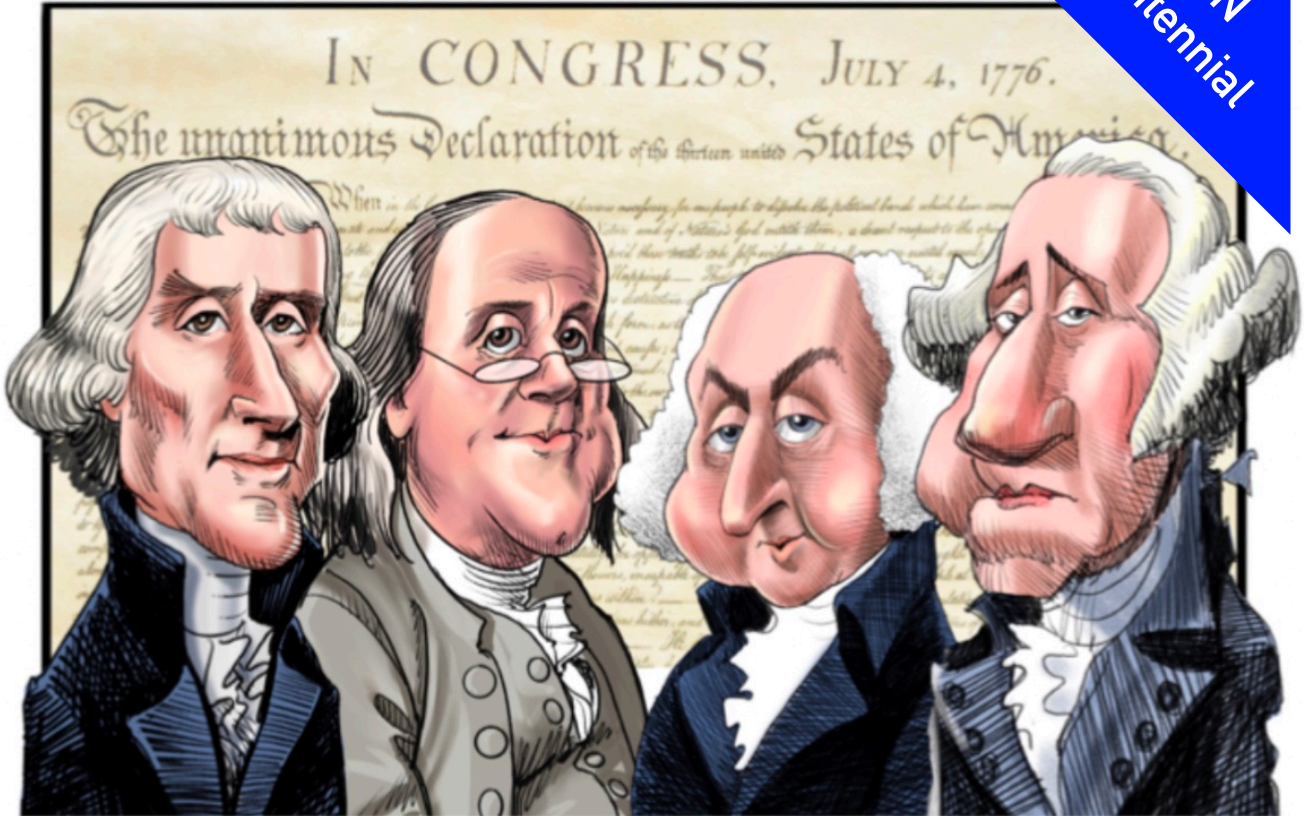


# INDIANA POLICY

Review

Summer 2026

SPECIAL EDITION  
The Semiquincentennial



(Gary Varvel)

## A Return to Founding Principles Celebrating the Declaration of Independence

“The American founding was the culmination of hundreds of years of thought, struggle, sweat, blood and sacrifice on both sides of the Atlantic. Fate drew a long arc from the meadow at Runnymede (the Magna Carta) to the streets of Philadelphia. It ran through the lives of people born and bred on the British code that no man should be denied either justice or right.” — *President Donald Trump*

*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.*



Vol. 37, No.3, Summer 2026

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## A FUTURE THAT WORKS

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

- Exalt the truths of the Declaration of Independence, especially as they apply to the interrelated freedoms of religion, property and speech.
- Emphasize the primacy of the individual in addressing all concerns.
- Recognize that equality of opportunity is sacrificed in pursuit of equality of results.

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

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# From the South Wall

## The Long Train of Usurpations

We began our celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by simply congratulating each other on being there. The polls tell us that too few understand the import of that amazing, profound American proclamation, our declaration of independence. We meant to change that.

We welcomed a sold-out spring seminar May 9 at the Hope Evangelical Covenant Church in Indianapolis. It began on a personal note, the burying of a grievance. I publicly forgave Ben Franklin for calling my German (Palantine) ancestors in Pennsylvania “swarthy, smelly boors.”

Putting that behind me, I was reminded that the Declaration is not a letter of complaint. Rather, it is an elegant explanation to the world of the philosophy of the American revolution — and it was a revolution, importantly, not a revolt.

King George “in a long train” of usurpations had turned the colonists’ world upside down. The Founders demanded that it be revolved upright again, that the proper relationship between citizen and government be restored, that the primacy of the individual should rule, not the balance in a royal checkbook.

President Donald Trump took the occasion of King Charles’s recent visit to press just that point. The President denied that America was merely an idea of the moment. Liberty, he reminded us, did not spring full blown from the head of Thomas Jefferson, however eloquent he may have been. I quote President Trump:

“The American founding was the culmination of hundreds of years of thought, struggle, sweat, blood and sacrifice on both sides of the Atlantic. Fate drew a long arc from the meadow at Runnymede (the Magna Carta) to the streets of Philadelphia. It ran through the lives of people born and bred on the British code that no man should be denied either justice or right.”

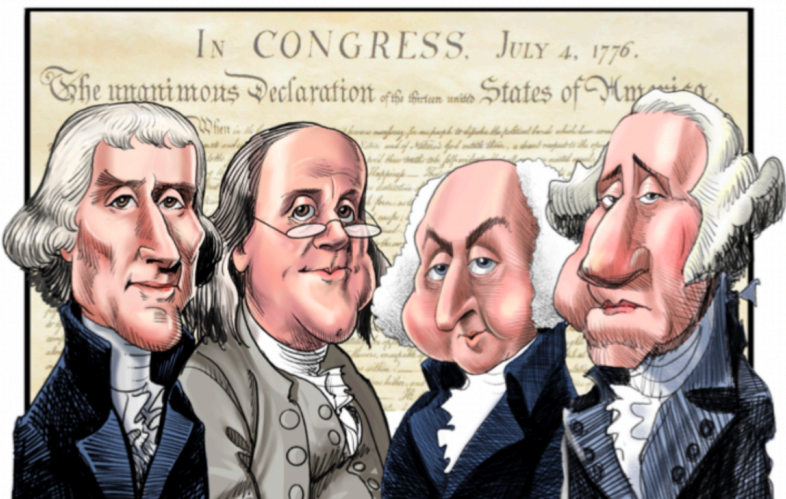
That primacy of the individual, so carefully prescribed in the Declaration, can be guiding our political mind in 2026 as much as it did at Runnymede in 1215 or in Philadelphia 561 years later. That is why we print its preamble in every issue of the Indiana Policy Review, and have done so since our beginning 37 years ago.

To summarize, the Founder’s generation insisted by force of arms, and they proved to be valiant warriors and brilliant tacticians, that Americans, even my smelly ancestors, be treated as equals to free Englishman — only better, with more effective checks and balances on government power. — *tcl*

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## There’s Still Time: "Indiana Mandate"

**YOU CAN NOW ORDER** “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles” at the member price of \$19.54 at [Amazon.com/books](https://www.amazon.com/books). With the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence upon us, the Indiana Policy Review through the lens of the Declaration examines 75 of the most critical issues facing our state.





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# George Washington

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## The Indispensable Founder

Anne Neal Petri, a speaker for the foundation's spring seminar, is regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. A lawyer by training, Petri has spent much of her career promoting history education and conservation. She served as president of the Olmsted Network, leading the celebration of Frederick Law Olmsted's 200th birthday in 2020 and the campaign to preserve the parks and public places he designed and inspired. She has headed The Garden Club of America and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which she co-founded in 1995. Portions of the following presentation are drawn from her chapter, "The Indispensable Founder: George Washington" in *What Every Student Should Know About American History and Government*, edited by Joshua M. Dunn and Michael B. Poliakoff. Copyright © 2027 by the University of Tennessee Press. Reprinted by permission.



The Semiquincentennial — it doesn't easily roll off the tongue. But it's an important anniversary and a time for all of us to reflect, as we often do on our own birthdays and anniversaries, on where we have been and where we are going.

We have an origin story. Most countries don't. We know that on July 4 — our country was formed. John Adams was clear — in words that only his Rotundity could pen:

It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.<sup>1</sup>

At least in the old days, you could assume that all Americans would celebrate as Adams exhorted, and appreciate the principal player in this origin story. It wasn't so long ago that nearly every classroom in America featured a portrait of George Washington, and every American could identify the subject of Lighthorse Harry Lee's words: "First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."

But the chasm between those days and today is vast. An op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* recently documented articles in the journal of the American Studies Association. There was not a single one that praised America.

Ken Burns addressed this issue when he released "The American Revolution." He confessed his hope that it would help reconnect the American people to this origin story. Hundreds of thousands of men and women have died for our country — and the principles on which it was founded. But do we know those principles? Do we remember the sacrifice?

It is perhaps not surprising that many commentators have suggested that the Semiquincentennial celebration might actually divide us more than bring us together. *Time* magazine — a full four years before the celebration — warned, "get ready for controversy." The author predicted political dissension between those who wanted to sanitize the past and those who wanted to present a nuanced story from diverse perspectives.

Let me suggest as we start our conversation today, that these times — fraught times — are not unlike the times in which the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association got our start. And let me suggest that the reason the Association came together to save Mount Vernon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century — namely to unite the American people through Washington's character and leadership — is as powerful today as it was then.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776, <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760703jasecond#:~:text=It percent 20ought percent 20to percent 20be percent 20commemorated,this percent 20Time percent 20forward percent 20forever percent 20more.>

Let's begin where the Ladies began. The piazza of George Washington's mansion was held up by ships' masts; the estate was no longer productive; the country was on the brink of Civil War and neither the federal government nor the Commonwealth of Virginia would answer the call to save the home of General Washington. A mere 50 years after Washington's death — the home of our first president — was nearly lost forever. How *could* this happen?

Indeed, that was the question of one Louisa Bird Cunningham, who noted the condition as she traveled down the Potomac in a steamboat.

In a letter to her daughter, she expressed her dismay:

I was painfully distressed at the ruin and desolation of the home of Washington. If the men of America have seen fit to allow the home of its most respected hero to go to ruin, why can't the women of America band together to save it?<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, why not? The rest as we like to say is history. None other than Louisa's daughter, Ann Pamela Cunningham, answered the call. She and a remarkable group of intrepid women soon became the founders and early leaders of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. These women *could not vote*, they *could not hold property* in their own right — but they banded together to do what the feds and the Commonwealth of Virginia refused to do, namely, rescue the home of our first president.

With a civil war looming, Ann Pamela Cunningham realized that in order to establish a broad fundraising base, the campaign to save



Ann Pamela Cunningham, Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. The three illustrations in this article are selected from 57 slides that supported the presentation.

Mount Vernon would have to be national in scope. She set out “to constitute Mount Vernon as a *national beacon*, around which the people of the whole country shall rally.” Her idea was to establish a network of supporters, all working under the direction of a core group of ladies, each of whom would represent a single state.

Yes, they welcomed philanthropists. But they were not interested in relying only on them. Instead, they had faith in the American people to step up and support the cause. From the smallest schoolchild to the most battle worn veteran, Americans were asked to give what they could to save Washington's home and help the Ladies raise \$200,000: *The dime or even the penny of the child will be received as respectfully as the most liberal contribution of the wealthy. Let those who cannot give a dollar give a Shilling. The name of every contributor will be recorded, unless it is otherwise desired.*

Saving Mount Vernon was the first successful grassroots fundraising campaign. The names of those who gave \$1 or more were recorded in the Mount Vernon Record to inspire others to support the cause.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/early-history-of-the-mount-vernon-ladies-association>

Cunningham enlisted many prominent partners in the campaign. One of the most important was former Massachusetts Senator, Governor and Harvard President, Edward Everett. I am sure this crowd recognizes the name. And for what is he most famous? . . . the speaker *before* Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address. Everett raised more than a third of the dollars needed by lecturing on “George Washington, Builder of the Union,” a topic fraught with deep meaning as the conflict between the North and South began to escalate.

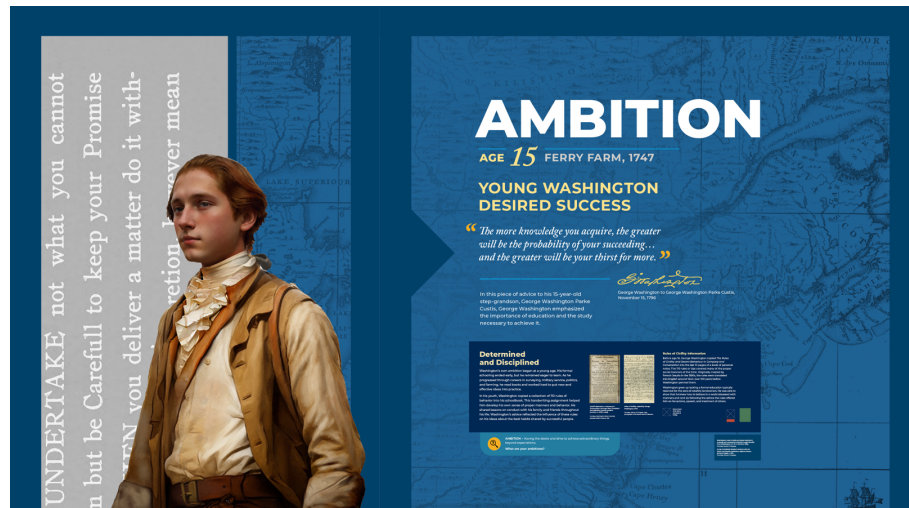
He and the Association were all working toward the same goal: to lift up George Washington as a way to unite all Americans prior to the Civil War. Hence, the Association was entitled the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union and the mission was to be “above” politics. That has been our ruling ethos ever since.

Alas, the Union did not hold. And the Ladies’ preservation activities largely came to a halt during the war.

But even in the midst of the Civil War, the Ladies ensured that soldiers from both sides could visit Mount Vernon, perched as it was between North and South, establishing early on that Mount Vernon would remain neutral territory.

Order No. 13 signed by General Winfield Scott gave the Board secretary free access to Alexandria and declared that soldiers should lay down their arms.

While our minutes do not mention Tocqueville, the Ladies were the embodiment of the vibrant civil society he outlined — free associations



Courtesy, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, panel displayed in the Donald W. Reynolds Education Center and Museum.

which came together to do what the government *would not* or need not do.

In the beginning, as today, the Association understood that the survival of the country depended upon educating people about their extraordinary founding and the indispensable role played by George Washington.

Indeed, George Washington, John Adams, and others were emphatic — the survival of a democratic republic relies on an educated populace. They feared — and were quite open about it — that succeeding generations would forget the sacrifices that had been fundamental to America’s creation. Washington and others foresaw that the loss of American memory would undermine the great experiment that the Founders had so valiantly undertaken. As Washington wrote:

Every valuable end of government is answered by teaching the people themselves to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority. . . .<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> George Washington, Farewell Address, 1796, <https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-source-collections/primary-source-collections/article/washington-s-farewell-address-1796/>



But without that memory, he feared for future generations.

“Our cause is noble, It is the cause of mankind and the danger to it springs from ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

Today, that is where we find ourselves. The danger to our republic springs largely from ourselves. Recent surveys show that a significant percentage of Americans are no longer proud to be Americans. And they fail to know some of the most basic information when it comes to civic engagement.

That is why we at Mount Vernon are working each and every day to keep Washington first. That’s why — today — I am calling on all of you to help us reignite passion about the story of our Founders and the legacy of Washington — a legacy of civilian rule, peaceful transfer of power, and government by consent of the governed.

That is why I was proud to sign on to a “Broadside for the Nation,” recently released by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, calling on American colleges and universities to reinstitute an American history requirement for all college graduates.

But let me add to that: To understand our history, we must also know George Washington.

In modern America, presentism thrives and our forebears are judged by today’s standards. Washington is often reduced to nothing but a slave-owning hypocrite or a prig who cut down the cherry tree.

But, there is good news today — as they say on NBC news. In an academic world that regularly rejects the Great Man theory, recent scholarship and open-minded reexamination are helping to paint a new picture of the General.

Annette Gordon Reed, James Thomas Flexner, Christopher Brown and others agree. Washington was imperfect, yet he was the glue that kept the army together. He was the man who helped roll

out a new and independent nation. We would have no country without George Washington.

Even so, Washington — probably more than any of the other founding fathers — suffers from the marble-statue syndrome. Being first, it turns out, is not always the best place to be. Washington’s indispensable role has rendered him almost untouchable — an epic figure whose remarkable legacy seems distant from the care and concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

We of course have no photos or drawings of Washington in his youth. But we do have descriptions and later paintings which have allowed us — thanks to the power of AI — to make some educated guesses. (Who wouldn’t fall in love with the adorable fellow portrayed on page 7?)

That is surely our goal at Mount Vernon. We want Americans to embrace George Washington in their minds and in their hearts — as the Indispensable Founder, whose example is more powerful than ever.

Far from a one-dimensional figure, Washington was a multi-faceted leader whose life, actions, and political teachings are essential to the American story. Knowing Washington is central to knowing ourselves and understanding why the United States is a great nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to a “more perfect union.”

So let’s explore a bit — why is Washington indispensable and why should all American college students know his story?

### **Washington Is First in War**

As I said earlier, we have an origin story, the American Revolution. Was winning the American Revolution inevitable? The answer is no. In the new Education Center exhibit at Mount Vernon, George Washington: A Revolutionary Life, we offer an immersive experience so that children and adults can partake in the military struggle — cannons firing and snow falling.

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<sup>4</sup>George Washington to James Warren, March 31, 1779, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-19-02-0651>



John Trumbull, General George Washington Resigning His Commission, U.S. Capitol Rotunda, Oil on Canvas, 12' x 18'

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Visitors can see Washington and his horse, his valet William Lee, and the Life Guard at Valley Forge where we lost 2,000 men to malnutrition and disease.

They can see his camp bed. And they can understand what Washington achieved. In 1775, there was no army, there was no country, and yet George Washington was able over a period of eight years by force of character to build a disciplined, committed band of brothers who defeated the most powerful army on earth.

#### **Washington Establishes Civilian Rule**

Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon, Stalin — when military leaders gain power, they don't give it up. They make themselves king. The exception — George Washington.

Just think about Newburgh. When soldiers were starving, received no pay, and sought to march on Congress, Washington urged them to be patient. Reaching for his glasses, he said: "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my

spectacles for I have not only grown gray, but almost blind in the service of my country."

Just months later, he stopped in Annapolis on his way to Mount Vernon to relinquish his military commission to the Continental Congress.

This one act was so remarkable that King George III in England is reported to have exclaimed, "If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world." Students must understand that voluntarily relinquishing power is a great legacy and unique part of our democratic republic.

#### **Washington Displays Character and Leadership**

Character — Does it really matter? Yes. It does. Every person who leaves Mount Vernon goes through our Great Hall which outlines Washington's character. Perseverance, ingenuity, wisdom, honesty, humility, vision, ambition are enduring principles of virtuous public service.

This is the very reason that Parson Weems told the story of George Washington and the cherry tree. It is a story of honesty and honor, qualities

that today remain essential to a free and happy nation.

### **Washington Helps Create a New Political Order**

While most Americans credit Jefferson and Madison with establishing the key principles of a democratic republic, in fact, George Washington played a critical role in laying the groundwork for that republic.

First in 1774, he and his neighbor George Mason collaborated on what is known as the Fairfax Resolves. In it, the two patriots created one of the most comprehensive lists of colonial grievances against British rule. They outlined key principles — taxation without representation; uniting the colonies; self government — that were later embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

Thirteen years later, Washington again plays a seminal role, this time serving as the chair of the Constitutional Convention.

Far from being a mere figurehead, Washington was deeply engaged to ensure that 13 largely independent states could come together. While he acknowledged that the Constitution was not perfect, he was also clear: “It was the best that can be obtained . . . without dissolution of the Union.”

He urged the American public to embrace the Constitution with confidence, noting that it contained a provision for its own amendment.

### **Washington Frames Executive Power**

While the Constitution established checks and balances, the Founders acknowledged that this new form of government would ultimately depend upon the honest and just application of the law. Here again, Washington set the example, proving that an executive can be something other than a king.

In characteristic modesty, Washington relayed in the First Inaugural Address, that he was “unpracticed in the duties of civil administration.” However, over the next eight years, he demonstrated that an executive could govern without corruption or despotism by acting with self-restraint and adherence to the rule of law. During his service, Washington established a cabinet, resolved the debt crisis, selected a national capital, called for neutrality — a policy that shaped American foreign policy for more than a century; and established the notion of term limits. His decision to step down voluntarily after two terms was a precedent maintained without constitutional prescription until the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt.

### **Washington Promotes Religious Freedom**

While the First Amendment ultimately established freedom of religion, it was Washington who helped define the critical role of religious freedom in a republic.

His most extraordinary campaign to support religious freedom came when he served as president. Traveling up and down the coast to “meet” his constituents, he chose to attend services of many denominations. Often in response to inquiries, he sent letters to diverse congregations — including Catholics, Methodists and Baptists — outlining his belief that an inherent right of all Americans was religious liberty. His letter to the Jewish congregation of the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, today remains a powerful statement on the contours of religious liberty:

It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its



protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.<sup>5</sup>

In his Farewell Address, Washington reminded his fellow citizens of the importance of religion and morality in the political life of the United States:

Let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.<sup>6</sup>

### **Washington Pursues Innovation and Experimentation**

Washington believed fervently that experimentation and innovation would be central to American success and prosperity. He recognized that enlightened agricultural practices could help build a prosperous nation.

