

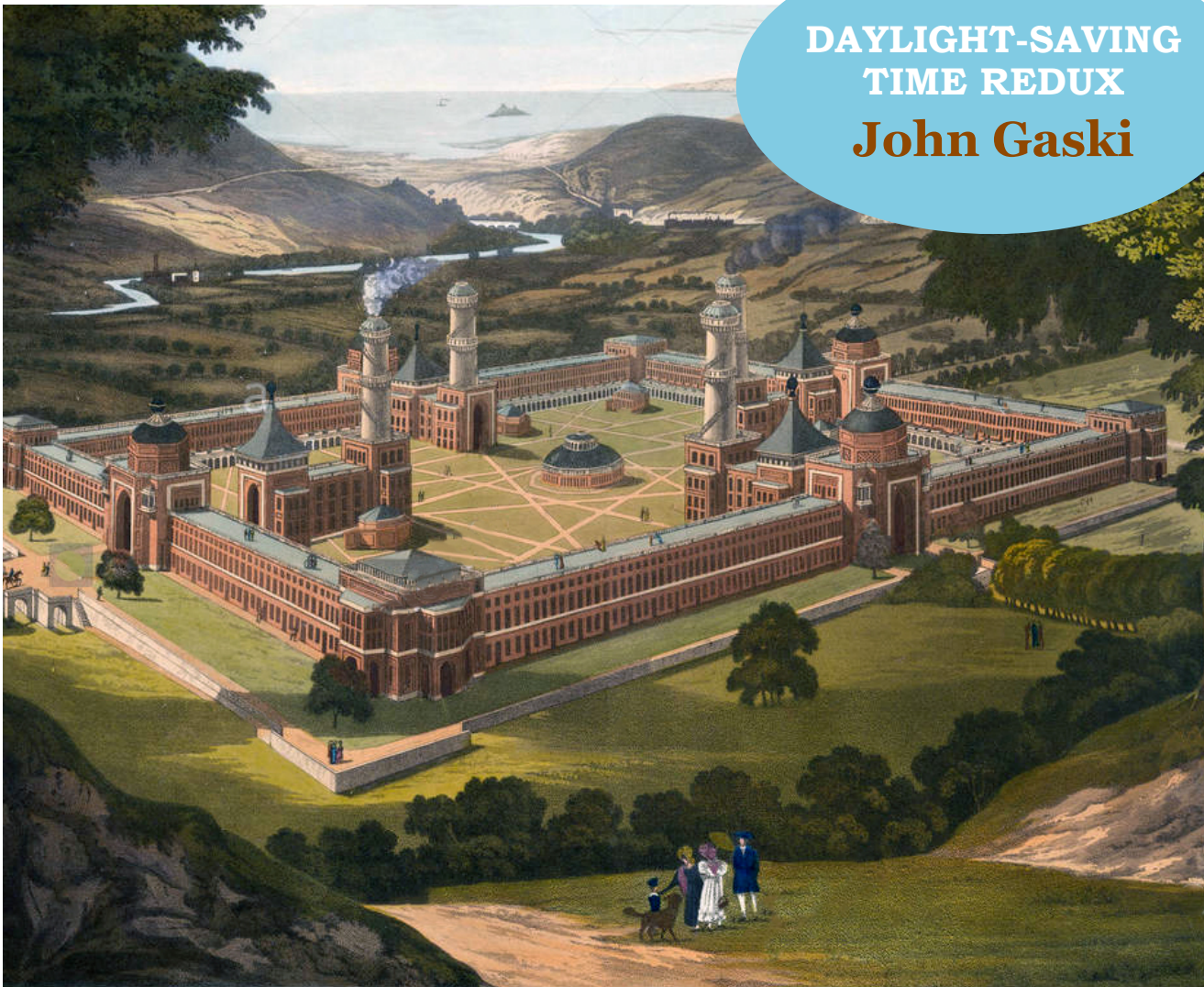
INDIANA POLICY

Review

Spring 2025

DAYLIGHT-SAVING
TIME REDUX

John Gaski



"New Harmony as proposed by Robert Owen," engraving by F. Bate

New Harmony, Indiana The Great Socialist Experiment

The 19th century founding of an Indiana town encapsulates the internal contradictions of socialism — namely, why knowledge and incentive problems cause failure, especially at large scales, and why well-intentioned people find it so alluring nonetheless.

“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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- 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

DeKlerk: Richard Lugar played a disastrous role in the creation of a Marxist South Africa.

Where Good Intentions Went Bad

We are glad to learn that Indiana University occasionally offers study-abroad courses in South Africa. What a wonderful chance for students to learn what happens when you discard the tenets of Western Civilization solely because they were developed by white people.

To begin, because college students are interested in fairness above all, the World Bank keeps something called a Gini coefficient. It is a 0.00-to-1.00 measurement of wealth inequality with black-run South Africa's latest score being 0.63, making it one of the most unequal countries in the world (even corrupt Brazil, for comparison, is only 0.52). The score would suggest a society where income is heavily concentrated in the hands of a few. In fact, the richest 10 percent in South Africa own over 85 percent of household wealth, while over half the population has more liabilities than assets and 62 percent are affected by poverty.

Economic equality, you will recall, was the reason used by Richard Lugar and Jimmy Carter for kicking out the hated white Afrikaners, who, not so incidentally, were not really colonizers but had built the country from scratch. A friend associated with the Indianapolis Economic Club values the insights he gained spending a day with F.W. DeKlerk, one of the club's guest speakers and president of South Africa as Apartheid was being dismantled. Here is his account:

"DeKlerk asked what I thought of Richard Lugar, (then on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and active in the negotiations over South Africa). I enjoyed opining as to the senator's overrated standing and corrosive actions. DeKlerk's smile and nod were priceless, and he went on to tell just how destructive Lugar in particular was to the negotiations with the African National Congress (ANC). In his mind, Lugar caused long delays (three to five years), and shackled DeKlerk's efforts to better secure a political solution with the radicals. He further predicted South Africa's implosion."

In any case, in 1994 the new South African leadership inherited a situation arguably better than any other post-colonial polity. There was stability and prosperity with plenty of natural resources, a strong manufacturing sector and an excellent university system. As DeKlerk predicted, it didn't last long.

Today, South Africa's debt-to-GDP ratio is an alarming 71 percent of the government borrows heavily to fund social programs and infrastructure amid slow to zero growth. And if national defense is important, the once formidable air force, navy and army have been reduced to ferrying and security services for top officials. Only six of 330 aircraft, for example, are operational due to equipment and expertise shortages.

I can pull up more dismal statistics if you wish but it is enough to say that the race-Marxists of the governing ANC have achieved "equity" in 30 short years by reducing both whites and blacks to the default setting of a Soweto slum.

Eve Fairbanks, a former political writer for The New Republic who has lived in South Africa for the last decade, tells of the nation's degradation in her book "The Inheritors." This from the review, "The lights Are Going Off in South Africa," in the Claremont Review of Books:



De Klerk



Lugar

“We blacks saw businesses we thought had no challenges,’ a farmer tells (Fairbanks). ‘But we were lying to ourselves.’ There you have it in a nutshell: Black South Africans thought their white neighbors were rich because of the things they had. As it turned out, nice things didn’t stay nice for very long without the codes of behavior that kept them nice. Being a white South African looked very easy from the outside, but it turned out to depend on lots of little habits that, even with the best will in the world, would have been hard to explain in advance.”

The lesson for our traveling IU scholars? Respect for life and private property is the first thing to go when envy and a blind pursuit of social justice take hold — that and government integrity. And yes, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu were frauds, media manufactured ones.

For in South Africa today, where official theft is normalized, a law was recently passed allowing the expropriation of land from whites without reimbursement. In the last couple of decades it is estimated that as many as 3,000 white farmers have been murdered by blacks. A popular political party has chanted “Kill the Boers” at rallies in recent years.

We would like to take comfort in the 7,800 miles of ocean between us and Cape Town. To do so, though, requires us to ignore the actions of our own Charlestown, Indiana. The city government there in 2017 tried to evict hundreds of residents from a neighborhood of mid-century homes because municipal planners wanted a higher quality citizenry living on better floor plans.

This year, a Democrat mayor in Rhode Island tried to seize a private developer’s subdivision so he could build government-subsidized “affordable” housing. The owner, ironically, was threatened with a charge of trespassing.

Finally, there is Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, where the city leadership inexplicably failed to fund basic water service and now faces infrastructure repair costs estimated at \$2 billion a year, not including the utter debilitation of daily life and the almost total deterrence of private

investment. Understandably, the city has experienced the most dramatic population decline of any U.S. city this decade.

But back to those study-abroad courses at IU. They are designed to provide students with “academic credit, cultural immersion and hands-on experience” overseas. A chance, again, to live the ideology on your tee-shirt.

So, how about some “immersion” in the new radical Islamic Syria? Christian and Jewish students would study remotely of course. — *tcl*

New Harmony 1825: Socialism Begins

Robert Owen envisioned a community with an impersonal Creator God, a focus on reason and rationality, the abolition of private property and less emphasis on the nuclear family. It failed in two years.

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This year is the 200th anniversary of British industrialist Robert Owen's social experiments at New Harmony, Indiana — a utopian commune on 20,000 acres along the Wabash River near Evansville.

Much has been written about Robert Owen and the community at New Harmony. Owen has been described as a forerunner of socialism and the cooperative movement. He is also credited as a founder of utopian socialism. Benjamin Rogge devotes a whole chapter of his classic book, "Can Capitalism Survive," to the experiments along the Wabash, arguing that their stories offer "three morality tales" for historical guidance.

Rogge's morality tales also illustrate some of the classic economic arguments against socialism — namely, why knowledge and incentive problems cause failure, especially at large scales, and why well-intentioned people find socialism so alluring despite its many failures.

For these reasons, Owen's utopian socialism took just two years to fail at New Harmony. But the story begins a decade beforehand.

Beginnings

The town of Harmony was founded in 1814 by a religious group of German immigrants called the "Harmonists" or "Rappites" (after their leader, George Rapp). As with many 19th-century religious Americans, they believed that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. For the Harmonists, this manifested as a desire to strive for temporal perfection in communal living, while anticipating His return to govern the Earth. Through Rapp's leadership and a drive to live in Christian community, their enterprise is widely viewed to have been quite successful.

The original Harmonists established their first settlement in Pennsylvania but a rising population and trouble with the locals encouraged them to move westward toward the frontier. A decade later, again perturbed by worldly neighbors, they made plans to return east toward Pittsburgh to settle along the Ohio River, establishing a new community called Economy.

The Harmonists sold their land and buildings there to Robert Owen for \$150,000 in early 1825. He renamed it New Harmony, hoping to establish a model community for social reform and communal living *not* based on religious beliefs. In a word, instead of the Harmonists' biblical vision of the Millennium, Owen envisioned a secular paradise on Earth. Owen had been a successful industrialist in New Lanark, Scotland — both as an entrepreneur and in managing an ongoing business. He amassed considerable wealth and was devoted to social progress, putting his principles into practice. For example, at New Lanark he offered housing and education to his workers and their families; he banned corporal punishment in his schools; and he refused to hire child labor under 10 years old.

At New Harmony, Owen looked to extend these principles into a utopian effort at building and maintaining community. For example, New Harmony had the first co-ed public school and one of the nation's first trade schools. In his 1813 collection of essays, "A New View of Society," Owen presented his "science of society": highly

planned communities of 2,000 people with deistic religion (an impersonal Creator God), a focus on reason and rationality, the abolition of private property and far less emphasis on the nuclear family (Owen 1813).

Owen's vision attracted many talented people — and thus, New Harmony was initially home to some impressive productivity. In particular, a number of natural scientists settled there — most notably, in geology. His family was especially prolific. Oldest son Robert Dale Owen published the first argument for birth control in America. Separately, as a member of Congress, he also introduced the bill that established the Smithsonian Institutions. Owen's third son David was responsible for choosing the stone for the Smithsonian building in D.C. and was the first person to be a state geologist in three different states. Youngest son Richard taught at Indiana University and became the first president of Purdue.

Governance in New Harmony was entrusted to a town council of seven — three elected and four appointed by Owen, allowing him to maintain putative control. After a rough and somewhat anarchic start, Owen established a constitution that allowed private property for personal belongings but reserved communal rights for other property while giving residents opportunities to investment in the town's capital and to work for credit at the town store. A year later, a replacement constitution arranged residents' duties according to age. However well-intentioned, these efforts and adjustments would not be enough to fulfill the vision because not enough attention was given to motivating production — and the incentives to produce were minimal.

Another likely problem: Owen did not spend much time at New Harmony. As a brand ambassador, he was busy trying to recruit new residents and capital. Owen was effective at getting an audience for his ideas with the most powerful people in American society. He addressed the U.S. Congress and five presidents —

in what may have been the first prominent discussions of socialism in America. In 1839, he became one of the first to use the term in print. (Some consider him the father of British socialism.) In other words: although Owen was an eloquent visionary, he didn't persist in enunciating the vision at New Harmony. Assuming he was reasonably competent as an administrator, his active leadership may have been helpful if not decisive. Instead, the effort quickly floundered without sufficient leadership — or ultimately, sufficient followership.

Owen (and a key partner, William Maclure) heavily subsidized the endeavor at New Harmony. The experiment seemed to have the key variables: smart people, robust idealism, significant resources, a good start and visionary leadership. But aside from marshaling resources and attracting talented people to follow socialist ideals, it's difficult to imagine how the structure and incentives of New Harmony's society and governance deserve any merit. Owen's vision obscured the hard reality that reallocating wealth and subsidizing production are quite different from motivating the creation of new wealth.

Too little production and disagreement about inequities quickly led to internal strife and then failure, with the dismantling of the project starting in early 1827. Owen sold the property and businesses to various individuals — and in June returned to Europe hoping to find more fertile soil for his ideas and social experiments. People continued to live in New Harmony, but the social experiment phase was over.

The stories at Harmony, New Harmony, and New Lanark — Rogge's "three morality tales" (Rogge 1979) — hold intriguing similarities but also wild disparities. From Owen's view, the old Harmony had been run by ignorant and superstitious peasants; his New Harmony was inhabited and run by brilliant men. With the best minds and intentions, what could go wrong? On the surface, old Harmony's success should have been extended by New Harmony's infusion of genius and wealth. But by comparison the original

Harmony settlement lasted ten years and was prosperous; the New Harmony experiment lasted just two years and was a social and financial disaster.

Rogge's conclusion: "The Robert Owen who showed the world the way to a better life for all was not the Owen of New Harmony but the Owen of New Lanark, the hardheaded businessman who proved that the humane treatment of others works . . . it serves the purposes of both employer and employee." Owen's voluntary work as a compassionate business owner on a small scale was far more effective than his efforts at communal living. Further along the spectrum, socialism turns out to be much more complicated — ethically and practically — especially on a large scale. As a result, Owen's legacy, rooted in the textile mills of New Lanark, Scotland, is an ironic testament to freedom, markets, and mutually beneficial trade in business and society.

Christian Socialism?

Communal living (a social system) is a cousin of socialism (a political and economic system). Advocacy of socialism requires faith in government — that politicians and bureaucrats have sufficient knowledge and incentives to run society effectively, and also sufficient morality (e.g., selflessness, integrity) to pursue those ends. Without meeting both criteria, the results will be well-intentioned incompetence (good motives without corresponding good knowledge) or effective corruption (knowledge without motives).

Socialism puts more value on society than the human person. It also requires sufficient drive within followers to work despite its inherent economic disincentives. As such, proponents of government activism in general — and socialism in particular — tend to be: a) confident that ruling elites have good knowledge; b) ignorant about the need to motivate economic production; c) naive about human nature including economics trade-offs; and d) more interested in the welfare of communities than individuals. Owen met all four.

Often, faith in government is explicitly secular but implicitly religious toward the State. For some Christians, their interest in socialism is connected to beliefs on what the Scriptures say about communal living. And then, by way of analogy, socialism has some similarities with the way in which (effective) churches and families routinely function. We're raised in families, which can be wonderful examples of communal living. And Christians attend churches, which can be impressive examples of shared resources achieving laudable goals. As such, church goers and leaders may be especially prone to believe that socialism can routinely work well — or even, that it is the most desirable form of government.

On the surface, this might appear to be correct. "The people of Israel" and "the Early Church" lived under something of a self-imposed socialistic system. From the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 15:7-9 says: "If there is a poor man among your brothers . . . be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: 'the seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near', so that you do not show ill will toward your brother and give him nothing . . . Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart." While this Scripture speaks primarily of lending, it also implies outright gifts, given the command to retire unpaid debts every seven years. Leviticus 19:10 is even more explicit, while maintaining a work ethic for indigents: "Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien." From the New Testament's description of the Early Church, Acts 2:44-45 reports that "all the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need . . ." Acts 4:32-35 is similar: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had . . . There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and

put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." This sounds similar to Karl Marx' dictum: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." In a word, the Early Church lived out socialism of a type: all income and wealth went into a common pool to be distributed by their leaders as necessary. Acts 2:47 reports that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Clearly, God was happy with this system. It is easy to understand why some have interpreted these verses as calling on believers to put faith in governments to redistribute wealth and uphold socialism as a national economic system.

