INDIANA POLICY

Review

Fall 2025

ANTI-NATALISM
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"Visit to a Family Doctor," Norman Rockwell, 1947

Financing Hoosier Healthcare

Avoiding Fiscal and Personal Crises

We may be ready to forfeit some options and the paperwork associated with them. High-quality, low-cost, standardized healthcare packages are possible and would be welcomed.

"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.

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From the South Wall

Speaking up for Flyover Country

Mana Abdi, a state representative in Maine, says that moving to America from Somalia was a "boot camp" and she abhorred the housing provided her. "They first put me in Kansas of all places," she says. Other Somali leaders have made similarly disparaging comments, making clear that they prefer what they consider their superior culture over the traditional American one.

In my later years I have been trying to put the most charitable interpretation on things. Therefore, I am squelching my initial, visceral urge to dismiss Ms. Abdi, et al., as pathetic, ignorant, dirt-bag ingrates whom should be sent back to the hell holes from which they came.

That was the old me. Now I would only compare Ms. Abdi's arrival in America with those of a typical 19th-century settler in the Great Plains or Midwest — your ancestors, most likely.

"The speed with which the American wilderness was turned into a land of farms, towns and cities was a heroic achievement, a saga of human courage and ingenuity unmatched in history." — Paul Johnson

Begin by imagining breaking prairie soil far, far from any neighbor, your family's survival depending on a horse, a plow and a single harvest. And to keep things interesting, throw in the stray torture-minded primitive — let's just call them the savages they were — plus the most unpredictable weather on earth.

There is a story of a pioneer settlement in Kansas, the place Ms. Abdi holds in contempt, that was hit by a tornado within its first week. Tragically, another tornado hit a week later. When the railroad representative came to check on them a few months later, they had built their entire settlement underground and had begun farming.

These people didn't arrive here to pick up a welfare check, huddle in ethnic enclaves and then treat the democratic process as if it were an ATM. Rather, they saved and planned for years to make the trip, mostly from northern Europe. They considered it the greatest of privileges to be here where they could own land and enjoy liberty beyond the imagination of those whom they left behind.

The pull of liberty was so strong and they arrived in such numbers and succeeding to such a degree that it transformed America into a world power — all within a single generation. Before our European ancestors set to work, the Great Plains were dominated by native grasses and the Midwest by a mix of forests and prairies. Between 1860 and 1900, millions of acres were brought into cultivation.

The late British historian Paul Johnson, in "A History of the American People," calls this monumental and heroic: "The speed with which the American wilderness was turned into a land of farms, towns and cities was a heroic achievement, a saga of human courage and ingenuity, unmatched in history. The settlers, armed with little more than determination and crude tools, tamed a continent."

My Grok assistant tells me that the U.S. become the world's leading wheat producer by the late 19th century, with wheat acreage expanding from 21 million acres in 1879 to 44 million acres by 1899. Again, the bulk of this transformation occurred in an incredibly short period, within a few decades, particularly between 1870 and 1900. For example, in the Dakotas, settlement was negligible before 1870, but by 1900, over 10 million acres were under cultivation.

And success was not accidental. Some arrived as a corporate group with specific skills, that is, one an expert in Turkey Red wheat, a blacksmith to fashion the necessary steel-tipped plows, another an expert in livestock, another fluent in English and American law, and so forth. They had saved money and were heavily recruited by the new railroads to settle, to invest, along the routes.

Do Somalis have specific skills? A fair question. They have among the highest unemployment rates of any nationality in the U.S. And if they have any accomplishments comparable to that described above — here or in Somali — I am unaware of them. *— tcl*

Financing Hoosier Healthcare

A perfect healthcare financing system does not exist, and needed changes are unlikely barring a crisis. For Indiana that crisis would mean unsustainable personal and state expenditures and reduced access to care.

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Shuffling through health insurance paperwork, do you sometimes wonder if your neighbor is equally confused? Does the saga of the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBBA), signed into law on July 4, concern you? Setting aside healthcare quality, we attempt to provide a snapshot of Hoosiers' access to healthcare and the ever-changing means with which they finance it.

Indiana ranks 17th in state population, yet 8th in the estimated decline by 2027 in healthcare spending due to OBBBA. Is there something unique about healthcare financing in Indiana? The answer is a qualified "yes." The qualification is that, to some degree, Indiana's uniqueness is a response to federal incentives.

Contrary to public opinion, the U.S. is not the Wild West in terms of access to healthcare. In fact, by 2023, the insured share of the population exceeded 92 percent in general and 93 percent in Indiana.

As seen in Table 1, the federal and state governments offer full or partial health coverage for a significant percentage of the U.S. population. The total percentages exceed 100 percent because some enrollees are covered in more than one way. For example, Medicare enrollees often supplement coverage with private Medigap policies and Medicaid clients in long-term care can continue with Medicare.

The Federal Role in Financing Hoosier Healthcare: Medicare and Medicaid

Federal government is a dominant player in insuring and financing healthcare, but the role of local and state governments preceded it by many decades.

In Indiana, the Board of State Charities, established in 1889, had the duty of ensuring that children, prisoners, and destitute persons residing in public institutions received proper care. The Board supervised the management of these institutions and the proper expenditure of state funds. All care was financed by the state and local government. Federal finances to support such activities were generally not available until 1936, when Indiana was able to access federal grants for specific health services.

Social Security, another federal program, was also initiated in the 1930s; however, no nationalized system of health insurance existed until much later. In 1965, both Medicare and Medicaid were signed simultaneously into federal law. Initially, Medicare focused on basic hospital insurance policy (Medicare, Part A) exclusively for those 65 and older to be totally financed with payroll taxes. If payroll taxes for Social Security and Medicare Hospital Insurance (Part A) exceeded benefits in any year, trust funds, consisting of federal treasuries, would make up the difference.

Unlike payroll taxes for Social Security there is no income cap on Medicare payroll taxes. In fact, high-income workers can pay an additional surcharge. Unlike Medicare Hospital Insurance (Part A), premiums are charged for Medicare Parts B, C and D. Nonetheless, annual premiums and payroll taxes combined are insufficient, and the trust funds, making up Social Security and Medicare deficits, could be insolvent by the 2030s. The viability of Medicare is not a state policy issue, but it does concern the 15 percent of Hoosiers claiming Medicare benefits.

Unlike Medicare, Medicaid is jointly funded by the state, and is therefore an important policy issue for Indiana. Medicaid was designed to target low-income individuals. Ironically, as a result of its simultaneous birth with Medicaid, Medicare Parts B, C and D premiums flow together with federal Medicaid funds into a joint account, called Supplementary Medical Insurance or SMI. The federal budget is on line to back up these joint commitments.

Over time, these commitments have expanded. Eligibility and benefits offered by Medicare and Medicaid have increased at a faster rate than revenue sources designed to finance them.

When a government reaches the limits of its ability to collect revenue, its legal commitments are in trouble. The size of the Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) account is a particularly serious issue because it affects, by default, both federal and state budgets. Medicare, Medicaid (including the Children's Health Insurance Program, enacted in 1997), and the Affordable Care Act's premium subsidies, enacted in 2010, have complementary missions in financing healthcare. It would make sense for Congress to consolidate federal healthcare trust funds and cap the Treasury subsidy. A reasonable recommendation, given the size of the National Debt, would be for SMI not to exceed its present 1.6 percent of GDP (Capretta).

How does Medicare assist in funding Hoosier healthcare? Those Hoosiers who are over 65 and Social Security recipients are eligible for Medicare Part A hospital benefits, that is if they or their spouse paid Medicare payroll taxes generally over a minimum of 10 years. Part A hospital benefits are limited; they come with a deductible and require part or full cost per day payments after a 60-day hospital stay and after a 20-day stay in a nursing facility.

Those on Part A are eligible for Medicare Parts B, C and D for which they will be charged premiums. Penalties in the form of higher premiums are associated with neglecting to enroll in them when an individual is eligible without proof of alternative coverage.

Medicare Part B covers doctors' appointments, outpatient services and certain medically necessary products. In 2025, the standard Part B monthly premium is $185. However, those with Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) exceeding $106,000 for an individual pay a surcharge. This surcharge, referred to as the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA), ranges from $74 to $443.90 per person. The standard premium plus any surcharge due is typically deducted from each person's monthly Social Security payment.

Medicare Advantage Plans (Medicare Part C) are a choice offered by private insurance companies and combine aspects of Parts A and B. Certain Advantage plans cover hearing, vision and dental care. About 49 of Hoosiers enrolled in Medicare choose Part C Advantage plans, slightly less than the National average. Holders of Medicare Advantage are not exempt from IRMAA surcharges

Medicare Part D offers optional prescription drug coverage. Premiums vary by the private pharmaceutical plan chosen; however, Hoosier premiums and deductibles are higher than the National Average. Again, the government makes it simple. Part D private premiums, together with up to an additional $85.80 IRMAA Part D fee, can be deducted from each person's monthly Social Security payment.

In addition, many Hoosiers purchase private Medigap policies to assist them in paying for deductibles and any uncovered Medicare charges. Medigap premiums are per person and vary depending on one's age and benefits covered.

Neither Medicare nor private Medigap policies cover long-term residential care. Individuals are expected to pay for these services out-of-pocket or purchase private long-term care insurance.

Medicare is a serious topic of conversation for Hoosiers approaching retirement because the ins and outs for themselves and dependents are complicated. However, Medicare is a relatively simple program compared with Medicaid. The federal/state Medicaid program is akin to a Rube Goldberg machine in complexity.

In 2023, as shown in Table 2, 35.8 percent of Hoosiers were enrolled in either Medicare or Medicaid; those dually eligible are listed in either Medicare or Medicaid.

The State of Indiana's Role in Financing Hoosier Healthcare

From Table 2, we learn that about 21 percent of Hoosiers are enrolled in Medicaid, significantly more than those receiving Medicare.

Recall that residential care for orphaned children, the mentally ill and aged adults in need was provided in Indiana, locally or by the state, prior to any federal assistance. By the late sixties, however, Medicaid had initiated federal subsidies to States for free or low-cost healthcare for all low-income households.

Therefore, starting in 1965, Indiana co-financed original Medicaid for low-income residents. For those, requiring long-term institutional care, these funds were generally allocated on a per-person fee-for-service basis.

As early as 1981, Indiana had established the Indiana Comprehensive Health Insurance Association (ICHIA), a high-risk pool to provide coverage for those unable to obtain health insurance due to their health status. Indiana had also initiated a unique Healthy Initiatives Program (HIP) for low-income households, while managing separate programs for pregnant women and children enrolled in the federal CHIP program.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010, sometimes referred to as Obamacare, greatly expanded eligibility for Medicaid healthcare coverage, and every state, including Indiana, responded uniquely to changed incentives.

What is now the first step for any Hoosier adult lacking employer, Medicare, or other health insurance? Those with household incomes of approximately 138 percent or less of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) can apply for coverage

Table 1. Major Sources, Enrollment, and Health Expenditures in the United States in 2023.

Sources of National Health Expenditures in 2023	Enrollment	Expenditure per Enrollee	Percentage of U.S. Resident Population (334 million)
Private Health Insurance	207.3 million	$7,065	62.2%
Medicare	67.1 million	$15,808	19.5%
Medicaid	91.7 million	$9,502	27.5%

Based on: Martin, Anne B., Micah Hartman, Benjamin Washington and Aaron Catlin. "National Health Expenditures In 2023: Faster Growth as Insurance Coverage and Utilization Increased," Health Affairs, Vol. 44. No. 1. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Baltimore, MD. Published online Dec. 18, 2024.

directly to the State of Indiana. Otherwise, the front door to coverage is the Health Insurance Marketplace, introduced as part of the Affordable Care Act.

Indiana, unlike some other States, has not set up its own Health Insurance Marketplace. Hoosier residents access the Federally Facilitated Marketplace through HealthCare.gov.

The Health Insurance Marketplace determines eligibility but does not automatically enroll an applicant in Medicaid. The goal of the Marketplace is to facilitate enrollment in private plans for those with estimated adjusted gross income too high for Medicaid eligibility but less than 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Those who qualify can sign up for free or low-cost subsidized coverage. In some cases, those with even higher incomes may be directed to plans charging reduced monthly premiums with lower deductibles and co-payments.

Public concern about the anticipated decrease in the percentage insured in the U.S. seems to focus on enhanced subsidies recently introduced into Medicaid and Marketplace policies. Enhanced subsidies provided additional premium support and tax credits during COVID, as well as coverage at no cost to those with incomes up to 130 percent FPL. Enhanced subsidies were extended through 2025 in the Inflation Reduction Act. However, they were eliminated as part of the OBBBA.

Marketplace plan clients are responsible for premiums; however, the Marketplace generally forwards federal subsidies directly through to insurance companies that cannot deny coverage to those with preexisting medical conditions. An enrollee's tax liability adjusts if yearly income exceeds or falls below that estimated when determining the size of the subsidy.

Federally Facilitated Marketplace plans differ from Medicaid plans. Indiana manages several Medicaid plans with Maximus Health Services, Inc. serving as its enrollment broker. Maximus's role is to provide unbiased counseling on the health plan that best serves anyone seeking assistance. Hoosiers choose between policies offered by state-partnered managed-care organizations (MCOs), such as Anthem, CareSource Indiana, Managed Health Services (MHS), United Health and MDwise. MCOs arrange, administer and pay for the delivery of healthcare services. The MCO is responsible for ensuring access and quality care for anyone enrolled in one or the other of Indiana's health plans.

Indiana plans are regulated and subsidized by Federal Medicaid. Table 3 categorizes the over 2 million Hoosiers enrolled in Medicaid; the numbers given represent an average of monthly enrollment in 2024.

Indiana Healthcare Plans

The Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP), a unique healthcare plan pioneered by the State of Indiana in 2008, includes vision and dental coverage for Hoosiers ages 19 to 64 with incomes up to 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). It requires premiums and copayments. HIP

Table 2. Health Insurance Coverage in the U.S. and Indiana: 2023

	Employer	Non-Group	Medicaid	Medicare	Military	Uninsured
U. S.	48.6%	6.2%	21.2%	14.7%	1.3%	7.9%
Indiana	51.9%	4.8%	20.8%	15.0%	0.8%	6.8%

Based on: Kaiser Family Foundation analysis and estimates derived from the 2008-2023 Census Bureau's American Community Survey. https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/total-population/.

incentivizes members to take better care of their health and offers a savings plan to cover out-of-pocket healthcare expenses. The HIP program now includes the expanded Medicaid enrollment population, initiated by the Affordable Care Act.

Hoosier Care Connect is a healthcare program for individuals aged 59 years and younger who are blind or disabled. It includes some children in foster care. Certain enrollees, ineligible for Medicare, may be receiving federal Supplemental Security Income.

Hoosier Healthwise is an Indiana Medicaid plan for children, former foster-care children, pregnant women, blind, or disabled individuals. Members do not have any cost-sharing obligations for basic healthcare. Hoosier Healthwise generally does not include the expanded benefits of HIP. However, families with incomes below a certain level can access, at little or no cost, a policy provided by a managed care organization covering doctor visits, prescription medicine, mental healthcare, dental care, hospitalizations and surgeries.

Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) is a federal program enacted in 1997 to provide funding to states to reduce the number of uninsured children. CHIP enrolls children in low-income working families who don't have access to job-based coverage but earn too much to qualify for Medicaid. Children served by CHIP are included in the Hoosier Healthwise population. CHIP members are responsible for low monthly premiums and copays for certain services.

Pathways for the Aging is a new Indiana program for those 60 years of age and older; as such, no enrollment figures for fiscal year 2024 are listed in Table 3. The anticipated 2025 enrollment figure was 119,619. Of these, 19 percent would be residing in nursing homes, 24 percent would be receiving Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) services, and 57 percent would be receiving treatment for acute illnesses. Pathways is designed as a long-term services and support program in which the Indiana Family & Social Services Administration partners with managed health organizations to coordinate Medicaid and Medicare benefits.

Previously, Medicaid only paid for long-term care services in an institutional setting. The waiver program "waives" the necessity of admission into a nursing facility or group home

Table 3. Medicaid Enrollment in Indiana Healthcare Plans

Indiana Health Care Plans	Average Monthly Enrollment Fiscal Year 2024
Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP)	736,768
Hoosier Care Connect	96,268
Hoosier Healthwise	797,206
Pathways for Aging	
Total Managed Care Enrollment	**1,630,242**
Institutionalized	31,099
In Waivers granted to Indiana	75,364
Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS)	3,342
Other (Emergency Services, Dual Eligibility, Savings Program, etc.)	341,333
Total Fee for Service Enrollment	**451,138**
Overall Total Enrollment	**2,081,380**

Source: Indiana Family & Social Services Administration."Medicaid Financial Reports," June 2024.

for Medicaid to pay for needed home and community-based services.

Indiana has applied for and received other Medicaid waivers, each of which has a fixed number of individuals served annually. For example, there are waivers increasing financial or institutional coverage for youths with serious mental, developmental and medical issues (Wheeler). Indiana also received waivers to allocate Medicaid funds directly to institutions aside from those earned on a per-capita basis.

Table 4 indicates that while over 50 percent of all Medicaid spending in Indiana went for those in managed care plans, less than 44 percent was spent on fee-for-service care. However, these percentages are misleading when enrollment, as shown in Table 3, is considered. Average Medicaid expenditure per person is around $6,000 for those in managed care and $19,000 for all those enrolled in any fee-for-service plans. Obviously, expenditures for healthy adults and children are significantly less than those for the elderly and severely ill. As such, a ballpark per capita estimate, based on Tables 3 and 4, for those in residential care is $84,447.

