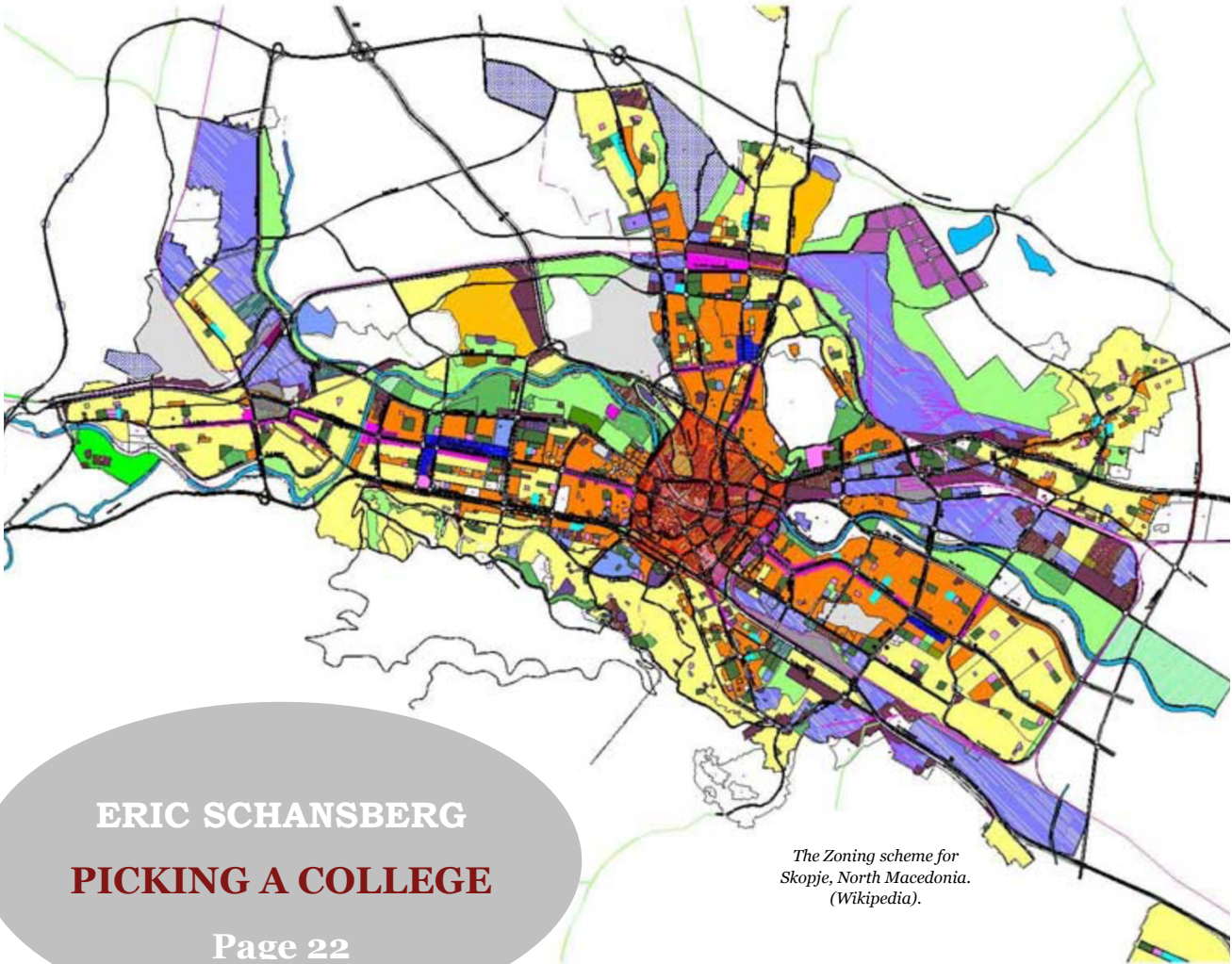


INDIANA POLICY

Review

Winter 2026



ERIC SCHANSBERG
PICKING A COLLEGE

Page 22

*The Zoning scheme for
Skopje, North Macedonia.
(Wikipedia).*

Zoning Is the Problem Unaffordability Is the Symptom

The regulatory burden on new housing adds almost the same amount of dollar outlay to the starter home as to the mansion. This results in a smaller price differential between starter homes and larger ones, making the former relatively less attractive for buyers and builders.

“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.1, Winter 2026

A FUTURE THAT WORKS

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

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

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

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From the South Wall

Yes, Socialism Works . . . Sort of

"Great idea; wrong species." — E.O. Wilson, entomologist

This year has seen major American cities, like New York City and Seattle, elect socialist mayors. Elsewhere, positions a bit lower on the totem pole have also found successful socialist candidates, including winning city or area council seats in Atlanta, Georgia; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Detroit, Michigan; Greenbelt, Maryland; Ithaca, New York; Jersey City, New Jersey; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Poughkeepsie, New York; and Carrboro, North Carolina.

And there are many more socialists running in the next year or so.

As in New York City, socialists' victories came from similar demographics behind them: rich, educated, white liberals (especially women) and poor people. These victories highlight the renewed appeal of the Marxist system. Some now see socialism as the wave of the future. Conservatives reply by saying that this system must be rejected because "socialism does not work."

However, socialism does work if you have a different idea of what "works" means.

As a free-market capitalist – which I confess to be – I understand the imperfections of being a free-market capitalist. I look at "my" system as the least-worst of all the economic systems. The statement, "Capitalism is the least-worst economic system," is, admittedly, a paraphrase of Winston Churchill's own thought regarding democracy. It encapsulates a widely held view that while free-market capitalism has significant flaws, it has proven more effective in generating prosperity and innovation than alternative systems have when implemented on a large scale.

Most people reading these thoughts in the Indiana Policy Review, with its conservative outlook, would conclude that my observations are just more proof that socialism does not work. It proves the failure of a defective economic system that rewards laziness and encourages theft through the redistribution of wealth.

I can hear it now, "Socialist fools can't see that socialism does not work. It is so obvious."

However, I can come to an opposite and more terrifying conclusion: Yes, socialism works.

We must look at the pattern. Where socialism rules, impoverishment follows. It is intentional. This is no mistake. The general loss of order, beauty, ambition, motivation and excellence, to name just a few attributes of a free society, is not caused by socialist leaders making endless attempts to reach prosperity with broken tools and a defective system. The system and the people leading socialistic governments want things that way.

The key to understanding this strange conclusion is to plumb the depths of what different people mean by "works."

When I say that something works, I mean it functions according to its intended purpose. A car that does not move forward fails to perform its transportation function and does not work. A piano that can only play half of the notes in the C major scale fails to reach its musical end. Neither the car nor the piano works.

So it is with socio-economic systems. A free-market economy and its corresponding society aim to produce great wealth and prosperity through certain economic rules. Though that system isn't perfect — producing unequal outcomes, excessive ambition and greed — among them. Its goal is "human flourishing." Individuals matter. Responsibility matters. Accountability matters. So does one's work ethic, intelligence, resilience, drive, stamina, creativity, imagination — and more. Virtue matters. When all this stuff works, it creates a natural hierarchy in which all individuals prosper according to the effort they exert. Yes, for sure, luck figures in, too. In addition, the culture strives for excellence because it improves production, efficiency and prosperity. When a society reaches this goal, it all works. When a stock market generates great financial losses instead of profits, we say it has crashed. That didn't work.

However, a socialist economy and its corresponding society aim to redistribute wealth, not for excellence or individual accomplishment. In fact, it delegitimizes individual wealth creation. Marxism (in all its applications) is not only an economic system but a philosophical system that idealizes an egalitarian society under which everyone (well,

everyone but the leaders) is equal, and no one possesses more than anyone else. In any of its myriad manifestations and varieties, what unites socialist thinking is its attack on hierarchies and those manifestations of excellence that give rise to inequalities. In fact, it is hostile to the ultimate Authority and Creator of inequalities, who is God Himself.

Thus, when people say that socialism does not work, they really mean it does not produce the same results as a market economy and its society does. And they are absolutely right. However, a true socialist isn't interested in achieving the goals of a free-market economy and society.

Socialism works to create an egalitarian society. It works when it destroys the structures and hierarchies that have allowed the West to prosper. It works when it destroys the standards of excellence that favor human flourishing, particularly individual effort. It works when it suppresses what it considers excessive wealth by taxation, regulation, legislation and even confiscation. It works when it favors vulgarity, drabness and all that is ordinary.

Socialism attracts rebellious (and, as well, not a few intelligent) souls who hate authority and any restraint upon disordered passions. It creates resentments, entitlement and class struggle. Socialists aren't stupid. They pursue an egalitarian, atheistic society with cunning and purpose as a means of achieving this end that favors their most deeply-rooted vices.

As Mayor Mamdani promises more rent-controlled housing in New York City, why would a landlord work to maintain or beautify a building when it costs unrecoverable investment, makes him stand out, and maybe trigger socialist persecution? Why would he (or she) improve something that an owner can't charge more for and might find the owner has no control over those who might rent the dwelling and abuse it? To the socialist, remember, we're all equal, remember, no matter how we act or treat each other.

Why would others use refined language, better clothes and polite manners that reinforce charm, courtesy and hierarchical structures? The socialist tendency is not to stand out and attract attention. Everything and everyone must be equal. Radically equal, if possible. Socialism creates the constant race to the bottom.

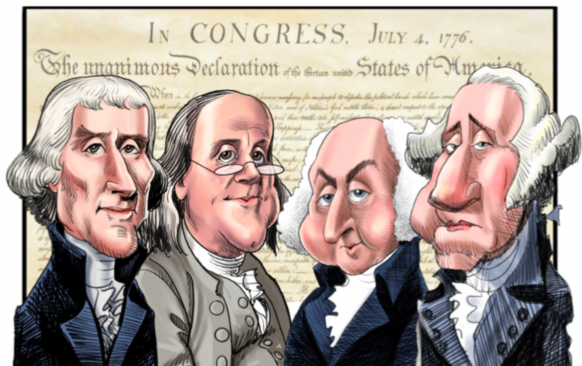
Indeed, in much of the Soviet world, in Eastern Europe, in China, for instance, socialism has worked beyond Marx's wildest dreams. Socialism works when it produces hopelessness, despair, blocks of ugly, poorly made, identical apartments, godless societies and depraved morals.

We can say that socialism works wherever it is true to itself, be it in Cuba, Venezuela, or other places.

We are not threatened by the socialism that does not work according to Western standards. We are threatened when socialism works, radiating its egalitarian and gloomy presence everywhere. — [Jim O'Donnell](#)

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 approaching, the Indiana Policy Review, through the lens of the Declaration, examines 75 of the most critical issues facing our state.



A Builder Looks at Housing Affordability

The supply is constrained by rigid exclusionary zoning (excessive single-family zones in particular) and cost-ratcheting building codes.

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



Home prices in the United States are at or near all-time highs following the Covid-era housing boom. After the previous peak during the 2000s housing boom/subprime mortgage bubble, home prices cratered for about five years, then resumed a more historically normal growth rate through the late 2010s. Home price appreciation then took off during the Covid lockdowns, with year-on-year price increases topping 20 percent in late 2021. This appears to be an all-time record for home price appreciation, which had previously topped out at about 15 percent during the peak of the 2000s housing boom.

These data are nominal prices, however, meaning they are partly composed of rising home values, and partly represent the declining value of the U.S. dollar — which was especially acute during the Covid “stimulus” spending and money-printing blowout. Adjusting for inflation reveals, however, that real home prices did indeed eclipse the 2000s boom peak during 2021, and they have remained stuck at or near these all-time highs in the ensuing four years.

There’s no doubt that homes in America are more expensive than ever. This factoid is not meaningful by itself, however, because Americans are also, by all legitimate measures, richer than we’ve ever been. What matters of course is the rate of growth in home prices relative to that of household incomes. The median home in the U.S. now fetches roughly five times the median household income. While this

figure is down slightly from all-time highs reached during the Covid housing boom, it has held near this level for ten-plus years, and this represents a significant rise from a ratio of around four times median income that was stable during the 1990s.

These data underscore the political salience of the housing “affordability crisis.” Home price appreciation has clearly outpaced income growth in the U.S. for at least 20 years. There have been exceptions to this trend, with falling price-to-income ratios (i.e. improving home affordability), but these came either during times of economic distress (subprime mortgage crisis & Great Recession) or were short-lived (first Trump term economic boom). Politicians and commentators on the left, most notably incoming New York mayor Zohran Mandami, have made much of the widely-felt affordability issue, particularly in housing. Indeed, large urban areas such as New York, Los Angeles, and most big American cities face even more acute home price inflation, and rents in these cities have likewise been rising at a significantly higher clip than overall inflation.

For lower-income people in the cities, the housing affordability issue merits the “crisis” label. As many have noted, unaffordable housing is deeply related to other social problems such as delayed marriage,¹ collapsing birthrates, and youthful despair. While housing affordability may feel like a young person’s problem, those of us middle-age and up who care about our economic future and children’s and grandchildren’s prospects should take note. Boomers who “got theirs” and currently benefit from rapid appreciation of their long paid-off homes should be cognizant of the challenges facing the younger generations; it would be wise for those in leadership to do what they can to alleviate this problem with free-market solutions, before the youngsters are completely radicalized and vote historically ignorant socialist dreamers into office across the fruited plain.

Some Often Overlooked facts about the Housing Stock

Having acknowledged that America faces housing affordability challenges, I will address some root causes driving excessive home price appreciation

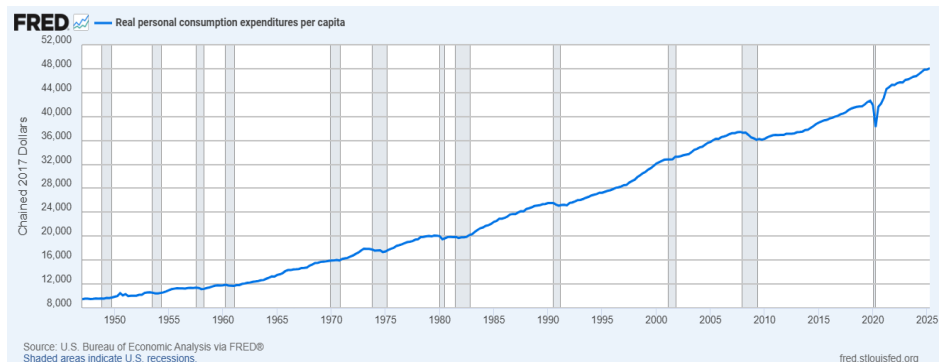
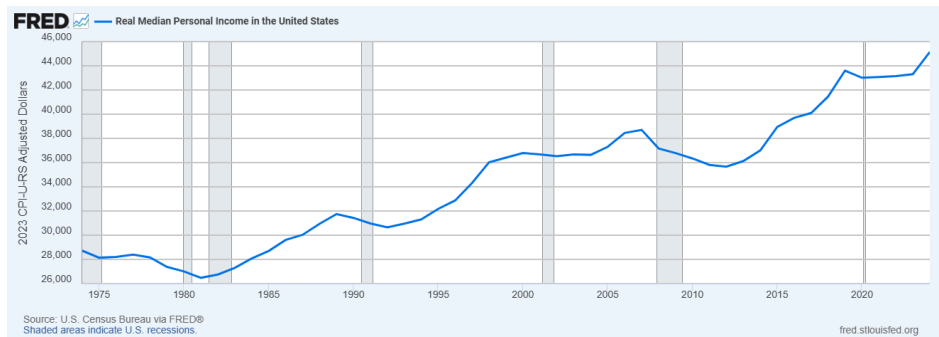
¹ Coldwell Banker, “The State of the American Dream” Nov. 10, 2025 <https://blog.coldwellbanker.com/american-dream/>

and recommend some helpful reforms. But first, some details about developments and changes in American houses are in order, to provide a more complete and nuanced understanding of the issue.

Let's begin by acknowledging that the American economy remains the most successful engine of mass wealth generation in human history. No other large country really comes close to America's GDP per capita — about \$90,000 in 2025 — or median personal income — \$45,140 in 2024. America's economy features steady growth, albeit with episodic volatility; despite some large recessions and inflation episodes, real personal income shows a strong uptrend and has come close to doubling over the past 50 years.

With more income to spend, people naturally buy more things and nicer things. Some of this extra spending goes to products that didn't even exist in the past, or were exclusively the province of the rich elites, such as computers, flatscreen TVs, smartphones, gourmet dog food, and the like. Much of this spending goes toward the basics — food, shelter, clothing — but the larger real incomes can purchase more and/or better of these products. Adjusting for inflation, per-person consumption spending has quadrupled since 1960, and this strong uptrend has shown only brief interruptions during recession episodes.

Spending patterns that hold for cars,² clothing, food, personal electronic devices, and all other products also hold for housing. As incomes rise, people spend more, in real terms, and they get more.



