." The French issue had to be managed, that issue being one of multiple groups under incompatible leadership. In addition to De Gaulle's faction, there was Henri Giraud, commander of the North African French troops, and a remnant of the Vichy government, the loyalty of which was suspect at best but still needed by the Allies to contribute rear area security.

As difficult as Casablanca proved, it was child's play compared to later conferences once Joseph Stalin and the Russians began participation. For a well-written history of the Yalta conference and its unfortunate aftermath, see my review of Diana Preston's "Eight Days at Yalta: How Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin Shaped the Post-War World" in the summer 2020 IPR Journal. These two histories make excellent bookends for the wartime alliance structure, its ultimate success and the rocky road to get there. Suffice it to say that each conference was rife with American-British bickering or worse until American predominance in men and materiel prevailed. Conroy's survey of each succeeding conference is brief but on target.

*Coup d'Oeil*

**“Road to Surrender: Three Men and the Countdown to the End of World War II”** by Evan Thomas tells the story of the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan but its perspective is unique. It views things primarily through three men: Secretary of War Henry Stimson, General Carl Spaatz and Japanese Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo. All three wrestle with moral issues, at times in opposition to their perceived duty. Stimson was a sick man, suffering several minor heart attacks during the late years of the war. Spaatz was in command of the strategic bombing offensive against Germany where he saw the horrific civilian cost of the Allies “de-housing” bombing of workers’ homes. But the most interesting character is Togo, the Japanese foreign minister who alone convinced the government and Emperor Hirohito that Japan must surrender. He accomplished this despite the personal risk of being assassinated by army hardliners. He was also about the only governmental official who argued against the Pearl Harbor strike. For his efforts he died in prison convicted of crimes against peace. Thomas has provided an interesting book written in an easy-to-read style.

**“A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599”** by James Shapiro is an interesting history of that year as seen through the plays Shakespeare released in 1599. It was a productive year for him with four plays produced: Henry V, As You Like It, Julius Caesar and Hamlet. I’ve read and/or watched them all but next time I will be alert to the subtleties written in that reflect his commentary on current events. Henry V, my favorite history, is loaded with current references to England’s military excursion into Ireland, led by the former court favorite the Earl of Essex. I knew he had a falling out with Queen Elizabeth but never realized how close he came to outright treason. Another example is the mustering of Essex’s army, a criticism of how England impressed unfortunates into serving involuntarily. Julius Caesar, of course, is a play about treason and Hamlet’s lese-majeste falls right into the same category. Even the on again,

off again love affair of As You Like It is uncomfortably close to the Elizabeth-Essex relationship. I always thought of Shakespeare as the tame court playwright for the Tudors but Shapiro convinced me he often sailed close to the royal wind. This is a great book for Shakespeareans but also for those who love the Tudor period of English history.

**“Jefferson’s White House: Monticello on the Potomac”** by James Conroy is his second book about life in the executive mansion during a presidential administration, Lincoln’s White House being his earlier work. I’m not a Jefferson fan for several reasons, but this book softened my anti opinion of the man. Jefferson was not the first occupant but John Adams had only lived there one month before leaving office so the book is about Jefferson’s efforts to make it a livable as well as a functional home. Two points are made clear by the book. First, the White House in Jefferson’s time was incomplete and not structurally sound. Furnishing it mostly came out of Jefferson’s personal funds as Congress appropriated very little in support. These expenditures contributed significantly to Jefferson’s eventual bankruptcy. Second, Jefferson spent lavishly on entertaining by inviting diplomats, congressmen and others to dinner on a regular basis. He even developed a friendship with a Federalist senator, this during a period of elevated rancor between the two parties. How he accomplished this was by focusing the dinner and post-dinner conversation toward non-political topics, Jefferson’s reputation as a polymath working to his favor. Despite my prejudice Conroy is convincing that Jefferson the host was an engaging and likable person. It reminded me of the Kennedy quote at a state dinner for Nobel laureates. "I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone." Except that Thomas Jefferson almost never dined alone, perhaps because he was a lonely widower with family issues. ♦



# Backgrounders

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## Social Security Has Promises to Keep

(Nov. 13) — James C. Capretta, fellow at the American Enterprise Institutes, asks, “How can the largest items in the federal budget, Social Security and Medicare, be preserved without more borrowing? (Tightening the Terms of the Social Contract, Law and Liberty, Nov. 7, 2023)”

The original concept of tying retiree benefit payouts to the payroll taxes has been stretched. Due to the growing gap between Social Security and Medicare contributions and payouts, the federal government is on the edge of a financial crisis and must borrow to cover costs.

Americans have never viewed Social Security and Medicare as welfare. Voters still believe they pre-pay Medicare and Social Security annually in the form of payroll taxes from their first job to retirement; as such, they tend to deny that reform is necessary.

The common perception is that payroll taxes have been set aside from the rest of the federal budget and reserved for the monthly checks and healthcare payments received in retirement. Americans were told when Social Security (SS) was initiated in the 1930s that receipts and spending would be tracked and that elected leaders would not be able to appropriate payroll contributions for any other purpose.

In 1964, a nationalized system of health insurance, called Medicare (HI), was added. HI would offer retirees medical coverage but for hospital expenses only. It would be financed with an add-on to the SS payroll tax and paid into a separate Medicare Hospital Insurance (HI) trust fund. At the same time, however, two additional programs were established. One program was

voluntary and designed to pay for physician services, this is generally referred to as Medicare Part B. Another program, Medicaid, funded jointly by state and federal government, was also created at this time. Any premiums paid by participants flow into a separate account called the Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) trust fund.

From the very beginning, Social Security (SS) and Medicare Hospital Insurance (HI) were designed to be financed through payroll taxes with any excess revenue held in trust funds. This was not the case for additional Medicare programs financed from premiums and subsidies from the federal government. The creation of Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) has had lasting effects on the federal budget.

Because it receives substantial and uncapped subsidies from federal tax revenue, Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) is altogether different from Social Security and Hospital Insurance. This has resulted in annual federal budgetary deficits that increase the national debt of the U.S. Federal allocations to Supplemental Medical Insurance in 2023 equal 1.6 percent of total GDP.

Expanding Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) benefits has made it politically challenging for Congress to increase premiums or limit expenses. Meanwhile, given that 30.7 percent of the population is now aged 65 and older, the separate Social Security trust fund will be exhausted by 2034. For the Medicare Hospitalization Fund, insolvency is expected in 2031.

What principles should guide Social Security and Medicare reforms? Capretta first suggests getting a handle on Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) in order to address a significant portion of the overall federal government deficit. His modest proposal is to prevent the general fund contribution to SMI rising from its 2023 level (1.6 percent of GDP).

Capretta then tackles the rapid depletion of the payroll-financed Social Security and Medicare Hospital Insurance trust funds. Something needs

to be done relatively soon with support from the two major parties.

It is now presumed that current law prohibits spending by Social Security (SS) and Medicare (HI) when their trust funds are exhausted. To sustain the principle that Social Security and Medicare Hospital Insurance payments reflect premiums paid during a person's working career, consider two reforms: 1) Current formulas for payment requests must be amended in order to lower costs; and 2) increased revenue must flow into these trust funds.

Another option being considered would transform the programs by raising taxes on taxpayers with incomes exceeding \$400,000 from all sources; this would essentially remove the programs from payroll taxes. Alternatively, policymakers could work with the public perception that payroll taxes fully cover costs and impose no financial burden on the broader federal budget. This would retain the concept of promised retiree payments based on one's previous earnings.

Adjustments will not be popular but procrastination will surely result in a crisis, decreased trust in the program, lower labor force participation, and unsustainable increases in the national debt. Capretta proposes that whenever Social Security and Medicare Part A trust fund deficits are anticipated, half of any adjustments needed be assigned to higher payroll taxes and the rest to benefit cuts. Congress could periodically revise these formulas and protect the lowest-income retirees from any changes.

It would be wise to consider Capretta's suggestions. The architects of U.S. Social Security wanted all American workers to own Social Security by paying for it themselves with the confidence that what was promised will be delivered.

### A Plea for Law and Order

*(Aug. 31)* — When Hoosiers gather to discuss local government expenditures, polarization kills conversation. Comments like, "We absolutely need more bike trails," and "It's the potholes,

stupid," do not help. Why not start with principled limits on government, a recognition of scarce tax revenue and a locality's particular concerns?

Consider four groups that successfully direct local funds to preferred projects:

Firms who want the public to assume the private cost and risk of doing business; they argue that this is essential for job creation and economic development.

Nonprofits wishing to transfer substantial resources towards social issues; they argue that this is the only way to maintain law and order.

Organizations concerned with preserving the natural environment; they argue in terms of the earth's long-run sustainability.

All those earning salaries in association with the above groups.

Interest groups seeking to direct local funds to their preferred projects function legitimately, but they crowd out issues benefitting the public in general. Hoosiers have generally given priority to public safety, education, public health, bridges and highways, water quality and adequate sewage treatment. Well-financed organized interest groups can count on the public to passively and mistakenly assume that basic services will continue to be adequately provided.

Local officials do not function well as the final arbiter of what a community needs, and self-appointed experts in the form of interest groups often do a great deal of harm. There is no right recipe for local government, and, even with free elections, mistakes will be made. But is it too much to expect those writing laws and making policies to try to work out a system for maintaining general norms of justice?

"Whose Justice?" some ask, "Commonly-held values no longer count." Of course, they do. Individuals long for safe, stable and peaceful neighborhoods, and can act together even if they do not think alike. We should expect the government to promote conditions and remove obstacles to promoting safe communities. The challenge is achieving this with a minimum of civil coercion and within the prerogatives of democratic government.

Totalitarian regimes can be relatively stable in pursuit of evil ends. Therefore, we are reluctant to impose any comprehensive view of civil behavior, thinking that this represents a lack of respect for certain people. However, this destroys justice for anyone. Justice is motivated and consists of appropriate relationships with other people, and a government fails to the extent that it does not provide or promote justice.

Policymakers need to distinguish between behaviors that must be tolerated in a free society and those that lead to civil decay. Then, we will hold everyone responsible for obeying local laws and ordinances. For example, no one gets to set up tents on public property without permits and shoplifters can expect to be pursued and punished.

Fifteen Indiana counties rank in the 90th percentile or higher among all counties in the U.S. in terms of fewer violent crimes per 100,000 residents. Of course, within these top-ranked counties, there are pockets of disorder. As well, there are pockets of order in 5 out of 92 Indiana counties ranking below the 15th percentile nationally in terms of violent crime. Hoosier communities have different needs and traditions. Overall, we need to restore the priority of self-government where citizens can realize their particular concerns.

Too often, meaningful public celebrations in Hoosier towns have been discontinued, supposedly due to civil disorder. Yet, non-government organizations still retain the ability to sponsor publicly attended events, admittedly charging high entrance fees to cover private security costs.

However, a functioning democratic society is re-invigorated through celebrations of civic holidays and traditional community events. Besides the ever-present small group of disruptors, what other factors preclude 4th of July celebrations and summer street festivals? Evidently, officials believe that they personally have more important events to attend, no doubt out-of-town. Or, are decision-makers distracted by interest groups and unwilling to allocate scarce

revenue in providing security for public events? Police officers parading around in cool motorcycles and leather jackets impress 7-year-olds. However, teens and older would respect highly visible pairs of cordial officers deterring or apprehending anyone getting the least bit out-of-line at nominally priced public events.

Suppose local officials began to value and support small services like warning sirens benefitting all residents rather than granting large benefits to special interests. Such towns might even be willing to reinstate traditional high school basketball tournaments between Christmas and the New Year.

Dr. Richard Moss, a physician in the town of Jasper in Dubois County, is the author of “A Surgeon’s Odyssey” and “Matilda’s Triumph” available on amazon.com. Contact him on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. A version of this essay first appeared in the June 25 edition of the American Thinker.



## Savages, Civilization, Israel and the West

*(Jan. 11)* — One should resist the temptation of separating Hamas from the Palestinian people. There is broad popular support for Hamas in Gaza; they were elected overwhelmingly in the one election held. Palestinians embrace acts of terror by Hamas and other Muslim terrorist groups. They celebrate them. If Hamas had the wherewithal to do to all of Israel what they did in the southern part recently, there would be ecstatic merrymaking for months.

The Palestinian terrorists chose the timing of their massacre of the Jews strategically. It was the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. It was also a Jewish holiday that comes at the end of Sukkot known as Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, a celebration of the renewal of the Torah reading cycle. They knew the Israelis would be resting or in prayer, cell phones off and unprepared for an attack. And so, they

celebrated by slaughtering some 1,400 innocent Jews, men, women, children and babies.

There is a sociopathology amongst Palestinians, particularly those living in Gaza, but elsewhere as well. Embracing victimhood, they are also ready to strike out with extreme violence, as the world has seen. They are among the most subsidized people in the world, pampered and indulged by the “international community,” receiving billions of dollars in aid every year, a form of protection money. They are also the darlings of the media, NGOs, aid organizations, the EU and the UN. With all this attention and coddling for so unworthy a cause and people, their violent tendencies well known, and especially with so many other conflicted and underserved areas of the world, is there any wonder they act as they do? They are the terrorist equivalent of spoiled children and know the world will support them, regardless of how heinous their actions.

