

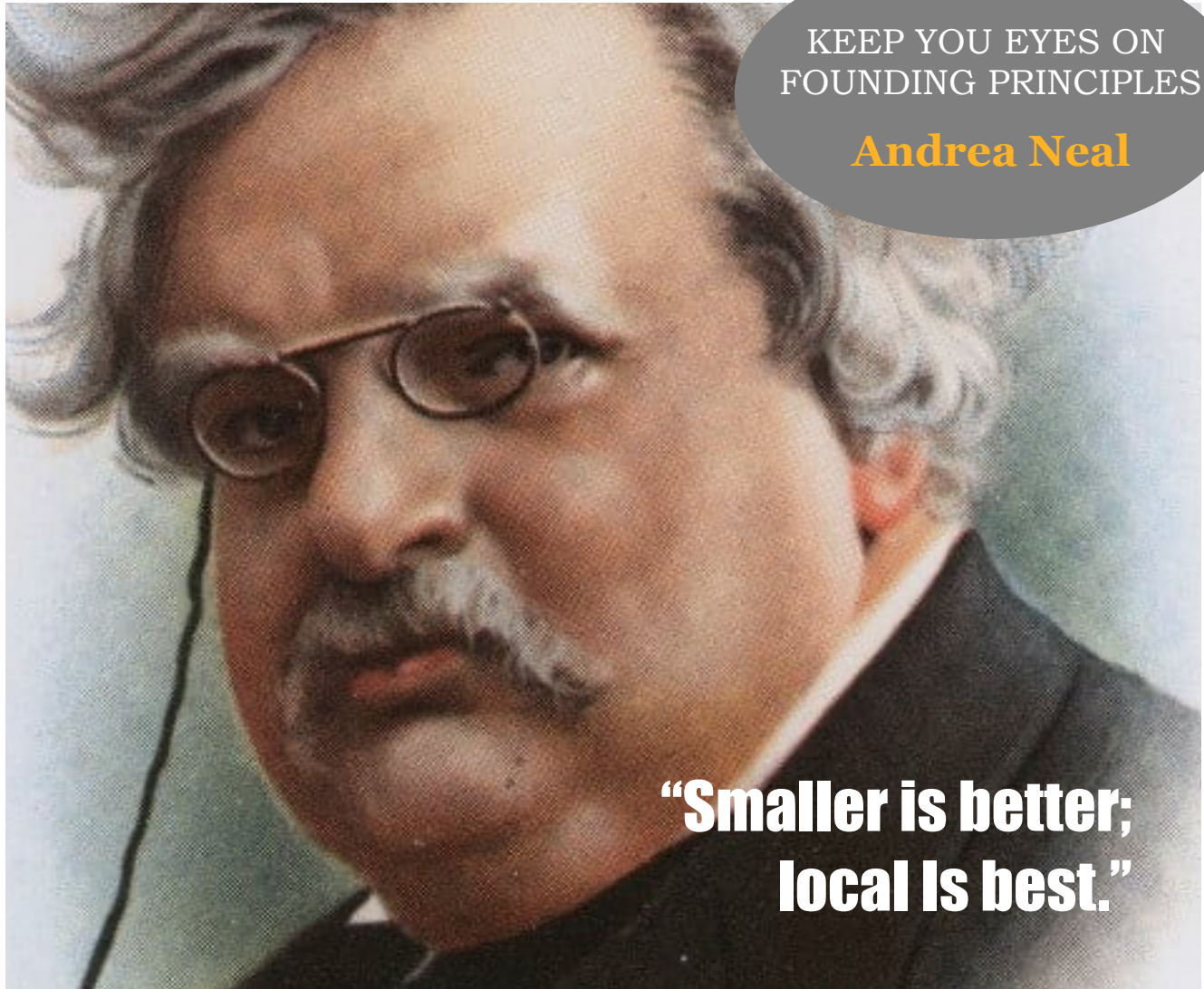
INDIANAPOLIS

Review

Fall 2024

KEEP YOUR EYES ON
FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

Andrea Neal



**“Smaller is better;
local is best.”**

C.K. Chesterton's portrait for Will's Cigarettes (the National Portrait Gallery)

Economics as if People Mattered Discouraging Big Soulless Institutions

“The idea is to get back to a society where people can live together as neighbors and not just as wage slaves or bureaucratic cogs.”

(C.K. Chesterton)

“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

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 all 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

‘Nobody Is Coming to Help’

I’ve been fighting modal verbs for some time now. A modal verb, as only you grammar nerds know, is an auxiliary verb used to express ability, permission or necessity, e.g., someone “must,” “should,” “ought” do something.

In today’s political context, modal verbs are a tell, that is, they signal that the user is in the habit of depending on someone else to solve problems. Opinion pages, Republican or Democrat, are full of modal verbs. They are always saying that somebody should come and help but “Nobody Is Coming to Help” is on the T-shirt I wear to political events. I have a second one that I will get to in a minute.

Before that, here is where in the screed where I relate the example of an unnamed San Francisco policeman. CNN showed him walking through the devastation of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. He was yelling to those trapped in the rubble that nobody was coming to help; that they would have to care for their injured and get water themselves. A true hero, he must have saved hundreds of lives.

We are not heroes but we do our best, and that is just this: Donald Trump is not coming to help, nor is the Republican Party, and certainly not

your city, state or local government. If you think our constitutional republic is worth saving, it will be you that does the saving.

And I have a suggestion in that regard: Do not underestimate the power of small groups focused on specific policy questions. I can assure you that there is not an officeholder in the state who will ignore a group of two dozen or so informed voters gathering in their district to intelligently discuss the details of a bill or law.

That is because insecurity drives politics these days. Your average officeholder, disconnected from his constituency by party-controlled campaign financing, spends a lot of time guessing what you are thinking. That’s why they are always commissioning polls and scheduling “listening” sessions with us commoners. Let’s help them out by getting together and handing over a list of concerns.

This foundation is committed to organizing town meetings throughout the state using the 2024 Indiana Mandate as a discussion guide. The Mandate’s theme, “Returning to Founding Principles,” covers monographs on 75 issues facing the Indiana Legislature in one way or another, some of which nobody in officialdom wants discussed.

Also, contributors to the Mandate, including cartoonist Gary Varvel and editor Andrea Neal, can be available to walk through the topics. Call or write and we will help with the details.

Which brings us to that second T-shirt logo: “Don’t Just Do Something, Stand There,” a witticism credited to everyone from Adlai Stevenson to the White Rabbit. In this argument it is to say don’t waste time trying to find the perfect politician, make certain the imperfect ones know where you stand and the consequences of ignoring you.

It is a matter of defining principles rather than chasing impossible political goals in what has become a corrupt, identity-driven democratic process. And no modal verbs will be needed. — *tcl*

How to Order ‘Indiana Mandate’

You can now order “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles” at the member price of \$19.54 at Amazon.com/books. With both a presidential election and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence approaching, the Indiana Policy Review, through the lens of the Declaration, examines 75 of the most critical issues facing Indiana.



Economics ‘as if People Mattered’

Those who grew up among 4H clubs, classless basketball and sewing circles were a truly diverse breed with the advantages that implies. Social capital, as they call it, was being built there.

Craig Ladwig is editor of The Indiana Policy Review.



‘The aim is to have a society in which the great majority of people own their own homes and farms and small businesses,” wrote C.K.

Chesterton. That is, smaller is better, local is best, in the organization of human affairs.

The experience of the last 50 years proves the English journalist and Christian apologist right to anyone wide awake. Chesterton’s “The Outline of Sanity” (1926) is still the best lay argument for the economic theory of Distributism (the wide distribution of individual ownership):

“To be free and to be independent is to be a part of something bigger than oneself. The idea is to get back to a society where people can live together as neighbors and not just as wage slaves or bureaucratic cogs.”

Those of my generation have experienced life only getting bigger and more complex, e.g., our corporations, our cities, our schools, our farms, our hospitals. This paper argues that it is time Hoosiers think in the other direction, especially in three critical areas: media, agriculture and

medicine. It says that organizations and institutions should be scaled to human needs, not numerical goals.

That can be done without as much social or economic turmoil as you might imagine, or at least no more than will ensue regardless.

Other than Chesterton, our literary guides are Thomas Jefferson, “The government closest to the people serves the people best,” and Henry David Thoreau, “That government is best which governs least.” Our practical guides are the economists E.F. Schumacher¹ and John Medaille, plus the political scientist John Putnam and the work of Ken Meter in agriculture.

I borrowed my title from Schumacher’s classic work, “Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered.” Therein he suggests that we start . . . well, that we start small with a simple question.

Chesterton and Schumacher’s challenge to those who call themselves conservatives, particularly those laboring in today’s Republican Party, is just this: Why is the concentration of wealth and power a bad thing when it is done by monarchs, despots and centralized governments but a good thing, or at least a tolerable thing, when it is done by corporations?

And both made the embarrassing admission that most of the world’s wealthiest nations on a per capita basis are small, while the largest countries, including their own, are poor in comparison.

Schumacher followed that up with a lament that as Western economies have grown larger, so has the segment living in poverty and hopelessness. Something is wrong with our economic strategy.

Before we get too far into this, let’s acknowledge that legislators will give you a hundred valid reasons why corporations cannot

¹ Schumacher (1911-1977), an English economist, was influenced while an economic consultant in India by Mahatma Gandhi and his concepts of “economy of permanence” and “appropriate technology.” And while in nearby Burma, Schumacher developed the set of principles he called “Buddhist Economics,” which align with the theories of Distributism. His 1973 book cited above was ranked by The Times Literary Supplement as one of the 100 most influential books published since World War II.

be constrained. However, there also must be 100 ways that a legislature can encourage smallness and discourage, or at least challenge, bigness. The point is that they are not even trying.

Schumacher grants that certain industries (steel, heavy manufacturing, mining, insurance) may require the ability to raise large amounts of capital with limited investor liability, all of which incorporation and bigness make possible. But he proposes economic designs to manage this, some of them elegant, while noting that the great many can function and grow perfectly well without such special arrangements:

“We can restructure large-scale industrial ownership without revolution, expropriation, centralization or the substitution of bureaucratic ponderousness for private flexibility. It could be introduced in an experimental and evolutionary manner — by starting with the biggest enterprises and gradually working down the scale, until it was felt the the public interest had been given sufficient weight in the citadels of business enterprise. All the indications are that the present structure of large-scale industrial enterprises, in spite of heavy taxation and an endless proliferation of legislation, is not conducive to the public welfare.”

He recommends this be done generally with: 1) tax incentives, regulatory considerations, grants and easier access to financing for small and intermediate businesses; 2) implementing policies that promote local decision-making processes; and 3) promoting policies that incentivize or require businesses to source materials, products and produce locally.

Specifically, and a trigger warning here for libertarians, Schumacher describes a “profit tax” to address bigness by modifying how the profits of

widely held corporations are taxed on a state-by-state basis, believing that their institutional focus on maximizing profits leads to harmful practices and social imbalances locally.

How would all of this work?

Economists agree that incentives matter but there are serious objections to using policies to nudge or favor a particular interest group, even as deserving as middle-class Hoosier families. Incentives can backfire, as history continues to teach us. For example, firms might game Schumacher’s system, developing accounting tools to minimize profits and restore the status quo ante — or worse. Legislators might fiddle with the definition of “profit.”

And as Friedrich Hayek argued in defense of free markets, not even a roomful of Schumachers would be able to anticipate every scenario.

Those objections aside, must Indiana choose to become either a state of villages or a state of megatropolises? Schumacher insists it is not an either-or decision. He would employ the organizational principle of subsidiary function to dynamically adjust the balance between big and small.

The principle says that the burden of proof for whether the larger entity (the corporation, the city) should absorb the function of a smaller entity (a single proprietorship, a town) rests entirely with the larger entity.

Indeed, my Catholic friends tell me that this is the heart of a specific teaching, It is the message of Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical:

“It is a fundamental principle of social philosophy, fixed and unchangeable, that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise and industry.”

Long before, of course, Martin Luther had challenged the hierarchical and centralized nature of the Catholic Church itself, advocating for the priesthood of all believers and a more direct relationship between the individual and God. This emphasis on local authority and individual responsibility in matters of faith reflects a decentralization that aligned and preceded the broader spirit of subsidiarity function.

The experience of the last few decades is that two of the three examples we use here (media and agricultural corporations) have failed all of these tests. Subsidiary function says we can locally discourage their growth without shooting ourselves in the economic foot.

Experience with the third, healthcare, is less clear because of the nature of the service but nonetheless comes down on the side of an individual physician's practice over the bureaucracy of a mega-hospital.

Schumacher argues that his measures would encourage corporations to invest more in improving their products, services and working conditions while opening opportunities for local individual proprietors to rise and prosper. It better aligns an economy with local needs and capacities, where individuals can have meaningful input and a sense of ownership. Also, smaller organizations have shown themselves more capable of fostering human capital in the form of personal responsibility and creativity.

John Medaille, author of "Toward a Truly Free Market" and an economist known for his work in the school of Distributism, chimes in with this:

"Corporations, by their very nature, are legally required to maximize profits for their shareholders. This can lead to a disregard for the well-being of other stakeholders, including employees, consumers and the community."

And political scientist Robert Putnam, author of "Making Democracy Work," calls our attention in much of his work on the corporation's role in both undermining trust in democratic representation and eroding social capital at the community level:

"The effectiveness of government is closely related to the level of civic engagement and social networks, which are influenced by various social and economic factors, including the nature of employment and corporate practices."

Big widely held corporations are the trophy catches of municipal economic-development programs and gubernatorial trade missions. Such companies are better at justifying tax abatements

and grants by counting up supposed new jobs "coming to town."

To that, Wes Davenport, a research fellow at the Center for Economic Accountability

writing in the Aug. 13 National Review, says the ribbon-cuttings are overhyped:

"It's important to understand how jobs actually are, and are not, created. New jobs do not cause a local economy to grow. Rather, a growing local economy creates new jobs. It's the context of that local economy, the conditions that either help or hurt people and businesses, that creates the need for new jobs."

Crime and riots, for instance, would seem devastating to job-creation and should be the first order of business in any economic-development campaign. But few Chamber of Commerce types and fewer politicians want to buck the woke narrative against tough sentencing and aggressive policing.

In any case, Davenport doubts that local economic-development agencies know much about what *really* creates jobs, that is, new ways of meeting consumer demand and discovering new consumer desires:



AS BIG BUSINESS and corporations have grown larger, public confidence in them has declined. A Gallup poll released Aug. 27, 2024, found that with only 16 percent of Americans having high confidence in big business and 42 percent reporting low or no confidence there was a net confidence score of -26. That number has not been in positive territory since the early 2000s and remains close to last year's record low of -29.

“Economic-development agencies conflate jobs with growth when neither can be predicted in detail,” he says. “These hollow promises come with very real costs: Besides government spending, these agencies interfere with the broader economy by advantaging some companies (large corporations) over their competitors. Government-favored industries get a boost, while innovation and entrepreneurship get smothered by red tape and taxation.”

Whatever analyses is preferred, the wisdom of discouraging widely held corporations becomes plain when we compare how our three areas of interest performed on a smaller scale, noting especially what has been lost in the process of growing larger for the sake of growing larger.

Schumacher talked about setting up a state-based demonstration. If so, why not in Indiana?

To my mind, it is the only “economic development” strategy with the potential of improving the lives of middle-class Hoosiers while at the same time reducing the segment of each generation mired in poverty.

Media: The Demise of the Indy Star

Some blame the Internet for the decline of local newspapers and along with them local electronic media. The data deny that. The decline in home newspaper circulation, a steep one, began long before the Internet was even a gleam in Al Gore’s eye.

The better explanation is that a decline corresponded to a change in ownership model, from individual proprietors to, again, widely held corporations.

America’s heartland newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s were purchased en masse by widely held corporations motivated by: 1) the industry’s reputation at the time of being inflation-proof; and 2) inheritance taxes that pressured a generation of newspaper families to sell out.

Eugene S. Pulliam’s Indianapolis Star, once a statewide influencer, succumbed to that reality late but succumb it did. The Gannett Company acquired it in 2000 and the new corporate spokesman immediately promised to continue the tradition with only minimal changes in staff or scope. It was the joke that never got a laugh.

For corporations operate newspapers differently than do individual owner-publishers. That that has to be said should indicate the shallowness of the current analysis of media. Where the Pulliam family counted as part of its “profit” the satisfaction of leading a statewide readership, Gannett, not unreasonably, is interested in the money. I have heard estimates that the Pulliam profit margin was less than

percent some years while Gannett expects 20 percent plus.

First to be noticed was that adult supervision left the building, reversing the flow of newsroom authority and power that had prevailed for a century. Previously, the copy and news desks reflected the publisher's personal preferences, political, social and professional, those of a man or woman who had put their life's treasure into supporting and leading a community through their family newspaper.

Under Gannett, the most experienced editors were allowed to leave — encouraged, even. That sounds counter-productive but corporate executives may prefer hiring their editors from some distance — easier to manage than a local know-it-all.

A friend, just one example, walked out of the newsroom door when Gannett arrived. She took with her an Ivy League degree, her fluency in Spanish and economics, invaluable Washington experience covering the Supreme Court of the United States for a national wire service, and, perhaps most important, deep and loving roots in Indiana with family relationships that included a party chairman and the publisher of a revered small-town newspaper here.

Replacing her were the professionally nondescript, all transferred here from somewhere or another in Gannett-land. They would not be judged on any journalistic skills during their five-years-or-so stint here in flyover country. Rather, they would be judged on how smoothly the newsroom operation went.

That smoothness would depend on how well they mollified the younger, liberal staffs of radical political bent who have always been the management challenge in metro newsrooms.

The first Gannett editor to occupy the executive editor's office, arriving eager to relate to

that young generation of reporters, sported a ring on one ear signaling that change had arrived (does it matter which ear?).

And the old guys on the copy desk, again the historic nemeses of brash young reporters, headed for the exits. Story ideas that would have been spiked during the Pulliam era, i.e., "Let's do a special full-color page on the various styles of condoms," became *de rigueur*. Over the years, day in and day out, such "human interest" proved to be death to family and home readership — that and the recurrent sophomoric lectures on the opinion page, which now have been abandoned altogether for lack of readership and space.

In sum, throughout the Midwest, these new hip editors turned out to be woefully unprepared to guide serious information systems, especially those with a family-centered customer base. The

late novelist Donald Barthelme, a reporter for the Houston Post early in his career, described this period artfully in a 1980 essay for the New Yorker:

"Even while America continues to ramp up farm production to astounding levels, net farm income is now lower than at the onset of the Great Depression."

"Top management is discouraged and saddened, and middle management is drinking too much. Morale in the newsroom is fair, because of the recent raises, but the shining brows of the copy boys, traditional emblems of energy and hope, have begun to display odd, unattractive lines. At every level, people want management to stop what it is doing before it is too late."

How late is it? Consider the numbers: The now defunct Fort Wayne News-Sentinel, which once enjoyed 100 percent market penetration and was the state's third largest before being purchased by Knight-Ridder News, Inc, ceased publication on March 6, 2023.

In all, several dozen other Indiana newspapers have closed since 1970. More than 1,300 localities nationally have lost news coverage. It is important

to know that as late as 1975 newspapers were the largest manufacturing sector in the U.S.

Virtually all surviving U.S. newspapers announced layoffs last year, and the number of employees has dropped 75 percent within the past decade.