For years, he and eminent British agriculturist Arthur Young corresponded about bringing the new husbandry to the New World. Washington abandoned tobacco and moved to wheat, corn and hemp. He developed a seven-year crop rotation to ensure healthy soils and to implement the best principles of scientific and regenerative agriculture.

He designed a 16-sided barn that was both beautiful and utilitarian, providing him with a way to thresh wheat in all seasons and to keep the prized wheat under lock and key. Animals and livestock also gained his attention, resulting in his breeding a unique American animal — the mule — that could support American farmers and

entrepreneurs with special resilience and strength.

### **Washington Strengthens Economic Unity and National Identity**

As a surveyor and soldier, George Washington observed the frontier and saw the immense opportunities that would await American settlers there. To establish a strong and unified nation, he took steps to promote economic prosperity beyond his own estate.

In 1785, he turned his attention to the creation of the James River and Potomac River Companies. This Potowmack Project was a business enterprise, one, Washington hoped, that would help "bind those people to us by a chain which never can be broken."<sup>7</sup>

Writing to Benjamin Harrison, the Governor of Virginia and the signer of the Constitution, Washington noted:

I need not remark to you Sir, that the flanks & rear of the United States are possessed by other powers — & formidable ones, too; nor, how necessary it is to apply the cement of interest, to bind all parts of the Union together by indissoluble bonds — especially that part of it, which lies immediately west of us, with the middle States. For, what ties, let me ask, shou'd we have upon those people? How entirely unconnected with them shall we be, and what troubles may we not apprehend, if the Spaniards on their right, & Gt Britain on their left, instead of throwing stumbling blocks in their way as they now do, should hold out lures for their trade and alliance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, Aug. 18, 1790, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-06-02-0135>

<sup>6</sup> George Washington, Farewell Address, 1796, <https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-source-collections/primary-source-collections/article/washington-s-farewell-address-1796/>

<sup>7</sup> George Washington to Jacob Read, Nov. 3, 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-02-02-0105>.

<sup>8</sup> George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, Oct. 10, 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/j7xq>.

By creating domestic infrastructure, he could give Americans a pathway to self-sufficiency that would diminish the need for international alliances and support.

### **Washington Frees His Slaves and Sets an Example**

In the early years of his life, Washington thought little about the institution of slavery. He and the Founding Fathers were part of a global economic system where slavery played a critical — and largely unquestioned — role in the production of goods. He and Martha relied on hundreds of slaves on his five farms. But over time, economic and moral concerns led Washington to condemn the practice.

While he took no public action, in the 1780s he wrote candidly to friends and family members about his desire for a gradual legislative end. In a letter dated Sept. 9, 1786, he emphatically vowed that he would never “possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted (by the legislature) by which slavery in this country may be abolished by slow, sure & imperceptible degrees.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1799, upon his death, the most prominent founding father chose to set an example for the world: He freed the slaves he owned and provided for their care. And he did so in a will that he knew would be published widely.

### **Washington Calls for Civic Education**

Let me conclude by returning to the topic today — an educated citizenry. From the

beginning, Washington and his colleagues raised concerns about the fragility of the Republic. To succeed, they knew that the system they were creating demanded an educated and virtuous citizenry to uphold it. Jefferson noted: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.”

In this country we are not united by religion, ethnicity or race. We are bound by ideas. And each generation must commit to relearning them. Washington was deeply concerned that unity would be undermined by an ill-informed populace.

He was also concerned that overweening partisanship would weaken national unity and open the door to foreign influence and corruption. So, in his farewell address, he exhorted us to emphasize those things that unite us rather than divide us.

In this anniversary year, we have an opportunity to renew enthusiasm for what Washington called that “political experiment on which the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government was laid.” We have an obligation to insist that all students are introduced to American history and that they learn about the first and indispensable Founder, George Washington.

I hope that I can count on all of you to keep George Washington “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” Restoring civic knowledge and appreciation would be a most fitting gift to the nation and appropriate tribute to the indispensable founder. ♦

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<sup>9</sup> George Washington to John Francis Mercer, Sept. 9, 1786

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# Faith and the Founding Fathers

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## The Indispensable Spirit

Gary Varvel, a speaker for the foundation's spring seminar, is a nationally recognized political cartoonist whose work is distributed by Creators Syndicate. As the Indianapolis Star cartoonist for 24 years, Gary won the National Headliners Award, the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, the National Cartoonists Society Reuben Award and dozens of other honors.



**H**ow do you “fundamentally transform” a nation? Answer: Through education.

In March 1996, Steven Morris wrote an article that originally appeared in the Los Angeles Times titled, “The Founding Fathers Were Not Christians.”

In it he claims “the Christian Right is trying to rewrite the history of the United States to force their religion on others.”

Morris declares, “The early presidents and patriots were generally Deists or Unitarians, believing in some form of impersonal Providence but rejecting the divinity of Jesus and the absurdities of the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea that the Founders were Deists or atheists dates back to the 1970s, and as it gained traction it established the assumption that the Founders created a secular nation.

If that's true it should be easy to prove through the Founders words and actions.

In the U.S. Capitol Rotunda hangs an 1843 painting by Robert Weir of the Pilgrims praying with an open Geneva Bible in the middle of the painting. Above them, the inscription “God With Us” that captures the certainty underpinning their journey.

Also in the Rotunda hangs a painting of the “Baptism of Pocahontas” by John Gadsby

Chapman in 1840. It seems odd for atheists to include these images in the halls of government.

What about the beginning of public education?

In 1647, settlers in Massachusetts wrote the Old Deluder Satan Law which stated, “It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue . . .”

The law ordered townships to hire a teacher to train children to read so they could study the Bible.

In 1690, the New England Primer was published which was filled with scripture and used Bible verses to teach the alphabet.

Ok, so that was before the “atheist-Deist founders” became more enlightened. Let's focus, then, on their backgrounds.

Twenty-nine of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence held the equivalent of seminary degrees. So over half of the atheists graduated from Bible college. And signer John Witherspoon was a Presbyterian minister and the president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).

Let's look at the Constitutions of the original 13 Colonies during 1776-1784. Nine of them required a profession of faith in Jesus Christ in order to hold political office. For example:

Delaware's 1776 Constitution stated, “I, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; and I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration.”<sup>2</sup>

Pennsylvania's Constitution required that officeholders pledge: “I do believe in one God, the creator and governor of the universe, the rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked. And I do acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by Divine inspiration.”<sup>3</sup>

That sounds very Christian. It's puzzling that atheists and Deists would require their leaders to be professing Christians.

Consider Massachusetts Gov. John Hancock, known as the signer of the Declaration with the largest signature; he issued at least 22 formal prayer proclamations. He asked his state to pray, “that all nations may bow to the scepter of our Lord



and Savior Jesus Christ and that the whole earth may be filled with his glory.”<sup>4</sup>

That doesn’t sound very atheistic.

The Founders were also greatly influenced by the clergy. The preaching of Revs. George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, William Tennant, Samuel Davies and many others helped set the colonies aflame spiritually. Their sermons were printed and distributed throughout the colonies and were credited for the First Great Awakening which lasted from 1730-1770. Benjamin Franklin, known as a Deist, printed the sermons of his friend George Whitefield.

When the Founders met to debate and draft the founding documents, their understanding of the Bible guided them in their decisions. In 1988, Political scientist Donald Lutz surveyed the political literature of America’s founding. His findings were published in the American Political Science Review. He discovered that the Bible accounted for approximately one-third of the references in the literature he surveyed.<sup>5</sup>

In 1926, on the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, President Calvin Coolidge said:

“These thoughts [in the Declaration] can largely be traced back to what (Rev.) John Wise was writing in 1710.” Wise said, “Every man must be acknowledged equal to every man.” Again, “The end of all good government is to cultivate humanity and promote the happiness of all and the good of every man in all his rights, his life, liberty, estate, honor,” and so forth . . .

Wise’s works were reprinted in 1772 and have been declared to have been nothing less than a textbook of liberty for our Revolutionary Fathers.<sup>6</sup>

During the Continental Congress on Sept. 16, 1774, John Adams wrote a letter to his wife Abigail. He gives us a glimpse of how the Bible impacted the Founders. He wrote that they asked Mr. Duche, an episcopal Clergyman, to read prayers to the assembly. The next day, Psalm 35 was read and Adams wrote, “I never saw a greater effect upon an audience. It seemed as if Heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that Morning.” The Psalm calls for the Lord to “fight against those who fight against me.”

This doesn’t sound very atheistic.

At the Constitutional Convention on Thursday, June 28, 1787, the Founders deliberations were failing. Some were contemplating leaving when 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin stood and gave an extemporaneous speech calling for prayer. He said:

“In this situation of this Assembly groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the Divine Protection.

“Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a Superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance.

“I have lived, sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth — that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that ‘except the Lord build the House they labor in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel . . . I therefore beg leave to move — that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service.”

After three days, the members returned and completed a constitution which has outlasted all other nations on earth. While other countries



Robert W. Weir (1843)

average drafting a constitution every 17 years, ours has lasted 250.

It has been said that the U.S. Constitution does not mention God. But the principles within the document are based on Bible verses.

- Our Republican form of government comes from Exodus 18:21.
- Three branches of government come from Isaiah 33:22.
- Separation of powers comes from Jeremiah 17:9.
- Our president cannot be foreign-born comes from Deuteronomy 17:15.
- Tax exemption for churches comes from Ezra 7:4.

Just as it's true that the philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will become the philosophy of the government in the next, the Founders had advice for what should be taught.

One of the lesser-known Founders is Benjamin Rush. He was not only a physician (often called the Father of American Medicine) and a signer of the Declaration but also a ratifier of the Constitution, a Treasurer of the U.S. Mint and a Surgeon General. In 1791, he wrote, "A Defense of the Use of the

Bible in Schools." In this 16-page pamphlet he wrote:

"The Bible, when not read in schools, is seldom read in any subsequent period of life . . . [T]he Bible . . . should be read in our schools in preference to all other books because it contains the greatest portion of that kind of knowledge which is calculated to produce private and public happiness."

He concluded with this:

"I lament that we waste so much time and money in punishing crimes and take so little pains to prevent them. We profess to be republicans, and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government; that is, the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible"<sup>7</sup>

Our first president George Washington wrote in his farewell address that religion and morality were "indispensable supports" for good government. "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man

claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens . . . And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. . . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”<sup>8</sup>

Our Second president John Adams wrote: “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion . . . Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”<sup>9</sup>

Adams also wrote: “Without religion, this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in polite company: I mean hell.”

Adams’ words were prophetic. Our secular (godless) society today has devolved into the hell that Adams warned about. Unfortunately as politicians debate how to constrain crime, they never admit that secularism has failed miserably. They never arrive at Adams’ solution — religion is the only power capable of restraining evil in the hearts of humans.

Even our least religious Founder and third president Thomas Jefferson believed the importance of religion. On one wall in the Jefferson Memorial quotes him saying, “God who gave us life, gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever.”

Jefferson authored the phrase “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights . . .” Certainly not a secular phrase.

On Dec. 4, 1800, while serving as Vice President and President-elect, Jefferson presided over the Senate when it approved the use of the Capitol as a place for worship.

Eyewitnesses, including Margaret Bayard Smith, noted that Jefferson was a “regular attendant” at these services. He often rode his horse to the Capitol to attend, regardless of bad weather.

That is strange behavior even for a Deist who wanted a secular society.

John Adams’ son, John Quincy Adams became our sixth president. In a letter he wrote to his son, George Washington Adams, he explained morality this way:

“There are three points of doctrine the belief of which forms the foundation of all morality. The first is the existence of God; the second is the immortality of the human soul; and the third is a future state of rewards and punishments. Suppose it possible for a man to disbelieve either of these three articles of faith and that man will have no conscience, he will have no other law than that of the tiger or the shark. The laws of man may bind him in chains or may put him to death, but they never can make him wise, virtuous, or happy.”<sup>10</sup>

He was right. We have too many tigers and sharks in our society today.

After the 1963 Supreme Court decision banned the Bible from being taught in schools, and Darwinism took its place, generations of people were taught there is no God, life after death or judgment and we have witnessed our culture become immoral and corrupt. When you teach children that they are just evolved animals, we shouldn’t be surprised when they act like animals.

I realize that Abraham Lincoln is not a Founding Father, but he recognized the nation’s need for God in the midst of the Civil War. On March 30, 1863 he issued a proclamation for a day of humiliation, prayer and fasting. The proclamation began with:

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, and to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in Holy Scripture, and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.”

It continues:

“We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no





John Gadsby Chapman (1840)

other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God . . . we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us. It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended power, to confess our national sins and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

While it’s true that Lincoln was never baptized or joined a church, He must’ve read the Bible a lot because his speeches were filled with references from the Scriptures.

In a book called, “Lincoln Memorial Album,” published in 1882. Lincoln replied to an Illinois Clergyman:

“When I left Springfield I asked the people to pray for me. I was not a Christian. When I buried my son, the severest trial of my life, I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ. Yes, I do love Jesus.”

After 250 years what should America do to endure?

- The Puritans said the people would become “God-fearing and law-abiding citizens if they could read the Bible and sermons.”
- Washington said, “religion and morality were “indispensable supports” for good government.”
- Even Deist Ben Franklin said, “without (God’s) concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel.”
- Abraham Lincoln proposed that the Civil War happened because, “We have forgotten God.”
- And a hundred years ago, President Calvin Coolidge said, “Unless the faith of the American in these religious convictions is to endure, the principles of our Declaration will perish.”

I add my voice to these men. May God bless America again. ♦

## Endnotes

1. <https://ffrf.org/fttoday/march-1996/articles-march-1996/the-founding-fathers-were-not-christians/>
2. Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library. [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/deo2.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/deo2.asp)

3. [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/pao8.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pao8.asp)
4. <https://wallbuilders.com/resource/proclamation-thanksgiving-day-1784-massachusetts/>
5. <https://americanheritage.org/the-influence-of-the-bible-on-americas-founding-era-the-most-cited-source/>
6. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-celebration-the-150th-anniversary-the-declaration-independence-philadelphia>
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8. George Washington - <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc21/pdf/GPO-CDOC-106sdoc21.pdf>
9. John Adams - <https://wallbuilders.com/founding-fathers-jesus-christianity-bible/#FN2>
10. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-03-02-2029>

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# The Panel Discussion

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## What Every Indiana College Graduate Should Know about the Founding

**W**hat should every American know about the founding? Or more specifically, what should every Indiana college graduate know? We gathered together a distinguished group of panelists to lead us to some answers.

**Andrea Neal**, our moderator and a writer and editor for the quarterly Indiana Policy Review, is the former editorial page editor of the Indianapolis Star. Neal is the author of several books, including the first full-length biography of Vice President Mike Pence, “Pence: The Path to Power” and “Road Trip: A Pocket History of Indiana.” Most recently, she edited “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles,” a collection of 75 monographs on how the principles of the Declaration of Independence apply to current Indiana issues. Neal, who taught English and U.S. History after leaving the Star, was inducted into the Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame in 2019.



**Cole Jones** is associate professor of history at Purdue University where he has taught for the past 11 years. His specialty is U.S. political history, especially the history of the American Revolution. Dr. Jones is the author of “Captives of Liberty: Prisoners of War and the Politics of Vengeance in the American Revolution,” available on Amazon. He is currently working on a book about Loyalist resistance to the American



Revolution, which will be published by the University of North Carolina Press in 2028.

**Andrew Ireland** is the state representative serving District 90, which includes parts of Franklin and Perry Townships in Indianapolis. Rep. Ireland was elected in 2024 after serving as former Deputy Attorney General for the State of Indiana where he assisted with all aspects of civil litigation including co-authoring briefs in appeals before the U.S. Supreme Court. He is now in private practice with a focus on labor and employment law.



**Sarah Skwire** is Senior Program Officer at the Liberty Fund, a private educational foundation that publishes books, conducts conferences and offers online resources related to individual liberty - from ancient times through today. Dr. Skwire has authored dozens of academic articles on subjects ranging from the broken-window fallacy to Shakespeare to zombies, for publications as varied as Literature and Medicine, The George Herbert Journal and The Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization.



**Eric Schansberg** is a professor of economics at I.U. Southeast in New Albany and adjunct scholar with the Indiana Policy Review Foundation. He is the author of two books on public policy: “Poor Policy: How Government Harms the Poor” and “Turn Neither to the Right Nor to the Left: A Thinking Christian’s Guide to Politics and Public Policy.” Dr. Schansberg has written hundreds of academic journal and popular-press articles as well as a helpful guide for families: “College 101: What Students and Parents Should Know about Universities.” Available on Amazon. And most recently, he’s the author of “Gen Men: What the Men of Genesis Can Teach Us Today.”





## The Discussion

*We're going to start with a lightning round, which means each gets one minute to answer the same question. In his annual address to Congress in 1810, President Madison said it is universally admitted that "a well-instructed people alone can be permanently a free people." Here we are on the eve of the United States' 250th birthday. Are we a well-instructed people? What might Madison think of us? And we'll go from Professor Jones left to right, ending with Professor Schansberg.*

**JONES:** First, thank you so much for inviting me. I just have to say that the opinions I express today are my own and do not reflect Purdue University or the state of Indiana. I'm a public servant, so with that out of the way, I think Madison, looking at our moment, there'd be a lot that he would find really encouraging, even miraculous. We have more information at our fingertips right now than he could possibly have imagined. Books were a huge commodity in the 18th century, they were expensive, and to build a library was a real challenge. So we have democratized knowledge in a way I think Madison would be thrilled, but with that, I think our patience for new information and our attention span has waned, and very often I think we fall into confirmation bias, where we see information we agree with and move on. That can really lead to problems, especially when you're trying to cultivate an active citizenry of people actively involved in the Republic.

**IRELAND:** Good afternoon, everybody. I want to key in on the word "well-instructed." I think we're incredibly well instructed for many of the reasons the professor just shared. We have incredible access to information. It's all on this little device here in my pocket, right? I can pull up every document that the founders ever could have accessed, and more. We have more access to information today than the richest man in the world of that time, which is an incredible thing, but are we well informed? Are we actually understanding and appreciating that, particularly in context? I think we're doing a better job now as a state and as a country of maybe at least knowing the basics of the founding, knowing the documents,

knowing what they say, but not appreciating them in context, understanding what they mean. You know, 250 years is an incredible thing, but it's still a blip in the history of time. Understanding the principles that the country is based off of is really important, too.

**SKWIRE:** Thank you for having me here today. It's a real pleasure. As it was a pleasure to visit with the Boatmen a while back. Socratic education and public education are some things that I care about enormously. I do think that there is a lot about America today that Madison would recognize. One of the things he would recognize is the amount of faction in America, and both the challenges and the usefulness of that kind of faction. I think that our divisions are also an opportunity for education and for reaching out to people who are unlike us and to people with profoundly different ways of thinking than we might have in an individual family or in an individual town. Our founders valued the process of debate and discussion enormously, and you see that in their writing, and you see it in the culture of pamphlets published during the Revolutionary War period. Debate was on the streets, it was public, it was constant, and every citizen felt him and herself to be a part of that debate. I would love to see us encourage that kind of vigorous debate on our campuses again, and in our high schools again.

**SCHANSBERG:** Glad to be here — and thanks to you all for coming as well. This generation may have a bit more knowledge or at least, information. But to an economist, the more interesting angle comes from a school of thought called "public choice economics," which emphasizes rational ignorance. The idea is that we're all ignorant about a lot of stuff — and it's rational to be so, because the benefits of getting more information are outweighed by the cost. And this is really true in politics. I have very little to offer the political realm; I have a vote and 100 bucks I might send to a candidate. So we're all basically morons about public public policy, and we need to acknowledge it. This is rational ignorance. It's rational that even a professional economist like me knows very, very little about politics and public policy. But the larger problem

today is what Bryan Caplan calls “irrational ignorance,” where you take this ignorance, and you throw in dogmatism on top of it. If you look at the way public debate unfolds today, irrational ignorance is the bane of what we see. If we all knew we were morons, then it wouldn't be that big of a deal. But people pretend they're not — or imagine they're not — and this causes all sorts of trouble.

. . .

*With the exception of Dr. Schansberg, you all had a slightly more positive take on the question than I was expecting. So I'm going to introduce the next question with just a bit of data. According to a 2024 multiple choice survey conducted by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 60 percent of college students could not identify the term lengths for senators and members of the House, and 48 percent believed the President, not Congress, has the power to declare war. For my next question, let's consider the role the K-12 system plays in developing historic and civic literacy. Professor Jones, do your students at Purdue come to you with a substantial understanding of American history and government? Have they been well prepared by their high schools for the content you teach?*

**JONES:** The short answer is no, and it's a disappointing answer, but I don't think it's the kids' fault, nor do I want to blame my hardworking colleagues at the K through 12 level. I think the issue is much larger, and it's much more rooted in America's past, deep into the 20th century, when we, as a society, came to jettison history, we came to say history, it's not progress, it's not future-oriented, it's not going to get us that next technologically focused job, and so therefore, at the secondary level, history got subsumed into social studies, and then even that part has been relegated by comparison to the STEM disciplines. I teach at a STEM university, to be fair, and when my students come to Purdue, they're here to get a job in STEM, and this is a pre-professional degree for them; they're not here to learn about the origins of the American republic, or their rights and responsibilities as citizens of that republic, and I can't see a solution other than real structural change, where we as a society have to come

together and say we value this, it matters, the founders would want us to know their history, and until that happens, I don't see any profound change.

. . .

*Professor Schansberg, how about your students who are studying economics, not history, but these disciplines are interrelated and have impact on each other in many ways. Could you sort of talk about the level of preparation you're seeing, and what they're missing?*

**SCHANSBERG:** We're a liberal admissions university, and over time I haven't really seen a big difference in our students. If they're worse at history than they used to be, this might be the case. But my top concerns would be they're not great at reading, math, and critical thinking. So, to the extent there's been a decline in overall education, history is a piece of that. I do agree with Dr. Jones' point about progressivism. We live in a time when “progress” is held at a higher level, and implicitly this is going to denigrate history.

. . .