Israel left Gaza in 2005, thus ending the “occupation.” In 2006, Palestinians voted Hamas in over the Palestinian Authority. In June of 2007, Hamas launched a brutal takeover of Gaza and massacred their Muslim compatriots in the Palestinian Authority by hurling them off roofs, shooting them in the head in front of loved ones, or dragging them through the streets chained to cars. They are a recognized terrorist organization that calls openly for the destruction of the state of Israel and do not recognize Israel’s right to exist. An offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, they seek not just the death of Israel but all of Christendom and the West and to create a global caliphate.

But Hamas is merely a reflection of its people. It is not, as it is often portrayed, of poor Palestinians dominated by the kleptocrat terrorists that form Hamas. Not at all. The people are Hamas. They embrace and support Hamas.

Gaza and the Palestinians should be a wild success story. They receive tremendous amounts of aid, are beloved by the West and the liberal establishment, and doted on by the media and the UN. They enjoy a favorable climate, pitched on the Mediterranean Sea as they are, with gorgeous

beaches and neighbors to a highly intelligent, dynamic people that can readily employ them. They themselves are known to be an industrious, innovative people. So, why do they not flourish? Because like Hamas, the Palestinians are obsessed with death and killing, and not building a lawful, thriving, civil society. Combine that with equal measures of self-pity and hatred, and you wind up not with Miami on the Mediterranean, but Mogadishu.

It is also odd, that Israel is portrayed in the media as a villainous oppressor over the pathetic, helpless, long-suffering, poor Palestinians. One would think that the Jewish people have some claim to victimhood, not that they want or need it. But isn’t it the case that the Jews are the most victimized people on earth and through history? And not the poor Palestinians? For the last 2,000 years, since the calamitous Roman war of annihilation against the Jews and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, Jews have largely been a stateless, ghettoized people subject to the will and whim of the surrounding Christian or Muslim majority. They have endured expulsions, pogroms, massacres, ghettos, second class status, and a minor item known as the Holocaust. But just the raw numbers alone should suggest the absurdity of the fantasy of Jewish oppressors. There are half a billion Arabs and nearly 2 billion Muslims. And 16 million Jews. There are 22 Arab nations and some 50 Muslim nations. And one Jewish state, barely a pinprick on the world map. How could a single tiny Jewish nation, Israel, scarcely the size of the state of New Jersey, a mere six miles wide at its waist, in a sea of Arab and Muslim nations, dominate the Middle East – or come to abuse the Palestinians? Well, it doesn’t. But the world is obsessed with Israel, its every miscue and misstep, its very existence, the leftist media having long ago abandoned the one nation and people most in need of some commiseration. Indeed, Israel is the David against the Arab-Muslim Goliath and the Palestinians are the political football used to attack it.

There are common terms adopted by the Left to condemn Israel and to define the Arab-Israeli

conflict with such nomenclature as “colonialism,” “expropriation,” “apartheid” or “occupiers,” as if the Jews had no claim to the Holy Land and did not have a presence there for nearly 4,000 years. This is the language used against our own nation and others such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, but particularly America, based on their European or Western or, let us say, “white” origins. It is a farcical attempt to racialize Israel and portray it not as Jewish but white, to better align with neo-Marxist theories. It is bogus for any number of reasons wherever deployed but in particular in regards to Israel. Israelis may be white, although many Sephardim (“Spanish” or “Arab” Jews) are “swarthy,” and some are actually black (the “Falasha” or Ethiopian Jews). But Israelis are first and foremost Jews and they are the indigenous people of the land.

As we observe the raucous support for Hamas occurring on our streets, college campuses and capitols, what are we to make of our own policies, in particular of our wars in the Middle East, and then immigration? How many Gazas have we imported into our own country because of misguided policies? How many Jihadis have we allowed into our nation and on our college campuses? How many 9/11s await us, how many slaughters of the innocent will we have to mourn, here, and the West in general, before we awaken to the self-inflicted wounds we have committed? Will we recognize the damage done, begin deportations, end student visas from various Muslim nations, and reconsider our reckless immigration policies?

There is such a thing as Just War, which includes the defense of one’s people, especially after repeated attacks. Few question the wisdom and morality of Dresden or Hiroshima and Nagasaki despite the enormous civilian casualties. Israel has every right to defend itself, destroy its enemies, despite significant civilian casualties. If Hamas and the world are concerned about civilian casualties, they can unconditionally surrender and leave Gaza, otherwise accept the responsibility for the death and destruction that is coming. Israel must abandon the absurd “Two-State Solution” and “peace process,” and embrace instead a “One-

State Solution,” not to commit genocide as Israel’s enemies would, but to control and administer its territories. This will include Israel proper, Gaza and the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), allowing “Palestinians” some autonomy and self-governance but under Israeli control.

Israel is the canary in the coal mine. What has happened there has and will come to us again. The West, including the U.S. and Europe, and then Israel, must awaken to the threat of Islam and take appropriate measures. Do we have the will to live? To do what is necessary to survive? Or are we too decadent and corrupt? We shall find out. Out of the ashes of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, the modern state of Israel was born. So must it and we be reborn again.

### A Word Against the New Sodom and Gomorrah

*(Aug. 10)* — The entire month, each June, is a low point for the country. The unrestrained debauchery, the flaunting of pathologic deviancy and the celebration of perversion — does it get any worse than “Pride Month?” Our ruling elites in all sectors are positively swept away by it, consumed as they are with promoting it, and virtue signaling their fealty and allegiance to it. It has become our most important holiday season.

Compare it with other notable celebrations. Consider Mother’s Day or Father’s Day. Mothers give birth to us, nurse and raise us. Fathers take care of us, protect and provide for us. Moms and Dads are responsible for creating new life, preparing the next generation, and transmitting the values and wisdom of our culture and civilization. They perpetuate the species. Without them life would cease. Moms endure the pain of pregnancy, labor and delivery. Dads risk their lives and endure much hardship to ensure our survival. But that, of course, is as nothing compared with the contributions of the LGBTQIA++ community. That’s why mothers and fathers get a single day. Homosexuals and transgenders get a month.

Consider the men who lost their lives in military service defending the nation? They get a

single day, Memorial Day. Veterans also get a day, Veterans' Day. Our country? We get Independence Day, the Fourth of July, celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the birth of our nation. But just a day. How about the birth of Jesus, the founder of Christianity and, for Christians — God incarnate? Sorry, just a day. But the LGBT “community” — well, they get a month. Nothing, after all, is more sacred than the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community. Forget about Christianity or the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Rainbow is our new religion. We shall know a nation by its celebrations. And ours is truly satanic.

Major corporations promote the LGBT agenda: Target, Anheuser-Busch, the LA Dodgers (and all of Major League Baseball, for that matter), PepsiCo, Starbucks, GM, Walmart, Pfizer, Apple, Disney, BMW, and so on. Our schools and colleges, the media, banks, major equity firms, Big Tech and our government at all levels collude in celebrating Pride Month while often denigrating traditional Christian culture and values. We are in the midst of a late-stage cultural collapse, a once great nation in moral free-fall. It is Sodom and Gomorrah — only worse.

Pride month is the epicenter of the cult-Marxist soul. It is the beating heart of the Left. Its obscenity and debauchery are precisely the point. Its purpose is to offend, upend, reject, smash and destroy all icons and symbols, all conceptions of morality, tradition, wisdom, objective reality, and biology. It seeks to put an end to “norms” in general. To degrade our institutions, which they perceive as corrupt, a “social construct,” and part of the “power structure” — or take them over, which they have largely succeeded in doing. Most important, they seek to undermine the nuclear family and the recognition of the sexually dimorphic, “binary,” nature of humanity — of man and woman (in the Bible that would be Adam and Eve).

Watch the politicians, government at all levels, stars, starlets, those transitioning and those already transitioned, bureaucracies and corporations prostrate themselves before the new

gods and celebrate sodomy and the Rainbow Jihad. Next, they seek to normalize pedophilia. Have you heard the acronym, “MAP,” for Minor Attracted Persons? Or, their rallying cry, “We’re here, we’re queer, and we’re coming for your children,” proudly proclaimed at parades. I believe them. You should too.

Remember that pride is the deadliest of the seven deadly sins, the sin that conquered Lucifer (Satan) himself. It is the mother of all vices. Pride cometh before the fall. Hubris (pride) is followed by Nemesis (downfall). It is fitting that the Left and LGBT activists should embrace “pride,” dedicating a month to it, feeling, as they seem to, that they may redefine nature and reality, as if they themselves were as “Gods.” Pride, indeed.

Ultimately, they are setting the stage for a final push to destroy all “norms” and “normalcy.” And create new ones based on the new deviancy. And then to control us and to determine what we hear — and think. It is, ultimately, a prelude for totalitarianism — yes, including the death camps. They are building up to it, consolidating power, dehumanizing and indicting us, the “normies,” as they did the unvaxxed during Covid, jailing us, condemning us in their state media, establishing two standards of justice, controlling the levers of power, commandeering and weaponizing our institutions including the government and the deep state, and then the final surge and takeover with the cattle cars, gulags . . . and death camps. They loathe and despise the 50 percent that, in turn, reject them and their agenda — patriots that work hard, take care of their families, go to church and love God and America.

Do our enemies celebrate pride month? Do China, Russia, Iran, Turkey or North Korea worship the Rainbow? Do the Arab and Muslim world? I don't think so. Rather they observe in wonderment our depravity, the self-inflicted wounds, and the willful crack up of the most powerful nation in the world — as they plot to take advantage of our pathetic weakness and decadence.

Pride Month must be broken — and replaced or countered by God Month, Faith Month or

Prayer Month — take your pick — but a month dedicated to prayer, faith and good works — and the reverential celebration of our biblical tradition. Pressure campaigns against “Pride” should also be undertaken (see Budweiser, Target, Disney, and so on). The following month, the month of July, we should celebrate Independence Month or, perhaps, Liberty Month, to commemorate the founding, the founding fathers, the signing of the Declaration of Independence — and the greatness of American history and its accomplishments — absent the usual apologies.

We must preserve this nation, its traditions and way of life, for our sake and the sake of the world. Each of us must do what he can to salvage some remnant of the founding — athwart the demonic forces arrayed against it.

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## A ‘Little Dab’ll Do Ya”

(Sept. 15) — Advertisers understand incrementalism better than anyone. They leverage a brand’s growth with the understanding that change comes in increments sometimes imperceptibly. Who was the genius copywriter who created the directions on a shampoo bottle, “wash, rinse and repeat”? I’m guessing sales doubled.

In the 1950s, Brylcreem created the slogan, “A little dab’ll do ya.” Copywriters knew if they could entice a man to use a dab of their hair dressing every day, he’d soon use the whole tube and have to buy another.

The economist Charles E. Lindblom may have been using Brylcreem when he developed the theory of incrementalism to explain the process of policy-making. Lindblom didn’t believe a group of smart, rational people would sit down, discuss the challenge in a rational way, and then enact a

value-maximizing decision. Rather, Lindblom figured that a group of political actors would sit down, get tired of thinking, and simply build on past policies whether they were effective or not, focusing on incremental change rather than large wholesale change.

So, how can grass-root citizens, who aren’t paid government actors, use incremental change for their own purposes?

To mix metaphors and a bad joke, how do you eat elephantine issues like pro-life, high taxes, underperforming school districts, deficit government spending and judicial overreach? Punchline: One bite at a time.

Liberals are effective incrementalists. They break down long-time social values and traditions incrementally. Think Christmas, or bygone Nativity scenes at city hall and schools, or election laws, or the many permutations of war, or welfare state policies or men competing in women’s sports. What we’ve experienced has been an unrelenting incremental attack on Christian-family and other religious values to install an anti-value-based government focused on dominance, and increasingly, revenge.

These changes happened almost imperceptibly, we didn’t pay much attention. Who had time to worry the first year that the Nativity scene wasn’t set up at city hall? We had our shopping to do.

We are lulled to sleep by small incremental changes that aren’t worth the fight at the time. Now, we’re looking at a mountain of incremental changes supporting an administrative state that are daunting.

How can family-value conservatives fight back? The same way. A little dab’ll do ya. Many of us want to lose weight. When we look in the mirror, we grab a handful of fat, and imagine ourselves 20 pounds lighter. We don’t see ourselves a couple of pounds lighter. What’s a couple of pounds? Pass the mashed potatoes please. That’s exactly the point. We lose weight by not taking a bite, one non-bite at a time.

Lindblom showed us that legislators don’t have an appetite for wholesale change. We must work them incrementally, one little bill at a time.