And don't expect the niche to be filled by broadcast news, which, absent the benefit of a sound newspaper-driven perspective, is entertainment at best and silliness at worst. Nor has the Internet, still a dog's breakfast of unvetted sources and opinion, shown promise of providing trustworthy, reliable and prescient journalism in the near future.

We in the hinterland will miss — nay, are missing in this presidential election year — those home-based owner-publishers and their corps of hidebound fogies. For their journalism was the editing, sifting, sorting and weighing of facts, the forewarning whenever possible of events and the honest explanation of their portent, all to a trusting daily readership of average folks.

This, as it turns out, was a critical element of a healthy democracy, which dies not only “in darkness,” as the Washington Post warns, but in corporate management.

All that considered, a law professor once suggested to this author a more direct idea. He wondered whether in the case of media specifically the Indiana Attorney General might define corporations in a way that discourages those formed merely for financial advantage.

For the worst is yet to come. Google and the state of California last month struck a \$180-million compact to fund state-backed news organizations and to ostensibly save local journalism.

The Wall Street Journal reports, however, that the fund will be “laundered” through the News Transformation Fund and be distributed by the University of California's wide awake Berkeley

journalism school. Google will deduct its contribution from taxes.

Left to be decided is whether the model for this new journalism will be Izvestia or Pravda.

Agriculture: What Happened to the Coconut Cream Pies?

“The great problem of our age is the tendency of people to assume that economic growth is a universal cure for all ills, while it often brings new problems and exacerbates existing ones,” wrote Schumacher.

That is nowhere more true than in farming, where the notion that endless growth, a feature of industrial agriculture, is beneficial in all aspects. And to put it most directly, there is no good reason for Indiana to sacrifice its own social capital and topsoil for export to global financial networks — and to do so without a thorough public discussion. Corporate or foreign-owned

mega-farms growing genetically altered corn to turn into energy does not get Hoosiers ahead.

You can dismiss the next few paragraphs as nostalgic debris if you wish, but the memories nonetheless relate to both the politics and sense of self for my generation, how we see the society around us.

I spent my early journalism career traveling the Great Plains and Midwest. A great treat back then was stopping for morning coffee wherever I happened to be and ordering a homemade coconut cream pie in the ever-present, family-owned downtown restaurant. The pie, difficult to perfect, was invariably excellent from town to town. I don't know how to explain that except that the clientele would accept nothing less. The best home bakers in town vied for the restaurant's pie concession.

Today, industrial agriculture is replacing the family farm, evicting the local implement dealer, the law offices on the square, the corner grocer, the one-chair barbershop, the hardware store

Less than 15 percent of Indiana corn is used for human consumption (corn syrup, cornmeal and tortillas).

(where they actually knew things), the feed store (where they complained about politics and the weather), the weekly newspaper and those homemade coconut cream pies.

Several of the towns on my beat held annual "founders' day dinners" where hometown sons and daughters who had "made good" in the outside world returned to be honored and to give a little speech. I was always surprised by how impressive the accomplishments, how sincere the pride and how heartfelt the gratitude.

And it wasn't too many years ago that our Hoosier countryside was dotted with small family farms growing food to eat. Today, less than 15 percent of Indiana corn is used for human consumption (corn syrup, cornmeal, tortillas). The rest is animal feed and biofuels.

Many families had full gardens. My grandparents, although townspeople, dedicated their backyard to a vegetable and fruit garden plus a chicken coop and a bee hive. No car, no central air, big front porch. They hardly used money.

These days, as I travel the state, I have had to face the fact there's no there there. And it makes me sad that I cannot trust our now ubiquitous suburbs, popping up like tent cities around crime-ridden urban cores, to raise the same quality sons and daughters as honored at those founders' day dinners. For people who grew up among 4H clubs, classless basketball and sewing circles were a truly diverse breed with the advantages that implies.

They came into contact with a wide range of personalities at all levels of society. Necessity taught them to realistically assess their own abilities and those of others to work toward common goals, and to do so without letting personal judgment get in the way. Social capital was made there, and you're going to miss it along with the coconut cream pies.

My bias against industrial agriculture acknowledged, I can grant that some considered all that as progress. What I cannot understand is why it was perfectly OK with the legislators who represented those poor folks in their now desolate towns. If preserving a constituency's way of life isn't a legislator's job, what is? Viable alternatives and people-centered policies were available all the while.

In fact, critics of industrial agriculture have long argued convincingly that it prioritizes efficiency and profit over social capital, not to mention over environmental sustainability and public health. As a partial remedy, they have advocated small, local organic farming, agro-ecology and community food systems, all to deaf ears in the legislature.

"Our current food system has decimated rural communities and confined the choices of urban consumers," says Ken Miner, author of "Building Community Food Webs," Even while America continues to ramp up farm production to astounding levels, net farm income is now lower than at the onset of the Great Depression, he says.

Miner has visited Indiana to lobby political leaders here on how grassroots food and farming groups can overturn the extractive economic structures of widely held corporations. Sad to say, his arguments so far have been largely ignored in Indianapolis.

Nonetheless, skepticism of industrial agriculture is growing and encompasses a range of environmental, social, economic and health concerns. Here are some objections that critics raise:

- To repeat, industrial agriculture can undermine small, local farms by making it difficult for them to compete with large, industrial operations. This can lead to the

"The hospital received total payments of \$21,112.81. A competitor, a small surgery center, advertises similar surgeries for 85 percent less — 85 percent!"

consolidation of land and resources in the hands of a few large agribusinesses.

- Industrial agriculture often relies on monocultures and heavy machinery, which can lead to soil erosion, reduced soil fertility and loss of biodiversity.
- The use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides can lead to water pollution through runoff, harming aquatic ecosystems and contributing to problems like algal blooms.
- The extensive use of chemical inputs can lead to pesticide residues in food, which some studies suggest might be linked to health problems, including cancer.
- The use of antibiotics in livestock to promote growth can contribute to the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, posing risks to human health.
- Industrial agriculture often involves growing a single crop over large areas, which reduces biodiversity and can make crops more susceptible to pests and diseases.
- Some argue that the focus on high yields and uniformity in industrial agriculture can lead to a decline in the nutritional quality of food compared with more diverse and traditionally grown crops.

Can this be corrected? No, we can't turn back the clock and that's not what I am talking about here. It's called self-reliance. If you've forgotten what that looks like, drive through Lagrange County and Amish country.

The Legislature can discourage corporate consolidation while encouraging small farms and towns without going full hippie. The least we can do in our urban leisure is refuse abject dependency on distant, amoral corporations for our food and jobs.

Hospitals: The 'Veterinary Model'

"Winning is only important in war and surgery," said the late Al McGuire, coach of the

Marquette basketball team. The problem with modern hospitals is not so much bigness itself as the attendant broken relationship between physician and patient. And yes, it is a matter of winning and losing, life and death.

First of all, we have to answer a multiple-choice question. The merger of hospitals and the absorption of private practices are: a) the continued drive for efficiencies and more-expert care; or b) the unconscionable result of misaligned incentives and government intrusion, particularly those that encouraged the dissolution of private practices.

Those are two vastly different answers, and to determine which is closest to the truth you begin where the average hospital patient ends up — with the bill.

"One of ObamaCare's unintended or at least unannounced consequences is the buying up of private practices."

A member of this foundation spent three days being treated at one of our mega-hospitals. When presented with something like a \$23,000 bill, he offered to pay in cash and on the spot. The bill was reduced to about \$6,000.

Before we go further, let's dismiss greed as an explanation. "None of us is greedy," Milton Friedman famously observed. "It's only the other fellow who's greedy." In fact, the world runs on individuals pursuing their separate interests, Friedman taught us, and the great achievements of civilization have not come from government bureaus.

Those behind recent healthcare reform, however, confuse greed with a necessary search for profits — profits earned in medical innovation, efficient hospitals and patient-focused care.

Supposed reformers like Barack Obama traded this profit-seeking behavior for what economists call "rent-seeking," i.e., administrators, physicians and others in the medical industry shifting the focus of their efforts to the manipulation of government policy to gain advantages — monopolistic, if possible — while imposing

disadvantages on competitors. It is, sadly, the default setting for the rest of the world.

The tradeoff, then, is a bad one for American medical and insurance customers. It will without exaggeration turn our nation's healthcare system, the envy of the world, backward toward the default.

Even so, how can there be such disparate pricing? I have in front of me another hospital bill for a routine hernia operation performed at a general hospital in Indianapolis some years ago. Prices have skyrocketed since then but it will do for illustration. The bill shows a charge of \$34,385 for pharmacy, implants, surgery services, anesthesia, recovery-room services and, of course, miscellaneous supplies.

The insurance company was able to negotiate a 38.6 percent discount for these services in the amount of \$13,272. The company, after applying the discount, made a payment to the hospital of \$10,297, leaving the patient with a balance of \$10,814, payable within 30 days.

So, counting the insurance company and the patient, the hospital received total payments of \$21,112. A competitor, a small surgery center, advertises similar surgeries for 85 percent less — 85 percent!

It is all representative of the big hospitals and inscrutable bills that have become the new normal since we fell into what the New York Times called a “quiet revolution” transforming how medical care is delivered.

Although the changes in how it is delivered may have been quiet, the way we sell medical care has become raucous as hospital bills and insurance rates explode. Indeed, critics see it not so much revolutionary as acquiescence to that default setting for healthcare worldwide, a greatly inferior system.

And they see that default encapsulated in Obama's high-minded Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) or ObamaCare, which, ominously, was timed to begin taking full effect after a presidential election along with higher insurance premiums and more restrictive

policies. In Indiana, premiums almost immediately increased by double digits for men and women age 40 and below.

Whatever its intentions and however feel-good its vision, ObamaCare prescribed a system that few Americans either understood or freely chose. Indeed, before it even went into effect, a New York Times/CBS News poll of uninsured people found that nearly three in 10 said they objected to the government's requiring it, while about one in 10 said they felt they did not need it.

This month a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that ObamaCare networks include on average only 40 percent of doctors in a patient's area. More than a quarter of physicians who participated in traditional Medicare don't participate in any ObamaCare plan. And many doctors don't accept Medicare because of its low payment rates. So much for, “If you like your doctor, you can keep your doctor.”

Indeed, one of ObamaCare's unintended or at least unannounced consequences was the buying up of private practices. In 2005, more than two-thirds of medical practices were physician-owned. Three years later that share had fallen below 50 percent and has continued to slide. An Indianapolis general surgeon reacts:

“There may not be anything explicit in the PPACA that says hospitals should buy physician practices, but because it encourages bundled payments for a patient's care, which a hospital then distributes to the doctor and others, it encourages hospital ownership of doctors. The goal of progressives such as Mr. Obama is a single-payer, government-run system, and they believe that the sooner the private practice of medicine dies the sooner their utopian dream can be realized.”

For private physicians, this means adoption of what some derisively call the “veterinarian” model. An Indiana insurance executive explains:

“The veterinarian model of healthcare eliminates the patient from an active role in healthcare decisions. Choice of doctor, hospital or clinic, procedures performed or not performed are all

left to someone other than the person receiving the medical care. A positive aspect of real veterinary care, however, is that at least the owner of the animal loves the patient. I'm not sure who has the patient's best interests in our new humanistic model."

By contrast, in the traditional model of the doctor-patient relationship, even with the institution of Medicaid and Medicare, physicians and the poorest patients often "worked out" how payment could be handled, human compassion contributing unbilled hours to a physician's workweek.

Can the loss of this compassion in the new relationship be measured? Not exactly, but studies in my files use a statistical method to determine that investors believe value is destroyed rather than created in the new healthcare model. And a plastic surgeon in northeast Indiana was convincing in his talk with me that the effect is adverse on multiple levels. I quote at some length to capture his intensity:

"The physician's highest priority will become the whims and wishes of the hospital system, not the needs and desires of the patient. But if the hospital does not prioritize the patients' needs first — and it won't be able to do so because of bureaucratic red tape and regulations — then

the doctor will be forced to render limited substandard care because the 'system' demands it or because the doctor will lose his job for going against the system. And if the nation is put under financial strain or if medical economics dictates rationing, doctors will be ordered to comply; they will be acting as an arm of the government through the authority of their contractual relationship with the hospital. Finally, the hospital-owned medical-practice model will lead to a substantially diminished leadership role for the physician within the

"Does it strike anyone else as odd that Indiana never has a discussion as to whether getting bigger in regard to this or that project, institution or program won't actually improve the situation of those living and working here?"

medical community. Salaried MDs essentially will be co-equal employees with other hospital-employed medical providers such as pharmacists, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and nutritionists, all with different and sometimes conflicting motivations and priorities that may or may not include the individual patient."

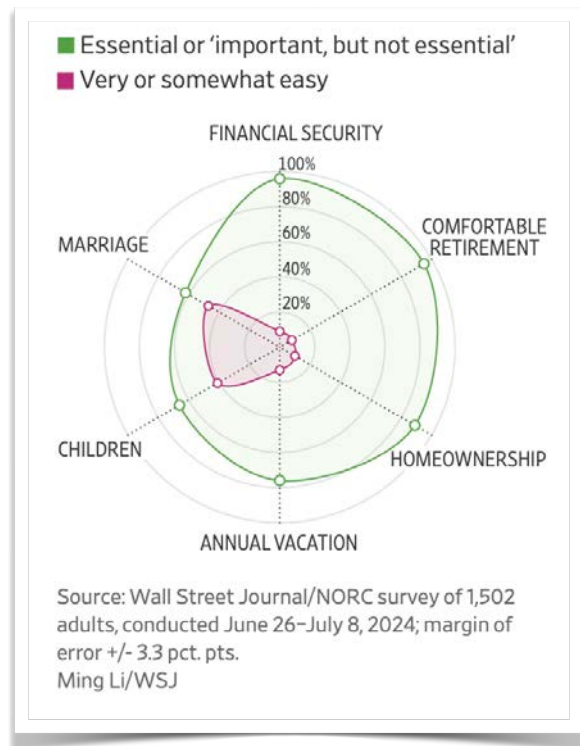
Ridding ourselves of the deadly absurdities of ObamaCare will begin when we re-orientate policy to reflect the proper relationship between the patient (consumer) and the individual physician to reflect the human truth of why people become doctors in the first place. As the surgeon made clear, it is not to find sinecure in a sparkling new hospital set on beautiful acreage. Nor is it to please an administrator or to meet the actuarial expectations of an insurance company or a federal agency. It is to put his knowledge and skills to work healing the individual patient in front of him, hour after hour, day after day.

Such a role assumes — requires — ownership of the process, an ownership that was once built into the operation manuals of the great hospitals, e.g., the Mayo Clinic, the Cleveland Clinic and, locally, the Indiana University Medical Center and Riley Children's Hospital.

The ObamaCare experience says that this ownership, epitomized by the private practitioner, is absolute. It is destroyed by even the most measured changes imposed by the command-and-control systems of a modern mega-hospital. And all of the warning signs — the loss of transparency, the inscrutable billing, the impersonal economics applied to even life-and-death decisions — tell us that corporate medicine is no substitute.

In a backhanded admission that bigness is not everything, the Wall Street Journal reported

What's Left of the American Dream



Q. When it comes to achieving your own vision of the American dream, how important is each of the following? And in the U.S. today, how easy is it to achieve each one?

recently that more than 300 hospitals have begun dispatching paramedics, nurse practitioners and other medical staff to treat patients at home. Dare we call this a return to “house calls”?

Conclusion

Again, does it strike anyone else as odd that Indiana never has a discussion as to whether getting bigger in regard to this or that project, institution or program won’t actually improve the situation of those living and working here? That makes no sense. There must be some project, institute or program that would work best at its current size or even a bit smaller. The American dream must come in various sizes.

Chesterton, Schumacher and the others quoted here come to the same thought from their different places and times. It is that an economics of numbers, statistics and graphs that serves only

soulless corporations and governments is not worth study.

For living, breathing humans can only be themselves, only be happy, in optimum-sized groups, not as units in ever-larger mega-organizations, or so Schumacher argued. His grand challenge, thrown down to modern economist and politicians alike, is this paper’s conclusion:

“We must learn to think in terms of an articulated structure that can cope with a multiplicity of small-scale units. If economic thinking cannot grasp this, then it is useless. If it only engages in vast abstractions such as the national income, the rate of growth, capital/output ratio, input-output analysis, labor mobility, capital accumulation, instead of addressing the human realities of poverty, frustration, alienation, despair, breakdown, crime, escapism, stress, congestion, ugliness and spiritual death, then let us scrap economics and start afresh.” ♦

Epilogue

The reader will forgive me for not including perhaps the most compelling example that big is not better, that is, the disastrous consolidation of Indiana’s local schools into regional public school corporations. It was decided that the foundation had written so often on this subject and in such depth that the space available could not do it justice.

I recommend instead that you go to www.inpolicy.org and use the search function for “student-based budgeting,” “government schools” or just “education reform.” Also, several earlier journals were dedicated to education reform and can be accessed under the “journals” tab. You will find a wealth of material arguing that we take education away from the state and the districts and return it to the school and the classroom.

For the same reason, I did not take up the many examples in the long stretch that is military history, specifically the principle of the Prussian *Auftragstaktik* later developed as “mission type”

tactics in U.S. and British forces. The tactic, a classic example of smaller is better and local is best, gives small units clearly defined objectives but their officers must work out the details. This allows a high degree of flexibility at the operational levels of command, which makes for faster decision-making on the ground. (*Tip of the hat to Mark Franke.*)

Nor did I compare jobs data between corporations and proprietorships because, as argued in the article, the numbers are both politicized in origin and misleading in application, employment multipliers particularly. For instance, in bidding successfully for a subsidy from the city of Indianapolis, United Airlines promised to create hundreds of jobs that later turned out to be cooks and waitress in a 200-mile radius of the proposed airline hub, which, not so incidentally, closed a few years later.

Finally, material for this article was freely borrowed from past work, specifically: “Where Did Your Doctor Go?” in the Winter 2015 edition of *The Indiana Policy Review*; and “The Fall of the Star: Ownership Mattered” in an Aug. 13, 2019, “Outstater” column.

Andrea Neal

Andrea Neal, formerly editorial page editor of the Indianapolis Star, is a history teacher and the author of three books, including “Road Trip: A Pocket History of Indiana” and “Pence: The Path to Power.” Most recently, she edited “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles.” This essay has been adapted from a talk she is giving to Indiana groups preparing for the upcoming anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.



Keep Your Eye on Founding Principles

If only George Washington could see us now ... what would he say?

“Didn’t I warn you that political parties are a bad idea?”

“Have you forgotten my advice about avoiding foreign entanglements?”

“Just look at your credit cards. \$34 trillion in outstanding debt. Apparently you ignored that part of my Farewell Address that urged you to pay your bills quickly so as not to burden the next generation.”

Yet here we are – so politically divided that an assassination attempt of our former president surprised almost no one.

So entangled in global affairs – we’ve committed 175 billion dollars in Ukraine related aid and, according to the Stacker newswire, are involved in more than a dozen shadow wars from Afghanistan to Yemen.

My latest check of the national debt clock put it at 34.9 trillion and counting. We have burdened the next generation beyond anything George Washington could have imagined.

What would Washington and our other founding fathers have to say?

That was the question — and premise — behind the publication: *Indiana Mandate, A Return to Founding Principles, An Agenda for the 2020s*. I worked on this book with Craig

Ladwig, executive director of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, with the intention of examining current issues — local, state and national — from the lens of the founding generation. With the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence right around the corner, we hoped to get people talking about the many ways this country has strayed from the principles of limited government, rule of law, individual rights and economic freedom that have been the foundation of our country since 1776. And we asked the question: Can we return to those founding principles before it’s too late?