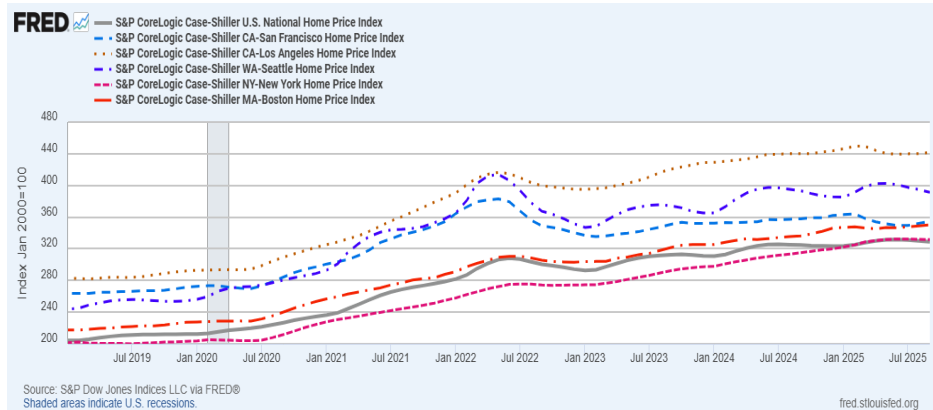
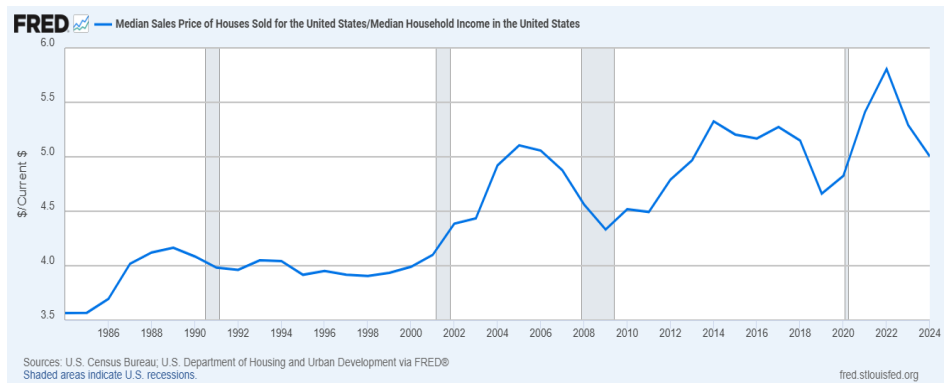
With respect to housing, “more” takes two forms: bigger homes (more square feet) and better homes (more amenities). In-depth data for U.S. housing is readily available going back to 1960, so I'll use that year as a baseline for comparisons. The median size of new homes in the U.S. in the 1960s was 1,500 square feet. As incomes rose, homes grew steadily, with the median new home peaking at 2,500 square feet in 2015, then declining slightly to about 2,200 square feet in 2025. In simple terms, today's new homes are close to two-thirds larger than they were 60 or 70 years ago. In addition to being bigger, houses are qualitatively better across all margins of value that people care about. In my experience this is most evident in the kitchen: Today's houses have bigger kitchens with better layouts, better-quality cabinets, stone or synthetic solid-surface countertops, and most importantly a full suite of very good appliances including dishwasher and microwave. Houses also have more rooms overall, more bathrooms, more insulation, and more efficient HVAC systems. Indeed, only perhaps 2

² Quality improvements in automobiles from the “good old days” to today are almost innumerable. I like to show my students the sticker price of a 1950 Chevy sedan in comparison to a modern vehicle that is equivalent in model type (i.e. 5-passenger, 4-door sedan) but vastly superior in every conceivable attribute of interest to the car buyer: safety, performance, emissions, fuel economy, comfort, convenience, reliability, etc. The base price of today's car is likely slightly higher than the 1950s version when adjusted for inflation, but you get a lot more (better) product for your money. “They don't build them like they used to” is true — they are much, much better now.

percent of homes built in 1960 featured central air conditioning,³ compared with nearly 100 percent today. Other items that are typically standard now, but optional in the supposed golden age of home affordability: double-pane windows, grounded wiring and GFI-protected outlets, washer/ dryer, attached garage (2 car +), garbage disposal, smoke/ carbon monoxide detectors, and myriad other safety and convenience features.

It's difficult to adjust the median home price data for the quality improvements the U.S. housing stock has seen over the years, but we can adjust for home size, personal incomes, and the often-ignored fact that household size (people per household) has also declined steadily since the 1960s, from 3.3 to 2.5 people per household. Factoring in all of these attributes, [which I did in this brief study](#)⁴, provides some useful depth and nuance in the analysis of the home affordability problem. In sum: when assessed on the basis of real price per square foot, real price per household income, and real price per household size (persons), the affordability problem looks somewhat less astronomical.

So while it's clear that home prices have risen substantially, even after adjusting for inflation, it is also clear that homes are significantly better across all margins of value.⁵ This is scant comfort, though,



to people who long for home ownership but find it increasingly out of reach. The affordability problem is real, though perhaps overstated in certain ways. But let's take a final look at the home ownership landscape in our 1960s golden age to see if, and by how much, we've retrogressed. Social media is full of memes about how a single-income family headed by a blue-collar worker could afford a home in the "good-old days," 1950s through 1960s depending on the particular version of the folk story.⁶ The memes are, at best, incomplete.

The U.S. homeownership rate in 1960 stood at 62 percent. This rose to an all-time high of 69 percent in 2004, hit a post-great recession low of 63 percent in 2016, and rebounded to 65 percent in mid-2025. Home ownership appears about as healthy as it had

³ Biddle, Jeff. 2008. "Explaining the spread of residential air conditioning, 1955-1980." *Explorations in Economic History* 45(4), p. 402-423. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222777062_Explaining_the_spread_of_residential_air_conditioning_1955-1980

⁴ <https://www.econlib.org/is-the-housing-affordability-crisis-an-illusion/>

⁵ Old timers in the construction field will cavil about declining build quality, specifically with regard to lumber. Having remodeled many 100+ year old homes, I acknowledge that lumber quality was superior in the golden age and before. In the big picture, however, construction methods and materials today are unquestionably superior to old homes, from foundations to roofs and everything in between. Complaints about today's marginally inferior lumber ring as shallow to me as claims that 1950s cars, with their all-steel construction, are better in any way than modern vehicles which feature many plastic panels and components.

⁶ Reason magazine has an excellent piece debunking this line of thought, which they dub "Nostalgianomics": <https://reason.com/2024/02/01/the-bankruptcy-of-nostalgianomics/>

been in the golden age of affordability, but further parsing of this data is in order. If it turns out that more of those homeowners are older and wealthier cohorts than in past years, the steady ownership rate is of no comfort for those of us concerned about affordability as a drag on family formation and economic growth. The National Association of Realtors collects data on buyers' and sellers' ages (among many other factors) and reports that, for 2025, the median age of first-time buyers hit an all-time high of 40, while the median age of repeat buyers likewise peaked at 62.⁷ It's clear that the 63 percent homeownership rate is increasingly comprised of older, wealthier households.

Home ownership has long been the defining aspect of the American dream. Rapid home price appreciation has simultaneously priced young people and families out of the dream, while enriching older cohorts (retired boomers) who can cash in on their inflated home equity. Understanding these generational dynamics is important to any reform proposals aimed at improving affordability — that is, reducing home prices. Older, wealthier households are the main beneficiaries of booming home values, and there are many more of them than there are aspiring young homeowners. Policies aimed at deflating U.S. home prices will have to contend with the entrenched interest group of old people who are perfectly happy with home prices rising, because they are the ones who benefit and they comprise a larger, more politically powerful constituency.

The Economics of Expensive Housing

Any competent economics student should be able to diagnose persistent growth in real home prices. If the price of a good is rising, the supply curve (costs) must be shifting “up and left,” or the demand curve (consumer preferences/ buying power) must be shifting “up and right.” If both a leftward supply shift and a rightward demand shift occur, price can rise substantially.

For economists assessing America's housing market and housing affordability, the cause-and-effect relationship is obvious. Rising incomes and wealth — especially amongst older cohorts —

Metro Area	Ratio: Median Home Price to Median Household Income
Los Angeles	10.7
San Diego	9.1
San Francisco	9.2
New York	7.7
Seattle	7.0
Boston	6.8
Miami	6.4
Denver	5.8

Source: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/housing-affordability-across-north-america-in-2025/>

pushes up the demand for housing. If the supply of housing cannot grow apace with housing demand, prices must rise, sometimes substantially. Observing rising prices, we focus our attention on factors that are pushing the supply curve up and left — in other words, factors that are escalating the costs of home construction.

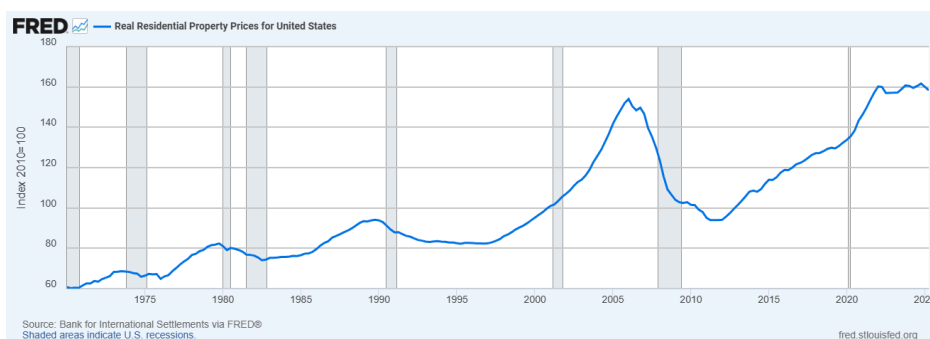
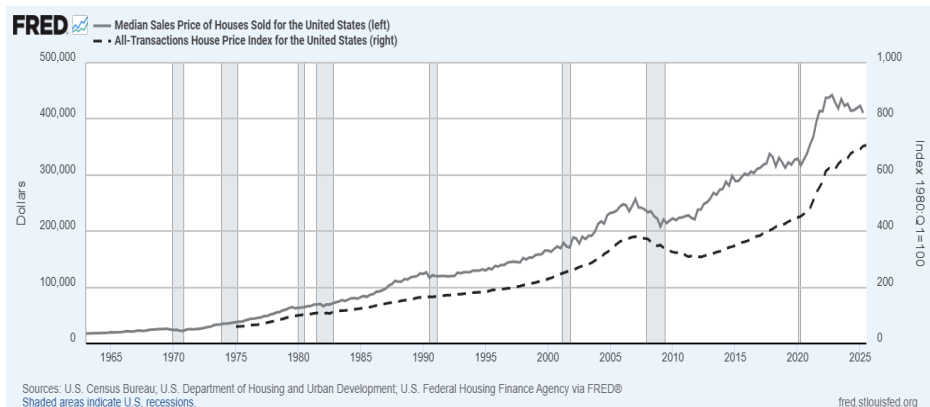
There are two major government policies that cause home construction costs to rise faster than the overall rate of inflation: zoning and building codes. Zoning regulations limit housing density and impose arbitrary requirements on home and lot sizes. The building code in force in most American jurisdictions — the International Residential Code — is revised on a three-year basis, and these revisions almost always end up raising rather than reducing code compliance costs, sometimes substantially. Some jurisdictions additionally impose strenuous environmental and/or energy efficiency regulations, which both restrict and delay new residential construction development, further holding back housing supply. The large fixed costs stemming from this regulatory environment, furthermore, give home buyers and builders incentives to go upscale, fostering a “bigger is better” mentality. The result is that fewer small, affordable starter homes are built every year, exacerbating the affordability problem.

⁷ <https://www.nar.realtor/infographics/fast-facts-2025-profile-of-home-buyers-and-sellers>

Zoning: The Single Largest Barrier to Affordable Housing Development

For many years, economists have called attention to multiple problems arising from urban planning, and in particular zoning. The zoning system employed by nearly all American cities today has its origins in the early 20th century in cities such as New York and Los Angeles, where planners sought to regulate land use in a rigid, top-down manner by drawing lines on maps which stipulated what could, and could not, be built within each specified zone, a system properly labeled “exclusionary zoning.” Because zoning excludes *any* multifamily development, from duplexes to apartment blocks, in broad swaths of a city zoned “R1” (single family residential), it’s not hard to see that such zoning will reduce the number of housing units that can possibly be built in that city. This is the main negative housing supply impact of zoning, although there are more subtle ways that zoning limits housing and drives higher home prices. Nolan Gray, a former New York City urban planner, explains the channels by which zoning restricts housing supply and raises housing costs and prices in his excellent book, *Arbitrary Lines*:

The most obvious way is by blocking new housing altogether, whether by prohibiting affordable housing or through explicit rules restraining densities. This results in less housing being built, resulting in the supply-demand mismatches we see in most U.S. cities today. A subtler way that zoning drives up housing costs is by forcing the housing that is built to be of a higher quality than residents



might otherwise require, through policies such as minimum lot sizes or minimum parking requirements. Beyond these written prohibitions and mandates, zoning often raises housing costs simply by adding an onerous and unpredictable layer of review to the permitting process.⁸

Economists Edward Glaeser of Harvard and Joseph Gyourko of Penn have been at the forefront of economic critiques of zoning, with numerous empirical studies that confirm zoning as the major culprit in rising urban home values. In a 2018 paper they summarized the profession’s take on the affordability implications of zoning: “The general conclusion of existing research is that local land use regulation reduces the elasticity of housing supply, and that this results in a smaller stock of housing, higher house prices, greater volatility of house prices, and less volatility of new construction.”⁹

Economists love to illustrate theories with, data, examples, and especially “natural experiments” where different jurisdictions (cities, states, or countries) tried different policies with different

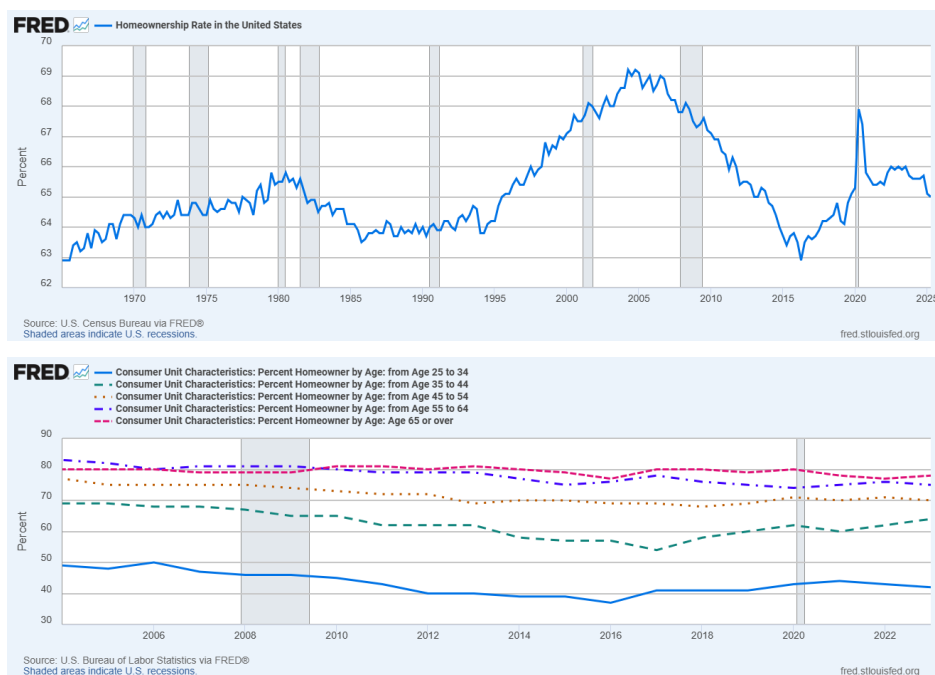
⁸ Gray, M. Nolan. 2022. *Arbitrary Lines: How Zoning Broke the American City and How to Fix It*. New York: Island Press. p. 52-53.

⁹ Glaeser, Edward, and Gyourko, Joseph. 2018. “The Economic Implications of Housing Supply.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 32(1), p. 3–30. <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.32.1.3>

incentives and consequently saw different outcomes. For those of us pointing to zoning as one of the biggest factors in the housing affordability problem, Houston, Texas is exhibit A. Houston is America's only large city that remains unzoned. Houston therefore has a significantly higher "supply elasticity" of housing compared to other large metro areas with their zoning and other regulatory restrictions on housing development. In layman's terms, this means that developers in Houston have the capacity to readily add more housing in response to market forces that indicate additional housing is wanted (i.e. it is profitable to build). As Gray notes, this means that "Houston builds housing at nearly three times the per capita rate of cities like New York City and San Jose... in 2019, Houston built roughly the same number of apartments as Los Angeles, despite the latter being nearly twice as large."¹⁰ Houston's ratio of median home price to median household income stands at just 4.0 — less than half that of the most expensive metro areas like San Francisco and Los Angeles, and the 2nd-lowest among the 22 largest U.S. metro housing markets (Detroit is just lower, at a ratio of 3.8).¹¹

A telling aspect of Houston's open, liberal land use regime is that, in response to relentless growth in population and therefore housing demand, developers have razed entire sprawling neighborhoods of single-family homes, replacing them with tightly-packed row houses. As Gray explains:

In 1998, Houston eased up on setbacks and dropped minimum lot sizes for single-family homes down from 5,000 to 1,400 square feet within the 610 Loop. This effectively removed the final remaining barrier to widespread infill



development in Houston — other than minimum parking requirements — allowing the thousands of postwar, ranch-style homes that had previously characterized the city to be subdivided into up to three new townhouses each. By one estimate, this change triggered the development of over twenty-five thousand new homes within the urban sections of Houston, dramatically densifying many of the city's neighborhoods and relieving pressure on housing prices amid surging population growth. In 2013, these reforms were scaled up to the city as a whole.¹²

Building Codes Equal Cost Disease

Zoning might be likened to a disability, a partial paralysis, for the home construction industry, as it limits what builders and developers can do in response to market price signals. To extend the medical metaphor, building codes compound the housing affordability problem by acting as a form of cost disease, one that spreads of its own accord without regard to the well-being of the host organism. I first noticed the cost-inflating potential and tendency of building codes when visiting my

¹⁰ Gray, M. Nolan. Ibid, p. 144.