*Representative Ireland, let's talk from the legislative vantage. What is your opinion of how well the K to 12 system is doing to educate Hoosier children in history and civics and government? And if you're satisfied, what has led you to that conclusion? If not, what needs to be done?*

**IRELAND:** A couple of pieces here. One, I think there are some really incredible examples out there of great civics education involving not just high school but really much younger students. Maybe the founding documents aren't quite at their reading comprehension level, but still, you know, they are getting involved in the historical aspect of where this country came from. I'll tell you the three great honors of my life were marrying a woman who's way out of my league, our little baby girl, and then in eighth grade, I won the middle school We the People Championship. We the People is such an incredible example of what can be done. Today I volunteer as a judge in the program. You have eighth graders, seventh graders, who look like they're about this tall, and

they're over there telling me things that even I don't know. It's really impressive. I had an incredible teacher in eighth grade, Stephanie Motz, incredibly gifted teacher, willing to invest in her students, and it paid off. I definitely wouldn't be doing what I am doing today if it wasn't for some of the things that she's done. And so, how do you replicate that? How do you take that and put that in a bottle and you sell it to the rest of the schools in Indiana? It's something we struggled with. I think at the Statehouse it's pretty easy to mandate a curriculum, and we do that, but you know, I think we have to go a step further of really involving students, not just, here's the information, read it in the book, check the box, and move on.

. . .

*As a former We the People teacher, I'd like to endorse the value of that program and the funding the Indiana legislature has provided, although I'm under the impression that that funding has been cut. Can you comment on that?*

**IRELAND:** That is my understanding as well. I will say I'm hopeful for the next budget cycle that is going to be something that we're going to correct because I think it is a really important program, certainly something I took a lot of advantage of as a student

*Dr. Skwire, let's stipulate that many Hoosier students do not enter college with broad exposure to the great writings and documents of the founding, such pieces as George Washington's farewell address or the Emancipation Proclamation. Would it be possible to create a reading list that would be assigned to every high school student as a part of their history or government class, so we know that there is that common knowledge base, that common understanding of what Indiana high school students know, and if so, what would you put on that list?*

**SKWIRE:** I love a core curriculum. I like a nice broad definition of what a core curriculum might contain. I think that there are some really obvious answers: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution. There are some things that we don't

even need to mention putting on the list like that. So I want to give you a couple of things that are maybe a little bit less obvious. I would say no student should get out of high school without reading one of the documents that Dede mentioned, which is Washington's letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport. I'd like to make a particular case for that this week because literally last night and the day before I was helping to host a delegation of 30 Israelis visiting Indianapolis who came here because they knew that Indianapolis had made great steps for itself as a city, and they were here to sort of see the great strides that Indianapolis had made and to think about the way that they could bring that kind of civic leadership and those kind of public-private partnerships home. While they were walking on our heritage trail, our cultural trail, downtown, they were verbally assaulted and physically threatened by our fellow citizens on that trail because they were a group of Israelis, so I would say everyone should read the letter to the Hebrew congregation in celebration of the way that America has made space for different groups over time and has made people from all over comfortable. In order to lean into that narrative with students, I would also suggest that they read the Declaration of Sentiments from the Seneca Falls Convention, which was a convention of women seeking their rights in the 1850s in Seneca Falls, NY, incredibly important, I would have them read Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July, which is an absolutely beautiful speech that tangles in a rich and complicated way with Douglass's love of America, his patriotism, his faith in it, and also his sense of horror and betrayal for the history of slavery. It's an incredible speech, and one I think that would challenge our high school students to deal with some of these complicated topics, and also to understand how it is possible to criticize a country and to love it at the same time. I would put those things together, and I would include Federalist Number 10, which is Madison's great essay on factions and why our divisions are a complicated challenge for us, but they're also the source of our strength.

. . .

*I love your list, Dr. Skwire. I do want to ask a question about the Declaration of Independence,*



*though, and Professor Jones, maybe you can answer it based on the students you see. As a retired eighth grade U.S. history teacher, we would read the entire Declaration of Independence aloud in class, and it took three days. And so my question is, are students that you're seeing at the college level coming with that very basic level of literacy? Have they read the Declaration and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights?*

**JONES:** I would say that the majority of my students probably couldn't tell you the difference between the Declaration [of Independence] and the Constitution, they confuse them all the time, and this is at the 100 level introductory course, and so just getting, getting the basics. I used to be able to assume some knowledge of the balance of powers, the nature of federalism, the Bill of Rights, etc., and now you do have to sort of spoon feed them that information, but they're receptive, and so that's part of it.

. . .

*You probably can't understand the Declaration of Sentiments if you haven't read the Declaration of Independence. So, we do have sort of a ground level that we have to establish. In addition to the question of historic literacy, I'd like to tackle the subject of patriotism, and for our purposes today, let's use a definition often attributed to Mark Twain. True patriotism is loving your country all the time and your government when it deserves it. A Gallup poll last summer found that a record low 58 percent of U.S. adults say they are extremely or very proud to be an American, with each new generation significantly less than the previous one to say they are proud of their country. I'd like to ask each panelist, and we'll start with Professor Schansberg this time: Do these survey results align with what you are seeing, and what does this trend mean for our future?*

**SCHANSBERG:** We don't talk about patriotism much in an economics course. This goes to what I talk about as a major theme in my little College 101 book. Most people don't understand that elite and flagship universities are fundamentally different than regional public

universities like my own, and we get tarred with the same brush. We don't do a lot with pronouns; we don't have funky orientations for new students; we're not teaching you to apologize for being a white guy — the sort of things you see done famously in the elites and the flagships. Even if we wanted to do this, our students wouldn't tolerate it, because we're attracting a different kind of student. So I suspect most of our students are relatively patriotic in the sense that they're also relatively conservative. Not necessarily politically conservative, but their approach to life is generally grounded in conservative values. So, I think a lot of them are patriotic in this sense, and I don't think it's really changed very much over time.

**SKWIRE:** It's hard for me to try and take a bird's eye view on patriotism in the country as a whole. I think it's easy to feel that we have become less patriotic because I think that we are currently living in a time, as I've been saying, of great division and great strain, and it's easy to look at the complicated conversations and the complicated arguments that arise from those divisions and from that strain and say that they are coming from a place that is not patriotism. I think on the whole that that is probably not true. I think on the whole that the complications and even the nervousness that people have about saying, "yes, I'm a patriotic American," is because our country is a very complicated place right now, our country is a very difficult place right now, and people feel uneasy, and that means that you can love your country enormously, but feel uneasy about its direction, about its potential future, and that sort of makes it hard to put the flag out front the way that we're used to, but I don't think that that comes from a place of shame or a place of hatred. I think it comes from a place of acknowledging that the world is way more complicated than anyone thought it was.

**SCHANSBERG:** To build on that, there are things worse than patriotism and division, like apathy and taking things for granted. Just because people don't see the future of the country the way we do, it doesn't mean they're not patriotic. I think it just means we have a very different way. So, you admire the passion, and I wouldn't want us to go

the other direction, which is apathy and other things; that's a different kind of problem.

**IRELAND:** For a long time I kind of bought the narrative that, you know, there's waning patriotism, or if nothing else, that had become particularly a partisan thing, that conservatives are patriotic and liberals are not. And the last couple of years, I feel like I've kind of walked away from that. One of the things that was actually really refreshing: I served on the House Education Committee. You have Democrats and Republicans on the committee, like any other. There's a gentleman by the name of Dr. Vernon Smith, career educator, a great guy, but he is as liberal as I am conservative. We are probably the full ideological spectrum of the Indiana General Assembly, just between the two of us. And this year he said something that I really thought was interesting, and I'm looking forward to partnering with him on this. It's that he wants to see more values-based patriotic education within our schools, which is really exciting to me. That shouldn't be a partisan thing, and to him it isn't and it isn't to me either. I think we have an opportunity to get back to that. I do think there has been waning, particularly with younger generations, but I think we are still a patriotic nation.

**JONES:** That statistic is troubling, no doubt, but I think we need to make a distinction between patriotism and 'my country, right or wrong' nationalism. When the people we call our founding fathers invoked that term patriot, they called themselves patriots very self-consciously. There was not a United States. There was no United States. There wasn't even an idea really of America. It was just sort of a continent. They were Virginians or from Massachusetts or Pennsylvania. When they said patriot, what they were doing is invoking a particular British tradition of standing up to tyranny, loving liberty, protecting individual rights against a tyrannical, usurping governments, which is what had happened for much of the 17th century, and that's what they're standing up for, and so it is in some ways an oppositional identity, it's holding your government to account when your government is not behaving in a way which

promotes virtue and liberty, and so you know, when I was growing up in the 80s and 90s, I would have absolutely called myself a fervent patriot, but I don't think I behaved very patriotically. I don't think I engaged in patriotic behavior. I think if I were to poll my class today, many of my students would not use the term patriot to describe themselves, but they're angry and they're active, they're speaking out, they're doing things on both sides of the political spectrum, versus apathy. I think I'd rather have that, so they might not call themselves patriots, but they're behaving patriotically, and so I think this is where history education can come in, and we can, we can inculcate this idea of civil discourse and civil disagreement to try to find the common good.

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*Let me ask a slightly different question, and that involves being proud of our history. One of the things I discovered over the years as an eighth grade history teacher was that at the beginning students came to me with a sense of pride in history, and by the time I retired, often they came in, and without my having taught them a day, they already were embarrassed by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, because they knew them to have held slaves. They knew very little else about them, but they knew that, and that made it hard for me to teach a full picture. Are you seeing that at all? Is that a problem that we can rectify here on the 250th birthday?*

**SKWIRE:** For a long time, we taught very much a great man approach to history, where the founders were presented as these paragons, without error, without flaw, who sort of marched through like Marvel superheroes, right, kind of saving the world with the creation of America. And I think that that really did a disservice to our history and to our students, and it did those of us who care about the founding an enormous disservice, because, boy, is it easy to poke holes into that kind of representation of any human being. No matter who we are, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Sarah Skwire, we are absolutely not without flaw, and if somebody were to stand me up in front of a room and say, you know, Sarah

Skwire, she's the paragon, she's what you should do, it would be super easy to poke holes in that, destroy a student's faith, destroy a student's support, because they can see the lie there. When you do the sort of work that Dede is doing at Mount Vernon, and that is being done by good historians now, where you're trying to present the whole picture of the founders, and the whole picture of America as a nation, that allows students and all of us the space to say, yes, like every other human enterprise, the founding is a flawed enterprise. Like every other human being, the founders are flawed beings. Look what they did, anyway.

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*It takes a special person to teach a thorough, complicated, nuanced picture of these people. Are we training students to do this - to teach the flaws and all? Is the typical K to 12 teacher able to teach that kind of complicated history to get them ready for you, Professor.*

**JONES:** I would hope so. And again, I can't speak to that experience, having not taught in that classroom. What I can say, I have noticed over the last decade is, you know, when I first started teaching, I had to sort of explain the flaws. I had to say, you know, Jefferson was capable of great hypocrisy, right, and now they come to me with that. Well, I don't need to read Jefferson because he's a slaveholder, and it allows them to dismiss history and say, "Oh, these were just backward people who were racist and therefore we can just move on with our lives, let's forget that," and I think that there's a real danger of that in a republic. Citizens need to have something that binds them together. We're a nation of immigrants. This is an incredibly diverse country, always has been, and is getting more so. What do we have in common? We imagine ourselves as fellow Americans because of our founding documents and our history. It's what binds us together, and if we just dismiss it without understanding it, then I worry that it will be easier and easier to "other" Americans who might hold a different political opinion than you do.

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*I'd like to talk for a little bit about some actions the legislature has taken to try and address the problems of civic and historic literacy. So this question is for Representative Ireland. The Indiana General Assembly has tried to make civics education a priority, and beginning in the 2023-24 school year, Indiana law mandates a required semester-long civics education course for all sixth graders. Is it too early to know if this is helping with our civic literacy problem?*

**IRELAND:** A little bit before my time, so I can't take any credit for the work there, although I think a number of those are still my colleagues today, and some of our best. I will say anecdotally, again, go back to the We the People program, and I had the chance to judge a couple of the state competitions, and it's really impressive. And those are the kids that are probably one year removed from that required program. I could not have done that in eighth grade. So, either incredible teacher or maybe incredible legislature, combination of the two, there. But really, I mean, at the end of the day, I think it's a positive step. It's something we're moving in the right direction. We're going to continue to monitor. We always like to collect the data and come back and say, is this working, and if not, then you know what else can we do? So, ask me again in two years, and we'll see where we're at.

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*In the same vein, there is a requirement that all high schoolers take the citizenship test that is given to naturalized citizens, and yet they don't have to pass it, they just have to take it. What's the story about that law?*

**IRELAND:** You've got to love the General Assembly in its wisdom. Also, before my time, but you know, I think it is a really positive thing. If we're asking individuals to become a citizen of this country, you need to know XYZ. Surely we can expect the same thing of people that live here that want to participate in our elections, potentially lead this country in the future. So, it's a really positive thing. The one thing I would push back on a little bit through that approach is, we do a very good job, I think, already of here's the founding documents, read them once, we're going to take a test on it, you're going to take AP U.S. government,

AP U.S. History, whatever, and we kind of stop there. It's really hard to appreciate America and its founding particularly without understanding the history that came before it, without understanding the Enlightenment, going back to the Romans, the Greeks. If you're not doing that piece of it, that context is really missing. I think it's a lot easier than for people to look back 250 years and say, okay, well, First Amendment, the Second Amendment made sense back then, but the government's never going to censor me now. Why do we need a second amendment? These kinds of things, I don't think, unless you have that context, that historical context to build it off of, that you're going to really gain as much as you could out of that.

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*We will move on to our college level Hoosiers. According to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, fewer than 20 percent of liberal arts colleges in the United States require an American history course for graduation. Neither of Indiana's flagship universities, Purdue or IU, require U.S. history for a bachelor's degree. Professor Jones, let's start with you. Could you discuss the higher ed landscape in this regard, but also highlight some of what's going on at Purdue to address the humanities and civic literacy crisis.*

**JONES:** Yes, here I'm afraid the picture is a bit bleak. History as a discipline taught at universities is dying, it's dying alongside the rest of the humanities, in some ways worse. Professors will retire, they will not be replaced. Those lines will go elsewhere. They're just not enough students who are interested in taking history classes, not because they're not interested per se, but it's because they've been told that this is a waste of time, a general education requirement. They just want to get it out of their way and get to the real business of studying the stuff that's going to get them a job. It's become a very sort of transactional relationship between students and universities, and this I think is a real, a real shame. I will say I'm very proud to work at Purdue University. We had a visionary president who hired me, so I can say that, Mitch Daniels, and Mitch recognized this crisis, and he did a lot to promote the Humanities, the liberal

arts at Purdue, to promote history and civics. Now, every student who graduates from Purdue University must fulfill a civics requirement. That's tremendous. That does not mean they have to take a class, although they can take my class, and that will fill the requirement. But I think we can and should do more, and I'm not sure the path towards that, but if we don't do something, history is not going to be taught on university campuses in the future.

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*We will get to that path in a minute. First, I'd like to ask Professor Schansberg about one variable we have yet to consider, which is the impact of Indiana's dual credit program on student learning. Many general education students in Indiana are essentially exempt from college core curriculum requirements, as are AP and IB students. This is wonderful in that it can save parents 1000s of dollars that would otherwise go to tuition, but I'm wondering if there's damage to learning and history education as a result.*

**SCHANSBERG:** First, a brief comment to build on what Dr. Jones was saying. I don't know the data on this, but students have to take courses as a part of "general education" or "gen ed." Sometimes, it's a particular course; other times, you choose from a set of courses. So, they might have to take history or political science or sociology. There's not a particular requirement for a history course. But to your question: "dual credit" courses are also interesting here. In our high schools, we have courses that are taught by college professors — or more likely, high school teachers who have been certified as "college-worthy." And so, students often go to college having already satisfied a history requirement, and they never take a history course again. I don't know the numbers here, but I know gen ed courses in college have been decimated by this practice. Now, it's wonderful for students who are getting college credit while they're in high school, assuming it's a well-taught course. But that's certainly part of the puzzle. Another piece that's worth talking about is the proliferation of online classes in college — and this adds to the treatment of gen-ed as just



something you knock out. It's not valued highly. On top of that, online classes can be gamed relatively easily if the professor is not working really hard on this. So, I suspect it's not simply that the number of students taking the courses is down. I would say the quality of what they're getting and their engagement with the course is probably reduced quite a bit compared to what it would have been even 10 years ago. So, ultimately, college is probably not going to carry much weight in these matters. If you're going to have reform in education on history, for better and for worse, it's going to be K through 12, which lifts the weight.

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*That segues into the question that I'm about to ask, which is more about the college level. I mean, if we solve things at K to 12, we might not need a mandate at the collegiate level. You all have at your chairs a broadside for the nation report that was just issued by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, as well as the National Commission on History and Civics, on which Mitch Daniels serves, and it has recommended as a legacy of the 250th anniversary of our country that all college students take an introductory class on American history and government. A semester-long introductory class. Let's go left to right. Is this a good idea? I'm actually going to jump around this time. Dr. Skwire, you want to go first?*

**SKWIRE:** Is it a good idea? It's an admirable idea in a lot of ways. I taught required college writing for a lot of years when I was a graduate student working on my Ph.D. in English. Required courses are infamously handed off to the least experienced teachers, frequently graduate students trying to pay their rent, for a large number of students in one room. So you find ways if you've got to teach writing or American history to 150 or 200 students, you're going to find ways to do it with multiple choice questions, right, with as little kind of debate and discussion as possible, because you just can't do it for a room that large. So I think so much of the good idea of it turns on how it will be executed. I think that the impulse is noble and an excellent one, and I think that this is information we want everyone to have, but boy,

execution is going to be everything with a program like this.

**SCHANSBERG:** And it may not be done well; let's be careful not to be naive about this. An example of this is economics in high school. There's an old joke about this: The first name of every economics teacher in high school is Coach. The assistant soccer coach will be teaching economics at our school! Well, that ain't economics. You're getting the stock market game; you're getting a little personal finance: maybe wonderful material, but not economics. Then they come to my class and they say, "I got an A in economics in high school," and I'm thinking "this is not going to go well." So, whether we're talking about government policy in general — or a mandate on something in particular — you should always worry about naive theories about how government policy will actually function. Good intentions are "good"? Not really. I want good policy. We settle for good intentions a lot. But we need to really think: how is this really going to play out? And I'm not optimistic here.

**IRELAND:** I echo a lot of what they just said. I think it's a really well-intentioned idea. I will say, credit to Purdue for leading its own way there. And I'm hopeful that maybe you'll see steps like that at IU, my alma mater, in the future. One of the things I do kind of worry about a lot, and I'm certainly not the only one in the Statehouse, is I think we've tried to commodify the university degree a little bit too much sometimes. There's certainly something to be said that, one, taxpayer dollars are going into this, and two, students are investing in this, we want to make sure that they're getting return on that investment. They're not just spinning their wheels for four years to go out into the workforce and have nothing to show for it. At the same time, we want to make sure that you're getting an actual education in those four years, and particularly for these people that are the most credentialed in our society, that they actually have something to back up that credential, not just the piece of paper that it's written on. I don't know if that necessarily has to be a mandate from the state. It seems like often we have a lot of mandates the state does, and we don't even really enforce them. All sorts of things

for K through 12, where we do that. I would love to see IU, as a partnership, institute something like that. It doesn't have to be as rigid as every single student does it. Some students are there for a very specific purpose, and they're going to be there for one year, and they're going to get their check mark, and they're going to go off and do that thing. Maybe they don't need that full semester of that, but I think there certainly is a place for more civics education within our public universities here in Indiana.

**JONES:** I love this idea. Actually, I'm a huge fan. I teach the introduction to U.S. History every semester to two to three hundred students, and if Purdue has 58,000 students, counting graduate students, if we could teach every student an introduction to American history that would basically save the historical discipline at Purdue. So, for personal reasons, I'm a big fan, and I think it can, it can work. I'm going to give you an example of what we do at Purdue, this is a pretty recent, within the last five years or so, five or six years, a program known as the Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts. Previously, every student who came to Purdue had to pass a writing requirement and a public speaking requirement. If you're going to graduate from Purdue, you need to be able to write, and you need to be able to speak publicly. Great, it was taught by graduate students. It was hated, the graduate students hated it, everyone hated it, miserable. And I had a visionary colleague, she's an early modern English political historian, and she said, "Here's what we can do. We can take all of the great humanists on campus, people who are trained in literature, history, economics, political science, anyone in liberal arts, and we can put them in a freshman classroom with the great books. Because you don't get to be a professor unless you can speak publicly, and unless you can write, so they all know how to do that, right? Great. They can teach it. So, here's a list of the canon of the greatest works, of civilization's greatest authors. Long list keeps getting longer, and you can choose from amongst these, and the students will read these great books, and then they will write about them, and they will speak about them, and it's been a transformative experience for our students, because they're getting a tenured or tenure-track professor, not a graduate student,

every time, someone who's really passionate about the material. Everyone does a different theme. My theme is, what does it mean to be free, and I teach Plato. And I teach Tacitus, and I teach John Locke, and John Stuart Mill, and I've seen kids who come in there that first day, oh, I'm an engineer, why am I here? Miserable. By the end of it, they shake my hand and are smiling and thanking me. So I think it's doable. Where there's a will, there's a way. And if I can do anything to encourage the Statehouse, you have my vote.

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*And I'll just point out that in 2024 the Indiana Policy Review, in its Indiana Mandate, did call for a requirement similar to what is being suggested by the Broadside for the Nation. So it's something worthy of debate. Now, if we were to have such a course, Dr. Skwire, what reading list would you assemble for it?*

**SKWIRE:** A lot of the things that I suggested earlier. This is hard for me because I don't think about individual items, I think about how I would teach it. I would want to find things that set up a debate, so I would give them a combination of readings from the Federalist Papers and from the Anti-Federalists. I would give them abolitionists and slaveholders to read. I would "teach the debate," as I used to say, about Darwin and creationism. I would find ways to bring the debates, which are so foundational to America and to our founding, right into the classroom and look for documents that do that. America is a discussion, it's not a conclusion.

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*To the rest of you, are there any documents or great writings that come to mind that you would put on such a list, something that all Indiana college students should read before they graduate?*

**IRELAND:** I'll mention this one. I know we're here today for America's 250, but you know one of the things that I don't think we come to appreciate enough, and I'm an attorney, and candidly, I don't think the courts appreciate enough, is the Indiana Constitution. We have a whole list of rights in the

Indiana Constitution we never talk about. You want to talk about guns? Frankly, the Indiana Constitution has a lot more protection in place than what the federal constitution does. I would love to see that in the classroom more.