But there are two key differences between the Biblical call for individual Christians and what the Bible has to say about the optimal role of government. First, Israel and the Early Church are examples of relatively voluntary behavior. In stark contrast, government activity is coercive. (While the dictates of biblical community might be enforced within the group, people always have the option to leave.) Second, Israelite society and the Early Church were governed at local levels and on relatively smaller scales where socialism tends to be more effective. Government activity is often non-local and conducted on a large scale — both of which introduce an array of knowledge and incentive problems. With any form of wealth redistribution based on need, there are incentive problems for recipients — those in need. Textbook issues including the free-rider problem and Prisoners' Dilemmas are exacerbated when moving away from local and small scale to more writ large arrangements. For instance, it is easier to discern true need and monitor the behavior of recipients in a smaller local setting; fraud and long-term dependency are less likely. Further, to the extent that guilt is a factor, people are more likely to abuse a system run by a distant and impersonal government rather than people in their own communities. This is not to say all people will reduce effort in large-scale settings. But at the margin, shirking becomes more likely for each individual. Certainly, there are those who

will work despite receiving little directly from the fruits of their labor. Historically, the Early Church, various communes, and Israeli kibbutzes have largely avoided shirking. But these people are driven by something in addition to economic incentives — a devotion to religious teachings and a form of work ethic.

Objective standards for productivity allow for easier monitoring. And of course, having intrinsically motivated people can be quite helpful. When I'm teaching economics for business students, we frequently talk about incentives in the workplace. This leads to the takeaway that collective arrangements work better and easier when people are internally driven to "do the right thing", underlining the crucial importance of the Human Resources function in firms.

About 1,000 people joined the experiment at New Harmony. Owen cast a wide net in his invitation to join the community. Not surprisingly, he attracted a mixture of true believers, eccentrics and free riders. One of his sons described the residents as "a heterogeneous collection of radicals, enthusiastic devotees to principle, honest latitudinarians and lazy theorists, with a sprinkling of unprincipled sharpers thrown in." More homogeneity in participants allows them to be "on the same page" — as well as to monitor and enforce standards with people they understand better. Because Owen was hostile to "organized religion" his community may have had more homogeneity in this regard. The bad news is that he reduced or eliminated a helpful motive for people who might have been called to be productive for higher purposes. If Owen had been more selective, success would have been more likely. But in the end, the diligent grew to resent those who responded to the incentives at hand.

Even in special cases where communal living has been relatively effective, incentive problems are still present. Again, the example of the Early Church is instructive. Acts 5 relates the story of Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple who

voluntarily sold a piece of property and claimed to give the entire proceeds to the church. Instead, they kept part of the money for themselves. By lying to the leaders, they responded to the economic disincentives at the expense of their supposed moral beliefs.

The same tension is evident throughout Paul's letters to churches. He frequently encourages work, condemns laziness and discourages financial dependency on others. He was teaching against the incentive problems inherent in any socialistic system. Implicitly, he was encouraging an increase in monitoring and discipline to stem the tendency to "free ride" against the efforts of others.

Other lessons

By two metrics, Owen clearly deserves immense credit. First, in business and in his efforts at social reform, he put his money where his mouth was. He was willing to sacrifice profit to do business by his principles and he devoted much of his wealth to his ideals for communal living. Second, his vision was based on charity from philanthropists and cooperation from community members, rather than advocating socialism *per se* or agitating the working classes to rebel and establish it by force.

Too often, people conflate their personal convictions with a need to press those convictions on others, especially through the use of government's coercive powers. This is a mistake. Even if something is a good idea, it doesn't follow that government is an ethical and practical means to the desired ends, forcing conformity to those beliefs. Owen didn't commit this particular mistake and instead relied on voluntary behavior — both for financing these communities and, largely, in governing them.

In this way, Rogge's three moralities mirrors some of the most classic economic arguments against socialism. In their 2019 book, "Socialism Sucks: Two Economists Drink Their Way Through the Unfree World," Robert Lawson and Benjamin Powell offer a breezy take on socialism (Lawson

and Powell 2019). Its casual tone is rooted in their use of beer as a metaphor and a key prop to describe different types of socialism in various countries. Lawson and Powell's punchline: many people advocate socialism without knowing what it is. (Not many people understand capitalism either, but that's another story.) Socialism is defined as government owning all means of production. But few people really want that, including most self-styled socialists. Instead, they imagine "socialism" as a dog's breakfast of leftist and liberal policy proposals. They see it as a vague call to increase government activism, justice, and ironically, "democracy."

So, for readers worried about people advocating (real) socialism today, you can rest easy. They're not advocating political oppression and the abolition of private property. They're usually fans of watered-down versions of socialism: government interventions fraught with inefficiencies, inequities, and a mix of good intentions, cronyism and ignorance of economics and/or Scripture. Although the ideas may look good on paper, they rarely work out, either ethically or practically.

In this, naive utopians such as Robert Owen are actually fine examples. The world would be a far better place if socialist wannabes considered how their good intentions might be better achieved through voluntary efforts in business, politics and society. ♦

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Americans Need the Freedom to Work

It is time to restore the priority and freedom for all those seeking to work legally. This is true even when personal decisions do not directly advance a nation's quantifiable interests.

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Consider the desperate job searches of a youth with limited skills in need of job training, a professional between jobs, or a worker constrained by location and personal responsibilities. Opportunities for flexible finite employment contracts enable individuals to freely negotiate wages, benefits and conditions of employment.

In 1981, legal historian Tibor Machan argued that national goals were undermining workers' natural rights. His objection was not to safety regulations or laws banning force or fraud, but rather to labor law justified in terms of benefits to the nation as a whole rather than individual workers.

Laws targeting national goals (maximizing Gross National Product), demographics, income distribution, wage-based tax revenue, etc., assume that collective goals are more important than the unmeasurable interests of individuals. Then, it is not the costs and benefits for particular individuals that matter but whether there is a net benefit accruing to society as a whole.

Unnecessary obstacles for seeking legal employment should be eliminated.

At times, it is necessary to trade off personal liberty for national goals. However, in the U.S., individuals have been free to participate in the labor market or not. Throughout our careers, we resign, insist on acceptable working conditions and pursue multiple options. Unless force or fraud is involved, the insertion of third-party goals is superfluous, distortionary or, more importantly, a violation of individual rights to contract.

Minimum-wage laws and regulations concerning paid leave and hours worked are designed to protect workers. However, carving out and enforcing appropriate exceptions to large-scale mandates is difficult. Large firms may be able to finesse tradeoffs and tolerate the risk of litigation, but an individual in need of a job cannot.

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), nearly one in five U.S. workers (about 30 million people) are subject to noncompete clauses. Conflicting rulings prolong uncertainty over the FTC's potential ban on such agreements. A one-size-fits-all ban does not assist those workers willing to sign a noncompete clause for increased compensation.

Occupational licensing is required when clients cannot assess professional quality. As of 2019, 22 percent of all employed in the U.S. had at least one occupational license. A review is needed to evaluate whether certain licenses protect clients or merely restrict entry.

The National Labor Relations Board safeguards employees' rights to organize and seek better working conditions. However, the relationship between employer and employee can be unique and is not always adversarial. Increasing employment options precludes neither collective bargaining nor private unions. However, standardized contracts and apprenticeships grow organically. Providing information about contracts and prevailing wages is a direct means of increasing workers' strength in negotiating contracts. Government has a role in providing this information.

Incentives, supposedly in the national interest, distort labor demand and supply. For example, government incentives to increase labor supply, when successful, actually reduce wage rates and, on the other hand, increasing income transfers decreases labor supply.

Incentives, such as the earned income tax credit (EITC) are designed to encourage labor force participation, increase tax revenue, and reduce dependency. They are ineffective when additional wage income significantly affects EITC eligibility. Overall lower tax rates on wages are the better choice.

If a past stigma reduced women's labor force participation and incentivized married men to over-engage, incentives designed to equalize male and female compensation may result in greater or less than optimal participation for one partner or both. Individual choice, based on specialization and the willingness to participate in high or low-paying careers, is preferable to attempts to equalize compensation between family members or occupations.

Does the state have a legitimate role in trying to finesse family formation with labor participation incentives? Pro-family policies, which shift compensation between workers, are divisive considering that most households do not include young children. Families are essential to the nation, but government attempts to strengthen them often fail. Aid to Families with Dependent Children, for example, disrupted families and resulted in unintended social outcomes.

Survey respondents accurately believe that Social Security benefits increase with labor supply; however, they somewhat overestimate the link for the income of dependents. This misconception may be in the national interest but not that of the individual. A retirement program resulting in the accumulation of individually owned assets, on the other hand, offers career flexibility and strength in negotiating wages.

Living-wage proposals misrepresent how Americans actually work. The nurse and ROTC

reservist down the street supplement income by working weekends. Others drive for Uber and clean offices at night. Teens gain confidence and others survive and maintain skills by mowing lawns, substitute teaching, free-lance editing and delivering pizza.

The U.S. Department of Labor reported in July 2024 that 8.4 million persons held multiple jobs, 5.2 percent of all employed persons. In 2023, 34.9 million employees worked exclusively part-time averaging approximately 22 hours a week.

Unfortunately, the current regulatory framework restricts organizations from providing benefits to independent contractors. Otherwise, an independent contractor might negotiate an existing childcare program or a universal savings account in return and opt out of a health plan that duplicates one earned by another household member.

Employment flexibility does not imply tolerance for tax evasion. An Upjohn study estimated that the percentage of those with a primary job but failing to report "informal work" income varied from 8 percent for those who clocked 15 hours a week or less part time to 0.4 percent for those clocking more than 15 hours.

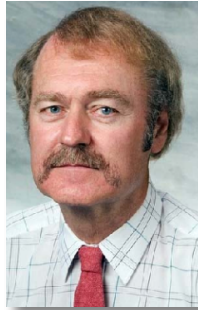
It is time to restore the priority and freedom for all those seeking to work legally. This is true even when personal decisions do not directly advance a nation's quantifiable interests.

For most people, jobs are a necessary and honorable means, not an end. Government programs artificially incentivizing labor force participation are unnecessary. What is required are more employment options. Many types of employment arrangements are freely chosen, valued, and relied on to earn and supplement income. ♦

Had Enough of Daylight Saving?

Why force children onto streets and highways in early-morning darkness?

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Officials of both the executive and legislative branches of the federal government have recently sounded off on the prospect of eliminating Daylight-Saving Time, i.e., ditching the inconvenient semi-annual clock change observed in most of the U.S. The highest official of all, President Donald Trump, is a proponent. This development resurrects the specter of Indiana's tumultuous history with Daylight-Saving Time (DST) and time-zone policy decisions. The most recent such conflict occurred about 19 years ago when the state abandoned year-round Standard Time, accepted the DST regimen and then wrestled with which time zone, Eastern or Central, would be best. As we know, most counties in the state chose the Eastern Zone (to their detriment).

The key issue for now, especially for a state like Indiana which is near the natural and legislated time-zone boundaries and could conceivably opt anew for either Eastern or Central, is to manage and mitigate any adverse consequences from looming abolition of DST. First, some background:

To understand these issues and the present discussion, it is essential to distinguish between time zone and Daylight-Saving Time. The two are

separate policies. Regardless of what time zone a locality or state is in, it may or may not be subject to the twice-a-year Daylight-Saving/Standard Time switch along with (most of) the rest of the country. There is a valid argument for Indiana to observe DST when most of the nation does, i.e., to prevent the confusion of being out of sync sometimes with out-of-state business contacts. That was our pre-2006 situation when most of Indiana always remained on Standard Time, ignoring DST while nearly all other states abided by it. As I would explain it to non-Hoosiers then, "Indiana never changes."

However, DST is detrimental in several vital ways. Abundant medical literature confirms mental and physical health disorders resulting from the semi-annual time changes which render clock time divergent from natural circadian biorhythms. "Seasonal affective disorder" is the term given to human day-night dysfunction due to not conforming well to daylight and darkness respectively. (In effect, the body knows when it should be day or night, light or dark, and the clock may not agree because of DST.) There is also a finding from research the renowned Bloomington statistician, Jeff Sagarin, and I published in 2011 which reveals a 16-point decrement in SAT scores attributable to DST — with corresponding damage to economic welfare. Except for those who attach supreme value to late-evening daylight for activities such as recreation, elimination of DST should create an improvement in national, or state-wide, well-being.

A Brief Detour into Time Zone

The problems of time zone, in particular imposing the wrong zone on a piece of geography, are oblique but similar. Relegation to the Eastern Zone has always been economically unsuitable for Indiana, and not only because of the invisible wall it creates between us and the economic engine of Chicago. The Central Time Zone aligns with the entire nation's work day better than the Eastern Zone does; likewise with interstate export traffic alignment. (Domestic trade volume-weighted

discrepancy from the other U.S. continental time zones is minimized by Central time, that is.) In practical terms, a Central Time Zone business can live with being two hours discrepant from its West Coast customers and suppliers, but a much greater impediment is the Eastern Zone's three-hour difference. Moreover, with modern digital-age communication, no longer does being on the same time as New York City provide a substantial advantage. To the contrary, the Central Time Zone allows for some after-hours service to the entire Eastern Zone. Has anyone ever heard of a "before-hours" commercial advantage?

Transcending the Central Time Zone's economic superiority is the humane factor. The natural boundary between the Eastern and Central Time Zones vertically splits the middle of the state of Ohio. Indiana lies near the middle of the natural, geographic, solar Central Time Zone. (The mid-point of the Eastern Zone runs through Central New York and down toward the city of Philadelphia.) Compelling Indiana into the Eastern Time Zone, as our politicians have done — exempting a few counties bordering Illinois — does create later sundown and dusk, but also later sunrise and dawn (about an extra hour late compared with natural, solar time, exactly an hour later versus legislated Central Time). Later evening dark-fall via extended sunlight may enable some recreational benefits, but extended morning darkness kills children! For much of the school year, Indiana school kids are forced onto streets and highways in early-morning darkness. What could go wrong? Child (under age-18) traffic fatalities were above trend at a rate of 8.32 per year during the first five years after Indiana's imposition of the mortal combination of Eastern Daylight-Saving Time in 2006 (per a 2012 study published in the *Geographical Bulletin* and consistent with general findings of the National Bureau of Standards in 1976). Extrapolating to the present, that is about 158 aggregated child fatalities attributable to the wrong time zone compared with what the death toll would have been if we had remained on the prior schedule of

Chicago time (equivalent to Central Time) for two-thirds of the year — even with Central DST. Further, for emphasis, these numbers apply only to child fatalities, not total traffic carnage induced by the wrong time zone. (True, Indiana did not change to Eastern Time in 2006, but acceptance of DST achieved the same material outcome, to a two-thirds extent, because eight of our annual months of Eastern Standard — equal to Central Daylight — became Eastern Daylight.) What descriptor should we apply to the political crime responsible for the bloodbath: reckless endangerment or negligent mass manslaughter?

The combination of Eastern Time and DST (or "double fast time" as Hoosiers know it), inflicted on Indiana for eight months per year now and since 2006, appears to be the worst possible condition for public safety. The ultimate enemy, in this regard, is the hazard of early a.m. darkness, whether resulting from Eastern Time, DST, or both in our state's tragic case. If DST is abolished nationally, Indiana politicians may not have sense enough to choose the Central Time Zone, but at least the scourge of Eastern + Daylight Time will be gone — yet child fatalities will still likely be unpardonably excessive due to the wrong time zone. What about evening after-school fatalities if we would have earlier sundown with Central Time or the absence of DST? Not a corresponding problem; daily school dismissal is early enough so the last afternoon yellow buses would continue to run before dusk throughout the state. ♦

Richard McGowan

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Modified Men Versus Real Women

A few weeks ago the Indianapolis Star reported that a bill passed out of committee prohibiting trans women from entering women's collegiate athletic competition. The bill "requires, for purposes of interscholastic athletic events, state educational institutions and certain private postsecondary educational institutions to expressly designate an athletic team or sport as one of the following: 1) a male, men's, or boys' team or sport; 2) a female, women's, or girls' team or sport. 3) a coeducational or mixed team or sport." The bill, among other directives, "prohibits a male, based on the student's biological sex at birth in accordance with the student's genetics and reproductive biology, from participating on an athletic team or sport designated as being a female, women's, or girls' athletic team or sport."