Recently, we had success getting my state’s legislators to approve a bill giving seniors income tax and property tax relief that will total \$500 million plus each year when it’s fully implemented. It wasn’t a massive overhaul of the tax system, it was a small one. But in the process, we built and activated statewide network of thousands of seniors through our website. Next year, we’re going back for a few more bites of the tax pie (we’re looking for relief from sales tax on staple groceries and a depreciation table on personal property taxes).

A little dab’ll do ya.

### In Politics, Losing Isn’t Winning

*(Aug. 16)* — The first time I heard the phrase “Winning by losing” was a couple of weeks ago. A Republican county commissioner enlightened me with a conspiratorial wink. Our group had just lost a vote to freeze seniors’ property taxes. The “winker” had introduced our bill to the county council.

I should mention here, the “winker” is planning to run for state senator during the next election cycle. State senator is a status upgrade as far as political jobs go. In our county council, Democrats outnumbered Republicans, and the vote was along party lines. Hearing his phrase, I shook my head hoping it would make sense. It didn’t. How was losing winning? Senior citizens lost.

The American spirit is competitive. The Bald Eagle is our national symbol. It’s not the wild turkey which is relegated to a whiskey bottle label and the Thanksgiving dinner table. The Bald Eagle is a bird of prey. It’s proudly perched on our official documents, flags, and public buildings. America is forged on values that take pride in being first, not second or God forbid, last. Americans grow up competing with ourselves and others. We compete in sports, video and card games and even spelling bees. Americans honor honest effort and discipline, but the highest honor goes to the winner not the loser. We keep score. At the end of the competition, whoever has scored

the most points, or has the biggest wad of Monopoly money — wins.

So, what in the world did the Republican county councilman mean? There I was trying to understand a lost vote, and he was whispering to me that losing was winning. It didn’t feel like winning. Our volunteer-grassroots group had worked our collective tails off to develop a bill, find sponsors, and collect 2,200 signatures from across the state on our website to promote tax relief for seniors. We had walked the halls of our state capitol, testified in committee hearings, and advocated with legislators for months to pass a bill for senior tax relief. Our members had sent tens of thousands of emails and made thousands of phone calls to legislators demanding various votes be taken for tax relief. In the end, the bill passed 187-3 (combined Senate and House) and it was signed by the Republican governor, albeit grouchily.

It removes state income taxes for social security and private pensions, a benefit totaling \$309 million each year. It also offers a provision which allows an individual county to adopt an ordinance which freezes the property taxes on a senior’s primary residence. We never said, or even thought, it was okay if the bill didn’t pass. We weren’t deterred that experienced lobbyists told us to relax because it would take two to four years to pass a bill. Losing didn’t compute, and it certainly wasn’t winning. Our only path to victory was to win. Getting our bill passed into law was a huge win, but we won’t be satisfied until every county freezes seniors’ property taxes. Winning is winning not losing. Again, it’s the American way.

The un-American “winker” wasn’t thinking about seniors, he was thinking about himself, when he whispered “losing is winning.” It didn’t matter to him whether seniors got property tax relief or not, he was focused on getting the “credit” in his senate race for “trying” to get tax relief for seniors. If seniors would’ve gotten their property taxes frozen, he won; if seniors didn’t get property tax relief, he won. He won by losing. Seniors weren’t so lucky.



Winning by losing isn't just an oxymoron, it's a losing philosophy that is becoming a way of life for too many transactional Republicans. Winning is winning. Losing is losing. Losing is not winning. Don't let losers win by losing. Hold them accountable.

### The 'Bob Vila Effect'

*(July 27)* — For me, 1979 was a big year. I bought my first newspaper, the purchase of which included a farmhouse that needed lots of work. It had an old console TV, so I was able to watch Bob Vila's first season of *This Old House*. I also had contracted with my state's GOP to start and publish a newspaper. There was harmony in my universe. I didn't have any handyman skills to complete home projects but it didn't matter. Bob was going to help me fix up my old farmhouse. I wasn't worried about publishing my newspapers. I knew how to publish.

Having Bob Vila in my life was like having a useful uncle. He was someone with practical skills who would happily work side-by-side kindly showing me how to put a nail in a plaster wall or unclog a septic system that backed up into my basement. Bob didn't yell at me when I made a mistake. He was understanding, and smiled while he identified the problem, calmly explained how "we" were going to fix the problem, and then fixed the problem.

The state GOP . . . not so much. They were talkers, endlessly debating about things that could or shouldn't be done. The state party was in disarray. It still is. Elected officials, especially the most powerful, paid little or no attention to the state party once they were elected.

Every week, Bob and I met at my TV console for another work session. Bob would arrive dressed in work clothes ready to do a project that was completed by the end of the show. I was usually laying across my couch sipping a beer watching. Bob's work crew included the homeowners who were putting in sweat equity. After the dilapidated parts were torn out, the crew rebuilt it like I wanted my farmhouse to look. Fresh and shining.

Meanwhile, meetings with the state party were more painful than having a tooth pulled without anesthesia.

By the end of *This Old House's* first season, which was 13 episodes, I hadn't completed one project on my farmhouse, and I had hired someone to unclog my septic system. All of my pictures were still unhung. It was the same way with the state GOP. Nothing had gotten done.

Even though I hadn't done anything to my farmhouse I wasn't worried. I felt successful with the work that was done watching Bob Vila, and I knew what could be done to my farmhouse with some sweat equity. My discussions with the state party were ongoing, but we hadn't published a single issue.

This is the situation our politicians and grassroots organizations find themselves in today. I call it the "Bob Vila Effect," we think knowing is enough. The Bob Vila Effect gives us permission to think we're being successful by endlessly talking about getting our house in order. It's the quandary of every think tank. They waste time in unproductive meetings debating and pontificating about what can or can't be done. By the end of the "work" day, everyone is emotionally spent — exhausted from talking. No one has the time or energy to take on a project and complete it.

But talking isn't work. It's time for conservatives to assess their work ethic. Historically, conservatives, and almost everyone else, have organized themselves as an endless litany of clubs and organizations based on outdated hierarchical organization charts. The higher up the chart, it is presumed the more important the person, but what does anyone actually get done? Do they fix up their old house?

Most of our time is spent complaining and arguing about things like taxes that are too high, an education system that doesn't produce results, an administrative government that values itself more than the tax payers, and extraneous topics with no bearing on future success. Talking is a complete waste of our time.

I say tear up all of the organizational charts. It's time for a new work ethic. Start a "Do

Tank.” Organize groups by projects with specific goals and an expiration date for the group. Either fix up the old house, or get out of the way for someone who will. It’s time to stop talking, and start doing. Knowing isn’t enough. I challenge you to take on one civic project, and do it — like Bob.

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### The Downtown ‘Doom Loop’

(Sept. 8) — A friend, a longtime political observer here, quipped that if Fort Wayne city councilmen were going to pretend to be investment bankers, we should elect smarter city councilmen. That has proved woefully prescient as workers and businesses nationwide are abandoning downtown offices for more flexible, safer and more efficient remote work. Fort Wayne’s downtown real estate is particularly at risk of collapse just at a time when the political class is blindly investing in it.

Over the last decade, Fort Wayne government has subsidized nearly a million square feet of new commercial space at a cost approaching a billion dollars in local, state and federal subsidies in various forms. Those include tax abatement, tax credits, tax increment financing (TIF) bonds and direct cash payments. A detailed distribution is available in “Eco-Devo Promises; Let’s Unwrap Them” in the winter 2019 Indiana Policy Review.

And yet, we are within weeks of a mayoral election and neither candidate has mentioned any of that, what is the most serious fiscal challenge to our city since the Depression. Surprisingly, they haven’t even bothered to blame that all-purpose bugaboo COVID, which was only the last blow in a series of events that overcame the crass political ambition that has guided downtown development to this point.

Some background: Commercial real estate pays a heap of taxes. If its market collapses, there will

be a sure drop in city revenue. That means either more taxes from other sources (you) or reduced services — police, streets, schools.

A study earlier this year from the Graduate School of Business at Columbia University says this could result in municipal fiscal crises when federal COVID aid shrinks: “At that point, some municipalities may find themselves entering in the doom loop scenario. The magnitude depends on the elasticity of migration to local tax rates and public-good spending (streets, public safety, etc.)”

What is a “doom loop”? Last week, Indiana citizens had to depend on the faraway Washington Post to tell them that a national tech firm just cut a quarter of its office space in the tallest office building in their state.

“All across the country, downtowns, office spaces and shopping centers are at risk of becoming ground zero for a new economic hazard: the urban doom loop,” the newspaper reported. “The fear is that a commercial real estate apocalypse could spiral out and slow commerce, wrecking local tax revenue in the process.”

The Post’s Rachel Siegel says economists are most worried about midsize cities such as Fort Wayne that have fewer ways to offset the blow “when a company slashes office space, the sale price of a building craters or a downtown turns into a ghost town.” She goes on to describe the steps in an urban “doom loop”:

With more people working from home, companies rethink their leases or pull out of them altogether.

That drives vacancy rates up and makes it harder for landlords to attract new tenants or sell buildings for a healthy price.

Then property owners struggle to pay off their mortgages or clear other debt.

Business districts dry up, stifling tax revenue from commercial properties or employee wages.

Shoppers and tourists have fewer reasons to venture downtown to eat or shop, choking off spending and forcing layoffs at restaurants and retail stores.

We think a doom loop has already begun here. In 2005, an eight-story office tower in downtown Fort Wayne with 140,000 square feet of space sold for \$28 million. It now sits on the tax roles assessed at \$8.5 million. That is less than \$58 a square foot (compared to \$70 a square foot for an average residential home here). The long story short is that when these rebar-and-concrete investments go south, they don't recover.

Also, we believe the experts who say that 30 percent or more of office space in our city already is likely vacant. Worse, city councilmen here knew or should have known this when they were directly and indirectly funding that million square feet of new commercial space. But that was done without independent market tests. The heavily subsidized projects were pushed through by a rent-seeking industry of lawyers, contractors, engineers, architects and suppliers of concrete and rebar, many of whom were contributors to city political campaigns.

Rather, we were told that the tax breaks and tax-insured bonds necessary to build the new office space were sound investments. The risk was justified, they said, by future demand, the evidence for which turned out to be fabricated and misleading especially in regard to downtown commercial properties.

To summarize, both mayoral candidates, one on council and the other in the mayor's office, remain tight-lipped — and understandably so. Both were enthusiastic supporters of these boondoggles, and it will soon be apparent that their bad judgment has cost Fort Wayne property owners and taxpayers dearly.

But what is done is done. The challenge now is to identify the policy errors in order to restore Fort Wayne's economic health. It will be a big job requiring honest leadership, that and the advice of real, not political, investment bankers.

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## January 6 and the Big Gaslight

*(Sept. 6)* — Did you notice that the term “gaslighting” was just selected word of the year because of its overuse? But why would that usage increase have happened? Maybe because the practice itself has become more common as a political weapon.

In practical parlance, “gaslighting” means trying to persuade others not to believe their “lying eyes,” or not to believe what they already had known as established fact. Recent examples of such disinformation themes include:

The summer 2020 riots were not really riots but “mostly peaceful” demonstrations.

The Hunter Biden laptop emails are not real but instead a Russian disinformation tactic.

The U.S. southern border is closed.

It was Republicans, not Democrats, who favored defunding the police.

Voter ID requirements are actually voter suppression.

Critical race theory is not really racist-and is not being taught in schools anyway.

The Afghanistan surrender/retreat was really a great achievement and success.

Curiously, all these familiar ploys are authored by the same political camp. I wish I could balance with Republican cases, but sometimes reality is unbalanced. (The “stolen” 2020 election? No, most Repubs have not signed on to Donald Trump's claim.)

One gaslight theme has become so prevalent — without adequate response — that its contribution to rhetorical disequilibrium needs to be addressed before it does any more damage to the national cognition. You have seen and heard much about the U.S. Capitol “insurrection” of Jan. 6, 2021,

especially on the two-year anniversary occasion. Trouble is, that event was not an insurrection. Look up the definition of insurrection. Or, I'll do it for you:

An insurrection is organized and armed uprising against authority or operations of government; the crime of inciting or engaging in such revolt. It is violent action taken by a large group of people against the rulers of their country (Collins English Dictionary, among others).

The Jan. 6 Capitol near-riot — which is a fair descriptor — did not involve organization or arms, and was hardly a “large” group relative to the scale of its opposition or historical comparison with real insurrections. (Even the hostile and politically weaponized FBI has admitted the absence of prior coordination.) This was one “mostly peaceful” protest that really was.

So, what else was the Jan. 6 event? It was trespassing. It involved some vandalism. It was an invasion of the U.S. Capitol that turned ugly. It resembled radical leftist “occupation” of government or university buildings in past decades. But Jan. 6 was not a literal riot. Unlike the Democrats’ 536 genuine riots in 2020 which yielded at least 25 fatalities and an attack on the White House, there was no arson, mass looting, or bombing perpetrated by the demonstrators, contrary to the false image cultivated by the liberal media. Violence? Yes, some, but compared to an average weekend night in the Democrat sections of Chicago, negligible. The claim that one policeman was beaten with a fire extinguisher turned out to be a lie, and the only mortal violence was the homicide committed by a Capital cop against a female demonstrator. Objectively, therefore, violence against the protesters transcended any violence attributable to that group. (Can we agree that rioting by Republicans would be a man-bites-dog phenomenon? Rioting is what Democrats do.) Jan. 6 was largely, although not entirely, a group of people walking around the Capitol building like tourists — because they were invited in. Just look at the videos that finally are available. (But who invited them?)