. . .

*I might mention Georgia's law. Georgia is one of about 15 states that have a history or civics requirements for college students. The Georgia law requires undergraduates to successfully complete work or pass an examination on the history of the United States, the history of Georgia, and the principles and provisions of the U.S. and Georgia constitutions, so that focus on the state could be part of the legacy.*

**SKWIRE:** Different answers if we're talking about Indiana history, obviously the 1815 constitution and the current constitution. You'd want them to look at the Northwest Ordinance to see where we came from. I would want to pull together some document collections on great Indiana entrepreneurs, like Madam CJ Walker and like Colonel Eli Lilly, so they can see the people who improved their communities and improved the state and improved the nation as well.

**SCHANSBERG:** This is really not my area, but it did occur to me: I like reading books which popularize history. So, I'd like to see an assignment where students review a book such as *A History of the World in Six Glasses* by Tom Standage. We have a cultural problem here. We can mandate this, but it's a cultural problem — go back to the idea of too much cultural weight on “progressivism.” We're not putting a high value on history. We think it's boring; it has no use for me. So, it's beautiful to read all the classics — whatever this should look like — but it's maybe most important to awaken in people a respect, a love for history that's really faded. And if you get this, then you have a lifetime of people picking up history books — what we ultimately want. We're not trying to get them to pass a history test. This isn't really the goal, right? We want history to be something they value and something they see as important — and this requires an awakening; it's a

cultural thing. A mandate may not address this — and may make things worse.

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*Speaking of a mandate, it's something that conservatives typically don't like government to do. Is there a better way to achieve the same goal without a legislative mandate from the top, and what might other means of achieving the same goal be?*

**SKWIRE:** Competitions like We the People are really important, and other speech and debate competitions throughout high school and history, literature, humanities-based debate. We've spent so long underfunding the humanities and, frankly, deriding the humanities publicly in favor of STEM education and practical education. Why would you go get a degree in English or in history if you could go get a business degree or a pre-law degree? Why would you do something as impractical as those and spend all that money to do that. I think there's a cultural change that has to happen, and we can help to make that happen by encouraging kids to see that there are benefits to be had to acquiring historical knowledge and literary knowledge.

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*Is there a way to spread Purdue's new initiative statewide?*

**JONES:** I don't want to speak for my colleague Melinda Zook, but I highly recommend you look her up. You can watch her on YouTube speaking about this Cornerstone program, which, by the way, is launching a new Institute for Civic Thought in the fall. So civics is now going to be a component of integrating the liberal arts into a STEM education. She has had interest from many, many different universities that have flown her out to sell the program. In fact, I was giving a lecture at the University of Texas, and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences wanted to meet with me. I thought, oh, this is great, I'm gonna get a job offer, and no, he just wanted to talk about this Cornerstone program. He'd heard about this and wanted to know how it's working. I think emulation is the highest form of flattery, so I'd love

to see it emulated down in IU. That would please this Boilermaker.

**SCHANSBERG:** Maybe more needs to be written about it. I don't know how much writing has been done about what you all do there. Another angle for influence would be to work with secondary ed teachers and speak at their conferences about this, because all the things we're talking about here could also be done at a high school very easily, so if it becomes an expectation in a high school, and this is the way it's done, it certainly makes it easier on colleges to move forward with it. You have four years in a high school, there's a lot of opportunities there, so maybe influencing high school teachers might be a way to go.

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*We're getting near the end of our program, and so we're going to do - well it doesn't have to be a lightning round, you have enough time to go more than a minute if you like. This 250th birthday party is a wonderful chance for us to reflect, but hopefully do more than reflect, leave some tangible legacy. So, my final question: What would you hope is the legacy of this semi quincentennial celebration? We'll start with Professor Schansberg and just go right to left.*

**SCHANSBERG:** I was reading through the Declaration this week. I haven't written anything on it yet, but I'll have to get around to it this year. Of the many phrases, I was struck by "We find these truths self-evident." I like the brashness of it: there's part of this that is so evident. This encourages us to be non-apologetic about what we believe about these things — and the importance of history — to have a kind of self-assuredness, cockiness, "this is just obvious" approach.

**SKWIRE:** I have kids who are 18 and 20, and I think that I would like them to know how deeply loved and respected America is abroad, even despite our great complications, and I think I would like them to every now and again echo the words that my great grandfather used to use whenever something particularly wonderful would happen, like the air conditioning would come on,

or someone would show him a color television. Great grandfather, who had come over from Poland in the 1890s, would lean back in his chair and say, "America, what a country, what a country," and I'd like my kids to say that.

**IRELAND:** Obviously, 250 years is a great thing. We're going to have some great celebrations this year. In fact, I'm going to D.C. on Monday, and I'm excited to see the big blue beautiful Lincoln Monument reflecting pool, and that sort of thing. And all of that's exciting, but I will say, I caught this the other day, it was the Virginia's 250th anniversary, and one of the things they did was a performance of Patrick Henry's speech to the delegates. You should go look it up on YouTube, it's totally worth watching. But one of the most fascinating things is, while they were introducing it, they mentioned the fact that actually it wasn't written down for something like 40 years later, but because people told that story so often they knew it by heart, and able to write it down 40 years later still of what Patrick Henry said on that day. Now, maybe there's a little bit of editorial discretion in that, right? But at the end, give me liberty, give me death, and that has stuck with people for a long time. I think we have to do a better job as a society, particularly the adults here in the room, of sharing those stories that we know to be true about this country and bringing them down to the next generation and sharing it in our daily lives. That's one of the things I want to challenge myself as a lawmaker, sharing more of that in my day-to-day job, because we don't talk about those fundamental things a lot. We got very focused on the political thing of the day, or the policy piece, but I'd love to try to do more to connect that back.

**JONES:** I think most Americans today are pretty cognizant of and familiar with the fact that the Revolution secured our rights, the blessings of liberty, right to life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, the Lockean triad, life, liberty, property - we're very familiar with that, and celebrate that as well. We should, but there is another intellectual tradition that the founders all imbued, and it colored every aspect of the revolutionary experience, and that's republicanism. We live in a republic, a constitutional republic, not a democracy, a



constitutional republic. The animating principle of republicanism is civic virtue, and civic virtue is the belief that we are stronger together, coming together, and that we must subsume our individual predilections for the common good, or what they would call the Commonwealth, and we have to think, we have to see past our differences to realize what we have in common with one another, and what we can achieve if we put aside the rancorous discourse that seems to dominate the body politic of late.

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*Thank you. On the first day of school, I often asked my eighth grade history students, what are the first three words of the Declaration of Independence, and they predictably all yell out, "We the people," and I say: "Stop, no, "when in the." And they look at me, "when in the?" Yes, I tell them, those are the first three words of the Declaration of Independence. "When in the course of human events." I always make them memorize a little segment of the Declaration of Independence before we move on to the Constitution, and I imagine many of you have too.*

*These are the beautiful words that bring us together today. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." What Walter Isaacson calls the greatest sentence ever written. And then the second greatest sentence, "that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."*

*So my hope for the semiquincentennial is that all students will at least memorize those excerpts from the Declaration of Independence. I hope that you will stay a little, look some more at the merchandise. If you are interested in the Indiana Policy Review, please go to our website, and you can find out more. You can become a member. Craig Ladwig sends out fascinating articles by our adjunct scholars. Professor Schansberg is one, Mr. Franke is another. We distribute Gary Varvel's column, which is always enlightening and delightful, as well as his cartoons. We encourage you to take a part in the Indiana Policy Review going forward. And we thank you all for being here today. ♦*

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# Unorthodoxy

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## The Unmet Demand for a Well-Rounded Education

Craig Ladwig is editor of *The Indiana Policy Review*.



We stress the importance of teaching history in our newly published Indiana Mandate. The Founders believed the country would remain free only if its people learned history's lessons. Benjamin Franklin noted that history would show the young "the advantages of liberty, mischiefs of licentiousness, benefits arising from good laws and a due execution of justice, etc."

Until recently, higher education took this responsibility seriously. Not anymore. Surveying over 1,000 liberal arts colleges, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) found that only 18 percent require an American history course for graduation. The number likely has dropped further.

In a more recent report noted in several places in this journal, "No U.S. History? How College History Departments Leave the United States out of the Major," the ACTA found that 18 of the top 25 public universities did not have an American history survey requirement even for students seeking a B.A. in history.

Neither of Indiana's flagship universities requires a course in U.S. History. According to Indiana University at Bloomington, "U.S. History is not strictly required for a bachelor's degree. There is a GenEd social and historical studies requirement, but that can be fulfilled with a variety of courses." Purdue states, "Our core curriculum has a human cultures/humanities requirement and U.S. history is an option." (Purdue does have a civic literacy requirement though it is not an academic course).

More broadly, just last week Yale University issued a report on declining trust in higher education. "A decade ago, 57 percent of Americans expressed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence

in higher education," it notes. "By 2024, that number had dropped to a historic low of 36 percent. While trust improved slightly in 2025, 70 percent of Americans say that higher education is heading in the wrong direction."

Our foundation proposes mandating a course in U.S. history as an undergraduate requirement for Indiana public universities. Georgia has set the example. Legislation there says that no undergraduate student in any college or university in the state can receive a certificate of graduation or a degree without successfully completing course work on the history of the United States and the history of the state and on the provisions and principles of the U.S. Constitution and those of the state constitution.

That said, beyond the founding documents, we are not fans of government prescribing what exactly to teach. We would prefer that parents, donors, patrons and supervisory boards make those decisions — and be responsible for any adverse consequences, specifically graduates too unknowing or too indoctrinated to function in the real world.

If there are professors outside the curated orthodoxy quietly teaching the material described below, my apologies for not giving them credit. But again, for the good of society, to encourage critical thinking, to avoid a fatal divisiveness, greater effort should be made generally to offer every student a balanced view of history and economics — a complete, well-rounded one. And yes, I have suggestions:

**SOCIALISM** — Young minds are drawn to the promises of socialism and egalitarian philosophies. They should learn about them in all respects, including their discouraging economic record. That record began 200 years ago in New Harmony, Indiana, with the failure of the first socialist experiment, Robert Owen's "New Moral Order." Essential to understanding that failure will be the work of Adam Smith and more recently that of the Austrian School of Economics, both of which show how capitalism harnesses self-interest through private property, profit and loss. It turns out that it is not merely a matter of socialists needing to try harder, socialism has systemic flaws. Without personal gain tied to results, productivity

falls and innovation slows. Sorry examples are plentiful, including the former Soviet Union's chronic shortages despite vast resources. Befriending nations that eschew such envy-driven policies, and opposing those nations that adopt them, which would include Islamists and others of authoritarian stripe, will serve as a workable foreign policy — a “we win, they lose” strategy, in Ronald Reagan's famous words.

**THE FRONTIER** — It is a fine thing to teach the tragedy of the “Trail of Tears,” the decade-long forced displacement of tens of thousands of Native Americans who had earlier rejected voluntary alternatives of compensation and assimilation. (The displacement, interestingly, included the black slaves owned by the tribes.) But students also will want to know about the earlier St. Clair's Defeat, in which a thousand U.S. soldiers, plus their encamped wives and children, were massacred and tortured on the banks of the Wabash River. A few years later, Gen. Anthony Wayne, for which Fort Wayne is named, utterly defeated and dispersed the same tribes using Roman Legion tactics while killing only 25 enemy combatants. The victory, a frequent topic in our office, opened the West to settlement and the cultivation of an entire continent in only two generations, an achievement said to have been unmatched in world history.

**EQUALITY** — We will want to teach about all aspects of the life of Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, organized under the premise that men should be judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin. A contrary view, however, one that commands preferences on the basis of ethnicity, assumes a “blank slate” theory that all peoples are inherently the same and have been so for 100,000 years. Any disparity, proponents argue, must therefore be caused by racism and must be forcefully corrected — equality of results over equality of opportunity. The science cited by the blank-slate theorists may or may not hold up, but students will want to hear a counter argument based on new DNA evidence. It is put forward most prominently by a Harvard geneticist, David Reich, and rejects the dogma of human sameness. It warns that genetics is discovering evidence

of dramatic and differing evolutionary trends in human groups within only the last 10,000 years, beginning with the Neolithic Revolution and the start of agriculture. Could it be, then, that we are “created equal” as Dr. King and the Declaration of Independence rightly state but with different abilities and natures all following ancestral pathways?

**IMMIGRATION** — Students should be aware of the challenges faced by the estimated 12,000 impoverished Haitians dropped into Indiana by the Biden administration, most of them in the Evansville area. Students also should know that those difficulties are of Haiti's own making. Following the Haitian Revolution, the country's first leader, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, ordered the execution of the country's entire white population. Dessalines justified the killings as an act of “national authority.” Subsequent generations of Haitian leadership have proven incapable of governing a modern economy and the country has been in severe poverty ever since — not a population model on which to build U.S. immigration policy.

**SLAVERY** — If there is any student graduating without a thorough understanding of chattel slavery as practiced in parts of the American South, that should be corrected. They also should read the work of a black economist, Thomas Sowell, on how slavery existed across nearly all human societies for thousands of years — among Africans themselves, Europeans, Asians, Arabs and others. It was not invented or uniquely practiced by white Americans or Westerners. In fact, more whites were enslaved in North Africa by Barbary pirates than Africans in the U.S., and they were being enslaved long after American blacks were freed. Western Civilization was the first to abolish slavery globally, at great cost, partly borne by 25,000 Hoosier soldiers who died in the U.S. Civil War. If this history were fully understood, a call for reparations would be seen as absurdity, not social justice.

**EVOLUTION** — Finally, students will want to study the ideas of Charles Darwin on evolution, ideas that changed how mankind views itself. They will need reminded, however, that as with the blank-slate viewpoint discussed

above it is just a theory and is being critically tested by modern scientific methods. Indeed, there is an argument that small variations and Intergenerational differences do not accumulate to transform one species into another. And sure enough, the fossil record after 167 years of archeological exploration does not show the gradual transitions and unbroken chains that Darwin expected would be found. Rather, high-tech microscopy is seeing examples of irreducible features at the cellular level. These are composed of interacting parts where removing any single one causes the entire system to fail. That would mean that they were unlikely to have “evolved” but were more likely — brace yourself — to have been *designed*. ♦



# Watts

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## A Review: Taxes Have Consequences

*Taxes Have Consequences: An Income Tax History of the United States* by Arthur Laffer, Brian Domitrovic and Jeanne Cairns

**T**axes Have Consequences” (THC) is a masterful survey of income taxation in the United States since the ratification of the 16th amendment in 1913. The authors make a compelling case that high income tax rates are bad economic medicine that routinely fail progressives’ stated goal of reducing income inequality, while the implementation of lower tax rates has routinely led to both higher economic growth and increased federal revenue. THC is solid economics, applying the principles of opportunity costs and incentives to the history and impact of perhaps the most important economic policy lever the government can wield. THC demonstrates that taxes matter; getting taxes wrong has devastating consequences for everyone, and even seemingly small downward adjustments can have a huge positive impact on growth, incomes and employment. THC’s narrative style and chronological structure make it palatable to the economic layman, yet it’s packed with enough empirical data and fascinating episodic analyses to be of great use to trained economists.

THC’s authors make it clear that earning and reporting income is a choice driven by costs and benefits at the margin. Those with the highest incomes — and hence the most to lose through high tax rates — have strong incentives to reduce reported income and/or shelter income from taxation. THC’s well-crafted historical narrative recounts how tax sheltering and avoidance tactics

emerged over time, beginning amid the imposition of ultra-high marginal tax rates during World War I. THC provides a trove of insights from contemporary observers of the tax scene, such as Pennsylvania financier Andrew Mellon, who observed that “an income tax is the price which the Government charges for the privilege of having taxable income” (p. 70). Mellon realized that as the “price” of income rose, people would “buy” less of it, partly by working and investing less, but largely by moving their capital into tax shelters.

THC dedicates an early chapter to outlining these tactics and tools, such as municipal bonds, deduction of lavish business expenses, “in-kind” compensation by way of well-appointed offices, income splitting, and many more. THC also documents in detail the tug-of-war between Congress and corporate lobbyists, whose interactions gave rise to the byzantine system of deductions, exemptions and credits with which we’re all familiar.

The accretion of multitudinous tax-code tweaks and favors, resulting from decades of lobbying efforts and Congress enacting social policies via the tax code, has made America’s tax system outrageously arcane and expensive. Laffer cites his earlier study indicating that federal income tax compliance costs amount to upwards of \$431 billion annually (Laffer et al., 2011).

With a firm awareness of tax incentives and the availability of tax shelters, it is easy to see that the reported income of the rich will ebb and flow in response to changes in top marginal tax rates. As the authors note, “[i]ncome at the top is the most variable of all income because the people earning it do not desperately need it” (p. 16). This negative elasticity of reported income with respect to tax rates leads directly to the well-established logic known to modern economics as the Laffer Curve. Tax revenues at first rise with higher rates, but at some rate the disincentive effect over comes the revenue effect, bending the revenue curve backwards. At any point in this “prohibitive range” of the curve, government revenue will rise with a reduction in the tax rate. Laffer gets naming rights for (re)popularizing this basic economic logic in the 1970s, but Laffer readily acknowledges that economists were well aware of these tax dynamics from early on. (On this point Paul Craig Roberts notes, “[p]erhaps the Laffer curve should be known

as the Ibn Khaldun curve because it has been traced to this fourteenth-century Arab scholar” [2020, p. 468].)

THC marshals quotations evincing a thorough understanding of the incentive effects of taxation from multiple sources. Perhaps most surprising is this gem from progressive stalwart Woodrow Wilson, who stated in December 1919:

Congress might well consider whether the higher rates of income and profits taxes can in peace times be effectively productive of revenue, and whether they may not, on the contrary, be destructive of business activity and productive of waste and inefficiency. There is a point at which in peace times high rates of income and profits taxes discourage energy, remove the incentive to new enterprise, encourage extravagant expenditures and produce industrial stagnation with consequent unemployment and other attendant evils (p. 110).

Wilson’s awareness of counterproductive tax policy did not translate into reform, however. Laffer et al. contend that the ultra-high World War I era tax rates drove the U.S. economy into a sharp recession in 1920, helping sweep Republicans into power that fall. Newly elected President Harding installed Andrew Mellon as Treasury Secretary, and Mellon set himself the task of undertaking the largest tax-cutting movement in U.S. history. Echoing Wilson and presaging Art Laffer, Mellon made the evergreen case for supply-side tax cuts in his 1924 book, *Taxation: The People’s Business*: “These taxpayers are withdrawing their capital from productive business and investing it instead in tax-exempt securities and adopting other lawful methods of [tax avoidance]. The result is to stop business transactions... and to discourage men of wealth from taking the risks which are incidental to the development of new business... the only way to save the situation is to put the taxes on a reasonable basis that will permit business to go on and industry to develop” (Mellon, 1924, p. 56).

Following up on their discourse regarding the underlying economics of taxation, the authors next dig deeply into the data to recount the impact of taxes on U.S. economic performance over time. The U.S. income tax regime oscillated between high and (relatively) low marginal personal and corporate tax rates, giving economists a rich natural experiment to peruse. The authors

document no less than five distinct episodes of significant tax cutting, from Mellon’s aggressive 1920s rate cuts, to the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which Art Laffer himself promoted as an advisor to the Trump Administration. Each tax cut generated an economic boom with above-trend GDP growth and (eventual) increases in federal income tax revenue.

Fans of supply-side economics are probably aware of the Mellon tax cuts, the JFK LBJ tax cuts, the Reagan tax cuts, and most recently the Trump tax cut, and their positive economic impact. THC provides a riveting, detailed accounting of these stories, as well as lesser-known but also fascinating and important episodes from the annals of taxation. Take for instance the little-known tax reforms of the late 1940s, among which Congress first allowed married couples to jointly file their tax returns, claiming one spouse’s income divided equally between them. This reform was prompted by a movement amongst the states in the 1940s to switch from “common law” to “community property” legal regimes, primarily for the benefit of their taxpayers. Community property systems treat all assets and income of a married couple as belonging equally to the husband and wife, which allowed high income earners to significantly shave their tax bills. THC explains how this worked:

“A male high earner making, for example, \$50,000 in 1941 (about \$925,000 today) faced a marginal tax rate of 59 percent, with a great part of this income taxed at rates above 40 percent. However, if this male earner filed for only \$25,000, with his wife filing for the other \$25,000, the top rate for each filer was 48 percent, with the bulk of the income taxed at rates around 30 percent. In this case, total federal tax liability from the two filing separately was a third less than if the husband filed on behalf of the household” (p. 250).

THC notes that postwar tax reforms, involving both rate reductions and the formalization of income splitting into the federal tax code amounted in practice to a substantial tax cut, which helped spur the rapid and robust recovery from wartime austerity. THC is chock full of such fascinating tidbits of tax history, all of which illuminate the book’s clear theme: when taxes are too high, “[i]ncome earners... will spend less, earn

less and search for ways to avoid paying the tax” (p. 2). Wise policymakers will realize this and set tax rates appropriately, and when they do the economy will perform well.

No 400-plus page book is perfect. I found an inordinate number of typos in the text, perhaps indicative of lax editing. Academics and researchers will be frustrated by the absence of an index. I also noted a few inconsistencies in terminology — for instance, are taxes the “price” of income, or it’s “cost”? (p. 26).

The authors pay very little attention to other elements of the “policy mix” in promoting growth, particularly the role of monetary policy. Though the book admittedly is laser-focused on the consequences of taxes, it would have been nice to see a greater integration of monetary and regulatory policy into the analysis of taxes. All in all, these flaws are minor and do not detract from the reading experience. Editing can be tightened and an index added in future editions; my quibbles about content are easily forgiven in light of the overall excellence and depth of this book.

Adam Smith is often quoted declaring that “[l]ittle else is required to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice; all the rest being brought about by the natural course of things” (1980, p. 322). What Smith knew 250 years ago, America has spent a full century re-learning, sometimes through very painful tax-induced down turns. With this book, Art Laffer — ever the happy warrior for incentives-based economic policy — and his crew equip today’s economists with evidence the ancient economic wisdom regarding taxation holds true.