One might assume incorrectly that Indiana's Medicaid payments from the federal government reflect the higher costs associated with providing care for different Medicare classifications. Ironically, the federal government compensates Indiana on a per capita basis for its healthier, less costly clients at a significantly higher rate.

ACA expanded Medicaid coverage to nearly all individuals and households with incomes up to 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and provided states with an enhanced federal matching annual rate (FMAP) of 90 percent. The bonus matching rate was in return for increasing their original Medicaid population to include the expanded ACA-eligible population. A 90 percent matching rate is significantly higher than the matching rate for original Medicaid. The lower federal matching rate varies from 50 percent to over 80 percent depending on a state or territory's level of income. Indiana's federal matching rate is 64.74 percent, and we can assume that this is a good estimate of the federal government's share for original Medicaid.

ACA expansion was optional, and Indiana's Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP) was already in effect.

Table 4. Medicaid Spending in Indiana for Health Care 2024 State Fiscal Year

Type of Expenditure	Dollars Spent	Percent of Total Expenditures
Managed Care	**$10,353,867,761**	**52.1%**
Healthy Indiana Plan	**$5,878,806,202**	**29.6%**
Hoosier Care Connect	**$1,725,551,782**	**8.7%**
Hoosier Healthwise	**$2,749,509,777**	**13.8%**
Pathways for Aging		
Fee-for-service Total	**$8,705,165,770**	**43.8%**
Long Term Institutional Care	**$2,626,219,098**	**13.2%**
Long Term Community Care	**$3,572,795,279**	**18.0%**
NEMT Program	**$26,008,458**	**0.1%**
State Plan Services FFS	**$2,480,142,935**	**12.5%**
Manual Expenditures that tend to be one-time	**$1,439,237,242**	**7.2%**
Other Expenditures and Collections	**($635,278,470)**	**(3.2%)**
Total Expenditures	**$19,862,992,304**	**100.0%**
Total Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Expenditures	**$388,757,196**	

Source: Indiana Family & Social Services Administration. "Medicaid Financial Reports," June 2024

However, Indiana, like all but 10 states, succumbed to the 90 percent annual subsidy incentive and adopted expanded Medicaid. Expanded enrollment in Indiana is now about 31 percent of its total Medicaid enrollment, exceeding 24.3 percent for the U.S. in general.

The federal government over time pays about 70 percent of total Hoosier Medicaid expenditures. Does this imply that the remaining 30 percent is part of Indiana's biennial budget approved by the General Assembly or excise taxes on cigarettes? Not quite as indicated in Table 5, a snapshot of how Hoosier Medicaid is financed. Indeed, just 21-23 percent of Hoosier Medicaid expenses are allocated through the General Fund; however, this is not an insignificant amount. For the 2026 fiscal year, 29 percent of the total state budget has been allocated to Health and Human Services, and approximately 24 percent exclusively to healthcare.

A key to understanding the other revenue sources, listed in Table 5, lies in the incentives associated with the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Provider Taxes and Assessment Fees

As Medicaid enrollment grew, Indiana increasingly turned to taxes and fees on hospitals, nursing homes and other healthcare providers to generate funds to pay for its Medicaid programs. The General Assembly has considered extending taxes and fees to Managed Care Organizations; 20 other states have already done so. Note in Table 5 that Intergovernmental Transfers, Provider Tax Receipts and Hospital Assessment Fee Funding accounted for 8.2 percent of all Medicaid Funding in Indiana in fiscal year 2024.

Provider taxes are state-imposed taxes on healthcare providers. Since 1980, states have been taxing healthcare providers; Alaska remains the only state that does not. A 1991 "holding harmless" provision prevented States from guaranteeing that the revenue collected from this tax would return to the same provider. Thus, provider taxes should be broad-based and

Table 5. Major Sources of Medicaid Funding in Indiana — 2024

Major Sources of Medicaid Funding	Percentage of Total Funding
Federal Contribution to Indiana Medicaid Program	67.6%
Intergovernmental Transfers	3.4%
Provider Tax Receipts	.5%
Hospital Assessment Fee Funding	3.6%
Healthy Indiana Plan Funding	2.1%
Indiana's Contribution from its General Fund	22.8%
Major Sources of Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) — Included above as part of Total Funding	**Percentage of CHIP Funding**
Federal Government	75.6%
Indiana's General Fund	20.3%
Hospital Assessment Fee Funding	4.1%

Source: Indiana Family and Social Services Administration. "Medicaid Assistance Funding Summary," Medicaid Financial Reports, December 2024.

uniformly applied to all providers in a specific category. Currently, however, the federal government exempts states from the "hold harmless" provision on taxes up to 6 percent of net patient revenue. As of 2024, Indiana had a provider tax on nursing facilities (less than or equal to 3.5 percent), on hospitals (4.5 percent-5 percent) and on intermediate care facilities (5.5 percent) (Alice Burns, KFF).

Assessment fees, on the other hand, are additional charges, with fixed and variable rates, levied on healthcare providers. These fees are generally not as uniformly applied as provider taxes. In Indiana, assessment fees target the expansion population in the Healthy Initiatives Program and compensate institutions for taxes and fees paid versus costs incurred, given Medicaid's base rates.

Provider taxes and fees support Indiana's program in offering healthcare institutions serving low-income populations with supplemental Medicaid payments. As such, they are viewed by some as a means whereby the state, in cooperation with hospitals and other health facilities, back-channels revenue from Medicaid programs. They suggest that the intention is to increase the Medicaid population to draw more federal money, about $2 more for every dollar contributed by the state for original Medicaid and $9 for able-bodied individuals in the expanded ACA population (WSJ Editorial). In response, the president of the Indiana Hospital Association argues that the remuneration received from two-thirds of all hospital clients does not cover costs. As a result, nearly one-third of Indiana's rural hospitals operate at a loss because the percentage of Medicare and Medicaid patients they serve exceeds the state average (Tittle).

States seek waivers in order to provide institutions with supplemental payments, and Indiana ranked 4th of all states in the percentage of Supplemental Payments as a share of its total Medicaid expenditures (Congressional Research Services). Supplemental payments include Intergovernmental Transfers to County hospitals and Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) Payments meant to offset the costs of uncompensated care. Upper Payment Limits (UPL) are designed to bridge the gap between Medicare and Medicaid rates.

Because Indiana's provider taxes are below 6 percent, it falls at the moment within the safe harbor in allocating Medicaid Supplemental Payments. However, OBBBA reduces the "hold harmless" safe harbor threshold for provider taxes from 6 percent to 3.4 percent, reducing the rate level by 0.5 percent annually starting in fiscal year 2028 and reaching 3.5 percent by 2032. Nursing facilities and intermediate care facilities, unlike hospitals, are exempt from this phase-down.

OBBBA specifically targets Indiana's ACA's expansion population with multiple mandates, including an enrollment cap. It requires recertification for Medicaid eligibility every six months and imposes work requirements on non-disabled adults not caring for young children. For those with incomes above the poverty level, it mandates cost-sharing up to $35 per visit for most health services. OBBBA also reduces the 90 percent federal matching rate (FMAP) for the costs of emergency medical care provided to immigrants who happen to be covered by Medicaid but are undocumented.

In 2018, Indiana sought and received Medicaid approval for work requirements for those enrolled in its "Healthy Indiana Plan." However, it suspended enforcement due to legal challenges. The state and federal intentions to control deficits and reduce dependency are understandable. However, work requirements are costly to administer and introduce distortionary incentives to household and firm decision-making. Furthermore, KFF reports that 72 percent of all Indiana Medicaid adults already work part-time or full-time.

Unlike work requirements, the administrative costs associated with eligibility checks on household income are directly related to the integrity of Medicaid. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid reports that 1.2 million Americans in 2024 were enrolled in Medicaid or CHIPS in two or more states. Another 1.6 million were enrolled in both Medicaid and a Marketplace plan with taxpayer subsidies. Insurers benefit when enrollees, enrolled in another state, do not utilize coverage on policies issued in-state.

Could eliminating enhanced Medicaid and Marketplace subsidies reduce insurance coverage on these plans by 19.2 percent as some reports suggest (The Global Statistics)? Indeed, that would be unfortunate. It is more likely, however, that those with Marketplace plans will continue with their pre-COVID subsidized policies because their incomes are too high for Medicaid, and OBBBA doubles tax-free contributions to health-saving accounts. If, for some reason, they do become eligible for Medicaid, they will be directed to free or more heavily subsidized private insurance policies.

Private Insurance and Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Financing

More than a majority of Hoosiers are linked in some way to private healthcare coverage

Private health insurance can be divided into non-group and group policies. The non-grouped include those in subsidized Federal Marketplace and Medicaid, and the unsubsidized ones purchased by individuals. Group policies are generally employer-provided. Hoosiers have a greater likelihood than Americans in general to be enrolled in employer-provided policies.

The average annual healthcare premium paid by employers in 2024 was $8,951 for single coverage and $25,572 for family coverage. Consider that the average joint employer/employee premium is about 32 percent of the median household income. Yet, this premium is less than U.S. healthcare costs per person. Medicare and Medicaid combined annual expenditures tend to exceed those paid by private insurance. One explanation is that those enrolled in employer-sponsored health insurance are younger and employable, whereas those in government policies tend to be elderly and more infirm.

In employer-provided health insurance, covered workers contribute on average 16 percent of the premium for single coverage and 25 percent for family coverage. Plans vary significantly with respect to deductibles, co-payments, benefits covered, health savings accounts and firm size. A few generalizations stand out. For example, the average premium contribution of covered workers in nonprofit is higher than that in for-profit firms (KFF Authors: Cox).

Continuation of Health Coverage, referred to as COBRA, initiated in 1986, gave employees and their families the right to continue with employer provided policies for a limited time on separating from a job. Presently, policies accessed through the Federal Marketplace may be less expensive.

Employer healthcare plans vary by type. PPOs (Preferred Provider Organizations) are most common; they offer flexibility and generally do not require referrals to see specialists. PPO members pay less when using in-network providers.In 2024, 48 percent of covered workers were enrolled in a PPO, another 27 percent in a high deductible plan with a savings option, and 13 percent in an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization). Certain employers do not offer insurance but compensate employees for healthcare expenses in what is called a POS (Point of Service) plan; others merely reimburse employees for a fixed percentage of healthcare costs (KFF, Employer Benefits 2024).

It should be mentioned that certain economists view employer healthcare costs as “tax expenditures.” They argue that, because employer/employee healthcare premiums are treated as a cost of doing business, they reduce the corporate and income taxes that the government would have otherwise received. Nevertheless, the residual competitive and market aspect of employer-sponsored health insurance adds value. Employees bargain for benefits, employers have an incentive to seek low premiums, and insurance companies negotiate services and prices with healthcare providers.

Out-of-pocket costs represent the amount of money spent by individuals on healthcare that is not paid for by a health insurance plan or public programs like Medicare or Medicaid. It includes health spending by uninsured people and any expenses not covered by health insurance plans. Out-of-pocket spending does not include health insurance premiums. Cross-country comparisons indicate that universal single-payer nation health insurance may require significant out-of-pocket co-payments. Various estimates place overall U.S. out-of-pocket healthcare expenditures at 10 percent of total healthcare spending.

Why Is Financing Healthcare So Expensive?

Competition between providers, along with client choice, would concentrate scattered cost/pricing information into the most effective ways of delivering services.

Three partial explanations for high medicalcare funding in the U.S. include: 1) a disconnect between costs and prices; 2) a lack of political consensus on income-based government policies and the level of care provided; and 3) Americans' preference for options.

Administered prices do not reflect market costs. Medicare rates are set by a federal formula; state budgets affect Medicaid eligibility; premiums are shaped by designated Managed Care Organizations. This fragmented approach has led to growing rate differentials. Consider the following hypothetical example.

Suppose Hoosier Hospital charges Clients A, B, C and D $300 for medical and lab services.

Client A: Medicare covers $75 for Client A, her Medigap plan negotiates a fee and pays $85, and Client A is charged and pays $25 out-of-pocket.

Client B: Medicaid covers $60 for Client B, his subsidized plan pays $75, and Client B pays $25 out-of-pocket and receives a tax credit for that amount.

Client C: Uninsured Client C receives similar services for acute care in the Emergency Room for which Hoosier Hospital receives $0 in revenue.

Client D: Hoosier Hospital needs to charge Client D, paying full price, $955 to cover its stated costs of $1200 for all four clients. Otherwise, it might seek supplemental payments from the state to cover losses.

Pharmaceutical charges provide another example of cost/price distortions. In some instances, plans charge members differential prices for identical drugs depending on a patient's diagnosis. Pharmaceutical companies pay fees and offer discounts to intermediaries and the government, but not all discounts are passed through into lower insurance premiums (WSJ).

It is no secret that firms redistribute revenue internally between goods and services. However, the degrees of separation between costs, charges and premiums plus out-of-pocket costs are significantly greater in three- and four-party medical financing. Also, unlike corporations, nonprofit healthcare providers seldom go out of service. Nevertheless, healthcare can be life-or-death, and G. K. Chesterton warned against tearing down a wall without knowing why it was built in the first place.

Is there a way of linking costs with prices in healthcare without destroying what presently works? Introducing healthcare competition without reducing quality could reduce costs. Competition between providers, along with client choice, would concentrate scattered cost/pricing information into the most effective ways of delivering services. Unnecessary government controls, on the other hand, reduce incentives to innovate in the development of generics and breakthroughs in new treatments. A realistic suggestion would be to reduce or, at a minimum, not expand any non-critical goods and services that can be provided elsewhere in competitive markets.

Is "Healthcare Financing" the Same as "Medical Insurance?"

It is a misnomer to call present healthcare policies "medical insurance." In the past, health insurance was a way to avoid large unanticipated expenses due to illness or injury. We now tend to view our healthcare policies like maintenance contracts to be renewed annually with virtually no ceiling on reimbursements.

To some extent, for-profit plans and health providers have access to and use actuarial data for large populations to keep their premiums and charges in line. Individuals, with knowledge about their own household's health status, shop around for a policy that, over time, will pay out benefits equal to or exceeding premiums. Meanwhile, they have an incentive to avail themselves of all included services. Guaranteed government subsidies encourage both providers and clients to advocate for more services to be included in "insurance" policies. Expanding coverage for everyone increases government's commitments, hence, more public revenue must be raised through taxes or debt.

The average amount spent on healthcare per person in other high-income countries ($7,393) is about half of that spent per person in the U.S. in 2023 ($13,432).

Long-term care for those unable to care for themselves is a completely separate issue from having access to a healthcare policy with an affordable premium. In such cases, one may be affluent enough to arrange for care or have purchased a long-term care policy. For others, Medicaid is the payer of last resort.

Hoosiers are not legally required to contribute financially for their parents' care; Pennsylvania does have such a law, but generally it is not operative due to administrative costs. Medicaid, however, can and does seek reimbursement from adult children to whom funds were transferred from parental assets used to determine Medicaid eligibility. Indiana was one of the first 4 states to initiate, in 1993, a choice between a traditional long-term care policy or one with a Medicaid Partnership Provision. Presently, Medicaid long-term care applicants covered by a policy including such a provision are permitted to retain assets beyond the normal limits and still qualify.

If healthcare is a right, then someone is responsible for providing it. In Indiana, the political will to stabilize anyone presenting with acute illnesses continues. Hoosiers are willing as well to provide healthcare for impoverished elders and those with protracted incurable illnesses. No one knows precisely the available resources required to service these commitments. Federal Medicare and Medicaid funding, however, is insufficient.

Rhetoric aside, the goal in offering Indiana's relatively new Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) is to lower the cost and number of those eligible for long-term residential care. For some Hoosiers, however, community-based services will not function as a low-cost substitute. Other difficult questions remain, such as who determines the level of state care provided and what is the role of families, churches and other non-profits in monitoring and providing care. Data from the American Time Use Survey indicates that 14 percent of U.S. adults report providing unpaid eldercare, and over one fourth of these are engaged in eldercare on any given day (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The average amount spent on healthcare per person in other high-income countries ($7,393) is about half of that spent per person in the U.S. in 2023 ($13,432) (Peterson-KFF. Health System). To some extent, the expenditure difference is due to two factors. First, Americans prefer a variety of options in selecting the type of financing and level of care. Recall that a recent proposal to tax those who choose not to purchase health insurance was quickly rejected. Secondly, these expenditures may indicate a higher preference of Americans for healthcare services versus other types of consumption. Fortunately, neither government nor private plans preclude access to expensive but available treatments.

International comparisons inevitably raise the question of healthcare quality. Do more options and increased spending result in better health outcomes? We suggest that the system of U.S. healthcare financing has resulted in health outcomes equal to or exceeding international standards for most U.S. residents. Why then do Indiana residents have worse health outcomes compared with the U.S. as a whole?

The South Bend Tribune Editorial Board argues for increased public health funding to address these issues. They refer to Indiana's "abysmal" ranking on infant mortality (8.7 per 1,000 births compared with 5.6 nationally), the percentage of adults who smoke (14.5 compared with 12.1 percent nationally), and obesity (36.3 percent of adults compared with 32 percent nationally) (June 29, 2025). Furthermore, drug deaths and adults with multiple chronic conditions in Indiana exceed national averages. The problem is not due to a lack of access to healthcare. Indiana exceeds or hovers around national averages in terms of the percentage insured, in having a dedicated healthcare provider, and the availability of preventative care (United Health Foundation).