The Star noted that the bill passed by a 12-1 committee vote with bipartisan support. The bill resembles the 2022 HB1401 bill banning trans-girls from competing in k-12 athletic competition. The 2025 bill aligns with President Donald Trump's executive order banning trans-women from competing at the collegiate level. Indiana's bill is the result of legislative action as opposed to executive action, action that could be withdrawn on the president's authority alone.

A committee member voted for the bill but said it was "a waste of time," reasoning that the NCAA had already taken the action of prohibiting trans-

athletes from competing against the other sex. That reasoning runs parallel to the thinking of the Indiana ACLU, which also said the bill was unnecessary. Again, the NCAA is an authoritative body that could change policy without consulting Indiana government, its officials, and its citizens.

World class athletes have weighed in on the issue. The Journal of Sports Sciences published an article (April 2024) entitled "The perspective of current and retired world class, elite and national athletes on the inclusion and eligibility of transgender athletes in elite sport." The authors found that "athletes in the present study favoured categorisation by biological sex and did not support trans women eligibility for the female category in sports reliant on performance-related biological factors that differ between sexes." However, that is the judgment of expert sports performers.

What do the scientists say? It is more accurate for me to ask, "What do scientists continue to say?" having traveled down this road once before. Recent studies, like the one out of England, state that "Studies show that transgender women (male-born individuals who identify as women) with suppressed testosterone retain muscle mass, strength, and other physical advantages compared to females; male performance advantage cannot be eliminated with testosterone suppression."

The publication, *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* (2024), had an article on combat sports which concluded that "Numerous studies have proven that transgender women may have a competitive athletic advantage against otherwise matched cis-gender women. Likewise, transgender men may suffer a competitive disadvantage against cis-gender men."

The bill's prohibiting modified men, i.e., trans women, from competing in women's sports, certainly follows the science. The law should provide what the bill's author, White and Republican Michelle Davis, hoped to provide: "a safe and even playing field" for female athletes.

Not everyone was pleased with the bill's passage, a common occurrence with any bill.

Emma Vosicky, Executive Director of GenderNexus, a group whose stated aim is to provide “a safe, inclusive space for gender-diverse people and their loved ones to find the support they need,” was not pleased. The Star reported that she said, “You don’t have to watch the pain that occurs from folks that are impacted by your legislation.” Her reasoning follows that of the lone committee member who voted against the bill. The Star reported that “he decided to vote against the bill because he doesn’t see any evidence of a problem, other than a few isolated cases, and this only adds anguish to a group that is already struggling.” Committee member Ed Delaney noted how few cases there have been with trans athletes, a fact that the NCAA leaders have taken.

That reasoning is not very inclusive, though. What of the natural females who fail to win a medal in a swimming competition by losing to a modified male? Is their pain relevant? Modified male Lia Thomas beat Olympic performers in swimming competitions during NCAA events. How do the losing women feel? Do the feelings of modified men take precedence over the feelings of natural women? I think not.

How much do natural women enjoy a modified male gazing at them in a locker room? Protection of the long-established right to privacy should mean something. Protecting that right does not constitute “harassment of women athletes who look like they don’t belong,” as the ACLU phrased the matter. What the bill does is ensure a safe and comfortable locker room.

The ACLU states about the bill that “the only logical motivation for its consideration is to send a message to Transgender Hoosiers – you don’t belong here.” But, in fact, modified men do belong here — just not on the playing field competing against natural women. On the playing field, modified men still retain the physiological advantages from being born male. As one high school coach said, “It breaks all the universal standards that the essence of sports is supposed to entail.

It’s simply not fair that modified men can compete against natural females.

Rethinking ‘Diversity’

Last week the Indianapolis Star reported on “Senate Bill 235: Banning DEI.” The Star said that “this bill bans all state spending on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives — from trainings to diverse hiring initiatives — at state agencies, educational institutions and health profession licensing boards.” The bill passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee by an 8-2 vote. The committee’s vote aligns with President Donald Trump’s actions to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion programs in federal institutions.

Could the long slog be over for my brothers and me? And sometimes for my sisters, too, our “value” being judged on our unalterable characteristics?

Our mother was born in Germany, our grandfather having left Germany as Hitler was coming to power. Therefore, her children are first-generation Americans. Three of our grandparents were born overseas and the fourth was born shortly after his family immigrated from Ireland in the 1890s. He came over when “No Irish Need Apply” signs were posted on job notices. Five decades ago, when affirmative action was legislated, “immigrant stock,” i.e., immigrants or first-generation Americans, composed 7 percent of Indiana’s population and a bit more nationally. The data suggest that my brothers and sisters and I are diverse, statistically wide of the norm.

Not that we spoke any German as we grew up. We were born too close to the end of World War II. In its aftermath, all things German were verboten, forbidden. I know at least the word for “forbidden” but I learned it in college. The high school I attended removed the German language from its foreign language department.

My German grandfather was a journalist who became the overseas correspondent for all things German that occurred in America. For instance, on May 6, 1937, he traveled from New York City to

Lakehurst, New Jersey, to cover the arrival of a German aircraft, the Hindenburg. Note: it was good that he had become a journalist and was assigned to a post in America. Hitler's verboten list included more than Jews, homosexuals and intellectuals. Hitler did not much care for independent-minded journalists as well.

My brothers and sisters had different lives because of our heritage.

I often talked about that experience with others. At the YMCA (Germans strongly emphasized having a fit body; Milwaukee, with its Teutonic influence, has a greenspace, a place for tumbling, within one-half mile of every house), I fell into a conversation with a guy working out. I told him of my experience.

He said, "I was born on a ship somewhere in the Atlantic. My mother left Germany. As a kid, I never spoke about my heritage or used German."

Again, could the long slog be over for all immigrants and first-generation Americans? And for every newcomer to our shores who followed the law to get here?

Were that to happen, newcomers would have to be treated as individuals and not be judged on unalterable characteristics that bear little or no connection to the individual's capability to contribute to the new culture and country. Perhaps that would require a rethinking of "diversity."

Being different or diverse does not, of itself, make for a contribution or value. An individual who murders another is diverse — and thank goodness there's not many of them.

I propose that we use the notion of diversity suggested by Mr. Rogers. He always closed his children's show by telling children, "You make every day special, just by being you." It's as though each individual, regardless of unalterable characteristics, has value and dignity. If Mr. Rogers was on to something, we must treat each individual as unique and not treat an individual as a black or white group member ... or any other group, for that matter.

Reasoning Seems so Obsolete

A few years ago, Ward Farnsworth wrote a good book, "The Socratic Method: A Practitioner's Handbook." He argued that "social media has weakened logic and good reasoning to the point of societal demise," though social media may only be partial cause for societal demise.

A few responses come to mind. First and probably most importantly, "nothing is new under the sun." Plato dealt with the problem of persuasion being more valued than truth. In his dialogue, "Meno" (precursor to his famous "Republic," Socrates says to Meno in his first oration, "He got you in the habit of answering any question you might be asked, with the confidence and dignity appropriate to those who know the answers."

That is, Meno answers questions whether he knows what he is talking about or not. Meno chooses to appear smart, whether he is or not. He does not recognize his ignorance.

When I taught, I told my students that in the last 30 years, I was able to answer every question put to me by students. Of course, they did not believe me so they'd ask, "What is the 47th element on the atomic chart?" Or, "how high is the highest structure in Fort Wayne?" I answered, "I don't know. And if 'I don't know' is one of your answers, you can answer every question, too."

I wanted them to understand the limit of human knowledge and that ignorance is not a problem. Not learning or not seeking an answer is the problem. I added, "But if it is a question relevant to this course, I will do the research and provide a more satisfactory answer."

Biased Premises — When I taught informal logic, with its linguistic and other fallacies, I emphasized the fallacy of biased premises, the delimiting evidence so that a conclusion is accepted. The New York Times reported that in such and such a year, there were "612 hates crimes against the Jewish population and institutions" but omitted to state, "that is more hate crimes by religious bias than any other faith."

In an article about teen suicide, it is positively irresponsible journalism to leave out the fact that males represent about 80 percent of the suicides among young people. I have made a cottage industry of pointing to that fallacy in many journals and newspapers.

Dogmatic Skepticism — The other “non-starter” for reasoning is the fallacy of dogmatic skepticism. If an argument has all true premises, and the reasoning is valid (meaning if the premises are all true, then the conclusion is ... must be true), then the conclusion cannot be rejected as false. I can’t tell you how many times I have asserted this claim: More research has been done on women than men in the last 50 years, and then provided the data from PubMed only to have my scientist friends reject the claim.

They do so without any argument against, no contrary evidence, no critical analysis of the reasoning, just outright rejection. That is dogmatic skepticism, an enemy of logical thought.

Those are the two fallacies reject logic and good reasoning, though they dominate media and popular culture. In other words, there are a lot of Menos running around today, people who have little or no respect for the limitations that good reasoning imposes; many of the Menos populate newspapers and the popular press. Some Menos are in politics, too. (“It depends on what is, is,” anyone?)

Ethical Relativism — Finally, the problem Socrates faced with Meno, and that our culture faces today, leads to ethical relativism and disrespect for reasoning itself. When I was at Butler, the chief ethics officer for Eli Lilly gave a talk. I encouraged my students to attend. The speaker defended the rape of women in Afghanistan. “What we find unacceptable is accepted in their culture.” To their credit, my students “ate her up.” She could not satisfactorily respond to the problems her response allowed. (Nazis, anyone?) If Germans exterminate Jews, it’s just their culture? As I said, my students had her for lunch.

To her credit, she did tell me that the Butler group was the most challenging audience she ever experienced, “even more than Harvard students.”

Plato had to contend with the illogic and relativism of Protagoras, who said, “Man [each person] is the measure of all things.” Okay, should that man be Jefferey Dahmer? Protagoras might say, “No, I don’t mean foreach person.” But Jeffery Dahmer is a problem in the same way that the culture of antisemites is a problem.

J.K. Rowling saw a culture heading out to the pastures of irrationality. If reasoning does not bind truth, no ethical truth exists. In the second to last chapter of the first Harry Potter book, he-who-shall-not be-named ... ah heck, Voldemort, says, “Silly boy, there is no good or bad, there is only power.”

Is Voldemort correct? I think not, but I sometimes feel like I’ve been put out to pasture, too, and I’m grazing with too few other horses. ♦

Nathanael Snow

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A Splendid Little 'Blackout'

I just received information of a call for an economic 'blackout' on Feb. 28. There is no reason to be opposed to participation in a blackout, but the reasons given for this one have shaky foundations, even in the legitimate context of "voice and exit" in political theory.

Voice and exit comes up in discussions of economics, especially in regard to how people respond to failures in institutions or governments. In simpler terms, it's about whether people choose to try to fix things (voice) or just leave (exit).

In this case, a group called the People's Union USA, founded by John Schwarz, is promoting the blackout, and may have originated the idea. The email I received, however, did not include the People's Union name nor did it name any other organization. The Instagram account held by John Schwarz, with 156,000 followers, named "TheOneCalledJa." has been promoting the blackout. Some news reports suggest that the blackout is a response to President Donald Trump's attempt to eliminate DEI programs.

Again, there is no reason to oppose grass-roots actions. Indeed, there are reasons to encourage exercise of voice and exit. Voting is the least expensive way to participate in a democracy, so we should not be surprised that it is also the least effective. Direct exercise of voice and exit is much more powerful. We can encourage civil disobedience, economic disruption and other forms of subversion. In particular, subversive action, action that erodes existing power but that does not seek to capture power for itself, communicates to those in power that it has exercised that power beyond what is legitimate.

Does the Feb. 28 Blackout qualify as a subversive act? Perhaps. It is articulated in terms of a collective "we" that does not identify any formal organization or institution with which it is affiliated. Informal social action can be powerful because an informal group does not have any individual authorized by the group to negotiate with outsiders. An informal group does not compromise. An informal group does not necessarily present a list of demands or a list of goals. The Occupy Movement of 2011 is a good example.

The Feb. 28 Blackout, like other boycotts, is an instrumental act of expression. Instrumental action seeks a pecuniary outcome and engages in expectation of personal pecuniary gain. Expressive action seeks to articulate values and demonstrate group solidarity and identity. Public Choice economists have demonstrated that due to the negligible impact of any one person's vote most voters are rationally ignorant about instrumental issues in politics and instead tend to indulge their biases by voting expressively. The Feb. 28 Blackout uses pecuniary action to express vague disagreement with the current political climate.

Some people will derive expressive value from participating, and again, we can applaud the subversive and collective nature of the activity. However, the open letter calling for participation in the Blackout has no concrete objectives. The Feb. 28 Blackout seeks to make an impact in economic terms, and primarily by targeting corporate revenues on one particular day. The letter states, "Corporations have billions. Politicians have lobbyists. We have each other."

Of course, not every corporation has billions. Many corporations fail or go bankrupt. "Business [bankruptcy] filings rose 33.5 percent, from 17,051 to 22,762 in the year ending Sept. 30, 2024." Among bankruptcies were household names such as Red Lobster, True Value and Tupperware.

What is meant by "corporations have billions" seems to be that there is something unfair or

unjust about the distribution of corporate profits. However, those profits represent earnings from voluntary exchanges with consumers who generally benefit more from those exchanges than do the corporations. The recipients of those corporate profits include anyone who has savings stored in the stock market, banks, pensions or insurance policies. Also, among the billions held by corporations are the investments in capital, property, equipment, safety gear, intellectual property and employee training materials that all augment employee earnings.

Wherever corporations enjoy protection or privilege through regulation or tariffs, those profits represent economic rents that can involve economic harm.

The blackout will succeed, if at all, by getting a large number of people through decentralized organization to act in concert. It certainly will not have any direct economic impact, and least of all on corporations. Most participants will not fast on Feb. 28. Instead, most participants will make purchases before that day or after that day such that their total consumption for the week surrounding will not be affected at all. If firms expect the blackout to be a success they will send employees home on that day. Those most affected are likely to be those hourly employees at the margins who will suffer lost wages. This is certainly not the intention of the movement, but good intentions are meaningless to those actually affected.

The letter goes on to say with a sneer that “politicians have lobbyists.” Lobbyists inform politicians about issues and attempt to sway a politician’s vote on bills in favor of the entities those lobbyists represent. Not only corporations and businesses have lobbyists. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) represents one of the largest and most powerful lobbying groups in the U.S. More progressive special interest groups like the United Way and the Sierra Club also hire lobbyists. Wherever the law is vulnerable to influence lobbyists will be the influencers. Perhaps the law could be more

constrained such that it was less liable to influence. That does not seem to be among the goals of the Feb. 28 Blackout, though constraining the actions of the current regime might be among the implied outcomes.

The letter also claims that “we have each other.” This places the “we” in contradistinction to corporations and lobbyists, though “we” are certainly entangled in various ways with both, and if they are culpable for anything so are “we.” But the “we” also implies a unified vision of society. That sentiment is lovely. However, the most direct route to that end runs directly through the reconciling function of markets.

“TheOneCalledJai” is well intentioned. And, if, as I understand, views on social media platforms are associated with compensation, it now also is a bit wealthier. A nice act of solidarity is always exciting and uplifting but let us not fool ourselves that it is much more than that, especially if it is not well thought out.

Social Media and Coming of Age

Sir Walter Scott in the first of his “Waverly” novels describes the early adolescence of young Edward Waverly. Edward is too “indolent and impatient,” to enjoy fishing. He is lacking what he needs to move forward in his life. “Society and example, which, more than any other motives, master and sway the natural bent of our passions” were not available to him. Adam Smith would note that we only really learn sympathy as distinct from affection by engaging with our peers away from adult supervision.

Scott writes that “when, upon any particular occasion, Edward mingled with accomplished and well-educated young men of his own rank and expectations, he felt an inferiority in their company, not so much from deficiency of information, as from the want of the skill to command and to arrange that which he possessed.” Is there a better description of the awkwardness of the adolescent?

“The idea of having committed the slightest solecism in politeness, whether real or imaginary,

was agony to him.” Please don’t embarrass me! the young person evokes with every eye roll and sigh of ennui. For “even guilt itself does not impose upon some minds so keen a sense of shame and remorse, as a modest, sensitive, and inexperienced youth feels from the consciousness of having neglected etiquette or excited ridicule.” Every young person after engaging in public comes back believing that they are “unfitted for society, merely because he had not yet acquired the habit of living in it with ease and comfort, and of reciprocally giving and receiving pleasure.”

Indeed, coming into society is among the most difficult challenges every person faces. That challenge may be exacerbated if the entry into society is not entry into a cloud of witnesses that includes close relations and neighbors that have an interest in a lad’s or lassie’s success but if it is the “cloud” of everyone in the world connected through social media. We have observed that every would-be influencer faces (through the forward-facing camera on their phones) legions of critics flush with disapprobation.

How can we help young people to negotiate the entry into society?