What is the evidence that the United States — in many ways — has lost its way? Consider the following:

On a global index of economic freedom, the United States ranks 25th — trailing such countries as Lithuania, Cyprus, Chile and the United Arab Emirates. The 2024 Index, conducted by the Heritage Foundation, looked at economic policies and conditions in 184 sovereign countries from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, and ranked the countries on a 100-point scale. It found that the average global score for economic freedom is the lowest it has been since 2001 — at 58.6.

What’s notable is the continuing decline of the United States, whose score dropped to 70.1, its lowest level ever in the 30-year history of the Index. According to Heritage, the primary reason for a decline in economic freedom here is excessive government spending, which has resulted in mounting deficit and debt burdens. These threaten the quality of life of our children and grandchildren. Placing in the top three in the ranking are Singapore, Switzerland and Ireland.

Political freedom is likewise on the decline globally and in the United States. A ranking conducted annually by Freedom House looks at political rights and civil liberties on a 100-point scale. The organization reports that “Global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year in 2023. The scope and scale of deterioration were extensive, affecting one-fifth of the

world's population. Almost everywhere, the downturn in rights was driven by attacks on pluralism — the peaceful coexistence of people with different political ideas, religions or ethnic identities — that harmed elections and sowed violence.”

The United States registered a score of 83, down from 86 prior to the pandemic, and behind such countries as Uruguay, the Bahamas, Slovenia and Portugal. Now, Freedom House has a bit of a left-wing ideological bias, so I disagree with them on the culprits behind the U.S. decline but I certainly agree that our political freedom is under attack. Political division and discord in this country have resulted in suppression of views, especially of conservatives and Christians, an increase in political violence, and concern for election integrity. And the Justice Department has been weaponized for political purposes.

What can we do about these trends?

The Indiana Policy Review believes the place to start is educating ourselves. We the people and our elected officials need to understand what the issues are and how we can apply founding principles to them. And some of these issues are complicated.

We started by picking 75 topics that are of concern today and researching what if anything the founders might have said about them. In some cases, there is clear and convincing evidence of what they thought. On some issues, we had to extrapolate. And in some, we stretched a bit in order to include them. It was a fascinating exercise and one I think all policy minded people should do before staking out a position on anything. After establishing the founders' views, we offered context and data for the issue in today's times. And whenever possible we suggested actions steps policymakers should take to take into consideration founding principles.

Let me share some examples.

Let's start with the economy, which voters consistently indicate is a top issue heading into the 2024 elections. On many of the economic issues on which Republicans and Democrats

disagree, the founders' philosophy is indisputable. They opposed excessive taxation.

While their primary concern in the revolutionary era was taxation without representation, they understood that government should tax only for urgent need. George Washington wrote, "... towards the payment of debts there must be revenue ... to have revenue there must be taxes ... (and) ... no taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant." Today, the combined rate of federal, state and local taxes on the average middle class wage earner is approaching 50 percent ... talk about unpleasant. As Craig Ladwig noted, that's a rate that would make even King George blush. The solution is self-evident. Government must spend less in order to tax less. The public has to demand discipline from our elected representatives.

The founders were firm in their support of property rights. Thomas Jefferson borrowed heavily from John Locke's second treatise in which Locke said that even in a state of nature, where no government exists, "No one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions." Jefferson's wording transformed Locke's thought into "life liberty and happiness," suggesting that happiness and property are related. George Washington said, "Freedom and property are inseparable. You can't have one without the other."

The founders warned against incurring government debt that couldn't be paid off quickly. Washington referred to it as "ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burden which we ourselves ought to bear."

The founders opposed earmarks — those bills that direct tax dollars to specific projects in lawmakers home districts. James Monroe said federal money should be limited to "great national works only, since if it were unlimited it would be liable to abuse and might be productive of evil." Did you know that in January 2021 Congress brought back earmarks after a decade long moratorium? In 2023, Congress passed 7,396

earmarks costing \$26 billion. Notably and worthy of kudos, Indiana ranked near the bottom in pork per capita at \$5.70. Alaska ranked at the top at \$668. Some would contend Indiana's congressional representatives are failing to get Indiana its fair share. But this should not be a competition to fleece the taxpayers. The only solution: Ban earmarks altogether.

In sharp contrast to the national government, Indiana's lawmakers are conscientious about spending and debt, our constitution places limits on debt, and our laws protecting private property are commendable. However, there are threats aplenty at the state level to our fiscal freedom. Economic development policies, as one example, distort market forces by picking winners and losers. This was one of the few issues on which the Republican gubernatorial candidates actually disagreed in the primary campaigns.

Economic development sounds worthy. The stated purpose of the Indiana Economic Development Commission and related municipal and regional agencies is to grow the economy and create good paying jobs. Their chief strategy, however, is to offer tax relief or subsidies to certain types of business ventures – from hotels to convention centers. We taxpayers fund all sorts of things that benefit some but not all – such as Lucas Oil Stadium where the Indianapolis Colts play. Indianapolis taxpayers are right now helping to finance the new Signia by Hilton Hotel downtown because the project couldn't get loans from the private sector.

The example that you all are familiar with and that has been in the news is the LEAP (Lebanon Innovation District). At first blush, it sounds fantastic. It's been billed as the economy of the future. 9,000-plus acres with advanced manufacturing, ag-bio science, defense, high tech logistics. The IEDC, which by the way is a quasi-public agency that receives minimal legislative review, has committed almost a billion dollars in tax dollars to it.

The case can be made – and was strongly made by Eric Doden and Brad Chambers in the GOP primary – that this will benefit Indiana's economy, employ thousands, lead to technological advances etc. But what would the Founders say about it?

I think they'd object. The First Congress rejected a bill to loan money to a glassmaker as unconstitutional favoritism. In a debate during the second congress, South Carolina Rep. Hugh Williamson opposed a bill to pay a bounty to New England cod fishermen because it sought to – “gratify one part of the union by oppressing the other.”

We hear the term crony capitalism thrown around a lot. It's something we need to be concerned about because it limits economic freedom. The founders would point out that crony capitalism caused the Boston Tea Party. Colonists objected to the Tea Act of 1773 because it granted the East India Company a monopoly on tea exported to the colonies, exempted the company from the export tax and guaranteed it a “drawback” or (refund) of duties owed on surplus quantities of tea in its possession. The tea act benefited some at the expense of all.

Let's move from the economy to election integrity. If the Indiana Policy Review were to prioritize one issue above all others in “Indiana Mandate,” it would be election integrity. If we cannot trust the accuracy and fairness of our electoral process, our republic is sunk.

The latest survey I could find on this was CNN's from August 2023, when 69 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning voters questioned the legitimacy of Joe Biden's election. That's a lot of “election deniers.” Many in the Republican Party are saying the only solution is to beat the Democrats at their own game – to do everything possible to maximize early voting and mail-in ballots so the GOP's lead can't be eroded by “middle of the night” vote-counting shenanigans. Elon Musk just committed 45 million-dollars a month to a political

action committee that will focus on early voting efforts.

What would the founders say?

The earliest elections occurred by voice vote or paper ballot, and — as today — fraud was a concern. Candidates greeted voters at the polls, often offering food and drink to opponents as well as supporters. Elections in the early republic sometimes lasted two or three days to accommodate those traveling long distances to the courthouse. The idea of month-long early voting periods or mail-in ballots, however, would defy the founders’ understanding of “election day” as a patriotic and social affair that brought citizens together for what Samuel Adams called “one of the most solemn trusts in human society.”

Absentee and early voting are modern inventions. Absentee voting began during the Civil War so soldiers could participate in the 1864 presidential election, but it wasn’t until 1921 that a state — Louisiana — enacted the first absentee law. California was the first state to offer absentee voting for any reason in the 1970s, and Texas offered early in-person voting starting in the late 1980s.

This trend continued and accelerated during the Covid pandemic. In 2016, two in five ballots cast for the general election were early, absentee or by mail. In 2020, 43 states allowed early voting with windows ranging from a few days to almost 50. In Indiana, early voting starts 28 days prior to the election.

Early voting sounds democratic but creates a huge risk of fraud and ballot damage, misplacement or accidental destruction. As observed by political commentator Deroy Murdock, “Making early ballots disappear from overwhelmingly Democratic or Republican precincts could throw elections. Even if nothing inappropriate happens, as ballots gather dust, they generate suspicions of monkey business, especially in skin-tight races. Such doubts corrode confidence in institutions and officials.”

Early voting is changing the fundamental nature of campaigning, making it more expensive

and thus more likely to benefit incumbents, who have budgets, staff and tactical ability to conduct get-out-the-early-vote efforts. Further, early voting changes the very nature of the election season. From Labor Day until early November, candidates have the opportunity to appeal to the people, and citizens have the opportunity to debate. According to constitutional law professors Eugene Kontorovich and John McGinnis, “The integrity of that space is broken when some citizens cast their ballots as early as 46 days before the election, as some states allow. A lot can happen in those 46 days. Early voters are, in essence, asked a different set of questions from later ones; they are voting with a different set of facts.”

Indiana can be a leader here. Under the Elections Clause of the Constitution, state legislatures hold the power to determine time, place and manner of federal as well as state elections. Any effort to address the chaotic hodgepodge of voting rules and procedures that exist around the country needs to begin at the state level.

Indiana lawmakers could and should return to single-day voting on Election Day, expand voting day hours (6 a.m. to 9 p.m.), increase the number of polling sites and continue to offer absentee ballots to Hoosiers with legitimate reasons they cannot vote in person at the polls. Indiana has the opportunity to create a model law that restores the integrity of Election Day but preserves the opportunity for all eligible citizens to vote.

At the federal level, we should make Election Day the most important national holiday, rivaling Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. Countries that do this have higher voter participation rates than the United States.

Turning to education, another issue that continues to be at the top of voter priority lists. Here’s what is absolutely clear: The Founders were not worried about college or career readiness, which are the obsession of politicians and business leaders today. They saw the primary purpose of education as “civic” — as unifying, as

essential to character development. They understood that the ability to read, write and think is essential if citizens are to take part in representative democracy.

That thought was written into the Declaration by Thomas Jefferson: Governments “derive their just powers from the consent of the governed,” and it was assumed education made that consent possible. It was never suggested that the government order students to attend certain schools, and the wording in subsequent state constitutions made clear that the establishment of public schools was for regions where schools had not yet been established.

The Founders considered civic education essential to continued good government. In his Farewell Address, George Washington said, “A primary object should be the education of our youth in the science of government. In a republic what species of knowledge can be equally important? And what duty more pressing than communicating it to those who are to be the future guardians of the liberties of our country.”

At that we have failed abysmally. We laugh when the late-night comedians air “man on the street” interviews showing just how ignorant Americans are of their history. I watched one on Prager U’s channel the other morning conducted at the National Mall. When was the Declaration of Independence signed? 1904. To what political party did Lincoln belong? Democratic. In a recent Annenberg survey, less than half of Americans were able to name all three branches of government.

To our great detriment, we have lost the Founders understanding – that the new country would remain free only if people were educated in good government and history – and we need to get that understanding back.

As a side note, the Founders were all-in on phonics. Noah Webster, best known as the author of the dictionary, noted that “every child in America ... should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice.” Webster’s “blue-backed spellers,” used

during the 18th and 19th centuries, taught children to spell and read by learning explicitly the relationship between letters and sounds. The Indiana General Assembly has been trying to get “science of reading” back into the schools, but it hasn’t been easy because of resistance from the education schools and teachers unions.

Moving on to the administrative state, the bureaucracy, the swamp. The Founders would be aghast at where power lies in our country today – it lies with executive branch agencies and employees. They would surely be in favor of Vivek Ramaswamy’s proposal to cut the federal workforce by 75 percent.

The Founders created a system of checks and balances with separation of powers to ensure no one branch overpowered the others. Their writings, however, make clear that they considered the legislative branch the most important because it was elected by the people. It’s horrifying to report that executive branch agencies enact more policies each year than Congress itself.

In 2023, the Biden administration issued 3,018 regulations with the force of law, compared with 65 laws passed by Congress during the same period. This directly relates to the economic freedom rankings I mentioned earlier. The National Association of Manufacturers reports that the cost to the economy of regulatory compliance exceeded 3 trillion dollars in 2022. For a typical U.S. business, regulations cost about 19 percent of payroll expenditures. This system has been decades in the making and will take time to solve, but Congress can start with a simple accountability measure. Require lawmakers to vote all major rules into law. Congress should feel empowered in this regard by the Supreme Court’s recent, welcome decision to overturn the Chevron precedent, which had essentially allowed federal agencies to interpret the laws they administer with almost no oversight.

Let me finish by sharing a few of things that surprised and delighted me about the Founders.

As you might imagine “Indiana Mandate” does not buy into the validity of climate change. The

Founders would not have supported President Biden's effort to shut down coal plants or to phase out fossil fuels; they would have agreed with the philosophy of energy independence as a matter of national security.

That said, they liked trees, and would probably approve of tree-planting and tree conservation as the best method of carbon capture, which reduces air pollution.

British historian Andrea Wulf, in her book "Founding Gardeners," credits James Madison, the father of the Constitution, with being a forefather of the American environmental movement. "Madison feared that if society lived off nature at the current rate it would eventually destroy it and that man had to return to nature what man took from it," Wulf writes. Notably, Madison's residence in Montpelier, Va., maintained hundreds of acres of untamed forest, which he saw as a treasured asset. The fourth president demonstrated his affinity for forests into retirement when he protested unnecessary logging in an 1818 address to the Agricultural Society of Albermarle County, admonishing farmers for "the injudicious and excessive destruction of timber and fire wood."

The Founders would not have supported subsidies of electric vehicles, but they probably would have been fascinated by the technology. They were noted tinkerers, Ben Franklin's experiments with lightning being just one example.

For that reason, they might think ChatGPT and Artificial Intelligence are pretty cool – but surely they would worry about their use in K-12 classrooms before students acquire the necessary skills of reading, writing and critical thinking.

Finally, an issue of great importance to the next generations. They would tell the Indiana legislature: Do not follow the crowd. Do not legalize marijuana. They would tell the Biden administration: Treat fentanyl as a public health emergency. Dr. Benjamin Rush, founding father and founder of the first medical school in the United States, warned his colleagues that

overconsumption of distilled spirits negatively affected industry, health and morals. His then novel theories about alcoholism and addiction have all been proved correct by subsequent research.

The founders of our country knew what they were doing when they created the United States of America. They had insight into almost every issue confronting us today. We talk in "Indiana Mandate" about such diverse issues as the autism epidemic, vaccine mandates, Midwest exceptionalism, term limits, wind power and abortion.

Our country is on the verge of squandering a great inheritance. Let us honor the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by reclaiming their wisdom, their political philosophy, and their founding principles. ♦

Eric Schansberg

Eric Schansberg, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, is Professor of Economics at Indiana University Southeast and the author of "Poor Policy: How Government Harms the Poor."



'Of Boys and Men' (Richard Reeves)

In his book "Of Boys and Men," Brookings Institution scholar Richard Reeves brings welcome attention to the struggles of men and boys in contemporary society. (He focuses on American society, but sporadically notes that this is a general phenomenon in developed countries. From the limited international data and anecdotes, it seems likely that American problems are worse.) He has a clever opening line — that his concern for his own boys has bled over into his day job, into worries about boys and men in society (x).

He revisits the same angle in his conclusion, noting that even staunch feminists are concerned for their own boys (183).

Reeves hopes to add to a sporadic literature (x) and normalize the topic. In a word, he does a terrific job in discussing the problems of boys and men with respect to education, labor markets and family. But his proposed solutions are less impressive, suffering from the inherent limits of public policy, sins of commission (unwarranted optimism about some well-intentioned proposals) and sins of omission (a reluctance to discuss certain problems/solutions).

Reeves notes that society and elites often focus on race, class and gender. But the focus on gender rarely includes men, despite obvious problems for men revealed by traditional metrics. Analysis, reporting and levels of concern are wildly inconsistent between the genders. Likely reasons include inertia, ignorance and lack of imagination. In covering his flank, Reeves cites another cause:

that defense of men is often seen as an attack on women. He is careful to say (repeatedly) that one can be in support of both men and women — that we can hold two thoughts in our heads at the same time. In a word, it should be women and men, rather than women versus men. (As an aside, Reeves argues for [only] two genders, while describing other expressions of genders as exceptions to this rule [89, 121]. It was reasonable to avoid the topic of transgenders in women's sports, but it's unfortunate that he doesn't at least mention Abigail Shrier's fine book with its focus on gender.)

In part, this is related to a broader fallacy— conflating the win/win of economic markets with the win/lose of political markets. Ironically, people often ignorantly imagine a zero-sum economic world, while somehow perversely imagining a positive-sum political world. Although counterexamples are possible in both realms, these exceptions only serve to illustrate the rules. Given the subtle and long-term costs of government intervention, this is an easy but regrettable and immensely damaging intellectual mistake to make.

In terms of the rhetoric, a related issue is the inconsistent use of terms such as "systemic racism". Even when the concepts are defined in a coherent manner, they are rarely applied consistently. (When those wielding the term won't start such a discussion with government's K-12 education and the impact of welfare policies on family structure and stability, you can know that you're dealing with a rube or someone who thinks you're a rube.) In the context of gender, we might imagine a concept such as "systemic genderism". But even if so, Reeves would argue that it would usually be applied only to women.

Reeves is also really helpful on the relevant basic statistical concepts. We often hear comparisons of averages/means, without understanding the overlap in the underlying group distributions (24). Even if group X has higher average outcomes than group Y, it can still be quite likely that any given individual in group Y will have better outcomes than any given person

in group X or even the average X. Averages matter, but don't get too excited about them.

In Chapter 1, Reeves details the struggle of boys and men with education: fewer AP courses, lower GPA's, lower graduation rates from HS and college and fewer study abroad experiences. Women have made remarkable strides in higher ed, especially in grad school. Another concern, looking forward: males struggle more with on-line education (4). Interestingly, the federal government does not require states to report data by gender (7-8), when it does for race, class and other factors. As for explanations of these gender gaps, Reeves emphasizes biology and the timing of brain development (8-11). But he also asserts an "aspiration gap" — a fuzzy but likely difference in the hopes and goals of men and women these days (17).

In Chapter 2, Reeves turns to the world of work, including sobering numbers — e.g., one-third of men ages 25-54 with a high school education are not in the labor force (19). He notes that women's wages have risen while men's have declined slightly (23). While it's useful to see the contrast, ignoring other forms of compensation is a common but regrettable compromise.

Reeves notes that the overall gender pay gap is "math not myth" (26), but then asks the more important question: why? Here, he thankfully goes beyond univariate analysis, focusing on women's frequently-intermittent labor market focus in child-bearing years.

For decades, childless men and women have had equivalent labor-market outcomes.

In terms of men's labor market struggles, he points to automation and trade — causing increased labor market competition, especially in male-dominated fields. Exacerbating the problem: women have moved into male-dominated fields (notably, in STEM [science, tech, engineering, math]), while men have not returned the favor (notably, in HEAL [health, education, admin, literacy]).