The disconnect between indicators of the Hoosier health status and access to healthcare is puzzling. It does suggest the need for health financing programs in line with the unique issues facing Indiana. One recommendation is to build on the framework of the state's Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP) that emphasizes incentives and remuneration for those who assume responsibility for their health.

A perfect healthcare financing system does not exist. Modest incremental but needed changes to existing programs are likely to be dismissed, barring a crisis. For Indiana, a crisis would mean unsustainable personal and state expenditures and reduced access to care. On a more positive note, Hoosiers may be ready to forfeit some options and the paperwork associated with them. High-quality, low-cost, standardized healthcare packages are possible and would be welcomed. This would require transparency about costs and charges, entry and exit of providers, and a finite list of services offered. Let's aspire to a more realistic and effective system to maintain present or better health outcomes for all Hoosiers. ◆

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Anti-Natalism: The Path to Extinction

Lost to so many young people today seems the discovery of meaning and purpose in children, family and church. So many growing into maturity today are addicted to social media, entertainment, comfort, and themselves.

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Preface

In preparing my thoughts for this article, I thought it worthwhile checking out catastrophic extinction sites. Can't hurt, right? I ran into an Australian firm, Risk Frontiers, that makes a living searching out and estimating the likelihood of nasty events. Through Risk Frontiers, I met, only virtually (thank heavens), Toby Ord. Australian-born Toby Ord is a moral philosopher at the Future of Humanity Institute, at Oxford University. Toby has advised organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank and the World Economic Forum (WEF). Ord has also written "The Precipice Book" estimating what kinds of catastrophic disasters are ahead for humanity and when and, perhaps, how often these events will occur. I am sharing some of Ord's findings, saving you having to read them for yourself.

- Stellar explosion — 1 in 1,000,000,000 (years)
- Asteroid or comet impact — 1 in 1,000,000
- Naturally arising pandemics —1 in 10,000
- Super volcanic eruption — 1 in 10,000
- Climate Change — 1 in 1,000
- Nuclear War — 1 in 1,000
- Other environmental damage — 1 in 1,000
- Other anthropogenic risks — 1 in 50
- Engineered pandemics — 1 in 30
- Unforeseen anthropogenetic risks — 1 in 30
- Nonaligned Artificial Intelligence — 1 in 10

The list is an elitist's dream — or maybe nightmare for many of us — for so many of the disasters Ord predicts have significant man-made components. And Ord's whole process is such a beautiful example of junk science. I can only imagine for how many years WHO (another client of Toby's) might shut down human activity Covid-style if any of these disasters occur and some of us survive. — *jmo*

Anti-Natalism

Demographics are relentless. My children largely appeared in the late 1970s, a time of public-school construction. Because our little ones had been born just after the baby boom, I know many, at the time, believed more children equals the need for more school buildings.

But no one in my upscale, suburban New York neighborhood seemed to be focusing on demographics: how many children will actually be born following our own cohort of children. Answer: not as many as before. Hence, unrealized at the time, there might be a need for fewer new schools and even, out a few years, thoughts about closing some we already had.

Today, in America, demographics are predicting things we might or might not like. For instance, big trends today include the growing racial and ethnic diversity of the country, Asia's replacing Latin America (including Mexico) as the biggest source of new immigrants to the U.S., and the fact that the share of Americans who live in middle class households is actually shrinking. These three trends are all major demographic movements now occurring in America. They will affect us deeply for years to come. Of course, over time, they may change. But unlikely quickly or soon. One trend that seems invisible to many today and is, surely, grossly underreported, is anti-natalism, a trend that is already a ticking bomb.

People around the world — starting with the West — less and less want children or the burdens and sacrifices that come with them.

The figures are alarming and are worsening by the year. Let me cite a few in the Western and the developing worlds.

Remember the key replacement number is 2.1 children per woman - and hopefully married. That number equals replacement.

America is currently at 1.6, as is Brazil; Italy is at 1.2, as is Japan; So. Korea is at .8. Even the developing world is seeing the effects of anti-natalism. Niger, a poor country in north-central Africa, has dropped its birth rate from 7.5 in 1970 to 6.1 today. Iran has gone from 6.8 in 1970 to 1.7; and China has fallen from 6.1 in 1970 to 1 today. Bucking the trend – sort of – is Israel, which has a birth rate that has fallen from 7.5 in 1970 to 2.8 today, a rate still above replacement.

Increasing numbers of women in the workforce, especially with a college education, don't want children. They find that children add to an overbearing narrative that permeates much of modern culture.

What's behind this catastrophic trend and what can be done to reverse it — at least to some degree? Until recently, dire predictions surrounding depopulation seemed absurd. Maybe your charitable giving, like mine, has brought mailing to you from outfits like Population Connection or Stop Having Kids, to name a couple. A Reddit group on anti-natalism has 35,000 members. Many of these people think the planet's greatest enemy and threat is human life.

That was yesterday's problem, not today's. But anti-natalists still think population is growing dangerously and creating more misery for those here and those still coming online. And still true enough today, in favor of anti-natalist's view, there's no shortage of people. For the past two centuries the global human population has steadily climbed. But it's expected to peak at 10.3 billion people in the 2080s, according to a recent United Nations report.

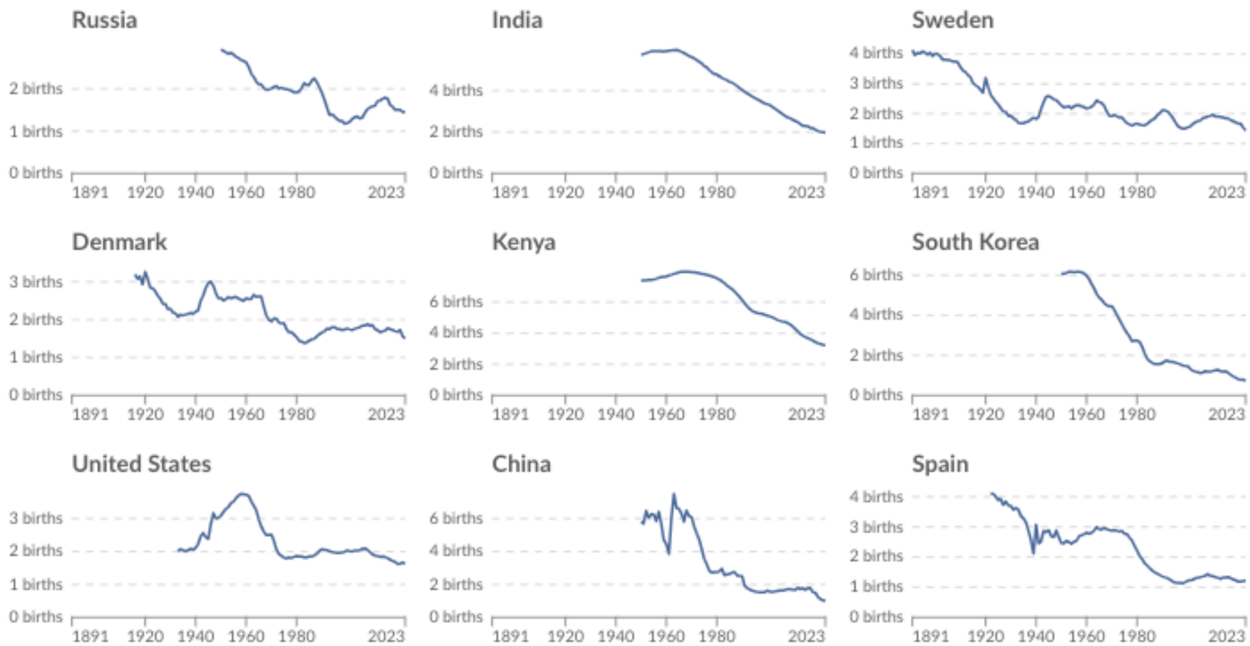
From there, how rapidly the population declines and whether that is a good or bad thing have become subjects of heated debate among demographers worldwide. Again, the coming so-called "demographic winter" is not yet an urgent crisis — at least in the United States. But the economic, political and social implications for societies where the elderly outnumber working-age populations are already playing out in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Italy and other parts of Southern Europe. Social unrest could blossom in China, for instance, because of the one-child policy it pursued from the 1980 to 2015. That policy caused families to abort many females, leaving many Chinese men today with little hope of marrying a woman.

In 2022, Elon Musk called the collapsing birth rate "the biggest danger civilization faces, by far." Currently, he has at least 14 children with four different women and has donated $10 million in funding a pro-natalist research group.

Elon's way is one way of dealing with this threatening problem. Not my recommendation (having four child-bearers in your stable and 14 children or more so far), but with enough money, someone can do that. Others, including PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Skype founder Jaan Tallinn have funded

Total Fertility Rate: Births per Woman

The total fertility rate summarizes the total number of births a woman would have, if she experienced the birth rates seen in women of each age group in one particular year across her childbearing years. *Source: Our World in Data* https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/children-per-woman-un?tab=table&country=OWID_WRL~OWID_LIC~OWID_LMC~OWID_UMC~OWID_HIC~USA



fertility technology and other pro- natalist initiatives.

I hope the efforts and investments of these tech billionaires have a positive effect on encouraging more babies, because national governmental efforts so far have not. Consider a few attempts.

Hungary's fertility rate rose after it instituted a series of pro-family policies beginning in the early 2000s to combat its shrinking population. But in recent years, its fertility rate has dropped again.

Japan has embarked on a decades-long rollout of policies to urge people to have more babies — everything from subsidized childcare to childcare leave and direct cash payments for having even one baby. But these measures have also failed. In fact, in 2023, Japan's fertility rate dipped to its lowest level since the government began gathering data in 1899. Now, Japan is hoping migration into the country will help.

Or consider China again. The birth rate has been falling for decades as a result of that one-child policy and China's rapid urbanization. As in neighboring Japan and South Korea, large numbers of Chinese people have moved from rural farms to cities, where having children is more expensive and culture is very different. When China relaxed its one child policy in 2015, it granted families the right to have two children. Then, during COVID, the government permitted three children. China even offered cash incentives of $4,000 or so for each child. Still, nothing seems to be changing the downward drift in Chinese births. Remember, China's replacement rate currently is 1.

Why is this happening?

While there has been plenty of struggle — for eons — between men and women wrangling over childcare and children, increasing numbers of women in the workforce, especially with a college education, don't want children. They find that children add to an overbearing narrative that permeates much of modern culture. That rhetoric deems child-rearing and marriage as low status, draining, unpleasant and economically unfeasible, robbing woman of real career options and advancement.

Still, raising children is seen by many women and not a few men as the greatest work they will ever undertake in their lives, but that view is less prevalent today especially in urban, educated environments. It is not in the DNA of today's culture.

For sure, again, especially for people of traditional religious faiths and values, a child is a blessing, but for many others having children wreaks of subservience and self-sacrifice. And modern culture ain't into those categories too much no more. Marriage itself, or the kind of commitment between a man and a woman that endures through thick and thick, is also pretty weak sauce these days. In fact, just this past March, the Wall Street Journal did an important story entitled, "American Women Are Giving Up on Marriage."

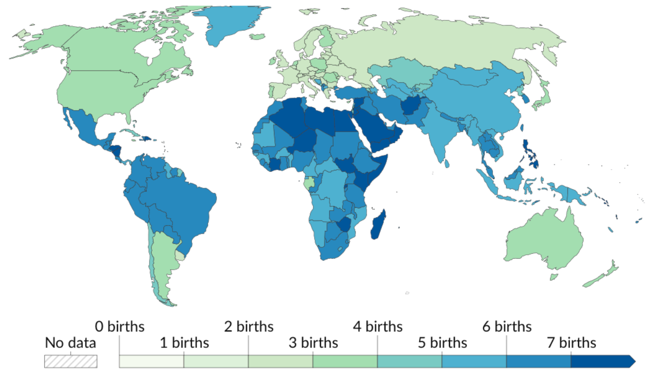
Add to that trend the scourges of abortion, physician-assisted suicide and even the most radical elements of climate anger (which hates human life because, to them, human beings are the major threat to the planet), and we have, indeed, a rich stew of anti- humanity cooking up on the cultural stove.

Abortion takes a bit over a million little lives a year, currently, over 50 percent of whom are extinguished by pills. For sure, a culture that can be as hardened or desensitized to that level of murder of innocents is also one that is on its way to losing its shared humanity.

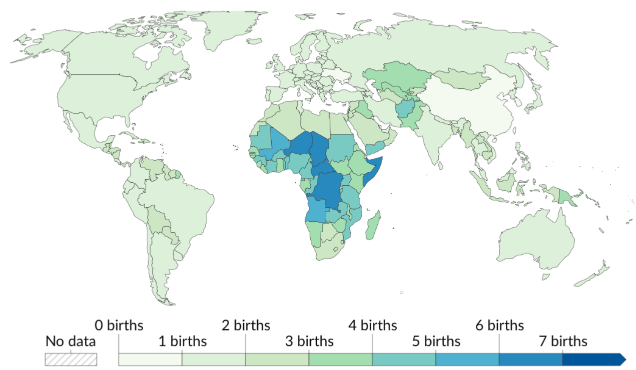
As an example of the level of hardened hearts favoring even more abortion, consider a thought from the Speaker of the Colorado House, Julie McCluskie, who said at a committee hearing early this year, "A birth is more expensive than an abortion. Ultimately, we do achieve a cost savings because of the averted births that will not take place."

Democrats have for years flirted with this kind of fiscal justification for abortion, Now, at least in Colorado, they're coming right out and saying it. Is it any wonder then that suicide is the number

Fertility Rates 1950



Fertility Rates 2023



Source: Our World in Data

two cause of death among young people? Lost to so many young people today seems the discovery of meaning and purpose in children, family and church. So many growing into maturity today are addicted to social media, entertainment, comfort, and themselves. Is it any wonder that loneliness and depression are rampant in our culture, particularly among the young? We need each other. We need community. We need hope.

Then, too, there is the euthanasia movement or the "physician-assisted suicide" trend in America and throughout the Western World. The difference between the two movements is that one allows someone to take your life; the other only helps you take your own. In America, euthanasia is forbidden. Elsewhere, in Canada and Switzerland, for instance, it is legal. Either way, both euthanasia and physician-assisted- suicide offer examples of the breathtaking march we're on toward more hedonic, radical, personal autonomy that many moderns believe is all that separates us from true human fulfillment.

In the end, I can't help but think that changed values and culture have brought us to this place. We are increasingly a self-absorbed, radically individualistic culture that wants ever more pleasure and fun. With lots of exceptions, of course, we seem to care less about family, faith, tradition, real community or even acquiring wisdom.

If many, especially younger moderns, had a flag to raise, it might proclaim, "I want what I want. I want it now. And I'll do whatever it takes to get it."

As a person of deep Christian faith, I mourn for these souls. I naturally incline, instead, towards faith, hope and love, and deep, thick community. At 77, I will be fine, but eroding culture and many modern values all around me bring increasingly greater concerns to my soul and my confidence for many in this world I will leave behind. ◆

Richard McGowan

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Biological Parents

When I taught ethics at Butler, there were with ethical issues that did not exist when I previously taught at the now-defunct St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, technological innovation was not nearly so developed as it was a mere ten years later. For instance, I-phones were not invented until 2007.

Another example of technological change involved surrogate parents. I posed this question to my students: A and B would like to have a child but are infertile so they hire C to have the child? What is C called? Invariably, the students answered, "surrogate mother."

Anyone well read in the Bible recognizes that response as half-true. The book of Genesis has an account of surrogacy. Abraham's wife, Sarah, herself incapable of producing a child, had her maidservant, the Egyptian slave Hagar, become pregnant by Abraham. However, the manner of pregnancy involved intercourse between Hagar and Abraham.

By the time I taught at Butler, surrogate mothers were commonplace and even some surrogate fathers. Students ignored that possibility until I pointed out that fathers could be surrogates, too.

I responded, "Is biological connection important?"

That question brought looks of consternation, as though I came from another planet. It was obvious to them that biological connection was so important that a professor who asked the question was not altogether together.

I stated, "If it is important, it is also important to the child, too. Right? So shouldn't the connection to the surrogate be preserved for the sake of the child?" As my most recent alumni publication put it, a person has "the enduring, human need to know one's origin."

A person's knowledge of his or her origin likely contributes to the empirical data regarding a child's welfare. Professor Jane Anderson wrote, in a 2014 National Institute of Health article, "Nearly three decades of research evaluating the impact of family structure on the health and well-being of children demonstrates that children living with their married, biological parents consistently have better physical, emotional, and academic well-being. Pediatricians and society should promote the family structure that has the best chance of producing healthy children." Juho Härkönen et al observed in a 2017 NIH article, that "Previous research has documented that children who do not live with both biological parents fare somewhat worse on a variety of outcomes than those who do."

Another NIH article noted, in 2018. "A vast amount of literature has documented negative associations between family instability and child development, with the largest associations being in the socio-emotional (behavioral) domain." Children from intact families with a biological mother and father do better, and not just in America. Here is what two Canadian researchers found in 2018, "We find that children who stay-in [nonintact families] or move-to nonintact families have lower reading scores than those who stay in intact families."

More recent research has corroborated the benefits of children growing up with biological parents. Nina Stoddard et al wrote, in a 2023 issue of the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, "A large body of literature suggests that children living with two married, biological parents on average have fewer behavior problems than those who do not."

Other articles support the same conclusion: Children growing up with their biological mother and biological father perform better, cognitively, psychologically, and socially, providing their kids a huge advantage in life.