First, we can recognize that this entry is difficult. Ancient initiation rites manifested this challenge explicitly but were almost certainly gamed to ensure the success of those ready for acceptance. Providing ample opportunities for the child before adolescence to face and deal with challenges and difficulties, disappointments and injuries, while under affectionate care, will better prepare them for the gauntlet.

Second, we can postpone entry until a young person is well prepared. Jonathan Haidt is leading the charge in advocating for keeping phones out of the hands of children. His preferred age for having a phone is 16 years old. By then most young people will have entered the immediate society around them and will not be introduced to the entire world all at once.

Third, we can encourage the reading of novels like “Waverly,” to show young people that they are not the first to face these challenges, and though there will be many pitfalls and failures, the end of their story is in part in their own hands. ♦

Mark Franke

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Birth Citizenship

One of Donald Trump's executive orders establishes an official administrative interpretation of the citizenship language of the Fourteenth Amendment. The question, contentious of course in these divisive times, centers on the right of "birth citizenship," the automatic granting of United States citizenship to any baby born within the U.S. regardless of the parents' citizenship status.

Here is the relevant language from the amendment:

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

The Trump executive order declares that "the Fourteenth Amendment has never been interpreted to extend citizenship universally to everyone born within the United States. — The Fourteenth Amendment has always excluded from birthright citizenship persons who were born in the United States but not "subject to the 'jurisdiction thereof'."

Unfortunately, the executive order does not provide any citations for its interpretative claim, unless it was the unstated exception for babies of accredited diplomats or those born to foreign invading armies. Fortunately the latter exception has never needed to be litigated.

Our monthly Socratic discussion group took on this topic at our March meeting. It was proposed by one of our number who is a practicing attorney with a legal background in this issue. He argued that Trump's order offers the correct interpretation of the Constitutional language and is the most practical method of administering this interpretation.

We began by attempting to set the moral and legal boundaries for our discussion. We could all agree that the issue has both. We are a nation of laws, laws based on the ascending language of the Declaration of Independence and the more earth-bound language of the Constitution.

It soon became obvious that the salient definition we needed was for the clause "subject to the jurisdiction thereof." Is this no more than a geographical designation? If you are born on U.S. soil, are you meant to have automatic citizenship? There are legal precedents for this, including an 1894 Supreme Court decision regarding a child born in San Francisco to Chinese nationals who was declared a U.S. citizen.

Then in 1982 the Supreme Court ruled that children who are in the U.S. illegally must be allowed to attend public schools. The relevant Fourteenth Amendment language behind this decision prohibits states from denying "any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." There's that pesky "jurisdiction" word again.

One would think that these decisions could settle the matter but then this is today's America. It seems that nothing is ever settled anymore.

We had our usual detours into American history, primarily the immediate setting for the Fourteenth Amendment — the rights of recently manumitted slaves. Then we dropped down the philosophical rabbit holes of Enlightenment social contract theory and the Lockian classical liberalism of the Founding Fathers.

Where we ultimately landed was on this question: Is there an effective difference between "subject to the jurisdiction of" and "subject to the laws of"? The lawyer who defended the

provocation was adamant in his belief that there exists a clear and definable distinction between the two, as the Trump executive order claims. This distinction can be reduced to clear language through legislation and court decisions, although he realized this could take ten or more years.

The argument goes something like this: A non-citizen temporarily residing in another nation must obey the general laws of the host nation, such as obeying speed limits and common criminal laws. No one would argue with that. Jurisdiction, however, is a broader concept that runs with citizenship responsibilities based on national loyalty. At least that's the position of the Trump administration and others who differentiate.

Because this issue has practical and immediate implications, we determined to handle it under strict Socratic rules, or at least as strictly as we amateurs could apply them. Our rulebook is Plato's Dialogues, our source for how Socrates did things back then.

Plato's rubric is an extended question-and-answer format in which Socrates identifies the weaknesses in his interlocutor's logic by constantly questioning the assumed premises and the potentially faulty conclusions. He almost always succeeds in changing his opposite's opinion.

I served as our attorney colleague's Socratic foil, probably because I am the most contrarian of the group, yet I was not able to move him from his opening statement in support of the Trump executive order. But then, I am hardly Socrates. Which is a good thing for me, as I don't care for hemlock cocktails. — *March 28*

The Aging of America

(*March 17*) — By 2035 the number of senior citizens in America will exceed the number of children.

I learned that fact at the annual meeting of a faith-based retirement community for which I am a voting delegate. While this may seem like a

positive growth forecast for this ministry, it presents its challenges as well.

What kind of living accommodations and health-care facilities will this aging population need in 10 years hence? Lutheran Life Villages, the ministry I support through my participation in its governance, appears well suited for providing the required services. It offers all levels of care, through independent living in apartments or cottages, through assisted living and memory care, to full service skilled nursing and rehabilitation services.

But that's today. When I served on its board of directors 10-plus years ago, the offerings were somewhat different. Memory care was not a high demand need, at least not yet. Assisted living was being restructured to recognize seniors' desire to remain as independent as possible while having access to immediate health and lifestyle care.

The aging of America is one of those dreaded mixed blessings. Due to medical advances, people live longer and remain active well into retirement. We can spend our well-earned free time doing important volunteer work and helping to raise grandchildren. At least those two activities are what keep the Franke household busy.

Patient demand for health-related services has grown exponentially. If you doubt this, just look at the huge medical complexes in our cities. Sure, this growth has created millions of new jobs across the care-giving spectrum but someone has to pay for it all. Health insurance premiums have risen even faster than taxes, and that's saying something. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid have become federal and state budget busters while defying whatever modest political courage our politicians are able to summon.

Health is one of two American industries that do not have a sustainable financial model. The other is higher education, where I spent my career but sensibly getting out before these institutions jump lemming-like over the coming enrollment cliff.

As I find myself well-entrenched in my mid-70s, I can't help but notice things changing in

my life and my ability to cope with even the routine. I expected the physical degradation. I can't lift as much dead weight as before and I don't bend at the knees or waist like I used to. Fatigue sets in more quickly during exertions and earlier in the day.

It seems most of my friends have gone through knee or hip or shoulder replacement but I am fortunate on that count. All my original parts are still there, wisdom teeth excepted, although these OEM parts certainly don't work so well anymore. However, that does provide for a ready excuse to get out of the heavy lifting. "I'm too old to do that anymore" is my mantra.

Another common senior complaint is having sleep issues. They say we old folks need less sleep but I think that is an erroneous conclusion drawn from the fact that we just don't sleep like teenagers anymore.

I have never used an alarm clock, being able to wake up naturally at any required time. I resolved in retirement to get more sleep, primarily by moving back my wake-up time. It didn't work.

It's the mental side of the equation that concerns me most. It is more than simple forgetfulness; the evidence of infrequent bouts of absentmindedness is a real cause for concern. If I walk into the kitchen and then forget why I came, so what. If I walk out of the kitchen and leave a stove burner on, that's serious.

I used to have an excellent memory, being able to memorize lists with little effort. I almost never forgot a name and frequently would recall the details of conversations held decades previously. Now, it's a hit and miss situation. Names of people I see regularly may momentarily wander off into Never Never Land. If I do recall the name, I don't trust the accuracy of my recollection. Listen to any conversation among a group of senior citizens and eventually this complaint will surface, with all nodding their heads in agreement.

My family doctor told me to analyze my memory problems this way. If I forget where I put my car keys, it is simply normal aging. If I find

them and can't remember what they are used for, that's a real problem which needs professional attention.

So far, I have always recognized their use when I pulled my car keys from my pocket. Now, if I can just remember where I parked the car . . .

Property-Tax Misery

(March 3) — Sometimes, things just don't make sense.

The news has been full of stories of local government taxing districts unhappy with Gov. Mike Braun's proposal to reduce property taxes for Hoosiers. It seems these units will find it stressful to operate with a reduction in tax revenue, regardless how small.

That's standard operating procedure. No governmental unit will ever gladly embrace a reduction in revenue any more than a family will be happy with a reduction in its income. It is human nature, including the natures of those humans who head up governmental agencies, to lock into an income stream and the expenditure level that it supports. No one expects it to ever decrease.

The non-sensible part of the property-tax bewailing is that it does not jive with what we taxpayers have experienced. Everyone with whom I talked, and I do mean everyone, complained about large increases in their annual-property tax bill. Some of the percentage increases were so high that I assumed they were exaggerations. Then I calculated what has happened to my own property tax bill.

In the five years beginning in 2020, my net property-tax payment increased by 52 percent. That that's a huge number even with inflation. To put it into perspective, my Social Security benefit increased 26 percent over the same period. At the same time, our employer pensions have remained flat for 12 years with no annual adjustments, the very definition of living on a fixed income. The net effect was that my wife and I had to cut back on some other discretionary expenditures to satisfy the tax collector.

Other than Governor Braun, I don't think anyone in Indianapolis gets it. The Senate Republicans are patting themselves on the back for "cutting" the proposed increase in property tax bills but only a governmental type could call it that with a straight face. I don't single these senators out as exceptions to the norm; the politicians in Washington have made careers out of proposing huge increases in spending and then reducing the increase slightly and bragging about their fiscal responsibility back home. Only in government does a "cut" just mean a smaller increase.

Am I the only one getting tired of being told to tighten my belt because the government won't?

Farmers are even more unhappy than homeowners. Property taxes on farm ground have increased by 48 percent in just one year for a farmer friend in Allen County. His township has a new fire district levy that accounted for about one-half of the increase, so I reviewed the increases in all Allen County rural townships and found consistent rises well above the rate of inflation. The increases for Allen's most productive agricultural townships ranged from 28 percent to 76 percent, according to a document posted on the Allen County website.

But why should the rate of inflation factor into this? Inflation is hitting these same homeowners and farmers across all their expenditures. Inflation is the cruelest tax of all, as I learned in my first economics class. The nasty thing about inflation is that it invariably affects prices before incomes can catch up. Family budgets go out of balance with the only options being to stop buying something or to go further into debt.

Recall the debt-ridden Mr. Micawber's advice to the young David Copperfield in the Dickens novel: "Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen [pounds] nineteen [shillings] six [pence], result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds nought and six, result misery." The balance between financial happiness and financial misery is a fine one.

There are property-tax caps of one percent for homeowners and two percent for farmers but these don't stop increases in our net bills. The secret ingredient in the state taxing recipe is the assessed valuations of our property. If they go up, for legitimate real estate market changes or just due to inflation, our tax bill will go up as that one percent is calculated on a higher base. Not that increased valuations, no matter how realistic, help us settle our tax bill with the county treasurer. No additional income comes in from these paper gains but more real outgo goes out with our tax payment. Heads I win, tails you lose.

The underlying principle is: Whose money is it? Is it a benevolent government that generously allows us to keep some declining percentage of our income for personal use? Or are we as a free people voluntarily paying reasonable taxes to fund common services best provided collectively by the government?

The Founding Fathers used a rallying cry of "No taxation without representation" to justify their war for independence. I don't think we independent Americans today are any happier about taxation with representation.

A Modest Proposal to Save America

(Feb. 27) — Donald Trump and Elon Musk must be accomplishing something, given the howls coming out of the Washington establishment. Could Trump actually be making good on his 2016 promise to drain the swamp?

Still, I am not sanguine about his ultimate success. The root problem will still be there no matter how much fiscal mismanagement DOGE finds.

The problem is Congress and its absolute unwillingness to reform itself. It can't even pass an annual budget with continuing resolutions ad nauseam. After DOGE goes out of business and Donald Trump decamps from the White House, you can bet your bottom dollar that it will be back to business as usual in those hallowed halls.

Since it is evident to me that Congress is incapable of serious reform, I feel duty-bound to

offer a solution that would outlive this and the next administrations. I won't claim an Isaac Newton moment when the apple fell from the tree but a simple solution suddenly appeared like those lightbulbs going off above a character in the old comic strips. With no disrespect of Jonathan Swift intended, I would like to offer the following immodest proposal.

The key is a single word, "sunset."

First, Congress must pass an overarching law that requires all future laws to contain a sunset provision, the legislative equivalent of a "use by" date. To be truly effective, the sunset limit should be no more than 10 years, long enough for the benefits of, or damage caused by, the law to be measurable.

The same sunset requirement should be legislated for all executive orders and administrative rule-making. Maybe this doesn't seem necessary for executive orders as our recent presidents have gleefully voided the policy-based orders of their predecessor while heaping on dozens of their own.

A second overarching law to be passed is to retroactively amend all current laws and regulations to apply a 10-year sunset to them. There are 60,000 pages in the U.S. Code, the compilation of all laws passed by Congress and still in effect, and an additional 180,000 pages in the Code of Federal Regulations, all the rules promulgated by federal departments and agencies.

A commission, or several of them, would be tasked with reviewing all quarter-million pages of this stuff to prioritize what should be addressed immediately by Congress. The DOGE example is useful, demonstrating how outside expertise can cut through the special interests that are entrenched on Capitol Hill.

These two laws are intentionally draconian in scope. The task at first blush seems gargantuan and doomed to failure. But remember that this is the age of artificial intelligence. All these documents are digitized and therefore open to

computerized searching and analysis. This would be a productive application of AI.

There are some other changes that would help build a wall against a slow creep back to the gridlock past. I like George Will's idea for addressing both a balanced budget and term limits with a single constitutional amendment. Any member of Congress who votes for an unbalanced budget in peacetime would immediately lose the right to run for reelection. Just think how that would slam the door in the lobbyists' faces.

I have other suggestions. This may sound like heresy to my conservative fellow travelers but I think we need a more activist Supreme Court, with this caveat: The activism is to be focused on judicial review of laws and presidential orders for constitutionality. If my sense is correct, such an activism could jumpstart a return to federalism as the Founders envisioned it.

I could add several of my own ideas, such as the right of imposition for state governments to opt out of federal programs, but I don't want to diffuse the attention needed by my first two suggestions for sunset setting. If adopted, sunset setting would fundamentally reverse the consolidation of money and policy in a central government far removed from the citizenry.

What chance does my immodest proposal for sunset setting all federal legislation and rulemaking have? I would expect none at all, but then after writing this column I learned from Third District Congressman Marlin Stutz that he just introduced a bill to require sunset setting in new legislation. His objective is more modest than mine but then he is constrained by politics, defined by Otto von Bismarck as the art of the possible. I am not so constrained.

What I can do, though, is talk about this with people who have more influence than I have. This will start with my monthly Socratic discussion group, assuming I can get this on our 2025 agenda. The Socratic method is ideal for examining off-the-wall ideas like mine. Its structured questioning is designed to poke holes

in poorly formed opinions and thereby either discard them or strengthen their logic.

That's the best I can hope for.

Signs of an Early Spring?

(Feb. 17) — Having just dealt with multiple winter storms in the last fortnight, my subconscious has drifted to thinking of spring. Given northern Indiana's reputation for unpredictable weather, an early spring breakthrough is not beyond the realm of possibility — that's possibility, not probability. Still, it got me thinking of spring despite the risk of disappointment to follow.

What are the signs that spring is coming? First, there is Major League Baseball's (MLB) spring training camps opening in Florida and Arizona. Pitchers and catchers reported first with the rest of the squads following close behind. I hesitate to note that the Chicago Cubs got a head start of several days by having their batteries report early. The Cubs can use the extra few days, as my Cubs fan friends would readily agree. Now I need to determine the least expensive way to renew my MLB network subscription so that I can watch a game every day if I want. Just don't get me started on MLB's blackout rules. Fort Wayne is considered a local market for the Cubs, White Sox, Tigers and Reds so those games are verboten, irrespective of the simple fact that I don't have any local channel coverage for several of them.

I also received a polite email message from my ticket manager with the Fort Wayne TinCaps that the final payment on my season tickets is now due. I'm never sure about that notice when it comes every year. It's a lot of money, as my wife never hesitates to remind me, but it also means I will get to spend many pleasurable evenings at the ballpark watching the only professional sport that I truly love.

At least the opening of spring training means the shutdown of what is called the Hot Stove League, that period of time over the winter when everyone with an open mic or a social media account can criticize trades made by their favorite

team. Or, more often, trades not made by their favorite team. Perhaps I am too much of a baseball purist; just shut up and let the teams decide the issue on the field. They have six months and 162 games to do it.

My sport might be baseball but my wife's is golf. Another sign of the coming spring is her switching her default TV channel to the golf one from HGTV. And it's about time. I am running out of excuses why I can't undertake the home improvement projects that look so easy when the professionals do it on TV. It is less stressful to answer her questions about the arcane rules of golf than to admit to my inadequate carpentry skills.

She took up golf last year and has become irredeemably addicted. She played last season with borrowed clubs and earned the "rookie of the year" award in her women's golf league. Her sights for this season are set higher: new clubs, professional lessons, computerized analysis of her swing and who knows what. By the time all those financial bills are settled, I think it would have been less expensive doing that complete bathroom remodel project she wants.