¹¹ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/housing-affordability-across-north-america-in-2025/>

¹² Gray, M. Nolan, Ibid, p. 157.

brother Joel, who had started up in home construction again almost 10 years after he and I had wound down our spec home venture at the onset of the subprime crash in late 2006. I in the meantime had gone back to school for a graduate degree in economics and started my academic career.

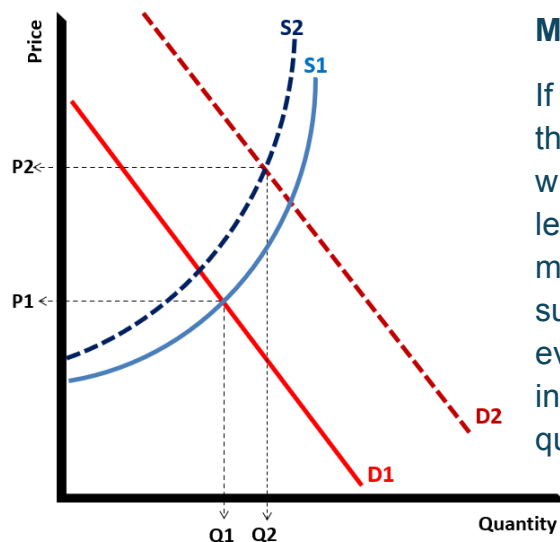
Checking out Joel's single-family construction site in Pueblo West, Colorado, I instantly noticed that the exterior walls were built with 2x6s, rather than the normal 2x4s that had been standard practice in residential construction since the invention of "stick framing" in the early 1800s. Joel revealed that 2x6 exterior walls — for the sake of additional insulation rather than wall strength — were but one item in a long list of new requirements from the local building department aimed at making homes more energy efficient — but not necessarily cost-efficient.

The National Association of Home Builders undertook a series of studies to catalogue the per-home construction cost impact of routine changes in the International Residential Code (IRC), the baseline building code for nearly all local building departments in the United States. The NAHB research found that, for the four triennial IRC updates from 2009 to 2018, code updates raised the building cost for an average home in our climate zone by a figure ranging from \$13,225 to \$26,210.

[Another study](#) by NAHB¹³ suggests that regulations as a whole (zoning, building code, design, safety, etc.) make up around 24 percent of the price of a new single-family home in 2021, a figure that at the time amounted to \$93,870.

The Disappearing Starter Home and Relative-Price Economics

It's still theoretically possible to build a relatively affordable single-family home in most places in America, despite the supply limitations of zoning



Market Dynamics

If demand shifts to the right ($D1 \rightarrow D2$) while supply shifts left ($S1 \rightarrow S2$), price must rise substantially for even a modest increase in quantity.

and the mounting construction cost burden of local building codes and miscellaneous regulations. The key is to build small homes with lower grade finishes and minimal amenities, often referred to as "starter homes." For the United States as a whole, construction costs for single family detached houses average \$195 per square foot¹⁴ (this includes the baked-in regulatory burden but excludes the cost of underlying land). New homes currently average 2,400 square feet in size. It stands to reason that a 1,200 square foot, low-end starter home should have a construction cost roughly half that of the double-sized median home. But even under a conservative assumption that a half-median-size starter home has just 2/3 the cost-to-build of the median home, due to some fixed costs in construction, this easily amounts to a home price more than \$100,000 lower. In other words, small = affordable, even in today's regulatory environment.

Yet small homes seem to be going out of style faster than gray shiplap. Homes smaller than 1,400 square feet, once a solid majority of builds, collapsed to less than 10 percent of new home starts, and this despite the above-noted significant decline since 1960 in persons per household.

Housing affordability has been a pernicious and growing problem for years, if not decades, in some locales. Why aren't builders and developers responding to the need for affordable homes by

¹³ <https://www.nahb.org/-/media/NAHB/news-and-economics/docs/housing-economics-plus/special-studies/2021/special-study-government-regulation-in-the-price-of-a-new-home-may-2021.pdf?rev=29975254e5d5423791d6b3558881227b>

¹⁴ <https://www.home-cost.com/cost-per-sf-by-state/>

Estimated Total Cost of Code Compliance for Climate Zone 5 Single-Family Home (Additional Costs imposed by code updates)			
Code Update	Low range estimate	High range estimate	Largest cost-changing item
2009	\$7,877	\$13,394	Minimum insulation requirements
2012	\$6,468	\$10,568	Energy efficiency provisions
2015	(\$572)	\$2,088	Isolated combustion room for furnace
2018	(\$548)	\$70	Elimination of duct-sealing
Cumulative Cost Impact	\$13,225	\$26,210	
Source: https://www.nahb.org/advocacy/top-priorities/building-codes/construction-codes-standards-research/estimated-costs-of-building-code-changes			

ramping up production of small, low-end homes? Economic theory has a ready and reasonable answer to this puzzle: the [Alchian-Allen Effect](#).¹⁵ UCLA economists Armen Alchian and William Allen first spelled out this theorem in their 1964 textbook, *University Economics*, with an illustration that went something like the following: Florida citrus growers produce oranges in both high-grade and low-grade varieties. Naturally, high-grade oranges command a higher price, \$2/lb, versus \$1/lb — in Florida. It costs \$0.50/lb to ship oranges of either variety north to Indiana, where high-grade oranges will list for \$2.50/lb and low-grade for \$1.50. High grade oranges are everywhere more expensive, but notice the relative price difference: in Florida, high grade oranges are priced 100 percent higher than low grade (2:1 price ratio), whereas in Indiana, high grade oranges are only 67 percent more expensive (2.5:1.5 price ratio). With high-grade oranges having a lower price differential *relative to low-grade oranges* in Indiana, you'd expect a larger proportion of Indiana's orange consumption to consist of high-grade oranges. To generalize, Alchian and Allen predict that whenever the prices of two substitute goods both go up by the same fixed amount, consumption will shift toward the higher-price (higher-grade) product. The idea is simple and familiar: if you must spend a lot (due to the fixed

cost component), you might as well splurge; the marginal cost of going upscale is relatively minor.

This is exactly what we observe in American new home markets: regulations at all levels, from zoning to building codes to other miscellaneous local accretions, constitute a fixed cost of building that is generally invariant to the size of the home being built. In other words, the cost of regulatory compliance is roughly the same for a 3,000 square foot "McMansion" as it is for a 1,000 square foot cottage. Whenever that regulatory burden becomes a substantial share of total building costs, it pushes down the *relative price* of larger luxury homes as compared with smaller starter homes.

Let's illustrate by comparing the costs of a basic 1,200 square foot starter home against a high-end 2,400 square foot McMansion. Assume regulations add \$100,000 to the total cost of each home. As noted, basic construction costs (labor and materials) are proportional to home size and quality. Without the extraneous regulatory burden, the 2,400 square foot home should have about double the construction cost of a 1,200 square foot home. The regulatory burden, however, adds almost the same amount of dollar outlay to the starter home as to the McMansion. This results in a smaller price differential between starter homes and McMansions, making the latter relatively more attractive for

¹⁵ <https://www.econlib.org/high-quality-oranges-and-high-quality-hotels/>

Year	percent of new homes < 1,400 square feet	Average People per Household	Source
1960	57 percent	3.33	US Census:
1970	50 percent	3.14	https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/1997/compendia/statab/117ed/1997statab.pdf
1980	35.5 percent	2.76	(note: 1,400 s.f. cutoff interpolated from 1,200-1,599 s.f. bin data)
1990	22 percent	2.63	https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/households.html
2004	12.1 percent	2.57	
2023	8.7 percent	2.51	https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/10/25/a-look-at-the-state-of-affordable-housing-in-the-us/ United States Census Bureau, Historical Households Tables .

buyers and builders, and triggering the starter home death spiral that is clearly apparent in the data.

Toward Improving Affordability: Recommended Reforms

The economics — both theory and empirics — are clear: Housing supply is constrained by rigid exclusionary zoning (excessive single-family zones in particular) and cost-ratcheting building codes. Reform that will restore affordability must unlock supply by peeling back zoning-based limitations on building and ratchet down construction costs by introducing greater flexibility into building codes, permitting, and other local regulations.

But what reforms are realistic? Most libertarians, and even many progressive-leaning economists would gladly push an “abolish all zoning” button. Zoning is at best a clunky, top-down, one-size-fits-all remedy for highly localized externality problems of development (i.e. “spillover” effects that ostensibly harm incumbent neighbors). These matters can be dealt with effectively by ad-hoc local action, such as neighborhood-based deed restrictions and covenants that specify minimum standards for houses and limit the kinds of establishments allowed in an area, or by “keyhole” legislation such as noise and nuisance

ordinances. Houston again is a prime example of getting the localized benefits of zoning, although with much greater local flexibility and without the generalized supply constriction and ensuing citywide affordability crisis, via covenants, deed restrictions, and ordinances.¹⁶ The reality of zoning, however, is that most people like it and it’s probably not going away. Indeed, zoning’s biggest constituency is incumbent homeowners (65 percent of us) who, having most of their wealth in their real estate holdings, greatly appreciate policies that make their homes appreciate at higher rates.

Yet despite the intransigence of the homeowner interest group, several states in recent years have implemented zoning reforms aimed at unlocking more housing supply. Most common among these efforts are measures to allow mutli-family housing (duplexes, 4-plexes) in erstwhile R1 zones, and moves to override local bans on “accessory dwelling units” (ADUs — think small “mother-in-law” apartment added in the back yard). California, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Connecticut have enacted some combination of these reforms, as well as Minneapolis at the city level.¹⁷ Early evidence shows some increases in permitting and development of multifamily housing, but little to no short-run effect on affordability so far. Given that

¹⁶ See Gray, *ibid.*, p. 147-160

¹⁷ Lincoln Institute of Land Policy: “A State-by-State Guide to Zoning Reform” <https://www.lincolninstitute.edu/publications/articles/2022-12-state-by-state-guide-to-zoning-reform/>

Starter Home			McMansion		
<i>Basic costs</i>	<i>Regulation costs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Basic costs</i>	<i>Regulation costs</i>	<i>Total</i>
\$100k	\$100k	\$200k	\$200k	\$100k	\$300k
McMansion/starter home price ratio			Regulation reduces the <i>relative</i> price tag of the McMansion from 100 percent more to only 50 percent more than the starter home.		
Before regulation	1:2				
After regulation	2:3				

the real estate development process, from lot acquisition to certificate of occupancy, can take years, especially for large developments, many of these reforms are too new to have shown significant supply shifts. Moreover, as supply-side housing advocates know well, local jurisdictions and NIMBY neighbors have many tools at their disposal, beyond zoning, to shut down prospective developments.

In the realm of building codes, reform proposals are likely even less viable than zoning reforms. Some libertarians would push a “make building codes optional” button, allowing builders to reduce costs selectively, at their own hazard of liability for dangerous practices and consumer acceptance of reduced quality. Of course, even in libertarian utopia, many codes would be enforced contractually by insurance companies, power and water utilities, and even local governments or building departments, who could implement code compliance through the strictly voluntary vehicle of covenants, deed restrictions, insurance coverage conditions, etc. Reasonable people can still favor government-imposed and -enforced building codes for the sake of minimum safety and quality standards, but surely these codes do not need to be upgraded to the latest and greatest possible requirements every three years. I’ve worked on many pre-WWII homes, and even some Victorian-era homes, with crumbling stone foundations, desiccated, ungrounded knob & tube wiring, rusty, poorly-vented plumbing, and numerous other age-related inadequacies. In all cases these homes were livable and their inhabitants were not in imminent danger. Many safety features, such as plastic-sheathed, grounded wiring, are standard and cost-effective, and it would be

unthinkable to turn back the clock to more primitive and dangerous alternatives. But some code updates provide marginal safety improvements at steep costs, or, as is the case with myriad energy efficiency requirements, are merely exercises in substituting the regulators’ preferences on economy for those of builders or homeowners.

Building codes have not gotten as much attention vis-à-vis the affordability crisis, and building codes are generally viewed primarily from a safety standpoint, thus there has not been as much reform talk regarding codes and construction requirements. There has been some movement in this area, though, such as a growing number of states adjusting building codes, for instance eliminating a requirement for multiple stairwells in mid-rise multifamily buildings, in order to reduce redundancies and construction costs.¹⁸ These kinds of reforms have some promise, but as of yet they are only a drop in the bucket of what’s possible. As with the modest zoning reforms we’ve seen, it’s likely too early to tell if this kind of incremental regulatory easing will have had a significant impact on supply, and thus affordability, but nonetheless pro-housing advocates should keep pushing for more of this.

Conclusion: Let There Be Low-Quality Goods

The late economist Walter Williams of George Mason University was the best teacher from whom I’ve had the privilege to learn, and he was also a personal hero and role model for me. I vividly remember Dr. Williams proclaiming that “low quality goods are part of the optimal stock of goods.”

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, “State Legislatures Make Bipartisan Breakthroughs on Policies That Promote Housing” https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2025/09/15/state-legislatures-make-bipartisan-breakthroughs-on-policies-that-promote-housing?utm_source=chatgpt.com

In realms where arbitrary government regulations are limited or absent, a wide variety of products exists across a broad quality spectrum. Think of clothes (T.J. Maxx versus Brooks Brothers), groceries (Aldi, Kroger, Whole Foods); or even in a somewhat more regulated industry, cars (Hyundai, Toyota, Ford, Chevy, Lexus, Mercedes, etc.). If institutional factors, namely regulations and the state of competition, can allow for a full spectrum of quality tiers, markets can cater to the needs and preferences of all people at all income levels. Robust market competition, paired with minimalist safety regulations, will ensure consumers' needs are met with more than adequate versions of each product for each market segment. This can apply to housing, too, if we let it. Affordable housing exists, even in a strict-code world; other regulations (mainly zoning) don't allow it to be built in anything near sufficient quantities to push the supply curve to the right to keep up with demand. Easing both of these regulatory barriers is the remedy for the housing affordability problem. ♦

Is Indiana Healthier Today than in 2015?

State-backed initiatives can focus on empowering families and individuals rather than expanding bureaucratic structures.

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Indiana's health-care landscape has changed dramatically over the past decade. Some of those changes clearly improved the lives of residents; others left the state facing persistent or even worsening challenges. When we compare 2015 with 2025, we find a picture that is neither fully optimistic nor entirely discouraging. Instead, Indiana's health system reflects some increase in insurance coverage, mixed performance on local access, but disappointing stagnation in population health outcomes. Whether Hoosiers are "better off" depends heavily on which dimension of health care one stresses.

Indiana's Coverage Gains: A Clear Increase

The most unambiguous change since 2015 has been Indiana's success in reducing its uninsured rate. The expansion of the Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP 2.0) in 2015 brought Medicaid coverage to many more low-income adults and became one of the state's most significant structural reforms in decades. Since then, federal marketplace trends, stronger subsidies and continued enrollment growth have further reduced the number of residents without insurance. By 2024, roughly 1.9 million Hoosiers — about 27 percent of the entire state — were enrolled in Medicaid. This is nearly double the share of a decade earlier and represents a major expansion of financial protection for low-income and working households, but a troubling trend for society in general (see Table 1).

From an economic standpoint, these gains matter. Insurance shields families from

catastrophic medical bills, encourages preventive care and provides more stable access to needed medications and routine services. However, the expansion places greater fiscal pressure on the state budget — because more people rely on public coverage — the welfare gains for some households are substantial, but the economic burdens it places on others are also substantial. In purely financial terms, Hoosiers are safer today with respect to health care than they were in 2015.

When Insurance Isn't Enough

Yet improved insurance does not guarantee that people can receive timely care. Over the same decade that brought large coverage gains, Indiana experienced significant erosion in its physical health-care infrastructure, especially in rural counties. Several communities lost hospitals altogether, while others saw cuts to obstetrics, emergency services and specialty care. Workforce shortages — particularly in primary care and behavioral health — compounded these problems.