As a caveat, I note that the conclusion is an observation, not a scientific law such as the law of gravity. Sociological observations find clear patterns of human behavior. However, people are individuals. They behave similarly but not invariably. Gay parents can raise healthy, well-adjusted, bright children. Divorced parents (non-intact) can raise good children. However, those arrangements are typically not the best for children's welfare.

Were I making policy on behalf of children's welfare, I would follow the data. Professor Anderson has it right: "Pediatricians and society should promote the family structure that has the best chance of producing healthy children." She has in mind two biological parents raising a child, as that arrangement is better for the child. — *Sept. 11*

Social Justice

A widely used phrase in newspapers and on campuses across America, including the one where I taught, is 'social justice.' In fact, my school implemented a committee to design a required, social justice component for students. Was that smart? The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy says that "Western philosophers generally regard justice as the most fundamental of all virtues for ordering interpersonal relations and establishing and maintaining a stable political society." If justice is about ordering interpersonal relations, then 'social justice' is redundant. Justice already is social.

I also note that the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has no entry for 'social justice.' Nonetheless, the hue and cry for social justice persists across academia, even if social justice is a philosophical phantom.

Further, my school's committee, like so many other schools concerned about 'social justice,' had a very specific concept of justice in mind. Similar to other schools, my school acted as though the question about justice had a definitive answer. It does not.

Professors of philosophy, the academics whose bailiwick includes justice since the time of Plato's Republic, have not settled the question of justice — otherwise the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy would not offer several positions on distributive justice nor would ethics textbooks list several notions of what justice demands regarding society's distribution of benefits and burdens.

My students used a textbook that explained five major positions on distributive justice.

The egalitarian position defines justice in terms of equality, suggesting that no relevant differences exist among people to justify unequal treatment. Of course, that simplifies the world. When I stayed up late grading papers, my children were not allowed to stay up with me. If I had a tough day at work and cracked a beer, I offered none to my children. While equality is important to justice, equality needs qualification. Further, conceptual ambiguity exists: does equality mean economic equality or political equality? The former would provide equal material conditions while the latter stresses equal opportunity and equal rights.

The capitalist position holds that burdens and benefits should be commensurate. The position focuses on the contribution an individual makes to the success of the social endeavor—a company's bottom line, a team's winning percentage, a project's completion, and so on. For my children, that meant "Mow the lawn and get an allowance." For the Yankees, it means errorless ball and home runs, or strikeouts and a low ERA. The reality of human existence is that people are not equal and contribute unevenly, thus they benefit unevenly.

However, a capitalist system often lacks compassion. Some people make a marginal contribution and some, not at all. People born with physical challenges often cannot make a big contribution to a social entity's goals. People hit and disabled by drunk drivers cannot make much of a contribution—and through no fault of their own.

Should we let them starve? Capitalist systems lack compassion.

Socialist justice fixes that weakness. Its mantra is "from each according to ability, to each according to need." In my house, both as a kid and raising kids, a socialist system prevailed. My wife and I fed our children, housed our children, clothed our children, and cleaned their dirty diapers. They made few contributions to the house, yet we took care of their needs.

However, we also told them how to behave and foisted our judgments on them. While socialism captures an important aspect of justice, namely, compassion, any society that adopts the position will need some authority to make and execute decisions. Individual liberty is compromised.

The libertarian position fixes the weakness. Its mantra is "from each as each chooses, to each as each is chosen." Justice must protect an individual's ability to choose. Again, an important ingredient of justice is evident: freedom. However, pure libertarian systems would allow racism and a whole host of other isms.

The Rawlsian position is an amalgamation of the four previous positions. The position attempts to include the strengths of each position while avoiding the weaknesses. A big drawback from the position is its complexity to execute.

Which position on distributive justice is the best? That was up to my students to decide. Yet, the outcry for social justice on campuses across America suggests the question has been decisively answered. Many academics—professors and campus leaders—speak and act as though justice requires equity, the offspring of economic egalitarianism. Each individual must have a roughly equal share of society's material benefits.

Nonetheless, campus leaders do not grant tenure to every professor. And professors continue to grade students. Higher education utilizes a capitalist model, with benefits based on merit and contribution, rewarding professors and students accordingly.

Policy is not designed around equity or any equitable system. — *July 30*

Nathanael Snow

Nathanael Snow, an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, is Assistant Teaching Professor of Economics at Ball State University and Affiliated Scholar with the Institute for the Study of Political Economy. He researches the constitution of informal social groups the political economy of Archbishop Richard Whately, and the economic history of the abolition of slavery.

An Avian Parable on Polarization

Over the White River on the east side of Muncie a bridge spans connecting the Kitselman Trail to the Cardinal Greenway. The Canada geese below responded with some interest to the first bits of stale bread I tossed down. As I manifested as the source of manna by throwing more morsels to the combative flock, other birds joined the fray. The more crumbs the greater the combat. When the crusts were gone the honks of demand persisted.

Among the sources of political polarization is the quantity of privileges that the political machinery is delegated with distributing. A higher pile of goodies attracts more special interests and their lobbyists. It is not that geese are particularly greedy, they simply respond to incentives.

Among the harms counted by economists when analyzing this phenomenon are the taxes that must be collected to accumulate the pile of goodies. Taxes, from a purely economic point of view, are harmful because they foreclose upon various exchanges, that should they obtain, would have generated mutual benefits to both exchanging parties. The distribution of goodies is also considered harmful because some exchanges obtain that the parties involved would have considered wasteful but for the subsidy.

Less frequently will the political economist point out that the energies expended in the battle for the benefits are energies that could have been put to productive activities. And one may generally have to consult a political scientist to also learn that fighting over a fixed prize leaves no room for reconciliation of differences and indeed increases the degree of disagreement. Hence, polarization.

No one directly involved in the battle has an individual incentive to back away, or to promote policies that reduce the size or scope of government. Nobel Laureate James M. Buchanan with co-author Richard Wagner explained that we can expect "Democracy in Deficit" (1977) perpetually.

When we advocate for an increase in spending for our favorite flavor of stale bread, we ought to consider that we invite a similar appeal by those who have different preferences. Among the costs we must calculate the losses from taxes, the waste from subsidies, the lost productivity expended on lobbying, but also the harm to our democratic republic that we observe in lost civility and increase polarization.

Instead, we can each contemplate what privileges we can do without, unilaterally, to help restore and preserve good governance. — *Aug. 20*

Gerrymandering Is a Distraction

Indiana, like most other states, redraws its Congressional voting districts every 10 years when a new Census comes out. Shifts in population within and among states require that new lines are drawn to balance the number of citizens represented in each district. This helps to preserve the connection of citizens to their representatives, who are responsible for making decisions about how to spend the Federal government's budget.

Participants from every part of the political spectrum get excited about the process of drawing Congressional lines. Each perceives an electoral advantage to be gained or fears such an advantage might be lost. In today's political climate states are considering making changes to the lines outside of the usual time. This is a bad idea, not because of how it might affect midterm elections, but because it probably won't, but because it sets a bad precedent for political processes, and because the effort will waste a great deal of time and resources.

Both parties have engaged in opportunism, making rash changes to policy and pushing the boundaries of constitutionality in the way policy changes have been enacted. The use of the Executive order has been abused. Congress has abdicated much of its responsibility to the Executive. The structure of checks and balances is out of whack. When policy is set arbitrarily and constitutional constraints are not respected we generate a more tumultuous environment, increase uncertainty, and disrupt economic growth and the lives of families. Arbitrarily changing the time when redistricting occurs moves further in this dangerous direction.

Gerrymandering is easy to recognize, but impossible to resolve. There is no possible mechanism for fairly drawing district lines. Arrangement of Indiana's voters into districts can be done in a way that gives each party (neglecting the possibility of a third party) the number of representatives in Congress that matches the proportion of Indiana voters from each party. Or the districts could be drawn such that the minority party or majority party gets more than the proportional share of representatives. But given the shifts in public sentiment and the number of swing voting Independents, it is impossible to draw the lines in any way that can guarantee a desired outcome in the midterm elections.

An alternative mechanism, that would give each party a share of seats that best reflects the attitudes of voters, would be proportional representation, as is practiced in some other countries. However, the tradeoff of such an approach is that citizens lose their connection to a particular representative. Similarly, districts could be drawn such that common concerns within geographic regions are bundled together, regardless of party connection. However, voters might feel they have more in common with people who live in a different region, and their interests might not be well represented.

In short, there is no perfect solution. That is why we have not allocated some sort of computer program for drawing the districts but have left it to the democratic process, with lines being drawn as a result of negotiations within the state legislature.

Democracy sometimes is best described as governance by discussion, not voting. That discussion needs to happen both broadly in public, and in a concentrated way in the state legislature. Citizens can provide feedback to state representatives in part by voting them out of office, but better by communicating with them directly.

The recent news of proposals to redraw district lines outside the usual time will simply impede on the time that the state legislature needs in the coming session to deal with more pertinent matters of governance, something we are in short supply of lately. Changing the district lines now will waste the time of our elected officials and will increase the influence of the Federal government on the State of Indiana. It would set a bad precedent for constitutional processes and norms. It would increase the opportunism and arbitrariness of policy making. It would in the end not make much difference at all and would certainly not establish a more fair or just allocation of voters to districts.

For the Indiana legislature to take up redistricting at this time would be a distraction. — *Aug. 12*

Mark Franke

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The Constitution and Government Power

(Sept. 15) — Sept. 19 is Constitution Day by act of Congress in 2004. It supplanted Citizenship Day which had been set for Sept. 19 but I can't recall ever hearing about that growing up.

Upon reflection it is a natural progression from citizenship to the Constitution, which reduces the duties and rights of citizens to writing. A really good explanation for commemorating our Constitution on a day already dedicated to citizenship can be found on the National Flag Foundation website:

"Constitution Day . . . is an important part of the cultural heritage of the United States of America, because it recognizes the value of the American experiment, and the success of a nation of free people whose rights and liberties are protected by a written Constitution."

The concept of peoples' rights and liberties is the theme of the Declaration of Independence, the philosophical godfather of the Constitution. But how to guarantee those liberties? The Bill of Rights was added immediately once the new government formed. As important as these amendments are, something more fundamental was built into the structure of the government in the original Constitution itself — a separation of powers within the federal government as the means of ensuring adequate checks and balances among the branches.

While he hardly ever gets the credit he deserves, this careful separating, balancing and checking of governmental powers owes much to John Adams. Adams may have been the least likeable of the Founding Fathers, his irascible personality and dour disposition not among the traits taught by Dale Carnegie.

His biggest problem was that he was often right, although sometimes this wasn't fully appreciated until years later. He saw in the British constitution of his day that the tripart structure of Crown, Lords and Commons made each the natural auditor of the actions of the other two. He was more correct in theory than in practice perhaps but he instinctively recognized the natural tension between a government strong enough to be effective in its delegated responsibilities over against the natural rights of a free people.

The Constitution separates and balances the powers of the executive, legislative and judiciary in several ways. For example its basic structure is to establish three separate branches each with its own article in the document. Congress and the President interact in numerous, not always collegial, ways. Witness the current contretemps over the Senate's delay in confirming Trump administration appointments. Then there is the presidential veto power to slow things down in the opposite direction.

The judicial branch is significant due to its independence from the other two branches, at least after appointment and confirmation checks. It is designed to be above politics, meaning not that it stays away from political issues but that it decides political cases on constitutional and legal grounds. The Supreme Court should not be in the business of reading political approval polls.

It sounds like a mess but it somehow has served us well for 236 years despite all the present furor over which branch is the threat to democracy. Just the fact that this is controversial is an endorsement of the Founders' prescience in establishing a government that would work but not too well. Liberty is to triumph over efficiency.

The Founders liked to cite ancient Rome as their model of personal and governmental virtue. Rome's constitution was a true mess; anyone who tries to sort out all the Roman legislative assemblies will quickly come to this conclusion.

Then there was the corruptible career ladder for politicians who were supposed to progress from one level to the next over their public lives.

In the final analysis it didn't work, as witnessed by the constant civil wars in the first century BC and its replacement by a military dictatorship that we call the Roman Empire. But it did last for over 500 years, a credit to its balance of powers structure among those overlapping citizen assemblies and the oligarchic Senate.

Our Constitution is well-regarded throughout the world for establishing a workable form of representative government, one that has aged well since its drafting. The paradox in this is that it was written to prevent government from becoming too powerful at the expense of the citizenry and the states. See the Ninth and Tenth amendments for clear statements of this limitation by design.

We Americans have a right to show satisfaction in our Constitution but there is another nation which has pride of place for being the oldest republic with the oldest constitution. San Marino, a miniscule independent state totally within Italy, is smaller than a rural Indiana township but it has survived the warp and woof of history. Its republic was founded in A.D. 301 and its current constitution was adopted in 1600.

Good for you, San Marino, but that does not diminish the outsized role played by the American constitution as the model of Enlightenment self-government.

The Dog Days of Baseball

(Aug. 4) — It is August now and for baseball that means the July 31 trading deadline has passed. For major league teams it is the best opportunity to upgrade rosters for those with playoff potential, or to unload high salaries and impending free agents for those with no hope for October baseball.

For minor league teams such as the Fort Wayne TinCaps, it is a bittersweet moment. The TinCaps lost their two middle infielders, the offensive sparkplugs who could ignite late inning rallies. The bitter part was realized the first night, July 31, as the team was unable to generate any offense to overcome a 2-0 deficit.

If there is a sweet side to this bittersweet moment, only time will tell as new players are transferred to Fort Wayne by Padres management. Can they replace a top prospect like Leo De Vries or a fan favorite like Brandon Butterworth? Time will tell, but I am sure the regulars like me will grumble about their loss for the rest of the season.

And herein lies both the strength and the weakness of the current professional baseball structure. I am a reader of baseball history, and the history of minor league baseball is fascinating. There was a time not too long ago when the minor leagues, through the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, had significant negotiating influence with the major leagues. I use the plural because there used to be two major leagues, the National and the American, with responsibility for much of their own affairs. That independence, what was left of it, was eliminated in 1999 when the Commissioner's Office took sole authority over all things baseball.

That was just a portend of what was to come. This may seem like a nit being picked but that was when the umpires, not so affectionately called "Blue" by unappreciative fans, were newly attired in black. Baseball conspiracy theorists, like me, were caught asleep. The two league presidents were fired, cross league scheduling wreaked havoc on divisional races and, most heretical of all, the National League adopted the designated hitter.

It didn't take long for Commissar Rob Manfred to set his imperial sights on gaining complete control of minor league baseball by dissolving the National Association. This happened during Covid — a crisis too good to pass up, as Obama chief of staff Rohm Emanuel was wont to say.

So what, you may ask? One unfortunate change was that the individual leagues no longer controlled their own schedules. If memory serves, 2025 was the first year in the history of the TinCaps when we didn't have a July 4 game at home, always a sell-out since attendees had front-row seats for the city's firework display.

This year's schedule was just plain awful, for the players and the front office personnel and us fans. I understand the reason for the six-game series to minimize travel expenses but the old Midwest League would alternate weeks at home and weeks on the road. This year, in contrast, the TinCaps had four double weeks when the team was at home or on the road. Was this really necessary?

It is obvious that I have a bad attitude about the changes in baseball since the current commissioner was elected by the owners to maximize their profits. I am a classical liberal, a disciple of Adam Smith, so I understand profit maximization. But I learned in one of my MBA classes that profit maximization can only happen if you serve the public. Commissar Manfred, no doubt realistically, understands that his public is the 30 MLB owners who pay his salary and not the millions of fans who pay the bills.

One last rant. I subscribe to the MLB TV network which blacks out all White Sox, Cubs, Reds and Tiger games for Fort Wayne reception. Theoretically they are on local channels but I can't figure out our current streaming service so I have no idea how to get these games. What makes no sense to me is why when I tried to watch a Yankees-Phillies game I was blacked out. My neighbor was able to get it. Since I am now a card-carrying conspiracy theorist, I suspect that the MLB politburo in Manhattan was behind this.

Maybe it is due to the recent heat wave or to the struggles of my two favorite teams, the TinCaps and the Yankees, but my attitude has been less than exemplary the past few weeks. Perhaps watching Fort Wayne native Andrew Saalfrank pitch a perfect inning in relief for the Arizona Diamondbacks last Saturday will help overcome all this brooding.

Or perhaps I should just take a friend's perspective: The multi-millionaire players get regular paychecks, taxpayers are still getting fleeced for new stadiums, and where else can you get a $20 beer?

Family Farms and Agribusiness

(July 30) — There used to be an economic-outlook panel from the IU School of Business that would travel the state to give advice on the state of Indiana's economy. I attended enough of those during my professional career that, while the presentations were interesting, they soon got relegated to the dustier recesses of my memory attic.

One comment I still can remember came from economist Morton Marcus. I will freely paraphrase him here:

"People say the backbone of Indiana's economy is agriculture. Every dead corpse has a backbone but to be alive requires a beating heart. That heart in Indiana is manufacturing." He went on to cite several statistics that affirmed his conclusion and who can argue with facts. He was objectively correct but in my opinion missed the moral issue at stake.

Yes, industrial production is the economic driver for this state. My home congressional district, the Third, is number one among 435 districts in the nation based on manufacturing employment. Indiana ranks number eight among states.

But there's more to economic importance than looking at accountants' reports. Sometimes, there are things that punch well above their weight class. In Indiana, that is agriculture.

The problem is that farming is now the property of big business, even when pursued by the last farming member of a rural family. These few, these happy few, to steal from Shakespeare, must continually buy or lease more farm ground to make a living.