In Chapter 3, Reeves discusses family and culture, including noteworthy numbers (e.g., 30 percent of wives out earn their husbands) and

sobering stats (e.g., 40% of all children are born into non-married households, but the percentage is much higher in lower income classes [35]). "The separation of men from women too often means the separation of fathers from children. This is bad for men, bad for women and bad for children." (41).

Ironically, expectations of prospective husbands have been static, especially among the lower income classes where the drop-offs have been particularly severe — what he calls "culture lagging economics" (36-37). Reeves says that women's places in society and economy have changed, while men's have remained stagnant. He argues that a change in expectations for men is appropriate given the changes for women — and thus, men.

Reeves will discuss welfare later, but one would hope for a significant mention of this by now in the book. The fact is that government has become a substitute for men, given payment incentives to be unmarried. And there is a connection between women's welfare and men's work as well. To the extent that men can mooch on women in relationships, the incentive to work is reduced. Another omission: Reeves discussed education in chapter 2, but there is little or no effort to connect poor educational outcomes (in government schools) to the job market woes in chapter 3. Reeves is also interested in "intersectionality" (46) — how gender intersects with race, class, etc. in chapters 4-5. In terms of class and gender, "deaths of despair" (from Case and Deaton) are three times higher for men than women — and these problems are concentrated in the lower income classes (60). Men have 70 percent of the opioid deaths, with half of prime-age males out of the labor force on prescription pain medicine in 2016 (62). Men are three times as likely to commit suicide (63). Here, welfare gets a brief mention — that women see men "as just another mouth to feed, an inversion of the men's expected role." (64)

Reeves cites Sawhill's research (65) on class, marriage and births in/out of marriage, but he should have referenced Murray's powerful

work, "Coming Apart." (He does cite Murray's *Human Diversity* on gender later — as "a thorough, mostly balanced, summary." [125]) One irony: The women with the most independence are far more likely to get married and stay married (65). "I don't think Gloria Steinem or anyone else thought that this was how things would unfold." The impact of tough neighborhoods and peer effects is stronger for boys (70). The impact of family structure on educational outcomes is also rougher for boys (71).

With Trump's choice of J.D. Vance, class will continue to be a political factor, at least from the GOP side. (If you haven't read it or seen the movie, "Hillbilly Elegy" is worth a look.) Still, far more could have been said here. Reeves notes the impact of family structure on children, but provides few cites about that impact, especially on boys. This is unfortunate (and telling), since the literature on single-parent households and children (especially boys) is voluminous, powerful, and not at all surprising. Reeves goes light here — and barely works to close the loop with respect to the welfare policies that have contributed significantly.

In terms of race and gender, Reeves points to educational outcomes (50) and to prison and the War on Drugs (53). Again, the inconvenience of the simplistic ideological metrics is in play here again: "There is a real reluctance to focus on the particular challenges faced by Black boys and men . . . [it] doesn't fit into the binary models of racism and sexism that many are comfortable with." (58) He notes in passing that "Black boys seem to benefit even more than others from engaged fatherhood" (56), but the attention devoted to this key variable is too little.

As with gender by itself, the cherry-picking extends into "intersectionality." Again, the answers are "inconvenient" and thus, usually ignored. "Class warriors downplay gender concerns . . . , gender warriors play down class concerns . . . But inequalities of class and gender have to be considered together, especially when

they pull in opposite directions." (61) The same holds true with race and gender (along with class): when black women are doing much better than black men and even white men, what are gender or race ideologues to do?

In chapter 7, Reeves turns to the role of biology. He notes that men tend to be more aggressive/violent and more likely to take risks and engage in heroism (89-92). Men are more interested in sex (93), so getting rid of "sex workers" is wishful thinking. (He recommends decriminalizing prostitution.) And then he goes "intersectional" again, noting the interplay between gender, culture and family structure (94-95).

In chapters 8-9, Reeves throws hammers at both the Left and the Right. He claims that the Left makes too little of biology, while the Right makes too much of it. The aversion to science on the Left is odd and noteworthy, given the prevailing rhetoric and conventional (incorrect) wisdom on such things. Again, differences in groups don't necessarily imply differences between individuals. Moreover, differences don't have to be universally good/bad. And even if so, bad differences for one group can easily be offset by good differences within the same group. His conclusion: "Denying science altogether is not useful . . . The rather boring truth is that masculine traits are more useful in some contexts and feminine ones in others." (87)

Reeves finds "toxic masculinity" to be an unethical, inconsistent and impractical term. Unethical in slandering immaturity and naturally-occurring traits. Impractical in pushing boys to the "online manosphere" instead of engaging them in dialogue — and driving men to the opposing political and ideological side. Inconsistent in that the same terminology is not applied to girls who behave badly. He also notes that the Left inverts its usual penchant for blaming external factors rather than the individual. Bottom line: The Left is only willing to talk about gender when it comes to women's disadvantages. This is intellectually dishonest and not helpful to society.

Perhaps someone from the Left would critique aspects of his argument (although I didn't catch anything). In terms of the Right, it's mostly fine, except for his strange insistence on their advocacy of "traditional marriage" rather than merely marriage. I'm sure there's some of the former within the Right, but I don't see it as a major player. I'm not sure whether he sees the world this way or was merely looking for a convenient dichotomy to look unbiased. He does make an interesting point about marriage — that it worked in the past, while reducing autonomy of both men and women (34).

Reeves also pokes at conservatives for not having good policy ideas. But this is mostly the pot calling the kettle black. In chapter 6, he notes that policy doesn't generally work well in this realm (77). In chapters 10-12, Reeves turns to policy in education, labor and family, but leaves the (educated) reader feeling less than satisfied. Political leadership is bereft (184), so this should encourage more realism than wishful thinking from Reeves. In any case, there is little that

government can do; these are largely cultural matters. Related: Reeves points to the possibility of Affirmative Action for men in education (14-15), but notes that this can't be a long-term solution. Another odd omission: absolutely no mention of the Church (and the relevant literatures).

One last point: Reeves points to gains for women since Title IX (3). But it's not clear the extent to which those gains are caused by versus merely correlated with Title IX. An irony: to the extent one thinks it's causal, then they should now be eager to advocate government remedies for men in some settings. If not, we're back to the sort of inconsistencies one often sees in these realms.

We must do better. But the solutions are largely individual and cultural—and surely, even for a secular social scientist, the Gospel and the Church have a significant role to play. At the end of the day, Reeves' book is really good at pointing fingers, but not so much in helping us find answers. ♦

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'Money and the Rule of Law' (Peter Boettke et al.)

Money has a social function and is an emergent institution. Together with private property, the rule of law and free exchange that allows for price discovery money improves the processes of coordination, cooperation and innovation that generate flourishing in our lives.

Money reveals profit and loss (Mises 1951), directing the activities of entrepreneurs. When money is bad, economic calculation is frustrated and economic growth falters. Governance of money needs to be disciplined by the rule of law, recognizing each person's holdings of money as a property subject to taxation only by democratic consensus and sensitive to how interventions may affect market processes. In "Money and the Rule of Law," Peter J. Boettke, Alexander William Salter and Daniel J. Smith consider the Federal Reserve (Fed) and argue that its structure of governance, open to the discretion of Fed officials, cannot be robust to knowledge problems or incentive problems, and consequently the Fed must be bound by a monetary rule.

The authors present their argument in seven chapters. Following an introduction (Chapter 1) the authors explain the knowledge problem and the incentive problem as they relate to discretionary monetary policy as practiced by a central bank (Chapters 2 and 3). It is shown that the incentives faced by experts within the Fed often lead those who ought to be monetary crisis firefighters to behave as arsonists (Chapter 4). The authors demonstrate the evolving concerns of Nobel Laureates F.A. Hayek, Milton Friedman and James Buchanan regarding the vulnerabilities of discretionary monetary policy (Chapter 5).

Therefore, the authors argue that the rule of law ought to govern monetary policy (Chapter 6). In conclusion the authors relate their argument to the maintenance of classical liberal institutions (Chapter 7).

In 2004, Boettke and Peter Leeson initiated a research program in "Robust Political Economy" (Leeson & Subrick 2006; Pennington 2010). A robust political economy interrogates a field of public policy with concerns about epistemology and incentives. Successful projects in this program include Christopher J. Coyne's and Abigail Hall's (2021) work on military propaganda; and more recently, studies on government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (Candela & Geloso 2021).

The "robust" (Levy 2002) approach to political economy searches for institutional arrangements that, when populated by knavish (Hume 1777) or ignorant participants, avoid outcomes that would not be anticipated by nor preferred by those same participants. To test the robustness of a policy regime the political economist applies two sets of standards. First, the regime must not presume decision-makers to already have knowledge that is only generated by the process (Kirzner 1963) being governed (Hayek 1945). Second, the regime must not presume that decision-makers will violate their own self-interests in pursuit of some ephemeral ideal outcome (Buchanan and Tullock 1962).

In contrast, interventionist monetary policy presumes the following: First, that there has been a market failure (for example, a decrease in nominal spending growth) such that financial markets will not correct themselves. Second, that the expert-officials at the Fed can obtain information in a timely manner and implement a new policy that corrects for the supposed market failure with such precision and rapidity that the policy implemented does not undershoot or overshoot its target. Third, that officials at the Fed are constrained by appropriate accountability to sufficiently democratic institutions such that Fed policy does not result in unanticipated redistributive outcomes. Upon rigorous analysis

by Boettke, Salter and Smith we are reminded that Fed officials are neither omniscient nor angelic.

Monetary policy as practiced by technicians at the Fed has sought to fine tune the instruments at its disposal (and has often invented new instruments at its own discretion) with the aim of achieving the most efficient solution between the dual mandates of stable price growth and unemployment. There are no solutions, however, there are only tradeoffs (Sowell 2015), and pursuit of efficiency has come at the cost of robustness.

The Fed does have rules. However, as the authors show, the Fed also has the discretion to bypass its rules. Such an institution is not accountable to those who are affected by its decisions. When the Fed has faced financial market uncertainty, pressure from politicians in the Executive and Legislative branches, or pressure from special interests within the market, the Fed has failed to implement efficient policies, to follow its own rules, and to produce outcomes that would achieve consensus from all of those affected by its actions. Burton Abrams (2006) has revealed how Richard Nixon put the screws on Arthur Burns, and laughed in his face (p. 75), but this example is merely the tip of the iceberg among instances where the Fed violated its independence from politics and duty to the rule of law.

Standing on the shoulders of giants, the authors outline the increasing skepticism of Hayek, Friedman and Buchanan towards the Fed. Hayek's opinion evolved away from attempts to implement better technical controls over the Fed to advocating "the abolition of central banks" (1978). Friedman's thought evolved from arguing that government must provide money early in his career (1948) to a rejection of "the ability of discretionary monetary authorities to be able to achieve sound money" (p. 138). Buchanan began from an open exploration of alternative monetary institutions and "became convinced that the only solution was to constitutionalize money" (p. 140). The implication is that careful classical liberal analysis leads to concerns about discretionary monetary policy.

Given the rapid changes in Fed policy surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the unexpected inflation of 2022 and political volatility this book may require a revised edition sooner rather than later. The authors acknowledge as much, noting that the book went to print near the beginning of the pandemic. However, the principles outlined in *Money and the Rule of Law* are explicitly of the sort that do not waver in response to current events. Salter and Smith, along with authors like William Luther, director of the Sound Money Project at the American Institute for Economic Research, continue to apply those principles in their regular publications in academic journals and popular outlets.

The reader comes to appreciate both the soundness of the methodology found in robust political economy, and the argument for a Fed bound by the rule of law. The book is thoroughly researched. Each chapter includes references readily pursued by the reader.

I have personally assigned this book the last two semester to my Intermediate Macroeconomics students who have completed very satisfactory term papers based upon it and the references within, and I plan to use it again in coming semesters. Inflation in the last year has demonstrated that the experts at the Fed have a limited understanding of the consequences of their interventions.

Now is the time to constrain them from making more errors in the future. Boettke, Salter and Smith could not have provided the argument for a classical-liberal monetary rule of law at a more urgent time. ♦

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Is China a Threat?

(Aug. 29) — It is interesting to observe how public opinion can change in short order. Twenty or so years ago China was viewed as an ideal market for American goods as it began an economic liberalization away from state-controlled communism toward a somewhat freer market system. The thought was that the purchasing power of its peasant population would rise with this economic liberalization.

Now China is viewed by many as an existential threat to our well-being.

What changed?

My Socratic discussion group took up this topic at our August monthly meeting. As in past months, we found that we disagreed on several points, but always collegially in tone and intentional in our resolution to find a common answer.

One of our disagreements was over the potential danger in the amount of U. S. debt held by China. One of our group pointed out that this debt is not held by the Chinese government but by wealthy Chinese individuals who see the U. S. economy as a safe harbor for their wealth. The assumption is that these investors will serve as a brake on China's communist leadership's antagonism. Let's hope that this belief comes from realistic insight and not unrealistic optimism.

Related to the debt issue is the trade imbalance which heavily favors China. The net result of this on-going imbalance is nearly a trillion American dollars in Chinese hands. On the plus side this puts China under a constraint to protect the strength of its dollar holdings. Is it any wonder

that so many of these dollars have found their way back to the States invested in American assets? Our group tended to think this was a good thing rather than a threat.

But we did have a few naysayers around the table. China's saber rattling is unsettling. Its occupation of islands in the South China Sea is a direct provocation to its neighbors, many of which are American allies through SEATO, the Pacific version of NATO. Taiwan, a nation we are treaty-bound to protect, lives in constant dread of an invasion from the mainland. The belt and road initiative, an economic scheme to tie other nations to China through investment in trade infrastructure, has had an effect but it is becoming clear that China may have overextended itself financially.

Current Chinese leadership has put the nation on a rearward path back to the communism of Mao's time. It can be argued that this has caused the economic slowdown and exacerbated China's other domestic threats. It's one child policy has led to serious depopulation, especially given that the one child allowed was supposed to be male. Fewer women, fewer births. It's not just a declining population; Chinese people are fleeing the countryside for the cities in a mass migration that makes the U. S. southern border look like an orderly Boy Scout hike. As the economy slows, these migrants have problems finding jobs.

The economics can't be denied. Chinese inflation is rising and its internal debt is twice its GDP, a higher percentage than in the U. S. Its growth rate has slowed, straining government revenues. The most recent Chinese budget reduced subsidies to local governments and restricted borrowing by these local and regional entities.

So far the economic situation, what about the military one?

China has invested heavily in modernizing its armed forces, particularly its navy with dreams of challenging American naval superiority in the western Pacific. Its problem is that these modern weapons are not battle tested and they are being

deployed by inexperienced personnel. Does that mean China must resort to the attritional tactics of its past wars in the next one? The one thing China has in surplus is foot soldiers.

This thought brought our discussion back to the main question: Is China an existential threat to the United States? We concluded that the answer to that question lies within us rather than them. Can the United States demonstrate the resolve to prevent Chinese aggression against our allies and, by extension, us? Are we able to exert the national will to stand as the leader of the free world as we did in World War II and throughout the Cold War? Will the next president act like Churchill or Chamberlain?

The most depressing statement made by one of our group was to indict America as an unserious nation in a serious world.

The simple fact is that we can't really be sure what Chinese leader Xi Jinping will do to address a weakened situation at home while pursuing an expansive posture in East Asia. And probably that is the way the Chinese want things — obscure and unpredictable to everyone else. Yet Xi has warned his lieutenants against an American “black swan” move, that is, one which is unpredictable and with dire consequences.

Maybe it is America that should be on alert for a Chinese black swan.

Taking a Called Third Strike

(Aug. 20) — My hometown minor league baseball team, the Fort Wayne TinCaps, has a bad habit of taking called third strikes. For the baseball agnostics out there, this means the batter doesn't swing at a pitch and strikes out by doing nothing. It is extremely frustrating to the fans in the stands. I can only guess the reaction of the coaching staff.

The other night, the TinCaps were rallying in the ninth inning from a 5-0 deficit. Two runs had scored, two more runners were on base and the potentially tying run was at bat with two outs. The batter absolutely had to put the ball in play but instead, he looked at a third strike.

While I am no baseball genius, it doesn't take one to know that the batter's decision was the worst one he could have made. And this team seems to do that all too often. One game last year with a similar ninth-inning rally in progress, the batter looked at three straight strikes for the third out. He never lifted the bat off his shoulder.

I am certainly not suggesting I could do better. My early baseball career ended when my new pair of bifocals made it difficult for me to figure out which of the two balls coming at me I should hit. I certainly never had to face fastballs headed toward me at 90 plus miles per hour. I would need to start my swing the day before for any chance to catch up to those.

So other than being extremely frustrating for a true fan like me, what does this have to do with real life? My perspective on life is that all can be explained by baseball metaphors. I took a lot of philosophy courses in college so I am allowed to think these grand thoughts. Except for maybe that Plato guy, I consider Yogi Berra to be the greatest philosopher in human history. Yankee haters may want to stop reading now.

It will not surprise my family and friends that I have reduced the 2024 presidential election to a called third-strike situation. That's the only way I can make sense of it.

Kamala Harris apparently has resolved not to swing at any pitches thrown by a mostly friendly media. Her strategy, and it may yet prove a winning one, is to let an accommodating media on the mound ineffectively miss the plate with their softball pitches. Ball four and she takes first base without trying.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump is swinging wildly at every pitch thrown by a mostly antagonistic media. He doesn't care how far off the plate the media pitch is, he swings at it. My philosopher hero Yogi was renowned for hitting bad pitches, very bad ones. Donald Trump is not Yogi Berra.

Kamala Harris is at the other extreme. Has she been asked any pertinent questions by our supposedly non-partisan media? She has reason to be confident . . . at least for now . . . since most

of the national media have been lackadaisical if not completely somnolent when addressing her political record. Recall that the New York Times labeled her a “pragmatic moderate” when Joe Biden selected her as his running mate. This was the same Kamala Harris who scored 100 the previous year on the liberal Americans for Democratic Action spectrum, the same score as self-proclaimed socialist Bernie Sanders.

Back to baseball and my admittedly strained analogy. Neither type of batter, the swing at everything one or the swing at nothing one, helps his team. He is only good for aggravating the fans, even the die-hard ones like me. Does that sound like the current presidential election?

Maybe not so much, as both candidates have their fan base that is quite accomplished at selective rationalization of their candidate’s verbal faux pas. Most of us, sometimes myself included, tend to look first at who said it before considering what was said. One of the joys in my dotage is to watch when the majority party changes and the new minority immediately opposes policy positions they supported when they had all the power. Just look back a decade or two for a quick rehearsal of the two parties’ attitudes about Supreme Court independence.

Perhaps I have pushed the baseball metaphor too far. But maybe not. Consider this: You can bet on any baseball game with the odds changing as the game progresses. You can do exactly the same thing with the presidential election. Contemporary American culture has reduced everything to betting odds.

The major difference is that there will be another baseball game tomorrow when you can try to make good your gambling losses. With the presidential election you are stuck for four years.

Bet wisely.

Witnessing Democracy at Work

(Francesville, Ind. Aug. 5) — It seems the epithet of choice among more than a few politicians is to charge an opponent with being “a threat to democracy.” Mostly this accusation is

used against Donald Trump, his threat being primarily to the election prospects of his opponents.

One can get into an endless debate on whether Republican policies or Democrat policies are the greater threat to our sacred democracy. A libertarian (and I have a libertarian chromosome or two) would suggest both parties represent threats as they proliferate government power through a multitude of federal regulations focused on telling us Americans what we may no longer do.