Anyone who reads this book and still favors high tax rates is either living in proud ignorance of economic logic and facts, or is aware of the consequences of high taxes but cares more about punishing “the rich” than about growing the economy or funding the government. In either case, *THC* may well prove a useful remedy. For the rest of us, the book will stand as an important contribution to sound economics, a valuable teaching and research tool, and another powerful example of the economist’s creed, “incentives matter.” — *April 15*

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## Birthright Capitalists

**W**e free-market economists tend to pooh-pooh complaints about income and wealth inequality. When “democratic socialist” or even populist right-wing demagogues complain about stagnant or declining middle-class incomes, we point out all sorts of empirical flaws in the data they use: “They don’t include government transfer payments in income measures.” True. “They don’t include the monetary value of benefits like health insurance.” Often true. “They don’t account for the fact that almost everything has become less expensive in work-time cost.” True. However, just stating that, “actually, lower- and middle-income people are better off than ever” is cold comfort for people’s felt economic anxiety. Most people compare their personal situation to what they currently see or read on their screens, not to a detailed breakdown of economic stats. Perceptions matter in politics, and a growing body of people feel that “the system is rigged” in favor of a small cadre of elites, at the expense of the broader population of working schmucks. Even if these complaints are baseless, or at best shallow, they carry political heft — vis. Bernie Sanders, Zohran Mamdani, AOC and the like, with their redistributionist tax-and-transfer schemes, largely aimed at leveling those dreaded inequalities. To preserve and protect future economic prosperity, we’d better take this issue seriously and tackle it

strategically, lest we lose it all to the utopian redistributionist dreamers.

It seems that the pro-capitalist coalition (conservatives, libertarians and normal people) can offer one of two main answers to economic inequality. We can go with pure Ayn Rand ideology: capitalism is a meritocracy, the rich earned it, profit seeking generates socially beneficial innovation, and so on — so stop complaining, work harder and leave me alone. Or we can try a slightly different tack, call it the “populist capitalism” response: If workers don’t like being left in the dust by capitalists, why don’t we do everything we can realistically do to make those workers into also-capitalists? In other words, let’s enact broad policy measures to graft as many people as possible into the ownership structure of the economy — let’s make them all capitalists. When more people have income from working but also own a piece of the economy’s capital assets through the stock market, they too will earn a share of capital’s income and become real stakeholders in the free market economic order. These worker-capitalists will more likely be on guard against bad socialist policies, like wealth taxes, redistribution schemes, socialized healthcare, and so on — policies that deter investment, sap incentives to work and innovate, erode growth and make everyone poorer.

There are signs that populist capitalism is gaining ground. More Americans than ever, particularly younger folks, are investing in the stock market, and well over half of U.S. workers participate in workplace retirement investment plans. We have seen growing numbers of “401(k) millionaires” — i.e. middle class earners who built wealth quietly over decades through disciplined contributions to their tax-advantaged funds.

Building on this momentum, Congress, President Trump, and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent have taken a great step towards massively broadening capital ownership with the new Trump Accounts. Think what you will of their orange namesake, Trump Accounts can become a vehicle to create full-fledged capitalists out of America’s next generations. Essentially kiddie IRAs, Trump

#### Simulation Average Results: Increasing Contribution

| \$1,000 to age 20, thereafter increases at ten-year intervals by: |             |             |             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Age                                                               | \$1,000     | \$2,000     | \$3,000     |
| 18                                                                | \$27,997    | \$33,107    | \$28,226    |
| 35                                                                | \$126,927   | \$173,640   | \$208,370   |
| 45                                                                | \$297,813   | \$390,052   | \$482,089   |
| 55                                                                | \$584,791   | \$865,803   | \$1,131,741 |
| 65                                                                | \$1,390,851 | \$1,726,034 | \$2,137,839 |

#### Simulation Average Results: Constant Contribution

| Annual Contribution |           |             |             |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Age                 | \$1,000   | \$2,000     | \$5,000     |
| 18                  | \$32,335  | \$61,655    | \$171,078   |
| 35                  | \$122,336 | \$208,218   | \$612,058   |
| 45                  | \$233,919 | \$384,790   | \$1,094,696 |
| 55                  | \$444,414 | \$642,666   | \$2,110,211 |
| 65                  | \$769,597 | \$1,260,565 | \$4,458,696 |

accounts can be opened for any child at birth. Family, friends, and employers may contribute up to \$5,000 annually, with the requirement that funds be invested in an automatically-diversified portfolio of stock index funds. Each child gets ownership of his/her fund at age 18, when money can be withdrawn without penalty for certain qualified expenses like college or a home down payment. Otherwise, Trump Accounts convert automatically to traditional IRAs, to which the account holder can keep contributing all through his/her working years. Well-funded Trump Accounts can and will be a vehicle to massively jumpstart young Americans’ retirement savings.

To show the potential of Trump Accounts for lifetime wealth building, I set up a spreadsheet simulation to model potential investment results. I assume investing strictly in an S&P 500 index fund, and I maintain the same annual contribution level for the life of the account holder. For each yearly contribution amount, I ran 100 trials, applying a rate of return drawn at random from historical S&P 500 data: with an average annual real (adjusted for inflation) portfolio return of 6 percent (reinvesting dividends), and standard deviation of 20 percent.

Continual yearly contributions to a Trump Account will grow nicely over 18 years, potentially reaching well into 6-figure territory. Continuing contributions for the account holder, even at laughably modest yearly amounts for an average income earner, should easily reach 7 figures well before retirement age. In scenarios in which contributions grow with income (a more likely



situation for well-informed, responsible capitalists), we are looking at a proliferation of American millionaires “like no one’s ever seen before” as the President himself might put it.

In addition to creating new generations of “birthright capitalists,” funded Trump Accounts, upon maturation into turbocharged IRAs, may very well provide an exit ramp from the Social Security debacle. As sober economists know, Social Security is a fiscal train wreck in slow motion, a “paygo” system that hands current workers’ tax contributions directly to today’s retirees, with no real investment or accumulation of returns in between. Social Security has paid out more than it takes in since 2010, and the so-called trust fund — IOUs for prior years’ surpluses that Congress blew on other spending programs — is expected to run dry by 2033. If Social Security is not reformed — i.e. some combination of increasing retirement age, boosting payroll taxes, or trimming benefit formulas — the “Old Age” (retirement) program will pay out less than 80 percent of scheduled benefits to seniors once the trust fund is depleted. If, however, we can massively jump-start future generations’ retirement accumulation with Trump Accounts, Social Security reform can become much more viable when it will be needed most. We can

transition Social Security into a means-tested welfare program for truly poor old folks. Better yet, we can phase out Social Security altogether, as it won’t be relevant for most worker-capitalist-investor Americans, thanks to the compounded gains on their Trump Accounts.

Americans have had a long and fruitful love affair with the stock market, but until fairly recently, building lifetime wealth through stock investing was mostly the province of tycoons, trust fund kids, and white-collar elites. The creation of tax-qualified, defined-contribution retirement plans like IRAs and 401(k)s enabled tens of millions of Americans to tap into to the largest engine of individual wealth creation in human history. With Trump Accounts, we can truly democratize this wealth-building machine at mass scale, and take giant steps toward socialism-proofing the world’s richest and most innovative economy. This is an idea we probably should have done 20 or 30 years ago, but better late than never. Now that Trump Accounts are here, let’s take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to pass down our great economic legacy to all our posterity. Make a Trump Account contribution for a child you love today. — *March 30*

# Schansberg

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## Acting and the Spiritual Disciplines

In March, Jessie Buckley went viral for her Academy Award-winning acceptance speech. In a bit over one minute, she professed an exuberant love for her husband and child — and extolled the virtues of marriage and family. Beyond what she said, it was how she said it. You can hear the overflowing gratitude, joy — wonder in her voice. You can see the same in her broad smile and her glowing demeanor. And the kicker: She noted that it was Mothers' Day in the UK.

Buckley had won the "Best Actress" award for her work as Shakespeare's wife in *Hamnet*. The movie is not everyone's "cup of tea." But it is exquisitely crafted, with excellent music and costumes — impressive acting by Buckley, Paul Mescal (playing Shakespeare) — three child actors who depict their children. In the "Behind the Scenes" documentary about the film, the actors praise the film's director (Chloe Zhao) for her work in cultivating a "family" atmosphere on the movie set and framing an artistic and beautiful expression of marriage and family. When you hear Buckley talk, it's obvious that the process of acting awakened great and wonderful things within her.

In contrast, Jim Carrey had trouble understanding and maintaining his identity through acting, especially in his depiction of the comedian/entertainer Andy Kaufman in *Man on the Moon*. Carrey describes this in the documentary *Jim and Andy*. Given the difficulties of portraying Kaufman, a creative but bizarre man — or was he merely playing a character? — Carrey decided to stay fully in character 24/7, on-screen and off-screen. But by the end of the filming, he said "I didn't know who I was anymore."

Adding to the complexity, Carrey also depicted Tony Clifton in the movie — a wildly eccentric

character that Kaufman had created. Carrey said, "No one really knew what was real and not real half the time." Presumably, this made Carrey more effective in depicting Kaufman (and Clifton). But the experience left him profoundly shaken about who he was. He "felt so good being Andy" because he was free from himself and "on vacation from Jim Carrey." But if you're not comfortable being yourself, what's left?

A more famous example: Heath Ledger died of a drug overdose at age 28, months after playing The Joker in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*. While there have been lighter depictions of Batman's nemesis, Ledger described his version of the criminal as a "psychopathic, mass murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero empathy." While Ledger's death was ruled an accident, he took a mix and quantity of drugs that make it difficult to imagine without at least a tinge of suicide. We'll never know for sure, but it is reasonable to speculate that acting like The Joker was not good for Ledger's mental and spiritual health.

Really, it's surprising that this doesn't happen more often. At its root, acting is a lie, pretending to be what you're not, wearing a mask to conceal your own identity — in an effort to depict or even to "become" someone else. The Greek word "hypocrite" originated with the varied masks worn by theater performers as they changed into different characters. The actors were "two-faced." The term came to be used to describe the hypocrisy of saying one thing and doing another. Jesus used the concept to great effect in His teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount and his blistering rant against the Pharisees in Matthew 23.

In *The Mask*, Carrey's character observes that when he puts on the mask, he "can do anything...be anything." But when you can "be anything," can you really confidently be...anything, really? Think of how common it is for child actors to be a mess as adults. Surely, much of this is the difficulty of handling fame, popularity — wealth — even for well-adjusted adults. Some of it may be the immersion in a world that is often hostile to Christianity — or even, to basic morality. But part of it likely stems from the practice of pretending to be other people and failing to cultivate one's true self.

The key question is whether an actor can repeatedly practice being a hypocrite — as an actor — while leaving his actual character unharmed. The examples of Heath Ledger and Jim Carrey indicate that the answer is no — or at the least, that the practice is fraught with danger. But Jessie Buckley's testimony points to the provocative possibility that emulating someone, "putting on" a character or a character trait, "dressing up" as someone respectable might work out well after all.

We see something quite similar in the practice of disciplines — spiritual or otherwise. Ideally, the disciplines are practiced with a heart that aims to become better at something — or to become a better someone. Simply put: For Christians, a spiritual discipline is aimed at becoming more like Jesus. This is often a point of confusion, especially in the religious realm, where it's easy to confuse means and ends. Paraphrasing Dallas Willard, the goal of spiritual disciplines is not to practice the disciplines, but to cultivate a spiritually-disciplined life. We should only practice a discipline insofar as it helps us lead a more godly life.

But disciplines are not practiced with such a rosy outlook in every moment. If they were, we wouldn't use the term "discipline." For example, if eating my favorite flavor of ice cream made me a better man, it would be silly to call that a discipline. In contrast, I don't always feel like being patient with my wife and children — and so, sometimes I pretend. I'm not always in the mood to work out at the gym when the time comes, but I usually go anyway. I don't always want to teach Economics or the Bible, but I'm thankful to have a job and ministry opportunities that "force" me to do it. And so on.

So, sometimes we practice a discipline when we "don't feel like it." And that must be OK, because we can't persevere in a discipline — or receive its fruits — without that reality. In a word, we sometimes act as if we want to do the thing, even when we really don't. In this, we're much like the actor who pretends to be one thing while doing another. And as Buckley's example illustrates, acting to be something can help me be more like the ideal I'm portraying.

But if we never feel like doing the discipline, that's not a good sign either. If we have to muster

extraordinary willpower to practice the discipline, it is unlikely to last. So, when is pretending good for us — and when is it bad for us? Where is the line? "Fake it 'til you make it"? Maybe. But this can be dangerous, since it can devolve into harmful legalisms, fading willpower or performative hypocrisy.

There are important principles in play here, but no clear lines to be drawn. So, 10 concepts to consider as I close this out:

1. We should typically embrace disciplines of omission to deal with sins of commission — and disciplines of commission to deal with sins of omission.
2. Remind yourself often about your goals and the benefits of achieving them.
3. Avoid conflating the means with the ends. Practicing the discipline is not the goal.
4. Don't beat yourself up for failing to do the disciplined thing on any given day.
5. Don't beat yourself up for not always wanting to practice a discipline.
6. If you find yourself increasingly disliking the discipline, reconsider its merits and look for ways to shift gears.
7. Continue to look for new and better ways to practice the disciplines. (For example, I wrote *The Word Diet* to help newbies get into the Bible when other methods have failed them.)
8. Disciplines are not always for forever. Prayerfully wrestle with whether it's time to stop practicing any given discipline.
9. Find ways to practice the disciplines in community — for greater accountability and the side benefit of relationships that make it easier to "take your medicine."
10. Pray for strength and perseverance, relying on the informing and empowering role of the Holy Spirit. — [April 19](#)

# Franke

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## Memorial Day 2026

(May 18) — Memorial Day is here again and much of our attention will be on those who died in service to their, our, country. As a popular meme says: All gave some. Some gave all. It is those who gave all that focus our memories now, while in November we thank everyone who served. That is a significant difference, one that is not merely conceptual.

Sometimes remembering our fallen military hits close to home. Two of my wife Tommy's former students were killed in the perpetual mess that is the War on Terror. What makes this unique is that they were one year apart in school and close friends throughout their grade school and high school years. My wife taught them across several grades at Concordia Lutheran Grade School back in the 1980s.

Both boys went on to Concordia Lutheran High School and participated in JROTC there. One, Kevin Pape, went on to college, married and had a daughter. His schoolmate, Neale Shank, was admitted to West Point and began a military career as a commissioned officer.

After the September 11th terrorist attacks, Kevin felt the call of duty and enlisted in the Army. He was selected for the demanding Ranger school and earned several additional Army leadership badges. Kevin was killed in action in Afghanistan fighting the Taliban in 2010. He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Valor, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart and the Meritorious Service Medal.

Kevin's classmate Neale graduated from West Point and was also chosen for Ranger school. He participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom where he was killed during his first deployment in 2007.

When my wife and I were at West Point several years ago, we attempted to find Neale's grave on

the academy grounds but were unsuccessful given the time our official tour allowed. Kevin was buried with full military honors at Lindenwood Cemetery in Fort Wayne.

It was a friend and former schoolmate of these two soldiers who brought their sacrifice to the forefront of my wife's mind. State Rep. Martin Carbaugh contacted her with an idea to do a special fundraising project to purchase a bench in their memory to be installed at the Veterans National Memorial Shrine and Museum on O'Day Road in Allen County.

When my wife mentioned the Shrine bench, I immediately knew what she was talking about. My alma mater, Elmhurst High School, has a bench next to the replica Vietnam Memorial for graduates of the class of 1965 who were killed in that war.

My wife enlisted support from Angie Owen, a former colleague at Concordia Grade School who taught the two boys and is still on the teaching staff there. She also contacted Sergeant First Class Alan Conrad of the JROTC program at Concordia Lutheran High School to ask for support in the fund-raising project.

Both Concordias, elementary and high school, immediately agreed to help. The students and the JROTC cadets enthusiastically raised funds to make the bench a reality. TeamPape, a group that holds an annual memorial project for Kevin, also raised money for the project.

The initial goal was to raise \$3,000 to purchase and install a single shared bench at the Shrine. Funds collected by the students at both schools and by TeamPape exceeded the goal sufficiently to allow a second bench to be purchased. Instead of sharing a bench, each fallen hero will have his own.

Eric Johnson of the Shrine board was quite cooperative in working through site plans. This got more complicated than first anticipated. A location was selected and concrete slabs were scheduled to be poured. Then Hoosier weather took charge. Excessive rain made it impossible for the concrete work to proceed and so a May dedication date became moot. The dedication is now set for Aug. 22, weather permitting of course. That shouldn't be a problem but then this is northeast Indiana.



The dedication of the benches may have been delayed due to construction issues but many of those involved in the project, not least of which is my wife, will mentally memorialize these two young men as is appropriate on Memorial Day.

As a Son of the American Legion, I am privileged to serve as chaplain for the honor guard from American Legion Post 330. At every military burial I end my commendation to the family with these words; “He will not be forgotten.”

This Memorial Day First Lieutenant Neale Shank and Staff Sergeant Kevin Pape will not be forgotten, nor will the thousands of their comrades who gave all so that we may enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as our Declaration of Independence promises.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of our nation, we Americans should reflect on what made it possible: our military and the sacrifice of our citizen soldiers.

## Casino Pro and Cons

*(April 27)* — There are two ways to think about governmental incentives for new commercial enterprises. One is the high-level theoretical or philosophical one. In this way of thinking, the basic question is whether government even should be involved in what essentially are free enterprise activities.

The other is to accept that government, being government, will provide incentives so the question is to determine which projects are productive for the community and which are just boondoggles.

Here in Allen County, we have several projects attracting public opposition. That is the question my Socratic discussion group took up in April. The proposed New Haven casino served as our launching platform.

It was acknowledged that casinos can bring significant tax revenue and spending from tourism, but they also come with potential social impacts. What makes this question difficult is that both the positive and negative outcomes are supportable with data mined from other localities that have already gone down this road.

Elsewhere economic development officials will argue that their casinos have been financially rewarding with ancillary benefits of a lower poverty

rate due to the influx of consumer spending and job creation.

That said, some Hoosier counties have admitted that they are directing 40 percent of their newly won tax receipts to address gambling addiction and recovery. That raises a significant morality issue to address alongside the economic one. Should we, through our governmental officials, encourage a potentially self-destructive habit because we make a tidy profit from it?

The argument is that Hoosiers love to gamble so why not encourage them to do it here rather than take their dollars elsewhere. Americans certainly are gambling addicted as anyone who watches a sporting event will quickly realize as the major advertisers and sponsors are hawking their gambling opportunities.

As a case in point, I recall back in the 1980s when the Indiana General Assembly seemingly voted every session on whether to initiate an Indiana lottery. One of the arguments for it was that Hoosiers were just crossing state lines to buy lottery tickets in other states, taking their dollars with them. This argument eventually prevailed in 1988, supported by growing popular support. One member of the state House of Representatives, Steve Gabet, announced he would not seek reelection because he could not morally support state-sponsored gambling and the inevitable state incentive to encourage it among Hoosiers. Gabet proved prescient; just notice all the billboards, TV commercials and event sponsorships paid for by the Indiana Lottery.

That took us to the second proposition on the floor: Investing in data centers, manufacturing, and renewable energy like wind and solar can promote sustainable and long-term growth.

These projects can generate even louder public outcries than a casino does. The Google data center under construction in southeast Allen County got a brief respite from bad press because the nearby proposed casino captured front page attention.

Wind and solar farms are no more popular than casinos and data centers. They also require substantial upfront investment and potential remediation costs when they must be removed. The argument that they promote long term growth is not proven but at least sustainable energy can point to providing a usable product.

Conservative political philosophy is a big tent movement. Our group's discussion of the casino issue pointed out that we have representatives from most if not all modern conservatism's branches.

The libertarians among us opposed government financial support for these projects but did not object morally to private enterprises like casinos. They just don't like the nanny state's overreach into private decisions.

The classical liberals (my preferred designation) thought government should stay out of these decisions. Why, if these projects are so important economically, are government subsidies needed? Why aren't private capitalists lining up to invest in them?

The social conservatives were the ones who opposed the casino specifically due to its potential for increasing local poverty due to gambling addiction.

The common good conservatives were most likely to accept some governmental involvement as a given and so were resolved to channel it appropriately to the most beneficial projects in the long term.

Having suggested the above taxonomy, I am compelled to disclose that we don't all announce our faction affiliation up front and wear appropriate identification badges. Nor does any of us find himself restricted to a single faction. What makes the group work is that we energetically challenge every member's assertions to test their strengths.

One point of unanimous agreement was a strong preference for directing centralized economic development support toward existing businesses which have an opportunity to expand. Why spend all this time trying to attract some entity from elsewhere when we have long term residential employers who have proven their commitment to our local community?

If I may mix gambling metaphors, we should keep betting on a winning hand rather than trying to draw to an inside straight.

## The 2026 Baseball Report

(April 6) — At risk of irritating my wife . . . again . . . it is time for my annual baseball column.

Major League Baseball is well underway and the TinCaps have opened their home season. I have moved my "baseball" TV out of winter storage to the back porch where my baseball addiction is less irritating.

Some random thoughts on the new season:

My MLB network subscription has been renewed at no cost to me, courtesy of my phone carrier. I should say at no additional cost as the company finance gurus have certainly factored that cost into my monthly cellular bill. Still, it is a bargain for me.

Having the MLB network used to give access to what they call all out-of-market games. "Used to" is the operative phrase. Now MLB in its pursuit of profit maximization has sold off specific games to ESPN, Amazon Prime, Apple TV and Netflix. Netflix? Even if you have an MLB subscription, you need additional subscriptions to watch these games. I guess out-of-market has taken on a new and more pernicious meaning to us fans. We hoi polloi should be consoled by hearing the cash register ring at MLB headquarters in New York City.

MLB has always blacked out what they define as in-market games. For viewers in Fort Wayne, that meant the Cubs, White Sox, Reds and Tigers were all blacked out, both home and away. Fort Wayne was sited in a strategic location by the Miami tribe and the American army due to its central location on several transportation networks. Their foresight has redounded to our losing about 15 percent of MLB broadcasts. I'm proud to be a Fort Wayne native but there are times when I am not so grateful to my local forebears.

The good news is that the Detroit Tigers apparently have been removed from the local blackout list. At least I was able to watch them on opening weekend. A good friend and a diehard Tiger fan told me that he is still blacked out by MLB. He lives only a few miles away from me but on the other side of the St. Joe River so maybe MLB has figured out how to use the rivers to control their broadcasts. At this point I am willing to believe any outrageous claim against the baseball commissar, Rob Manfred, and the Manhattan politburo that rules everything baseball.