Some signs of spring are closer to home, literally. We provide housing for two families of bluebirds and they have returned to our backyard. I don't know where they go for the winter but I save money on their specialized bird feed while they are gone. Trust me; they have an expensive diet. Once they return, my job is to keep the sparrows from squatting in the blue bird houses. This isn't California so there are no legal constraints on my rights as the landlord. Sparrows are served immediate eviction notices if they try to enter the bluebird houses.

Looking across to the bird houses on the back side of our wooded property, I am forced to remember what spring means in terms of yard work. All those twigs blown down by winter storms must be raked, the yard needs to be fertilized and then mowed twice per week as the fertilizer kicks in, the flower beds must be mulched, and the disorganized mess that has

accumulated somehow in the garage must be cleared. Still, those chores are appealing compared to walking behind my snowblower again. At least they sound appealing in February.

Eventually I will be yanked from my reveries back to reality. This is Indiana, so we can expect a March snowstorm during the high school sectional basketball tournament. This may fall into the category of urban legend but all us Hoosiers insist on its veracity.

Despite these early signs of spring, it doesn't officially begin until I can hear the neighborhood children playing in the evenings at the end of the cul-de-sac. That is music to my grandfather's ears, especially when my own grandkids are down there with them.

Cultural Change and the Decline of the Family

(Jan. 30) — “The changing structure of the family unit has degraded cultural values and economic stability.”

This was the provocation addressed recently by my Socratic discussion group. We call our monthly topic a “provocation” because it should provoke probing questions and lively debate. This one did, so much so that near the end of our mandatory two-hour limit we wondered if the provocation should be stated in reverse: Degraded cultural values and economic stability have caused changes in the structure of the family unit.

Regardless, the assumption is that there is demonstrable causation involved. One causes the other to happen. It is not simply a matter of things happening by coincidence or due to a common cause. This causation-versus-correlation determination is a critical analytic tool that was drummed into my young brain as an undergraduate economics major. It is the academic term for the old “chicken or egg” question as to which came first.

Poverty levels, juvenile delinquency, adult incarceration and low educational achievement are all markers of something being very wrong for

a segment of our population. At the same time, there is a decline in the traditional family structure of two parents in the household. Church attendance also has fallen, suggesting a weakening of the family's spiritual foundation.

The correlation is so strong that one can't help but see causation. As long as I have started using fowls to illustrate my point, here is another. “If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck,” you have a strong indication of what the thing is.

One argument for causation is the so-called Success Sequence. The term became popular back in 2009 as a result of two Brookings Institution researchers doing a longitudinal study of a cohort of Millennials who had reached age 28. What were the defining differences between those Millennials who had moved from poverty into the middle class and those who remained in poverty?

The researchers found a sequential set of decisions made by a high percentage of these successful young adults. They graduated from high school, held a full-time job and delayed having children until at least age 21 and only after marriage. Only two percent of these 28 year olds were living at a poverty level compared with 15 percent of the total peer group.

This appears to be a rather strong argument for part of our original provocation, that is, changes in family structure caused this economic instability.

So, can the converse be valid? Is the culture encouraging disintegration of the traditional family unit? Watch TV for a few hours. “Father Knows Best” is not a sitcom that will be coming back anytime soon.

What about our governmental programs that provide disincentives to replace welfare with paid employment? Check out any graph showing the “welfare trap” to see that it takes about \$80,000 in after-tax wages to replace the welfare received at a \$30,000 net wage level. The economic principle that people generally act rationally in their own interest is the salient theory being applied here.

What should intelligent people of goodwill do? Elections do matter, as we found out in 2020 and are relearning now. But that is at the macro level. There is only so much positive change that can come from Congress and the White House.

Our group came up with a laundry list of ideas. For example, what if every senior citizen helped just one person in need? There are nearly 60 million of us, most of whom have the time and experience to be useful volunteers. Several youth organizations are refocusing on career exploration and can use our help. We all had careers; can we be a positive influence on these impressionable young people?

A well-known proverb, attributed to multiple people, is that you can eat an elephant if you do it one bite at a time. You don't have to change the whole world, because you can't. Start with what you can change.

Grover Cleveland and Donald Trump

(Jan. 20) — Donald Trump's inauguration today to a non-consecutive second term had the beneficial effect of reminding us of Grover Cleveland, the only other president to have achieved this dubious honor.

Having memorized the presidents as a schoolboy, this being one of those obscure lists that my failing memory can still resurrect, I recognized the name. The other reason Cleveland has stuck in my memory is that his interim year of non-voluntary retirement sandwiched the term of Benjamin Harrison, the only president elected from Indiana. Maybe even more important is the fact that he was president when my maternal grandmother was born, a grandmother with whom I was quite close up to her death at age 105.

Other than his electoral oddity, Cleveland is hardly remembered. The various presidential ranking lists, about as useful as the College Football Bowl seeding, tend to bury him in the middle of the pack. All these lists tend to reflect modern sensibilities, as non sensible as they may be.

The only lists I have seen that ranks him near the top are a libertarian-based one and that by the Federalist Society, a group of modern classical liberals.

I find it surprising that he used to be ranked higher by the more liberal groups. Historian Arthur Schlesinger's list had him near the top 10 spot after World War II and the early years of the Cold War. Schlesinger classified Cleveland as "near great." Now, except for Donald Trump's electoral fit and start, Cleveland is "near forgotten."

What gives?

Allow me to suggest that Cleveland hasn't changed; we have. At least the predominant narrative in our brave new world has moved demonstrably away from those characteristics which made Cleveland near great.

Cleveland served during a period of transition in our history. The three previously elected presidents were Civil War generals. We Americans do like our war heroes. But the times, they were a-changin'. The progressive era was in its birthing throes and political corruption seemed to be the natural order of things. Cleveland ran on his reformist principles, taking on the Tammany Hall political machine that controlled Democrat politics.

This may be hard to believe today but back then the Democrats were considered the conservatives while the Republicans were the liberals, the advocates of an activist federal government. It was Republicans such as Theodore Roosevelt who established progressivism as a governing philosophy. No matter that Democrat Woodrow Wilson co-opted the Republicans and staked out the progressive space for his party. It was the Republican progressives who held sway back then and gave Grover Cleveland his foil for his classical liberal ideals. It is in Cleveland's counter to progressivism that we can see additional similarities to Donald Trump.

The easy comparison is Cleveland's taking on the corrupt political establishment and civil service, much like Trump's determination to

defang the Deep State and drain the bureaucratic swamp.

There are more. Cleveland was focused on governmental economy. Trump's Department of Government Efficiency is based at least partially on financial goals (although his first term can't be used as Exhibit 1 for fiscal constraint). Cleveland was also an international non-interventionist; at least he tried to be in the face of a much more assertive Congress.

The comparison can be pushed too far. Cleveland was more of a constitutionalist than Trump is. Their personalities could be called opposites, as Cleveland was a reserved New Englander focused on thrift and honesty. Cleveland's record on immigration was mixed, favoring assimilation under restricted immigration standards, while as yet there is no mixed anything in Trump's statements on immigration.

The greatest difference can be found with international trade. Cleveland was a free-trader and Trump clearly comes down on the side of tariffs as political and economic tools. While they appear to be opposites, there is an aspect of this controversy that identifies a common root cause of each man's position. Each took his stand on the basis of populism. Cleveland argued that tariffs were special privileges for the powerful and the politically connected. Tariffs harmed the common people. Trump's position also arises out of populism, in this case the argument that unfair trade harms the citizenry and can be countered only by assessing punitive tariffs on imports.

These two presidents may look different to us today but that may be a function of different times. If we are able to free ourselves from the disease of presentism, the tendency to judge the past by today's mores, their similarities begin to show.

That said, I still see them as fundamentally different leaders. Grover Cleveland believed in and practiced classical liberalism, the philosophy that sets individual liberty as the touchstone of

human society. This requires limited government under the rule of law.

Can Donald Trump be classified as a classical liberal? I will give him the traditional presidential honeymoon of six months. Then ask me again.

Time for Some Presidential Focus

(Jan. 13) — It's high time for Donald Trump to focus.

His transition team got off to a good start by readying nominees for federal offices and Trump was active in the foreign policy space. A different Donald Trump was evident late in the campaign and it seemed the new Trump was for real.

Then Donald Trump 2.0 reverted to the 1.0 version.

Where did this nonsense of making Canada a 51st state come from? I'm sure they didn't ask for it. Recall Canada's stance in both 1776 and 1812 when Canadians had the opportunity to join the new United States but declined, both passively and actively. Canada has been a staunch ally for more than 100 years and is one of our most valued trade partners. We used to brag about the Canadian-U.S. border being the longest undefended border in the world. Then September 11 happened but that's another story.

As if Canada wasn't enough to covet, he then announced we needed Greenland, Denmark's opinion notwithstanding. True, the GIUK gap (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom) was one of the most significant strategic areas during the Cold War, with submarines from both sides playing a dangerous game of chicken below the surface. Russia still is a threat but I'm not aware of any disruption in our NATO relationship with the GIUK nations.

The Panama Canal is another strategic choke point but why Trump thinks he can demand it back escapes my understanding. The United States negotiated a 99-year lease and Panama refused to extend it. Those 99 years must have seemed an eternity to American diplomats at the time; Great Britain demonstrated the same lack of foresight in its lease of Hong Kong. But that was

the deal and per our Constitution contracts are inviolable.

And there is the strangest one of all: renaming the Gulf of Mexico. Who dreams these things up? How much transitional staff time was wasted on this idea? How much of Trump's personal time?

Donald Trump's electoral victory was driven in large part by voters' disgust with Washington's apparent disinterest in solving any of the real problems we face, problems that threaten our future. The southern border is in crisis mode. Our budgetary deficit has pushed the national debt past the point of economic danger. Social Security and Medicare are predicted to go bankrupt in the next decade. Crime is rampant in the cities and war continues in Ukraine and the Mideast. That should be enough to focus any leader's attention.

Every hour President-elect Trump spends on flights of fancy is an hour stolen from the people who elected him. He can't defer everything important to Elon Musk, as preternaturally brilliant as that young genius may be. He made promises and we should hold him accountable to keep them.

Anyone who has worked in a large organization understands how the whims of the big boss disrupt normal activity. Frequently this is a good thing when standard operating procedures need to be disrupted. More often though, it just distracts staff at all levels from real work. Been there, done that in my career.

The downside for Trump is that it distracts more than just his own staff. The public and the media also lose their focus. He will need public support if he is to make the needed but unpopular changes in our propensity for profligate spending.

Social Security benefits and age eligibility criteria can't be exempted. Past attempts to make reasonable modifications have been to the detriment of the forward-thinking politicians who proposed them. Any sensible idea is immediately attacked by a parade of special interest groups purporting to represent senior citizens.

Every federal program, financial subsidy and entitlement has a lobby standing watch over its

preferential treatment hard won by political dealmaking sometime in the past. A pundit whose name I can't recall once said that "when you start yanking snouts out of the public trough, there's bound to be a lot of snorting."

All of this will require every last ounce of political good will Donald Trump brings with him to the White House. And it will require every last minute of his working day to find support wherever it is to be found. Compromises are the touchstone of democratic governance, compromises which advance the agenda of the elected majority without trampling the rights of the political minority. We just lived through four years of that.

There is a calculus involved here, a need for shrewd and insightful thinking to get the job done. The job needs to be done legislatively, through a childishly dysfunctional Congress that also must step up in this hour of need.

Will the Republican congressional leadership prove they can lead? Will Donald Trump put all his political energy into those issues that really matter? These are the two salient questions I will keep in mind during the next year. ♦

Backgrounders

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Shame on the Legislature

The good governor of our great state campaigned on a number of issues, but the one that caught my ear – and a number of other Hoosier homeowners – was property tax relief.

We don't need to go over the history. You know it far too well. Property taxes have gone up and up and up. Republican Mike Braun talked a lot about it on the campaign trail. Democrat Jennifer McCormick didn't.

Braun even was so bold as to craft a plan to create immediate changes in our state's property tax situation by rolling back the amount we all pay to 2021 levels.

Bully for him.

So Senate Bill 1 was introduced and it looked like there might actually be some positive things happening at the corner of Capitol and Washington in downtown Indy.

Enter Indiana cities, counties, towns and schools.

You see, if property tax bills are reduced for you and I that means the money the state makes available to our communities will also be reduced. And that means cities, towns, counties, schools and any government entity may (and likely will) get less of our money.

Heavy emphasis on our money..

As our pal the Bard would say, ay, there's the rub.

The status quo is a powerful thing. The government (and I care not whether it's local, state or nation) – our government – is not held to

the same standards as you and I. Life dictates our circumstances more times than not. Someone loses a job? They cut spending. An unexpected repair can mean a dip into savings, or worse, a loan. If our needs suddenly outpace our abilities, we adjust. Sometimes dramatically. Often painfully.

Not so with government.

Government just keeps growing.

And growing.

And growing.

Did I mention lobbyists?

Here in the state, groups representing Indiana cities, towns, counties and schools rolled up their sleeves and went to work before the ink was dry on Braun's proposals. They've bombarded legislators and anyone who'll listen about how reducing property taxes would negatively impact government. If Braun's initial ideas go through, there will be less money for the government to spend. That is a fact.

Make no mistake about it. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is the crux of the entire issue. Property tax reform means that somebody, somewhere is going to have to figure out how to make do with less. It is important you understand that the hired hands in Indianapolis are trying to make sure that's you and me and not their constituents – the people behind the lobbyists.

Oh, do you think I said that wrong? Do you think that their constituents are us schmucks on this side of the checkbook?

Silly people.

What was it my Grandpa used to say? What you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you're saying. Our elected representatives are telling us with their words, deeds and votes that their constituents, the folks they really represent, are the mayors, councils, superintendents and such – not us lowly taxpayers.

How do we know? We know because any fool can see that government spends like a drunken sailor on a three-day pass in an exotic port. From

statues in roundabouts to plush high school athletic facilities to spec buildings to . . . oh, never mind. I don't have time to list all the ridiculous things our tax money goes for and you don't have time to read something that long.

The right answer, the only answer that is sustainable over time – is to reduce government spending. Yet everyone from the schoolhouse to the statehouse to the White House is doing the opposite.

OK, in the spirit of transparency, let me be very clear. My business – the newspaper business – has our own problems with legislators. Every year lawmakers try to hide what they do by taking away the required publication of public notices. It's a battle we keep fighting, some years faring better than others. Ironically, lawmakers say they can save taxpayers money by taking away public notice advertisements from newspapers, despite the fact that they pay pennies for them – and despite the fact that it will cost the government more to publish those same notices than they are paying my industry to do it now. (Not to dive too far into the weeds here, but you should know that the state tells newspapers – private businesses I might add – how much we can charge for legal ads. In most cases, it is the cheapest – by far – ad rates we have. Just saying.)

And yes, I know this is repetitive, but how many high paid assistant fire chiefs does a municipality need? How many recreational facilities need to be built with our money? How many spec buildings? How many assistant school superintendents, expensive new pools, new fields, new buildings do we need?

To be fair, are they all guilty? Of course not. There are mayors, city councils, county councils, school boards and school superintendents who are not good but great stewards of their resources. Unfortunately, too many are not.

Friends, this is not a front-line problem. Teachers are not overpaid. Cops, firefighters, first responders are not. The issue is almost always the top-heavy side – the administrations, the bureaucracy, the infrastructure Throughout

Indiana, we see tax money – OUR money – spent on things that would never fly in private business. It's long been said in this space that elected politicians would never spend their own money this way. They just don't hesitate to spend yours.

It leaves us smack dab in the middle of a whirlwind where Hoosier lawmakers are telling us they need our money more than we do.

Please.

Say it with me now. Someone is going to have to do with less. It's absolutely shameful that those in office – at any level – are telling us it can't be them.

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Israel Is Being Betrayed

It is painful when defeat is snatched from the jaws of victory as occurred on Jan. 15, 2025, some five days before President Trump's inauguration. Israel was on the verge of a strategic triumph over the Muslim Brotherhood/Iranian axis in the Middle East, brought about by its unparalleled military superiority and audacity. That victory is now in question.

The chain of events began with the unprovoked massacre of 1200 Israelis by Hamas and the taking of some 250 hostages on October 7, 2023. In the war that followed, the "seven front war," between Israel and Iranian proxies, the Middle East was being transformed before our very eyes with the fall of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and Hamas in Gaza. New regional alignments were emerging in the face of Israeli victory and hegemony. All this despite the best efforts of the Biden administration to thwart and hamstring Israel.

Many supporters of Israel looked forward to the Presidency of Donald Trump, a known ally of

Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel, and the force behind the “Abraham Accords,” which occurred in his first term: the unprecedented normalization of relations between Israel and four Arab nations, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. Trump also recognized Jerusalem as the capitol of Israel and moved the American embassy there.