What is left is the denial of any useful meaning to the word “democracy.” America is not now, nor was it ever, a democracy in the philosophical sense. We are a republic, a form of government in which citizens vote on representatives who vote on laws. Some might call this representative democracy. Fair enough, if properly understood.

That said, representative democracy does exist in America if one looks to the local level. It is in this place where citizens are most likely to have immediate access to their elected representatives. It is here where the citizenry is confronted with the governmental decisions that have the most impact on their daily lives and pocketbooks.

At least that is the way an ad hoc group of citizens in north central Indiana sees it.

As a contributor to The Indiana Policy Review’s “Indiana Mandate: An Agenda for the 2020s,” I was invited to speak to this gathering of community activists on the topic “Property Rights: Theory and Application.” The meeting was held in Francesville, a town in Pulaski County and one I had never visited before. And thanks to the barricades the State Highway Department has placed on state road IN14, I almost didn’t visit it that night..

The group has a common purpose, that of having their voice heard when county officials make decisions on large projects such as wind and solar farms or carbon-dioxide pipelines. These issues are the nexus between practical democracy and property rights. In the words of the Declaration of Independence, we are talking about

the “pursuit of happiness” and how conflicting views of this are adjudicated.

Take the wind farm case as an example. An energy company has negotiated with sufficient north central Indiana landholders to place dozens of these large wind turbines on their farmland. Those farmers feel with some justification that they simply are exercising their pursuit of happiness by disposing of their property as they wish. Many libertarians would agree with them.

But there are always at least two sides to every issue. Adjoining property owners see the value of their land falling due to these windmills. The exercise of property rights by one devalues the property of another. Is this fair?

One complaint of the group, a complaint shared by my colleagues at The Indiana Policy Review, is that these projects are never properly costed. One hears of jobs created, positive economic impact and a laundry list of other putative benefits. Post-project accounting hardly ever attests to the validity of these pre-project claims.

If the project fails to deliver on its promises, what was its true cost? Economists don’t do debit and credit accounting for cost; they use a tool called “opportunity cost,” what one gives up when a choice is made. Most people have never heard this term but they do understand it viscerally. One comment that night was that if a wind farm were to be built where proposed, that ground could never be developed for homes. Exactly.

This is where zoning raises its menacing head. Zoning is typically used to control what can be done within a limited geographic area. Does a zoning decision reduce the right of those within the zone to use their property in pursuit of their happiness or does it rightly preserve the property value of others? Whichever, it represents a power of government subject to abuse by those who wield that power.

A professor from my undergraduate days reduced all public-policy decision-making to identifying whose ox was being gored. In other words it often comes down to who has the most at

stake and their ability to recruit sufficient political support to prevail. If it’s not my ox, I probably don’t care. But if it is my ox, I have the incentive to use the American system of representative democracy to my benefit and for my protection.

The good citizens I met in Francesville definitely see their oxen being gored and are rallying to prevent that. Based on the individual county reports I heard that night, they are having at least a modicum of success — and they remain resolute.

The officials in those counties best gird their metaphysical loins.

Disarming Rhetorical Violence

(July 30) — My monthly Socratic discussion group met in mid-July with the intent of examining the proposition that China represents an existential threat to the United States. We call our monthly topics, distributed in advance with a suggested reading list, provocations due to their inherent controversy. We expect all the heat to be in the provocation itself with the light emanating from our serious and dispassionate application of the Socratic method.

The attempted assassination of Donald Trump provoked, if you will, a change in our subject matter.

The focus shifted to the language of politics and its descent into increasing intemperance to the point of serving as a catalyst to violence. We weren’t buying into the woke claim that speech is itself violence but clearly speech can stimulate those who have no societally acceptable moral boundaries on their actions.

We, the Socratic group, are lovers of and avocational students of history. We were able to establish a list of times in the past when the rhetoric was equally provocative. Cicero’s attacks on Marc Antony, the Hamilton/Jefferson anonymous ad hominem attacks through partisan newspapers, and pretty much anything anyone said about slavery in the 1850s all came to mind.

The speech of those times often did lead to violence but something seems different to us

today and not just because we are condemned to live it. One of our group, a retired college professor, described us as swimming in a narcissism of social media exhibitionism. I wish I had said that.

When looking back to Cicero and the first century before Christ, public rhetoric was prized above all, except maybe for bloodshed in the public arenas. We likened our American elections to the electoral process of late republican Rome when it all came down to which candidate could spend enough of his own funds, or those drawn from the public fisc, in spectacles. Bread and circuses was the accepted political strategy then. It worked . . . at least for a while.

Is 21st century America any different?

Extremizing our rhetoric serves a useful political purpose. We can get agitated over something or someone to the point of monopolizing our minuscule attention spans. Agitation allows us to avoid talking about the issues themselves, which can be hard work.

Our presidential elections are not about policy; they are about people. J.D. Vance is already a target for a left-leaning national media. Kamala Harris is benefiting from a brief honeymoon that will end after the Democratic convention. And then there is Donald Trump, who just can't help himself.

Even though our group consists of conservatives of various schools of thought — classical liberal, libertarian, common good conservative, national conservative — we differ on our opinions of Trump and his candidacy. Most are cautious if not completely negative but several are supportive. It makes for lively discussion, all collegial and respectful.

But here is the conundrum. Like or dislike Donald Trump, what options do thinking conservatives have? I posed the following question to the group, in good Socratic style:

What is the one thing, policy or personality or issue, that would determine which candidate will get your vote in November?

Several refused the dilemma of a binary choice, something Socrates would not have allowed. This

came from frustration with the two-party system in which sufficient choices are not available. To them it was not a binary choice between Biden (now Harris) and Trump. They would consider third party candidates or not voting at all as the morally best choice.

Most of us, however, had a pivotal issue. Many responses were liberty-, related, such as which candidate would promote free-market economics instead of state capitalism or socialism. The very practical concern over Supreme Court nominees was mentioned as was the question of who would have the nuclear codes. Social issues such as family values and patriotism made the list.

We don't always arrive at a conclusion at these sessions but we do leave with what we call an action plan. That may be a misnomer because it is hardly a grandiose, "save the world" sort of agenda. We simply want to suggest actions that each of us as private citizens can take to make things better, better by our definition at least.

There is a Chinese proverb that it is better to light one little candle than to curse the darkness, so we developed a short list of candles to light: Focus on policy issues; create study groups similar to ours; plant seeds even if we won't live long enough to see them sprout; fight the good fight even when it doesn't prevail because that is what good people do.

Meanwhile we will continue to live in a cartoon world created by the likes of Hanna-Barbera. It sure does seem like Loony Toons some days.

The Real Threat to Democracy

(July 18) — "In a democratic republic, the organs of state are separate and may even at times work at cross-purposes, with one acting as a balance for the other. In an autocracy, these organs must be deprived of their autonomy . . ."

These words are taken from the preface of "The Sons of Caesar: Imperial Rome's First Dynasty" by Philip Matyszak, one of the A-list historians in my uncontrollable reading pile. The book in a nutshell is a history of how and why the Roman Republic, one of the prototypes for our American

republic, succumbed to autocracy under a military dictatorship of the Julian-Claudian clan of emperors in the first century A. D.

As an avocational student of history, I see frightening parallels between ancient republican Rome and America's current events: Incitement of urban mobs to violence, attempting to disrupt constitutional processes, prosecution of officeholders upon leaving office and, the point of this essay, the attempt to overthrow the very constitutional checks and balances designed to safeguard democracy.

The goal of this intemperate and dangerous anti-Court rhetoric is to destroy the independence of our court system, put in place to protect our liberties against government overreach and usurpation of illegal power. Its independence is also threatened by proposed legislation to alter its composition through court-packing schemes, term limits for justices and even impeachment proceedings.

This is not an entirely new phenomenon. The Warren court was not popular among us conservatives during my formative years. More than a handful of decisions by the courts of Warren, Burger, Rehnquist and even Roberts were deemed constitutionally wrong and politically outrageous at the time. Yet the public outrage never reached the level of vitriol we are seeing now. The private homes of justices were not picketed, the personal ethics of justices or their spouses were not publicly challenged and there was no orchestrated campaign by those of the other two branches to delegitimize the Court.

Things have changed and not for the better.

Governmental agencies and officials naturally lust for more power. Lord Acton knew whereof he spoke when he warned against corruption when unchecked power is grabbed. The courts, at least those in a representative democracy, are charged with enforcing the limits placed on governmental entities, limits between them under the separation of powers doctrine and between the power lusters and the citizenry.

A federal district judge in Texas saw this clearly when he ruled recently that the federal law prohibiting home whiskey distilling was unconstitutional. "Indeed, the Constitution is written to prevent societal amnesia of the defined limits it places on this government of and by the people. That is where the judiciary must declare when its coequal branches overstep their Constitutional authority."

There is a reason that federal judges are not subjected to election and reelection campaigns. Article III of the Constitution states that federal judges "shall hold their Office during good Behavior." During good behavior does not mean being politically popular per opinion polls, let alone pandering to the mob. And it absolutely does not mean their being frog-marched to politically acceptable decisions by dictates from Congress or the White House.

Alexander Hamilton, in Federalist #78 and following, made the case for an independent judiciary. His focus was on preserving the rights of "the people" even when the legislative branch usurped them in violation of the Constitution. Congress may be popularly elected but it does not have an absolute grant of power. Hamilton wasn't alone in advancing this argument. His partner in the Federalist Papers, James Madison, wrote several explaining the separation of powers doctrine and the equality of the branches.

So how "bad" is the Roberts court in the progressive eye? Horrific, if one were to believe the rhetoric blasted from the Beltway. But what are the facts?

Several weeks ago the Wall Street Journal analyzed the Roberts Court's record of decisions

About one-quarter of the decisions were unanimous but the 6-3 decisions were not always from the same six justices. The most conservative federal circuit court was overturned more often than the most liberal. Textualism and originalism

were the common theme, and not just from the Trump appointees.

Whoops. As Patrick Moynihan was fond of saying, “You are entitled to your opinion. But you are not entitled to your own facts.”

After the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Donald Trump, both presumptive presidential candidates promised to ratchet down the inflammatory rhetoric. Let’s hope they do, but I am not sanguine.

The simple fact is that the Supreme Court must perforce be unpopular with the president and the majority party in Congress or it is not doing its job. It is the Dutch boy’s hand in the dike. If its finger is yanked out, who knows how much damage the flood will cause to our liberties. Actually, history instructs us. Just look to first century Rome.

Reaganism Without Reagan

(July 12) — Each month a handful or two of conservative friends gather to discuss a predetermined topic chosen the previous month. We have the conceit of calling our group Socratic but I suspect Socrates would not grade us favorably should he chance onto one of our meetings.

We do try to use the Socratic method, though, mainly by timing each speaker to a limit of three minutes and preventing interruptions. We theoretically come prepared by contemplating the month’s provocation and several suggested Socratic questions. We also receive a reading list of news reports, journal articles and topical books. Followup questions are prioritized over opinions.

It works, sort of, as we all leave amicably and better informed on the topic of the month. In June, we considered the question of whether it is possible for a return to Reaganism without Ronald Reagan’s personal leadership. Can we have Reaganism without Reagan?

We began with an attempt to define what is meant by Reaganism. We all lived through his

presidency and were supportive both of his substance and of his style. We acknowledged that our recollection of an idyllic time four decades ago may be enhanced by the human predilection to wallow in nostalgia.

So, what stood out with Ronald Reagan? We came up with a rather long list but it can be distilled into these three character traits: his resoluteness in defending his principles, his optimism about the future of America and his ability to communicate his vision to the voting public.

Reagan had a real-world education in the struggle between liberty and tyranny when he served as president of the Hollywood actors union. He refined this education during his tenure as an itinerant speaker for General Electric, developing principles that were not simply political stances but the bedrock foundation of what he believed. His presidency was one of standing firm on principles but willing to compromise on the details.

He believed that America’s love of liberty would triumph over the evil empire of the Soviet Union. Almost no one else, including many in his administration, thought we could win the Cold War. Their strategy of playing for a tie, known as mutually assured destruction, was abhorrent to Reagan. He knew we could win and never wavered.

How he maintained his optimism against all those naysayers is beyond my ability to understand. But he did. Anyone with an open mind could not help but listen to him and feel spirits uplifted during those dark times. It was “Win one for the Gipper” writ large. Americans were ready for someone who gave us pep talks. His 1984 reelection theme of “It’s morning again in America” said it well. He won by a landslide.

Yes, he was the president of the United States. Yes, he was a Hollywood actor. Yes, he owned a valuable ranch in southern California. Yet none of these were a source of disconnect for middle America. He had a preternatural understanding of

how we think and an uncanny ability to convince us that he was with us.

What stands out with Ronald Reagan was his character. In fact Peggy Noonan's history of the Reagan presidency was entitled "When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan." He said what he believed and it clearly came from his heart. He didn't pander to our basest instincts. Those to the left of him in ideology could disagree with his political philosophy and with his legislative agenda but they couldn't dismiss him; he was just too hard to dislike after getting to know him. Political opponents, including an initially antagonist D.C. media, soon realized that. Reagan was charming in person and eloquent in public speaking. His sense of humor was one not seen in the White House since John Kennedy.

One example of the his genuine humanity was his relationship with Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill. Someone who relied on newspaper headlines or 30 second TV sound bites can be forgiven for thinking they were implacable foes. They certainly had their differences but still maintained a civil personal relationship, one that clearly was based on friendship.

The story is well known how Reagan would phone the Speaker's office after the House adjourned to invite O'Neill to stop by the residence, the second floor of the White House used by the First Family as their private quarters. A cocktail or two and who knows how many political deals were cut.

Compare this relationship with that between Donald Trump and Nancy Pelosi and one can only despair how far civility in Washington . . . and elsewhere . . . has fallen.

I'm a conservative so I can be excused for fondly looking back to the good old days. I miss Ronald Reagan's resolution, optimism and humor. And I don't expect to see this trifecta repeated in the 2025 White House.

The Violently Selfish Campus

(June 24) — "People talk about the divide in this country as though we were standing on opposite sides of a chasm. When the reality is that we are standing over the chasm, as if on a bridge. You're never going to get everyone to cross to one side or the other. Some people can't accept that. If they can't get everyone to their side, they'd rather blow up the bridge."

The above is quoted from the futuristic "2054: A Novel" by Elliot Ackerman and Admiral James Stavridis. It appears at the end of the book as the protagonist muses over civil violence in an America that represents a logical extension of our current situation.

It has the ring of a Shakespearean soliloquy although the speaker is addressing a young friend. The speech would fit nicely in "Julius Caesar," perhaps as Brutus reflects on his actions and that of the other conspirators on the eve of the battle of Philippi. Octavian, the future emperor Augustus, won that battle and the sun set permanently on the Roman republic and Brutus' time on this earth.

I admit to being a skeptic but not a pessimist and certainly not a cynic, but it is hard to find a reason to be optimistic these days. Is there any good news to be found in the daily headlines and the cable news chyrons? Public reaction to the recent convictions of President Donald Trump and Hunter Biden was informed not by respect for American jurisprudence but by predetermined bias for or against the defendants.

In a perverted sense one cannot help but conclude that the legal process did not matter at all. Why go through expensive trials when the outcome would not be accepted by half of the population? Why not just put the verdict to a popular referendum?

Ancient Athens and Republican Rome had court systems that involved large open juries of citizens, at least those who bothered to show up for the trial. In Rome's republican death throes, guilt or innocence was decided by which side

rallied the larger number of favorable jurors to attend. It was political theater at its most cynical, Cicero's courtroom eloquence notwithstanding.

In the novel "2054" street mobs are a daily occurrence. The nation has broken down in a crisis of governmental legitimacy and the unwillingness of the general populace to view it as legitimate. These demonstrations devolve to violence on a regular basis. Meanwhile White House advisors and senior Congressmen scheme for power exercised behind the scenes as they manipulate an inept president.

One might want to excuse the situation on our college campuses as they are just kids going through a phase. Let's hope that is all it is but I am not sanguine. I was in college during the Vietnam demonstrations. Although my campus, IPFW, had only peaceful and non-disruptive protests, the same could not be said of other colleges and major cities. Wikipedia, my crutch for AI, has a list of these protests longer than I cared to count. The escalation of violence is evident as one scans the list which is in chronological order. Violence begets violence as history instructs us.

As I write this just after the summer solstice, there are news reports of a few radical environmentalists spray-painting the monuments at Stonehenge. Vandalism of important pieces of art is not a contemporary phenomenon; just recall the senseless iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire during the eighth and ninth centuries. And who can forget the Taliban's 2002 destruction of the large Buddha statues in Afghanistan? Cultural barbarism must have a half-life running to millennia.

This is not simply destruction of private property, which is abhorrent enough. The current horde of cultural barbarians are targeting historical treasures. But then their manifestos make it clear that they are at war with civilization.

I am Christian, not a Buddhist, but I regret the obliteration of their statues. Nor am I a pagan but I regret the defacing of Stonehenge.

While I am disclosing what I am not, I should add that I am not a psychologist either. In fact it

was my least favorite class in college. But it doesn't require a Ph.D. in psychology to recognize these acts, and their actors, for what they are — selfish and self-centered, declaring themselves intellectually and morally superior to we hoi polloi.

I wonder what goes through their minds when they realize that they just ran afoul of the criminal justice system. Or perhaps they won't face that anguish since they cleverly have taken the measure of large city prosecutors and campus administrators.

I must return to Shakespeare before I become irretrievably depressed by all this. What play would he write about America's political and cultural environment in 2024? Would he write a tragedy or a comedy? I doubt that even the Bard could find satire in our current state of affairs. And he surely wouldn't title it "Much Ado about Nothing." ♦

Backgrounders

Ryan Cummins, a business owner and an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, is a former chairman of the appropriations committee of the Terre Haute Common Council.



More Eco-Devo, a Citizen's Lament

"Hotel Coming to Site of Old VCSC Building" — Terre Haute Tribune, July 26, 2024

(July 31) — I write to you about another in a long list of eco-devo (economic development) scams, a particularly obscene one. That it is presented as a straight news story in a humdrum manner is even more disheartening. But then, I don't expect much from local "news" reporters and they rarely disappoint. Here is the key passage:

"Phase one of the project will cost more than \$40 million. The city will get a 114-room Courtyard by Marriott. The city is using about \$14 million in the (federal) American Rescue Plan Agency, the (regional) Ready 1.0 program and (municipal) Tax Increment Financing funds to get the new hotel off the ground. Terre Haute Mayor Brandon Sakbun says the public funds had to be used to . . . (blah, blah, blah)."

The "city" in this case are the hapless taxpayers of Terre Haute who will get nothing. They will not own the hotel, will not get a share of the profits, will not own any asset producing a return on investment. They will only get their money confiscated — at the point of a gun if necessary — and given to someone else with the influence to grab it.

\$14,000,000 — just think what local taxpayers could have done with that size of a tax cut. After all, isn't that how abatements are sold to us, tax cuts that spur economic development regardless of how politically selective?

But the dollars from Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan were created out of thin air by the Federal Reserve. We are all paying the inflation tax to fund them, a tax that is the most egregious and destructive to the average citizen. And the state's Ready 1.0 dollars are not some gift by your politicians in Indianapolis. They are your dollars, again, taken from you by threat of force.

And don't even get me started on the unethical scam that is TIF. If you want to know more about that immoral con, go to www.inpolicy.org and enter it into the search box. Or call me and we will go have a beer and discuss it.