This means that while more Hoosiers hold an insurance card, many must travel farther, wait longer, or settle for fewer local services than before. The value of coverage is diminished when providers are scarce. In this sense, the decade's improvements in financial access were partially offset by declines in geographic access, especially for rural residents.

Population Health: Stagnant or Worse

Where Indiana has made the least progress — and in some cases has moved backward — is in overall population health. The goal of the increases in insured coverage and spending has surely been to improve health outcomes, but life expectancy in the state has been declining since around 2010 and continues to trail the national average.

A 2022 public health commission highlighted dramatic disparities across counties, with gaps of more than a decade in expected lifespan between the healthiest and least healthy parts of the state (see Table 1). These differences reflect not only uneven access to care but also deeper structural issues: high rates of obesity and diabetes,

Table 1: Statewide Indicator Table

Indicator	2015 (approx.)	2018/2019 (mid)	Most recent (2022–2024 / best available)	Source
Uninsured rate (total population, ACS / state estimates)	~9–11% (ACS-era national & state declines visible by 2015).	~7–9% (after ACA effects).	6.9% (2023) — Indiana's share of uninsured (AHR / 2023 state measure). (Census.gov)	Census ACS; America's Health Rankings (state page). (Census.gov)
Medicaid enrollment (Indiana, statewide headcount)	2015: Medicaid/CHIP enrollment (monthly reports exist; CHIP/waiver counts small relative to later expansion). (See FSSA monthly reports).	Grew substantially after HIP waivers; expansion and HIP 2.0 increased rolls.	~1.6–1.9 million (2023–2024) — Medicaid/HIP enrollment near ~25–30% of state population (FSSA dashboards / public reporting show large growth since 2015). (Indiana Government)	Indiana FSSA Medicaid enrollment dashboard / monthly enrollment reports. (Indiana Government)
Life expectancy (state-level)	2015: Indiana life expectancy <i>≈</i> was <i>higher than 2018/2020 but trending down from a 2010 peak</i> (peaked in 2010 <i>≈</i> 77.5).	2018: <i>~77.1</i> (IBRC reporting shows a decline since 2010).	Most recent published estimates use 2020–2022 or 2021 data; Indiana's life expectancy is ~74.6–77 , depending on year & source; the state has trailed the U.S. average and shown a decline since 2010. (CHR/IBRC/CDC state pages). (ibrc.indiana.edu)	County Health Rankings / IBRC / CDC state stats. (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps)
Opioid/drug overdose deaths (Indiana, counts/rate)	2015: lower (pre-surge) — statewide deaths in hundreds.	2017–2020: sharp rise (opioid/fentanyl wave).	Peak ~2020–2022; 2023 saw a notable decline from 2022 (e.g., rate drop from ~41 to ~34.2 per 100k in 2023) per CDC/press reporting; counts still substantially above 2015. (Provisional CDC state dashboards & Indiana overdose surveillance). (Axios)	

persistent smoking in some regions and longstanding socioeconomic challenges.

Insurance coverage affects health, but only partially. For many Hoosiers, medical care cannot fully counteract the effects of unemployment, low educational attainment, or unsafe physical environments. As a result, the improvements in coverage have not translated into the broad gains in life expectancy that policymakers once hoped for.

The Continuing Impact of the Opioid Crisis

No factor has weighed more heavily on Indiana's mortality trends than the opioid and polysubstance-use epidemic. Overdose deaths rose

sharply between 2017 and 2020, reaching more than 2,300 opioid-related deaths in 2020. These losses deeply affected families and communities and contributed significantly to the state's declining life expectancy. Although more recent data from 2023 and 2024 suggest that overdose deaths have begun to fall from their peak, the numbers remain far above 2015 levels and continue to burden the state's health system, foster care system and workforce (see Table 1).

Indiana has expanded naloxone availability and increased access to medication-assisted treatment, and these efforts likely contributed to the recent decline in mortality. Still, the long shadow of the opioid crisis remains one of the clearest reasons why population health has not kept pace with

improvements in insurance coverage. Some perceived health care failings are self-inflicted by Hoosiers themselves.

Rising Costs and Fiscal Strain

Health care remains expensive, both nationally and in Indiana. As Medicaid enrollment has grown, a larger share of the state's budget has been devoted to health spending. While this spending improves households' financial security, it also constrains the state's fiscal choices, creating pressure to manage costs more carefully. Indiana now faces the challenge of ensuring that its large Medicaid program delivers real value — not just generous coverage but better health outcomes.

So, Are Hoosiers Better Off?

The answer depends on how we define “better off.” If the metric is insurance coverage and financial protection, then the last decade has been a success. Many more residents are insured, and low-income families in particular face less financial risk than they did in 2015.

But if we look instead at life expectancy, chronic disease, opioid mortality, and the availability of local care, the story is far less encouraging. Indiana has not made meaningful progress in population health, and several indicators have worsened. Gains in coverage have not yet translated into healthier communities, and geographic inequities remain stubbornly persistent.

On balance, Indiana is only partially better off than it was in 2015 — the improvements in coverage and increased spending have not been matched by improvements in health.

A More Conservative Approach to Improving Indiana's Health Outcomes

Indiana has many opportunities to improve health outcomes without dramatically expanding government programs or increasing long-run state spending. A conservative strategy emphasizes personal responsibility, market competition, local autonomy and fiscal restraint. These principles can guide a set of practical approaches that improve access and outcomes while keeping government limited and budgets sustainable.

One starting point is strengthening primary care through market incentives rather than

mandates or new layers of regulation. Indiana can make it easier for private practices, urgent-care centers and mobile clinics to operate by reducing unnecessary regulatory barriers. Allowing nurse practitioners and physician assistants to practice more independently — particularly in counties with severe provider shortages — can increase access without requiring the state to build new facilities. At the same time, direct primary care models, where patients pay low monthly fees for unlimited basic care, offer a market-driven way to improve access and reduce downstream costs. These approaches rely on entrepreneurship and consumer choice rather than state expansion.

Another option involves using competition to discipline health-care prices. Greater price transparency would allow patients, employers and insurers to compare costs for routine services, encouraging hospitals and clinics to keep prices in line with competitors. Site-neutral payment reforms could also prevent hospitals from charging much higher prices than outpatient centers for identical procedures. Similarly, supporting small-business and association health plans can give employers more flexibility and help create competitive pressure. These strategies aim to improve affordability by making the market function more efficiently, not by adding to the state's fiscal obligations.

Indiana can also address rural health challenges through local empowerment rather than broad statewide expansion. Rural communities could benefit from targeted tax credits to attract physicians, nurses and behavioral health providers, while micro-hospitals or freestanding emergency departments may be more sustainable than traditional full-service hospitals in small counties. Reducing regulatory barriers to tele-health — particularly by allowing Hoosiers to see out-of-state clinicians more easily — can dramatically expand access at minimal cost to the state. These measures preserve rural access by supporting private investment and giving local providers the flexibility to adapt.

The ongoing challenge of substance-use disorder also allows for conservative strategies that combine accountability with effective treatment. Indiana can expand access to treatment programs but tie funding to measurable results such as

treatment completion, long-term sobriety and employment outcomes. At the same time, strong law enforcement against fentanyl trafficking remains essential to reducing overdose deaths. Many faith-based and community recovery organizations, which operate with lower overhead than state-run programs, can play a larger role in long-term recovery. This approach balances public safety, personal responsibility and rehabilitation.

Conservatives often emphasize the role of individual behavior in shaping health outcomes, and Indiana can build on this philosophy. Rather than creating new state health campaigns, policymakers can encourage voluntary wellness programs through modest tax incentives for employers who promote fitness, nutrition and smoking cessation among their workers. Local nonprofits, churches and community groups can offer low-cost or no-cost programs that support healthier lifestyles. State-backed initiatives can focus on empowering families and individuals rather than expanding bureaucratic structures.

Medicaid reform presents another opportunity to preserve coverage while ensuring fiscal sustainability. Indiana can strengthen eligibility verification to make sure benefits reach those who genuinely qualify, and maintain policies that encourage work, education and long-term self-

sufficiency among able-bodied adults. Managed care organizations can also be required to demonstrate improved outcomes for chronic disease and fewer avoidable hospitalizations, helping the state control costs without reducing benefits.

Taken together, these approaches form a coherent conservative vision for improving Indiana's health: strengthen markets rather than expand bureaucracy, empower local communities rather than centralize authority, encourage healthy behaviors rather than rely solely on government intervention, and ensure that public spending is targeted, efficient and accountable. This strategy seeks real improvements in health outcomes while maintaining Indiana's longstanding commitment to limited government and fiscal prudence.

Conclusion

If your metric is insurance and financial protection, Indiana residents are better off today; if your metric is population health, equity and local access, the state is not clearly better off and in many places is worse — so the net assessment is mixed and points to policy actions that link coverage to on-the-ground care and social supports. Indiana needs to do better in the next decade. ♦

How to Choose the Right Type of College

One of the great things about college is one of its biggest challenges: the opportunities and difficulties that come with greater freedom and responsibility.

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Should you go to college at all? Maybe trade school is the better route — or maybe you should work for a year and then go to college. Perhaps you should start with a “community college” or “junior college” (“JuCo”) for a two-year degree and then transfer to a four-year college later. But for the purposes here, let’s assume you’ll attend a four-year college for the next academic year: Which school should you choose? Or before you decide that: What type of school should you attend?

Factors to Weigh in Choosing a School

There are many considerations: size of the campus, rankings and ratings, cost (tuition and fees; room and board if you’re not living at home), specialized majors or an Honors Program, sports programs and “college life,” dorm amenities, distance from home, living in a certain part of the country, suburban/urban versus school-centered small town, commuter versus residential campus, whether you want to embrace or avoid “wokeism,” and so on. All of these factors are important and worth some thought. But let’s talk about a few of them.

It’s probably smart to visit schools of different sizes. Our second son ultimately chose Ball State — a large school, but not huge. When we visited

Indiana University, he was awed by its size. It has about twice as many students and a much more expansive geographical footprint. The upshot was lots of green space, but a campus that we could not hold in our minds. Of course, there are much smaller schools too. Consider the regional campuses of IU; ours in New Albany has about 3,000 students (most of whom commute). And my youngest son attends a regional campus of Purdue; they have a few hundred students in a single building (all commuters). Smaller campuses imply smaller class sizes and more of a “chill vibe” — a characteristic that may be important to students who struggle with “social anxiety.” For some, such size differences are of little consequence; for others, they’re a deal-breaker.

Is “college life” a plus or is it going to be a problem? The extent to which the student population is residential (versus commuter) impacts this. Weekends will look different in an urban environment instead of a “college town.” But it depends on the campus. (For example, Ball State is mostly residential in a college town, but we were surprised that so few students were there on the weekends.) How far do you want to be away from home — enough to drive home on the weekends or for parents to visit easily?

One of the great things about college is one of its biggest challenges — the opportunities and difficulties that come with greater freedom and responsibility. Nobody will enforce a curfew or a bedtime. Nobody will make you wake up in the morning (or afternoon). Nobody will make you go to class. Nobody will make you study. And there will be a lot more studying (if you’re going to be successful). Compared to high school, college classes move twice as fast and meet for half the time. Sober expectations (by parent and child) and candid conversations are important here.

2/2 versus 3/3 versus 4/4

You’ve likely wrestled with the above considerations. Now, let me share something you probably don’t know, but is vitally important to understanding universities and what you can expect from them. Schools can be ably described by the teaching loads of their professors. At a “4/4” school, professors teach four courses in the Fall and Spring. (Summers are usually optional.) At a

3/3, they teach three courses each semester. And so on. This turns out to be a crucial distinction.

Most of the famous schools — considered “elite” or “flagship” because of their sports programs, the size of their alumni base, and/or their focus on academic research — are 2/2’s. (These schools have considerable overlap with “R1” universities — the 150ish schools with doctoral degrees and “very high research activity.” Many of these have teaching loads less than 2/2. There are also 125ish “R2” universities with “high” research activity and teaching loads of 2/2 or 3/2.) Especially at the larger research schools, class sizes can be enormous. Given their graduate programs, many of the professors will only teach grad students — and undergrad sections are often taught by grad students. (This is a mixed bag for reasons I’ll describe in the next chapter.)

At a 2/2 school, the time of a professor is allocated heavily toward research (or “creative activity” for faculty in the arts), since they are strongly incentivized to do it. We’ll talk about tenure and promotion later, but keeping your job and getting raises are primarily connected to research. You must be at least a good researcher to get tenure at a 2/2 university. It may be problematic if a great researcher is a dumpster fire in the classroom. But being a good (or great) teacher is relatively unimportant (professionally), mattering only at the margin.

Not surprisingly, more emphasis on research means less emphasis on teaching. As a result, for many faculty (although not nearly all), dealing with students is somewhere between a necessary evil and a terrible inconvenience. In addition, profs at 2/2 schools are not as engaged in faculty governance, so this falls to administrators who tend to be more liberal or more Leftist. So, one would generally expect a lot more “political correctness” and “wokeism” in those settings.

When I was in grad school, my dissertation advisor was approaching the end of his tenure and promotion process. His research was borderline, but he had just won a teaching award. You’d think the award would be good news and helpful for his case. But when faculty approached him about this, instead of congratulating him, they said things like: “This means you’re obviously not putting enough time into your research.” Although only one

anecdote, I’m confident that it reflects the general (although far from universal) sentiment at research schools.

At a 3/3 school (such as mine), teaching is primary; research is secondary, but still supported and expected. We receive “release time” — from having to teach a fourth class — which is enough to allow some research productivity. While 2/2’s have doctoral programs and draw from a national (or even international) pool of students, 3/3’s have a variety of Masters-level programs, a wide variety of undergraduate degrees, smaller class sizes, with students coming from a modest geographical service region. Appropriately, these are called “comprehensive regional” universities.

Research is also more broadly defined at 3/3’s. All schools want primary academic research, but top-tier refereed journal articles are the primary currency at R1’s, R2’s, and 2/2’s. For 3/3’s, lower-tier refereed journal articles are also valued — and output such as books and book reviews are welcomed. There is also a far greater interest in applied/practitioner and pedagogical research. When I came to IU Southeast, my colleague Eldon Little said they were looking for a dinner salad: Refereed journal articles are the lettuce, while other efforts are akin to tomatoes, cucumbers, and croutons. The extras are desirable — and the choice of extras are up to us — but lettuce is expected.

At a 4/4 school (e.g., small liberal arts colleges), teaching is tops and research expectations are light or optional. For one thing, can you imagine paying the big bucks for a liberal arts education with huge classes and profs who don’t care much about teaching? The teaching at such colleges should be really good and mentorship should be a top priority, but this leaves little time for traditional or even applied research. (It’s also telling that 2/2’s have considerably higher salaries than 3/3’s or 4/4’s.)

Years ago, I interviewed for a dean’s position at a school that was 4/4 but wanted to transition to 3/3. I’m not interested in higher-end administrative service, since I’d have to sacrifice virtually all teaching and research to do it. But this project intrigued me. Think about the sort of professors who are hired at a 4/4 — and how they do their jobs. How would they become 3/3

professors, when they've done little or no research for years or decades? Or maybe we should grandfather them into the new regime and keep them at 4/4. But then, how would the old 4/4's and the new 3/3's co-exist — e.g., evaluating performance for raises? And how well would committees of 4/4 professors hire 3/3 professors, when the 4/4's will be hard-pressed to evaluate research? I didn't end up taking the job for other reasons, but it was fascinating to think about the challenge of it.

Admission standards are related to the above. Elite and flagship schools (2/2's and 4/4's) tend to have high standards, so your peers will be more impressive. 3/3's usually have moderate or liberal standards, so your peers will be less impressive — at least in the early semesters. But the winnowing process of college will eliminate those who lack the skill and work ethic to succeed — and will train the remaining students to get in shape. (By the time IU Southeast Business students get to graduation, standardized test scores, and competitions between colleges indicate that our graduates are comparable to those at more famous schools.)

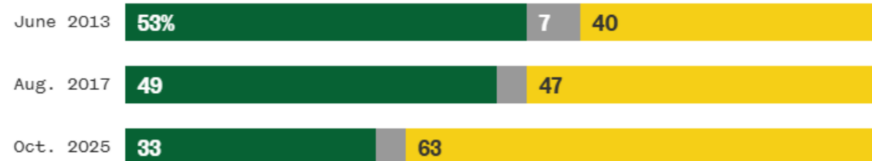
In this, I'm reminded of two excellent men's college basketball coaches: Rick Pitino and John Calipari. Calipari has always been a notch better in terms of recruiting; Pitino is considered the better teacher. Like students at a flagship or elite university, Calipari attracts a stronger peer group and the results are impressive — in large part, because of the talent he's accumulated. But how much did each player improve on the talent they brought in? In the case of Pitino, the growth is more obvious — less-talented players who develop into excellence over time.

For schools that emphasize teaching, you should expect strong efforts in the classroom. In contrast, if you attend a 2/2 where professors are not as

interested, able, or incentivized to teach well, why would you routinely expect to get great teaching? If they rely heavily on grad students and large lecture hall classes, why would you expect a superior classroom experience? Those who graduate will still be impressive, but much of it will be what they brought to the table and having sharp peers around them.