I admit to being incurably nostalgic but there is something to be said about driving past corn fields this time of year, all tasseled out and ears beginning to form. Looking at these seas of green for as far as the eye can see is a soothing experience for a native-born Hoosier. The problem is that these fields are hundreds of acres now, without any family farmhouses or livestock barns to break up the landscape.

Is this trend irreversible? My Socratic discussion group thinks not, based on our July meeting. Another future is possible but the odds against it are daunting.

The group, with two elected officials and a handful of farmers in attendance, developed a short list of alternatives to large-scale corporate farming with the goal of returning agricultural production to small-scale, family-based farms.

Utopia? There are obstacles to overcome. Current government policy emphasizes subsidizing consumers over producers through programs like food stamps that can be used for unhealthy choices. There are the politically unassailable subsidies for rice and sugar, hitting American pocketbooks at the checkout counter. Farmers in the Midwest benefit from a corn-to-ethanol shell game which diverts feed from protein production to inefficient gasoline price manipulation. A few farmers benefit while the rest of us pay up.

There are national-security concerns as well. Who owns the farm ground? The current issue with Chinese purchases of farmland, especially that around military bases, must be addressed. Even the briefest study of past wars instructs us that a nation's ability to feed itself is critical to its survival. That is why Japan does not allow more than token rice imports; rice is a strategic material that must be supplied by native Japanese farms to keep the nation safe.

The laws of economics come into play. Putting aside market distortions caused by government manipulation of prices and supplies, there are economies of scale that favor the large producers. And let's be honest; Americans love cheap prices.

If American consumers are always looking for a bargain, this may offer an opportunity for local producers to sell directly to households without utilizing — and paying the cost of — multiple levels in the distribution channel. Ideally this reduces the use of processes such as preservatives and refrigeration for transportation, resulting in a fresher product making its way to the family dinner table.

One movement that is gaining traction is the heritage farm, in which a family maintains a small farm on 10 or so acres. The farmer's focus is on preparing the soil for higher yields without the use of artificial chemicals. It sounds like a throwback to previous centuries but somehow that system once worked. Farm-to-table is not a 21st century innovation.

As one member of our group summarized: You are what you eat. It's no wonder that nearly 20 percent of Americans are classified as severely obese. Just do a quick count of the cars in the drive-through lines at the nearest fast-food restaurant.

In the final analysis our group recognized that the mini-farm movement is dependent on changing American preferences for convenient fast food and super-sized portions.

Morton Marcus is right about the manufacturing heart of the Indiana economy but living bodies also need a soul. And in Indiana that soul is farming. My group believes it is time to restore balance to our state's soul through family-based farming.

Hagiography an Iconoclasm

(July 22) — Someone, and I wish I could remember who, said culture was the telling to ourselves stories about ourselves. OK, but what if we have conflicting stories to tell?

The assumption behind all this is that the stories are at least partially true, if not in every detail then at least in the morals they purport to teach. What we believe may be more important than what we know.

Take the story of George Washington chopping down the cherry tree with his axe. Did he really do that? Parson Weems in his Washington biography informs us that he did. No other report of the event exists so many insist it didn't really happen.

The nay-sayers must believe that the absence of evidence is evidence of absence.

So what, one may understandably ask? The cherry tree has no historical interest other than as an object lesson in what Weems is telling us about young George's character. He fessed up. And as a story told to young children, that is an important moral lesson to be taught.

There is no plaque at Washington's boyhood home commemorating the event but generations of school children learned, or at least ought to have learned, an important lesson in honesty and taking responsibility for their own actions.

Historically true or not, the fable persists in our common memory. Grant Wood, who painted the scene in the early years of World War II, said he did it to reawaken interest in "bits of American folklore that are too good to lose."

Maybe in today's victimization culture, we no longer see that lesson as relevant or even positive to teach. Virtue has given way to virtue-signaling. The past is subjected to presentism, judging historical figures by our current progressive orthodoxy rather than by the cultural standards of their day.

Like everything else in our brave new world, we allow ourselves to be pushed into one or the other extreme. We have to choose between hagiography or iconoclasm. Even if we don't comply with this dictate, we are classified as being one extreme or the other by our ideological opponents.

Succumbing to hagiography, originally used as a category for the life stories of saints, is charged against those who accept stories like the cherry tree as useful whether true or not. They are accused of deifying people like Washington.

In contrast, iconoclasm's goal is to knock the hero off his perch. Washington owned slaves, therefore anything he did or said must be discarded as ethically corrupt. Keep moving; no lesson to be learned here.

And so we are reduced to a binary and unnuanced choice — love them or hate them.

Two articles I recently read set me on this path of thinking about our culture. One, written for a student journal by a Ph.D. student at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, explained how post-modernism is now being superseded by meta-modernism, a synthesis of the scientific hagiography of modernism and the iconoclastic deconstruction of post-modernism. (My summary, not his.) My young friend is a keen observer of modern culture, something I prefer to ignore, so I look forward to his analytical writing on the subject.

The other was a Wall Street Journal interview with historian Ken Burns, whose current project is a video history of the American War for Independence. In the article, Burns said he wanted to address the things we want to believe about our founding but really aren't true. That sounds like he may be headed down the iconoclasm path, but that may be an unfair judgment.

Despite his liberalism, I do find Burns' TV projects interesting and informative. He appears to try to be balanced in his documentaries, so much so that his current project is being underwritten by organizations and individual philanthropists from across the political spectrum.

And Burns is a good storyteller. Which brings us back to my opening statement about telling stories to ourselves about ourselves. The stories we tell must serve a higher purpose than simply reciting a bunch of facts. The perspective matters.

Take George Washington's role in securing our independence. The inconvenient fact is that our hero was not a particularly good tactician, losing every major battle he fought until the final one. But his grand strategy was just what the nascent nation needed — ensuring an army in being to outlast the British. This he managed even though Congress was incapable of supporting the army with adequate clothing, food and recruits. It is no wonder that Valley Forge is perhaps the most enduring image we retain from the war.

Call it hagiography if you must, but Valley Forge faithfully represents the crucible of our independence. It is an icon whose moral lesson supersedes whatever facts underlie it, as true as most of those facts are.

I'm betting that Ken Burns will see it that way too.

Population Worries

July 6) — During the 50 plus years of my adult lifetime, world population has been an issue but with a change in perspective. In the 1960s the concern was uncontrolled and unsupportable growth especially in the poorer parts of the globe. The doomsayers predicted mass starvation and other unpleasant outcomes unless the rate of growth was not slowed or preferably reversed. Stanford professor Paul Ehrlich's "The Population Bomb: Population Control or Race to Oblivion?" was the bible for those foreseeing disaster.

Nowadays, we don't hear much about that. Instead, a new concern is that we are facing the polar opposite—depopulation, especially in the West. Birth rates in many nations are inadequate to maintain current populations. The United States is expected to begin a backward population slide by 2080 while nations such as China, India and most of Europe are already below their replacement rate.

So what, you may ask. Wouldn't it be better for the planet if it had to support fewer consumers competing for limited and nonrenewable resources? That was the question addressed by my Socratic discussion group at our June meeting. We looked at the issue from both the moral and practical sides of the equation.

The practical issue became immediately obvious as one of the younger members of our group recited what it costs in 2025 to have a baby, raise a child and prepare him or her for adulthood. This continuum of child-rearing financial requirements begins with the hospital bill that comes home with a new baby and continues through the sticker shock of getting the first college tuition bill. For middle class parents it is not workable without a two-income household, which brings its own incremental cost in childcare expenses.

Economists speak of opportunity cost as being the only true costing model. What must you give up in order to have something else? This is where the moral aspect comes into play. Bank account aside, what else must the prospective parents forego in welcoming the new baby? The mother's career? The parents' social life? Personal free time for the parents' hobbies? And I don't need to mention the chronic loss of sleep as babies awaken during the night, demanding attention.

My Socratic group has members across all ages, with many of us now retired. We remember what life was like during our childhood and when we started our families. What we all could attest to is that societal priorities have changed, and not for the better. Priority is given now to the individual over the family and the community. Self-absorption has replaced self-sacrifice as part of our societal DNA.

One member of our group, with tongue in cheek I hope, asserted that our cultural mantra has become "I know what I want and I want it now!" This is at least superficially true, as one can see how many young people remain single and career focused, without any apparent permanent attachments. The group wondered if this might be not by choice but by acquiescence to a society that reinforces these attitudes and denigrates more traditional ones. As exhibit number one, depression rates are highest among young adults and suicide is the second leading cause of death for this cohort.

Loneliness has replaced belonging in our culture. Belonging insists on commitment, at times foregoing personal wants to support the needs of others in the family or community. This is not a giving up as much as it is a giving to if your perspective is right.

There has to be a better way. Even the federal government has recognized the problem and is considering actions to increase the birth rate. The tax code offers increasing deductions and credits to encourage larger families. Now we have Trump accounts as part of the One Big Beautiful Bil Act, offering a $1,000 deposit into a qualified account for each new baby. Just think how this might solve the Social Security insolvency crisis, making deposits at birth as true retirement accounts instead of the income transfer shell game that the program has become.

But this is America in 2025. Not everyone is on board with the importance of reversing the birth rate decline. Anti-natalism is a current ideology that still believes the world's population ought to be significantly decreased, human beings being bad for the planet. The most radical gleefully anticipate the extinction of the human race but fortunately they remain on the fringe.

Back in the day when Ehrlich and his population explosion fellow travelers were doing their best Chicken Little impersonations, someone proposed a simple question to be put to each set of prospective parents. Can you afford to support this child? If so, you are not contributing to overpopulation.

Today that question should be modified to ask if the parents are willing to sacrifice to support the child. Declining birth rates suggest the answer is too often "No."

America and Dante's Inferno

(July 27) — I am grateful these days for the time I can devote to reading. I have always loved to read, with eclectic tastes as to subject matter. Sometimes my reading choices land on disciplines I never took the opportunity to study while in school.

Theology is one such subject area. Having been granted audit student status at Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne, I can address that deficiency. These kind folks allow me to take any course I choose regardless of meeting the prerequisites for it (read: Greek). The professors tolerate me, even to the extent of voluntarily grading my tests and papers.

This summer's reading project is to work through Dante Alighieri's entire "The Divine Comedy" for the first time, all 14,000 lines. I quickly realized that I needed to brush up on my understanding of the political environment in 13th century Italy to get Dante's inclusion of historical figures, especially those he consigned to interminable suffering in Hell.

The Italy of 1300 was a convoluted, quarrelsome mess. They seemed to resort to violence at the slightest provocation. Citizens of Dante's home city of Florence were Olympic quality athletes at this. No sooner than a mid-century civil war between two opponents was settled, the victorious party immediately split into two more factions and resumed the fight. Exiles, extra-legal executions and assassinations were coin of the realm. And this in a city on the cusp of giving birth to the Renaissance.

I couldn't help but reflect on the similarity of the Florence of 1300 and the United States of 2025.

Understand that I try really, really hard to not get involved in your typical political discussions. Given the low level of civility in our civil discourse, it's best that I not contribute to its further deterioration. Plus, on a selfish note, I no longer have the patience to listen to the oral food fights that are what a former high school teacher used to describe as "more heat than light."

I rigorously avoid TV news channels. I agree with former FTC Chairman Newton Minow that television is a "vast wasteland," with cable news channels as exhibit number one. Well, maybe exhibit number two after all those senseless YouTube videos by so-called "influencers."

I will admit to subscribing to several news feed services that sometimes include headlines from Fox, CNN and MSNBC, and I do occasionally read some of the articles. This is to provide me with a balance of highly opinionated and journalistically deficient takes on the important news stories of the day.

Traditional print media, which should be the last bastion of serious journalism, have all but fallen off my daily reading list. I still look at headline feeds from the Wall Street Journal and my hometown paper, the Journal Gazette, to cherry-pick stories of interest. I dropped my subscription to the WSJ due to cost and now just read it digitally through the Allen County public library. The Journal Gazette is still delivered to my driveway every morning but it is sad how little content it contains.

Probably I am just making excuses for my lassitude in staying informed. But then, after listening to the political discussions at any public or private gathering, I feel better about my informational standard for contemporary issues.

Back to Dante. Is America reverting to Florentine medievalism in how we settle our political disputes? One of President Lyndon Johnson's favorite quotes was from the prophet Isaiah: "Come now, let us reason together." I fear Isaiah would be every bit as appalled by 21st century America as he was with Old Testament Judah. Reason is hard to find and togetherness non-existent.

Good can survive evil, if we let it. My hope is that there are enough intelligent people of goodwill to continue reasoning together to rise above the divisiveness that threatens to consume our polity.

It is with this objective in mind that I joined a Socratic discussion group where calm, informative conversation can proceed without any need among the participants for getting in the last word. In fact, we frown on a member's expressing his own opinion . . . unless he does it indirectly through Socratic questioning, of course.

That said, even the Renaissance was not enough to stop the internecine civil wars across the Italian peninsula. But at least it gave us great literature and art, Dante's epic poem being a precursor.

All I know is that I don't want anything to do with Hell if Dante's vision is even partially accurate. ◆

Backgrounders

J.D. Wong, former co-owner and vice president of an intercity bus company, is a route planner and expert on the transportation industry. He wrote this at the request of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation.

The Abuse of Intercity Bus Subsidies

(Sept. 9) — Since 1978, a federal subsidy program (49 U.S.C. 5311) has funneled taxpayer money into intercity bus routes. Fast forward to today and this initiative has failed. Instead of attracting riders, politicians have often crafted routes to win votes. As a result, subsidized buses have been squandering taxpayer money for 46 years. Meanwhile, unsubsidized bus companies have faced unfair competition from subsidized routes.

Since the invention of air conditioning, travelers have favored north-south routes. For instance, Flixbus now offers ten daily New York to Atlanta trips, up from six in 2019. Business is also booming between Chicago and Atlanta, with eight trips, up from five in 2019.

In contrast, demand for east-west routes has diminished. For example, Atlanta to Dallas has dropped from six to three trips. Direct service from New York to Chicago via Cleveland has also ended.

In FY2024 alone, Amtrak's east-west routes lost over $560 million. Meanwhile, the Auto Train (Virginia to Florida) made a $6.6 million profit. Since FY2011, east-west Amtrak passenger-miles have decreased by 22 percent. Yet, north-south routes have seen an 8 percent bump. In fact, train travelers favor north-south routes over east-west routes by a ratio of three to one.

Airlines are seeing the same trend. In the fourth quarter of 2024, the New York to Miami route saw 27,368 daily passengers, a 22 percent bump from 2019. Meanwhile, the New York to Los Angeles route saw only 13,903 passengers, a five percent drop.

In FY2021 alone, taxpayers subsidized Section 5311 bus routes with $821 million. For example:

- Indiana spent $20 million subsidizing routes, such as Elkhart to Indianapolis. Subsidized routes, like Muncie to Indianapolis, often have less than 10 passengers daily. Some trips operate with no passengers at all.
- Virginia lost $19 million subsidizing routes, such as Washington to Bristol.
- Ohio splashed out $30 million subsidizing routes, such as Parkersburg to Columbus.
- Colorado spent $16 million subsidizing routes, such as Denver to Grand Junction.
- Oregon spent $17 million subsidizing routes, such as Portland to Astoria.
- Washington spent $17 million subsidizing routes, such as Seattle to Port Angeles.

Intercity bus subsidies create a problematic cycle: Least-used routes need the most subsidies. Meanwhile, popular routes draw business from unsubsidized routes, causing their demise.

As a result, there is an ever-increasing number of subsidized routes.

Proponents argue that these subsidies connect large cities with smaller towns. Yet, there's no guarantee that subsidized routes wouldn't be profitable without support. Nor is it clear why some routes need subsidies while others do not.

Some routes, such as Denver to Colorado Springs, compete with unsubsidized routes. Others, such as Washington to Danville, replicate subsidized Amtrak routes. The subsidized Portland to Eugene route duplicates both.

Without subsidies, buses between cities might stop in smaller towns. Instead, subsidies have distorted the transportation landscape. Again, political support for weaker routes has led to an endless waste of taxpayer funds. For travelers, the results have been stark:

- Bus travel has become more expensive. A Denver to Dallas trip booked in advance can cost $138, while a flight might be $44.
- Subsidized bus companies use interline revenue as matching funds, against the law's intent.
- Buy-America laws force subsidized companies to buy vehicles from Motor Coach Industries. These coaches have small fuel tanks and need to stop more often for fuel. Many have fuel fillers on the right and cannot enter gas stations or truck stops to refuel.
- Bus insurance costs have soared from $8,000-$12,000 to $47,000-$73,000 per year. Taxpayers are now subsidizing insurance companies rather than bus routes.
- Subsidies worsened a dire shortage of mechanics. This in part raised annual bus maintenance costs from $25,000 two decades ago to $100,000 by 2021.Appointment scheduling takes weeks or months, with repairs needing another two weeks. Battery equalizers are more likely to fail causing unexpected engine shutdowns. Air suspensions deflate, causing coaches to bottom out and run aground.
- In 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Economic Relief for Transportation Services (CERTS) Act. It gave $2 billion to bus companies, yet BoltBus and Megabus still failed. Meanwhile, insurers raised rates citing the Act as a reason.

Maintaining underperforming routes with legislative coercion has always failed. Take the Saskatchewan Transportation Company for example. It shut down in 2018 because only two of its 27 routes were profitable. Greyhound Canada's unprofitability also caused it to go out of business in 2021.

So why does Congress continue to subsidize intercity buses when it defies market logic?

One reason is that Congress has given the money to the states. For this reason, state politicians can make federal taxpayers foot the bill.