Otherwise, some of the usual suspects in media and politics have accused the Jan. 6 demonstrators of racism—as they always so accuse everyone they oppose. Surely the national audience can see through that tiresome gambit by now. Even if every one of the few racist signs or shouts documented at the Jan. 6 event were produced by a right-wing Republican instead of a Democrat plant, the demonstration still qualified as “overwhelmingly non-racist,” to paraphrase Michelle Obama. But practically every Republican/conservative public event you have heard of in the past few years has been infiltrated by Dem plants to contrive a “false-flag” smear of the rightful participants, i.e., to commit overt offenses such as racist signage they hope will be blamed on Repubs. Might that also have been done in this case? If not, it would be a rare exception. We already know that the Jan. 6 melee was indeed infiltrated by deep state operatives from the FBI. Speaking of false flag, one FBI plant, we also know from video, was carrying a Confederate flag. Only one agent provocateur? This more insidious aspect of the Jan. 6 occurrence must be noted and emphasized: It has been reported in official documents that federal agents, the so-called “unindicted co-conspirators,” penetrated and also led the protesters who entered the Capitol. (This conduct does meet the legal definition of entrapment.)

We have seen video of Capitol Police welcoming protesters into the building on Jan. 6. We know that the congressional leaders who supervise the Capitol Police ordered them to stand down during the event, after leaving them unprepared and underequipped beforehand. All this while President Trump was offering National Guard support — also rejected by Democrat leadership.

Why were government plants inciting the crowd into the Capitol? Why did Capitol Police invite protesters inside? Who ordered this? Those police did report to Nancy Pelosi. Empty suit Christopher Wray still runs the FBI. How did he keep his job after the transition?

Is the big picture coming into focus? It is time to speak the unspeakable: The Dems wanted chaos and facilitated it. Democrat operatives incited and manipulated some Jan. 6 protesters into the Capitol building so the action could be publicly construed as a partisan riot, invasion, or insurrection. The whole thing was ginned up by the Dems as a political stunt, a dirty trick for the ages, as soon as they knew a Republican crowd would be nearby and likely marching on the Capitol. Far-fetched? No. We have seen the same playbook applied elsewhere with the Michigan Governor kidnapping set-up, which was led by undercover FBI agents. These are also the people who gave us the Trump-Russia hoax, so they have no limit.

Proof? Perhaps the best circumstantial evidence of all: Thousands of hours of video footage of the Capitol breach exist but most of it was not made available by the Justice Department or Congress until Speaker McCarthy's recent release. If the withheld video showed anything consistent with the Democrat narrative and contrary to what is outlined here, the government would have eagerly and promptly released it. (Now the Dems demand that the American people not be allowed to see the full video record. Of course.) This heretical argument is bolstered by how the Dems prevented Republican appointments to their Kangaroo Court congressional inquiry. Any doubt about how politicized Jan. 6 has become is dispelled by the amount of investigation and media coverage it is receiving compared to the absence of public attention given the 2020 Democrat "Summer of Riots."

Conspiracy theory? No, call it an analytically grounded hypothesis.

Many times, America has known the truth about a public scandal far in advance of the ultimate hard evidence surfacing. We knew the truth of Hillary Clinton's countless email felonies, Obama's spying on Trump, the dishonesty of the Russian "dossier," the sedition of the Deep State, and the Biden family's international influence peddling racket well before fully vetted tangible

evidence was in hand. Similarly, we knew Bill Clinton was guilty as sin long before the stained blue dress made its appearance. We knew the truth in these cases early on because logic and common sense had pieced together the big picture. Likewise now. Anyone want to bet against the Jan. 6 Capitol incursion turning out to be another case of the same, but with a heavy dose, this time, of false-flag deception and shameless gaslighting? I'll take that bet.

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## Court Dissent Based on Factual Error

*(July 19)* — The United States Supreme Court has a history of deciding questions of Equal Protection based on social and psychological studies. Studies, however, are often poorly designed and misrepresented by litigants. Appellate judges are especially poorly situated to evaluate those studies to determine the facts of a case at hand. The Court has allowed legal uncertainty, decades of unnecessary litigation, and embarrassing gaffes among its members by deciding cases by studies at the expense of constitutional principles.

In her recent dissenting opinion in *Students for Fair Admissions vs. University of North Carolina (SFFA)*, Justice Ketanji Brown-Jackson claimed, "[f]or high-risk black newborns, having a black physician more than doubles the likelihood that the baby will live, and not die."

Judge Jackson apparently lifted the claim from a brief submitted by The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the cluster of experts who administer the Medical College Admission Test, or MCAT, to evaluate students' suitability for medical school. AAMC stated, "for high-risk Black newborns, having a Black physician is tantamount to a miracle drug: it more than doubles the likelihood that the baby will live." To support this

claim, AAMC cited a study that examined newborn mortality rates in Florida between 1992 and 2015. During that time, 99.5549 percent of black babies born with white attending physicians survived. For AAMC's claim, parroted by Jackson, to be true, at least 199 percent of black babies would have needed to survive with black physicians. In fact, 99.6839 percent of black babies born with a black attending physician survived, an observed difference of 0.129 percent compared with white physicians.

Jackson, Justices Sotomayor and Kagan (who joined Jackson's opinion), their clerks, and AAMC apparently failed to realize that the unbelievable and mathematically impossible statistic was false.

After the Court decided SFFA, AAMC extraordinarily submitted a letter to the Court in which it admitted the error from its brief. Even the correction letter falsely described the study's finding as, "the mortality rate for Black newborns, as compared with White newborns, decreased more than half when under the supervision of a Black physician." The study observed 894 deaths per 100,000 black newborns and 290 deaths per 100,000 white newborns, a difference of 604 deaths per 100,000. The study observed a difference of 257 deaths per 100,000 births for black newborns under the care of black physicians vs. white physicians. 257 is less than half of 604, so AAMC again misstated the claim of the study. Not a great look for the experts who purportedly safeguard the initial stages of qualification for the medical profession.

AAMC may have embraced a reckless misunderstanding of the study because it was familiar with the Court's prior reliance on social and psychological studies to decide Equal Protection cases.

The Equal Protection Clause says that "[no State shall] deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Yet, a 7-1 majority had held in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* that racial segregation statutes did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment if the facilities offered to each race were equal in quality.

Justice John Marshall Harlan vigorously dissented from the majority opinion in *Plessy*, writing:

"Our Constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved."

In *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, the Supreme Court could have overturned the holding of *Plessy*. Yet, Chief Justice Warren, writing for a unanimous court, conspicuously declined to adopt the reasoning of Harlan's dissent and downplayed the importance of the original meaning of the Equal Protection Clause, claiming that "we cannot turn the clock back to 1868, when the Amendment was adopted." He opined that the intentions of those who drafted the Fourteenth Amendment were, at best, "inconclusive," saying:

"The most avid proponents of the post-War Amendments undoubtedly intended them to remove all legal distinctions among 'all persons born or naturalized in the United States.' Their opponents, just as certainly, were antagonistic to both the letter and the spirit of the Amendments and wished them to have the most limited effect. What others in Congress and the state legislatures had in mind cannot be determined with any degree of certainty."

Instead of holding that the Equal Protection Clause prohibits States from engaging in any racial discrimination, Warren determined that racial segregation deprives students of educational opportunities because it "generates a feeling of inferiority as to [minority students'] status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

The Court's determination depended on one of the published conclusions of a psychological study known as *The Doll Experiment* by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in which black children as young as

3-years-old demonstrated a preference for white dolls over black dolls. Thurgood Marshall, the lead litigator for the NAACP, cited the study in his argument for *Brown*.

Popular myth notwithstanding, the Court in *Brown* essentially affirmed the legal reasoning of *Plessy* by saying:

“We conclude that in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated ... are ... deprived of the equal protection ... guaranteed by the 14th Amendment.”

In other words, “separate but equal” remained the framework, but the Court held that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal because social science said so. “Whatever may have been the extent of psychological knowledge at the time of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, this finding is amply supported by modern authority,” Warren wrote.

The Court’s reliance in *Brown* on social science at the expense of examining the meaning of the law emboldened States to engage in affirmative action practices in which States applied different standards to people based on racial classifications. State universities often racially discriminated among applicants. For decades, the Court repeatedly opined that the affirmative action admission schemes did not violate the Equal Protection Clause.

The continued legal ambiguity regarding racial discrimination poisoned both public discourse and public institutions. President Biden tainted public perception of Jackson’s eventual appointment by pledging prior to election that he would nominate a black woman. By his pledge, Biden marginalized the legitimate qualifications that any appointee might have held.

Ilya Shapiro, then-incoming executive director and senior lecturer at the Georgetown Center for the Constitution, noted the way the President had insulted his eventual nominee, tweeting:

“Objectively best pick for Biden is Sri Srinivasan, who is solid prog & vs smart. Even has

identity politics benefit of being first Asian (Indian) American. But alas doesn’t fit into the latest intersectionality hierarchy so we’ll get lesser black woman. Thank heaven for small favors?”

In a follow-up tweet, Shapiro wrote:

“Because Biden said he’s only consider [sic] black women for SCOTUS, his nominee will always have an asterisk attached. Fitting that the Court takes up affirmative action next term.”

In 2013, President Obama nominated Sri Srinivasan to serve on the D.C. Circuit. The Senate confirmed Srinivasan’s appointment by a vote of 97-0. Srinivasan now serves as Chief Judge of the D.C. Circuit and teaches courses at Georgetown.

In response to his tweets, Shapiro was subjected to threats of violence and a four-month university investigation that failed to find that his speech fit within accepted bounds of conduct. Shapiro voluntarily resigned his post after his disgust at the process.

In *SFFA*, the Court qualified its opinion on affirmative action, holding, in part, that certain admissions policies violate the Equal Protection Clause where they lack sufficiently focused and measurable objectives warranting the use of race, unavoidably employ race in a negative manner, involve racial stereotyping, and lack meaningful end points. Chief Justice Roberts’s majority opinion decided the case on narrow grounds, not by holding that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits States from engaging in any racial discrimination.

Had the Court in *Brown* or any case until *SFFA* held that the Equal Protection Clause itself prohibits States from engaging in any racial discrimination, public universities might have long ago abandoned racial classifications for admissions and our politics today might have less tolerance for odious presidential pronouncements of racial preference. *SFFA*, though it falls short of Justice Harlan’s reasoning from his dissent in *Plessy*, is a small and meaningful pivot toward greater enforcement of the Equal Protection Clause. The reasoning of *SFFA*, however, guarantees future cases testing the boundaries within which the Court will allow racial

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discrimination. In those cases, the Court will once again grapple with whether to determine the meaning of the Equal Protection Clause or to once again tweak its complicated framework for deciding Equal Protection cases. ♦





Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

## The Outstater

### More 'Press-Release' Eco-Devo

(Jan. 14) — How did Indiana and its largest cities come to believe that prosperity could be achieved by simply leveraging government money to bribe investors? They call it economic development (eco-devo) but no economist we respect recommends it. They say it defies the laws of economics. Investigative journalists now suspect malfeasance if not fraud. So what happened?

Here is the morning coffee club's explanation: Former governor Mitch Daniels, who set eco-devo in motion, was clever enough to know that it was a limited morale booster for a state economy falling behind its competition — “press-release economics,” our Tad DeHavens called it.

Successive Republican administrations, not so clever, took it seriously. They adopted it not as a public relations stunt but as their economic strategy. The problem is it is a 400-year-old strategy, “mercantilism” being all the rage when Shakespeare was writing sonnets. It contends that governments can manipulate money and regulatory favors to gain advantage over competing states. It has never worked.

As practiced today by the Indiana Economic Development Commission (IEDC) and related municipal and regional agencies, it offers tax relief and other subsidies without true market tests to politically selected business ventures.

Gov. Eric Holcomb boasted in his State of the State this year that the IEDC had attracted a “jaw-dropping” \$28.7 billion worth of new investment.

From the start, questions have bedeviled these claims: 1) If such enticements are good for certain companies, why not offer them to all companies, including those already within the taxing district; 2) how many of the investments counted as IEDC “successes” would have been made in any case; and 3) is it government's business to dedicate tax dollars in ways that compete with existing businesses?

Over the last decade, the Indiana Policy Review has asked those questions repeatedly, publishing dozens of articles by credentialed authors warning of the consequences. Some of those articles are listed at the end of this essay.

Now a team of investigative journalists from Fox59/CBS4 and State Affairs is taking a close look at the governor's numbers. Despite his political claims of new investment, it turns out we can't determine whether or not the strategy is effective. Indeed, it looks like Indiana is getting played.