That said, large elite/research/flagship schools have some clear advantages: greater and broader opportunities for research, especially if one wants to go to grad school; more majors and minors to study; impressive outside speakers and more study abroad opportunities; stronger peer effects from being surrounded by a higher proportion of smart people; more networking opportunities with connected elites; and so on. So, go to the more-respected schools — for the pedigree and the credential, the peers and the networking, the opportunities during and after school. But you should also expect lower-quality teaching. It's how the professors are incentivized — and often, how they're skilled and motivated. If you want better classroom experiences, choose a school that emphasizes teaching. ♦

■ Worth the cost ■ Not sure ■ Not worth the cost



Source: CNBC polling from 2013; NBC News polls from 2017 and 2025

Graphic: NBC News

POLLSTERS TELL US that only one out of three now agree a four-year college degree is “worth the cost because people have a better chance to get a good job and earn more money over their lifetime,” while 63 percent say it’s “not worth the cost because people often graduate without specific job skills and with a large amount of debt to pay off.” Even among voters with college degrees, only 46 percent now see college as worth the cost: “They’re now seen as out of touch and not accessible to many Americans,” says Democratic pollster Jeff Horwitt. Indeed, the average, inflation-adjusted cost of public four-year college tuition for in-state students has doubled since 1995. Tuition at private, four-year colleges is up 75 percent over the same period. — *tcl*

Data Centers: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

How Indiana Can Build Data Centers Without Raising Household Electricity Costs.

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For decades, coal has served as the backbone of Indiana's energy system. In 2023, the state ranked as the second-largest coal consumer in the United States, using nearly 21 million tons of coal for electricity generation and accounting for roughly 40 percent of Indiana's total energy mix.¹ This long-standing reliance on coal has historically kept energy costs low because coal plants can be built and brought online faster and with far less infrastructure investment than alternative energy sources. Moreover, coal remains the most abundant and reliable source of dispatchable power for both households and industries across Indiana. However, as the state begins to transition toward new forms of energy, this once-stable foundation is beginning to shift.

Over the past decade, coal's share of Indiana's energy mix has steadily declined. Between 2012 and 2024, the state retired 5.7 gigawatts of coal capacity, and utilities have increasingly turned to higher-cost energy infrastructure such as nuclear and solar farms. Consequently, household electricity bills have begun to rise. Looking ahead, another 9 gigawatts of coal capacity is scheduled to retire between 2025 and 2038,

which suggests an even steeper decline in the supply of low-cost, dispatchable power.²

At the same time, the boom in artificial intelligence is driving unprecedented growth in electricity demand. Data center proposals in Indiana are estimated to require 9.7 gigawatts of electricity to connect to the public grid, which exceeds the 9 gigawatts of capacity being retired from coal-fired power plants.³ This convergence of declining coal capacity and soaring energy demand from data centers, combined with already rising household utility bills, underscores a pressing challenge for policymakers: how can Indiana meet the power needs of a rapidly digitizing economy without transferring the financial burden to families?

Indiana can address this challenge by requiring data center companies to directly fund the redevelopment of coal plants that are nearing retirement or closure. By doing so, these companies can upgrade existing facilities to generate additional power and build new data centers near these sites. As a result, they can reduce transmission costs, minimize community backlash, and fully leverage the state's abundant coal resources and established energy infrastructure.

To fully understand why households continue to experience higher utility bills each month, it is necessary to examine how Indiana's current utility rules distribute and recover the costs of new power projects.

Utility Economics - Rising Rates and Cost Shifting

Indiana's utility framework reveals why households often end up paying higher electricity bills whenever new energy infrastructure is built. Under Indiana Code § 8-1-2-4, utilities are authorized to recover both the cost of constructing new infrastructure — such as generation, transmission and distribution systems — and a regulated profit.⁴ In practice, this means that utilities can build expensive projects and then recover those costs, along with a guaranteed rate of return, from customers across the region where the project is located,

¹ U.S. Energy Information Administration. Indiana State Energy Profile. Retrieved from <https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=IN>

² State of Indiana, Executive Order 25-50. Retrieved from <https://www.in.gov/gov/files/EO-25-50-.pdf>

³ Jacob Stewart, "Indiana shouldn't pay for AI data center energy demand," *IndyStar*, July 10, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.indystar.com/story/opinion/columnists/jacob-stewart/2025/07/10/ai-data-centers-energy-electricity-indiana-cost/84525517007/?gnt-cfr=1&gca-cat=pp&gca-ds=override>

⁴ Indiana Code § 8-1-2-4, *Services to Public; Rates and Charges*. Retrieved from <https://law.justia.com/codes/indiana/title-8/article-1/chapter-2/section-8-1-2-4/>

regardless of who directly benefits from the investment. As a result, families frequently bear the financial burden for infrastructure that primarily serves large industrial or commercial users.

A recent example illustrates how this cost-allocation system operates in practice. According to *Mirror Indy*, AES Indiana proposed a \$4.4 billion natural gas expansion designed to support the growing electricity demand from new data centers.⁵ Although, the House Enrolled Act 1007 requires large users to cover 80 percent of the cost,⁶ the remaining 20 percent — nearly \$880 million — can still be borne by residential ratepayers. Consequently, even when data centers are the primary beneficiaries of such large-scale projects, households end up absorbing part of the financial burden simply because they reside within the same service region.

The effects of this cost shifting are already evident. In 2024, the average residential electricity bill in Indiana increased by 17.5 percent compared with the previous year,⁷ marking the sharpest rise in two decades. This record-setting jump illustrates how shifting even a portion of data-center costs onto households can quickly compound monthly expenses and strain household budgets.

Taken together, Indiana’s utility code and cost-allocation mandate have created a system in which households are effectively financing infrastructure that primarily serves the massive energy requirements of data centers. This imbalance in cost responsibility highlights the urgent need for Indiana to adopt stronger “cost-causation” standards — rules that ensure those who drive demand and benefit most from new infrastructure pay a proportional share of its costs. By aligning cost recovery with actual usage and benefit, the state can protect households while still supporting economic growth driven by the digital economy.

Nevertheless, cost shifting is only one of

the financial pressures facing households. Additional strain arises when coal plants scheduled for retirement continue operating beyond their planned closure dates. This practice generates hidden costs that utilities can ultimately pass on to everyday consumers.

Retirement of Coal Power Plants

As Indiana’s coal plants approach the end of their operational lifespans, it is important to recognize that most industrial coal facilities are designed to function for roughly 60 years. However, as these plants age, their operating costs increase sharply despite ongoing maintenance. Aging units typically demand higher expenditures for upkeep, regulatory compliance and efficiency improvements. Historically, utilities have passed these additional costs on to ratepayers, meaning

Table 1: Top 10 States in the United States by Coal-Fired Electricity Generation Capacity (Measured in Megawatts)

States	Operating	Retired (since 2000)
Texas	16,476	9,283
Indiana	14,204	8,420
West Virginia	13,003	3,089
Kentucky	10,158	7,790
Missouri	8,931	3,873
North Carolina	8,071	5,917
Illinois	7,433	11,673
Pennsylvania	6,703	14,092
Ohio	6,681	17,013
Michigan	6,285	6,075
<i>Source: Global Energy Monitor.</i>		

⁵ Elizabeth Gabriel, “How your electric bills could jump if a data center comes to Indy,” *Mirror Indy*, June 3, 2025. Retrieved from <https://mirrorindy.org/aes-southside-indianapolis-data-center-utility-costs-gas-fossil-fuel-generator/>

⁶ Indiana General Assembly, House Enrolled Act 1007 (2025). Retrieved from <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2025/bills/house/1007/details>

⁷ Niki Kelly, “Hoosiers’ Electric Bills Spike 17.5 percent in One Year,” *Indiana Capital Chronicle*, July 23, 2025. <https://indianacapitalchronicle.com/briefs/hoosiers-electric-bills-spike-17-5-in-one-year/>

households ultimately pay more to keep outdated plants running beyond their intended retirement dates.

A striking example of this challenge can be seen in the J.H. Campbell coal plant in West Olive, Michigan. The facility was originally scheduled to close on May 31, 2025, but its retirement has already been postponed twice by federal orders intended to address rising energy demand. Operating the plant for just the first thirty-eight days under the Department of Energy's mandate cost approximately \$30 million.⁸ This case illustrates the steep financial burden that accompanies efforts to extend the lifespan of coal plants beyond their planned closure dates, underscoring the long-term economic inefficiency of such measures.

This example holds a clear lesson for Indiana. As shown in Table 1,⁹ the state currently operates more than 14.2 gigawatts of coal-fired generation capacity, the second highest in the United States. If these aging facilities are compelled to remain online past their intended retirement dates, households will face a predictable outcome: higher electricity bills without any meaningful increase in capacity or reliability. Instead of investing in a modernized, future-ready grid, ratepayers would be forced to subsidize short-term operational extensions that do little to enhance Indiana's long-term energy security or competitiveness.

The underlying causes of this issue can be understood through two interrelated factors.

1. Mandated operation overrides market efficiency: When plants become economically unviable, utilities would ordinarily retire them and invest in newer capacity. However, federal or state mandates may require utilities to keep aging plants operational even when continued operation is no longer financially justified.
2. Cost recovery shifts the burden to customers: Older plants generate lower returns yet demand higher maintenance and compliance costs. To

maintain profit margins, utilities often seek rate increases to recover these expenses, effectively transferring the financial burden to residential consumers.

A report by Grid Strategies confirms that these “mandated” or “fixed cost recovery” charges are ultimately distributed across all customers, driving up household electricity bills while providing minimal additional benefit to reliability or capacity.¹⁰

This recurring cycle — aging plants, costly extensions and shifting expenses — demonstrates the urgent need for Indiana to pursue a more sustainable path forward. Rather than relying on mandates that impose unnecessary costs on households, the state should adopt policies that attract private investment to repurpose retiring coal sites into modern energy hubs. Such an approach would not only reduce financial pressure on families but also enhance grid resilience and support the energy demands of a rapidly digitizing economy.

Beyond these fiscal concerns, communities across Indiana are beginning to raise broader questions about the social and environmental implications of rapid data-center growth.

Data Centers Backlash

The rapid growth of data centers in Indiana has generated significant community concerns. Much of the public backlash has centered on three key issues: high water usage, rising household electricity costs and noise pollution. These concerns have prompted local debates, often contentious and, in some areas, calls to slow or restrict new data center developments across the state.

High Water Usage — A recently proposed Google data center in Franklin Township was projected to consume up to one million gallons of water per day,¹¹ sparking opposition from residents who feared strain on local supplies. A report by WestWater Research projects

⁸ Ethan Howland, “\$3.1B Annual Cost Estimated for Fossil Fuel Plants DOE Won’t Allow to Retire,” *Utility Dive*, August 14, 2025. <https://www.utilitydive.com/news/doe-mandate-fossil-fueled-power-plants-emergency/757653/>

⁹ Global Energy Monitor, Global Coal Plant Tracker: Coal-fired Capacity in the United States (MW), July 2025. Google Sheets. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fw5n00tZXaWeXGMpAHfHnV2_7GofSztHJJ5ipM-n7Ac/edit?gid=1338085819#gid=1338085819

¹⁰ Michael Goggin, *The Cost of Federal Mandates to Retain Fossil-Burning Power Plants* (Grid Strategies LLC, for Earthjustice), August 2025. https://earthjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/grid-strategies_cost-of-federal-mandates-to-retain-fossil-burning-power-plants.pdf

¹¹ Michael-Paul Hart, “Google Data Center Indianapolis Debate,” *MichaelPaulHart.com*, September 7, 2025. <https://www.michaelpaulhart.com/post/google-data-center-indianapolis-council-debate>

that data center water consumption in the United States could rise by 170 percent by 2030.¹² In regions vulnerable to drought or peak summer demand, this raises serious questions about sustainability.

Rising Household Electricity Costs — Research from Harvard has shown that utilities often sign special rate agreements with data centers that provide discounted electricity prices or long-term guarantees.¹³ While these deals help attract investment, they frequently fail to cover the full cost of new infrastructure. The uncovered portion is then shifted onto households through higher utility bills. In Indiana, where families have already seen steep rate hikes in recent years, many are understandably frustrated at the idea of subsidizing large industrial users.

Noise Pollution — Data centers operate 24 hours a day and rely on equipment such as servers, HVAC systems, cooling fans and backup generators. Residents living near these facilities have reported nighttime noise levels of around 65 decibels, the equivalent of a passing car. Public health research from Boston University links prolonged exposure to noise above 65 decibels with increased risks of hypertension and heart disease.¹⁴ For nearby communities, the constant sound raises legitimate quality-of-life and health concerns.

Such concerns are entirely understandable. Communities are right to be cautious about water, costs and noise. Yet Indiana is also facing an unprecedented surge in energy demand from data centers, and this moment calls for deeper thinking. Instead of accepting these concerns at face value, we should ask:

- How can the water use of data centers be managed so it becomes sustainable rather than overwhelming?
- How can household electricity costs be shielded instead of shifted upward?
- How can the noise of nonstop operations be contained so that communities are not forced to bear it?

The rebuttal below in the next section answers these questions, which reveal that the concerns, while valid, can be shown to be largely unwarranted or exaggerated when Indiana adopts the right approach. The key is finding models that both address these concerns and ensure that families are not burdened with higher electricity bills. One promising path can be found by looking at how other states are managing the dual challenge of coal plant retirements and growing energy demand from data centers.

Balancing Coal Plant Retirements, Data Center Energy Demand and Household Electricity Costs

As Indiana confronts the twin challenges of rising electricity demand from data centers and the scheduled retirement of coal plants, it can look to real-world models for guidance. Several states have already begun experimenting with strategies that integrate retiring coal assets with new digital infrastructure. One notable example is the Homer City power project in Pennsylvania, where a 1.8-gigawatt coal plant is being converted into a 4.5-gigawatt gas-fired facility designed to serve data centers built on the same site — a model known as “colocation.” The \$10 billion project is financed entirely through private capital.¹⁵

This approach advances two critical goals simultaneously:

1. It replaces retiring generation capacity while attracting major data center investments — all without shifting costs onto households. Because the project is privately financed, ratepayers are shielded from the cost increases that typically accompany utility-led expansions.
2. At the same time, this model promotes economic development by consolidating energy generation and high-tech infrastructure within a single, strategically located site.

¹² Adam Barth, Chhavi Arora, Gayatri Shenai, Jesse Noffsinger & Pankaj Sachdeva, “The Data Center Balance: How U.S. States Can Navigate the Opportunities and Challenges,” *McKinsey*, August 8, 2025, quoting WestWater Research’s projection of 170 percent growth in data center water demand by 2030. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/the-data-center-balance-how-us-states-can-navigate-the-opportunities-and-challenges>

¹³ Eliza Martin & Ari Peskoe, *Extracting Profits from the Public: How Utility Ratepayers Are Paying for Big Tech’s Power* (Harvard Environmental & Energy Law Program, March 2025). <https://eelp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Harvard-ELI-Extracting-Profits-from-the-Public.pdf>

¹⁴ Michelle Samuels, “When Sound Becomes Noise,” Boston University School of Public Health, May 13, 2019. <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2019/when-sound-becomes-noise/>

¹⁵ Ethan Howland, “Largest US Gas-Fired Power Plant Planned for Data Centers in Pennsylvania,” *Utility Dive*, April 3, 2025. <https://www.utilitydive.com/news/homer-city-gas-fired-power-station-data-center-firstenergy/744332/>

Reusing retiring power plant sites also brings major cost and efficiency advantages. These locations already possess essential infrastructure, including transmission connections, substations and industrial zoning. Leveraging these existing assets avoids the high costs and lengthy permitting timelines associated with building entirely new facilities in undeveloped areas.

For Indiana, the Homer City project demonstrates how private capital can turn retired energy sites into hubs for both power generation and data centers, meeting modern electricity demand without burdening families with higher bills. By adopting a similar model, Indiana can align economic growth with affordability and grid reliability goals.

Each of the concerns outlined earlier — water use, household costs and noise — has a direct and practical solution when Indiana leverages existing coal plant sites and requires private investment:

Managing Water Usage —

Redeveloped coal plant sites already have industrial-scale water infrastructure in place. By colocating new data centers at these sites, Indiana can minimize new withdrawals and avoid placing additional stress on community water supplies.

Protecting Household Costs —

Requiring private data center companies to directly fund coal plant redevelopment and cover the cost of new infrastructure ensures that households are protected. Instead of families subsidizing industry, the companies pay their own way.

Containing Noise Pollution — Coal plant sites are already zoned and developed for heavy industrial use. Building data centers there keeps noise within areas accustomed to large-scale operations, reducing the risk of disruption for residential neighborhoods.