No one anticipated that Trump would steal this historic victory at the last moment, undercutting much that Israel had accomplished singlehandedly by forcing Israel into a damaging ceasefire that restored, in effect, the status quo, and reinstated, incomprehensibly, Israel’s greatest enemy, Hamas: an organization formed in 1987, that is committed to the genocide of Jews worldwide and the destruction of the state of Israel.

Phase 1 of the ceasefire deal, required the cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Israeli troops, with massive rebuilding and aid to Gaza (600 “aid” trucks a day: more than double current levels). Lasting 42 days, it frees 33 hostages (31 Israeli, two American), 25 living, eight deceased, in exchange for the release of some 1700 Palestinian criminals, including many terrorists with Israeli blood on their hands. Israel will withdraw from the Philadelphi corridor in Rafah between Gaza and Egypt through which much of Hamas’s weaponry and supplies is smuggled. It also requires a withdrawal from the Netzarim corridor, which divides northern from southern Gaza.

The deal, however, leaves Hamas intact and arguably stronger, flush with the status of having withstood the onslaught of the “Zionist Entity,” and now able to rebuild. Indeed, they are celebrating their “victory” as we speak.

The key goals of the war as outlined by Netanyahu after Oct. 7, 2023 were: eliminating Hamas, securing the release of Israeli captives in Gaza, and ensuring that the Palestinian enclave would not pose a threat to Israel’s security. None of these goals have been achieved. The ceasefire deal ensures they never will be.

Although severely weakened, Hamas can now reconstitute itself. Israel loses control of the Philadelphi corridor, thus allowing Hamas to rebuild their war machine. The deal doubles the amount of aid to Gaza. Controlled and sold by Hamas at great profit, it solidifies their hold on power. They can recruit soldiers to restore their capability. Surrendering the Netzarim corridor allows Palestinians to return to northern Gaza. If fighting breaks out, they will have to be evacuated again, a public relations nightmare. It is a return to pre-October 7 with none of the war goals achieved. Worst of all, Hamas has been legitimized as a negotiating partner.

The release of some 1,700 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons, many with Jewish blood on their hands, is also problematic. The now deceased Yahya al-Sinwar, former leader of Hamas and architect of Oct. 7, was one such prisoner released in a prior prisoner deal of more than a thousand Palestinian prisoners in 2011 in exchange for a single Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas. The mass release of Palestinian terrorists and criminals can be expected to result in the shedding of more Israeli blood.

Then there is Steve Witkoff, Trump’s Middle East envoy, a real estate mogul and friend of Trump, with little experience or knowledge of the Middle East. He had negotiated this deal with the Prime Minister of Qatar. Witkoff pressured Netanyahu to accept it. Issues that had been life and death for Israel seemed to disappear. Witkoff, furthermore, has questionable allegiances. In 2023, the Qatari Sovereign Wealth fund, bailed him out by purchasing the swanky Park Lane Hotel in Manhattan for \$623 million. Qatar is the chief funder of Islamic terror, including Hamas, and should be nowhere near such negotiations. Nor should Witkoff.

Perhaps Trump recalled the return of the 53 U.S. hostages from Iran, with the inauguration of Ronald Reagan on January 20, 1981. Reagan achieved this historic return without firing a shot or giving up a thing. The return of the hostages

from Gaza bears no resemblance to this. Perhaps Trump wanted to avoid a “kinetic” war during his time in office. But this war did not start under his rule and he bears no responsibility for it. The current war in the Middle East occurred under Biden as a direct result of Biden’s policies of appeasement and enrichment of Iran and its terrorist proxies.

Did Trump simply want to take a victory lap for returning the hostages before his inauguration? It appears so. Trump, through Witkoff, forced Israel to agree to the very same deal that Biden (and Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken) had been pressuring Israel to accept since May 2024. Was Donald Trump so anxious for a peace deal that he would destroy the single greatest opportunity Israel, the U.S., and the world have ever had to put an end to the Muslim Brotherhood-Iranian bloc in the region?

Israel had resisted Biden’s efforts to accept the very same deal since May 2024. They did so because they were waiting for Trump to get in. They assumed, mistakenly, that Trump would support their war efforts and goals.

By pressuring Israel, to accept this horrible deal, President Trump has given Hamas a new lease on life. He has rewarded the Palestinians for starting the war. Gaza will now be rebuilt and they will receive tremendous amounts of aid and investment. Did they deserve this? Furthermore, Hamas could have ended the war at any time: through unconditional surrender, laying down of arms, and acceptance of military occupation by Israel over Gaza – as occurred with the Allied occupation of Nazi Germany and Japan at the end of World War II.

The emphasis on the hostages is also frayed. They (and their families) are victims, cruelly captured, tortured, with many killed, and now used as pawns to further Hamas’s cause and manipulate Israel, the U.S., and the world. But is their suffering greater than that of the more than 400 young Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza and their families, or the more than 15,000 wounded in that war, many with disabling and permanent injuries.

This ceasefire deal is a victory for Joe Biden, the Democratic party, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, Qatar and their many anti-Semitic supporters around the world including in western cities and college campuses. Hamas now is celebrating this unexpected gift from a leader generally and properly regarded as a friend of Israel, a modern-day Cyrus, the greatest friend that Israel and the Jewish people have ever had. This war should have secured Gaza, ended the terrorist threat, returned Gaza to Israel, with a full military occupation. Ideally, the Palestinians should be resettled elsewhere, as occurs often in war.

Israel and its supporters expected more from President Trump. The disastrous ceasefire is a strategic defeat for Israel at precisely the moment that should have been their greatest victory. The irony is tragic. As Israel was expecting strong support by Trump in their titanic struggle against Islamic terror, they were handed, in effect, Biden’s deal. It is also Hamas’s deal. And now it is Trump’s deal.

We appreciate the many good things President Trump is doing for the country and the world, including sealing the border, deporting illegal aliens, restoring the economy, dismantling the deep state, ending lawfare, winding down the war in Ukraine, and eliminating DEI, among many other things. We respect his courage and incredible comeback to win the presidency a second term against a hostile and corrupt bureaucracy, legal system, and media, and against all odds. While we appreciate the many good things President Trump is doing for the country and the world – we note that this is not one of them. This is a betrayal of Israel and the Jewish people. ♦

The Bookshelf

Once the presidential election was safely in the past, I figured it was time to read a history of a previous election. Fortunately for me, a book on the 1960 campaign was displayed on my library's new book shelf. **"Countdown 1960: The Behind-the-Scenes Story of the 312 Days That Changed America's Political Scene Forever"** by network newsman Chris Wallace is a day-by-day journal of the Kennedy-Nixon contest, the first one I followed closely as a nine year old schoolboy.

I was an ardent Kennedy supporter, but I cannot remember why. However, the most memorable event during that campaign was the day Richard Nixon flew into Fort Wayne and my school lined us all up along the highway leading from the airport to downtown. We waved as instructed and Nixon waived back as his motorcade sped by. Even though Nixon's Fort Wayne visit is cited in Wallace's book, for some imperceptible reason he failed to mention me and my schoolmates. Just sloppy research, I guess.

Wallace's approach is that of a diarist, structuring the book around each candidate's activities for that day. The reader can feel the tension build as both candidates faced open challengers early on and then had to face the elephant in the room (Lyndon Johnson Kennedy and Nelson Rockefeller for Nixon) who might appear at the last minute to grab the nomination. Then the tension picks up and each candidate pursues his idea of how to win the presidency.

Wallace does not gloss over Kennedy's shortcomings that should have, but didn't, get any significant news coverage. There was the Catholic issue of course, which Wallace covers well as Kennedy addressed this head-on in the West

Virginia primary. It was Kennedy's philandering, his serious health issue with Addison's disease and his father Joe's utilizing organized crime mobsters to launder campaign money that received no serious journalistic attention at the time. It was blatantly covered up by a friendly media.

The most surprising to me was Joe Kennedy's deal with Roman Catholic Archbishop Richard Cushing to divert all cash collected at all Boston Catholic churches one Sunday to the Kennedy campaign to be used to entice Protestant ministers in West Virginia to encourage their flocks to vote for JFK. Sure, Dad did make a "donation" to the archdiocese for the amount of the laundered money but still.

Wallace has high praise for Bobby Kennedy's campaign management. He made the right decisions at the right time. He could be ruthless but he got the job done. Bobby's intellect and Joe's money proved a winning combination.

In contrast the Nixon campaign seemed to drift. Wallace attributes this to Nixon's determination to make all decisions himself and often without any input from his advisors. Nixon's approach was to conduct an old

fashioned whistle stop campaign that visited all 50 states. Kennedy meanwhile used his private airplane to quickly adapt his current focus on battleground states.

There are those who attribute Nixon's loss to his performance at the first TV debate. Wallace explains why he lost. Kennedy arrived a day earlier, splitting his time between debate preparation and rest. Nixon, however, held campaign rallies both the day before and the day of the debate, allowing little time for preparation and no time for rest. Plus he was running a fever. It wasn't just the five o'clock shadow.



The most interesting part of the book for me was the account of the post-election discovery of voting irregularities. In both Texas and Illinois, there were multiple precincts reporting more votes for Kennedy than registered voters. Both states were notorious for complete Democrat control of polling places and vote canvassing. Frequently there were no Republican representatives present.

The Republican Central Committee attempted to have recounts in these states but failed to get state courts to agree. The intriguing fact here is that it was the party, not Richard Nixon, behind the challenges. Nixon, to his credit, feared that putting the election result in doubt for an extended time would damage American democracy irreparably if these charges remained unsubstantiated.

Perhaps Nixon's greatest moment as a statesman was the day he chaired the joint meeting of Congress to count the Electoral College votes. His short speech was a selfless paean to American democracy. Wallace's reporting leads me to believe that Nixon really did win the election, which makes his actions a true and noble sacrifice.

Al Gore, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump could have learned something.

As long as the Kennedy-Nixon election got me reminiscing about my childhood, being in school during the 1950's meant that I participated in the "get under your desk" nuclear war drills. We all did it but it didn't really mean much. My recollection, as fragile as it has become, is that the real nuclear scares didn't really start until the 1960's and 1970's. One memory is the movie "The Day After" which postulated a Soviet missile strike in Kansas and the challenges facing the survivors to rebuild their lives. The anti-nuke crowd expected massive psychological issues and even

had a counseling hotline ready. Did anyone actually call that number?

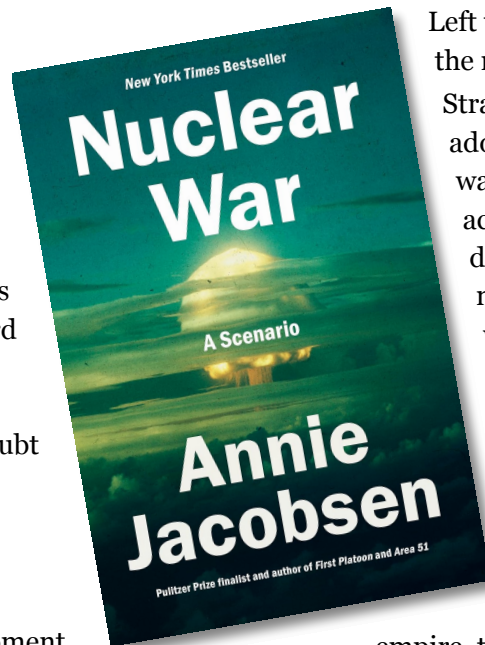
What made nuclear weapons hard to fathom is that their destructive power continually increased exponentially. That, and all the protests against American weapons but curiously not against

Soviet deployments. But that is how the Left thought back then; America was the real threat to world peace.

Strategic options were scarce. The one adopted by both sides in the Cold War was deterrence, best known by the acronym MAD (mutually assured destruction). The calculus was that a nuclear war was not winnable so why start one? Policy makers found it impossible to break free from this deadly embrace, at least until Ronald Reagan changed the policy from nuclear weapon controls to their total elimination.

With the fall of the Soviet empire, the assumption was that we no longer had to fear nuclear destruction. So why did Annie Jacobsen determine to write a book about nuclear Armageddon now? **"Nuclear War: A Scenario"** (Dutton 2024, 297 pages plus notes, \$19 hardcover at Amazon) is a worst case scenario played out in a fictional but realistic minute-by-minute account of the first 72 minutes of a global conflagration.

It is started by that mad demigod in North Korea who wants to punish the United States for past transgressions against his fragile ego. To summarize Jacobson's scenario, North Korea launches two ICBMs against a west coast nuclear power plant and the Pentagon. The United States leadership, those who survived by getting up in the air on the so-called doomsday planes, decide to retaliate against North Korea, but unfortunately the American missiles must transverse Russian territory in route. Putin refuses all American calls that don't come from the U.S. president, who did not survive the attack. Russian paranoia results in



a massive counter strike against the continental U.S. and NATO bases in Europe. Then China, which is suffering from fallout from the bombs exploded in North Korea, launches its own. You get the picture; all nuclear weapons not destroyed in the first attacks are fired, basically obliterating everything in the Northern Hemisphere.

Depressing stuff, but that was Jacobsen's point. A worst case scenario is the only plausible one. She carefully researched the technologies and political decision-making rubrics hardwired into the system. She interviewed nearly 50 former scientists, military officers and politicians who were on the inside.

Where Jacobsen falls short is her apparent lack of both empathy and sympathy for those policy makers who are faced with very few choices and all of them bad. There is a perverse logic behind MAD but that can only work when two superpowers are faced off. Crazy like North Korea's Supreme Leader and the ayatollahs in Iran won't care about retaliation but how does the world community keep them from building their own weapons?

Jacobsen's point is that nuclear war cannot be constrained. It is not survivable so it is not winnable. No doubt she is right about that but how does that realization inform our defense policy when dealing with irrational and bad actors?

That was the conundrum of the cold war and remains today so long as the North Korean and Iranian regimes are with us.

Being reminded about the Cold War's nuclear threat is depressing enough so I decided to turn to something almost as depressing and very relevant now: inflation.

Steve Forbes with coauthors Nathan Lewis and Elizabeth Ames addresses the issue of inflation in

their recent book **"Inflation: What It Is, Why It's Bad, and How to Fix It"** (Encounter books 2022, 134 pages plus notes, \$16 hardcover at Amazon). The "Fix," as one should expect from a hard money proponent like Forbes, is to reinstate a gold standard of sorts which the authors see as a panacea for all our inflationary woes.

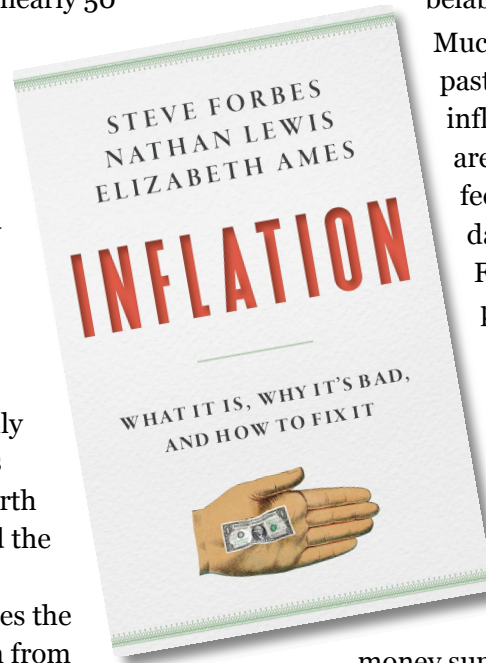
Perhaps I am being too hard on them. The book is well written with the general population in mind. One doesn't need a PhD in economics to read it. And it is short, as the authors don't belabor their points.

Much of the book is historical, pointing to past policy decisions that exacerbated the inflation problem rather than fix it. They are not wrong there, but somehow it feels like they have cherry-picked their data points and even misapplied them. For example, they insist that the oil price surge in the early 1970s was not political retaliation by the Arab states for America's support of Israel in the 1973 war but due to a rapidly falling U. S. dollar due to domestic inflation.

Forbes et. al. do a good job of explaining the difference between price increases and inflation of the money supply, the former simply being the effect caused by the latter. They also differentiate price changes from longitudinal increases in the price indices. That should make sense to the general reader and establishes a basic economic principle.

What I found harder to follow was their implication that gold has an intrinsic value that does not change. Volatility in the price of gold can be laid at the door of monetary inflation. They modify this somewhat by suggesting other commodities should be tracked as well. Commodity price shifts are proposed as better inflation indicators than changes in the various monetary aggregates.

Monetary policy is a difficult concept to understand; just note the abysmal track record of



our national economic leadership. The authors deserve credit for walking the reader through the significance of . . . and limitations of . . . various publicized indicators such as the Consumer Price Index and the various “M” monetary indices.