Another reason is the claim that subsidies connect isolated areas. Yet, subsidized intercity buses represent less than 0.001 percent of travel. In fact, Americans travel more miles by bicycle than using these buses.

Even if subsidized routes vanished, alternatives would be cheaper than subsidizing them. Despite the subsidies, air travel often costs less than bus travel.

There are also many ways to enhance the profitability of struggling routes:

- Using smaller coaches.
- Adjusting frequency.
- Attracting tourists with scenic and enjoyable destinations.
- Offering demand-responsive service instead of a fixed route.
- Rerouting or extending existing routes.

Since 1978, Congress has exhausted ways to limit the growth of bus subsidies. Its efforts at reform have not produced the desired results:

Intercity bus subsidies have become a sunk-cost fallacy. If Congress continues to subsidize intercity buses, their losses will only grow.

Insurers will continue to profit while unsubsidized bus companies fail.

A shortage of mechanics has persisted. Passengers will get stranded when coaches shut down on the road.

Buses cost more to operate than trucks because of exorbitant insurance costs. As a result, efforts to use them for freight transportation have also failed.

The only way to stop politicians from playing favorites with routes is to cut subsidies to $0. Political control over subsidies means that ending them would also end that control. Other "reforms" are unlikely to succeed, as they would still allow political interference.

Ending subsidies doesn't mean the end of underperforming routes. History shows that bus routes can come and go in popularity.

Innovative companies have reduced costs while expanding routes. Flixbus faced criticism for replacing terminals with curbside stops. Yet, this cost-cutting measure helped the company to grow its north-south routes.

Politicians can stop guessing which routes will succeed and cut subsidies to $0. The President can also veto any bill that subsidizes intercity buses. While these subsidies have enjoyed bipartisan support, it comes at the taxpayers' cost. Focusing on successful routes is better than bemoaning the end of unprofitable ones. Market-driven operations will succeed where subsidized companies failed.

Tyler Watts, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation formerly with Ball State University, is professor of economics at Ferris State University.

Tucker: A Man and His Dream

(Aug. 3) — The history of American capitalism is littered with the dashed hopes and shattered dreams of failed entrepreneurs. Seldom does a business failure story make for compelling Hollywood drama, but the 1989 film Tucker: the Man and His Dream does just that. The movie tells a heroic, riveting story of a revolutionary business that ultimately collapsed in failure and scandal. Tucker tells, in a highly dramatized fashion, the true and fascinating story of automobile pioneer Preston T. Tucker and his late-1940s start-up auto company.

Tucker's dream was to produce the most high-tech, high-performance car in the world, and launch a car company that would upend the entire industry by beating the "Big Three" U.S. car companies (GM, Ford, and Chrysler) to the market with the first all-new car in the post-WWII era. While Tucker did design and produce a version of his dream car in limited numbers, his company crashed in spectacular fashion, racked with scandal and facing federal fraud charges. Yet the film indicates that, despite the temporal failure of the Tucker car company, the innovations and forward-thinking attitude that Tucker's product spawned lived on in later generations of automobiles. Thus, Tucker truly earned a spot as a legendary American entrepreneur who made his mark not so much with a ubiquitous product, but with relentlessly innovative ideas that, despite his own failure, the rest of the industry could not help but ultimately adopt.

Tucker, portrayed by Jeff Bridges (later famous as "The Dude" Lebowski) was a man far ahead of his times. Although the film does not go into depth on Tucker's background, it does indicate that Tucker had been fascinated with cars from his youth, a time when the automobile was a rare marvel. Tucker got involved in the industry at a young age and ultimately worked his way into the Indianapolis racing scene in the 1930s where he partnered with engineers and drivers to develop competitive high-performance racing machines.

Tucker was an engineer in his own right, and in the years leading up to WWII he designed a nimble combat vehicle for the Army, featuring a unique 360-degree gun turret. Tucker's combat vehicle design was rejected as being too fast, but US forces did press his gun turret into service in PT boats and Army bombers.

Toward the end of the war Tucker had laid plans to enter the then-dormant consumer auto industry. All new car production had been idled to let the Big Three manufacture tanks, planes and armaments as part of the war-winning U.S. "arsenal of democracy." Tucker knew that with the return of peace and demobilization of millions of GIs, there would be huge demand for safe, reliable, high-performing cars. While the slow-moving Big Three were content to release warmed-over pre-war models,

Tucker aimed to bring out something new and revolutionary. The film depicts the shock and doubts raised by his engineers when Tucker announced the features he intended to include on the sleek "Tucker Torpedo" — rear engine (for improved traction), disc brakes, fuel injection, seat belts, pop-out windshields to prevent lacerations in a collision, and most iconic of all Tucker features, a center headlight that turned with the front wheels to aid night visibility around blind curves.

It is a challenge for any film to depict years' worth of events in the space of a few hours. Tucker does an admirable job with the use of montages and vignettes. Indeed, the film itself is an homage to cheesy contemporary corporate promo films, which gives the entire project an authentic 1940s flair. The film quickly takes us from Tucker's struggles to create the prototype to raising $15 million from stock sales to acquiring the world's largest factory in Chicago. Production of the car has not even gotten fully underway when disaster strikes in the form of a federal Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investigation of the Tucker Corporation on claims of stock fraud. Tucker soon learns that the Detroit car companies have friends in high places, friends like Michigan Senator Homer Ferguson (in a cameo portrayal by Jeff's father Lloyd Bridges) who, as the film suggests, uses us his governmental clout to make life miserable for Tucker, thus helping his Big Three friends forestall a major competitive threat.

In the culmination of the film, Tucker is on trial in federal court on charges of defrauding the public. Prosecutors claim that Tucker established his car company to merely bilk ignorant investors out of their money. Tucker admits to having made some foolish maneuvers along the way, but is adamant about his commitment to actually producing his car and bringing new levels of safety and performance to the American driving public. Although the movie takes much dramatic license in this final courtroom scene, it is used to good effect, with Tucker delivering an impassioned defense of America's unique free-market system. As the movie version of Tucker explains, "We invented the free enterprise system, where anybody, no matter who he was, where he came from, what class he belonged to — if he came up with a better idea about anything, there's no limit to how far he could go." While Tucker did not in reality testify at the trial, the film does capture a true historic detail when it shows jurors being offered rides in some of the 51 completed Tuckers that were brought to the courthouse to help demonstrate the superiority of Tucker's product and the viability of his business.

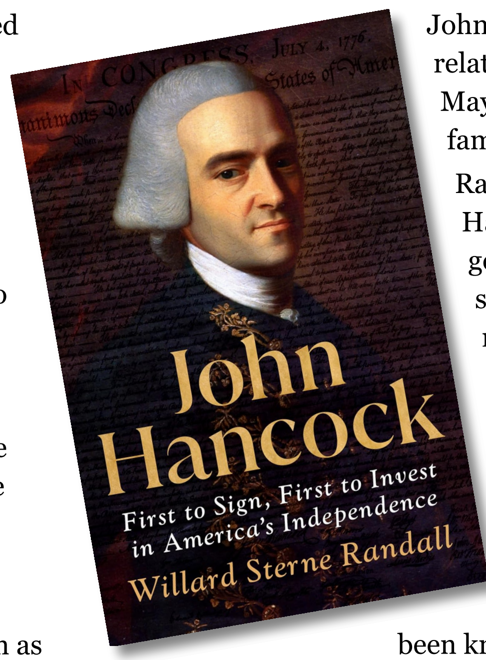
As expected with high production value Hollywood pictures, Tucker: The Man and His Dream takes artistic license with both the facts of the story and the personae involved. The filmmakers are nonetheless true to the basic arc of Tucker's saga and to the essential character of this visionary entrepreneur. Tucker believed in hugely innovative ideas and took equally huge risks in trying to bring them to market. Some risk-takers are bound to fail, whether through sheer bad luck or bad judgment, being out-competed, or through underhanded political machinations of corrupt opponents. Tucker arguably had a clear competitive edge with his revolutionary product but suffered from his own reckless ambition and a cronyism by which his market rivals could effectively wield government pressure against him.

Despite the premature failure of the Tucker Corporation, the film closes on a positive note, indicating that most of Tucker's then-radical innovations had eventually become standard features on all modern cars. Tucker had indeed succeeded in producing "the car of tomorrow, today." ◆

The Bookshelf

If there are only two things most Americans can recall about the Declaration of Independence, they are the phrase "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" and John Hancock's majestic signature. Who was the man behind the signature? More needs to be known about this enigmatic icon of our War for Independence but no recent biography has been published. Fortunately journalist turned academic Willard Sterne Randall has stepped into the breach with his "**John Hancock: First to Sign, First to Invest in America's Independence** (Penguin Random House 2025, 234 pages plus notes, $25 hardcover at Amazon).

My limited knowledge of Hancock's career left me uncertain whether he was a principled patriot or a shrewd businessman taking the main chance with his smuggling enterprise. Randall leaves no room for argument as he clearly comes down on the side of the principled patriot. While Hancock was a commercial genius, he used his wealth to support the Boston protests against the various Coercive Acts by granting loose credit to his wholesale customers and donating to nearly every charitable cause that came along. In fact, by war's end, he had lost half his considerable net worth.



An underlying theme of the book is Hancock's uncanny ability to see opportunities during difficult times, such as the deep recession in the colonies following the French and Indian War. He used these difficult times to expand in anticipation of economic recovery but did not achieve success at the expense of others. In fact his generosity toward both individuals and charitable organizations increased during these times.

Hancock saw little military action during the war even though he was major general of the Massachusetts militia. His service centered on governmental activity, at both the national and local levels. When Massachusetts approved its first permanent constitution in 1779, he was elected overwhelmingly as her first governor.

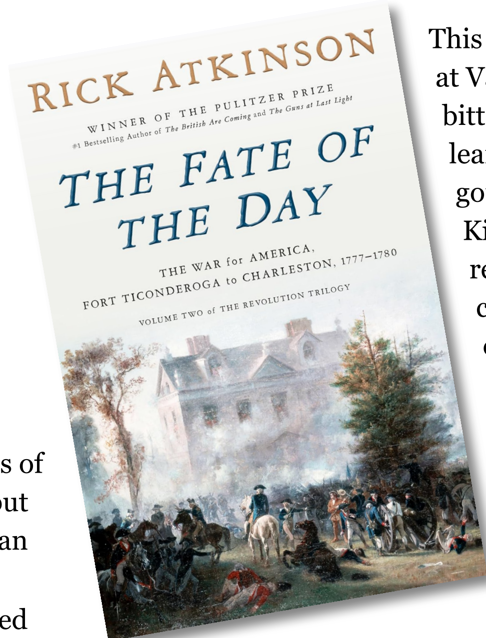
As he aged, Hancock suffered from increasing levels of gout. His ability to conduct public affairs was limited yet the populace continued to elect him to office by wide margins. A second theme of the book is his tremendous popularity among the common people. His only enemies tended to be political rivals who resented his popularity.

One of the sidebars in the Hancock story is his on again, off again relationship with Sam Adams, street level leader of the Sons of Liberty. They were close allies in organizing effective protests against Parliament's tax acts but then fell into bitter enmity during the war only to reconcile afterward. Sounds a lot like the John Adams-Thomas Jefferson relationship, doesn't it? Maybe it runs in the Adams family genes.

Randall's praise of Hancock's patriotism and generosity toward his suffering neighbors reaches encomium, even panegyric, levels but then I have come to expect biographers to be highly sympathetic to their subjects. The author begins the book by stating Hancock has been known only through the papers left by his enemies. At best he is seen as someone who would cooperate with the plans of others. Randall attempts to dispel this faint praise by rehearsing a long list of Hancock's accomplishments, both political and commercial. His case is convincing.

A contemporary French journalist said this about Hancock: "A great generosity, united to a vast ambition, forms his character." And this marriage has formed the character of many successful, wealthy patriots since. Harnessing personal interest in the pursuit of public good has been a foundation of the American way of life. In that respect John Hancock represents the classical liberal philosophy of government and economics. John Locke and Adam Smith would have been proud.

Hancock's role in the politics of the founding era is important but the avocational military historian in me can't be suppressed.



Rick Atkinson's much awaited second volume in his Revolution Trilogy is out and it doesn't disappoint. **"The Fate of the Day: The War for America, Fort Ticonderoga to Charleston, 1777-1780"** (Crown 2025, 618 pages plus extensive notes, $25 hardcover at Amazon) picks up the story with the critical 1777 campaign which resulted in the loss of the American capital of Philadelphia but was redeemed by the strategic victory at Saratoga. This volume includes the bitter winter at Valley Forge and the even more bitter winter the next year. We also learn about the European political goings-on that brought difficulties for King George and his ministry but also resulted in the French alliance that changed everything in the conduct of the war. And we get insight into the workings of Benedict Arnold's tortured mind, brooding over real and imagined slights to his reputation by an unappreciative Congress.

I reviewed Atkinson's first volume in the Fall 2019 IPR Journal so I won't repeat the comments made there except to express my gratitude for the multiplicity and detail of the campaign and battle maps. Every military historian worth the name, including strictly amateurs like me, demand sufficient maps to follow the story. Atkinson delivers. I just hope it doesn't take six more years to get the third volume. Whenever it comes, I'm confident it will be worth the wait. *— Mark Franke*

Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

The Outstater

Just Fire Them for Cause

(Sept. 15) — Bad judgment like common sense is a trait considered too banal for this generation of human resource managers. Rather, decisions such as firing someone for justifying the assassination of a man for his opinion must involve an exercise in pearl-clutching and legalese.

Thus, Ball State University's carefully worded response to a posting by its Director of Health, Promotion and Advocacy is a pluterperfect example of the art:

> "The administration at Ball State University is aware of social media posts by two university employees. Both posts were on the employees' personal accounts, and the posts do not reflect the culture on our campus nor the enduring values of the university. The administration is gathering additional information about the posts in order to determine what discipline, if any, is appropriate and permissible under the First Amendment to the Constitution."

No, the employees can be summarily ridden off campus on a rail. The BSU director made the simplistic defamation that the assassination of Charlie Kirk was a result of "the violence, fear and hatred that he sowed." That is both arguable and rude; it demonstrated a shallowness of thought unworthy of a university. Again, we once just called that bad judgment. Waitresses were dismissed for less.

That the powers at Ball State University, with its huge staff of personnel and communications experts, couldn't bring themselves to make such a decision without the most agonizing institutional appraisal tells us what we need to know about the management of modern higher education.

The Party that Doesn't Pray

(Aug. 29) — Mark down Aug.. 27, 2025, as the day the Democrat Party, or at least its prominent spokesmen, dismissed the prayers of children shot to death in their pews.

That is the partisan interpretation. A more charitable one would be that Democrats believe that such an act, shooting children at prayer, deserves action (gun control) and not just religious sympathy.

Both miss the point. The children were praying not to protect themselves from bullets fired through stained-glass windows but for three reasons at the heart of Christian teaching:

- First and foremost, they were being taught that God invites and commands their prayers so that they might have a closer relationship with Him.
- Prayer is how they express their dependence on God and receive His grace.
- Most pointedly, they were praying to intercede for others, even those who would mock them.

There is much, much more to say about prayer, hopefully to be taken up in this Sunday's sermons. Meanwhile, we will be praying for Democrats. For if this week is indicative, their souls are at risk.

Crime *Is* a Root Cause

(Aug. 28) — My city is addressing public policy in the starkest terms. Youth violence and encampments of derelicts are problems without easy answers. Yet, answers, however imperfect, can be sought, social order can be attempted.

Nobody likes to send a young man to jail or to order a troubled mind for treatment. In every case there are dozens of reasons, beginning with dysfunctional homes and economic hardships, that beg mercy and compassion. Government wields too heavy a hand to assume the natural moral authority of the family or community.

But what happens when we ignore societal breakdown? What happens when we defund the policy, tear down Chesterton's fence?

Perhaps "ignore" is the wrong word. "Fumble" is a better choice. This week, our mayor tried to answer the concern of a city councilman that the downtown had become unsafe. She released a list of steps she was taking, e.g., the hiring of a "manager of homeless services," the creation of a mental health commission, an encampment task force, a methodical counting of the homeless and the obligatory request for more funding.

Are we trying to keep ourselves busy chasing the ephemera of social justice so we don't notice we are failing society itself?

We spend millions rebuilding our downtown, and the homeless defecate in the storefront alcoves and juveniles shoot each other in the parks. Is that to be accepted as modern urban life, as a senator intimated this week? If so, why do we have laws against such things as assault and dereliction anyway?

There are 2.6 trillion reasons. That is the dollar estimate by Vanderbilt researchers of the direct annual costs of crime. That is 3.2 percent of U.S. gross domestic production and more than what is spent on either military or welfare programs — enough, in other words, to break a nation.

The indirect costs, however, are what bother me most. The Vanderbilt researchers say the cost of crime should include not only that to individual victims but to the community at large. For crime drives away prosperity. Every tick increase in the crime rate means fewer investments made, fewer jobs listed, fewer opportunities offered, fewer families formed, fewer homes built, fewer lives fulfilled.

This is all invisible as a policy matter — simply too gradual. Its summation, though, can be viewed. There are aerial photos of St. Louis, Baltimore, Detroit and Gary where crime has been allowed its way. They look like they've been hit by atomic bombs (although Hiroshima and Nagasaki recovered).

Investors both flee and avoid crime, especially violent crime and property crime, abandoning the guilty and the innocent alike. And that begins at some otherwise nondescript point in our policy deliberations. I suggest it is when, like our mayor, we first conflate personal compassion with public order.