When considered in this light, the three major concerns — water, costs and noise — are far less threatening than they first appear. Rather than creating new problems, Indiana can turn potential risks into practical solutions by leveraging existing coal plant sites and requiring private investment. This model protects

Table 2: AI Data Center Capital Expenditure Breakdown by Category (Projected through 2030)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Projected Share</i>
<i>Computing hardware (chips and servers)</i>	Includes GPUs, AI accelerators, CPUs, storage, and networking equipment that drive data processing and model training. These components represent the largest single driver of AI data center spending, reflecting the exponential growth in computational demand.	~60 percent
<i>Energy infrastructure</i>	Covers investments in on-site generation, transmission interconnections, substations, transformers, uninterruptible power supplies (UPS), cooling systems (HVAC, chillers, liquid cooling), and grid upgrades. Reliable and scalable power systems are strategically essential to ensure 24/7 uptime and operational efficiency.	~25 percent
<i>Real estate and site development</i>	Includes land acquisition, construction of building shells, zoning compliance, permitting, and environmental mitigation. While it represents a smaller portion of total capital spending, real estate remains critical for site scalability, cooling integration, and long-term expansion.	~15 percent

families, reassures communities and secures the energy infrastructure needed for a rapidly digitizing economy. To achieve this, Indiana would need to combine financial incentives with clear requirements for data center developers.

It is also necessary to evaluate whether data center developers can feasibly allocate the capital required to redevelop retiring coal plants into modern energy hubs.

Data centers can and increasingly do invest in redeveloping retiring coal plants to secure stable and long-term energy supplies. To understand why this investment strategy is both feasible and logical, it is important to examine how data center costs are allocated.

According to McKinsey, more than 60 percent of AI data center capital expenditures, as seen in Table 2,¹⁶ are directed toward computing hardware, primarily GPUs and AI accelerators, compared with roughly 25 percent for energy infrastructure and 15 percent for real estate. In other words, the majority of spending is already tied to energy-intensive equipment that depends on scalable and reliable baseload electricity. This makes investment in power infrastructure not only practical but strategically essential. Without dependable and affordable energy, even the most advanced AI servers and GPUs cannot operate efficiently or continuously.

This cost distribution helps explain why data centers are well positioned to invest directly in redeveloping power generation sites. A strong example can be seen in Pennsylvania, where the former Homer City coal-fired plant is being converted into a 4.5-gigawatt natural gas facility designed to power a cluster of data centers. The project, initially valued at \$10 Billion, is part of a larger \$25-billion-dollar initiative to transform legacy coal infrastructure into an advanced AI and data center hub. It has already attracted over \$60 billion dollars in additional private investment,¹⁷ showing how the integration of data infrastructure with power generation can attract significant private capital while protecting households from higher utility costs.

Indiana is particularly well positioned to replicate this model. The state's many retiring coal sites, existing transmission capacity and industrial zoning provide an ideal foundation for similar redevelopment. By converting these aging facilities into productive and revenue-generating energy hubs, Indiana can meet rising electricity demand, attract digital infrastructure investment and protect families from increasing energy costs.

With the right policy framework, the interests of data center developers, grid reliability and household affordability can align within a single sustainable model for Indiana's energy future.

Policy Recommendations for Indiana

The most effective step Indiana can take is to require or incentivize data centers to fund upgrades at retiring coal power plant sites. This approach ensures that existing infrastructure is reused while costs are carried by the companies creating new demand rather than being shifted onto families. By placing financial responsibility on private investors instead of households, Indiana can modernize its energy system without raising utility bills. This directly addresses the cost-shifting problem outlined earlier, where families were left paying for infrastructure built primarily to serve large industrial users.

To attract and direct private investment toward these redevelopments, Indiana must position itself as a competitive destination for large-scale data centers. The state can achieve this by implementing several policy measures:

1. Offering targeted tax incentives for projects that repurpose or redevelop retiring coal plant sites into data center and energy hubs. These incentives would reduce upfront capital costs for developers while stimulating local job creation and property tax revenue.
2. Streamlining the permitting process for projects that colocate data centers alongside existing or former coal plants. Expedited reviews would minimize delays and provide investors with the regulatory certainty necessary for energy infrastructure projects.
3. Simplifying regulatory requirements for developments at existing industrial sites. By easing redundant compliance steps and enabling adaptive reuse of infrastructure, Indiana can lower barriers to entry while maintaining environmental and safety standards.

Together, these measures would not only attract investment but also guide data centers toward industrially zoned areas with existing transmission lines, water resources and cooling systems. Leveraging these assets allows Indiana to reduce costs, avoid community opposition and strengthen its position as a national hub

¹⁶ McKinsey & Company, "The cost of compute: A \$7 trillion race to scale data centers," April 28, 2025. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/the-cost-of-compute-a-7-trillion-race-to-scale-data-centers>

¹⁷ Tanner, Bill. "Blackstone to Invest US\$25 Billion in Pennsylvania AI Hub for Data Centers and Energy, Sparking \$60 Billion More in Funding." *Intelligent CIO North America*, 11 Aug. 2025. www.intelligentcio.com/north-america/2025/08/11/blackstone-to-invest-us25-billion-in-pennsylvania-ai-hub-for-data-centers-and-energy-sparking-60-billion-more-in-funding/

for digital infrastructure — all while protecting families from higher electricity bills.

To ensure long-term balance, data centers receiving these benefits must also accept specific operational responsibilities that safeguard both households and the power grid. These include:

- Providing their own backup generation through microgrids, turbines, or comparable systems to prevent reliance on the public grid during peak demand.
- Signing Curtailment Agreements that commit them to reducing electricity consumption during periods of system stress or extreme weather.

These requirements, commonly referred to as “Bring Your Own Generation” and “Curtailment Agreements,” place accountability directly on companies driving new demand. They ensure that the financial and operational burdens of growth remain with those who create them, not with households.

Artificial intelligence data centers are particularly suited to this model. Unlike traditional computing, AI workloads can be paused or shifted with minimal disruption. Research from Goldman Sachs confirms that AI computing tasks are more flexible and can be scaled down when the grid is under stress.¹⁸ This flexibility makes Curtailment Agreements both practical and effective.

Under this model, data centers would operate at full capacity using their own power under normal conditions. During extreme situations such as heat waves, severe storms, or unexpected plant outages, they would reduce electricity use in a coordinated and pre-agreed manner through a Curtailment Agreement with the grid operator.

New Hampshire’s HB 672, enacted in August 2025,¹⁹ offers a valuable policy precedent. The law allows off-grid electricity providers to operate independently of traditional utility regulation, encouraging private investment in energy infrastructure. Its guiding principle is straightforward: those who create new demand must also create and pay for the supply. This ensures that families are protected from higher electricity bills while fostering faster and more innovative energy development.

Indiana does not need to adopt an off-grid model to capture the benefits of this approach. Instead, it can apply the same principle within the public grid. HB 672 demonstrates that when private actors fund and manage their own infrastructure, projects are completed faster and costs are not shifted to ratepayers. Indiana can draw on this lesson by requiring data centers to finance the redevelopment of coal plant sites, provide on-site backup generation such as microgrids or turbines and enter into Curtailment Agreements that reduce electricity use during periods of peak demand. Indiana can also simplify permitting and regulatory approvals for projects built at existing industrial sites, just as HB 672 reduced delays for off-grid providers.

The key difference is that Indiana would keep these projects connected to the public grid rather than separating them from it. This means that new capacity would not only serve the data centers themselves but also strengthen the reliability of the grid for households. Retired coal plants would become hubs for both power generation and digital infrastructure, providing shared benefits for companies and communities alike.

In essence, HB 672 reinforces a simple truth: costs should remain with those who cause them. By applying this principle to coal-site redevelopment, Indiana can attract private investment, expand its energy capacity and protect households from rising costs while maintaining the strength of its public grid.

This model solves two challenges simultaneously:

1. Protecting households from rising costs by ensuring that companies driving new demand pay for the infrastructure they require.
2. Strengthening grid reliability through a combination of on-site generation and flexible consumption agreements that prevent system overloads.

This dual benefit aligns with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s “cost-causation” principle, which requires that those who cause or benefit from new infrastructure bear its costs rather than spreading them across all customers. To implement this model effectively, Indiana should take two decisive steps:

¹⁸ Frank Long & George Lee, “The Data Center Balance: How Smart Demand Management Can Forestall the AI Energy Crisis,” *Goldman Sachs Global Institute*, August 11, 2025. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/what-we-do/goldman-sachs-global-institute/articles/smart-demand-management-can-forestall-the-ai-energy-crisis>

¹⁹ LegiScan, “NH HB672 | 2025 | Regular Session,” *LegiScan*, 11 August 2025. <https://legiscan.com/NH/bill/HB672/2025/>

1. Legislation: Lawmakers should enact a bill enabling data centers to colocate at retiring coal sites, bring their own backup generation and enter binding Curtailment Agreements with the grid operator.
2. Regulation: The Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission should update its cost-allocation rules so that project expenses are assigned to the users creating demand rather than to ordinary households.

Together, these steps would protect families, attract private capital and secure the reliable energy supply necessary for Indiana's digital economy.

Conclusion

Again, Indiana is at a crossroads. On one hand, the state wants to attract major investments in data centers

to drive economic growth and establish itself as a hub for emerging technologies like artificial intelligence. On the other hand, households are experiencing some of the highest electricity rate increases in decades.

Balancing these goals requires a strategy that promotes growth without imposing new costs on households. The framework outlined in this paper demonstrates how Indiana can meet rising electricity demand by redeveloping retiring power plant sites, attracting private capital and modernizing its energy infrastructure through partnerships that ensure growth pays for itself. By requiring those who create new demand to finance the capacity they rely on, Indiana can protect families, strengthen its grid and become a national model for affordable, innovation-driven energy development. ♦

Schansberg

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The ‘Militarization of Mayberry’

Radley Balko’s “Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America’s Police Forces” is must reading for those interested in police reform. Balko is careful to say that his book is not anti-cop — but rather, anti-policy and anti-politician. When politicians pass policies that create strong incentives, you can blame individuals, but you should start with the system.

Balko discusses “no-knock” warrants — like the one used in the Breonna Taylor case. (They started in New York in 1964 and spread to 25 states by 1969.) But his chief focus is SWAT teams — with their armored personnel, military-grade weapons and military training. More broadly, he is concerned about the militarization of the police and the over-use of massive force. One irony is that all of this often makes encounters less safe.

Some of this is probably a bias toward using spectacular force. Balko also argues that police departments felt an intense peer pressure to go along with the trend to militarize. “Soon, just about every decent-sized city police department was armed with a hammer. And the drug war would ensure there were always plenty of nails around for pounding.” Along those lines, Peter Kraska has documented a “two-decade insurgence of militarism into just about every city and county in America” — what he calls “the militarization of Mayberry.”

None of this is particularly surprising given the underlying federal policy incentives. For example, “civil asset forfeiture” debuted in the 1970s as a powerful motivator to prioritize drug offenses, since law enforcement agencies could keep assets connected to the crimes. These incentives also created perverse outcomes. More focus on drugs

meant less emphasis on rape, murder and other crimes. Law enforcement had an incentive to “find” a connection between property and crime. It was better to arrest people in their homes, so that the house could more easily be seized. It was preferable to wait until drugs had been sold, so the confiscated booty was cash rather than drugs.

Other policies also contributed. The military began to sell surplus equipment to the police. The National Guard’s presence was increased and its roles were expanded into standard police activities. Homeland Security introduced more funding and more rationales to militarize. The conflation of border security and the drug war led to more federal military activity in police matters. The drug war also led to the marriage of police and multiple military branches: the Navy intercepted boats that the Coast Guard could search and seize.

The War on Drugs is obviously a significant piece of the puzzle. Nixon and Reagan were the most aggressive in this realm. But Balko notes that this has been thoroughly bipartisan — from LBJ through Obama (except Ford and Carter). Those who wanted a lighter approach had high hopes for Clinton (especially as a former pot smoker). His rhetoric was less inflammatory, but he was still heavy-handed on policy. Obama criticized Bush II for cutting federal police programs and then increased spending by \$2 billion in 2009. This served to boost militarization, SWAT teams and multi-jurisdictional anti-drug task forces.

Balko’s book was written before Donald Trump emerged, but Joe Biden is one of its “stars” — easily its most prominent legislator. He commissioned a report that led to increased civil asset forfeiture in the 1980s and authored the resulting bill. He coined the term “drug czar” in 1982. He said Bush I’s drug plan was “not tough enough, bold enough or imaginative enough.” He authored the famous crime bill in 1994 that funded more militarization and drastically increased mandatory sentencing. In 2002, he wrote the RAVE Act, making businesses liable for selling “paraphernalia” used at rave parties (e.g., bottled water and glow sticks). And he was the chief catalyst for Obama’s push on federal police funding.

The public’s fear of criminals has been a key driver in motivating public officials to take action.

The GOP has the stronger reputation on crime. Often, however, Democrats felt pressure to go along. Other times, they seemed content to go along — or even to lead the charge. But these beliefs were so prevalent that it's difficult to aggressively assign blame. If you were opposed to the consensus, you would have been dismissed out of hand.

A pattern of abuses and mistakes has led thoughtful people — especially those responsible for enforcing the system — to reconsider their approaches. And many police leaders have worked to re-emphasize community policing. Balko concludes with a call to reform, laying out policy proposals — from ending the War on Drugs to more modest ideas such as transparency, community policing and accountability.

But unfortunately, high-profile incidents — like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor — are probably necessary to get the public's attention. Without persistent passion against vested interests such as police unions and the bureaucratic inertia of the status quo, little can be expected to change.
— *Aug. 28*

Degeneration of the News

Last week on NBC's "Meet the Press," moderator Chuck Todd played a clip from a recent CBS News interview with Attorney General William Barr. Unfortunately, the clip had been edited in a way that gave the opposite impression of what Barr was trying to say. NBC was publicly taken to task and has now apologized.

The fiasco is one more example of general problems we've seen over time with the media: a decline in the quality of reporting and news coverage; an increase in media partisanship; and a tendency to pursue viewers through flash and style rather than substance. Their desire to appeal to customers shouldn't be surprising. Even though our reflex might be to think of media serving "the public interest," they are certainly passionate about profit and their employees are interested in career advancement.

The current episode is also an illustration of two concepts in economics: "negative externalities" and "implied cartels." First, a "negative externality" is a harmful by-product of a person's actions or a market exchange that is imposed on another party.

COVID-19 provides a great contemporary example. An infected person is contagious and can spread the virus to others.

The classic textbook example is pollution. The goal of a company is to produce, not to pollute. But pollution is part of the "bargain" — and unfortunately its costs are imposed on others. For example, when you buy a car from Ford, you're asking Ford to pollute for you. If a negative externality is significant enough, government intervention may be helpful. Then again, government action itself routinely creates significant negative externalities.

When "Meet the Press" creates buzz for itself and partisan viewers with a fraudulent claim, it causes "pollution" — damage to society. If the fraud is detected, the entire industry is harmed. It also hurts itself, so that's good news in terms of incentives and fairness. But the damage extends well beyond itself.

Second, the media acts as an "implied cartel." A cartel is a collusion of sellers or buyers — to manipulate prices and gain more money. (Think about OPEC in oil, the NCAA in college athletics and labor unions in the market for labor.) An implied cartel functions like a cartel but without explicitly organizing.

Without help from the government, it's difficult to keep cartels together. The incentives to cheat on the agreement (to gain even more profit) — or to enter the market (to compete with the cartel members) — are too great. As such, it's common for interest groups to ask government to restrict their competition — to establish or strengthen a cartel.

So, cartels, whether explicit or implicit, are likely to degenerate and fail, if they can form at all. "Black Friday" is a good example. Remember when it started years ago? Businesses opened early on the Friday morning after Thanksgiving and offered special prices. And then, the start of Black Friday moved back to midnight. And then it moved back to Thursday. And now, it goes for the entire week. Nobody formed a cartel, but the arrangement acted like a cartel — before it fell apart.

The media is in a similar position. It had an implied cartel to be relatively objective, fact-oriented and serious. And for a long time, top-tier news providers stayed in line and were punished if

they got out of line. But now, this line has eroded tremendously. So, the incentive to cheat the standards of truth and to grab viewer eyes has undermined the credibility of the media over time.

Negative externalities are difficult to stop without government regulation. But government regulation of the press is a troubling solution for many reasons. The best answers are in the market. But if enough people value “news” like this, it’s difficult to imagine how we avoid the continuing degeneration of news.

Likewise, media are trying to make a buck. Their “greed” will continue to encourage them to cheat on the cartel — to buck the “standards of journalism” they’re supposed to pursue. — *May 20*

‘Systemic’ Racism

“It’s a black thing; you wouldn’t understand.” There’s a lot of truth to that statement. It’s difficult for any of us to understand each other — especially when we’re in different social classes, have different ethnicities or varying personal circumstances. At its best, the slogan is a call to learn and deepen relationships, to listen patiently and talk humbly. It’s worth the energy to read more liberally and diversify your friendships.

How about this one? “It’s an econ thing; you wouldn’t understand.”

As a labor economist, I’ve learned many things that cause me to see the world differently — in really important ways. The good news: You can understand what I see — if you’re willing to put in some work to expand your horizons and learn more econ.