My lifelong favorite team is the New York Yankees, probably because they seemed always to be on the Saturday afternoon baseball game of the week when we got our first TV back in the 1950s. I mention this as a segue to the Fort Wayne TinCaps as two of the Yankee starting pitchers this year are former TinCaps, Max Fried and Ryan Weathers.

It is always gratifying, I think that is the word I want, to see these young TinCaps kids move up to the majors. I watch them go through the rite of passage of professional baseball here in Fort Wayne, finding a niche one hopes in the major leagues. Even when the team or individual players struggle, I keep reminding myself that these are young men pursuing their dreams. They deserve all the fan support I can give them.

Preseason stories I have read in the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette promise an exciting season, with more than a handful of the San Diego Padres' top prospects assigned to Fort Wayne. We've suffered through some difficult seasons the past several years so the club, the fans and the city are ready for some excitement.

That's the good news. The bad news is that it's time for another April of ridiculously cold nights at

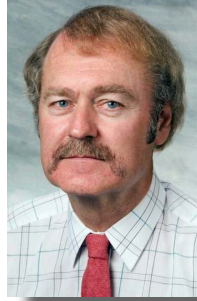
Parkview Field, as I try to make it to at least the sixth inning before frostbite sets in on my fingers and I am no longer able to keep my scorecard updated. And trust me, I can't see any reason for going to a ballpark and not keeping score. Truth be told, I prefer my scorecard full of chicken scratches, particularly when compared with the incomprehensible computer stuff that the networks use to obscure a perfectly good ball game.

That's it for the whining. For all its problems, including fan-unfriendly executive management and early spring games here in the upper Midwest, baseball is Americana at its best. I'm sure baseball is what Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he proclaimed that the pursuit of happiness was a God-given natural right.

So this spring and summer I will be in our back porch watching baseball while my wife is elsewhere in the house watching golf. That's the secret of a 54-year marriage — knowing when to be together and when to be apart even if we are physically together. Anyone married as long as I knows exactly what I mean. ♦

# Gaski

John F. Gaski, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, studies the societal impact of marketing activity and power. He describes himself as “a long-time registered Democrat and long-time registered Republican — sequentially and intermittently, not simultaneously” — which he trusts will dispatch any impression of partisanship.



## Save the SAVE Act, Not the Filibuster

(April 21) — On the prospect of ditching the Senate filibuster in order to pass the SAVE Act, Majority Leader John Thune has been heard to say, “The Democrats may intend to steal the car, but we don’t have to give them the keys.” Translated: Don’t provide future Dems with the filibuster weapon. The error of that shallow illogic, however, can be exposed as follows.

For background, to frame the legislative landscape, we should initially squelch the canard that the SAVE Act’s requirements, designed to prevent vote fraud, are onerous. Presumably, obtaining birth certificate or passport evidence of citizenship is a difficult impost. First, forget passports. They are explicitly not a necessary condition, only a sufficient one. (Readers will surely know the significance of that distinction for the focal issue. That is, holding a U.S. passport is not required.) And the difficulty of the alternative mode of proof, i.e., retrieving a birth certificate copy, has been debunked by those who have publicly demonstrated the ease of doing so online or by mail. The only American known to have had real difficulty producing a birth certificate is Barack Obama.

Moreover, most critics do not even challenge the SAVE Act’s other main provision, i.e., to require voter photo ID, because it is conspicuously reasonable. Some scorn the prospective act’s aim of eliminating mail-in ballots despite the near-universal recognition, even by Jimmy Carter’s commission, that they are a sure source of corruption — apart from the farce of the Y2020

vote count our nation experienced. Yet the mail-in aspect is secondary to the SAVE Act’s core essence.

The preceding merely clears the decks for the strategic crux: Regarding the Senate Republicans’ option of eliminating the filibuster to facilitate passage of the SAVE Act, many fear that such action would enable future Democrats, when they take power again, to pack the Supreme Court, engineer statehood for D.C. and Puerto Rico (creating four extra Dem senators), and legalize tens of millions of illegal immigrants to vote Democrat — virtually establishing permanent one-party rule. Yes and no.

This issue should be viewed as a variant of the Prisoner’s Dilemma from game theory. The Republican choice plight: a) Kill the filibuster and (+) they are able to pass some valuable law, such as SAVE, but then (-) the Dems will eventually use the precedent to enact everything their side has always wanted to do to destroy the country. Conversely, b) don’t kill the filibuster and (-) lose the SAVE Act benefits, but (+) this Repub restraint could inhibit the Dems from nixing the filibuster in the future. The inherent strategic flaw in this approach should be obvious, but apparently is not to some Senate Republicans: The Dems will kill the filibuster when they get the chance, no matter what the Senate Repubs do now. (So it is not a true game because, while the Republicans have been playing, the Democrats are not.) At that point, Repubs will ask themselves, “What good did it do us not to eliminate the filibuster? If we had done so, the resulting reforms might even have prevented the Dems’ socialist takeover.”

We know the Dem intentions for the filibuster up front because they have told us they will abolish it. The world has recently relearned the tough lesson that when fanatical totalitarians tell you they will do something, believe them, whether the zealots are named Ayatollah or Hitler. Likewise with the totalitarian zealots we know as American liberal Democrats, presently concerning abolition of the Senate filibuster.

Therefore, the rational choice distilled from our quasi-game theory is for Senate Republicans to nuke the filibuster now, to enact vote reform law that may even succeed in forestalling the Democrats from taking absolute power to America’s detriment. (Voting integrity can be an obstacle to future election chicanery, in other



words.) Any Repub action that lowers the probability of this grim Dem autocracy from 100 percent to even 90 percent is the preferred strategy. Otherwise, the Dems definitely will give themselves carte blanche to do all those terrible things they have long wanted to do to you.

Sleep well, comrades. And root for the Republicans to see the light. ♦

# Eichenberger

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## Pride — From Icarus to Instagram

(April 29) — Ancient civilizations recognized pride, or hubris, as a recurring human vulnerability with serious consequences. In Greek mythology and tragedy, excessive arrogance — defying natural limits or overestimating one's place — invariably led to nemesis, or downfall. The tale of Icarus, who ignored his father's warnings and flew too close to the sun, melting his wax wings, served as a cautionary archetype. Similarly, figures like Niobe, who boasted of her superiority, or Oedipus, whose intellectual confidence blinded him to fate, illustrated how pride distorts judgment and invites self-destruction. Roman historians warned of superbia, the arrogance that eroded republican virtues and fueled civil strife. These stories were not moral lectures alone but observations of a pattern: Pride disrupts balance, strains relationships and precipitates avoidable failures.

Twentieth-century thinker C.S. Lewis captured this in *Mere Christianity*, calling pride “the essential vice, the utmost evil” that leads to every other vice and is “essentially competitive” by nature: “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud.”

He contrasted this with humility, observing that “humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.” In our own era of social media, global competition, and rapid achievement, the same dynamic persists — manifesting in intellectual, monetary, power-related, athletic, status-driven, appearance-based and political-ideological forms — contributing to cultural fragmentation, personal dissatisfaction, and institutional setbacks.

Intellectual and educational pride today echoes the ancient Greek sophists, who prized cleverness over wisdom. Modern academics and online commentators often dismiss alternative perspectives as uninformed, creating echo chambers that hinder genuine inquiry. This form of pride, while rooted in legitimate expertise, can foster closed-mindedness rather than open dialogue. The result includes polarized public discourse and diminished trust in institutions of learning, much as hubris in classical Athens undermined civic cohesion.

Pride in political ideology adds a particularly corrosive layer. Across the spectrum, adherents of various viewpoints frequently treat their frameworks as unassailable truths, viewing disagreement not as legitimate debate but as evidence of moral or intellectual inferiority. This ideological arrogance mirrors the factional rivalries of ancient city-states, where loyalty to one's group trumped shared reason. In practice, it deepens societal divides, discourages compromise, and turns public life into a zero-sum contest.

Monetary pride finds parallels in the lavish excesses of ancient rulers who equated wealth with personal superiority. Contemporary displays of affluence on digital platforms amplify this, turning financial success into a measure of worth. When individuals view their resources solely as self-earned triumphs, it can breed overconfidence in decision-making — seen in corporate overreach or speculative bubbles — and contribute to broader economic instability. The harm extends beyond finances: It promotes a cycle of comparison that leaves many feeling perpetually inadequate.

Power dynamics reveal another continuity. Ancient leaders, from Persian kings in Greek accounts to Roman emperors, often succumbed to the illusion of invincibility, ignoring counsel and pursuing unchecked ambition. Today, executives and officials exhibit similar patterns, as documented in “hubris syndrome,” in which prolonged authority erodes empathy and realism. This leads to flawed policies, organizational failures and eroded public confidence.

In sports, pride transforms competition into identity. Ancient olympic games celebrated excellence but cautioned against arrogance that provoked the gods' displeasure. Modern

professional and youth athletics, amplified by media and sponsorships, sometimes prioritize dominance and spectacle over sportsmanship. Trash-talk, scandals and intense parental involvement reflect a win-at-all-costs mindset that can strain family bonds and leave athletes vulnerable to mental health challenges when glory fades.

Status and appearance pride, intensified by social platforms, parallels the self-absorption of Narcissus in Greek myth, who wasted away fixated on his reflection. Filters, curated profiles and follower counts turn everyday life into performance, correlating with rises in anxiety, body-image issues, and social isolation — particularly among younger generations. What begins as a natural interest in presentation escalates into constant comparison, diminishing authentic connection and gratitude.

These patterns do not stem from any single cause but from a universal human inclination. Psychology distinguishes “hubristic pride” — arrogant superiority — from healthier accomplishment-based satisfaction. The former consistently correlates with relational strain, poor risk assessment, and lower well-being. Ancient insights align with modern findings: unchecked Pride narrows perspective.

The counterbalance lies in humility — not self-deprecation, but a realistic self-view that prioritizes others and openness to learning. Cultures and individuals who cultivate it through reflection, service, and honest feedback demonstrate greater resilience, stronger bonds, and wiser choices. Our generation inherits both the tools of unprecedented achievement and the ancient warnings against its excesses. By recognizing pride’s timeless harms, we can foster environments that value collaboration over dominance and substance over display — before patterns of overreach repeat their familiar costs.

The choice is ours. We can continue feeding the ancient beast of pride through endless comparison and self-elevation, or we can become the first generation in memory to break the cycle. Let us choose humility — not as weakness, but as the quiet, unbreakable strength that turns rivals into collaborators, echo chambers into conversations and personal glory into shared

progress. In doing so, we will not merely avoid the falls that felled empires and individuals before us; we will build a culture worthy of the extraordinary potential we have been given. The ancient warnings have spoken for millennia. This time, let our generation be the one that finally listens — and rises.

## Christian Nationalism

*(April 21)* — “Christian Nationalism” has become one of the most abused phrases in American political debate. Once an academic term, it is now routinely deployed to delegitimize citizens who believe America’s Judeo-Christian moral inheritance should continue to inform public life. The phrase is rarely defined with precision and seldom applied consistently. Its modern function is not descriptive but exclusionary — to push Christian viewpoints outside the bounds of acceptable democratic participation.

Critics frame Christian Nationalism as an effort to merge Christianity with state authority, implying that ordinary believers harbor theocratic ambitions. Nothing in American constitutional law — or in the stated goals of mainstream Christian organizations — supports that claim. Advocacy for religious liberty, the protection of unborn life, marriage, or immigration enforcement does not threaten constitutional order; it operates fully within it.

These positions reflect moral convictions that shaped the American founding, when public virtue was widely understood as necessary for republican self-government. None of this argues for government establishment of religion or theological coercion — only for the equal constitutional right of Christians to bring their moral reasoning into public debate alongside every other worldview.

The founding record reinforces this point. The Declaration of Independence affirms that rights are derived from a Creator rather than bestowed by the state. Early American law reflected longstanding moral prohibitions against violence and theft. The Constitution’s restraint on religion was not a mandate for secularism but a safeguard against federal control of churches, leaving religious life to the people and the states. Even Thomas Jefferson’s “wall of separation” was meant to prevent

government interference with religion — not to banish Christianity from public life.

Yet the charge of Christian Nationalism is now routinely used to foreclose debate rather than answer it. Opposition to abortion policy, radical gender ideology in schools or lax border enforcement is dismissed not on constitutional grounds but by attaching a morally radioactive label. Polls purporting to measure the ideology rely on loaded questions and then conflate mainstream Christian belief with fringe extremism. Christianity does not seek to rule the state; it seeks the freedom to argue, persuade, and participate as an equal citizen in public life.

Here, the double standard becomes impossible to ignore. While Christian moral reasoning is depicted as dangerous, a competing secular worldview is increasingly enforced through courts, schools and administrative power. It advances rigid moral claims about identity, life and human nature, often with little tolerance for dissent. These doctrines are not presented as beliefs but as neutral facts, even as they are imposed through law, regulation, and professional sanction. This is not neutrality; it is moral establishment by another name — one that enjoys cultural and institutional privilege while denying the same legitimacy to Christian conviction.

This distortion does real harm. It falsely associates Christianity with authoritarianism while demanding its exclusion from public reasoning. America was never a theocracy — but neither was it designed to treat its Christian inheritance as a threat. Recasting heritage as heresy does not defend constitutional order; it abandons historical honesty and weakens the moral foundations that made that order possible.

## The Assassination Culture

(May 29) — In the wake of the assassination of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, social media lit up with memes, fan edits and justifications that portrayed the killer as a kind of vigilante hero. Many echoed the familiar phrase, “hurt people hurt people.” It sounds compassionate. It feels insightful. But it is, at best, a half-truth — and at worst, a dangerous excuse.

We live in a moment of rising emotional cruelty, political violence and relational breakdown. Yet

instead of reinforcing moral accountability, our culture increasingly leans on explanations that soften or deflect responsibility. Biology, trauma, systems and upbringing are invoked not as context but as justification. In trying to understand harm, we are forgetting how to judge it.

To be clear, the roots of harmful behavior are complex. Decades of research show that aggression and antisocial behavior are shaped by both biology and environment. Genetic factors can influence impulsivity and reward-seeking. Brain imaging reveals differences in regions tied to empathy and self-control. Temperament emerges early, and childhood experiences — from abuse to instability — can raise risks.

But risk is not destiny. Most individuals with these vulnerabilities never go on to harm others. The science is clear: Biology may shape tendencies, and the environment may tilt the odds, but neither removes the capacity for choice.

This is where the slogan “hurt people hurt people” fails. It takes a risk factor and turns it into a script. Yes, childhood adversity increases the likelihood of later harm — but most victims of trauma do not become perpetrators. Many become more empathetic and determined to break the cycle. At the same time, some of the most persistent abusers report little or no trauma at all. Their behavior stems less from wounds than from low empathy, poor moral reasoning or a willingness to exploit others.

Reducing all harm to pain flattens this reality. It ignores moral agency, erases meaningful differences between individuals, and, perhaps most dangerously, shifts attention away from victims. When every act of harm is explained as an inevitable outcome, accountability dissolves.

This problem is compounded by a broader cultural shift, particularly among younger generations. Surveys show rising moral relativism: more individuals believe that right and wrong are subjective or socially constructed, and fewer view traditional moral boundaries — such as honesty — as essential. Alongside this is a growing tendency toward what researchers call “interpersonal victimhood”: a mindset marked by grievance, moral self-righteousness and reduced empathy for others.



Social media amplifies this pattern. Personal pain becomes a form of currency, validated and rewarded through attention. Language itself is recast — words are treated as violence, while actual harm is often filtered through layers of justification. The result is a culture that demands accountability from systems and institutions but increasingly resists it at the individual level.

Even well-intentioned trends can contribute to this imbalance. Trauma-informed practices in schools and justice systems have delivered real benefits, from reduced conflict to improved mental health outcomes. But when these approaches drift from explaining behavior to excusing it, they reinforce an external locus of control — the belief that outcomes are determined by forces outside one's agency.

This is not compassion. It is condescension. It tells people, especially the young, that they are products of their circumstances rather than agents capable of mastering them. It lowers expectations at the very moment they should be strengthened.

None of this denies the reality of suffering. Trauma is real. Mental illness can impair judgment. Structural inequalities can shape opportunity. These factors matter — and ignoring them would be both unjust and ineffective.

But acknowledging influence must never become absolution. The purpose of understanding risk factors is not to excuse harm but to prevent it. The bio-psycho-social model is a map, not a pardon. Biology shapes the vessel, the environment provides the winds and currents, but each person still holds and controls the rudder.

And importantly, this capacity for agency is not theoretical. It is demonstrated every day. Programs that combine trauma awareness with skill-building in impulse control, empathy, and moral reasoning reduce recidivism. Stable families, mentorship, and character education consistently act as protective factors. Across history and in the present, countless

individuals choose restraint, integrity and decency despite hardship.

The danger lies in normalizing the exceptions. When culture amplifies narratives that excuse harm, it weakens the very resilience that allows people to overcome it. It subtly shifts expectations — from you must control your behavior to your behavior is understandable given your circumstances. Over time, this erodes both personal discipline and social trust.

Reclaiming accountability does not require harshness or a return to punitive excess. It requires clarity. We must be able to hold two truths at once: that forces beyond their control shape people, and that they are still responsible for how they act.

This means retiring slogans that oversimplify human behavior and replacing them with a more honest framework — one that recognizes suffering without surrendering moral judgment. It means elevating stories of individuals who break cycles rather than perpetuate them. And it means expecting, teaching, and modeling self-control, responsibility, and the courage to choose differently.

Even amid the undeniable influence of genetics, temperament, and environment, one thing remains constant: human beings retain the capacity for choice. Morality is not erased by circumstance; it is defined by how we respond to it.

Harm will never disappear entirely. Human nature is imperfect. But if we reject the comforting myth that pain inevitably produces more pain, we open the door to something better: a culture that equips people to confront their impulses, take responsibility for their actions, and rise above what has been done to them.

That path is harder. It demands more — from individuals, from institutions, and from society as a whole. But it is the only path that preserves both justice and dignity. ♦

# The Bookshelf

## Rage and the Republic

Why has rage become the dominant form of political expression? Why has violence against persons and property become acceptable to a growing percentage of our young people? And how are these excesses against law and justice claimed to be done in the name of democracy, and with a straight face?

More importantly, is democracy nothing more than the exercise of the will of the current electoral majority?

Jonathan Turley's "Rage and the Republic: The Unfinished Story of the American Revolution" (Simon & Schuster 2026, 342 pages plus notes, \$25 hardcover at Amazon) warns against existential threats to the Constitution and hence to our Republic from unrestrained majoritarianism leading to trampling the rights of everyone else. This is unfettered democracy, extreme to the point of authoritarianism.

Turley, a much quoted and interviewed law professor, has written previously on the threat to freedom of speech in an age of rage. He returns to that subject with an historical lesson of previous democracies that serve as clarion calls to 21st century America's direction into super majoritarian rule.

Before looking at the historical examples of democracy run amok, it will help to set the stage for Turley's prediction of where we are going.

Turley distributes the blame for our devolution into majoritarian authoritarianism among three Ps: politicians, professors and the press. Note that all of these represent factions of the elite of our society, a self-appointed aristocracy. (Aristocracy is, by definition, rule by the best, as these groups clearly think of themselves.)

One expects politicians to lead this hall of shame and perhaps they are too easy to blame for

everything. But then, we elect them. It is no wonder that politicians have learned the path to success lies in pandering to voters' grievances, inciting passion at the expense of reasoned solutions found only by making tough decisions.

Turley indicts the press for completely surrendering to advocacy journalism at the expense of objectivity, accuracy and fairness. He quotes the editor of a major city daily as saying, "Objectivity has got to go." And gone it has across newsrooms and journalism schools from coast to coast. Advocacy journalism is nothing new to our nation; see the fevered journalism of the 1790s.

The difference is that previous bias was balanced among parties and factions; you pay your money and take your choice.

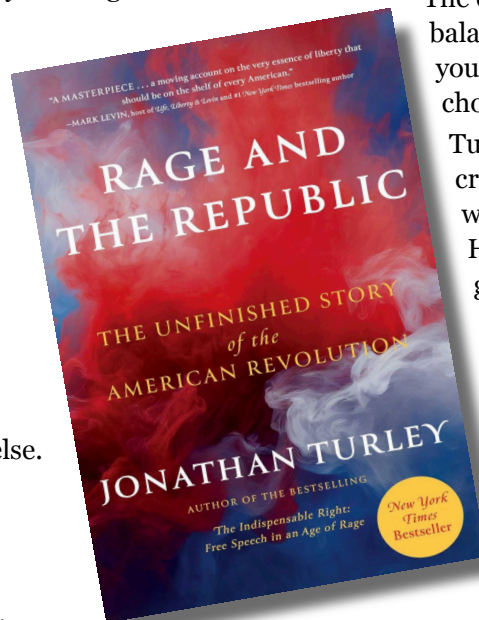
Turley reserves his most poignant criticism for the academy, a place where he works as a law professor. He doesn't simply make sweeping generalizations of higher education's movement further and further to the left. He gives literally dozens of examples taken from their own published books and interviews to show a complete disregard for liberty as we know it, particularly freedom of speech. What we conservatives have claimed about

university faculties for decades is documented with these quotes and by polls revealing the inbred left-wing political bias of the professorate. Turley labels the radical professorate as the Jacobins of the 21st century.

Turley's thesis is that unrestrained democracy is programmed to regress to authoritarianism imposed by an intolerant majority. He sees the natural path as ambition leading to activism to extremism and finally to authoritarianism. This progression is not that far off from Polybius' taxonomy of government forms, always moving toward authoritarianism until restarting the process.

To prove his point, he offers three examples from history.

He begins with that model democracy — Athens — and debunks much of what we learned in school.



The hero, as we were instructed in school, was Pericles and his “Golden Age.” Turley compares Pericles to the Emperor Augustus who hid his dictatorship behind the euphemism “First Citizen.” Pericles was little different and Athens’ democracy at this time was in reality a one-man rule, albeit with democratic trappings as the assembly gave Pericles whatever he wanted, that is until it devolved into mobocracy after the great man’s death in the plague of 429 BC. A favored tactic of this putative democracy was the use of ostracism, in which a public figure was charged with a crime against the state and exiled by majority vote. Reminds one of cancel culture in our day, doesn’t it? Then there was the democratically sanctioned execution of Socrates. So much for Athens as the birthplace of democracy.