Every elected person in my city and perhaps yours should be ashamed. Instead, they are congratulating themselves, which is most disheartening of all.

Richard McGowan, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, has taught philosophy and ethics cores for more than 40 years, most recently at Butler University. Research citations for Dr. McGowan's articles are available at www.inpolicy.org.



Crime: Inequities? What Inequities

(July 29) — When my boys attended North Central High School in the 1990s, the principal of the school and subsequent Butler honorary-degree-holder Dr. Eugene White called a special assembly. The assembly was special because Dr. White, a black man, required only black, male students to attend. He had seen the data about the behavior of black boys and he wanted it addressed at his school. What was plain to Dr. White was that black boys involved themselves in asocial behavior more than white boys.

Dr. White's message is still timely. The data show little change over the past 25 or so years. The Center for Disease Control lists homicide as the leading cause of death in 2021 for black males age 1-19. FBI crime data for 2019, the last year before COVID hit, show that there were 6,578 victims of homicide, including 3,299 white

victims and 2,906 black victims. Of the latter victims, 2,574 or 88.5 percent were murdered by a black offender. Arrest-related deaths, deaths by way of law enforcement, are the least of the worries we have as a society. It also appears that blacks are disproportionately more murderous than whites inasmuch as blacks comprise 13 percent of the population but commit 39 percent of the homicides.

Does that disproportion hold for juvenile crimes? The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquent Prevention, housed in the U.S. Department of Justice, has helpful data on “Youth Arrest Rates by Offense and Race.” The latest data, from 2020, show that the arrest rate for white juveniles was 5,680 per 100,000 persons 10-17 year old. The corresponding rate for black juveniles was 6,380 arrests. For violent crimes — murder, robbery, aggravated assault and rape — whites were arrested at a rate of 63.2 per 100,000 white juveniles 10-17 whereas blacks had a rate of 273.5 per 100,000 black juveniles 10-17.

This data can be found in a report entitled “Racial and Ethnic Fairness.” A conclusion warranted by the data is that black juveniles are more asocial — unless you assume that law enforcement agencies, whose agents do the arresting, are massively racist. Another conclusion, one which aligns with the FBI data on homicides by race of victim and offender and the Center for Disease Control data on leading causes of death for black males ages 0-19, is that black juveniles are more asocial than white juveniles. The disparity can be accounted for by the disparity between black and white offenders regarding violent offense — rape, murder and non-negligent homicide, robbery and aggravated assault.

Ignoring this data, the Indianapolis Star ran an article in early June entitled “Indiana’s Juvenile Detention Centers Disproportionately Detain Black Boys.” The article stated that, “There are more than 515,000 white youth and more than 93,000 Black youth younger than 18 in the state. While the rate of arrests is relatively the same

across racial lines, Black youth charged with a crime have a 30 percent chance of being detained compared to 15 percent of white youth, according to the 2022 Indiana Juvenile Justice Racial and Ethnic Plan.”

The article went on to say that, “There have been challenges tackling disparities in the juvenile justice system for decades and city officials, state lawmakers and local organizations’ next tasks have been trying to eliminate these inequities.” The article also stated that “What is unknown in the data set examined by the plan is what specific crimes were committed, which would impact detention rates,” as though the data were not available. Unless Indiana’s youth are significantly different than the nation’s youth, the data, above, show black youths commit significantly more violent offenses, the kind that merits detention.

The data are readily available but finding it requires a bit of work; that, and the data interfere with the narrative that the system is “racist.” I will concede that it is easier to write an article that follows popular but unfounded ideas. I will not concede, however, that Dr. White was a racist. Further, if the system is racist, because of a 15 percent difference in detention rates between black and white boys, then the system is decidedly and abjectly sexist.

The Indiana Juvenile Justice Plan 2021-2024 notes that “around 73 percent of youth referrals to juvenile court were male and the remaining 27 percent were female. Of delinquent offenses, around 76 percent were male referrals.” That huge disparity, over 45 percent, went unremarked in the Star’s article about disparities involving race. Ignoring those data suggests that no one is “trying to eliminate these inequities” as the newspaper charged.

The state government, journalists and those who manage media outlets should have noted that larger disparity. Maybe it is too much to ask that the state government, journalists and news media do inclusive reporting and fact-checking. Maybe it is too much to ask that the Indianapolis Star print all the news that is fit to print.

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Islamophobia or Propaganda?

(June 12) — What does the word “Islamophobia” mean? What is its formal definition? You can take your time to answer. Actually, this is an easy question because there is more than one correct answer.

In the meantime, a diversion: When was the first time you ever heard of the word “Islamophobia,” as best you can remember? Other than very young readers, who have heard it their whole lives, the likely answer for most would be about 20 years ago — say, following the 9/11 terrorism attack and its aftermath. There is a reason why that answer would be common, but maybe not the reason you expect.

As many will also recall, America was rather agitated against the 9/11 terrorists at the time, and could not help noticing that they were all Muslims, as are nearly all terrorist groups worldwide (per the U.S. State Department’s listing of international terrorist organizations). So, the propaganda arm of international Islam realized it had a public relations problem. “People are on to us; they are beginning to realize our movement’s true, violent nature,” they might have thought. But what to do about it? Their response strategy is obvious to anyone who knows anything about marketing and public relations (PR): They launched a propaganda campaign to equate any criticism of Islam with bigotry, thereby intimidating potential critics into submitting to that constraint and effectively silencing any opposition. QED. Widespread Muslim PR was around earlier, of course (M. Peretz, *The New Republic*, 1/10/11, <https://newrepublic.com/article/81178/the-invention-islamophobia>), but it intensified, of necessity, after 9/11.

Evidence of this? Your own memory: Have you ever seen any criticism of Islam that was not immediately denounced as bigotry, i.e.,

Islamophobia? In fact, how rare is it to see or hear criticism of Islam, period — especially relative to the provocations? Evidence of the campaign’s effectiveness: Why is it that there is one and only one particular religion we are not allowed to criticize? In contrast, surely you have noticed abundant public criticism of Christianity and Judaism. In some Muslim countries, practice of either religion is a capital crime.

But does Islam itself, the so-called “religion of peace,” deserve any criticism? Again, what does Islamophobia mean? The natural, inherent meaning of the term is fear of Muslims. Obviously, however, the prevailing usage has transmuted into a practical meaning of hostility toward Muslims, as any online dictionary can confirm. I do not represent the latter nouveau meaning. I can only endorse hostility toward the large proportion of world Muslims who support terrorism and mass murder. Shouldn’t we all? You have a problem with that? (A massive international polling effort by the Pew organization from 2002 to 2014 found that nearly half the Muslims surveyed support terrorism and suicide bombing against the West. Really.) Yet we also cannot deny that the grounding for such violent Muslim sentiment can be found in the Quran’s aggressive advice and the murderous example of Muhammad himself. So, I also suggest that genuine, devout Muslims take a hard look at their religion — and the barbaric behavior practiced in its name.

By the same token, fear of Muslims can indeed be reasonable, given the violent record of the religion’s most intense adherents along with the sect’s core purpose of imposing submission on the entire world, by force if necessary. Islam, you see, by its own testimony, is not only a religion but a cultural, social, and military movement — with all non-Muslims targeted, so to speak. Sorry to break the news this way.

Allahu Akhbar, and heaven help the rest of us. “Be afraid, be very afraid.” And remember my name, just in case this column makes me the next victim of a fatwa, jihad, or Charlie Hebdo-type mayhem. Imagine what Islam’s record of violence would be if it were not a “religion of peace”? ♦

The Bookshelf

Perhaps the most lasting and significant relationship I developed during my undergraduate years, getting married and having my first child excepted, was to become a member of Young Americans for Freedom. The people I met influenced my thinking, particularly to think in a disciplined and systematic manner. I developed friendships, some of which lasted well beyond our college years.

One person I met briefly was R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., who at the time was editing an intellectual magazine out of the Indiana University campus in Bloomington. Tyrrell and colleagues, including the fascinating John “Baron” von Kannon who went on to a career with the Heritage Foundation, were brilliant in their recognition of hypocrisy on the left and exposing it to clever ridicule in “The Alternative.” One of my favorite columns was inside the back cover and entitled “Braying from the Barnyard,” a collection of inane quotes by leftists referred to as “assorted jackasses” if memory serves.

Eventually “The Alternative” became mainstream without becoming supercilious or establishmentarian. They renamed it “The American Spectator,” moved to Washington and eventually achieved a circulation of more than 300,000, more than even National Review, as Tyrrell unabashedly points out.

Tyrrell’s **“How Do We Get out of Here?: Half a Century of Laughter and Mayhem at The American Spectator — From Bobby Kennedy to Donald J. Trump”** (Post Hill Press 2023, 354 pages with notes, \$18 hardcover at Amazon) is part autobiography, part exercise in name dropping. At least I first thought it was mostly name-dropping until I came to the realization that Tyrrell actually was a significant

national journalist with a lot of high-powered friendships.

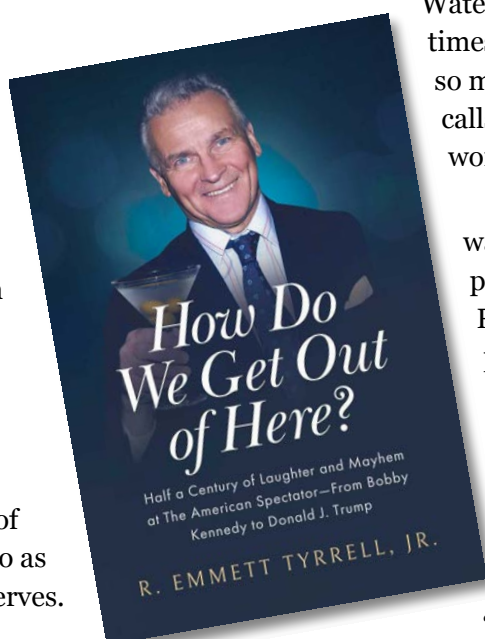
By following Tyrrell’s path through his travels, and he did a lot of international travel in search of essays and authors, the book gives one an enlightening history of conservatism during the past 50 years. I don’t know how Tyrrell and his wife managed to attend so many state dinners, Georgetown cocktail parties and political receptions.

One should never be surprised by what someone like Bob Tyrrell is up to next, but I had no idea he became a friend of Richard Nixon post-Watergate. Or that he met so many times with President Ronald Reagan, so much so that staffers who Tyrrell calls the “assistant presidents” worked to counter his influence.

The chapters on the culture wars are among the best. Tyrrell presciently understood that the Reagan victory in 1980 was only a political one unless conservatives influenced the culture as well. This is what he told Reagan, to the chagrin of the assistant presidents. He even coined a name for what was happening to western culture — the “Kultursmog.”

Despite the Spectator’s sarcastic irreverence for nearly everything establishment, the magazine still managed a high-brow patina. The writing was meant to be read by the cultural elite, especially the self-appointed elites, and so Tyrrell recruited some of the best thinkers in America and in Europe.

So much of Tyrrell’s professional life revolved around formal dinners. Expensive and exclusive dinners seemed to be his standard operating procedure and at first I thought it was simply braggadocio on his part. But then I revisited the personal relationship he had with several presidents. He became friends with Richard Nixon after Nixon’s resignation. He was invited to



the Reagan White House on several occasions and he even reciprocated by inviting Reagan to dine at Tyrrell's own home. The account of all the security requirements surrounding that dinner is a worthwhile read in itself.

Tyrrell's relationship with Donald Trump is interesting. Tyrrell was active in the Trump 2016 campaign, traveling with the candidate and writing speeches. His take on Trump's disposition was one of positive optimism about the outcome of the election even in the face of negative polls. Tyrrell believes that changed when Trump received evidence that he was being targeted by the intelligence community in a politically motivated investigation. It was then that his mood turned to a combative one. So Trump wasn't always like that? My memory of those days leaves much to be desired so I will accept Tyrrell's take as true.

My only regret with the book is that Tyrrell doesn't discuss the decline of "The American Spectator" from its 300,000 monthly circulation to a website, though still with interesting essays. Was it related to the Clinton administration's retaliatory persecution of the magazine and its editors for the hard-hitting investigative work of all the Clinton misdeeds, sexual as well as financial? Defending against the Clintonites cost the magazine in excess of \$1,000,000 in legal fees. That would sink any not-for-profit publication.

Tyrrell's wit is present in the book but not overbearing. In fact I would have enjoyed even more of it. It is subtle and might be missed by the unappreciative. It is with his wit that Tyrrell has always been at his best. And make no mistake, Tyrrell's best is good indeed.

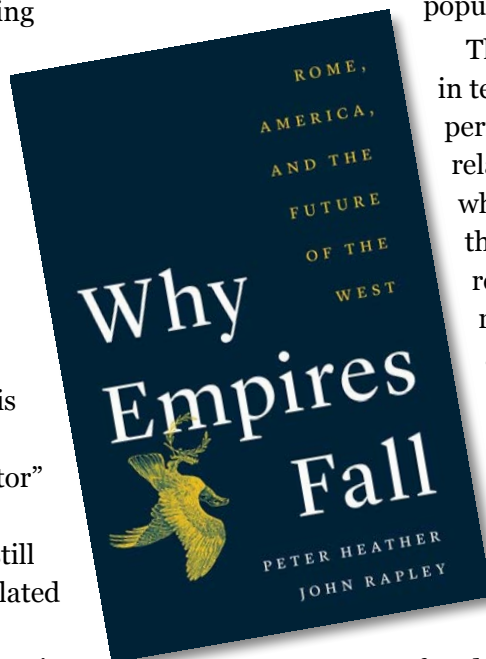
Reading Tyrrell's recitation of everything that has gone wrong with our republic, my thoughts turned to my oft-considered thesis that there is a

definite correlation between the fall of the Roman Republic in the first century BC and what we are experiencing today in America. This past quarter I found a book that addresses this issue but using the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD as the point of comparison. **"Why Empires Fall: Rome, America, and the Future of the West"** (Yale University Press 2023, 167 pages plus notes, \$9 hardcover at Amazon) by Peter Heather and John Rapley cautions us from drawing too strong a parallel with the fall of Rome, especially in regard to population migration.

The authors look at the two worlds in terms of their geographic cores and peripheries. It is the changing relationship between these regions which both caused and reacted to these changes. In short it was the reversal of the direction of resource exchange, from toward to away from the core, that provides the explanation. Their four points of study are: 1) the economic rise of the periphery; 2) the competition with another superpower; 3) exogenous threats; and 4) internal divisions.

Rome faced, and America now faces, superpower competition, Persia for late antiquity Rome, and China for 21st century America. Irreconcilable internal political differences are another threat for both. But it is the population migration argument that is most provocative and probably not one that will convince many Indiana Policy Review readers.

Heather and Rapley see two significant migrational differences between then and now. First, they argue that the groups migrating have quite different origins. Rome faced tribe/nation groups moving en masse to find a new homeland large enough to accommodate the entire group. They came as a semi-organized polity with a military structure to force their way in. Today, the



mass of immigrants tend to be families or individuals who disperse upon entrance.

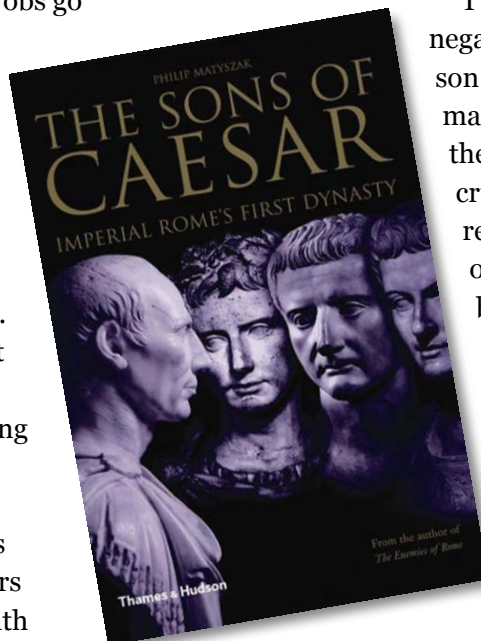
The second part of this controversial argument is an economic one. The so-called barbarians of antiquity desired land, a limited asset, meaning it was a zero-sum game for Rome. To give land to the Goths and their fellow travelers, Rome had to take it from someone else. America's putative immigrants can take something of which there is an adequate and semi-unlimited supply: jobs. Behind this, of course, is America's and the entire West's trend toward depopulation through precipitously falling birth rates. Jobs go unfilled so it is no wonder that the world's dispossessed see America as the land of opportunity.

The authors are not fans of what they call neoliberalism, with Bill Clinton being their example of its disastrous policies. They do emphasize the point that the West is borrowing irresponsibly to finance its growing welfare state driven by an aging population. Their prescription to avoid catastrophe includes things such as a debt "jubilee" for debtors such as students, significant wealth taxes and a guaranteed basic income. They don't support this program with much in the way of analysis, however, other than to claim it is necessary to stop the flow of funds from the non-developed nations to the richest of the West.

While I don't agree with their solutions, I do give them credit for identifying several existential threats such as a looming debt crisis and depopulation. It is a short book so my time was not wasted even though I was somewhat disappointed in their conclusions.

When my reading goes to Rome, it tends to stay there. **"The Sons of Caesar: Imperial Rome's First Dynasty"** (Thames and Hudson 2006, 296 pages, \$30 hardcover at Amazon) by Philip Matyszak is a history written for the laity

rather than other scholars. Each chapter is devoted to one of the Julio-Claudian emperors beginning with Julius Caesar and running through Nero. He does a quality job of explaining the fluid family situations in the last years of the Roman Republic as the nobility intermarried for political advantage only to break up through divorce when the opportunity arose. Still, it is hard to keep them all straight especially given the Latin naming conventions which frequently used the same name for father and son. Then there was the practice of giving all daughters the same name.



I was surprised about how negatively he treated Caesar's adopted son Octavius as the future emperor maneuvered to claim his heritage as the top man in Rome. Octavius used cruelty to an abundance in retribution against any and all opponents. But that was before he became Augustus and learned to skillfully manage palace public relations.

Matyszak's opinion of all six Caesars is certainly negative on balance but he does give credit where credit is due for competent administration. For example he credits both

Caligula and Nero, the two craziest of this bunch, with exemplary rule during their first years. Then, of course, they went bloodthirsty mad.

Although Matyszak never uses this terminology, one wonders if the problem was too many recessive genes as the Julian and Claudian clans intermarried and cross-adopted for political purposes.

The most discomfiting assertion the author makes is that the common Romans didn't really care if the current emperor spent his leisure hours murdering family members so long as he kept things normal for the hoi polloi. Bread and circuses kept the worst of these emperors popular despite the blood running through palace corridors. There is a lesson in here for us, as Ben

Franklin's quote instructs: "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Moving on historically, I landed in the Middle Ages, which I prefer to either antiquity or modernity. **"The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages 400-1000"** (Viking 2009, 564 pages plus notes, \$21 hardcover at Amazon) by Chris Wickham is a comprehensive, and I mean that literally, study of changes across the Roman Empire of antiquity as Europe and the Middle East transitioned into their medieval characters. In short, his theme is that these changes were gradual with much of the Roman influencing European culture and politics until the turn of the millennium.

The change was gradual and probably unrecognizable to the different peoples of that time, at least according to Wickham. He cuts off his history at the year 1000 because that is when Roman influence is no longer significant.