Let’s talk about some popular terms. The broadest definition of “racism” is treating a moment differently — positively or negatively — because of race. (For example, it would be racism of this sort, if I voted for or against Barack Obama because he is black.) But the most popular definitions of racism are narrower, focusing solely on disliking and mistreating others because of race.

Modern uses of racism often assume that you can’t be racist without “power.” You can’t act on racist beliefs without the freedom to act. But all of us have that power. So the newer definition must imply having power over others. (With a monopoly, you can only buy from me. And if I

don’t like your race, I can easily exert my racist beliefs over you.)

These days, there’s also a lot of talk about “systemic” racism — a vague term that goes beyond the individual and points to the need for systemic reform. The idea is that racism is baked into law, markets, culture and society. The resulting racism can be direct, but often is indirect and even subconscious.

As an economist, it’s interesting to me that government fits both modern definitions so well. Government certainly has considerable “power” over all of us, especially the poor and the marginalized. And government is the most obvious part of “the system.” So, efforts to deal with racism and systemic racism should start by looking at public policy and addressing government.

We’ve seen some of this in recent weeks, as people protest police misconduct. In Louisville, there’s been additional focus on how the death of Breonna Taylor connects to the “War on Drugs” — an immensely damaging policy that doesn’t get nearly enough attention.

But there are other policies that cause immense damage — consequences that are concentrated among the poor in general and African-Americans in particular. Consider the provision of K-12 education. The government has tremendous monopoly power over those in the lower income classes. As with the police, unions protect this monopoly power and make it difficult to fire ineffective or misbehaving employees.

The outcomes are poor, especially for African-Americans. Despite spending an average of \$350,000 per classroom of 25, our nation’s schools struggle tremendously. And what’s more damaging and unjust than giving kids a 9th-grade education and sending them into the world?

We also restrict or prevent younger children from working legally; make it more expensive to hire them through higher minimum wages; and hit them with a 15.3 percent FICA tax on every dollar they earn. We have a War on Drugs that establishes “organized crime” called gangs in the inner city. (Remember learning about Prohibition in the 1920s?) With their reduced opportunities for legal work, we tempt them to sell drugs (tax-free) and then throw them in prison when they’re caught.

One more government policy: With the “War on Poverty” in the 1960s, we began to give a lot more resources to lower-income women when they had children — especially if they weren’t married. Since the change in incentives was connected to poverty, it’s not surprising that this is more about class than race. For example, in 2016, mothers with no more than a high school education gave birth within a single-parent household 60 percent of the time.

But this policy has hit African-Americans harder. Their two-parent households were 80 percent in every Census from 1890 to 1960. In

1965, 24 percent of black children (and 3 percent of white children) were born into single-parent households. But by 1990, the percentages had risen to 64 percent of blacks and 18 percent of whites. In 2016, it was 70 percent and 28 percent. While there are many fine exceptions, problems with family structure and stability routinely cause trouble for children, schools and society.

We should all be passionate about addressing poor policy, injustice and “systemic” racism.” But let’s make sure we talk about all of the relevant issues, especially the ones that cause the most systemic damage. — *June 24*

McGowan

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Other Pitchers Who Could Hit

Now that the final 2025 MLB baseball game has been played, fans can start dissecting the past season. Of course, that also means examining the media coverage of the season, especially during the playoffs. Some observations easily avail themselves. If Ohtani's greatness is owed in part to his being a two-way player, then older players who exhibit the same greatness should also be accorded the utmost respect. Babe Ruth was the nonpareil but not the only player to excel on offense and defense, which in the old days meant also being good in the field.

While today we admire Ohtani and deservedly so, he is a hitter who also pitches and, for the most part, a sometime fielder. He is listed on baseballreference.com as 'designated hitter and pitcher.' Before the 1930s, it was pitchers who hit. No one has come close to Babe Ruth: .342 BA with 714 home runs, a won-lost record of 94-46 as a pitcher, and an ERA of 2.28. He was a pitcher who hit but transitioned into a hitter and fielder who did not pitch much after the transition. A baseball friend of mine said "Ruth didn't like to pitch."

However, he pitched long enough to set a then-record for consecutive scoreless innings in the world series. His 29 2/3 consecutive scoreless innings lasted 43 years, until Whitey Ford set the record at 33 2/3 straight shutout innings in the early 1960s.

Ruth was not the only player to pitch and hit, though, just the best. Research into those players with at least 1,000 at bats and 100 or more pitching decisions yields quite a few players.

Prior to 1900, Guy Hecker went 175-146 with a 2.93 ERA, once winning 52 games in one season. He had a career BA of .282 and in 1886, led the

league with a .341 batting average. Baseball reference listed him as 'pitcher, first base, and outfield.' Another 'pre-modern' ballplayer, Bob Caruthers (1884-1892), had a pitching record of 218-99 with an ERA of 2.83. Over the course of 2465 at bats, he compiled a .282 batting average. His WAR is 59.5, playing right field and pitcher.

Among modern ballplayers, probably the best example of a two-way player is Wes Ferrell (1927-1941). He had 6 20-game win seasons and hit .280 and still holds the record for career home runs by a pitcher. His wins against replacement (WAR), the ostensible single number that shows a player's excellence, was 60.1. However, his pitching WAR was 48.8 and his hitting WAR was 11.3, or, 59.8 for those two roles. The last .3 originated in his pinch hitting. In other words, he was valued for both his hitting and pitching.

George Uhle (1919-1934) went 200-166 and hit .289. He is listed as 'pitcher and pinch hitter.' He merited a WAR of 55.7. HOFer Ray Brown (1931-1945), of the Negro Leagues, went 119-46 with a 3.12 ERA. He was a pitcher and outfielder. Don Newcombe (1944-1960) had a 153-96 pitching record with a 3.57 ERA while hitting .268. He had only 917 at bats, but is included here for a reason: he had two 20-game win seasons before missing two years for military service and another 20-game win season after returning to the big leagues. Missing two years for military service earns him inclusion in pitchers who hit.

Although my list of pitchers who hit is not comprehensive, the point is made. Others exist but are not needed to conclude that complete ballplayers, those who hit and pitched, existed before Ohtani. Two observations: if Ohtani is as great as journalists make him out to be since he has such offensive capability as a batter and defensive capability as a pitcher, then many earlier baseball players deserve as much or greater respect for their two-way careers. And many played the field as well.

Of course, that means not living in the omnipresent now, being attentive to the past, and valuing historical accomplishments.

The second observation in the form of a question: Does it really make sense to learn about the achievements of earlier players by reading an

article by a retired academic instead of a sportswriter or other journalist?¹ — Nov. 19

AI Flunks the Baseball Test

This year's world series and all the attention paid to Shohei Ohtani reminded me of the way students used to get by when writing papers. They used CliffsNotes instead of doing research. Can AI be far behind?

I had a bright student who wrote a paper on Plato's "Crito" as explained by every student's former cheat sheet, i.e., CliffsNotes. Conner discovered that CliffsNotes was woefully deficient. In its analysis of that Platonic dialogue, it never addressed history's first presentation and explanation of civil disobedience, the explanation which Socrates delivered to Crito. The glaring omission led many students to poor comprehension and short circuited an avenue of contemplative thought about civil disobedience.

CliffsNotes was replaced by Wikipedia, but that source, while better, often lacked nuance and depth. At least an entry in Wikipedia provided sources enabling my students to research independently.

These days, of course, we have Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the word "artificial" accurately describes that source of information, at least n

leaders in career batting average for pitchers are Cy Young with a .210 average, followed by other pitchers with high batting averages like Babe Ruth and Dave McNally. However, when discussing a pitcher's performance, "BA" more commonly refers to earned run average (ERA) rather than batting average. BA has never referred to earned run average. And Dave McNally as a hitter? His BA, below the Mendoza line at .196, was worse than the anemic .201 by Cy Young, who hit .01 above the Mendoza line.

With Wes Ferrell in mind, I typed in "mlb pitchers with 6 or more 20-game win seasons not in the hof" and got this response: "There are no MLB pitchers with six or more 20-win seasons who are not in the Hall of Fame."

However, pitcher Roger Clemens has the most 20-win seasons (six) among eligible pitchers not in

the Hall of Fame." If the first sentence is correct, the second sentence makes no sense. Further, Wes Ferrell had six 20-win seasons.

Curious now about AI blunders, I typed in "pitchers with eight or more 20-game win seasons" and got this AI response: "No pitcher has eight or more 20-win seasons. However, Jim Palmer is reported to have eight seasons with 20 or more wins, a figure surpassed by only a few pitchers in baseball history."

This statistic is particularly notable because of the rarity of 20-win seasons in modern baseball. Jim Palmer: Had eight seasons with 20 or more wins, which is the most since 1960.

Other Pitchers: Many other pitchers have achieved multiple 20-win seasons, but none have reached eight or more."

That response is so plainly wrong as to baffle me. AI reported Spahn and Cy Young as having five 20-game win seasons. Spahn had 12 20-game win seasons and Cy Young had 18. In defense of AI reporting on Young, I note that perhaps the site did not know the difference between 20-win season and a 30-win season inasmuch as Cy Young had five 30-games win seasons.

More AI nonsense about baseball: "Whitey Ford: Managed by Casey Stengel for most of his career, Ford had only one 20-win season, in 1961, when he finally received more regular starts under new manager Ralph Houk." Ford won 25 games in 1961 and 24 in 1963.

Enough. For baseball data, AI is unreliable. Use baseballreference.com instead. As for teaching, I used to tell my students that Wikipedidia was an okay site for finding research sources — books and articles on their topic. I strongly counseled them to use Google Scholar, a grown-up source that lists books and articles that have been reviewed by academics expert in their respective fields.

Were I still teaching, I'd make the same recommendations but given reports on how AI is used, the recommendations would go unfollowed. So, what should we do? Have students write papers, turn them in, and then on the due date, in class, ask the students to write a one-page summary of their papers. That is the item I would

¹ All data from baseballreference.com

grade and record. Reading, research and writing is about comprehension and assessment (critical thinking), not the relaying of information that may or may not be accurate. — *Nov. 4*

Not the ‘Greatest’ Game

I grew up reading sports writers like Grantland Rice, Art Dailey and Red Smith. Their writing caught the nuances of whatever sport they covered and, if anything, they understated the achievements of the competitors and the teams. The writing hewed closer to reporting. That meant that their readers had to form their own judgments about an event.

Further, the writing was crisp and clear. They knew how to write. A friend who spent a life in journalism told me, “Journalists could not just jump into reporting news. There were already so many good writers doing that. So, many of those good writers covered sports.”

The early sportswriters did their homework, too. They knew writing, the sport and the athletes. But they let the reader appraise the performance. By contrast, the hyperbole and overstatement by the media regarding the Dodgers’ Shohei Ohtani in game four directed people what to think. Here is a headline from the Los Angeles Times: “Los Angeles Dodgers superstar Shohei Ohtani spoils Angelenos with the greatest game ever.”

The Washington Post headline was “Shohei Ohtani just played the greatest game in baseball history.”

Even the Wall Street Journal sportswriter got into the act: “By the time the final out had been recorded, the fact that the Dodgers had clinched yet another pennant was practically an afterthought. Everyone was still too dumbstruck by what they had witnessed from Ohtani: perhaps Shohei Ohtani just played the greatest game in baseball history.”

The Journal reported “No one’s ever seen something like this,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.”

The manager should not be believed. In fact, 36,365 people had already seen something very much like that several times already.

In 1931, approximately 7,000 people watched Wes Ferrell toss a no-hitter while also helping himself by hitting a home run, a double, and getting four RBIs. Pitching for the Cleveland Indians, he shut down the St. Louis Browns 9-0. And it’s not like he faced players who could not hit. Among the hitless were two Hall of Famers, Goose Goslin and his brother, Rick Ferrell. I note that Wes Ferrell, a six-time 20 game winner who holds the record for career home runs by a pitcher, certainly belongs with his brother at Cooperstown.

On April 27, 1944, Jim “Old Ironsides” Tobin no-hit the Brooklyn Dodgers. He helped himself by blasting an eighth inning homer. By then he had become the first pitcher since before the 1900s to hit three homers in a game, a complete game, five-hit victory, similar to Ohtani’s pitching except that Tobin pitched all nine innings. The knuckleball throwing Tobin faced HOFer (Hall of Famers) Paul Waner and Dixie Walker, who led the league that year in batting average. In fact, the Brooklyn Dodgers had three hitters over .300 in 1944. Tobin would have faced other HOFers but they were in the military.

Earl Wilson, the first black pitcher to toss a no-hitter in the American League, did so on June 26, 1962. Pitching for the Red Sox before a crowd of 14,002 spectators, he beat the Angels 2-0, hitting a home run in the third inning. Among the batters he faced were Jim Fregosi and all-star second baseman Billy Moran.

Rick Wise, playing for the Phillies, pitched a no-hitter at Cincinnati’s Riverfront Stadium on June 23, 1971. He helped his cause by hitting a two-run homer in the fifth inning and a solo shot in the eighth, the only pitcher in baseball history to toss a no hitter while having a multi-homer game. He faced some good hitters, too — George Foster, Pete Rose, Tony Perez and Johnny Bench. He performed in front of 13,329 spectators.

Ohtani pitched six innings, giving up two hits and hitting three home runs. As a pitcher, he faced no likely Hall of Fame player, though it may be too soon to tell about the Brewers’ catcher, W. Contreras.

If a person looks only at hitting feats, Milwaukee Brave Joe Adcock’s game with 4 homers and a double (it hit two feet below the fence) stands out. It was eclipsed by Shawn

Green's game with four homers, a double, and a single — a record of 19 total bases.

There have been 326 complete game no-hitters. In only one did the pitcher also have multi-homer games. In three other complete game no-hitters, the pitcher hit a home run.

It might have been nice for sport writers and media sources to provide the data before declaring that Ohtani “just played the greatest game in baseball history.” — *Oct. 24*

Fatherhood: Tussling With the WSJ

My experience with the Wall Street Journal, chronicled in this column a year and a half ago, showed how little awareness the paper had regarding domestic violence. My recent experience with the newspaper shows how much improvement the WSJ and United States could make in order to promote equality among the individuals in our great country.

The Wall Street Journal invites reader comments after an article. The article, “Divorce Plunged in Kentucky. Equal Custody for Fathers Is a Big Reason Why,” focused on custody decisions in divorce cases. The article suggested child abuse as an ostensible reason for favoring mothers and awarding custody of the children to them.

Of course, that reasoning suggests fathers are a malicious, pernicious lot.

So I responded in the reader comments section as follows: “Type ‘data on child abuse deaths’ into Google and here is what you will get: ‘Mothers acting alone were responsible for 30 percent of child abuse fatalities in 2022. Mothers and fathers acting together accounted for 23 percent of child fatalities in 2022. Fathers acting alone were responsible for 15 percent of child fatalities in 2022.’ Claire Renzetti’s book, *Violent Betrayal*, notes, I’m pretty sure on page 114, that lesbian couples show the same rate of domestic abuse as heterosexual couples. It would be better if that sort of data appeared in an article about parenting.”

The comment drew this response from the WSJ: “Your comment is waiting for approval due to the site’s policy.” Why? “Your comment has been sent to review since the current site policy requires manual approval for all comments.”

Six hours after I posted that comment, the WSJ still had not accepted it. So I tried again with another message. “Department of Health and Human Services report, *Child Maltreatment 2022*, Exhibit 4-4, Child Fatalities by Relationship to their Perpetrators, shows that mothers acting alone or with a non-parent are responsible for 40.8 percent of the child abuse fatalities acting alone or with a non-parent are responsible for 15.8 percent of child abuse fatalities. That kind of data ought to be included in discussions of child abuse.”

The comment drew the same response: “Your comment is waiting for approval due to the site’s policy.” Why? “Your comment has been sent to review since the current site policy requires manual approval for all comments.”

Five hours after I posted that comment, the WSJ had not accepted it. Being the sort of person who is persistent (and possibly prone to banging his head against the wall; think ‘Don Quixote’), I tried again:

“According to an NIH article (2007), ‘Several studies have found that men and women initiate violence against an intimate partner at approximately the same rate.’ That situation was documented in 1979 by Gelles and Strauss.”

This last one did, in fact, appear, but only after a 15-minute wait.

The WSJ appears ambivalent about reliable data. Or, perhaps, the folks who read the comment section could not find the data despite the precision about its location in my comments. Or perhaps the WSJ is following the popular narrative: men are violent, women are as pure as the driven snow. Some men, like some women, are violent but the vast majority of men and women are not.

Harboring popular tropes and being indifferent to data is the kind of attitude that will produce more violence. Further, lazy thinking based on some narrative, not the data, is a poor way of solving problems. Policy based on the narrative, prevalent in so many court cases and legal decisions in the past, is demeaning to men and, to put the matter bluntly, built on a malicious ignorance. — *Sept. 29*

Franke

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Farm Subsidies: A Better Way

One of the reasons I look forward to our monthly Socratic discussion group is the opportunity to learn something new. Regardless of what knowledge I have of the designated topic going in, two hours of rigorous discussion later and I leave knowing much more.