A study out of the University of Colorado shows that in graphic form. Cities with high crime have a statistically significant relationship with higher rates of poverty and lower rates of employment. The author's policy recommendation:

> "Focus on ensuring respect for private property rights, an effective police force, prosecutors willing to enforce the rule of law, and fair courts; this will enhance economic prosperity of your citizens and diminish poverty in your cities and state."

Our system of justice is not merciless. There is in this country the sanctity of the individual as manifest in the Constitution. And there is Christian charity in the personal decisions made daily by police, prosecutors, judges, juries and neighbors that fully consider human fragility. We must trust them to do this difficult work, not politicized commissions and task forces.

A $100,000 Audience with the Guv

"*That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part." — Thomas Jefferson*

(Aug. 22) — Financing politics should be a simple matter, or so we argue in "Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles": Just ensure that anyone funding a political effort use

his own name and money or face certain prosecution.

Some distance from that ideal is a "policy summit" next week to raise what the Capital Chronicle has hinted is "dark" money for a nonprofit supporting Gov. Mike Braun's agenda.

The price to attend the day-long event in an Indianapolis luxury hotel ranges from $2,500 for one session and lunch with the governor to $100,000 for a personal audience as a "headline partner." Money is nothing but fungible so nobody will tell us precisely from where the nonprofit war chest is coming. Let us just say that Governor Braun will certainly be told who gave what from where.

(May we suggest that an alternative would be the dozens of independent, fact-based scholars, economists and other Indiana experts, all politically unconcerned, available to advise the governor on any of 75 issues our foundation has identified — for the cost of a phone call.)

None of this is new, as we also note in "Indiana Mandate." George Washington was chastised for buying $195 worth of punch and hard cider for friends prior to an election for the Virginia House of Burgesses.

And we would be surprised to learn that any of this is illegal or even improper by Indianapolis standards. Indeed, the event seems designed by a perfectly honest lawyer and his lobbyist brother-in-law. Our objection is the message it sends to the Hoosier polity, that is, if you can't write a big check then your problems are secondary.

"All citizens should see themselves as members of the body politic and be encouraged to write to elected officials, attend public meetings, speak out at these meetings and run for office," we said in "Indiana Mandate." And as Thomas Jefferson wrote to Edward Tiffin in 1801, "That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part."

Events such as the Braun fundraiser, though, leave citizens estranged from an elite, out-of-touch political class. They perceive that they have limited ability to influence policies and that there is a small cadre of people who make up the "establishment."

It is therefore difficult to dismiss an email being distributed this week by Indiana Democrats: "Twenty-one years of one-party rule in Indiana has made the Republicans so corrupt that they'll sell you out to the highest bidder without even trying to hide it."

Nationally, we are told that 28 percent of Americans think a sizable minority of elected officials break the law or abuse the powers of their office; 12 percent think almost all elected officials abuse the powers of their office.

Those are the numbers you would expect in a monarchy or other authoritarian outfit, not a constitutional republic. And when ordinary citizens are asked why they don't run for political office they cite the burden of constant fundraising, lack of privacy for their families, a sense that politics is no longer the best way to effect change and cynicism about government and its ever-growing size.

So, is there a good reason that a governor needs to charge for his attention? Doesn't that come with the job?

Getting Serious About Crime

"Your race card has been denied, do you have another form of argument?" — anonymous.

(Aug. 18) — We can hope that our city is learning something from the crime crackdown in Washington, D.C. It turns out that if you arrest people for breaking the law, other people, regardless of their background or upbringing, decide to abide by the law, which is a good thing.

The D.C. Police Union reports that in just one week all crime categories have gone down: robbery by 46 percent; carjacking 83 percent; car theft 21 percent; violent crime 22 percent; property crime 6 percent.

Wow, but meanwhile elected leaders here prefer to just talk about crime. That is understandable, of course, arrests and prosecutions being absolutes that are difficult to fudge, which, bless their hearts, is what politicians do best.

Politics can change, however, and there are signs that officialdom understands that civic patience is wearing thin. Most concerning is the disparity between neighborhoods, one's chance of being a victim of violent crime ranges from only 1 in 714 in our northeast neighborhoods to 1 in 287 in the central neighborhoods.

The reasons, all arguable, would fill a book. We can focus here, however, on expectations. There is the expectation by outlying neighborhoods that central-city residents can't be law-abiding. And there is the expectation by central-city residents that they would be unequally served by more police attention to crime there.

Whatever your perspective, you can grant that such a two-tiered system unravels the social fabric. Our mayor, realizing this, has made clear that her priority is public safety. Still, the approach continues the soft-headed programs of four previous administrations, that is, to search for elusive root causes and easy sociological fixes — more meetings and discussion groups, all carefully avoiding the racial disparities in crime statistics.

She has proposed giving $10,000 checks to individuals and organizations working to reduce teen violence (details are sketchy). A manager has been named to "bridge the gap" between the community and the police. A "youth engagement council" of high school students has been formed that will host discussions on youth violence. The mayor emphasizes, oddly, that none of this is aimed at the central city where most of the teen violence is occurring but rather citywide where it is not.

You get the tone. Don't feel cynical if you doubt any of it will work — or at least to the degree that reality demands. Of the 59 shootings recorded here in 2025 so far, 16 victims were under 18. Last year, 19 percent of homicide victims in Fort Wayne were under 18, up from 14 percent in 2023 and just 3 per cent in 2019.

Still, there's no mention yet of an increase in police funding or a shift in prosecutorial energies, both unpopular in an increasingly Democrat electorate. Extraordinary leadership will be needed to strip this of its social baggage and declare that at certain levels of criminality the only thing that impresses a young mind is seeing the guy down the block go to jail.

And yes, we too wish it were otherwise.

Andre Carson Part I

"Islamism is a totalitarian ideology that seeks to impose a rigid, theocratic order, incompatible with the pluralistic values of Western civilization." — Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Somali-born author and activist for women's rights.

(July 15) — The degrading effects are inarguable in a half dozen U.S. cities, not to mention in the great cultural centers of Great Britain and Europe. So why are there frowns when it is suggested that Islamism may be inherently incompatible with Western civilization?

The social scientist Charles Murray dared ask the question in an X post a few days ago and got thousands of complaints within minutes. Clearly, the question is inflammatory but it persists — just hangs there unanswered as we read the latest news of Sharia, taqiyya, "no-go" zones and anti-American demonstrations.

There's no shortage of Islamist on social media telling us that they have come here not to assimilate but to conquer — emigration as warfare. That considered, Murray's question deserves to be asked and to be asked in a forceful way. We need to hear the professed distinction between Islam as a faith and the political ideology of Islamism.

Islamophobic? Prejudicial? Someone will have to explain that to me. If my Lutheran pastor voiced the same thoughts, say, as Ilhan Omar or Rashida Tibia, both of them outspoken members of Congress, he could expect to be questioned by the FBI and face charges of sedition.

That said, my Grok assistant tells me the Muslim population in Indiana is large and growing. It now is estimated at about 41,400, with Indianapolis as its hub. (For perspective, the last Democrat primary for Indy mayor was won with about 45,000 votes.) The Muslim community there includes Arabs, Pakistanis, Somalis, Ethiopians and Sudanese. It is organized in a dozen centers and mosques, all of them insular in function and teaching.

But let us assume the best. Andre Carson, a Democrat U.S. Representative and a convert to Islam, is presumed to represent the interests of 7th District Muslims in Congress. Carson is likely to pooh-pooh Murray's concern. Islamism, he will tell you, is a political ideology distinct from Islam, the religious faith. Just as all socialists are not Leninists, all Muslims are not Islamists.

That would be welcome news. Representative Carson should have no trouble answering Murray's question. And it is an opportunity for Carson to assure Muslims that their right to worship in peace is guaranteed here, unlike that of Christians in many Muslim-ruled countries.

Finally, the Constitution, which Carson has sworn to uphold, assumes a desire to share the principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence, the formal description of ourselves. Indeed, if the promise of individual liberty doesn't inspire in itself, ours might not be the country for you.

For America, as all nations, assumes within its borders a certain respect for its values and customs if not its political heritage. Dozens of immigrant groups have met that challenge at one time or another in our history. Forgive me, though, I don't get the same vibe from the Islamists. There is that insistence on Islam alone having all-commanding authority in politics, law and social behavior. It makes their arrival in mass intrinsically different — threatening even.

If it turns out that they find our Constitution anathema, as we are told some do, then both they and we will face some hard decisions.

Andre Carson Part II

I don't have any reasons
I've left them all behind
I'm in a New York state of mind

— Billy Joel

(Aug. 8) — New York City is poised to elect an Islamist mayor and at least the prospect of Sharia Law, "no go" zones, globalization of the infidel, anti-semitism and so forth, not to mention a historically ignorant race-Marxism. It makes you grateful to live in stodgy old Indiana, doesn't it?

Wait, what? Indiana's capital is already represented by a Muslim? Andre Carlson of the 7th District? Does he share the views of other Muslim politicians now surging in U.S. and European cities, views that include the dismantling of Western tenets?

Surely not. This, I repeat, is Indiana, Muslim or no Muslim. In the 2024 general election, Carson won re-election handily with nearly 70 percent of the vote against a consummate Hoosier Republican. Islamism never came up.

But worst case, again, might Carson see himself representing Islamism first and Hoosiers only incidentally? Neither the Indianapolis Star nor any other state medium has ever pressed that obvious question. It has allowed Carson, a second-generation politician, to clothe himself in the comfortable mufti of the civil-rights era.

The political aspects of his religion, however, deserve to be examined at least as critically as the Christian views of, say, a Micah Beckwith, castigated weekly in the Star. It is not bigotry to be concerned that Carson's religion differs from others, and in a political way.

"Mohammed's transition from the role of a preacher to that of a prince and a conqueror after his migration from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622 was avolte-face which has no parallel in the careers of the other great founders of religions," wrote the late British historian Arnold Toynbee.

Winston Churchill called Islamism "the most retrograde force in the world."There are those who say that Carson, who converted in 1990, is unavoidably Islamist, the only distinction being whether or not Muslims have reached dominance in his particularly society. And the history of the 50 or so Muslim-ruled nations tends to bear that out. Political, religious or social tolerance is not apparent in their governance.

When Carson has spoken about terrorism, for instance, he has been oddly circumspect. Is he constrained somehow, or is this taqiyya, the Islamic practice of concealing one's beliefs when facing criticism? He has called for cooperation with Muslim-ruled nations to appease their violent elements, often with financial incentives — not what you would call Scoop Jackson foreign policy.

Once more, Islamism is a political ideology that supersedes American party label. Its practitioners do not co-exist as do modern Christians, Hindus or Buddhists. They push to dominate political and social structures.

Given that Indianapolis Muslims are now in numbers that could swing primary elections, it is our duty to sharply, fully and continuously question Carson on how he views his representation of us. You will not want to get this one wrong.

Andre Carson Part III

(Aug. 10) — Gerrymandering is not an issue for serious minds. It rests on the absurd notion that legislators should choose voters rather than voters choose legislators. Nevertheless, the meeting here Thursday between Gov. Michael Braun and Vice-President J.D. Vance to discuss redistricting requires that it be addressed anew.

The late Jim Knoop, a friend of this foundation and a GOP consultant, was snooping around in an attic of the Statehouse many years ago and came upon an old chalkboard. As he swept aside the cobwebs, he realized he was looking at a workup of a redistricting plan, one of the first in a long, unbroken string of failed efforts.

Please know that Knoop was the most unabashed partisan you could imagine. Even so, he had concluded that racial gerrymandering or "packing" in the case of Indiana's 1st and 7th Districts benefited nobody but the most crass political operatives in both parties.

He argued way back in the Orr administration that if anyone were serious about redistricting they would start in one or another corner of the state and program their computer to create legislative and congressional districts that are mathematically identical, adding one citizen at a time, irrespective of race, voting pattern or geography.

His conclusion was based on a dedication to the core function of democratic government set down in the U.S. Constitution, that is, representation of individual points of view on the widest range of issues. Let's see how Indiana's 2021 redistricting stacks up:

GOP schemers left our most important city, Indianapolis, in the hands of a bumbling Democratic machine, disenfranchising Republicans there so that politicos could have a lock on adjacent districts.

Blacks in such a packed district get the false prestige of a House seat but pay for it with unchallenged, inattentive leadership. "I haven't been able to find a single country in the world where the policies that are being advocated for blacks in the United States have lifted any people out of poverty," says the economist Thomas Sowell.

Both Republican and Democrat gerrymandees are ensured seniority and influence in Congress. That, however, mostly benefits the crony capitalists and rent-seekers through pork-barrel projects drawing down tax revenue.

Indianapolis in particular needs competitive elections to avoid a stagnant middle class and degraded public safety. (Can you spell Cincinnati?) Again, office-holders in safe districts are inclined to play to their base at the expense of careful thought or compromise on complicated issues.

Some still hope that we can use computers and AI to more or less follow Jim Knoop's mapping. There are several slick mathematical formulas that would discourage raw gerrymandering by favoring compact districts with smooth boundaries.

Bottom line, though, you're not going to be able to take the politics out of politics. Few think anything can be done short of a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court. That is unlikely anytime soon, the courts having left those who benefit from redistricting in charge of redistricting.

So hooray if Vance and Braun can figure out a way to throw out a second-generation race grifter like Andre Carson. Perhaps the next district election and down-ballot elections will more seriously address the safety and welfare of all types and classes of urban citizens.

For now, let's be reminded that the House of Representatives was meant to be changed wholesale every two years. The current 90 percent reelection rate, black districts or white, poor districts or rich, defines a broken system.

The Atomic Bomb

(Aug. 7) — Excerpts from Paul Fussell's 1981 article in the New Republic commemorating the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima 80 years ago this week:

"Arthur T. Hadley said recently that those for whom the use of the A-bomb was "wrong" seem to be implying "that it would have been better to allow thousands on thousands of American and Japanese infantrymen to die in honest hand-to-hand combat on the beaches than to drop those two bombs." People holding such views, he notes, "do not come from the ranks of society that produce infantrymen or pilots." …

"F]ew of those destined to be blown to pieces if the main Japanese islands had been invaded went on to become our most effective men of letters or impressive ethical theorists or professors of contemporary history or of international law…

"[P]lanners of the invasion assumed that it would require a full year, to November 1946, for the Japanese to be sufficiently worn down by land-combat attrition to surrender. By that time, one million American casualties was the expected price….

"[J]ohn Kenneth Galbraith is persuaded that the Japanese would have surrendered surely by November without an invasion. …"Two or three weeks," says Galbraith. …

"[T]hose weeks mean the world if you're one of those thousands or related to one of them. During the time between the dropping of the Nagasaki bomb on August 9 and the actual surrender on the fifteenth, the war pursued its accustomed course: on the twelfth of August eight captured American fliers were executed (heads chopped off); the fifty-first United States submarine, Bonefish, was sunk (all aboard drowned); the destroyer Callaghan went down, the seventieth to be sunk, and the Destroyer Escort Underhill was lost. That's a bit of what happened in six days of the two or three weeks posited by Galbraith. What did he do in the war? He worked in the Office of Price Administration in Washington. I don't demand that he experience having his ass shot off. I merely note that he didn't…

"[O]ne young combat naval officer close to the action wrote home in the fall of 1943, just before the marines underwent the agony of Tarawa: "When I read that we will fight the Japs for years if necessary and will sacrifice hundreds of thousands if we must, I always like to check from where he's talking: It's seldom out here." That was Lieutenant (j.g.) John F. Kennedy. …

"[A]nyone who actually fought in the Pacific recalls the Japanese routinely firing on medics, killing the wounded (torturing them first, if possible), and cutting off the penises of the dead to stick in the corpses' mouths. The degree to which Americans register shock and extraordinary shame about the Hiroshima bomb correlates closely with lack of information about the Pacific war….

"[W]hy delay and allow one more American high school kid to see his own intestines blown out of his body and spread before him in the dirt while he screams and screams when with the new bomb we can end the whole thing just like that? …

"[W]hen we learned to our astonishment that we would not be obliged in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being machine-gunned, mortared and shelled, for all the practiced phlegm of our tough facades we broke down and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow to adulthood after all."

The Failing Legislative Experiment

"Decrepitude remains the path of least resistance for the institution that is supposed to be the beating heart of American self-government." — Phillip Wallach

(Aug. 5) — We all are tired of complaining about Congress so let's abandon it as sunk cost. We may be obligated to maintain the payroll and provide a place for it to meet, and, time available, we should continue to monitor as best we can its incursion on our liberty and property. The experiment, however, is sadly over.

Congress's job approval rating, ticking up only recently as Republicans there vote with the President, was 17 percent earlier this year, only television news being rated lower. That percentage, as I am fond of reminding, corresponds to the number of drunk or otherwise addled people wandering around at any given time.

The other branches already ignore Congress for practical purposes. Judges, organized as mini-legislatures, rule however they personally choose; presidents, sitting at their desk, sign executive orders— so many that one must wonder at what point we must concede that we live under administrative tyranny.

On the topic of tyranny, knowledgable friends advise that we divert our money, energy and time away from congressional politics and try to get into position to choose a benign dictator — or two or three, depending on how the nation segments.

Anyway, Congress's obituary may have been written this week by Philip Wallach of the American Enterprise Institute. Wallach, author of the 2023 book "Why Congress?" analyzes the dysfunction in a carefully thought piece. His conclusion:

"We have no shortage of prescriptions for congressional revitalization. What we are short on is members with the courage (foolhardiness?) to risk their careers and partisan good standing to force the institution to operate differently — together with the perspicacity to understand how such a change would play out and why it would matter."