What was obvious to the peasantry in the ninth and tenth centuries is what Wickham calls the "caging of the peasantry" as free peasant farmers became bound to the land as serfs by local lords and bishops. This was a result of the gradual breakdown of central authority, not so much after the fall of the western empire in 476 but more due to the collapse of Carolingian power in northern Europe. This was also felt in the transfer of taxing ability from the emperor and kings to local counts and dukes. And he blames Christianity for contributing to this. On the plus side of this deterioration at the center was the emergence of strong localized kingdoms, most notably Saxon England.

This book is long and drills down to detail on rulers, estates and events. Most were unfamiliar to me and I read a lot in this era. I skipped several

chapters focused on the East as my interest was in the rise and fall of the Carolingians. On this, Wickham did a nice job of differentiating West Francia/France from East Francia/Germany while not ignoring Frankish involvement in Italy. My time, several weeks of reading, was not wasted.

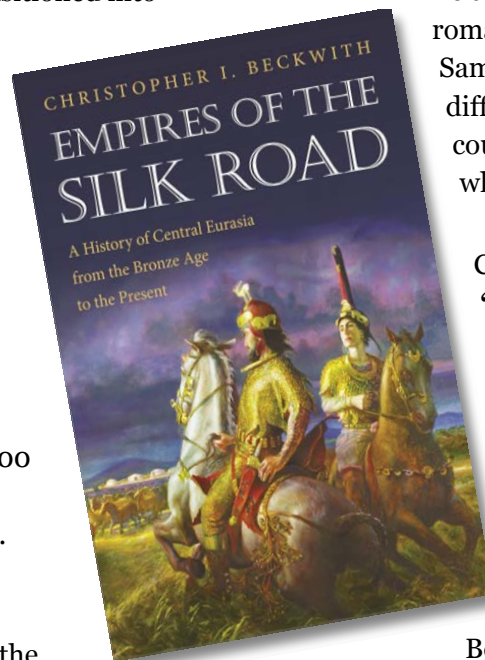
I developed this love for history when I was young. I don't think I read about an era of history that didn't cause this schoolboy to daydream about living in it. Perhaps, though, there was one: Marco Polo and the Silk Road. This appeared to me to be a black hole, a place of romantic-sounding cities like Samarkand and Tashkent, but so different that even my imagination couldn't conjure up an image of what it was like out there.

Indiana University historian Christopher I. Beckwith's **"Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present"** (Princeton University Press 2009, 326 pages plus extensive notes) was a fortunate hit when I was browsing my local library's digital card catalog.

Beckwith's project is ambitious given the time scale and the expanse of territory he proposes to cover.

Beckwith's thesis is that the peoples of central Asia were not crude barbarians but rather civilized groups motivated by the same political and economic considerations as Europeans. Their civilizations advanced best when left alone by the bordering empires of China, Russia and Rome (in its western and eastern manifestations).

He sets himself up as a contrarian of sorts, rebelling against both modernism and post-modernism and their deconstructionist view of history. My sense was that he wants the reader to take the central Asian peoples on their own recognizance and see them for what they were but now have lost.



It's a stirring tale of conquest and retrenchment but does not have a happy ending, at least not happy in Professor Beckwith's view. One reads of a brave people fighting against the empires on what the author calls the periphery but also all too often against each other.

What Beckwith offers the student of history is a deeper understanding of current issues, like what's the deal with Afghanistan or with the Uyghurs in northwest China? His answer, at least one of them, is that these ethnic nations are nations no more and therefore have lost their identity and autonomy as discreet groupings of related people.

The unfamiliarity of the place and people made it difficult to follow the narrative at times, a problem exacerbated by a lack of maps. (There were only two: a historical one inside the front cover and a modern one inside the back.) Sure, Genghis Khan and Timur the Lame were familiar but I'm still not sure who the powerful Junghars were. Because of this, the book is not one for the casual reader. It is well worth the time for serious historians or for someone like me, who just wanted to finally scratch a 60-year-old itch.

Eventually I had to return to more modern times and a place close to home. Peter Stark's **"Gallop Toward the Sun: Tecumseh and William Henry Harrison's Struggle for the Destiny of a Nation"** (Random House 2023, 315 pages plus notes, \$22 hardcover at Amazon) is set largely in Indiana during the northwest Indian wars. As the subtitle suggests, it revolves around Tecumseh and Harrison as they moved toward eventual battle in Ontario during the War of 1812. On its path there the book deals with earlier battles including those around Fort Wayne and Toledo. Both men cut their military teeth at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, the battle that

established American dominance in the Northwest Territory at the expense of the indigenous tribes.

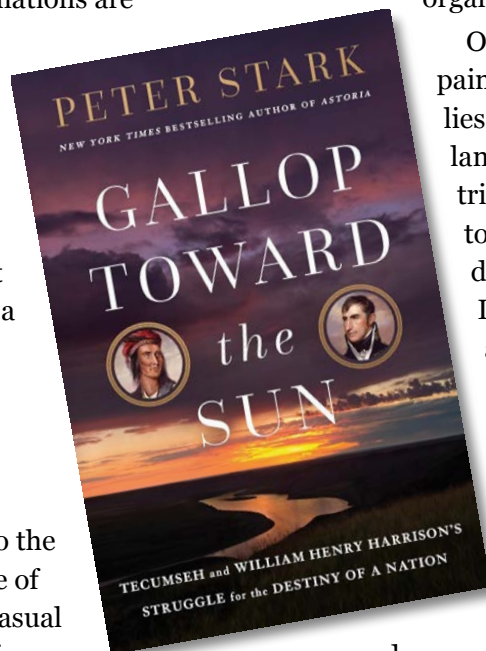
Stark's portrayal of Tecumseh is definitely beyond admiration. It is an encomium which stops just short of apotheosis. Or maybe it doesn't. His epilogue chapter comes off that way; I have trouble envisioning Tecumseh as a peace-loving paragon of reasonable compromise. However, there is no gainsaying his leadership and organizational skills.

On the other hand Harrison is painted as the villain of the day as he lies, cheats and steals his way into land-grabbing treaties with the tribes. One can't but see a similarity to Dante's treatment of the denizens of the lower circles of Inferno in the way Harrison's actions are reported. His motive, according to Stark, was to acquire as much Indiana Territory land as possible in order to meet the minimum population for statehood, a major opportunity for Harrison's political

advancement. But then, Harrison did ride his battle victory over Tecumseh's brother, the Prophet, near today's Lafayette into the White House so maybe Stark is on to something.

Having exhibited my biases about those of Stark, I must admit I did find the book a worthwhile expenditure of my reading time. He writes in an easy-to-read style and has a knack for storytelling. This is a story that deserves telling and retelling even if an excessive dose of morality preaching must come with it.

I will finish this column with brief mentions of two additional books that I found. Author Martin Dugard is best known for his "Killing" series in partnership with Bill O'Reilly. He has another commonly named series in which **"Taking London: Winston Churchill and the Fight to Save Civilization"** (Dutton 2024, 337 pages,



\$22 hardcover at Amazon) is his most recent. As the subtitle suggests, the main figure is Churchill and his struggle first to have influence in the early war British government and then to maintain national resolve through the Battle of Britain. There are other characters such as four individual fighter pilots and even some from the German perspective. The most sympathetic one is Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, head of Fighter Command and at strategic odds with everyone but Winston, the man who counted most.

The style is one of constantly shifting the perspective from historical figure to historical figure while carrying the overarching storyline. It is not my favorite writing style but Dugard makes it work. To me, it reads too much like a TV documentary script with short, punchy sentences.

The series includes “Taking” volumes focused on the post-D Day campaigns to take Paris and then Berlin. I’ve not read those but probably will at some point since they are easy reads.

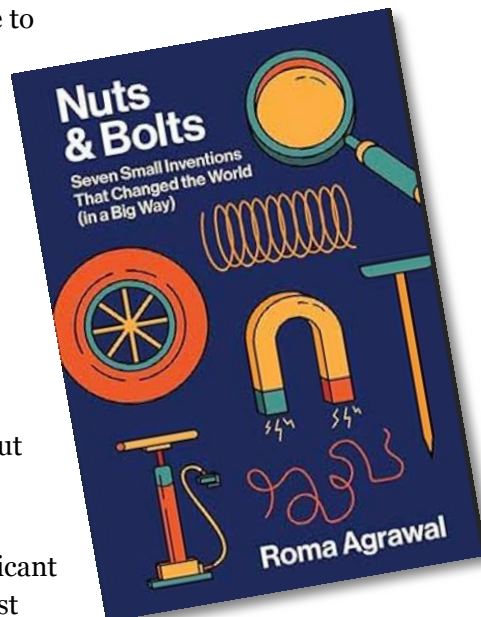
If asked about the most significant inventions in human history, most would name the wheel and then probably draw a blank. Structural engineer Roma Agrawal put together a list of seven not-so-obvious gadgets which, she maintains, changed the world. **“Nuts and Bolts: Seven Small Inventions That Changed the World** (in a Big Way) (W. W. Norton & Company 2023, 213 pages plus notes,) is a short book with each chapter dedicated to one of the seven: the nail, the



wheel, the spring, the magnet, the lens, the string and the pump. She introduces each invention and then traces its progression as it led to further inventions and uses.

Agrawal is a structural engineer, a bridge and skyscraper designer, so a slight bias toward engineering products is to be expected. Another evident bias is toward female and non-western inventors, no doubt due to the fact she is a native-Indian now living in London. I had the passing thought that perhaps she found her historical engineers and developed

her list of seven inventions around them. Nevertheless, she writes in a fascinating manner which keeps your attention . . . even that of a non-techie like me. — *Mark Franke*





Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

The Outstater

Wokeness Lives at the Art Museum

(Aug. 30) — 'When I hear the word culture, I reach for my Luger,' said Herman Goring. Good advice for those trying to follow the internal machinations of the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, as it now likes to be called.

Culture in Indianapolis, once known as Nap Town and a wide spot in a cornfield, is a sensitive topic for the haut mode there. They are constantly on guard for any cultural slip that might give them away as insufficiently hip, which alas they are, always behind the two coasts by a few years or even decades.

So it is with diversity, equity and inclusion. A portentous statement in a museum employment listing created a tsunami of embarrassment, hand-ringing, kowtowing and executive musical chairs. It said that the museum required a director who would work not only to attract a more diverse audience but also maintain (trigger warning) its "traditional, core, white art audience."

The curators for the museum's then upcoming "DRIP: Indy's #BlackLivesMatter Street Mural" exhibition announced that they could no longer be involved. And ditto for the co-founders of GANGGANG, a local art incubator working to elevate artists of color: "Our exhibition cannot be produced in this context and this environment."

Now, don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out why any of that would send the museum

directors screaming into the night. Just know that whiteness is a negative in the museum's new woke administration and, one must assume, in its collection. And it goes without saying that a black female director was immediately hired to allay suspicions that the DEI handbook had not been fully absorbed.

From there on, we don't know exactly what went wrong. The black female director exited after 15 months, perhaps having gotten lost in the intricacies of the museum's \$350 million endowment. The new director also is black, of course, but a certified public accountant.

Problem solved, although you would be right to wonder what any of this has to do with art. My best explanation is that the people wrapped up in that world are crazy. They exalt paintings that are ugly or at least incomprehensible to anyone other than the artist. They dismiss as the work of "dead white men" that in which the artist has invested decades of effort to impart beauty and grace to those of whatever skin pigment.

In sum, the hard work of appreciation shifted arbitrarily from the artist to the hapless viewer. The meaning of a piece of art decayed into meaningless or at least into cryptology, now "identity" cryptology.

It is a development that can have deadly impact on the moral bearings of a community. For love it or hate it, modern art requires acceptance of a portentous statement — that word again — i.e., that an arrangement of colors and shapes needs no relationship to objects outside the canvass.

When this thinking expands into the actual running of a city, which it is apt to do, art patrons being influential by definition, the trouble begins. Neither cities nor museums can be run on portentous statements or on the idea that discernment is optional.

The late Roger Starr, an urban planner and a member of the New York Times editorial board, addressed just this in his best-selling "The Rise and Fall of New York." He argued that his city's decline was intricately linked to the above described artistic decay:

“It is not overreaching to suggest that when the institutional leaders of a city make modern painting and sculpture their most prized art form, and when they devote as much time, intelligence and, not least, money to its pursuit as leaders of the postwar world have done, they demonstrate a set of values that endangers those needed to keep an urban polity on a firm, reasonable and safe course.”

It was his view as a former New York City housing commissioner that the degradation of art is both a reflection of and a catalyst for urban decay, underscoring the interconnectedness of cultural and economic health in a city. Throw in the insanity of DEI and you have to worry about the future of Indianapolis.

‘That Isn’t the Way This Works’

(Aug. 19) — Economists talk about “moral hazards,” that is, situations where someone takes on excessive risk because they do not have to bear the full consequences of that risk. Essentially, it’s the idea that if someone is insulated from the negative effects of their risky behavior, they might act less cautiously than they otherwise would.

Our society is creating walking, driving moral hazards. Parents, teachers, somebody, is raising children who think they are immune to social rules even at the risk of their lives and others. I have an example, a torturous one. If you want to try to follow along, here is one unofficial, unverified video and here is another.

Police in my city stopped a young women the other night for allegedly running a stop sign at high speed. It was 3:30 a.m. The woman, her car pulled to the side of the road, was texting on her phone when the police officer approached. He was polite as he began running through the standard questions.

Did she have any identification? No, she had left her purse at a friends. What was her name? Only silence as she continued texting. She was



Pablo Picasso, Man in a Beret, 1895.



Pablo Picasso, Portrait of Ambroise Vollard, 1910.

asked her name several more times. Still texting, still silent.

Pressed, she said she wouldn’t comply because she said she hadn’t run the stop sign. She demanded to see the video from his dash camera. “That isn’t the way this works,” the officer said in apparent reference to “Indiana Code, Title 35. Criminal Law and Procedure,” which the young women had apparently not had the opportunity to read.

At that point, the two officers now at the scene felt that duty required them to take further action. The first officer told our young woman that if she would not step out of the car voluntarily to discuss the matter, and if they had to remove her forcefully, she would face additional charges. She said, “Do it,” in a sort of inverted scene from “Dirty Harry.”

It was a battle. The young women allegedly kicked one of the officers repeatedly with a placement that caused him to yell an obscenity. In any case, the officers eventually brought her to the ground to be handcuffed.

Interestingly, the angle of a phone video taken from across the street made it look wrongly as if the officers had simply pulled an innocent woman from her car and began pummeling her to the pavement. Whatever, we had a George Floyd moment by then with numerous bystanders shouting disparagingly at the officers (are there

bystanders around at 3:30 o'clock in the morning in your neighborhood?).

What to think of all this?

Again, what stuck me was emergence of a new sense of perverse entitlement. Is it widespread? I don't know but this young woman, who already was named in a warrant for driving without a license, seemed utterly comfortable, even fearless, in her position that police had no authority over her.

Indeed, they need not be obeyed and she could go on about her business unencumbered by their silly contentions. At worst, she anticipated dismissal without prejudice after an on-the-spot inspection of the police dash camera. Nor did she hesitate to attack a police officer any more than she might have hesitated piling into a lunch fight in the school cafeteria.

Somewhere along the line, at home, at school, somewhere, she had gotten the idea that all of that was OK, or at least she had not been introduced to countervailing values that would have guided her through the incident more safely. She saw the police as a mere nuisance, an impediment to her get-along.

So, are we to signal to a generation of youth that speeding through a stop sign in the early morning without a license or identification and with an attitude that requires the application of police force to get you to step out of your car and state your name, all can be taken lightly, that it's no big thing?

Our new woke mayor described the video of the police cuffing the young woman as "shocking" and lent her weight to an immediate internal affairs investigation while reassigning the officers involved. Are they now assumed to pose a danger to innocents on the streets observing stop signs in the wee hours?

The young woman was routinely charged with resisting law enforcement causing injury, battery against a public safety official, refusal to identify herself, all perhaps to be bargained down to driving while suspended (what happened to the stop sign?).

It is uncertain whether a court date has been set and of course there is no immediate word expected from the prosecutor's office, always hyper sensitive to such incidents. Only one thing is certain: The accused now has massive street credentials.

Still, this all may explain why traffic deaths among a certain segment of drivers have increased 78 percent from the decade before. Could it be an expansion of the moral hazard to include driving while indignant?

Finally, do we need to assign race to the individuals involved? It's too sad.

The Gospel from a DEI Queen

(Aug. 9) — I opened the paper this morning to be instructed by the first-ever female president of our Chamber of Commerce, a comely white woman in her middle years full of social-justice sensitivity.

Now, I don't know this woman but she knows me, a bigoted member of the unwashed in need of enlightenment. Undeserving as I may be, she had interrupted her cracking of the glass ceiling long enough to make sure I understood how the world works. "Successful businesses and organizations hire people who reflect their customers and stakeholders," she begins. "It is a smart business decision."

Mentioning pointedly that she has served in upper management and in corporate board rooms for more than three decades, she asserts that hiring people of varying ages, genders, races and backgrounds strengthens a business. "Many organizations have gradually come to accept and embrace this reality. More recently, this smart practice has become known as diversity, equity and inclusion."

Not being in her employ, you can be spared her full "upper management" exposition. It boils down to this: Businesses are more successful when they mathematically select and deselect their employees by social and racial identity. The assumption is that all individuals from any background or in whatever state of mind are inherently equal in motivation, ability and

potential and there will be no loss in productivity or innovation if you adopt hiring policies that make you feel good — godlike even.

Prejudice is not prejudicial? Nobody really believes that. This is Queen-of-Hearts, Alice-in-Wonderland stuff, and from what her bio says is an “award-winning broadcast executive and development professional for several local nonprofits.”

Moreover, her message was directed at a midsized Indiana city renowned for its connections to innovation and productivity. This includes the television, gasoline pump, electric wheelchair, the modern electric motor, the hand-held computer, the first American-made motorcycle, the first commercial radio station, the ATM machine and the Hovercraft — all achieved without our Chamber of Commerce lady’s guidance.

Can we just say that this woman is a fool and go about our day? No, because it might just be me; I know nothing about running a business. I asked a friend, though, the owner of a third-generation one. His critique:

“She says successful businesses hire people who ‘reflect’ their customers and stakeholders. Rather, you and I know that successful businesses hire people who serve the customers profitably. What they reflect in general society has nothing to do with it. If a business does some hiring on her basis it is only because they have enough excess capital to blow on such foolishness. There are no small, competitive businesses that put any premium on superfluous factors like skin, religion, gender, etc., unless they have some direct bearing on the tasks associated with the job. I certainly don’t care — and don’t want to know — with whom they prefer to have sex. And what’s really strange about this is I didn’t need the government (or a Chamber of Commerce) to tell me any of that; I figured it out on my own.

“And don’t get me started on ‘stakeholders.’ That’s just some social justice bull meant to elevate people without a direct investment in a business to be equal to those whose property is at stake (the real stakeholders). That she brings it up

and places inordinate importance to the concept, betrays her lack of real qualifications. Who knows, maybe she was an early DEI hire.”

Perhaps none of this has anything to do with good business management or even diversity, equity and inclusion. Perhaps it is something primordial — an assertion of dominance or territory, in this case political, a “display” in the anthropological sense, as observed by primatologists and behavioral ecologists. Think Howler monkeys.

The DEI folks may be simply demonstrating that they can force on us a dabbler, call her a CEO, have her pronounce rubbish, order the newspaper to publish it and shame us into sitting still for the lesson — it being that if they can do all that to us now consider what can be done if they ever really become displeased.