The journalists, Kaitlin Lange and Steve Brown, believe that as much as 56 percent of the projects touted by the governor's office could have failed to meet investment targets. The reporters weren't able to say for certain because the IEDC routinely stops publicly tracking projects before the companies meet or miss their goals.

“Almost all of that information is hidden by government leaders from Hoosier taxpayers in the accountability and scrutiny of those dollars,” Rep. Greg Porter told Fox59. “It is truly troubling that we hear of those commitment numbers, but we don't see the real results.”

Lange and Brown explained that secrecy is employed in the name of protecting the business interests and trade secrets of the companies that receive public subsidies. “A consequence is that it's often impossible to confirm how many companies are meeting their obligations,” the journalist concluded. “The same people who brag about job creation are the ones tasked with oversight.”

What could go wrong?

*From our archive:*

“The Governor’s ‘Press Release’ Economics.” Tad DeHaven. *The Indiana Policy Review*, March 25, 2010.

“Indiana Eco-Devo: Progress With Transparency.” David Penticuff. *The Indiana Policy Review*, Dec. 30, 2012.

“Keeping the Crony Out of Capitalism. Craig Ladwig.” *The Indiana Policy Review*, Sept. 28, 2014.

“The Folly of Tax Abatements.” Barry Keating. *The Indiana Policy Review*, Dec. 7, 2015.

“Better Angels: An Eco-Devo Alternative.” Jason Arp. *The Indiana Policy Review*, Fall 2017.

### Crime Numbers Deciphered

*(Jan. 4)* — Indianapolis media tells us that crime has suddenly taken a downward turn there. This is announced just as crime is recognized as the top local election issue of 2024. The media doesn’t see a link between the two bits of information but we don’t believe in coincidences here, or at least not political ones.

Two causes come to mind: 1) Officials, reacting to public pressure, have improved their crime-fighting tactics; or 2) officials, reacting to public pressure, have redefined “crime” more favorably.

Human nature being what it is, the latter is to be suspected. That said, the work of Jeffrey Anderson, former director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics at the U.S. Department of Justice, should be of interest. He has reason to doubt today’s crime reporting.

“Violent crime rates rose dramatically in urban areas from 2019 to 2022, and we have no clear indication yet whether they have risen or fallen since,” Anderson writes in the current *City Journal*. He warns that crime reporting in the cities (including crime not reported to police) has become unreliable.

“The media may want to believe that our cities have become safe again overnight, but the most reliable statistics, as well as Americans’ daily

experiences, say otherwise,” Anderson concludes. He thinks urban mayors fudge the numbers. His arguments:

It is too early to check the politically generated local police numbers against FBI statistics, which at this point are preliminary for 2023 with 26 percent of police agencies yet to report.

The 2022 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that 58 percent of violent crime and 68 percent of property crimes were not reported to police, a factor unmentioned in the Indianapolis police reports.

The NCVS survey found that crime nationally increased 14 percent from 2019 to 2022. This year, however, the survey inexplicably did not include door-to-door surveys, the most insightful input, making year-to-year comparisons unreliable. In any case, a double digit drop in any crime category would be fishy.

In sum, based only on preliminary and partial-year numbers with more than a quarter of agencies missing, the Indianapolis Star and other mainline media are willing to declare the crime problem solved.

Fortunately, you don’t have to take their word for it. Go stand at Massachusetts Avenue and East 34th Street in Indianapolis around 2 a.m. and tell us if you feel safer than last year.

To me, this uncertainty about crime is the core issue, not the reported numbers at any point in time. People no longer trust their officials to either tell them the truth or protect their interests. Our preferred chance of getting shot being zero, we are not particularly assuaged by a percentile shift in a homicide report.

Does it need to be said that trust is the most important factor in governing? When it fails, the community fails, and in myriad ways, top to bottom and bottom to top. If there is anyone left on the 25th floor of the City-County Building who cares about their city, they should be concerned about that above all — above welfare payments, above neighborhood grants, above root causes, above diversity, equity and inclusion, above re-election.

And there is no better or faster way to restore that trust than to honestly and effectively address the issue of public safety. It scares me that nobody up there sees that.

## Who Is Coming, Going?

*“Much of the social history of the Western world over the past three decades has involved replacing what worked with what sounded good.” — Thomas Sowell*

(Dec. 27) — I have in front of me the latest census figures showing net migration in and out of the states. Indiana is about in the middle with a gain of 4,500 new “citizens.” That is where we usually are on any chart — about in the middle. We seem happy with that.

This aspect of the Hoosier character is difficult to understand. Why wouldn’t we want to be up there with Texas and the Carolinas, Georgia even? Arizona? It used to be a joke about selling oceanfront property. Now it’s a people magnet.

“Sure, weather matters but does it explain South Dakota attracting people and Hawaii losing them?” asks the columnist Richard Hanania of the new census figures.

A friend, also looking at the numbers, had this insight: “South Dakota is beautiful but it’s not Hawaii, so people migrate where they feel safe and there is economic mobility. The sad part is the poor have a harder time moving and are stuck in the states where they live.”

There is cross tabulation that deserves attention, specifically a clear and continuing tendency of people moving out of liberal states. This is a big deal, the most important set of information in economics — how many people are coming and how many are going. And please know that these aren’t just any people, these are people (some of whom own companies) with the means to escape crime and its enabling policies, people who will pay taxes and foster prosperity elsewhere.

They are not buying the idea that melanin count should derail thousands of years of Western

Civilization. It is a fine thing to worry about your fellow man. It is something else to allow him to burn down a city because a prosecutor or mayor cannot abide racially disproportionate arrests.

For that very reason the Blue states are failed states. Mixing sociological theory with law and order turns out to be a recipe for cataclysm. At some point you have to quit worrying about why an armed rapist’s great-grandmother had a baby out of wedlock to qualify for food stamps and just put him in jail regardless. The same for the pampered, unemployable social-Marxist humanities major living in your neighbor’s basement sewing Hamas headbands.

Here is where Indiana has an opportunity. Our state still has enough clear-headed citizens who know how to fix this, that is, to elect and to appoint judges and prosecutors determined to restore the founding principles. That means respect for the individual, respect for private property and an acceptance of the responsibilities of liberty.

If we could convince our ruling class of that, Indiana would zoom ahead, and a careful reading of “America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding” might do the trick. This exhaustively researched work by Robert Reilly (Notre Dame) concludes on an optimistic note:

“We can avoid the cataclysm anytime we choose to, by returning to reality, to reason, to the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God. Reality is resilient because, as Plato said, it is what is — not whatever one fancies. Logos wins in the end.”

Our “fancies” are what sounded good — equality of results, endless reparation, diversity for diversity’s sake, etc. They have ruled long enough. Will Indiana realize that before reality strikes us down as it has other states?

I would like to think so. But then again, we elected Eric Holcomb not once but twice.

## More Sheriff, Less DOJ

(Dec. 14) — A question occurred this morning as I sipped my Hyson green tea (what was thrown

into Boston Harbor) and admired the American flags and Christmas decorations along the cul-de-sac. The question — alarming in itself — was whether the neighborhood association could defend any of that should a radical muslim, antifascist, Black Lives Matter or MS-13 mob jump from the pages of my morning paper and march on the subdivision. The short answer was no. The long answer follows.

One strategy, that chosen by our Democratic friends in the Indianapolis mayor's office, is to welcome a bunch of officials to town and call them our "partners in the fight against crime." They could sit around and talk about stopping certain crimes, and that about summarizes the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Violent Crime Reduction Summit this week in Indianapolis.

There, Attorney General Merrick Garland urged his 1,500 official anti-crime "partners" to continue to "invest in the partnership." That was understood to mean the assembled should seek more funding for the myriad federal social programs addressing the root causes of crime. They should take care, though, not to cause the disproportionate arrest or prosecution of politically favored identities.

This is the same man who helped allow thousands of random military-age foreign nationals to roam the state and country looking for whatever plunder was left after the Internal Revenue Service had finished with us. And the programs to which he refers are careful not to interfere with the flow of money to the radical Left — enough money to forgo that march on my subdivision at least until the timing is right.

Garland (the type of fellow who was chased at recess) calls this success. But there is another strategy. It is to work hard to elect a local law enforcement officer serious about local law enforcement. We call them sheriffs (the types of fellow who used to chase Garland at recess).

It is fashionable now to mock the classic sheriff or even cast him as a right-wing villain ("Fargo" season five). But sheriffs differ from the tawdry mix of ambition and vanity that is the Department of Justice. They have a history. Sheriffs are

precursors of our constitutional republic and its attendant democracy. They arose in first-century Anglo-Saxon England or even before with the Norse. They were the natural, chosen leaders of their communities (shires), their title dating back to Alfred the Great.

Sheriffs are mentioned prominently in the Magna Carta, the earliest expression of limited government. Fourteen sheriffs or former sheriffs were either in an advisory capacity in the writing of the Magna Carta or were direct participants. And of the document's 63 clauses, 27 are directly concerned with the sheriff and his office.

Sheriffs spoke truth to power. They kept local order, but more important to this discussion they represented to the king the legitimate interests and concerns of common folk. I'm just spitballing here but I suspect today common folk would be legitimately interested in somebody making arrests relative to crimes committed.

A recent quote from a Colorado sheriff is representative: "In my oath it says I'll uphold the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of my state. It doesn't say I have to uphold every law passed by the Legislature."

Such an attitude was built into the office and wisely carried over to the legal codes of colonial American government. It continues today in a few Indiana sheriff offices, their counties crime-free relative to nearby police jurisdictions. My grandfather was such a sheriff, I'm proud to say.

Is it too much to ask for another kind of Violent Crime Reduction summit? One that would seek to ensure that our sheriffs don't slide into the DOJ model of pension-chasing armed postmen, indistinguishable from restaurant inspectors, tax collectors, meter readers and other hired statist muscle?

As the electeds (new woke word) in Washington and Indianapolis assume the power of kings, and as crime closes in on our neighborhoods and businesses, we need sheriffs with that old-fashioned Alfredian-Magna Carta grit.

We will know them by how they treat our property and our liberty.

## Extra! Extra! Read All About It

(Dec. 1) — I quit complaining about the mass media a few years ago when it became clear that nobody was interested in differentiating between newsmen and broadcasters let alone in understanding the distortion of corporate ownership. I still notice things, though.

A trained eye can see the malefic impact of Internet metrics. Headlines and stories are written today to gain inscrutable “clicks,” “reaches” and “reactions.” That, directly or indirectly, is how the news business is now funded.

A “reach,” if you give a hoot, is the number of unique people who have seen your story or post. A “reaction” is the number of times someone clicks the “like” button on an X or Facebook post. A “click” is when a page follower clicks on a link you have posted, the ultimate reader compliment in the brave new world of Internet journalism.

Please know that this isn’t an evolutionary thing. It’s a new universe entirely, with multiple suns and an altered gravitational pull.

What’s the difference in the end product? I hate to tell you but it is both inadvertent and ghastly.

To understand the impact on modern journalism we have to step back in time. Try to imagine when the success of a newspaper (radio and television news having always been frauds) was measured by home subscriptions.

Marketers know that to invite a product into your home, office or on your doorstep is an act of trust. It is the most difficult marketing goal. Newspaper that achieved high levels of trust and therefore high percentages of household market penetration could command higher advertising rates. The trust they had accumulated had value to advertisers who hoped to transfer it to their business (car dealerships, groceries, banks, etc.).

Trust, therefore, was the coin of the news realm. Compliments from editors would refer to a story’s perspective, insight, timeliness and of course accuracy — all aspects that reinforced a subscriber’s trust.

Consider the difference today. High metrics in clicks say nothing about trustworthiness, only noticeability. Headlines, therefore, make sensational claims, stories pursue titillating but unlikely lines, there’s no prescience. Question marks, scare quotes, mock crises and modal verbs abound. Decorum is abandoned.

Here are some examples from this morning’s Wall Street Journal, the most staid of our national newspapers: “‘Go F-Yourself,’ Elon Musk Says to Advertisers,” or “A1 Is the Y2 Crisis, Only this Time It’s Real,” or “Why Are Workers So Unhappy Right Now?”

Good luck banking on any of that folderol. But again, that’s how the money is made. Journalists today like to talk about trust but the honest ones know it doesn’t have the same value as before. They are glorified news hawkers. Life-and-death matters of politics and state are treated only as click bait — Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

## Hemmingway’s Sports Writer

Such thoughts make me miss a real journalist, Red Smith, legendary columnist for the New York Herald Tribune. He was Earnest Hemingway’s favorite sports writer and tapped out some memorable lines.

In Red Smith’s columns racehorses passed each other like “oysters on the half shell” and “the 90 feet between home plate and first base is the closest man has ever come to perfection.” Permit me a few graph’s from his Pulitzer-Prize-winning ringside commentary on the last of the three great championship fights between Joe Frasier and Muhammed Ali:

“He (Frasier) brushed pawing gloves aside, rolled in under punches, bore straight ahead and slugged, and by the fifth round he was getting the message across. It was hook, hook, hook — into the belly to draw Ali’s hands down, then up to the head across the ropes. He beat the everlasting whey out of Ali. His attack would have reduced another man to putty. The guy in the white trunks was not another man. He was the champion and this time he proved it.”