There's not much to add to that. I have no suggestion on how to deal with members of our Indiana delegation specifically. But we should each make an effort, no matter how admirable he or she may be, to firmly impress on them that whatever they are doing isn't effective, that things aren't copasetic out here, and to quit sending us those insipid mailings that presume we "don't know how things work" in Washington.

Because We Live Here . . .

(July 29) — Independently, a friend and I like to design thought experiments to test public-policy conception. He, an economist with a construction background, is working on one that challenges the "affordable" housing narrative. I am working on a model for crime-plagued retail.

The friend's idea is that affordable housing is what you can afford, not what someone will give you. He would build a house on the specifications and floor plan of a 1950s middle-class home — think "Leave It to Beaver." That would be without the air-tight windows and heavy wall-to-wall insulation, without advanced construction materials, pickleball court, mood lighting, steam shower, attached garage, wine cooler, walk-in pantry, rooms for every activity, and so forth. His premise is these are mere affectations added by succeeding generations able to afford what their parents could not.

He contends that if the basic 1950s house could be built today it would cost $100,000 less than today's average starter house — a fine and "affordable" home by most standards and available to anyone on the free market. He is working with a developer on the exact numbers but repealing senseless permit and code requirements might cut the cost by $50,000.

Interesting, huh?

My own idea is to identify a stretch of retail that nobody has been able to make work because . . . well, because it's in the wrong part of town. Customers venturing into my test retail market must have at least a 1-in-34 chance of being criminally victimized in some way and at least moderate prospects of being assaulted or killed.

There's a place in my city that meets my requirements. It is called "the Corridor," struggling retail frontage stretching from downtown south toward what were once in-demand family neighborhoods. Although now under demographic stress, the area contains some of the best housing stock in the city, inviting gentrification.

The ruling elite is sensitive to the implication that the retail failure may be somehow racist. My AI assistant tells me that in recent years more than $1 million has been dumped into these few blocks in the form of grants and subsidies of one sort or another. That does not include private philanthropy, indirect citywide assistance, basic infrastructure, connecting walking trails or a half dozen consulting studies.

A boosterish local media, announcing the other day that yet another consultant was coming to town, says success is finally at hand. It lists several new businesses opening along the corridor: a tattoo parlor, a record shop and something called an "art and awakening" center, all said to be part of "a slow but steady transformation."

Hmmm.

My alternate plan, stolen from dramatically successful Hong Kong, is to stop the subsidies cold and let the property fall to its true market value. Create a nonprofit, tax-exempt foundation to buy it up cheap and offer frontage at cost to investors who have lived in the neighborhood for at least a decade. Buyers would have to submit to these stipulations:

To be on-site proprietors or limited partners, not controlled by distant corporations, and agree that the property could be resold only to the same.

Join a municipally chartered association that places respect for private property above any aspirations of social justice. That would require maintaining a security force guided by top-drawer legal counsel with a goal of reducing crime to near zero regardless of a perpetrator's root cause or social grievance. The late Tom Bethell argued compellingly that private property is the Golden Rule in action, that is, you have reason to treat the property of others as you would have them treat your own. That means no rioting, no looting. no loitering.

Most important, the charter would exempt the merchants from affirmative-action fol-de-rol. Property owners could hire whomever they believe would make their operation more efficient, regardless of the employee's race, sex or ethnic background. Likewise, they could expel anyone from their property or their employ whom they deemed likely to be a threat, an irritant or however offensive to the base of paying customers. Stereotypes, positive or negative, would be assumed valid unless proven otherwise.

Finally, lest someone raise concern about any hint of discrimination or unfairness, the association would call attention to the life work of the economist Thomas Sowell. He has argued without refutation that prejudice carries its own punishment in the constriction of the pool of customers and labor as well as in the opening of prosperous niches for competing businesses. (Michael Jordan: "Republicans buy sneakers too.")

William Rockhill Nelson, the Fort Wayne native who moved west to become the guiding entrepreneur of Kansas City, was asked why he put so much energy into designing parkways, attractive neighborhoods and retail space. "Because I live here, damn it," was his answer.

Anyway, that's what I'd call my little thought experiment. Maybe you have your own. Don't keep it to yourself, send it to your city councilmen. Theirs aren't working

Urban Life Means Shoplifting

(July 11) — How are things going? Well, few venture out after dusk on our multi-million-dollar trail system; there are stabbings at Promenade Park, if that tells you anything; shootings threaten to become routine on the streets below our majestic new downtown constructions; and there is shoplifting and theft throughout. At some point we are going to have to face a sad fact, that is, there is bad, downright horrible, behavior by a segment of the population.

OK, but which segment?

Our Democrat administration would point to the city's German-American, Lutheran-Catholic lineage. Its members so oppressed the city's minorities, it is said, that they now have few paths to the middle class. Some have to steal to eat. If so, that is despite three generations of affirmative action and unconstrained welfare spending to the point that some age cohorts have never held a job. And please don't ask about family structure.

However, now that we have a black female mayor the discussion has left the political realm and settled on an odd combination of inanimate objects (guns, housing) and mystery root causes. Recently, for instance, she lamented the "moral failing" of just "jailing and burying our children."

There is some truth to all of that, and our mayor seems to be trying her hardest. Her pleas for more parental guidance and respect for police are particularly welcome. But if we are going to make progress going forward we are going to have to concentrate on the substantive.

For starters, it is not a moral failure to put people in jail for breaking the law — quite the contrary — and that is regardless of any social-oppression score, especially if those people are likely to harm others when allowed to walk free.

The segment responsible for this particular aspect is the judicial and prosecutorial systems. Despite heroic efforts by police in solving the most serious crimes, we seem paralyzed by social-justice concerns on the prosecution end. Blame a lack of funding or a lack of will, or both. A single FBI crime category, shoplifting, serves as an example.

My city doesn't keep comprehensible shoplifting statistics linking to prosecutions. If it did, there would be an explanation for the food "desert" in our central city. In any case, none were mentioned when the city council approved more than $3 million in grants, partnerships and guarantees for a new government grocery store, the model envisioned by several big-city mayors.

Let us just say again that private grocers operate on a profit margin of less than 2 percent, sometimes much less. Shoplifting by itself can wipe that out, not to mention violent street crimes making a store location a dangerous place to work or shop.

And while we await a response to our request for a look at the books of our own city-financed store (see "Auditing Good Intentions") let's extrapolate from data collected by the Manhattan Institute:

The 13 largest chains in New York City have closed 797 stores since 2020, largely as a result of increases in shoplifting and employee theft. If such numbers hold for a city the size of Fort Wayne, say, it could have lost as many as 26 stores.

An executive of Rite Aid in New York told analysts in 2022 that it has been almost impossible to stop retail theft and has closed 73 stores there. The city also has 45 fewer 7-Eleven outlets. Discount chains Family Dollar and Dollar General have shut 20 stores.

"In the wake of New York's 2020 bail reforms, shoplifting complaints in the city increased from fewer than 40,000 in 2019 to nearly 65,000 in 2022," writes Steve Malanga of the institute. "Meantime, a study by criminologists determined that two-thirds of those released under the 2020 bail reforms get rearrested within two years. The police commissioner has argued that these so-called reforms 'have rendered the criminal justice system in New York City a high-speed revolving door for recidivists.'"

Do you see a cause-effect relationship there? If so, here's a wild idea: Why not go the opposite direction? Let's concede that random youths shooting and stabbing each other at 3 a.m. (when combined with the complex social matrix from which they arise) is an intractable problem — for now, at least.

Instead, let's focus precious energy on the simplest of crimes, shoplifting. Let's set a modest goal of reducing shoplifting by half in the next year, sending a message that indisputable video evidence will likely result in time in jail (you can buy a lot of facial-recognition software for $3 million dollars.)

That will cause prosecutors some late hours and disrupt a certain number of young lives. There certainly will be complaints lodged about discriminatory enforcement even when the evidence is clear. Perhaps, though, brief incarceration could be paired with social instruction and help with life strategies, as several local judges have encouraged.

Most substantively, it could restore vibrant shopping and the attendant jobs and opportunities to our central cities And while we are at it, regulations and taxes on small businesses could be relaxed generally.

Capitalism, they call it. Let's give it a try, nothing else is working.

We're All Greta Thunberg Now

(July 3) — Some of us no longer pay attention to opinion surveys. We assume, politics and media being what they are, that the public is too ill-informed to have anything useful to say. One recent poll, though, begs analysis. It finds that a good majority of young Americans are not proud to be Americans.

Now, it is wise to approach such a thought assuming the most charitable interpretation. I'll do my best.

A Gallup Poll this month finds that 42 percent of those born after 1976 are not proud to be an American. That compares with 84 percent of those born before 1946 proud to be Americans.

Yes, that is troubling but perhaps the young people are merely expressing the contrarianism of youth. Maybe they are just saying, as the callow among us will do, that when they are running the country things will be better — so, no, they are not proud of being Americans at the moment but plan to be soon when their ideas and policies take hold.

Or perhaps they were paying attention even in puberty to the insanity and corruption of the Obama-Biden years. Or perhaps the bombast of the Trump style is just too much for them. All of that is reasonable enough. Maybe, though, there is an externality.

Could a rogue education system be at fault? Perhaps our young have been carefully taught that America is overrated, that our constitutional republic is a fraud, that direct democracy or even communism have not been given a fair shake. (This may explain the stark difference in political positions between "educated" voters and those of us who spent our day staring out the classroom window.)

That seems to me the most accurate albeit dismaying take on the Gallup results. Recent generations, for instance, cannot correctly place fascism on the political spectrum, Indeed, they think socialism and communism, distinctions without a difference, are viable alternatives with binary results, one good and one only insufficiently tested. They have little practical understanding from whence their liberty and prosperity came or the role played by constitutional guarantees, most critically private property.

And most corrosive, they have accepted whole the abomination that "civil rights" has become, allowing discrimination against white males while assuming everyone else is blameless regardless of motivation, life choices or behavior. That last also requires them to ignore the wildly varied outcomes of world cultures and to only call out the flaws, real and imagined, of Christianity and Western Civilization.

Finally, since we seem to be on a downward trajectory here, we must note that an incomplete education may have led this generation into a dark corner, somewhere called "communal narcissism," a term introduced recently by Jochen Gebauer in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Gebauer describes a generation of self-proclaimed do-gooders who cloak themselves in virtue while craving fame and attention. They wear compassion like a crown, seeking applause through affirmations of selflessness. Think of millions and millions of Greta Thunbergs.

Here is a summation in this month's Aporia Magazine:

> "Communal narcissism exists on a spectrum. At its mild end, individuals earnestly advocate for social justice, finding quiet satisfaction and camaraderie in their omni-cause of supporting the intersecting grievances of 'marginalized' groups. When less benign, individuals become dogmatic and antagonistic, as when 'The View' hosts engage in anti-Trump vitriol, prioritizing moral posturing over dialogue. At its most severe, individuals try to justify violence, such as BLM riots, assaults on Trump supporters, or the firebombing of Tesla vehicles. Perhaps most chilling is a selective compassion that shows a disconnect between their benevolent self-image and a deeper ideological purity that is silent even in the face of murder."

Teachers in the so-called social sciences would do well to give cause why they should not be hung by their heels from lamp posts.

Meet the New IEDC Board (Yawn)

(June 30) — A friend, a former submarine commander now a troubleshooter for a regional manufacturer, shared a management technique: Cancel the company picnic. Please, stick with me; this will explain why Gov. Mike Braun missed a golden eco-devo opportunity.

My friend's experience told him that nobody coming to his office to complain would be able to tell him why the picnic was essential to the plant's productivity, which was his and their primary job. Most important, he would have a handy list of the unproductive, soft-headed whiners and troublemakers in his employ.

I think of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) that way. But in naming a new board of directors last week, Braun demonstrated his disagreement.

First, some background. The IEDC was formed 20 years ago as a political stunt for then Gov. Mitch Daniels. It was meant to show he was fulfilling a campaign promise to "create" jobs. To be fair, Daniels may not have realized that it would grow into the monster it is now, pushing around hundreds of millions of dollars in economic incentives, tax breaks and special deals while accumulating political clout in every corner of the state.

At the time, this foundation waived a red flag. An adjunct scholar and former deputy director of the Indiana Office of Management and Budget spelled it out: The IEDC claims of job creation are politically inflated if not economic nonsense.

Tad DeHaven, a most practical economic mind, reminded us that politicians don't like to cut taxes, the simplest way to attract investment and create jobs. That's because less tax revenue means less political influence. They prefer to offer incentives, grants, rebates and cash transfers to give the appearance of creating jobs and of course to take unaudited credit for themselves. DeHaven dubbed it "press-release economics."

"Indiana doesn't need a politicized economic-development bureaucracy to create a welcoming environment for businesses," DeHaven wrote. "One alternative would be to eliminate the state's corporate income tax, which has a relatively high 8.5 percent rate (now 4.9 percent). The revenue loss could be offset at least in part by shuttering the IEDC and eliminating targeted tax breaks. The governor, of course, might have to forgo some press releases. The long-term benefits to the state, though, should be worth the political sacrifice."

We would further argue that Indiana as it stands has much to commend it to investors, beginning with strong families, Christian values, good schools and a tradition of innovation, all of which means a productive workforce. It would be an advantage to have a governor concentrating on that instead of a complicated fiscal charade.

"Most businesses already know where they are going to locate before they contact the IEDC," DeHaven said. "Businesses consider a myriad of factors including demographics, transportation, logistics and workforce capabilities when choosing where to set up shop. Although the tax and regulatory climate is an important consideration, IEDC handouts are just that — handouts."

After two decades, there was hope that Governor Braun understood this. His new appointments to the IEDC board, though, were sadly routine. He named some fast-talking deal makers, to be sure, and a sprinkling of solid businessmen, some people with big money and a community organizer or two — essentially the mix that made up the old board, all believers to one degree or another that the government, not the individual, creates wealth.

Most troublesome, we recognize more than one flat-out rent-seeker on the new board, defined as "an expert at gaining wealth without creating new value, typically by manipulating economic or political systems to secure benefits, subsidies or monopolistic advantages." We can hope they will be out-voted. although that sounds like a pretty fair description of the agency itself to this point.

Missing were any of the dozen or so free-market economists around the state. On a civic plane, economic knowledge is different than business savvy. The latter works if you are forming one of those public-private "partnerships," but the former is what Braun needs to guide his state into a competitive future.

Is it too late to cancel the IEDC picnic?

Auditing Good Intentions

(June 25) — For once, my mid-sized Indiana city is ahead of New York City fashion — policy fashion, at least. The Democratic nominee for mayor there is promising to build municipal-run grocery stores. Heck, we've had one of those for more than two years.

It was a political promise of our mayor as well. In both cases, the stated goal is to provide wholesome food options to the deserving. The unstated goal is to counteract vile, racist capitalism.

In any case, it provides us an opportunity to test the premise that urban food "deserts" are the result of racism and economic oppression independent of shoplifting, employee theft and violent street crime.

Also, we would like to know if economists are correct that the good intentions driving such projects can create unintended results — in this case, disruption in supply chains, market distortion and an invitation to corruption.

To be clear, the grocery is not designed to generate profit but rather to not lose money (not much of a distinction considering that the average private grocer operates on profit margin of 1.6 percent). The formal business plan anticipates initial losses with the expectation that the store will "eventually" reach a breakeven point.

That understood, after a couple of years it seems fair to promoters and critics alike that profit-and-loss accounting be applied so that the community has the information to ensure that the dollar value created by the store is greater than the dollar value of the community resources used to operate it.

That is why the foundation today asked four questions of our city's community development director, the fellow who nominally overseeing the municipal-nonprofit partnership that "owns" our full-service city grocery:

- Are there auditing mechanisms in place to determine whether the Pontiac Street Market, opened Nov. 6, 2023. is breaking even in a conventional sense, that is, including financing costs and excluding either government or charitable monies?
- Will regular financial reports be made available publicly?
- Is a record kept of shoplifting and other thefts, a particular problem in the grocery business?
- Finally, if there is a shortfall who is responsible for making up the difference?

While we await his answers, we are boning up on other experiments with municipal-run grocery stores.

The closest case we have found so far is the South End Grocer, a similar private-public partnership in Albany, NY. It closed in less than two years amid serious financial questions. You can read the gory details here.

But the administration of Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson is undeterred. It is reportedly inching toward a citywide experiment with municipal groceries.

When a Walmart and a Whole Foods closed stores in areas of the city, the mayor blamed racism and promised to build his own. The grocers, though, say the closures were due to the stores being unprofitable because of crime. In fact, in 2023 over 2022, thefts in the so-called food deserts were up 25 percent, according to the Chicago Police Department, while robberies were up 11 percent.

Again, crime or no crime, the tax revenue and inputs used by a city-run store have alternative uses, and without proper accounting a city cannot judge the store's value. That, of course, is what our foundation hopes to clarify in its letter to the city. We will let Peter Jacobson at the Foundation for Economic Education explain further:

"Our big fear with municipal grocery stores shouldn't be that they'll be run like a department of motor vehicles. Our fear should be that centrally planned businesses will destroy wealth. In centrally planned socialism there is no wealth to destroy to enable them to even keep up appearances. Since the American economy is by and large capitalistic, the city-run grocery store will be able to operate so long as it can burn the wealth created by the free market."

Yes, keep a good grip on your wallet. *— tcl*

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

INDIANAPOLICY
Review

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