Turley’s second example was the short-lived popular democracy in the city of Philadelphia during the War for Independence. It was popularly supported until hijacked by extremists who used it to provoke violence against those supporting the rule of law over against political mobs. The issue was the imposition of price controls during the horrendous inflation of the war years. “Profiteers” were attacked, verbally and physically, by democratic mobs seeking justice. Again, we have a current reprise as the Indiana Attorney General mounts a well-publicized populist campaign against price gouging at the gas pump.

Then there is the French Revolution. Its descent into a bloodthirsty hell is too well known to need rehearsing here, but Turley’s account is worth reading. Thomas Paine, an enthusiastic supporter of the revolution in its early days, ended up imprisoned by those who were his political heroes. One can only imagine his disillusionment. The adage that revolutions devour their children proved true in Paine’s case but he fortunately avoided the guillotine when the guard failed to see the chalk mark on his door identifying him as one to be executed that day.

Turley is so impressed with Paine that he bookends his writing with his story. One can argue that he was the most effective publicist of our War for Independence, especially with his treatise “Common Sense.” George Washington used it to maintain the morale of an army that seemed to be constantly in retreat. It is political writing with a

blunt end, leaving no doubt as to who was on the side of the angels.

Turley then follows Paine to France where he became an enthusiastic supporter of that revolution even in its most bloodthirsty days. The irony was that the radicals eventually turned on each other, including Paine who came within minutes of an appointment with Madame Guillotine. He died in poverty and disillusion, a man without a country. Somehow Turley views Paine as a hero in all this, a sentiment I have trouble endorsing.

The final section of the book deals with our modern society, one that appears to be ready to trample individual rights in service to super majoritarianism. After all, if the majority wants something, isn’t that democracy in action? Turley paints a bleak picture of where we are heading — a society with high unemployment due to artificial intelligence and advanced robotics — leaving an open door for transnationalism to run amok such as we see in the European Union.

But Turley does end on an optimistic note. What he foresees is not a prediction of our future but only a projection of what it might be. He opens the book with the story of Saturn devouring his own children, just like the French and other revolutionaries have done throughout history. He concludes the book with the story of Pandora and her box of evils followed by hope as the last to come out.

His thesis is well summarized in the title of the book. Rage is no way to run a republic. Rage does work quite effectively as a rallying cry for totalitarian movements claiming to represent “the people.” Democracy without structural protections for the natural rights of each individual will naturally evolve into a tyranny of the many and then to a tyranny of the few but in the name of the majority. It is only to be expected that our modern Jacobins see the Declaration of Independence as irrelevant and the Constitution as a barrier to be removed.

The Declaration is aspirational yet it concretely grounds liberty as directly given by God to individuals. There is no government intermediary which can grant or revoke liberty no matter how many people vote to do that. The practical political genius of the Constitution is to get in the way of

power grabs by government or demagogues. Its protection is built with bricks such as the separation of power among the three branches of government with multiple checks and balances, a bicameral legislature, independent courts, and, most importantly, the Bill of Rights. Each contributes to preservation of liberty against putative totalitarians. Imposing a dictatorship of the majority in the name of “democracy” just won’t cut it...if we remain vigilant.

## The Great Crash of 1929

One of the most fascinating books I read in high school was “The Great Crash: 1929” by John Kenneth Galbraith. I believed what most everyone else did, that the Great Depression was caused by the stock market crash. Galbraith disabused me of such a simplistic explanation.

Journalist Andrew Ross Sorkin’s new book, “1929: Inside the Greatest Crash in Wall Street History — And How It Shattered a Nation” (Viking 2025, 444 pages plus notes, \$21 hardcover at Amazon) retells the story as a journalist might rather than as an economist such as Galbraith would. And therein lies a problem to my way of thinking.

I will concede up front that it is unfair to judge a book by what the reader wanted rather than by what the author wrote. Sorkin does tell an intriguing story as he builds up to Black Thursday. We are introduced to a long list of key and marginal players, especially the National City Bank chairman, Charles Mitchell, who serves as the anti-hero of the book.

Sorkin’s assessment of the key bankers and industrialists tends to be negative but not completely censorious. He recognizes the public demand for scapegoats for the market crash so why not rich bankers, especially the short sellers? Of course the Senate piled on as politicians are wont to do, then and now. Just think of 2008.

Sorkin is not a fan of conservative icon Calvin Coolidge. He sees him as a grumpy, do-nothing

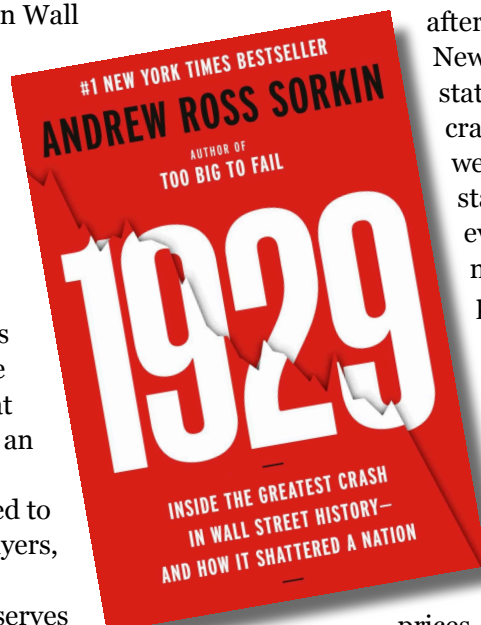
president. He also is negative about Herbert Hoover but rehabilitates his record in the book’s conclusion. One might think that he would see Franklin Roosevelt as an exemplary president but the glimpses into FDR’s personality are far from flattering. Sorkin’s conclusion is that he is overrated by historians.

It was fascinating to follow Sorkin’s account of William Raskob’s ascent to the chairmanship of the Democrat Party after its electoral loss to Herbert Hoover in 1928. His strategy was to plant negative stories about Hoover with newspapers as attacks on his competence and character. Discrediting Hoover through personal attacks was the Democrats political plan leading up to the 1932 election. Sound familiar?

To be fair to Sorkin, he is a journalist and writes like one in its positive sense. He generally reports fairly on all the characters and brings them to life as human beings, flawed in many ways but with a true desire to prevent the crash and its aftermath. While some criticized the New York bankers for making positive statements when the market was crashing, Sorkin explains that they were trying to prevent a total bear stampede that would impoverish everyone. They can be faulted for not knowing what to do but not for purely self-serving market moves. The psychology of the market is carefully reconstructed through the people who were part of it, bankers and politicians and wealthy industrialists. What I found interesting is Sorkin’s recounting of the popular response to skyrocketing stock

prices. Everyone wanted in despite a poor understanding of the inherent risk of any investment. Alan Greenspan would have been right at home warning about irrational exuberance. One amusing anecdote is from Joseph Kennedy, a heavy investor. He decided it was time to sell out when his bootblack started giving him stock advice.

The major problem for the public was bank failures. Undercapitalized banks, and there were a lot of these outside New York City, could not withstand the level of depositor demands for





withdrawals. Banking is now and was then a fractional reserve system in which only a small fraction of customer deposits is maintained as cash by banks while the rest is loaned out. Think of the scene from “It’s a Wonderful Life” where Jimmy Stewart is using his honeymoon money to satisfy the run on his small savings bank.

The response was creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to protect the small depositors, probably as much a political response as an economic one. The other reform was the Glass-Steagall Act which separated commercial banking from investment banking as a means of protecting the commercial side of banks from the risks incurred by their investment side. These are the only two significant responses to the crash that Sorkin acknowledged.

The role of the banking system in the American economy has been contentious from day one when Hamilton and Jefferson went head-to-head over a national bank. Sorkin does not address any of the

macroeconomic issues, but this wasn’t the purpose of his book. He proposed to tell the story of the people involved in and affected by the Great Crash. In that he did an excellent job. If he doesn’t encourage sympathy for all of them, he at least evokes empathy.

At the end of the book, he finally asks if the Great Crash could have been avoided. His answer is brief. He thinks there were market interventions that could have tamped down excessive speculation but that it would have taken “almost divine prescience” to look beyond short-term incentives to see long-term consequences.

In terms of policy advice, he offers only this: “The antidote to irrational exuberance is not regulation by itself, but humility.” Unfortunately there is precious little of that to be found in Washington D.C. politicians or New York City bankers. — *Mark Franke*



Thomas Hoepker. Sept. 11.

## The Outstater

### Alternative Families by the Numbers

(June 15) — The governor is getting grief over declaring June “Nuclear Family Month.” Does he think there’s something wrong with non-nuclear families? Well, there’s a two-part answer to that, and some aren’t going to like the second part.

First, let’s acknowledge that raising a family, any family, is a heroic endeavor. Raising a family as a single parent is especially so when it comes with the emotional throes of a divorce. One kind of family does not diminish another.

There are, however, distinctions.

As a member of the “Silent Generation” (1928-1945), I grew up with friends whose fathers had been killed in World War II. Without exception, despite the obvious hardship on young mothers who suddenly lost their husbands, those friends were admirable individuals. They stood out in my high school class.

I have a theory about that. Suppose fate gave those classmates a lesson in character and personal responsibility. Suppose their mothers taught them that without a father they were going to have to buckle down to overcome a disadvantage in life.

That, please know, is quite different from what advocates of today’s “alternative families” are telling the governor. They are saying there is nothing special about a nuclear family, the implication being that fathers are optional. A

Nuclear Family Month, therefore, is nonsense if not insult. This from an Indianapolis Star columnist:

“Mike Braun has no business telling my family we’re less (than another family). The nuclear family ideal is a mid-century relic. Indiana’s families deserve better than a governor who won’t see them.”

And Polly Crozier, director of Family Advocacy, GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders, added this:

”It is just so incredibly petty — to take the month that has been recognized for over 50 years by millions of people all over the country and use it to put some families ahead of others, it is just petty and it’s hurtful.”

Which brings us to the second part. Fifty years ago when we first began hearing versions of Polly’s argument, it sounded odd but there was no ready data. One had to grant it was possible, although implausible, that certain if not all of the crazy alternative models, given enough love and empathy, might compare favorably with the one that had prevailed for at least 4,000 years.

But now we have data. It says that as a social experiment alternative-model families are problematic for offspring, Hollywood being a locus of anecdotal evidence. I asked my assistant, Grok, to run the numbers nationally. Let’s look at just one set of data, i.e., economic outcomes:

- Poverty rates (2021 U.S. Census data): 9.5 percent of children in two-parent heterosexual nuclear families lived below the poverty line, versus 31.7 percent in other families (over 3x higher). For single-mother homes specifically: 35.0 percent; single-father: 17.4 percent.

- Recent figures (2022–2024): Single-mother families ~27–28 percent poverty rate (versus ~5–6 percent for married-couple families); single-parent families overall ~4x higher than married-couple.

- Children in single-parent homes are ~4x more likely to live in poverty overall.

- Social stigma is not an explanation.

Alternative families make up the overwhelming majority of households.

Moreover, population statistics and rigorous studies indicate measurable advantages, on average, for children in stable nuclear families across all of life's key domains — physical health, education, crime, emotional behavior. That means Polly and the GLBTQ crowd may be proud of their month but the governor can be as proud of his. It's a matter of expectations.

## A Teenage Work Ethic

*Yip yip yip yip yip yip yip yip*  
*Sha-na na-na, sha-na na-na na (Ba doo)*  
*Sha-na na-na, sha-na na-na na (Ba doo)*  
*Sha-na na-na, sha-na na-na na (Ba doo)*  
*Sha-na na-na, sha-na na-na na, ba*  
*Yip yip yip yip yip yip yip yip*  
*Mum mum mum mum mum mum, get a job.*

— “Get a Job,” the 1958 Doo-Wop classic  
 by The Silhouettes

(June 4) — I will try to avoid one of those “good old days” screeds. It is important, though, to be reminded that teenage work has immense community benefit.

A full-time summer job, one with adult standards if not adult pay, was a prestige coming-of-age marker until a few decades ago. And yes, I regale my bridge partners with stories of me as a 14-year-old shoveling manure through a quarter-inch screen in August at a Kansas feed lot for 40 cents an hour.

The point, though, is larger than a generational boast. It is said that holding a summer job as a teenager is the single best predictor of success in later life. Summer work, besides instilling self-confidence and a sense of purpose, teaches some realities of life that might not occur to the adolescent mind — absolutes such as coming to work on time, executing exact instructions, following up with the boss when the job is finished and then gracefully accepting suggestions as to how the work could have been done better.

But also, and perhaps most important, there is the impalpable element — a realization that if you keep showing up and doing your best, things

will somehow fall into place. Hopefulness, in other words.

The great American philosopher William James addressed that aspect in a letter to his son. I paraphrase his advice: “If you show up every day and just try to do your best, in 20 years you will be premier in your field because few of your peers will bother to do that.”

And another thing, most jobs involve a degree of teamwork, that is, assessing non judgmentally the strengths and weaknesses of not only others but oneself — learning that life is more complicated than comparing scores on the SAT or times in the 50-yard dash.

The economist Stephen Moore has been writing along these lines recently. He notes that the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that only 35 percent of teenagers are working or looking for a job, down 50 percent or more from the Doo-Wop era.

“This is deeply troubling,” he begins. “Teen employment is highly associated with later success, even if the job is just lifeguarding or scooping ice cream. Young people learn the Woody Allen rule that 90 percent of life is just showing up in these first jobs, and we blame pampering parents for not teaching them that.”

But it is not just parents. Unions pressure legislators to discourage teen work in a variety of ways. They resist expanding apprenticeships, or allowing sub-minimum training wages, or easing child-labor rules for entry work.

All of this might have something to do with the fact that one in three out-of-work American men now isn't even looking for a job. You may admire your new tattoo but productivity is how individuals and nations prosper, and how they survive.

Look, if our economy can support a generation of sub-par DEI hires just to make dubious social-justice points, then it can give a few earnest but callow teenagers a chance to demonstrate — and to learn — what they can do.

## Muslim Sensitivities

*“Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions.” — G.K. Chesterton*

(May 31) — We have waited long enough for someone in the GOP leadership to defend the lieutenant governor's right to describe Islam as "demonic" and that he hates it. That none has done so says a lot about the Indiana Republican Party.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations took immediate umbrage and dismissed his concerns as "imaginary." But the lieutenant governor's characterization, on his reading of Muslim statements, including those from Muslims in Congress, struck some as at least arguable if not demonstrable.

I would have preferred he had used "traitorous," something a court could define. For Muslims, please know, are not of the same social construct as the Bible-carrying civil-rights marchers who crossed the Edmond Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, six decades ago.

Given the chance, the lieutenant governor might have cited Dr. Peter Hammond's "Slavery, Terrorism and Islam," a work of pattern recognition, not prejudice. It sets out a demographic model of the political behavior of a Muslim population within a non-Muslim society escalating in stages from invisibility to dominance to oppression. It goes a long way in explaining why nobody wants to move to the 50 or so Muslim-majority countries in the world.

Anyway, if you cannot argue that it is demonic to wish death on others because they don't believe what you believe, then what can you argue? And if that is not the view of "moderate" Muslims, then why don't they loudly and spontaneously condemn it rather than dismiss what is a predictable reaction?

And finally, considering the gauntlet Muslims in general insist on laying at the foot of American society — hijabs, jibabs, demonstrative and disruptive public prayer, calls for jihad and insularity — the lieutenant governor can be commended for beginning a necessary discussion, that is, whether Islam is compatible with a constitutional republic and its Christian founding.

I am willing to put aside the "death to America" chants and the expressed disdain for American values. I will even grant that the passages in the Quran ordering the slaying of nonbelievers are being misconstrued by the numerous faithful Muslims trying mightily to carry them out. My

brief, rather, is with a Republican Party that cannot stand up for its constituency.

In Indiana, a good part of that constituency is made up of heritage Americans increasingly expected to accept and abide those who openly hate them, who have reduced civil-rights law to merely an anti-white canon. Indeed, it is acceptably woke to think kindly of Muslims solely because they reject traditional America, especially the Christian part.

But again, we expect somebody, particularly somebody in GOP leadership, to stand up to such suicidal empathy. My guide on these issues is Dr. David Azzerad, a professor of political philosophy and a contributor to the influential collection of essays, "Up From Conservatism":

"The only reason we all get nervous at the mere mention of defending white Americans against injustice is because the Holocaust, slavery and to a lesser extent, colonialism, are the only real instantiations of evil the impoverished American mind can imagine . . . (It) does not seem to be able to compute the possibility that great injustices could be committed against white people."

Today's Democrats, of course, thrive on such envy-driven contention. But Azzerad expects Republicans to find the courage to uphold impartial laws, standards and social norms, regardless of what disparities they may produce. He suggests that if Muslims or other groups have a hard time complying with these standards or reject them altogether, then the solution is not to pander to their sensitivities.

So, is it OK for a duly elected state official to confront those who in his view threaten the well-being of his family, friends and neighbors? More than OK, some will say.

### 'Affordable' Housing

*"A Conservative is a fellow who is standing athwart history yelling 'Stop,' at a time when no one is inclined to do so." — Mission Statement, the National Review*

(May 28) — Reading up on the Indianapolis "Vacant to Vibrant" housing plan, I'm honestly



having trouble differentiating it from Zohran Mamdani's New York City.

Both assume that “affordable” housing is independent of the incentives (lower taxes, fewer regulations, public safety, practical zoning) that would attract private investment to build or renovate housing in line with market demand at all price points.

Rather, the Indianapolis version “guides” investors vetted for their dedication to “equitable development.” These investors are exclusively offered property that the city deems inadequate — abandoned or degraded for reasons either murky or unstated such as impossible regulations, toxic culture or crime.

Again, the program sidesteps the free market, empowering government to decide who can and who cannot own property. The specifications are draconian but include a social-justice promise to rent only to lower income, politically defined tenants.

It won't work. How do I know that? Well, if it were a solid business plan someone in the private sector already would be doing it. The blight that City Hall would “fix” is the market's way of saying that the properties are overvalued for current conditions and have a ways yet to fall.

My suspicion is that “Vacant to Vibrant” is not a housing program but a financial scheme for politically connected players who will cash out down the road. It could be taken seriously only if the city, supported by the neighborhoods themselves, were focused on dramatically reducing crime, building infrastructure and inviting unrestricted investment. They are not.

The designers of the New York version, unrestrained by the niceties of Midwest expectations, don't even pretend their plan will work. We are watching a master class there in how to bring a city to ruin with housing policy being the wrecking ball of preference.

Mayor Mamdani announced this week that his administration, on top of already severe rent controls, will: 1) further handicap a landlord's ability to repair and maintain his property; 2) in effect bankrupting owners failing to meet its new stricter standards; and 3) placing billions of dollars of property in unaccountable third-party hands.

Look, if there's one thing history tells us it is that the best designers of public policy are citizens making individual choices as to how they want to manage their affairs and invest their money, all with due respect for Common Law and the Golden Rule.

That involves free markets setting prices as signals of what is to be manufactured and sold as well as guiding how we deal with others in the management and exchange of our property. Coercive government, as opposed to private charities, has no useful role in any of that other than to stay out of the way, although it tries mightily and continually to convince us otherwise.

As the economist Ludwig von Mises argued decades before his work accurately predicted the collapse of Communist Russia, government attempts to solve such problems merely create more problems. Intervention beyond public safety, protecting property and ensuring the smooth operation of the market only distorts economic calculation and replaces individual sovereignty with an arbitrary bureaucracy.

So, what will Indianapolis and New York do as failure inevitably looms? Call for even more intervention, of course, eroding individual liberty and threatening the system of private property itself leading to economic and social chaos.

How “affordable” is that?

It is not a matter of reform, you see, but a matter of taking Willam Buckley's sage advice and stopping it altogether. I don't see anybody in either political party here willing to do that.

## Horse Thieves Matter

*(May 15)* — The son of pioneers in the Flint Hills of Kansas, my sheriff grandfather was familiar with the story of “the Sedgwick County Anti-Horse-Thieving Association” — or the SCAHTA as it was never known because they were blessedly free of acronyms back then. Let us just say that it would not have fit into the defund-the-police messaging, nor would grandfather have known what you were even talking about.

In the winter of 1870 a group of 60 or so heavily armed men went place to place with a list of suspected horse thieves. They hung or shot dead eight of them. They did so on the authority of their

association's "manifesto." Years later, The Wichita Eagle got a copy of it. Here is an excerpt:

"Since the first settlement of Butler, Cowley and Sedgwick counties the people have suffered from the depredations of horse thieves. Within 10 miles, at least 300 horses have been stolen within the past year. In hardly any instance was the horse recovered and no horse thief has been successfully prosecuted in any court of justice. The evidence is clear that a regular organized band of horse thieves exists in the counties. Parties losing horses have traced the animals to certain localities and suddenly lost all clue to them. There also have been a number of murders perpetrated in the region, but none has been suffered thereafter."

So numerous were the horse thieves, the newspaper reported, that "no man dared institute a prosecution against any other man for horse stealing, however strong his suspicions might be." The suspected men "swaggered" about the streets and threatened the lives of any who dared voice suspicions, it was said.

Nonetheless, the list was compiled and the association formed, "Amongst them may be found farmers, lawyers, doctors, merchants, sheriffs, constables, justices of the peace, and in fact men in every avocation of life." That winter, during three raids in a two-week period, the vigilantes rounded up dozens, lynching or gunning down the eight.

A horse, please know, was not just a line item in a settler's budget, it was survival. It is an understatement to say their theft was taken seriously. Indeed, the newspapers at the time had no trouble justifying the lynchings, noting that along with the thousands of Texas longhorns on the Chisholm Trail came "lawless characters with murder and horse-thievery high on their list of accomplishments."

Let the law schools sort out the appropriateness of the Sedgwick County Anti-Horse-Thieving Association. I can only tell you that growing up under its example three generations later it was rare to run across anyone impolite let alone criminal.

## James Briggs: The New Journalism

(May 7) — We don't enjoy discouraging a fellow journalist. First of all, nobody cares. It is "inside baseball," as an editor of mine liked to say. Our members have more important things to do.

Still, any job has standards and after some decades in the business (note that I didn't say "profession") I have a right to express my understanding of them — standards that James Briggs of the Indianapolis Star fails to meet.