Most important, Smith earned his readers' trust by respecting their intelligence and honoring his subjects. "Sports is not really a play world," he said. "I think it's the real world. The people we are writing about in professional sports, they're suffering and living and dying and trying to make their way through life just as the bricklayers and politicians."

Be Red Smith . . . clicks or no clicks.

### Phony Altruism and an Apple Plethora

*In the Carboniferous Epoch we were promised abundance for all,  
By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul;  
But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "If you don't work you die." — Rudyard Kipling, 1919*

(Nov. 28) — We are toying with the idea for a new personal advice column. It would allow only one question, "Do you think this is something government should do?" And, given the popular mood, the answer would invariably be "no."

A test query comes from a friend who wonders whether Indiana and other states should be giving surplus apples to the poor. He attaches a clipping telling how proud West Virginia is that it saved tons of apples this year by giving them to charity. The National Public Radio reporter was inspired to new heights of drama, smarm and twaddle:

"There was a bumper crop of apples this year across the country, and now processors have too many to handle. With an oversupplied market, growers are now faced with an economic dilemma. Should they pay the labor to pick their apples or simply leave them to rot?"

A no-brainer, you say. Not so fast.

First, the apples, as is the case with your lunch today, are not free. Some virtucrat bought \$10 million worth of them with your money from a dozen lucky West Virginia growers. The apples

now are being distributed to charities from South Carolina to Michigan and all the way west to the Navajo Nation. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is so happy with the publicity that it approved an additional \$100 million of your money to relieve the apple surplus in other states including, one fears, Indiana.

Second, there are doubts about the charitable impact. In America the designated "poor" are not necessarily hungry. The Navaho Nation has a gross domestic product of at least \$12 billion. And sending apples to Michigan ranks right up there in stupidity with coals to Newcastle.

But ignore the waste and phony altruism; they are givens. What is being fed here is not apples but a dishonest and false narrative, i.e., that government has something proactive to do with wealth. The crisis assumes that no private-sector entrepreneur would have figured out a way to assign value to excess apples.

Look, an eighth grade dropout knows more about handling an agricultural surplus than the USDA. John Simplot, after leaving home at age 14 worked on an Idaho farm where he developed a low-cost method for feeding hogs with waste potatoes. When the market fell, hog producers began giving away their piglets. Simplot snatched them up and when the market recovered he sold at a profit and bought into a potato-processing business.

There, Simplot developed a method of freezing the favored Idaho Russet potato, which otherwise could not be shipped nationwide. Eventually he would supply more than half of all french fries eaten at McDonald's. And in retirement by the early 1980s, Simplot was providing the startup capital for Micron Technology, developer of the 64k memory chip. That is what launched the era of global technology and innovation now rivaling the Industrial Revolution.

Clearly, when an official claims to be doing good by giving away other people's property (\$110 million in the case of the apples) there are questions to be asked. Ryan Cummins, third generation owner of a family business and a

former Marine artillery officer, is stalwart enough to ask them.

Cummins for many years conducted an impromptu class on wealth creation as a member of the Terre Haute Common Council. The class was called into session each year at budget time when members of the city’s powerful police and firefighters unions presented their wage and benefit demands. They would bring their families to the council chambers carrying signs reading “Don’t starve our Kids,” or to that effect.

Cummins would begin by expressing his sincere hope that the union members got the raise they were expecting. First, though, they needed to answer a question to get his vote, a question he asks his own employees when they want a raise: What will you be doing next year, given your same responsibilities, that you aren’t doing this year at your current salary?

About then, Cummins would be asked to sit down and shut up.

His point, though, was made. It is a point undisputed in modern economic literature and early 20th century poetry: If you want more money (or apples) you will have to make yourself more useful and more productive — that or find a government agent who doesn’t know the difference. And conversely, if you have money and it is used to pay taxes rather than encourage the productive and the useful then you and your society eventually will be broke.

Next question.

## Thanksgiving in Kenya

(*Nov. 23*) — Granted, I may not know what is expected of a modern governor these days. Somehow, though, I didn’t think it would involve traveling to Kenya for Thanksgiving.

What’s he doing in Kenya? Well, the governor, his wife and entourage are visiting Indiana National Guard troops there. Whoa, now I’m really confused. What is our National Guard doing in Kenya?

The governor doesn’t answer my calls so I’m working off a clipping from the Center Square

news service. I can’t vouch for the accuracy. Indeed, it would be a relief to learn that the news service has gotten things mixed up.

It is certain about one thing: The governor is not paying for the trip; the National Guard is picking up the tab. That is supposed to make us feel better.

The only African country that celebrates what could be called Thanksgiving is Liberia. It marks when freed American slaves founded the country in 1822 and takes place on the first Thursday of November.

In Kenya, the biggest holiday is Jamhuri Day, Dec. 12, the date when Kenya obtained its independence from Great Britain. This is remembered along with the Mau Mau uprising in which Kenyans threatened to hack to death all white Europeans on whom they could get their hands.

But back to the Kenya trip. The governor’s news release explains that the core National Guard mission is to “serve us at home in urgent times.” So what happens if Indiana suffers one of those urgent times while the governor and National Guard are in Camp Simba, Kenya, 8,000 miles away?

Searching the Guard’s website, you find this: “The distribution of soldiers, equipment and facilities across the state allows the National Guard to respond quickly and efficiently to emergencies statewide.”

Again, it’s not going to be all that quick if they have to haul everything back from Kenya.

There’s more: “The Indiana Army and Air National Guard are reserve components of the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force. During times of national emergency (war), National Guard members may be called into active federal service by the President of the United States.”

Are we at war with Kenya for some reason? Does Barack Obama know about this?

Wait, my copydesk tells me that there are 2,382 Kenyans in Indiana. Did they go back to Kenya with the governor for Thanksgiving? If so, why? I would assume that if they are thankful it is

for being here and not there. I may be wrong about that.

No matter. The governor will clear all this up on his return.

Happy Thanksgiving.

## Exposing the Eco-Devo Game

(Nov. 17) — At last, an actually issue of critical economic importance in the governor’s race. Mike Braun has called attention to his GOP primary opponent’s role in creating a statewide eco-devo network that runs on favors and political connections.

“Eric Doden has been using donations from people who received taxpayer-funded benefits while he was running the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and Greater Fort Wayne to fund his campaign to hide from his liberal record, his support for Communist China and his past shady business dealings while (serving) in taxpayer-funded roles,” Braun’s campaign said according to the Indiana Capital Chronicle.

“Shady” sounds about right, even discounting the political embroidery. Coupled with a statewide campaign for office, it looks like a delayed pay-to-play scheme.

Doden as Mike Pence’s Secretary of Commerce perfected what we call “press-release economics.” That is a manipulation of tax-based grants, credits and bonds to entice corporate relocation to Indiana or even just across town. This in turn provides an opportunity for local politicians to cut ribbons and to send self-congratulatory news releases.

There have been several problems with that. The first is that the corporations, foreign or American, get paid up front so there is little investment in the community or loyalty to its workforce. Second, there is no way to determine whether the company would have decided to locate here regardless of government incentives or whether it is holding up its end of the bargain. Third and most troubling, it encourages a shadow network of crony capitalists who become the

primary political movers in every region of the state.

The Chronicle says that Braun created a website that called Doden “crooked.”

Strong words for a usually tepid Indiana GOP gubernatorial primary. A “smear,” was all that Doden’s team would say. That was smart because it doesn’t want anyone looking into the arcane world of either the IEDC or of Greater Fort Wayne.

A couple of weeks ago, Jason Arp, a Fort Wayne Councilman and former investment banker, charged in open council that Greater Fort Wayne had mismanaged its bonding responsibilities, losing as much as \$50 million on a garage deal that was part of a quasi-public economic development project.

Maybe \$50 million isn’t a big number anymore because there was no response from the council or from Greater Fort Wayne. There was no murmur from the legislative delegation. The governor didn’t call. No media coverage.

“There are other people in this room who can do the math; it’s not hard,” Arp said in exasperation. He referred the council to video testimony of the developer saying that if the larger project ever yields tax income it won’t be until 2055. “That’s a pretty delayed return on investment,” Arp concluded. “Certain people are getting a lot of money.”

Now comes Fox 59CBS4 in Indianapolis with a story detailing sweetheart deals amounting to over \$53 million between the IEDC and its individual board members. To the degree that the IEDC has responded, it asks us to just move along, there’s nothing to see here. The board members didn’t physically vote on the specific gifts.

That might fly with your buddies at the country club board but in the world of economics you would be called a “rent seeker,” an awkward designation that means something close to an inside trader.

However this shakes out, Braun deserves credit for raising a complex issue that doesn’t fit nicely into a campaign soundbite. It is nonetheless an issue that voters need to understand and resolve.



## A Man Without a City

(Nov. 9) — I have the complete off-year election results in front of me. My analysis? God seems to use elections to warn us that democracy is not going to be our salvation.

Around here, we reelect everybody. Our top council vote-getter is a race merchant with a socialist bent. Our pay-to-play mayor won his fifth term without risking a single original thought.

Democracy killed Socrates, you know, the father of Western philosophy — and on a slim 60-vote margin. One man, one vote, once, ushered in the tyrannical reigns of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Castro, Mao and Gavin Newsom. Look, it is an amoral mathematical process of selecting leadership that is only slightly more humane than the guillotine.

A favorite story relates a meeting between President Theodore Roosevelt and the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph. In their talk, Teddy asked the emperor whether monarchy would have a role in 20th century Europe. “Somebody has to protect the people from their government,” the emperor replied.

Go full circle and some of my friends are now saying that democracy is under existential threat itself, that the election of this fellow or that will “break our democracy.” I don’t know what they are talking about.

Democracy can only be said to “work” in homogeneous populations where factionalism is at a minimum. The pluperfect examples are from democracy’s inception: heavily armed Norse farmers voting on the coordinates before clamoring into a boat to raid Christian monasteries; or Greek farmers voting with pottery shards before grabbing their swords to hack away at their neighbors over olive groves. Take your pick.

In what America has become — a nation dividing by multiple shades of skin pigment with overlaying templates of religion, class, income, education and origin — it can be argued that it doesn’t work any more at all. The last two decades

have taught us that our vote can be manipulated to meaninglessness. How else do you explain either Joe Biden or Donald Trump? And given those two, what really have we got to lose? Are we merely fighting over who counts the mail-in ballots?

Jude Wanniski, the legendary Wall Street Journal columnist, described the process like this: A citizen goes to the polls intent on voting for a chicken. Once in the booth he sees that the choice is only between a turkey vulture and a snake. He chooses the turkey vulture as the closer manifestation of his democratic will.

We are being governed by turkey vultures.

The people elected Tuesday off my ballot are all charming enough, the kind you would like as neighbors if you didn’t have to invite them over for dinner. They are not people capable of protecting our property or our values or our families — which, lest we forget, is the point of leadership.

So I have no city I can call mine, and I lost my country some time ago. There is no democratically elected official to whom I can point and say “He’s my kind of guy” or “It’s about time somebody did something about that.”

Instead, I am caught between feuding camps of the rapacious and the envious, all indifferent to actual civic problems. We can’t get rid of our county chairman let alone our state senator. Our politicians have a 10 percent favorability rating but an 85 percent reelection rate. Explain that.

But wait, as I close out this column a bit of good news hits my desk from far, far away. Wichita, Kansas, of all places, has elected a Guatemalan-born Chinese-American as its mayor. She is Lily Wu, a first-time candidate who believes in personal responsibility and common law.

Wu, raised in Wichita and educated in its public schools, pledged to cut regulations, fight tax increases and end “sweetheart deals” at City Hall. She centered her campaign on hiring more police officers and increasing their pay. Her opponent was an insufferably woke incumbent named Whipple.

Lily Wu for president, I say . . . or for emperor, depending on how things go.

## A Silent Moment of Malfeasance

(Oct. 30) — For a journalist, malfeasance is something for which you expect to have to dig. You are surprised to find it on top of the ground or, in this particular case, sitting on a council table wrapped up as a \$50-million present to special interests.

The discussion last week in my city council turned to routinely — it was hoped — approving its odd relationship (\$300,000 annually) with a private economic-consulting group. Fortunately for the rest of us, there was someone at the table who understood what was going on.

It was left to Jason Arp, an outgoing councilman and a former banker, to explain the basics to his unquestioning colleagues. Presenting a motion to cut the consulting group's funding, Arp argued that the city's relationship with the group creates perverse incentives that produce ridiculous outcomes.

As an example, he detailed the high interest paid on the bond for a \$40-million parking garage. The garage is part of a downtown development that the city assessor has estimated will be worth on completion only one-third of its cost.