I should have my tea before I pick up the morning paper.

Hey, It Sounded Like a Good Idea

(Aug. 1) — I was surprised and disappointed in Indiana’s ranking on the just-released Internal Revenue Service report on interstate migration.

I subscribe to the boosterish Indianapolis Business Journal, you see, and it seems hardly a summer goes by that it doesn’t report the governor is wheels up to Europe, China or somewhere exotic to bring back high-paying jobs. And were Eric Doden and his GOP eco-deco buddies ever turned down for government money to leverage the dozens of public-private “partnerships” they scattered around the state?

So I expected better results. But it turns out that for every \$200,000 salary this brought to Indiana another \$200,000 salary left. We are treading water, in other words, spinning our wheels. Chris Edwards of Cato analyzes:

“Taxes are an important driver of migration, particularly for higher-income households. States with lower taxes tend to have higher ratios of in-migration to out-migration. The figure (above) ranks migration ratios for

households earning more than \$200,000. Of the nine states that do not have individual income taxes, seven of them are in the top 15 states for in-migration: Florida, Tennessee, South Dakota, Nevada, New Hampshire, Wyoming and Texas.”

Indiana is a pathetic 31st. We rank barely above Kansas and way behind Oklahoma, two god-awful places with decidedly hostile climates and desolate scenery. And we have a Republican pro-business governor and a legislative supermajority in both the House and Senate — and have had for a decade.

So, why is our political leadership satisfied with such a lackluster performance? Ruling out sabotage, it's simply easier. Lowering taxes and reducing regulations — weather and living costs being equal — are what make a state attractive. Changing that is hard work.

It's fun to meet for high-end lunches with CEOs and give them access to other people's money (yours). I need not mention the governor's jet flights across the oceans with window seats for appreciative political allies and their wives.

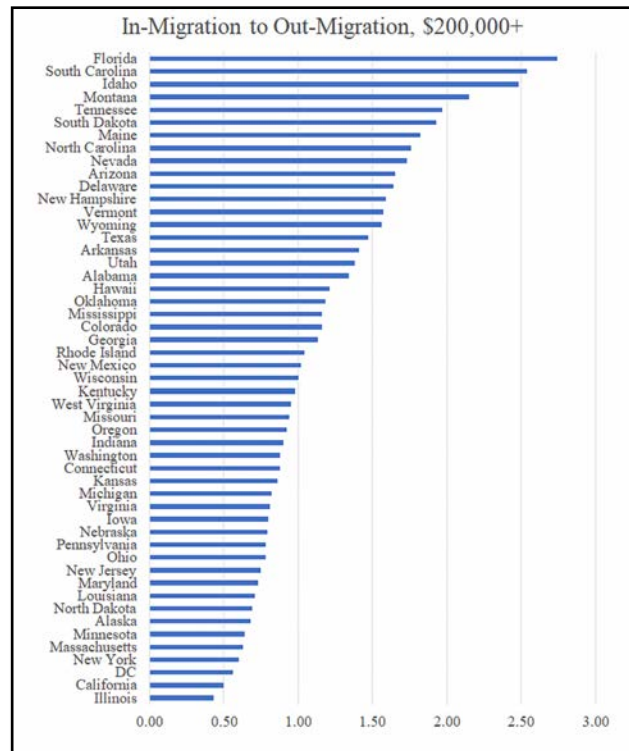
Back home, though, it's a slog to explain economic realities and tradeoffs to the wooden heads in the Legislature. Worse, you make enemies of influential people with vested interests in this or that boondoggle or regulatory advantage. Better to busy yourself with what Thomas Sowell has famously characterized as “replacing what works with what sounds good.”

The master of this has been our Gov. Eric Holcomb. His ranking, interestingly, has risen on Cato's Fiscal Policy Report on the Governors. He now is getting a “B.” Did I mention that he has been working with a veto-proof, solid, super Republican majority? Perhaps we were hasty to rule out sabotage.

An Election Year Poser

(July 26) — I'm going to need some help with this.

Where is the political authority, let alone moral authority, for a self-styled champion of Americans descendant from sub-Saharan African slaves,



whose father is descendant from a Jamaican slave owner and mother a member of a high Hindu caste, both immigrants, to speak in Indianapolis, where slavery was never sanctioned, to a sorority that does not include whites?

These are strange times indeed

Beware of ‘Trustworthy’ Guys

(July 25) — I don't often draw parallels between Venezuela and Indiana but when I do they keep me up at night.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Madura is attracting U.S. investors by fashioning himself as “pro-business,” reports the Wall Street Journal. This is a Marxist who oversaw the economic collapse of his nation and the exodus of a quarter of its citizenry.

“Your investment is welcome in Venezuela,” he now says in his best Chamber of Commerce voice, “We can work together toward a different U.S.-Venezuela relationship. We guarantee stability, legal security, peace, win-win relations.”

Madura, who is expected to rig his reelection this week, is cutting deals with individual U.S. businessmen offering special government

consideration and protection. “I’m a man of my word, a trustworthy guy,” he pronounced.

In this way Madura’s new strategy is the same as that of the Indiana Economic Development Commission (IEDC) — that is, to use the favors of government to reward select businesses.

Does it matter than in neither case the society in general benefits, the profits going elsewhere while the public debt increases? Not at all. Amoral international corporations want those “win-win” deals that only government can ensure. But if Madura has discovered the benefits of capitalist enterprise why doesn’t he extend it to his country at large?

Well, you wouldn’t need a dictator then, would you?

Here in Indiana, if tax breaks, rebates and sweetheart bonding help big corporations why not offer them to every Indiana business? Is it because the “trustworthy guys” who run the IEDC think like tinhorn dictators, that they and not participants in a free market know best?

The economist Friedrich Hayek said that fascism is the stage reached after communism has proved an illusion. That sounds about right.

Government Journalism

(July 10) — Economist tell us that life is a matter of trade-offs rather than solutions, as anyone over age 50 on a diet can attest. So I’m warming to the idea of the government funding media. It can’t be worse and it might be more informative in a perverse way.

Here’s the plan before us: Indiana, following the lead of New York, could pass a “Local Journalism Sustainability Act,” allowing publishers and broadcasters tax credits for newsroom salaries. The idea is being considered in New Jersey, California, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Illinois, Washington “and beyond,” reports Reason Magazine

As usual, we are lumped in the “beyond” category, but if Reason is correct Indiana can expect a proposal something like this: refundable tax credits of up to \$25,000 for the first \$50,000

worth of journalists’ salaries with a per-company cap of \$300,000. We are warned that the nation is moving toward “divorcing journalism outlets from a need to serve readers and listeners to remain financially afloat.”

But except for the “financially afloat” part, we don’t see what would change. Serving readers and listeners is no longer a part of the journalism business plan. What is a part is the telling of people what they should do and think, something government types imagine they also are good at.

My local newspaper no longer can be depended upon to cover city council meetings or much else that isn’t handed to it by an institutional or governmental source. If from time to time it could afford to send out a state-funded “reporter/bureaucrat” we might learn what the powers that be think is a good idea — and then we could work against anyone who supported it.

More editorials and opinion pieces would serve the same purpose. And more front-page headlines along the lines of “World to End; Transgenders to Suffer Most” would be a hoot.

For any market analyst worth his data trove will tell you that American media is failing for lack of trust, its only valued product. That our leadership, private or public, thinks the solution is more government involvement explains a lot about our situation.

Reality Makes a Comeback

(July 1) — We are sustained by the hope there will be a day when reality overcomes romance in guiding our civic affairs. That is, the romantic notion that everyone can live in harmony and abundance regardless of culture, system or effort will eventually be modified by the need for secure borders, safe streets and running water. Joe Biden’s debate performance says that day has come.

For three years the mainstream media told us that Biden was conducting staff meetings in seven languages while making notes on the margins of Einstein’s Grand Unified Theory. Reality came last week, live on national television of all places,

at the first and perhaps last presidential debate. More than one of us turned off the television that night praying that Biden had forgotten the launch code.

Reality is cropping up locally as well. A white-on-black police shooting at a traffic stop in our city, a fatal one, is testimony. It should have resulted in massive riots activated by BLM and Antifa agitators streaming in from both coasts. Instead, thanks to a police body camera, we saw the unfortunate young man repeatedly ignore orders to keep his hands on the dashboard. Instead, after two shouted warnings he chose to move one hand toward . . . well, toward mortal reality, a Draco AK semi-automatic pistol.

More examples? We once thought that attracting investment required the difficult political work of building coalitions to lower taxes and reduce regulations. But the last three Indiana governors, Republicans at that, convinced themselves they could waive a magic eco-devo wand to leverage tax-financed bonds, abatements, grants, etc., and . . . poof . . . better jobs would materialize.

Didn't happen. State Affairs, a newsletter on state government, challenged that strategy as it was first outlined in a 2006 news release announcing the newly created Indiana Economic Development Commission (IEDC). The commission's stated goal — promise? — was for Indiana by 2020 to exceed the national average in per capita income and average annual wages. From the State Affairs report:

“According to data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis within the U.S. Department of Commerce, Indiana's wages have remained largely unchanged since the IEDC's founding when compared with the national average. In 2005, Hoosiers made \$31,376 per capita, about 88 percent of the \$35,699 earned nationally. Indiana workers averaged \$60,038 in 2023, or 88 percent of the national average (\$68,531).”

That is in spite of tens of millions of dollars in investment incentives made available by the IEDC to politically selected corporations over two decades. Again, reality.

Remember the Green Revolution and transferring to the cheap power of carbon-free resources in order to save the world from problematic weather changes? Bjorn Lomborg, writing in the Wall Street Journal, has some bad news: Globally we spent almost \$2 trillion last year alone trying to force this energy transition. It hasn't worked. Indeed, fossil-fuel use has increased. Lomborg, a visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, notes that civilization has only shifted to new energy sources when there were better or cheaper alternatives, e.g., plowing with internal combustion rather than mule muscle, lighting with electricity rather than whale oil.

“Solar and wind fail on both counts,” he argues. “They aren't better, because unlike fossil fuels, which can produce electricity whenever we need it, they can produce energy only according to the vagaries of daylight and weather. At best, they are cheaper only when the sun is shining or the wind is blowing at just the right speed. The rest of the time they are expensive and mostly useless.”

Lomborg reminds us that when you add in the cost of storage, wind and solar energy solutions become uncompetitive except with lavish subsidies. In sum, achieving a sustainable transition to solar or wind would require orders of magnitude more storage at impossible expense.

How impossible? McKinsey & Co., a global management consulting firm, estimates that achieving a transition to green energy would cost more than \$5 trillion annually, slowing economic growth and making the real cost five times as high. Vaclav Smil, an energy researcher at the University of Manitoba, Canada, estimates the cost per U.S. voter could be more than \$13,000 a year.

Reality is a bitch.

Reagan's Unmatched Moxie

(June 28) — Being old, I spend considerable time correcting facile modern accounts of long-ago events that I happened to have witnessed. They rarely check out, as George Orwell so aptly

warned, the truth having been pushed down the memory hole.

For example, the Vietnam War was not a futile exercise in American hubris but rather a heroic effort that convinced (for a time) the Russian Politburo and the Chinese Communist Party that they could not afford to conquer the world by proxy. In any case, we were winning when I left.

And the social-justice movement that began in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco (not in hedonistic Woodstock) was not inherently anti-American. It was just what you get whenever you allow a generation of godless narcissists to design your future.

And Ronald Reagan was not a “dunce,” as the Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford is said to have said. Nor was he merely a “great communicator,” as if that were the measure of him. They wanted you to think so because the ideas he communicated were so darned compelling. Some examples:

- “Government’s first duty is to protect the people, not run their lives.”
- “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the government and I’m here to help.”
- “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.”
- “Government does not solve problems; it subsidizes them.”
- “The best minds are not in government. If any were, business would hire them away.”
- “Entrepreneurs and their small enterprises are responsible for almost all the economic growth in the United States.”
- “We can’t help everyone, but everyone can help someone.”
- “There are no great limits to growth because there are no limits of human intelligence, imagination and wonder.”

- “Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”

Forty-two years later you can still hear the sound of solid, independent judgment. It brought us out of a financial malaise (again, for a time) and ended the Cold War that had stymied the supposedly brilliant Clifford and four previous administrations.

Ronald Reagan was the product of a broad set of life experiences that afforded him an adult perspective on how the world works — Midwest roots, Hollywood celebrity, spokesman for an international corporation, labor union negotiator, successful governor and budget master. All of that came together to serve him well as a president.

Most of us can make a list of other modern-day presidents who were as based, e.g., Calvin Coolidge, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower. And a list of those who were not, who traveled only in the narrowest of lanes: Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and the pluperfect example, the bootless Barack Obama.

These last were insular men, please know, who never held what most Americans would recognize as a real job, that is, a job with challenges that had to be overcome and not just redefined, shortcomings that had to be acknowledged rather than assigned to others, all between moral rails that could not be moved to fit an ambition of the moment.

A Reagan biographer, H.W. Brands, argues that campaign promises and even policy detail, no matter how ingenious or high-minded, are muted at the presidential level. “Reagan had no policy agenda beyond basic conservative principles,” Brands concludes. “He expected events to furnish direction and they obliged from the start.”

Could it be that simple, that we do best with leadership that has risen by facing life squarely instead of finessing it? They used to call that “moxie.”

Which bring us to Joe Biden, a lifelong cager of political favors, and Donald Trump who made a fortune convincing other people to loan him more

money than he was worth — skills valuable in a political campaign to be sure, but are they sufficient to lead a great nation into the coming storm?

We're in serious trouble, aren't we?

Do You Trust Your University?

(June 19) — We don't have opinion surveys measuring the trust Hoosiers have in their particular state universities. My guess is that after the spring pro-Hamas encampments the percentage that still think that Indiana University, for example, is doing a decent job is around 10 percent, or roughly the number of people wandering around cognitively disabled in some way.

Is that fair to the many great teachers on the Bloomington campus? No, but the many great teachers there aren't running the university. Cabals of administrators are running them, and on some campuses they threaten to outnumber students.

My untrustworthiness guess is based on a widely quoted running opinion survey by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Here is the columnist Jonathan Turley on its latest findings:

"Not surprisingly, given the ideological balance at most schools, the highest levels of trust came from Democrats and liberals. However, even this group only showed a 40 percent "high confidence" rate. Among Republicans, it drops to 12 percent and among independents it drops to 28 percent."

Now, take Turley's suggestion and imagine that your business is getting the same feedback. And what's more, your most faithful "customers" (in this case political liberals and registered Democrats) recorded sharp drops in those who had "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in you. There would be at the very least a period of agonizing reappraisal, as we used to say in Haight-Ashbury.

Do you get the impression that's happening? Either at the Statehouse or in Bloomington? No, those in charge of the rolling disaster that is higher education plan to simply ride it out. The IU president has begun the predictable series of "listening sessions." The chairmen of the Senate and House committees on higher education are hunkered down for the summer. Is Eric Holcomb even on the continent?

The survey's authors don't presume to measure just why confidence is dropping, but permit me to speculate:

- A dome of 1960s ideological homogeneity excluding anyone outside the far left of the political spectrum.
- The rising costs of higher education stimulated by lavish and arbitrary federal student loans.
- A campus-wide bloat, including funding of worthless woke degrees in women's and black studies plus entire departments and sub-departments dedicated to the soul-crushing policing of a brave new world in diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Administrations pointlessly and often cluelessly taking sides on controversial and often unresolvable political issues.
- The degradation of academic degrees in relation to their cost and marketability, some of them inflated at the classroom level to meaninglessness,
- The abandonment of a role dating back to the Middle Ages as the heart and soul of Western society.

It is not unreasonable to expect public universities that have fallen so low in public esteem to come up with a public plan to address each of those points. This is said in recognition that we are dealing with smart people knowledgeable about the challenges facing higher education. Some of them are even selfless, well-meaning and seriously worried about the future of thier institution.

Those in that last group need to step up and find some leverage, and soon.

Eco-Devo: The Missing Studies

(June 12) — The good news is that the national media is losing its clout. The bad news is that so is the local media.

Here is Holman Jenkins of the Wall Street Journal on our newly acquired hype immunity:

“Older voters a decade or two ago assumed anything on a screen had the authority of the evening news. Now they understand that graphically ornate, professional-looking rubbish is still rubbish. Indeed, the big challenge for media outlets, at least those that aspire to be trusted arbiters, is to reverse the impression, not unwarranted, that they have also ventured into delivering rubbish.”

Now the bad news. These last decades of hype-mania (we used to call it “boosterism”) have overrun local media. And don’t write to tell me that there still are some great local news outlets. I know that. Many of them, not coincidentally, are members of this foundation.

The concern, rather, is with the larger metro newsrooms. They are filled with editors, producers and reporters padding resumes to escape Indiana for what they assume is hype heaven in the larger markets. Nobody, including politicians, much care what they say.

If you don’t know what I’m talking about, pick up a copy of Gannett’s Indianapolis Star.

The result is that Indiana is left without honest media having both motivation and staff to cover the large, more complicated frauds. And yes, I have an example in mind.

There is nary a proposed public subsidy or bond for an Indiana stadium, hotel or convention center in a mid-sized city or larger where the true cost has been fully discussed. In practically every case powerful people whom you don’t know end up meeting behind closed doors to determine who gets millions of dollars in taxpayer-leveraged money.

True, there have been “economic impact” studies that city councilmen pretend to understand. These often carry important-sounding titles such as IMPLAN (Impact Analysis for Planning), CUM (Capacity Utilization Model) or REMI (Regional Economic Model, Inc.). They are to real economic analysis what a husband says to his wife when she asks him, “Does this make my butt look fat?”

The John Locke Foundation explains how it works:

“The formula is simple, predictable and effective. A special interest group that stands to benefit from the project funds an economic impact study that purports to provide hard numbers on the number of jobs, the increase in wages, and the additional output that will be generated by the project or subsidy, and it will do this on an industry-by-industry basis. It makes grandiose claims about how much overall economic growth will be enhanced for the state or region generally. Once the report is completed, the special interest group that paid for the study will tout these results in press releases that will be picked up by the largely uncritical media establishment, ensuring that the political decision-makers and others who determine the fate of the project receive political cover.”

There are exceptions to this, although not here. A few years ago, a state senator in South Carolina grew suspicious of the dazzling numbers projected for a proposed headquarters and practice facility for the Carolina Panthers professional football team. All told, promoters said the project would yield an astounding \$3.8 billion on a \$115-million public investment.

The senator, however, hired an independent economist to check those numbers. Paid for it himself. Here is what he found:

The projected economic impact was overstated by nearly 41 percent, relying on assumptions that all 150 Panthers players, coaches, staff and owners would move to South Carolina.

About 75 Panthers employees could be expected to move to South Carolina permanently, half of what promoters promised. The project would create 208 jobs, not the 5,715 promised.

The project's multiplier (the number of additional, related jobs) was said to be 39:1 whereas the typical documented jobs multiplier for such projects is actually less than 4:1.

Our projects, by contrast, just keep rolling along picking up easy money from gullible councilmen on imaginary multipliers, rarely facing a challenge. We need a state legislator or two to step forward next time and fund an independent study.

The trick will be finding a statewide media outlet willing to publish the results — or finding a statewide media outlet at all. — *tcl*



"The Battle of Cowpens," painted by William Ranney in 1845, shows an unnamed patriot (far left) saving the life of Col. William Washington.