I start with what the late Robert Bartley of the Wall Street Journal taught us was the core value of any market-based information system — prescience. Nobody will pay to be told what to think.

Bartley pictured neolithic men sitting around a campfire planning the day's hunt. There would be one in the circle who had a better memory of the game trails. That was the journalist. He would receive an extra bite of gazelle leg or whatever.

Translated to modern media systems, it would be a newsroom trying mightily to manage facts and opinions in a way that helps readers/viewers anticipate the coming day, the coming week, or, if it is really good, the month ahead. Will it rain, will the team win, what does this new law portend?

It is not easy, and all of us fall short, especially those on the political beat. The line must be drawn, however, between those who are trying and those who are not. James Briggs is not.

The first thing that you see in Briggs' bio is that in 2020, the year that American journalism hit bottom with a dead-cat bounce, he decided to get a masters in journalism — a masters, mind you, in a craft that Mark Twain said could be learned in two weeks on a good weekly. That tells you he is either stupid, which he doesn't appear to be, or that he had too much time on his hands.

Please know that there is nothing particularly evil about the man. He is a hard-working guy trying to support his family on his available skills sets. I certainly would not like to see him fired or even demoted. I would like to see him transferred somewhere he can do less damage to the public

discussion — the obit desk, perhaps, where he can learn respect for his readers and his subject matter.

As it is, Briggs has fashioned a career out of little else than inflammatory descriptions of the powerful — calling people names essentially. The President of the United States is “despicable” and “craven.” The Indiana governor is a “loser.” Our United States Senator is “deserving of retribution.”

Does he suggest these people should somehow be done away with, is he a part of the dehumanization movement in activist politics, that is, would he demean you because you are a Fascist or does he call you a Fascist so he can demean you?

Well, as a regular reader of his column (it’s part of my job), I am sorry to say that he seems ambivalent about that. Indeed, he seems to play to it.

I know from experience, though, that when you build your journalism on a morality play, with the “good” guys always winning and the “bad” guys” always losing, regardless of facts or events, all the while assigning motives to fit your analysis, reality eventually smacks you in the face.

And so it was that Briggs sent this out to his readers on election eve under the unfortunate headline, “Trump’s Day of Reckoning Is Here”:

“The overhyped rallies and social media theatrics will be over. Braun, Banks and the entire Indiana Republican Party will have to wake up and figure out what just happened. Much like the Senate redistricting vote, Trump’s wrath is looking shaky. Reporting from Politico and CNN projects a bad night for the Trump-endorsed primary challenges.”

Did I mention that the value of journalism is prescience?

### Unserving ‘the Unhoused’

(May 1) — Our mayor has thrown down the NIMBY gauntlet. She is trying to shame opponents of her plan to build a \$3.8 million “homeless services” center downtown, a couple of blocks from the art museum. She says they selfishly don’t want the center in their backyard but cannot offer an alternative plan.

I am here to help, but first some background. Our foundation once had offices near a rescue mission and not far from the site of the proposed center. I don’t want to detail the nasty stuff we found in our alcove every morning but we eventually had to lock the front door to keep out “the unhoused,” to use the mayor’s term of art.

Who, exactly, wants that in their neighborhood?

A related experience is from a member of the board of an alcohol rehabilitation center. The board was offered a sizable donation to renovate the center. He was surprised by the staff’s recommendation to turn it down. A spruced-up building, the staff advised, would send the wrong message to a drunk dropped off late at night by a sheriff’s deputy — e.g., that considering the nice digs maybe he hadn’t hit bottom quite yet and had a few more drinks to go.

One councilman recognizes these realities and is questioning why the city would purposely foul a downtown area that it has spent millions renovating. I quote from his statement yesterday, a statement pointed at the do-gooder elite of our business community.

“I’m just an idiot councilman so I’ve gone and asked the experts who have the responsibility — the Downtown Improvement District — what will this do? Will it have any negative impacts? That’s a fair question because they have the responsibility to be an honest player in that question, and I can’t figure out why they would sit this one out. I guess they’re too busy planning big parties.”

While the councilman awaits an answer, we have a solution. It is to cut off the money. We should vigorously encourage the good work of private charities, of course, but not support vagrancy with a broad range of services funded with municipal dollars.

The role of the city should be a narrow one — public safety and law enforcement, no million-dollar buildings required. It is difficult and inexact work, but an attempt must be made by officers on the street to differentiate those homeless in need of medical help from those who are making miserable life choices. Money helping the former is well spent and necessary. Members of the latter group, however, can be given bus tickets out of town.

If that is too harsh, you might recall that counties once managed “poor farms,” an

alternative to jail time, where those convicted of repeated vagrancy were sent to do light chores to help pay their upkeep — until they could put their lives together, or so it was hoped.

## Republicans for Taxes

(April 29) — Gov. Mike Braun and the legislative leadership are ambivalent about an indefinite suspension of the 7 percent gas tax. But we elect Republicans to cut taxes, especially on what we want more of, such as cheap energy. The idea is to reduce the size of government, not to prop it up, and in a fiscal crisis to reduce nonessential services, not reflexively maintain the burden on the citizenry.

Nonetheless, they are telling us in effect that there is no spending anywhere in the \$44-billion budget — much of it line items we don't want or need or anyone requested — that could be cut to offset the gas-tax revenue, that could make life more affordable for every Hoosier, not only at the pump but all along the supply chain.

Perversely, Democrats, who worship taxation, are feigning opposition to discontinuing the tax. The uni-party is a real thing, isn't it?

## Let's Pack the U.S. House

(April 29) — Gallup reports this week that the approval rate of Congress has fallen to 10 percent. Coincidentally, a Butler graduate student, Evan Wareham, has an intriguing idea — reapportionment on steroids. What if we reformed the U.S. House of Representatives by adding members to increase per-capita representation?

That, please know, was the original plan. In the Federalist Papers, James Madison argued that the House of Representatives should expand with the size of the American population.

Madison's warning has proved prescient: "So small a number of representatives will be[come] an unsafe depositary of the public interests." He rightly predicted that representatives would turn unresponsive to the wider issues faced in their districts, having to account for more constituents than they could handle. In this chaos, he said, they would be "most likely to aim at a permanent elevation of the few on the depression of the many."

Congress followed the Madison blueprint for nearly two centuries, Wareham notes. House seats were expanded following every census beginning with 59 members in 1789 and growing about 34 seats every 10 years. The number was capped at an arbitrary 435 by the Reapportionment Act of 1929. Wareham proposes increasing the number of Representatives to 1,305, still way below what Madison's formula would recommend (10,000 or more).

Where would they all sit, you ask. Well, they could stay home and vote remotely, living among their constituents and their concerns and away from a concentration of lobbyists and the pressures of leadership cabals.

There are many other questions, and we don't mean to argue the reform here (it will be featured in the summer Indiana Policy Review). It is nonetheless reasonable to ask how the situation could be much worse, and does anybody have a better idea?

To put Congress's 10 percent approval rate in perspective, I asked my assistant, Grok, to estimate how many Americans are drunk, drugged or otherwise chemically discombobulated at any given time. Using self-reports, surveys and modeling, he estimates that the percentage of acutely impaired is significant — in the high single digits at least. That, hypothetically, leaves only a sliver of the sober electorate happy with a Congress that somehow wins reelection at a rate of 98 percent or higher.

Finally, Wareham's proposal, in addition to providing a constructive point to begin the reform discussion, is feasible — at least compared with a Constitutional amendment or armed rebellion. All we need do is elect a simple majority to vote for it, as is the case with any law. (We can deal with senators and the 17th Amendment later.)

"Political minorities would finally be heard," Wareham says. "Individual politicians would be left with less jurisdiction, less authority and more time to listen to the people — and maybe some of them would keep their promises."

Fire away, young Wareham, fire away.



## Assessing the Next Indy Mayor

*“A conservative is someone who stands athwart history, yelling, ‘Stop,’ at a time when one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it.” — William F. Buckley*

(April 24) — As Indianapolis

slides into progressivism, the way to think about Democrats is not what candidates stand for but what they stand against. We once had Henry “Scoop” Jackson, who, despite being a staunch supporter of labor, could be depended upon to oppose Communism. And of course there was John F. Kennedy, a machine Democrat who understood the supply-side mechanics of the American economy.

Yes, that was long ago. Today, given a moribund local GOP and unconscious Indy newsrooms, which one of the Democrat candidates for Indianapolis mayor will stand against Mamdani-style rule?

Assuming that Joe Hogsett retires, there is nothing to indicate that the leading candidate, the comely Andrea Hunley, will raise so much as a quibble against Mamdaniism. At best, she is a quasi-black version of Abigail D. Spanberger, the Virginia governor who campaigned like a school marm and is governing like a Nazi. And Indianapolis City-County Councilor Vop Osili or unionist David Bride are just different paths to the same oblivion.

So Hunley it is. A more pleasant woman you will not meet. What could go wrong?

First off, the demographics don’t promise mitigation of the blue-city blueprint. As we have noted here before, both the black and muslim populations of Indianapolis, now joined by an influx of assorted immigrants, are sizable and led by radical elements. If you want to know what I mean by “radical,” check out Andre Carson’s voting record in Washington.

However charming the disposition of Hunley, a former secondary school principal, she will be under serious pressure from a Mamdani wing here. Be reminded that a Gallup poll last year found that fully 66 percent of rank-and-file Democrats have a positive image of socialism.

No, you say, not our Indy, not our Nap Town, not the home of the gormless but lovable Dick

Lugar. And now we will have municipal grocery stores? “Free” city busses? Exodus-driving property taxes? Store-closing minimum wages? Rent freezes and housing shortages? Homeless encampments? Muslim calls to prayer? Militant public-sector unions? Fiscal collapse? Police retreat?

We hope we’re wrong. But again, who stands in the way? My colleague at the next desk thinks our best chance is that the situation in New York City becomes so miserable even the media becomes concerned.

Anyway, while you are thinking all that over, there is a pertinent article by William Voegeli in the current issue of the Claremont Review of Books, “Night of the Living Woke: The Democratic Party’s Center Cannot Hold.” As the title suggests, it is not optimistic.

Voegeli predicts that no matter how deep the potholes or how high the property taxes Democrats cannot “escape the vise grip of progressive primary voters.” In American cities he sees intra-Democratic victories such as those of Mamdani as increasingly to be the rule rather than the exception. An excerpt:

“The only true principle of the modern Democratic Party is that it is on the right side of history. This, after all, is progressivism distilled to its essence. But because moderates believe this vaguely, while leftists believe it fervently, it is nearly impossible for the former to induce the latter to be patient and restrained. Since believing oneself to be on the right side of history is unfalsifiable, the fervent view any setback as temporary, a speed bump on the social justice highway. To concede anything more is not prudence but cowardice, shameful pandering to the bigoted, reactionary forces that progressivism exists to discredit and defeat.”

The takeaway? If you own property in Indianapolis, reassess your portfolio regularly these next few election cycles.

## Build It and They Will Come

(April 17) — A few of us have spent considerable time trying to find a simple

illustration of how the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) works.

Are they trying to mimic a bank in some sloppy way or a Chamber of Commerce? More specifically, how is it a good idea to leverage government money to bet on random enterprises, some of which may only extract wealth from our community rather than invest in it? Is the primary purpose to announce a ribbon-cutting with a political claim to have created a certain number of jobs? Is it all about concrete and rebar?

We get hung up on the difference in incentives between the typical IEDC setup and the old-fashioned, almost forgotten, community bank. Such banks had special knowledge of their town and the personality of the particular business needing financing.

Because these banks were risking in directly accountable ways their own money, that of their officers and shareholders, they were organized to expertly assess that risk — in both character and ledger, both short term and long, and whether profit aside it would be good for their fellow townspeople.

Anyway, I think I've found a better analogy to the IEDC. It is the Papua New Guinea "cargo cult." You can think of it as an indigenous Chamber of Commerce but let my assistant, Grok, tell the history:

During WWII, the Allies set up military bases on remote Pacific islands to support the war effort against Japan. Massive amounts of "cargo" — food, weapons, medicine, clothing, and supplies — were airdropped or shipped in, dramatically transforming local life for the islanders who had little prior contact with the West.

When the war ended, the planes stopped coming. Some islanders responded by creating rituals and ceremonies designed to summon the cargo back. They built mock airstrips, bamboo "control towers," and wooden airplanes or radios. They marched in formation with sticks as rifles, waving signal flags and performing drills.

Cargo cults illustrate a universal human tendency: When faced with something powerful and mysterious, people often replicate the visible symbols and behaviors rather than grasping the deeper mechanisms (e.g., economics).

Those of you who have followed a full-blown IEDC campaign will recognize the parallels, especially in regard to clearing land for industrial parks, the display of scale architectural models and the ceremonial press conferences in full businessman-like attire.

## Unstacking Public Education

(April 15) — If you didn't already think it a bad idea to allow public-sector workers to hire their own bosses and set their own salaries in a self-serving fiscal doom loop then the headline this week in the Capital Chronicle should have been eye-opening:

"Union for ISTA Staff Files Unfair Labor Charges."

Yes, the teachers union's own employees are suing to wrest management prerogative from the union just as the union has assumed such control from the state and in turn from the districts — a sort of Russian stacking doll of management lunacy.

We've been writing on this for three decades now, so excuse the passion but dag nabbit it's important: Public-sector collective bargaining doesn't free teachers. Rather, it entrenches a privileged, oddly incompetent elite at everyone else's expense, eroding accountability and making government less responsive and more expensive (think Brandon Johnson's Chicago).

This foundation has argued that the 53-year-old Indiana Collective Bargaining Act is the reason that public education has stagnated. We have tried to show what should be obvious, that is, the predictable disfunction of government employee unions negotiating wages, benefits, pensions and work rules with politicians spending other people's money.

But only crickets at the Statehouse. The union has successfully blocked every serious attempt to encourage individual school districts to pay faculty on the basis of value to the education mission. Rather, egalitarians rule, superior teachers getting less than they are worth and mediocre teachers getting more than they are worth — an Animal Farm formula certain to degrade any school over time.

Indiana's collective bargaining agreements prioritize job security over performance. Teacher compensation is flat across the state with differences typically of only 10 percent for the same experience/credentials. With such a setup, firing the incompetent becomes nearly impossible, innovation stalls and resources flow to the least productive, DEI hires being particularly cherished.

In effect, Indiana's public school system is made up of 300 or so "Red Banner Tractor Factories," to use the late Bill Styring's description, all manufacturing the same product year after year, a product that nobody has said they want. Meanwhile, dedicated, talented and professionally called teachers go unrewarded.

Are there alternatives? For a survey of the literature, go to [www.inpolicy.org](http://www.inpolicy.org) and search "student-based budgeting" or "collective bargaining." But don't take our word for it. Begin by asking your preferred AI assistant for a comparison of public-sector unions with the more institutionally honest private-sector unions. Here is what our man Grok came up with:

In the private sector, unions bargain against profit-driven employers who face competition, bankruptcy risk and customer choice. If demands get too costly, the company can lose market share, cut costs elsewhere or go out of business. This naturally aligns incentives toward efficiency and sustainability. Public-sector unions face none of this.

Public employee unions don't just negotiate with neutral arbitrators — again, they bargain with politicians they help elect. These union members are major campaign donors, volunteers and voters in local and state elections.

Finally, public-sector deals routinely produce back-loaded costs — especially defined-benefit pensions and retiree healthcare — that explode years later, long after the negotiating politicians have left office.

A solution? It would be politically bloody but Indiana's Collective Bargaining Act can be repealed. Each school building can fashion a staff, a curriculum and a salary schedule as it sees fit. Let them succeed or fail on enrollment metrics, how well patrons think their particular school is handling its education obligations.

Some schools will make bad choices and suffer enrollment consequences. Some parents will make bad choices as well, as they do in any case. The overall result, though, will be dozens of competing, accountable education strategies all doing their best to produce quality classroom learning, not union sinecure.

We've got nothing to lose.

## Politics, Voting Are Overrated

*"Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention." — James Madison, Federalist No. 10*

(April 11) — In the morning mail is the two-thousandth postcard asking for my vote. The thought occurs that in a lifetime of going to the polls I have voted against my own interests a good deal of the time. I didn't know enough — couldn't know enough — to choose wisely. Might I have been better off letting the more grounded do the voting?

Not really; it didn't matter one way or the other under the current system. Granted, collective vote totals send politicians a message — if they are inclined to hear it. In Indiana, though, outside the battleground states, the odds of my vote making the difference in a national election are calculated at an impossible billion to one. The odds in a local elections aren't all that more favorable.

But it's my duty, you say. No, I would do better studying the law or economics so as to thwart incursions into individual liberty and thereby maximize choices every day, not just on election day. Who, by the way, voted to bankrupt the next generation, or gut Social Security, or give the Federal Reserve control of our money?

Look, democracy is a false god — a distraction. Governing purely by vote count, especially in a mixed society, is to be ruled by a "parliament of whores," in the words of the late P.J. O'Rourke. My assistant Grok cites strong arguments that universal suffrage "only broadens the demand for collective action and blame-shifting, the delegation of power to insulated bureaucracies and executive orders." That sentiment is expressed in a block of dialogue from the classic political comedy, "Wag the Dog":

*Robert De Niro: I don't vote.*

*Dustin Hoffman: Why don't you vote?*

*De Niro: Last time I voted was that one time Major League Baseball started the fans voting. I voted for Boog Powell on first base. He didn't get in it, and it just disappointed me. Stayed with me. It's futile.*

*Hoffman: You've never voted for president?*

*De Niro: No. Do you vote?*

*Hoffman: No. I always vote for the Academy Awards . . . but I never win.*

*Anne Heche: Liz, do you vote?*

*Liz: No, I don't like the rooms. Too claustrophobic.*

There of course is a more serious case to be made. Why not limit the electorate to those who have something to lose — property owners and taxpayers? At the least, we need a system more grounded in constitutional originalism where voting is an earned trust rather than an entitlement for setting foot on U.S. soil.

That was the idea, anyway. The Founders understood that legislatures otherwise would be driven by what economists have recently come to call the “diffuse costs, concentrated benefits” problem. It is the recognition that we do not have much incentive to oppose a tax that would cost us only a few dollars. Those whom that tax subsidizes, however, have a huge incentive to lobby for both more money and more power (think Indiana Economic Development Corporation).

Please know that none of this assumes one group of citizens is inherently superior. It says only that ownership and tax-contribution status creates incentives for more accountable governance — for everybody. It complements the checks and balances built into our Constitution. It is part of the formula for societal trust and general prosperity.

There are ways to get this done other than returning to the Founders' franchise of propertied white males. For starters, we can try weighted voting by taxes paid, taxpayer assemblies, tighter naturalization and civics requirements, heritage tests, and so forth. But somehow it needs to get done. Democracy, unfettered, will destroy us if we let it.

## Incoming, Media Bias!

(April 8) — OK, we get it. The corporate media does not like the application of military power by a Republican president. But like it or not, the destruction of bridges, power supplies and manufacturing plants is what armed forces do when an enemy refuses to surrender. It has been so since the application of gun powder. Before that, they laid siege and threatened to starve everybody to death.

An example of the converse is the thousands of lives that would have been saved in Vietnam on both sides had a president ordered such a bombing of Haiphong Harbor. If you are interested, there are web sites that show photographs of American soldiers who died as a result of White House reluctance.

There are no Queensberry rules in modern warfare, no padded gloves or three-minute rounds. Civilizations, regimes, administrations have no inherent right to exist, especially those that have sworn to destroy our own.

That this president would mention severe options was to state the obvious. The word choices? Awkward as usual from Donald Trump but hardly “insane,” as one congresswoman charged. In fact, it seemed to have accomplished what the Pope had ordered — a ceasefire.

Moreover, the Trump announcement of a resultant deal to open the Strait of Hormuz has reduced the oil futures price by almost 20 percent, one of the largest 12-hour reductions in history, the equivalent of a 75 cent to \$1 a gallon drop in the price of gas (can you spell “affordability”?).

And yet, here is the headline the next morning on a story from the Washington Post: “Trump's Apocalyptic Iran Threat Paused War but Fueled Debate About his Credibility, Morality.”

Will the curators of newsroom orthodoxy ever give it a rest?

## Politics From the Pews

(April 1) — Politics is something we don't talk about in my church — “verboden” my Lutheran



grandmother would say. That has never made sense to me. I understand why a pastor may not want to politicize from the pulpit, but Christianity is so entwined with Western Civilization that it would seem a good idea to keep tabs on how things are going.

A friend declares this political silence in the pews to be unnatural. He has come up with a plan for correcting it without sacrificing discipleship for partisanship. He would plant “Good Government Clubs” in churches and synagogues to fill what he argues is a vacuum in Judeo-Christian civil life.

Congregations are already involved in politics, of course, but of the single-issue stripe. The anti-abortionists and other morality activists, not to mention the Zionists, have never expanded effectively into economic strategies, public safety, fiscal management, individual liberty, DEI and so forth.

I will leave the pertinent Scriptural citations to do so to the more biblically literate, but rest assured there is plenty to mull over there under a pastor’s guidance.

My friend’s Good Government Clubs, though, would operate independent of the particular church (except to meet in the cafeteria). They would limit themselves to raising the level of civic knowledge of just those congregants curious about such things. The clubs could parse hard questions on such topics as corruption, economics, fiscal responsibility, religious liberty and the rule of law. You can expect the groups to be small.

More tactically, the clubs might keep their members informed about upcoming elections and the deadlines and requirements for filing as a candidate. The nonprofit, nonpartisan Indiana Policy Review is one group that provides an excellent step-by-step pamphlet on how to run a local election. Its “Indiana Mandate” includes monographs on 75 public-policy issues in the headlines.

Yes, I can see how this could get out of hand. There will be clubs comprised of Christians and Jews who oppose my political views. But Game Theory predicts that my position will be relatively improved. Please know that the modern secular movement, made up of those who recognize no power higher than themselves, is a religion in itself, already organized and busy fueling calamity wherever and however it can.

“Once abolish the God, and the government becomes the God,” famously wrote G.K Chesterton in his work, “Very Christian Democracy.” He argues therein that the secularization of public life hasn’t liberate society, it has simply idolized the state.

Most generally, a nonpartisan Good Government Club grounded in biblical principles of justice, truth and human dignity, would help us resist ceding moral authority to partisan or governmental power.

A few more of us entering the discussion from the pews, thus informed, Republican or Democrat, couldn’t hurt. — *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*

Established January 1989