Good citizenship recommends a careful listen to Arp's presentation. Here is a video link to the sparsely attended council meeting (Arp begins at the 56-minute mark).

Describing the relationship with the consulting group as a form of "racketeering," Arp asks the city's community development director whether she knows what the interest rate was when the garage bond was issued. She doesn't. He has to tell her it was 500 points above prime with a discount that set the yield to 30-year maturity at 15.5 percent. He repeats that for emphasis.

The other councilmen, silently staring at their hands, are asked, "Why in the world are our economic advisors putting us in deals that are absolutely ridiculous?" No answers and no

comments from the council. Nor are there any questions for either Councilman Arp, the community development director or the consulting group's representative.

"There are other people in this room who can do the math; it's not hard," Arp says in exasperation.

He estimates that the sloppy bonding of the garage alone will cost city taxpayers \$50 million. And he referred the council to video testimony of the developer saying that if the larger economic-development project ever yields tax income it won't be until 2055. "That's a pretty delayed return on investment," Arp concludes. "Certain people are getting a lot of money."

The motion to cut the consulting group's funding is defeated eight to one. The council's silent moment of malfeasance over, it quickly moves on to other matters.

## Deport Them; They'll Like It

(Oct. 26) — The administration of Indiana University is deep into what my colleague Mark Franke has identified as cognitive-dissonance reduction, a way of cramming inconvenient facts into an impossible ideology.

Pamela Whitten, with a doctorate in communication studies, is the university's first female president if that is important to you. She seems confused or perhaps just stymied as to why students from foreign countries can be expelled for something as innocuous as shouting "Free Palestine."

That is so even though the irate sign-holders straining the police lines nationwide don't look like they are indulging in what their apologists claim to be a harmless greater jihad, that is, a spiritual struggle within oneself against sin. It is not to be confused with a lesser jihad, which is more severe, as witnessed in Israel earlier this month.

We are grateful that Whitten has spared us the popular campus rationale that Israel (and the U.S.) deserve this treatment because of our "settler colonialism," a concept so juvenile

it defies serious explication except as a trope of revived socialism.

In any case, the governor's appointees on the IU Board of Trustees can let Whitten know that these students may be citizens of the mythical Socialist Republic of Bloomington but they are not citizens of the United States. They have no rights here. We were reminded of that this week by U.S. Rep. Jim Banks who is urging that they be summarily deported.

Good for him. Whitten should be publicly cooperating with Banks's office in compiling a list as authorized by Section 212(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

"We've already had a record number of illegal immigrants from terrorist-harboring nations," Banks said. "We need to shut down our border and then deport all non-citizen Hamas sympathizers. The Biden administration has the legal authority and an obligation to do both — anything less betrays America's national security."

But still, who can be against a "free" Palestine? Or against callow over-stimulated students from another culture taking an energetic study break, asserting their space? What happened to freedom of speech and all that? Don't people have a right to be wrong?

Not that wrong. To borrow a phrase from *City Journal*, IU students are supporting hard-line Islamists who are to freedom "what a fire is to a library." For what many in the IU administration had hoped — that students from Muslim nations, millions of them, would learn to admire and emulate the freedoms of the West — has not happened. Instead, they envy and hate us. Here recently is the author Ann Coulter, shouted off the stage at IU a few months ago:

"This isn't the old, 'They hate us for our freedoms.' Rather, it is simply an acknowledgement of the fact that the most common and destructive human emotion is jealousy. People will brag about being gluttons, prideful, greedy, angry, lustful and lazy. The only venal sin no one will cop to is envy. That's how insidious it is."

But what was that stuff about beheaded babies? "There were no beheaded babies," Hamas has said and the IU protestors apparently believe. And if there were, it were only an irrelevant few. And everybody knows that the clever Israelis spread around beheaded babies and raped children after a Hamas raid.

If these students are too young to understand what moral tommyrot that is, then their adult sponsors do understand. We need to start practicing the ancient diplomatic supplication "Go back home." Whitten can just tell them we have reached our quota of dangerous ingrates and envious malcontents, some of them elected to Congress.

"They'll like it! Vastly fewer 'white supremacists' to oppress them," concludes Coulter. "They can hate us all they want. Just do it from their own countries."

### The Success of an 'Annoying Child'

(Oct. 22) — I love to tell her story, although she says I don't tell it right. She is nonetheless an inspiration that you can bloom where you are planted, you don't need a high affirmative-action score or special favors to succeed. Heck, you don't even need a college degree.

Bobbi Ann Mlynar and I had the same English teacher our senior year, an eccentric word fiend who had figured out how to instill in teen-age miscreants a love for Shakespeare, Walt Whitman and a dozen other literary giants. Bobbi Ann soaked it up. I had better things to do.

We both got jobs at the local newspaper, Bobbi Ann because she was a fast, accurate typist and me because of family connections. I moved on to journalism school, world adventure and a career in big-city newspapers. Bobbi Ann, who married a rancher out of high school, languished (I assumed) in a part-time, dead-end job as a keypunch operator for her failing hometown daily.

But that's not the story. I reconnected many years later. My wife and I, big murder mystery fans, had settled down with our popcorn to watch "Murder Ordained," a true-to-life CBS television movie about how a reporter solved a scandalous

murder of a minister's wife despite the discouragement of everybody else in town.

We weren't too far into the movie before I realized it was set in my hometown, More shocking, Bobbi Ann was the reporter. She had uncovered the motive and the evidence. She should have won at least one of the two Pulitzers for which she was nominated.

In any case, her story made a captivating film with Kathy Bates playing Bobbi Ann and also starring Keith Carradine and John Goodman. Much of the dialogue came straight from Bobbi Ann's articles and the court transcripts. It is playing on Prime Video. You'll enjoy it.

Bobbi Ann and I have exchanged text messages since then, mostly about why I can't make it to the class reunions and what has happened to our once noble profession. Solving murders, it turns out, was only one of her achievements. After more than three decades at the newspaper, the last several as city editor ("forcibly promoted"), she won election as mayor. I am told she saved the city from fiscal ruin.

It doesn't surprise me that Bobbi Ann doesn't put much stock in a journalism degree. The secret to the profession, she says, is to have been an annoying child: "Forever tugging on a sleeve and asking, 'Why, why?'" The most obnoxious of these children become reporters — as I did." On Nov. 3 she will be inducted into her state press association's hall of fame.

Besides her example of hometown grit, I owe to Bobbi Ann a punctuation mark. She introduced me to the "interrobang," a combination exclamation and question mark used to express excitement, disbelief and confusion all at once — just the thing for our times.

How could I have called myself a journalist all these years without it?

### Monsters to Destroy . . .

(Oct. 20) — Time spent fighting a foreign war, a decade writing editorials on foreign policy and several years as a foreign policy aide to a U.S. Senator have left me with a single insight. It applies to the inflection that we see developing in

the Middle East and it is just this: Envy is always dangerous, but when it is institutionalized in a culture, political movement or a foreign policy it is calamitous.

The reason is that envy, unlike mere avarice, is non-negotiable. It does not seek a better life for its adherence, least of all in independence or liberty. It seeks only the reduction or the elimination of the envied. And unlike jealousy, it by definition rejects self-improvement. Its blame is always outer-directed.

If you listen carefully to the dictates of the Iranian mullahs, of the Palestinian Hamas or, sadly, of U.S. Democrats such as our own Rep. André Carson, you will hear it quite clearly. There is no plan to improve the lot of their own people or constituents, only a plan to bring the more prosperous and free — and, dare we say, the happier — down to their level of misery. You can call them envy regimes.

Think of it as Shakespearean tragedy. The speech this week of President Macbeth, er Joe Biden, conflated the greed of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict with the envy of the Hamas-Israeli one. Those are two different wars requiring two different strategies.

But the Biden regime's world view does not make that distinction. It is based on solipsism, what the late Charles Krauthammer would say is the belief that the whole world operates pretty much like suburban Boston.

As a result, the Biden strategy will fail. For in the Ukraine, cost-benefit analysis can produce peace. One side or the other will compare its losses with its prospects and open negotiations. "Ukraine's fate will be decided in Kiev not in Washington D.C.," writes the military historian Edward Lutwakk. "Having resisted bravely to win their independence irreversibly, Ukraine's leaders must now act to end the war by offering a territorial settlement, with fully supervised plebiscites in the disputed regions."

In the Middle East there will be no such negotiation. There, the scorpion stings the

frog even though they both drown. Lasting peace can come only when one side has utterly destroyed the other. Add to that the machinations of outside forces such as the Maoist Chinese and the fundamentalist Turks, in addition to the always troublesome Russians, and nobody in the Biden White House can tell you where this will end.

It certainly cannot be held at arms length. The affinity with Hamas demonstrated at our universities, in the pronouncements of Black Lives Matter and even in Congress are not accidental. They generate from the same envy-based philosophies. There will be no negotiating with them either.

Where to from here? We'll have to back up a few steps before we can go forward. Our colleague Mark Oetting refers us to President John Quincy Adams's foreign policy address to the U.S. House of Representatives. I urge you to read the entire speech, but here is something to get us started in the right direction:

Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her (America's) heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.

She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.

She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

She will commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example.

She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom.

## Gaza Perversity at IU

(Oct. 17) — IU students who protested following the terrorist attack on Israeli homes (do we need to show you the pictures that

the terrorists themselves took?) now say they were merely concerned for the lives of innocent children living from whence the terrorists came.

Really? So, one morning it is announced that a thousand Israeli men, women and children have been slaughtered in their homes and your first reaction is to grab a Palestinian flag and take to the street — for humanity's sake? That is so specious it would be laughable if it didn't occur in the perverse Alice in Wonderland of a university campus.

But it did — and in Indiana, if you consider Bloomington a part of Indiana. And to provide icing on this ignominious cake, the IU president issues a statement of fluff and ambiguity urging “caring and compassion” for all, a statement tightened up later to footnote that it was Israelis who actually did the dying.

The woman should have been fired at her podium — with at least as much pompous self-righteousness as the university mustered in ending the career of its perhaps last championship-level basketball coach.

No, that's not right. It's not her fault that she has no backbone. University presidents these days must prove they are bereft of backbone to get the job. It is the board of trustees that is responsible, five of its nine members appointed by the governor.

Are you beginning to see the problem? Explaining why the governor is unlikely to take a position, a defender of Eric Holcomb (who would make a great university president for the reason above) says there is nothing the governor can do — freedom of speech, you know.

Oh codswallop, a university is not a constitutional assembly or a court of law. It can expel anyone it wishes — even for flunking its insipid and increasingly worthless curricula. At my college they expelled perfectly fine, red-blooded young men for doing nothing more than participating in a panty raid (younger readers will have to look that up). The administration back then took Polaroids and threw out anyone the gimlet-eyed old deans could identify.

Let's do that again — the expelling part. Only let's focus our fancy new cameras on students and faculty from godawful, disease-ridden parts of the world with ties to the Students for Justice in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood and the like. And while we are at it, let's take a look at the 3,000 or so IU students from China with oaths of allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party.

Ask your candidate for governor about any of that.

### Leadership — the Other Kind

(Oct. 7) — Yes, we seem to have fallen into chaos, stumbled off a cliff even. The recent swirl around the office of Speaker of the House — a “gyre” is the new Beltway word for it — had me rethinking a decision of a couple summers back. I had chosen to play cards with some friends instead of attend a local political rally. It was the right call.

The invitation was sincere. The politician was a good man as politicians go. I was welcome to join him at a small dinner after the rally. He said he wanted to hear my ideas. Go, my friends urged, we need more informed “leadership” (a word, by the way, that should always be in scare quotes).

Now, no sane person asks someone such as myself for his opinion, someone who has been writing two editorials a day for roughly 40 years. If those opinions were once worth something, repetition has drained them of potency. My dog waits for my wife to call before it will come in for dinner.

The politician's bit of flattery aside, I considered other reasons that my presence might have been worthwhile. I could think of none these years later. The congressman mostly needed money, of which I had none. The nature of modern democracy being what it is, his focus was necessarily on finding the right mix of positions to attract enough support to stay in office.

That precluded any hopes I might have had for a smaller, more accountable government or a return to the country's founding principles. That's the way it is, that's the way it has been for generations now. No blame.

But what kind of “leadership” was I seeking? To be fair to the congressman, I couldn't have told him. A couple of weeks ago, though, a friend sent me the answer in an essay. It was written during a similar time almost 90 years ago and first printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*. It is “Isaiah's Job” by Albert Jay Nock. Please read it. Here is a link; <https://mises.org/library/isaiahs-job>

Nock uses as his model of “leadership” the Old Testament's Isaiah, whose wife also may have had to call the dog. Nobody listened to him, or at least nobody in “leadership.” But a point of the essay is that there is another type of leading, one that isn't as materially rewarding or as acclaimed but perhaps is more effective.

Think of it as a crowd (read “the masses”) going down a road with many twists and turns. It has a leader in the front who may or may not be headed in the right direction. He will need assistants to keep the travelers in line but the tradeoff is that they don't have to worry about direction. They just have to follow the fellow who say he knows where he is going. That is the first kind of “leadership.”