Focusing on a stolen election, nuclear Armageddon and runaway inflation is no way to begin the sacred season of Lent, so I was excited to learn that a new book was out focused on the composing of the Messiah oratorio by George Frideric Handel, the most powerful music ever written in my admittedly biased opinion. Except it wasn’t really about the Messiah. Charles King’s **“Every Valley: The Desperate Lives and Troubled Times That Made Handel’s Messiah”**

(Doubleday 2024, 270 pages plus notes, \$23 hardcover at Amazon) is more of a cultural and social history of Hanoverian England in the mid-eighteenth century. Messiah the oratorio doesn’t make much of an appearance until well past the midpoint of the book.

It is bad form to criticize an author for not writing the book the reader wanted, and perhaps I should have been warned by the book’s subtitle, but that doesn’t help my disappointment. I didn’t do an actual count but I am certain King devoted more pages to England’s involvement in the slave trade than to Handel’s compositional efforts.

That said, King provides a wealth of background to English society during Handel’s time there, following the intertwined lives of noblemen and opera singers, do-gooders and ne’er-do-wells as microcosms of what was happening during that era. He even brings in the Jacobite rebellion and its impact on London society. The book has real value in that regard, although the author tends to get rather preachy at

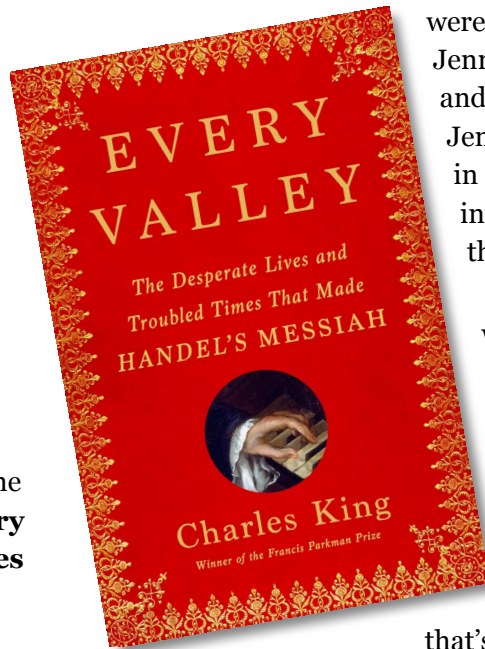
times, just in case the reader doesn’t appreciate the depravity of the villains.

King gives Messiah’s librettist, Charles Jennens, his due. The reader learns that the Scriptural passages that are the sung text were compiled over many years as Jennens reflected on his life and times and looked to the Bible for insight. Jennens hardly gets credit for his role in Messiah’s creation but then King informs us that Jennens preferred it that way.

King has a deep respect for the work but I think he misses the main point. To King, Messiah is a reflection on and a way through the vagaries of human existence. He claims for it definitive spiritual value for even non-Christians living in imperfect societies, which very well may be true. But

that’s not the point; God’s plan of salvation being worked out quite specifically in history is. But that just may be my own faith informing my understanding and appreciation of the work.

Nevertheless, I will be listening to Messiah on Easter Sunday just like I do on Christmas Day . . . and many days in between. — *Mark Franke*





Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

The Outstater

Statehouse Eyes Turn to Taxes

*“Read my lips.” — George H.W. Bush, 1988
GOP Convention*

(April 5) — Hearing hints from the Statehouse floor about details of a property tax “cut,” we are reminded of the “Bohanan Rule,” named after the Ball State University economist Cecil Bohanon. It says that taxes can be opposed for no better reason than to keep government comprehensible.

For the last 80 years or so we have steadily raised taxes on the assumption that if government gets bigger it will do more good. There may have been a point early on when that was true. We have long passed it, though, and government has gotten so big that it regularly intrudes on our lives in ways that are both unannounced and arbitrary if not evil. (I’ll wait while you make your list.)

And it is immaterial in applying the rule whether administrators honestly decide they need more money or even think they can put it to proper use in the name of some inarguable good or another (schools, healthcare, economic development). What matters is whether normal people — economists, journalists, plumbers — can easily and factually assess those decisions.

We can insist on that veto power because — and this is a tangential point — because it is our money, a position won with the blood and treasure of our forefathers.

Anyway, here is an example of the rule. If the pothole in front of your house has gone unfixed for a couple of seasons, you can conclude that either the street department is underfunded or inept. But if your city decides in a moment of grandiose boosterism, but without private independent market research, to transform the downtown into “a destination spot” with a multi-million dollar entertainment complex, sports stadiums and convention center, all to be financed over the next 20 years using government grants, municipal bonding, TIF districts, inscrutable financial arrangements, some with undetermined campaign contributors and silent partners, all of which is likely to restrict prospects for your children and grandchildren . . . then that is something else entirely; you might want to scale things back a bit.

The journalist Gideon John Tucker famously wrote it down in 1866: “No man’s life, liberty or property are safe while the legislature is in session.” Heeding that warning, our businessman-governor has been stalwart (so far) in saying that a tax “cut” should actually leave more money in a taxpayer’s pocket.

But the Speaker of the House has been more circumspect, perhaps misspeaking but perhaps letting the cat out of the bag. He says homeowners should see a reduction *in what people would have been paying in taxes*. He also says it will go to those who *need it most*, a sliding determination based on the most political of calculations.

The cynic might hear that to mean legislators will merely and begrudgingly be reducing the size of the intended larceny. Let us just say that the Legislature, which has grown haughty in supermajority, seems oblivious to a historical lesson. It risks raising the most damaging tax of all, the one on the citizenry’s trust.

Prospective primary candidates will want to stay tuned this coming week.

The Not-So-Great Gatsby

(March 31) — This week marks the 100th anniversary of the novel “The Great Gatsby” by F.

Scott Fitzgerald. It is an occasion, I read in the New York Times, to speculate on Jay Gatsby's identity, his swarthythness. Was he a member of one oppressed minority or another, or, if not, a literary representation of the ways that race tragically interacts with wealth and social mobility?

Scholars such as Henry Gates, Valarie Smith, Michael North and Marlene Allen have put forward their interpretations. And in a recent article for the Atlantic, Alonzo Vereen described the indeterminate, "unraced" aspects of the Fitzgerald character.. "Gatsby's American identity is so ambiguous," Vereen writes, "that the students could layer on top of it any ethnic or racial identity they brought to the novel."

Oh really?

Fitzgerald clearly says that Gatsby grew up in North Dakota as James Gatz. He has the book's narrator state that Gatsby attended "the small Lutheran College of St. Olaf's in southern Minnesota." Gatsby's father Henry C. Gatz was from a town in Minnesota and in the book arranges a Lutheran service.

Gasp! That would mean . . . yes, that would mean Gatsby was from a group that is so anathema that nobody in modern literature or film would dare pose it in heroic terms. This simply can't be. No English Lit faculty today would find anything "great" about a German-American-Lutheran Gatsby.

Oddly, this embarrassment — disdain even — exists despite the fact that German decedents are the largest ancestral group in the U.S. And it is a historical point that rapid agricultural settlement by German-Americans in several American colonies and then throughout the Midwest and Great Plains built the economic strength that allowed the early U.S. to resist foreign influence.

In a short four decades, the vast natural resources and agricultural capacity there were harnessed. Indiana came to life, its population increasing from 1.35 million in 1860 to 2.8 million in 1890, Nebraska's from under 30,000 to over one million. A self-sustaining and rapidly growing economy was created virtually overnight that

empowered the Monroe Doctrine and was the beginning of the modern American era.

None of this is mentioned in polite company on either coast. Lamentably, in popular American culture Germans are in demand primarily as villains — Major Dietrich in "Raiders of the Lost Ark," Ernst Blofeld in the James Bond series, Col. Hans Landa in "Inglourious Bastards" and of course Hans Gruber in "Die Hard."

I suppose, though, we all must do our part to keep identity politics alive in all of its sublime idiocy, even if it means throwing the great Gatsby under the woke bus.

The Statehouse: Our House of Mirrors

(March 21) — Spring is in the air, and now is the time everyone — the Indy media, the legislative leadership, everyone — scrambles to pretend they know how the session will end.

They don't have any idea, of course, for we once sent people to Indianapolis to represent us as our friends and neighbors. You knew what they/we thought about things. Now they go as mouthpieces for this special interest or that. Indeed, our democratic system has been broken for so long, and there is such a disconnect between the elected and the polity, that legislating has become mere guesswork.

Legislators do know that. They can sense it when they are in the home district. The type of people who want to meet with them are not reflective of the population at large, sort of like the front row at a rock concert. The predictions of these donors and true believers are unreliable if not downright daffy — a house of mirrors.

The obvious option for legislators, to think for themselves, is not within reach for most. So they depend on an army of lobbyists who outnumber the thoughtfully ambulatory at the Statehouse by at least four to one. That, and they try to mollify the GOP leadership (even more disconnected and clueless) so they can get their campaign lunch money to discourage any primary challenge.

By the way, have you ever met a real, live lobbyist? If so, did he ask your opinion about anything? I've been writing about politics for 40 years and have only known a half dozen, and then only because they were former legislators. No, lobbyists work in the shadows. A kinder way to say it is their time is valuable so they spend it with lawmakers and not with mere citizens.

Back to our point. The goal, again, is to seem to know what you are doing well enough to keep your title until retirement on the Gulf or promotion to the lobbyist ranks. Think Eric Holcomb.

A proof-perfect example is this session's handling of property tax. Tone deaf though they may be, legislators have an inkling that the proletariat has had enough of taxes, especially those spent on failing local public schools. Their solution, worked out in painful struggle sessions with the lobbyists, was to cut property taxes . . . well, not exactly cut them, just slow their increase. It was hoped this would hold the ingrates for a while (legislators think of all budgeted money as their own, not yours).

The clinker this session is Mike Braun, a different kind of governor. He has been to Washington and unlike his immediate predecessors dared look behind the curtain hiding the Wizard. Braun does not seem to be buying into the Statehouse game here. Indeed, he seems intent on exposing it. This from his web site:

- Overhaul the homestead deduction to allow every homeowner with an assessed value over \$125,000 to deduct 60 percent of their home's assessed value from their tax bill.
- Freeze future property tax increases by capping the increase in tax bills at 2 percent for seniors, low-income Hoosiers, and families with children under the age of 18; and 3 percent for all other
- Require any proposed property tax increase exceeding the cap to be approved through a referendum.

- Establish a Property Tax Transparency Portal that allows taxpayers to compare their current tax bill with potential changes under proposed tax rates.

- Require that all property tax-related referendums take place during high-turnout elections (e.g., general elections in even years).
- Require a referendum to propose a total levy (e.g., "Shall the school district raise \$5 million to the referendum's impact on the median home's property tax bill.")

Pretty heady stuff. As of today, the governor says the Senate version on property taxes, which cuts less than a fourth of his proposal, "has a long way to go before it gets my signature."

Will Braun be resolute or will he fold in the final weeks? A veto? A special session? I have no idea, counting myself among those flummoxed by the corruption, rent-seeking and money of modern politics. The only difference is I admit it.

Tariffs Discombobulated

(*March 13*) — The former chairwoman of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce has written her list of "threats to democracy," of chief interest here being her opposition to tariffs. Marilyn Moran-Townsend in a widely circulated letter calls on all Hoosiers, "progressive Democrats working with conservative Republicans, evangelicals working with Muslims and Jews, business leaders working with union leaders" — to join her.

This fits the view of America as a magical democracy where to save the nation one need only summon "the power of the people, participating in multiple coalitions," in Ms. Moran-Townsend's words. Holders of this view are generally confident that the Founding Fathers are on their side.

I have my doubts. The Founders designed our government not as a direct democracy but as an indirect one, specifically a constitutional republic. That means that your vote, however allied, is not particularly good at setting precise policy, least of all in international trade — too many

compromises on the way to a majority, don't you know.

Rather, democracy is a process of succession, a process only slightly more civil than the guillotine. It is the leadership in the three branches of government that is assigned the heavy lifting on policy. And the Founders anticipated Moran-Townsend's concern about authoritarianism not by putting their trust in democracy but rather by checking the power of each branch.

In cynical moments, I call up the playwright David Mamet's description:

"The Constitution, written by men with some experience of actual government, assumes that the chief executive will work to be king, the Parliament will scheme to sell off the silverware, and the judiciary will consider itself Olympian and do everything it can to much improve (destroy) the work of the other two branches."

So, before you evangelists, Muslims or whatever enlist in Moran-Townsend's "democratic" campaign against tariffs you will want answers to a few questions. The first is what tool other than a tariff do we have to keep a bad actor like mercantilist China from gaming the system? A nuclear-armed armada?

More particularly, how do we keep China from using our own energy and resources against us, building up its military to parity, a threat not only to free trade but to every freedom? And who else but the executive, love him or hate him, could wield that tool with any authority or effect?

Relatedly, considering China's growing dominance in so many industries, how does Moran-Townsend imagine we keep our remaining manufacturers? Would she have us reduced to a resource colony, supplying China only with farm products, fossil fuels and tourism? Is she asking us to sacrifice our Midwest cities and towns to promote free trade while Canada, Mexico, Europe and everyone else gets to interact with our economy on their terms?

Finally, intent is important. We agree it is bad economics to enact a tariff with the purpose

of dominating certain markets or giving advantage to certain industries (as we did with the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930 and as China is doing now). Ronald Reagan rightly warned that it is dangerously self-defeating.

But to enact a reciprocal tariff policy, one that burns itself out as other countries drop their tariffs, is reasonable — common sense, even. Nations around the world are recognizing this, or so reports Michael Lind, writing on "Why Tariffs Are Good" in the March 11 Free Press:

"Governments are resorting to tariffs and industrial policy not because their prime ministers and presidents flunked Econ 101 but because they do not want their economies de-industrialized by a flood of low-priced, state-subsidized Chinese imports."

Again, Moran-Townsend's letter mentioned tariffs only among other concerns, and in no greater detail than to imply that opposition was "self-evident" for right-thinking Hoosiers. Her real agenda seems to be blocking the current Republican administration across a broad front — an odd position for someone so closely associated with the Chamber of Commerce, the most special of special interests.

Still, I would give Moran-Townsend the benefit of the doubt. She is a respected player in public policy. But in regard to tariffs, her "democratic" coalition resembles the one that got us into this trouble, namely Democrats who sold out union jobs to promote globalism and Republicans who privately benefitted from "free" trade at the expense of their country.

I cannot think of a less worthy cause.

When Fair Isn't Fair Enough

(March 11) — Multiple WNBA players, including several on our Indiana Fever, are at least passively in sympathy with star forward Angel Reese in her conviction to "sit out" if demands for higher pay are not met.

Well, why not? They play the same game on the same sized court. The hoop is set at exactly the

same 10 feet. They run up and down the court only a few times less per game dribbling only a slightly smaller ball. They sweat the same, sort of.

Does it matter that so few watch their games that the league loses \$15 million a year, a sum that must be made up ultimately in one way or another by NBA fans, the great number of whom have little or no interest in women's basketball?

No, fair is fair.

And while we're at it, let's pay all women the same on average as all men in all jobs, even the dangerous, physically taxing ones in which they typically underperform and for which they rarely apply. But yes, let's lower standards for combat infantry so women get a fair shot at those high-paying billets even if that means lower-caliber rifles and grenades with smaller blast zones.

Do insurance companies adjust premiums for disparity between adult men and women in accidents per miles driven? I think they do.

Whatever, let's calculate average fairness to include lower lifetime earnings of women who voluntarily — and nobly, to my mind — interrupt their careers at critical stages to raise children and build a home. And let's reserve slots in professional schools for women, ignoring that they on average limit or even curtail their practices early, aggravating any shortage of doctors, veterinarians, etc.

And what about k-12 teachers so intent on women's studies, ethnic cultural history and such that they push degrees that leave his/her/ them in a parent's basement planning street riots? Let's pay them the same as teachers of STEM skills graduating physicians, engineers and physicists.

Wait, what? We do pay them the same?

Well, never mind.

Ball State Goes Eco-Devo

(March 6) — The decision last week by the trustees of Ball State University (BSU) to divert millions of education dollars to one of those public-private ventures is doubly sad.

First, it is discouraging to see one of our public institutions fall into a bad deal. Yes, I understand that it is more fun to be a “developer” looking over blueprints and lunching with bankers than trying to manage a campus-full of pesky, intractable and largely uncooperative students. Still, passable administrators make inept capitalists.

That said, let's hear about their project. It includes a new performing arts center, a boutique hotel, residential housing, retail and restaurants — all of them top drawer. Here are some budget items:

- Performing Arts Center — \$69.9 million, featuring a main stage theater with 425 seats, a studio theater and various “supporting amenities.”
- Hotel Development — Plans include a 95-room hotel with restaurants and a rooftop bar-lounge.
- Residential Housing — The university plans to construct new townhomes and single-family houses with an estimated combined cost exceeding \$30 million.
- Land Purchases — BSU has invested over \$5.3 million so far in acquiring property to support these developments.