The second kind takes some imagination for it is historically invisible. It is a person standing by the side of that same road with a signboard. He may have been down the road before and his sign is pointing directions, e.g., “There's a drop-off ahead, watch for it.” His job is to stand there with his sign whether or not anyone is actually passing at a given moment. In fact, because his vantage point is fixed, he may not have a good idea of how many people actually see the sign let alone make the right decision down the road.

And even in the best case, where people see the sign and make the right turn, gratitude or even recognition is minimal as is monetary compensation. These people have important places to go and not much time to get there. They can't afford to go back and tell our fellow how much they appreciated his signboard, although that indeed may be the case.

So you won't find this type of “leadership” at a Trump rally, although everyone may jump up and down, shout and have a great time. No minds are

awoken, no sure course of action outlined. Back on the road, however, the detailed directions on the signboard are passed person to person, mouth to ear. It is a gradual, almost imperceptible process. Here is Nock’s caveat:

“When the historian of 2,000 years hence, or 200 years, looks over the available testimony to the quality of our civilization and tries to get any kind of clear, competent evidence concerning the substratum of right-thinking and well-doing which he knows must have been here, he will have a devil of a time finding it. When he has assembled all he can and has made even a minimum allowance for speciousness, vagueness and confusion of motive, he will sadly acknowledge that his net result is simply nothing. A remnant were here, building a substratum like coral insects; so much he knows, but he will find nothing to put him on the track of who and where and how many they were and what their work was like.”

Nonetheless, some thereby find their way avoiding the drop-offs and the wrong turns. A judge here or there makes the difficult but just ruling, an executive order is thought through and issued however unpopular, a congressional debate turns on a profound insight, and even an election or two works out as the Founders envisioned.

Again, it can take a while.

### Obviously . . .

(*Sept. 29*) — As C.K. Chesterton famously said, every high civilization decays by forgetting obvious things. This is an apology to our members for continuing — perhaps monotonously — to remind them of those obvious things. But somebody has to do it.

A week ago we highlighted an economist’s courageous study showing that, yes, two-parent families have an advantage in raising children. Earlier this week we reminded ourselves that private property matters, critiquing the business plan of a government grocery store in Fort Wayne. Today, we address public safety, particularly an Indianapolis organization paid to stop violence by . . . well, by talking about it.

While inclined to acknowledge the sincerity of the effort, we pause to consider the method. As best can be understood from fawning newspaper articles and television interviews, unarmed “life coaches” of the Indy Peace Fellowship answer 911 violence calls with a pat on the back and an encouraging word.

Maybe we oversimplify. Here is 44-year-old Daniel Mallory, one of the fellowship’s life coaches, explaining the technique to the Indianapolis Star: “We attach ourselves to these (potentially violent) individuals, Their mind starts changing, like, ‘I don’t want to do nothing that’s going to lead me back to prison.’”

Again, we do not deny the nobleness of the effort. Nor do we underestimate the political utility of a mayor being able to claim to be addressing crime with a program that avoids actually arresting anyone, especially anyone driven by unknown but mitigating root causes.

However, we are taken aback by the cost. Here is the Star’s glowing summary of Indy Peace funding:

“After starting as a small pilot program funded by Central Indiana Community Foundation in 2021, the fellowship expanded to its current form through \$30 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act money granted by Mayor Joe Hogsett’s administration later that year to be spent over three years. The program is slated to receive an additional \$4.5 million in the proposed 2024 budget with the goal of making it a permanent part of the city’s budget.”

How can that much money be spent on an operation conducted mainly on the street telling people one-on-one the obvious, specifically that hurting other people is against the law?

Hard to say. The Indy Peace Fellowship says it has 65 employees managing 92 “fellows.” The group says it offers certain services to those participating in up to 18 months of life-coaching. These include support with “resume-building, housing, food resources and cognitive behavioral therapy.”

Now we're beginning to understand. You could run up a sizable bill over a year and a half providing food, housing and counseling for 92 troubled young men. Still, there must be more to it.

A throwaway line on the web site might explain the entire \$4.5-million budget: ". . . with stipends distributed once certain goals are achieved to further incentivize participation in the program." If by stipend they mean a fixed regular sum paid as a salary or allowance, you realize that big money is being distributed in cities throughout the nation to pay people to merely not be their felonious selves for a while.

For, interestingly, the Indianapolis peace-keepers and the Fort Wayne government grocery store share a funding source. It is the Biden administration's \$2 trillion American Rescue Plan, a program to relieve the economic pain of COVID but also, apparently, to keep people out of jail long enough to reelect their benefactors.

### Cornucopian Welfare

(Sept. 27) — I can't know enough about about my city's new government grocery store, one of several proposed for areas officially designated as food "deserts." If the facts are ever known it will serve as a bipartisan example of government folly, as good a one as any liberal could dream up and one overseen by a Republican city council.

Heck, authorized shoppers at the government grocery won't even need money. It expects to tap into a virtual cornucopia of welfare: Persons living in the designated areas will be able to walk to this store 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).

Earlier this month on the strong urging of our council's three black Democrats and with the applause of the leading GOP members, including a mayoral candidate, a resolution was prepared to put all of that in motion. It would approve use of a couple of million dollars to renovate and expand a 7,000-foot property as an urban grocery store. A critic of the project estimates the city already has

up to \$2.5 million cash in it with perhaps another million or so in streetscape and neighborhood improvement plus unknown future dollars in loss guarantees to cover the first years of operation.

Please know that the city won't actually own or manage this fiscal chimera. Somebody else will — the details are yet to be worked out — and we expect to see a long line of plunderers, er, applicants.

This is all being done absent anything resembling a business plan. If there were one, it would answer some obvious questions, one being why grocers left the neighborhood in the first place. They say they couldn't make a profit because of shoplifting, employee theft and general street crime.

But the city will fix that — right?

Au contraire, the woke council majority, the mayor's office and the prosecutor don't have the stomach for applying justice in racially disproportionate numbers — and that is a big problem for a grocery store whose customers are racially disproportionate.

Without a business plan there is no market research, and anyway, local authorities keep the discouraging numbers far back in the file cabinet. We have data from other communities experimenting with even more generously funded projects.

But let's back up a minute, there is a business plan — a failed one, borrowed from Chicago, the city of legendary inefficiency and corruption.

The Wall Street Journal reports that in the past two years at least six grocery stores have closed on Chicago's South and West sides. Earlier, the owner of Whole Foods Company stood shoulder to shoulder with the Chicago mayor to cut the ribbon at a much-celebrated urban grocery. The two promised it would provide access to fresh fruit and vegetables and be "a healthy anchor for the community." Six years later it quietly closed despite \$11 million in subsidy.

And in the same report we learn that Walmart has closed four stores in similar areas of Chicago because it was costing them tens of millions of dollars a year with losses doubling in the past five



years. In 2022, a mere 17 percent of retail thefts in Chicago resulted in an arrest, the newspaper reported. “The problem isn’t corporate racism,” the paper concluded. “It’s crime.”

Nor is it poverty. Does anyone believe that corner grocers if not chain stores would not re-enter an inner-city market if crime had not become such a huge factor? The Congressional Budget Office says that adjusted for transfer payments and tax exemptions, the annual U.S. household income of the lowest quintile is fully \$49,000 — large enough to attract private grocers if a neighborhood were crime free.

When New York City reversed its crime statistics in the mid 1990s, commercial investment doubled within a few years. You should want to try that before you turn over the problem to a lawyer-heavy redevelopment commission spending other people’s money.

Finally, there is no “owner” of our urban grocery, so who will audit its multi-million-dollar operation? The Board of Public Works? My journalistic instincts say it will be a “success” until it suddenly isn’t. That will be despite regular and unpublicized infusions of tax dollars in the years ahead to cover unexpected expenses — such as unreported shoplifting and inept governance.

### A Man for the ‘Masses’

(Sept. 25) — As Eric Holcomb prepares to leave office after another summer of foreign travel ostensibly in search of jobs for us, the opinion of him has softened. It is expressed to friends this way: He is a blockhead but he is our blockhead.

And as the view has become more charitable, we have had to put certain pictures out of our mind. There he is with that smile of obliviousness holding a gift plate on a visit to China with a high official of the Communist Party only weeks before the outbreak of COVID. There is another — the same smile but masked — welcoming Indiana’s ration of 70,000 random Afghans dumped on us by the Biden administration, a good number of whom now are believed to be threats to national security. And another of him introducing Indiana’s “historic”

very first Chief Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity Officer, an ex university operative whose woke job description testifies only to the idiocy of our times.

That done, we are ready to defend the man. Holcomb represented us perfectly, a paragon of democracy, the governor we deserved. The examples above, although cringe-worthy in retrospect, reflected the views of a majority of Hoosier at the time. He was us, winning reelection by over 24 percentage points, the largest margin for any Indiana Republican gubernatorial nominee, a man for the masses.

Now, the word “masses” is not used here as it is commonly understood, i.e., as the agglomeration of poor and underprivileged people, laboring people, proletarians. No, the masses include many of the best of us, the wealthiest, the most powerful and influential. I accept the definition of Alfred Jay Nock in his wonderful 1937 work, “Free Speech and Plain Language”:

“(The masses) means simply the majority. The mass man is one who has neither the force of intellect to apprehend the principles issuing in what we know as the humane life, nor the force of character to adhere to those principles steadily and strictly as laws of conduct; and because such people make up the great and overwhelming majority of mankind, they are called collectively the masses.”

This would include most state legislators, the mayors and councils of our major cities, the editors of the metropolitan newspapers and the chief donors to both political parties. Holcomb, obliviousness and all, was their — our — leader.

But we will soon be on our own. It would be unfair to monopolize the talents of a man like Holcomb any longer. He must go on to a well-deserved retirement on an ample government pension, or, better, assignment to a position of sinecure in some lofty but undemanding post. We wish him only well as we encourage the next governor, smiling or not, to include in his or her administration at least a few people who can solve problems.

For oblivion, however much it appeals to us, is a luxury we can no longer afford.

### ‘Family’ Misdefined

(Sept. 20) — The Baby Boomers thought they had invented a better way — the single-parent (female headed) family, easier to form and to organize. The next generation sped up the trend as young women’s salaries increased relative to young men’s and divorce became more practical in a reordered social structure, all while government support increased.

The rationale developed that the nuclear family was optional; a successful happy family could be modeled with a single liberated woman. Men were superfluous after a certain point. “A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle” was the inscrutable slogan.

Maybe, maybe not. Today, 40 percent of children in America are born to unmarried mothers, double the share in 1980. In the early part of this transformation, single mothers were likely divorced but now the majority has never married, and neither will their children.

Call it what you will but we have experienced an explosion of narcissism.

Those of us outside this social experiment were caught unprepared. All we had was anecdotal evidence as our warning. And we were conflicted by the fact that some of our best friends had been raised in successful families led by single, hard-working women, the widows of World War II. And the example of similarly exceptional women has continued over the years.

Looking back, though, we understand that those women made clear to their sons and daughters that the family would need to make a heroic effort to make up for their loss — a far different approach than today’s signaling that men are dispensable or at least interchangeable.

But again, we didn’t have data. Now we do. Economist Melissa Kearney has written, “The Two-Parent Privilege: How Americans Stopped Getting Married and Started Falling Behind.” This carefully researched work ends a half century of

debate. Here is Kay Hymowitz’s review in the this month’s City Journal:

“Growing up apart from a father carries considerable risks for children aside from economic hardship. Boys, in particular, are more likely to have academic and behavioral problems without their fathers in the house, and, statistically speaking, the presence of a stepfather doesn’t make their futures look any rosier. Growing up in a single-mother household is associated with poorer college completion, even after controlling for a host of other variables, as well as with diminished likelihood of marrying or staying married upon reaching adulthood.”

And no, the government cannot come to the rescue. There is evidence in the Kearney statistics, charts and models that even in the most progressive utopias government benefits do not compensate for family structure. It is a point of perverse pride that Indiana, with low welfare benefits, scores 46th in a list of best places to raise a family as a single parent.

“To marry is both to enter into and to create a family — the most powerful community in which most individualistic will ever engage — and to connect to a supporting network of friends, extended families and neighbors,” Kearney writes. “Family breakdown on the scale that we’ve seen in past decades inevitably ruptures communities and social life.”

Hmm, do we need to point out that similar warnings have been posted in scripture as well as in every other religious tract throughout the world, not to mention being hard-wired in cultural mores and taboos dating back to prehistory? Inconvenient though it may be, and how much our hearts may ache for struggling moms and adrift children, marriage between a man and a woman seems to be the way human society is made to work.

They say you are wise when you have seen two generations make the same mistake. The single-parent family is that mistake. — *tcl*



*“The Battle of Cowpens,” painted by William Ranney in 1845, shows an unnamed patriot (far left) saving the life of Col. William Washington.*

# INDIANAPOLICY

*Review*

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