Although financial details are sparse, if the project follows the eco-devo pattern its “Investors” are attracted by a plan that allows them to be paid largely up front, that is, the profits they would expect to earn over the life of the notes and bonds. The finances will play out for 20 years or so until the elements of the project begin to go bankrupt (there never having been independent market studies).

At that point, silent partners among the initial investors step in to buy individual parts and parcels at fire sales, with the city and the university (taxpayers) making good any loss.

Again, the administrators may not know any of that, seeing themselves as visionary, progressive stewards. Their partners, the more savvy bankers, lawyers, engineers and architects, are unlikely to tell them otherwise.

We should mention that BSU is sort of a bank itself. As of June 30, 2023, its endowment was \$341.3 million. This last year, the university achieved a record-breaking fundraising total of over \$79 million, marking it the sixth consecutive year of raising more than \$30 million in new private gifts (presumably given on the assumption that they would be spent on something educational).

Let us hope none of this becomes reality. But what is a public university doing in the eco-devo biz anyway? Or why if it is such a development opportunity isn't it simply left to the private sector? And will private interests in Muncie be hurt by the university-driven competition?

If you can ignore the impressive architectural renderings for a moment, the project has a Potemkin vibe with hints of crony capitalism, pay-to-play and rent-seeking. Rather than a product of natural urban growth it appears to be a buffer shielding the university from Muncie proper. To be glib, it lacks only a moat. The city, you see, has become something of an embarrassment to the university in recent years.

Muncie's combined violent and property crime rate is 33 per 1,000 residents, which is higher than 96 percent of U.S. communities. The chance there of being a victim of violent crime, which is a real enrollment discourager, is 1 in 227. Muncie residents face a 1 in 35 chance of experiencing property crime with the city having one of the highest rates of motor vehicle theft in the nation, with a 1 in 278 chance of losing your ride.

We said the trustees' decision to approve all of this was doubly sad. That is because the university, as Muncie's largest employer, has political clout that could have been used to provide constructive leadership and expertise, that could have braced the weak knees on a typical city council.

Particularly, instead of funding a boondoggle, it could have put forward proven crime-control strategies, more flexible zoning, relaxed regulation and lower taxes, all proven ways to attract real investment.

We know economists on campus who could have pointed them in the right direction. We doubt, however, they were consulted.

For sound urban policy requires an appreciation of the role of free markets and private property. The great number of faculty members and administrators have none. They are pledged instead to the all-demanding pursuit of social justice with its fanciful ideas of how the world should be rather than how it is — the perfect attitude for funding an imaginary city with other people's money. Update: Municipal Grocery Stores

Save Us from Municipal Groceries

(Feb. 24) — A city-run grocery store in a food "desert" — it seemed the perfect opportunity for our new mayor to demonstrate in microcosm how her economic-development vision could be realized. It was a pity the opportunity was missed.

The grocery, small enough for people to see the workings for themselves, could have taught us all how government, properly motivated, can suspend the laws of economics, pushing aside capitalist greed to provide savings, convenience and above all social justice.

The 7,000-square-foot store, meant to serve undetermined central-city foot traffic, was inspired by the mayor's account of a mother struggling with bags of groceries on a bus while her suburban counterparts parked Mercedes within a few yards of a Krogers. Hearing the compassion in her voice, the City Council had no trouble approving \$3.4 million in combined city, state and federal funds.

But for some reason, which we will explore here, the vaunted grocery was left out of the mayor's State of the City address last week. That was odd because she listed in exhaustive detail the dozens of other public-private partnerships the city has undertaken, big ones with inscrutable fiscal arrangements but similar promises to pay for themselves

Could it be that careful analysis — independent, of course — wouldn't support the

premises of our city grocery or, worse, wouldn't support the entire economic-development strategy? What if the food desert was not a product of capitalist racism but rather the result of unchecked shoplifting and employee theft? What if removing supposed greed from the grocery equation would not magically open operating margins. What if employees on the third shift were afraid to walk to their cars?

Similar questions are discussed in a recent article in *City Journal*, "Why City-Run Grocery Stores Are a Bad Idea." The author notes that an analysis of such projects has already been done — and we're waiting for those results as well.

It turns out that Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson commissioned a feasibility study to examine the very question. "That study has not been made public, however, and Mayor Johnson has backed off his plan," the magazine reported. That is so even though the state of Illinois established a "Grocery Initiative" to provide municipalities with up to \$2.4 million to open grocery stores.

Finally, the supposed poverty of central-city residents must be addressed, the mayor having alluded to the brains of children there being damaged for lack of food. A dissenting city councilman challenged that contention by noting that America's lowest income quintile can access with government benefits and programs the equivalent of \$49,000 a year, and that does not take into account our city's expansive network of churches and charities.

In any case, those living in our designated food desert will be able to walk to this store and "purchase" food with an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, an electronic system that allows them to pay through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, sort of mainlining into the U.S. Treasury.

In summary, if the mayor wants more grocery stores or anything else constructive in the central city she might consider lending her support to reconnecting the Clinton administration's work requirements with welfare benefits — that

and expand public safety efforts beyond her "Citizens Academy," a pet budget item meant to familiarize residents with why laws and police are important.

Democracy at Ground Level

(Feb. 9) — Applaud as we do the preference cascade that was the recent presidential election, a historic validation of the common sense of the common American, but at the local level, ironically, democracy still is problematic.

Any Indiana citizen can sign up for a tour of the Statehouse. These are scheduled through your district representative or senator. And, depending on time, you might be granted a few words with the legislator himself or herself, as the case may be.

But choose your words carefully because in a few minutes you will be gently but terminally ushered to a photo area where you can be pictured with your representative — sort of like what might be set up at a wedding reception but without the sentimental value.

Treasure it nonetheless, for that will be the extent of your impact on Indiana policy. I can say that on the authority of a classic 2014 study from Cambridge University. The study, which has since been replicated and expanded, looked at 1,779 policy issues in the United States. The researchers examined how much impact the preferences of three classes of Americans had on policy change: 1) average citizens (50th income percentile); 2) affluent citizens (90th percentile); and 3) interest groups.

"Initially, the preferences of all three groups had an impact," writes Alden Whitfield in *Aporia Magazine*. "However, this was due to the fact that they were highly inter-correlated. The authors therefore compared the independent effects of each group's preferences. What did they find? Average citizens were largely irrelevant, interest groups seemed to matter a bit and affluent Americans had the vast majority of power."

For you mathematicians, the correlation between the independent preference of those

average citizens and eventual public policy was 0.05 — essentially nil, zip, zero.

Just as dismaying, a related study found that issues approved in election years tend to lose funding compared with others, as if the political class used them as campaign loss-leaders.

On top of all this, in Indiana the leadership of a super-majority — a political machine in effect — has extraordinary power to thwart even the most popular issue position, excluding pertinent bills from committee consideration or floor vote. And a legislator who votes against its wishes can be cut out of Party fundraising to face an overwhelming primary challenge.

Right here, allow yourself a big, long sigh.

There are blessed exceptions to the above characterization but you won't need both hands to count them. Just know it was not so long ago that we sent representatives to Indianapolis as friends and neighbors, not hired mouthpieces. They would return on weekends to be grilled by knowledgeable civic groups like the government committees of the Chamber of Commerce and the Jaycees on how they voted the previous week — intense exchanges, not staged “listening sessions” or “town halls.”

Somehow, we've got to get back to that if democracy is to retain any meaning — any meaning, that is, beyond an awkwardly posed portrait hanging on an office wall.

Build it and They Will Come — Maybe

(Feb. 7) — My city has been operating with a “build it and they will come” strategy for a couple of decades now. The thing is we have no independent verification that people are actually coming — or coming in greater numbers than otherwise — so we're not sure why we built any of it.

Nonetheless, our downtown boasts multiple supposed “destination” projects, built regardless of market signals, most of them boosted by government favor and all of them requiring huge amounts of rebar and concrete.

To understand how all of this is working out, you must go back to the start. Many years ago our county and city fathers were sold the idea of a “food and beverage” tax. The rationale was that those businesses near our outdated coliseum should help pay for its renovation. It was only fair, you see, because they were benefitting from the customers the coliseum brought to town.

The tax proved so popular with developers and government types that it was used as the fiscal strategy for reworking the entire downtown — hotels, a sports stadium, a convention center, a river walk, assorted shopping and residential complexes, the third reworking of an old entertainment district and a wealth of parking garages. Recently, it was suggested the tax should be increased to fund even larger economic-development schemes, ahem, ideas.

Does any of this make sense? We won't know for 20 years or so until the notes and bonds come due. The inexpert opinion is that there isn't the amount of commercial traffic that you would expect from such expansion.

The profit figures, if any and for whom, are kept close to the vest of the various quasi-private development groups. Nobody is keeping track of the public money that is being either leveraged or spent outright. Self-serving and self-dealing seem to be the rule. We are expected to trust a commercial real estate firm, for example, to give us critical statistics on downtown office vacancies, if that tells you anything.

But we can go back to the strategy's inception for a clue. This week, the last of the large chain restaurants adjacent to the renovated coliseum closed. Yes, those were precisely the businesses that we were told could shoulder that initial food-and-beverage tax.

How could this be?

The economist Thomas Sowell has an answer: “It is hard to imagine a more stupid or more dangerous way of making decisions than by putting those decisions in the hands of people who pay no price for being wrong.”

Much of the development, you see, is financed up front. That is, a politically incentivized developer makes some or all of the return on his investment at the signing. Again, no need for independent market-testing. The distant owners of our baseball stadium, for instance, do not live or die by the turn-stiles. Nor will they go broke if maintenance costs increase dramatically. Our city has agreed to help make good on all of that.

And many of the public officials involved have retired, some to warmer climates. You could say they built it and they went.

Education: Partisan Is Good

(Feb. 5) — Bipartisanship, the comedian George Carlin famously said, usually means some larger-than-usual deception is being carried out. That has been our experience with school board elections.

Back in the 1980s we allowed the local political machines, some of them actively corrupt and all of them black at heart, to control the election of school boards. Even so, the bosses understood that their constituencies would not take kindly to the mishandling of children's futures. They made sure that at least in this area of their purview things were accountable and sensible. Resources were to be directed in ways that benefited the children and classroom learning. Otherwise, serious larceny in other parts of the city would be put at risk.

Today, thanks to supposed reforms, elections are controlled by the so-called teachers unions, 24-7, 12-month-a-year political campaigns that knock down the occasional uprising of hapless mothers aghast at how the schools are being run.

If you can ignore the "it's for the children" mantra, you will see that students and classroom learning are not motivating factors for the unions. Rather, hiring as many teachers with as few qualifications and the most union dependency is the goal. Indeed, higher teacher pay is only secondary to usurping management prerogative and controlling the system.

The Indiana Legislature, despite more than a decade of Republican super-majority, is unwilling to take on the derangement that holds all of this together, e.g., the Indiana Collective Bargaining Act, a statist tract that would make Lenin blush. The only option, then, is to turn it all back over to the local political bosses — yet another example of the iron law of amoral policy: "compared to what, at what cost and according to whom."

Venal ambition, you see, is better than insipid Marxism. Bring back partisan school board elections.

Diversity Has its Limits

(Feb. 1) — Listening to black legislators at the Statehouse this week protesting Gov. Mike Braun's dismantling of DEI, it was clear they are driven by sincere conviction. They believe there are many more people like them who deserve to be, say, surgeons, judges, engineers and pilots, but are being unfairly denied.

Oh, you should wish that were so easy to fix. We need more such professional expertise, as diverse as possible. But it is a fact, although the reason is arguable, that American foundational blacks at this moment in history on average do not score as well on the tests required for professional licensure.

Perhaps more can be done to prepare them scholastically. The percentages, however, have remained frustratingly constant even over these last 50 years of social leveling. That is where we stand, unless you think diversity is a worthy goal in itself.

So do we ignore merit testing?

Interestingly, we tried that, not only in outright DEI appointments but in admission to professional education programs. It is easier for a black to get into law or medical school than it was a generation ago — and into flight-controller school, if we may link to recent headlines.

But columnist Steve Sailer says that in the second Obama administration we began rigging the Federal Aviation Administration tests. He

found this in a lawsuit against the administration filed by the Mountain States Legal Foundation:

“... a candidate could be awarded 15 points, the highest possible for any question, if they indicated that their lowest grades in high school were in science. . . . In contrast, an applicant was awarded only 2 points if they had a pilot’s certificate and no points were awarded for having a Control Tower Operator rating or having Instrument Flight Rules experience. . . . In addition, one question on the Biographical Questionnaire awarded an applicant 10 points, the most available for that question, if the applicant answered s/he (sic) had not been employed in the prior three years. Another question awarded 4 or 8 points if the applicant had been unemployed five or more months in the prior three years.”

Who, really, benefits from such manipulation? Not, certainly, the young black test-taker who invested in a false promise. Again, whether we like it or not, proportionally fewer blacks finally enter their chosen high-tech field.

While the social scientists are sorting that out, note that a secondary problem has arisen. Because getting admitted to a college isn’t the same thing as becoming a doctor, those socially favored candidates dead-filled slots in the various professional schools. Hypothetically, those were slots taken from candidates who ultimately would have succeeded. If so, you have a shortage of doctors, flight controllers, surgeons, engineers or what have you.

Something similar although less grievous happened in the 1980s when women flooded veterinary schools. As it turned out, they were more likely on average to interrupt or even curtail their careers to give birth and raise a family. Did that reduce the number of practicing vets and raise the cost of care?

Again, how did any of this help anyone other than the race brokers? Not certainly those citizens, black or white, men or women, in need of affordable professional services, some of mortal concern. We all want to wake up from

surgery, to drive safely over a bridge, to book a flight that doesn’t fall out of the sky.

Our legislators can protest as their political interests dictate. Our governor, though, has restored sanity to the processes of licensure, contracting and hiring. Sooner or later, please know, someone has to ensure there are enough surgeons who can surgeon, engineers who can engineer, flight controllers who can control flights. Merit matters

Counterfeit Journalism

(*Jan. 23*) — The legacy media, exemplified by our own Indianapolis Star, is having a problem exerting authority — it has none.

Nonetheless, its editors and columnists still affect the tone of earlier days when their titles were depended upon to sort out the morning’s news. Columnists Michael Hicks, James Briggs and Abdul-Haikin Shabazz have assumed the concocted morality of fact-checkers, peppering their copy with modal verbs telling us that we “should” do this or “must” do that.

We mustn’t, shouldn’t and don’t, of course, because we suspect they are fools. Their business model is a miserable failure and that reflects on their judgment generally.

James Taranto of the Wall Street Journal has called their ilk a “counterfeit authority.” Their columns imitate a judicial ruling resolving a dispute but without factual discovery or the authority of public respect.

“Whereas a court’s opinion carries the authority of law, a journalist’s opinion binds nobody,” Taranto says. “A political fact-checker is a journalist pretending to be a judge — a counterfeit authority. What we now call the ‘legacy media’ and used to call ‘mainstream’ adopted this form in reaction to the weakening of the real, if informal, authority it enjoyed in the decades after World War II.”

The presumption is plainly stated in the current issue of the AP stylebook, once a journalistic guide to spelling and grammar now turned political canon. The stylebook,

incorporated or adopted by the copy desks of our state's largest newspapers, commands that reference to black Americans be capitalized but reference to white Americans not. The rationale, according to the socially attuned algorithms at ChatGPT, is this:

"The capitalization is meant to show respect and recognition of these distinct social and political aspects of Black identity. On the other hand, 'white' is not capitalized because it is seen as a more generalized racial category. Historically, 'white' in the U.S. has been the default racial identity, often associated with a group that has held power, privilege and dominance."

So, this is punishment meted by our journalist masters for perceived violations of some unwritten and shifting law of social justice. What arrogance.

Theodore Dalrymple, writing for the Indianapolis Liberty Fund, wonders why a stylebook doesn't similarly order "Fat" and "thin" or "tall" and "Short." The stupid are not to be made clever by means of a capital letter, he extrapolates:

"The supposition that by capitalizing the word 'black,' but not the word 'white,' some benefit is being conferred on black people is both condescending and demeaning to the supposed beneficiaries. Among other things, it supposes that they are defined purely or largely by how others refer to them in newspapers or other publications. It suggests that they can, and indeed need to, be rescued or saved by the merest gesture of those higher in the social scale than they."

I worked for a newspaper that as a matter of style purposely inserted a period in Harry S Truman's name only because Truman insisted there should be none. The same newspaper prohibited for years the word "snake" because of one editor's ophidiophobia. Another routinely spelled it "potatoe" out of respect for native son Dan Quayle.

Those quirks of style make more sense than assuming blacks are so vulnerable they need prophylactic spelling. — [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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