Last month the topic was agricultural subsidies and how taxpayer money could be better spent for the common good and, this is important too, for the benefit of our dwindling number of farmers. Our two hours together was hardly adequate to understand all the programs funded through the farm bill, formally entitled the Agricultural Improvement Act.

Even though we are all conservatives of one stripe or another, we did not discuss philosophical questions such as whether a limited government should be involved in influencing choices made by farmers. Subsidizing farmers, by which the government actually subsidizes consumers, is a policy as old as recorded history. Remember ancient Rome's free grain handout to all residents under its "bread and circuses" strategy to keep the populace somnolent.

Nor did we spend any time on the fact that 80 percent of the farm bill funds food stamps and similar programs under its nutritional title. About 50 percent of Indiana school children receive free lunches under this program so it benefits a substantial voting block.

Rather, we focused on sections of the farm bill where subsidies could be redirected for more effective results. Here again there are historical subsidies that are well-entrenched. We Hoosiers can rail against the payments made to rice, sugar and cotton growers in the South, but the highest subsidized crop is corn grown you know where.

Forty percent of corn production goes toward ethanol, that nasty fuel additive which plugs our lawn mower and snow blower carburetors. If there is one issue that can unite Midwestern senators from both parties, unfortunately it is funding ethanol production.

So where did that leave us? One of our members brought a proposal to redirect just 10 percent of current crop insurance payments from row crops like corn and soybeans to hay and grass acreage. This would reallocate about \$14M in the crop-insurance program, pennies in the overall federal profligacy. Note that this a redirection of current funding, not an increase in spending.

The idea is to apply crop rotation theory in a new way. Instead of the traditional three-year rotation approach, one that goes back to the Middle Ages, designated fields would be planted with hay or another grass crop and harvested for up to seven years before returning to traditional row crops.

Benefits would accrue through nutrient efficiency and better erosion control. The ground would serve as a water sponge and have reduced need for synthetic fertilizers. Soil organic matter would improve. More hay means more feed for cattle, which should help control the rising cost of beef.

So what could go wrong here? Several things. The increase in hay production will affect the supply curve for hay, which may drop the price to where it no longer is economical for farmers to participate in the program. And there is the premise that hay can be harvested productively for seven years. A farmer who was invited to our group as a guest expert thought three to five years would be the maximum life for a hay field.

Again, we didn't challenge the whole concept of agricultural subsidies as we grudgingly acknowledged that they are here to stay for several reasons. For one, they tend to level out wild price swings at the producer and ultimately the retail levels. Stable prices at the grocery store are essential for overall economic stability, as my wife, the director of purchasing at Franke Inc., constantly reminds me. Much of our current political turmoil is due to excessive inflation at the grocery store.

Second, they remove some of the risk that goes with farming. Weather, export quotas, cost of inputs — all these affect the farmer's margin and hence his net income. It is no coincidence that the family farm is becoming a thing of the past as only large corporate farming entities have the financial resources to smooth out the good and bad years.

Which leads to the third reason for farm subsidies. Foodstuffs are strategic commodities. A nation requires a reliable and stable food supply during peacetime and even more so during war. Relying on food imports places a nation at risk of those imports being cut off. Japan, for example, allows only minimal imports of rice as it has determined that self-sufficiency in rice production is a requirement for national survival.

"Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best," as the political mastermind Otto von Bismarck claimed. If taxpayer money must be spent on agricultural support, our group just hopes it can be spent smarter. — *Dec. 17*

Reapportionment

The Indiana General Assembly's special session appears to be over, having voted down a mid-decade congressional reapportionment proposal. The legislature is required to reapportion after each decennial census but not more often, although nothing prevents more frequent efforts other than their fiscal and political costs.

Despite the heavy-handed involvement of Donald Trump in Indiana's recent reapportionment process, he didn't create this mess. It has been going on for most of our republic's life. Establishing a governmental structure that was truly representative of the entire people while not being unduly influenced by special interest groups was the Founders' goal.

In the debates leading to the Constitution's ratification, James Madison warned against the unhealthy influence of what he called "factions." By that he didn't mean broad based, organized political parties, something several decades in America's future. Instead, he was referring to special interest groups that could wield disproportionate influence over public decision-making.

Madison argued that the only way to combat a powerful faction is with competing factions. Factions would keep each other in check through representative democracy. This would occur at several levels including the most basic one — election to the House of Representatives.

The original constitutional language called for a congressman for each 30,000 citizens as a target, achieving the ideal of the House of Representatives being closest to the people and their needs. These were to be truly local elections, with candidates known to many of their voters.

This worked for a while, until the population grew so fast that the House was becoming unmanageable. The decennial reapportionment was also becoming politically unmanageable, with congressional gridlock in apportioning House seats among the states after the 1910 census. Congressional gridlock; imagine that.

That was resolved by capping House membership at 435 with the creation of electoral districts left to the states. A simple system, except for the fact that everything today is an opportunity for a political battle in a nation that seems to split 51/49 on every issue. Enter Donald Trump.

Of course the anti-Trump crowd saw his demand for Indiana reapportionment as a naked power grab. It was hard to justify why a state where approximately 40 percent of the voters who chose a Democrat candidate should have no representatives in Indiana's nine-person delegation.

They made a good case, philosophically at least. What didn't come out was that Mr. Trump is not the original sinner in this morality play. He was merely following an age-old political gambit, albeit in his bull-in-a-China shop manner. His political calculus likely went something like this: Democrat controlled states have redrawn House districts to minimize Republic election victories. If I don't respond in kind, I will be unfairly denied a legislative majority in the next Congress.

His reason for thinking this, assuming I have psychoanalyzed him correctly, can be seen by looking just to west to Illinois. Only three of its 17 congressmen are Republican while the 2024 election gave 47 percent of the vote to Republican candidates.

California, where Governor Newsom vows to retaliate against Trump's reapportionment antics, is another gerrymandered state based on its delegation. Only nine of its 52 representatives are Republican although the party received nearly 40 percent of the congressional votes.

The case of the New England states is even more egregious. There is not a single Republican congressman from these six states. Maybe Trump was just applying a "New England rule" to Indiana's delegation.

Rolling up the data to the national level, however, everything looks copacetic. Republicans captured 51 percent of the national congressional ballot and have just under 51 percent of the House seats. What could go wrong with that?

This: Congressmen do not represent the entire United States but a limited district within their state. Defining these limited districts is not a simple mathematical exercise in objectivity. It is a political process, in that term's most positive and most negative meanings.

Let's just call it what it is — politics, as usual. It is one of those unfortunate side effects of a governmental system built to be run by imperfect human beings and not by angels, to call on James Madison one more time. No constitution, no matter how well written, can prevent partisanship from overriding patriotism.

Maybe the prophet Hosea said it best, in his chastisement of a hypocritical and short-sighted Israel. "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind." (Hosea 8:7 NKJV). We know what happened to the northern kingdom just a few decades later. They are not called the Ten Lost Tribes without reason.

When we reduce everything to winning the next election, we cheapen the ideals of the Founding Fathers as handed down to us through the soaring words of the Declaration of Independence and the practical roadmap of the Constitution. If this ultra-partisanship keeps up, the whirlwind can't be far off. — *Dec. 15*

The Thankful Month

Thanksgiving Day seems late this year and by the calendar it is. Contrast that with my general sense of time's moving much too fast,

especially as I am looking at leaves still on the trees and thinking in terms of mid-October. If I am not confused enough, I have four and one-half inches of snow in my back yard as I write this.

One of the history lessons I most enjoyed in my grammar school days was that of the first Thanksgiving in America. I suspect the story learned is part fact, part apocrypha, but the moral it taught was the important thing. Even in difficult times, we should give thanks for our blessings and be willing to share those with our neighbors. The deconstructionists will disagree with me, but I saw only good things in the story of the Pilgrim-Wampanoag celebratory feast.

If it weren't for that story, apocryphal or not, we wouldn't enjoy the best feast of the year. Who around here would even think of eating things like turkey, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie if it weren't for this story? Given our German heritage in this part of the state, we would probably be stuck with pork and sauerkraut, not that there is anything wrong with that but it just doesn't work on Thanksgiving Day.

We are not thankful enough in America today probably because we have become a consumerist society focused on what we possess and always coveting more. "He who dies with the most toys, wins" is a bumper sticker meme but has anyone ever seen a funeral hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer?

I am being cynical but I was given a tangible illustration of Americans demonstrating their thankfulness for all our blessings. In this case it was young Americans, the children at the Lutheran school my church operates.

It was this year's annual Veterans' Day commemoration. The school makes a big deal of this, inviting veterans from the congregation as well as the children's family members who served. The children respond enthusiastically, painting posters and rehearsing skits to perform for the veterans in attendance. The focus is thankfulness for our America's freedoms and how they are made possible by the sacrifice of the nation's armed forces.

Two examples of this should suffice.

The seventh and eighth grade boys basketball team sang the national anthem to begin the program. They asked their teacher if they could do

it. Think about it; middle school boys volunteering to sing before an audience of adults.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the preschoolers, including the three-year-olds. Since our school begins each day with the Pledge, they have been practicing it all year and they performed like troopers, pun intended.

This could have been a purely academic exercise for these school children, an opportunity to disrupt the normal school day grind. It wasn't; they clearly were into it, as we used to say.

One might think that the concept of military service is purely abstract for children this age. They are fortunate in that they have not experienced the suffering side of war growing up in the United States. I am not aware of any who have lost a family member due to war, although one school father has been deployed multiple times with the Air National Guard.

Yet somehow I sensed that there was an intuitive appreciation within the students that these veterans had done something important, something that directly benefited them as young citizens. The whole idea of serving others is hardly alien to them, being part of their religious instruction.

On the way home from the school, I stopped by an American Legion post. I was lucky to find an open parking spot. In addition to all the cars, there were about a half dozen nursing-home vans there. I was glad to see these facilities bring their veteran residents to the American Legion for a complimentary Veterans' Day lunch, but I was confronted by the cold fact that these are mostly Vietnam era veterans. In other words, veterans of my generation.

I should think less about my generation and more about that of my grandchildren and those schoolchildren I was with that morning. They have learned to be thankful for blessings received. And they don't need lectures from their grandfathers that start with "When I was your age . . ."

We Americans have a lot for which to be thankful: the freedom to think as we choose, speak as we choose, worship as we choose, vote as we choose. Few of us will focus on these blessings at our Thanksgiving Day dinner, pondering instead the material bounty we enjoy.

Even so, November is a month for thankfulness with these two holidays as its appropriate bookends. — *Nov. 17*

Supreme Court Independence

Every year the Gallup organization conducts an opinion poll to determine the level of confidence Americans have for major institutions. It should come as no surprise that news organizations rank at the bottom with Congress and educational institutions also scoring high negatives.

The confidence level in the Supreme Court of the U.S. is much more nuanced and not easy to decipher. Ever since the contentious Robert Bork nomination, names advanced by the president have become lightning rods for partisanship in the Senate and among the public.

Are the justices as clearly partisan in their rulings as most Americans appear to believe? The charges from the party in opposition that the current nominee is an extremist are so commonplace that one wonders if everyone is reading from a prepared script.

So do these justices deliver the partisan goods? That is a difficult question to answer objectively but fortunately two professors at the University of Michigan have developed a formula for assessing the ideological thinking of each justice. Called the Martin-Quinn Score after the two researchers, the model attempts to place justices based on a conservative-liberal continuum that analyzes past votes going back to 1937. Without going into the math involved, mainly because I'm not sure what the Markov chain Monte Carlo method is, a layman can look at an interesting graphic display in Wikipedia or at the author's website to get a quick sense of voting patterns.

Essentially, it works like this. Drs. Martin and Quinn select court cases that can be divided along liberal-conservative lines. Justices are then tracked over their careers on their propensity to side with the conservative side or liberal side of the issue. The scoring runs along a simple scale of minus eight for consistently liberal to plus eight for consistently conservative. A score of zero puts that justice right in the middle, presumably conservative one-half of the time and liberal the other half.

The model is hardly perfect, being better at analyzing past decisions rather than predicting future ones but it is still quite useful in showing the consistency, or the lack thereof, in each justice's opinion in a select number of decisions that have clear liberal versus conservative positions.

What the Martin-Quinn scores show is surprising, hardly what one would expect given the assumed bias partisans of either side charge against the other. If one restricts one's knowledge to national headlines, there should be a solid six to three conservative majority with the six Republican appointed conservatives voting as an ideological block. The data do not support that.

The most consistent justice on a left-right axis is the liberal Sonia Sotomayer, scoring minus four on the scale. The most conservative justices, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, fall between plus two and three. Next are the two liberals, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson, scored at minus two. The remaining four Republican appointed justices are all at a conservative plus one or below, the middle ideological ground. Clearly these four didn't understand their marching orders, if the common wisdom is to be believed.

So if you are keeping score at home, it's Liberals three, Conservatives two and Middle-of-the-Roaders four.

The major problem here is that "We, the People," expect the Supreme Court to be slavishly directed by the current majority's will in its decisions. We reduce it to a mini congress with justices expected to "vote" the way we want regardless of whatever legal or constitutional issue may be at stake. In other words the last thing we want from the Supreme Court is its independence from the political process, let alone incisive legal examination of the case before it.

So the salient question is obvious. If the Supreme Court isn't protecting our liberties, who is? If it isn't checking the excess of the legislative and executive branches of government, who will? If it doesn't give priority to the Constitution and our natural rights, what protection do we have against tyranny of the majority?

It is not the duty of the Supreme Court to determine the best laws for the nation. Its role is to determine the constitutionality of laws passed by Congress and of administrative actions taken by

the president and the executive branch. The will of the people in a democracy is expressed at the voting booth as their representatives are chosen. The Supreme Court must stand above that to protect those voters from the overreaches of Congress and the President. It really is all about court independence.

I guess I shouldn't expect the Supreme Court to be exempt from the political rancor of our brave new world. Questions asked during Senate confirmation frequently are attempts to trap nominees into a judicial corner. The Martin-Quinn scores show how unsuccessful that tactic is. Our republic is stronger for it. — *Nov. 10*

The Role of Citizenship

What is a citizen? What defines citizenship? Is it a set of rights and privileges? Or is it a set of duties and obligations? Or perhaps some of both?

More philosophically, is citizenship something bestowed by the government or does it inhere naturally within those who reside under the jurisdiction of a democratic government?

The on-going contretemps over birthright citizenship as defined in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution is an opportunity for civil discourse on these questions. Unfortunately like nearly every other political issue these days, the birthright debate generates more heat than light.

My monthly Socratic discussion group took on the questions asked above. We quickly determined that the only antidote to government usurpation of personal liberty was an informed and engaged citizenry.

But what constitutes an engaged and informed citizenry? This took us to an examination of citizenship as a duty or a privilege or both.

Consider this question: Does American citizenship give one the right to vote or the duty to vote? We all know people who don't vote because they don't think it matters. After all, what is one vote in the greater scheme of things?

One of our members, a former elected public official, offered a scenario he uses with high school classes when he is invited to speak about government. In the last Fort Wayne primary

election for mayor, only ten percent of eligible voters went to the polls. Using this metric, he asked a class of 50 students if they were OK with only five of their number setting the agenda.

That meant that a simple majority of three students were in charge of all 50. In other words one activist student and two buddies could put themselves in charge. Is this democracy at work or does it look more like one of the various forms of autocracy?

In his scenario if just one more student voted, it would take four to claim ruling power. If three more voted, the majority requirement increases to five. And so on until a critical mass of all students must be met by the putative ruling group.

So the answer appears to be clear: Get more citizens to vote. But what if those additional voters are woefully unformed and unwilling to put in the effort to educate themselves? Doesn't this just increase the influence of special interests and their obnoxious, negative advertising?

Even with two hours of structured discussion, my group could not agree upon the relative importance between duty and privilege in democratic citizenship. We all agreed that it is a duty of citizenship at its most elemental level to vote, but voting requires educated voters. And thus we ended right back at our starting point.

Should someone be given the opportunity to opt out of citizenship, to rephrase the question? Can a political system work if there are levels of citizenship? Is it fair to expect a minority of residents to accept responsibility for governance while the majority simply line up to receive the benefits? Can a democracy survive that arrangement or will it simply morph into an autocracy?

The Constitution is surprisingly quiet about the role of citizens. It speaks indirectly to citizenship in its preamble. Try parsing that long sentence this way:

We, the people, form this more perfect union in order to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense and promote the general welfare so that we can secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.

This sounds like a proto-definition of citizenship, at least the duties incumbent on the citizenry.

Perhaps citizenship is an intangible concept that remains partially undefined so that it can adapt to meet future needs of the polity. That may be the foundation of democratic governance — flexibility to meet new and unforeseen challenges. But is this naïve thinking?

My group certainly is not alone in fearing that our democracy is moving dangerously close to a crisis. It's not the first time in our history that a lack of citizen involvement threatened the nation. During one of the darkest moments in our War for Independence, Thomas Paine wrote this exhortation in his pamphlet entitled "The Crisis":

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value."

Paine had it right; democracy is hard work. But it is worth it. — Oct. 27

The Huge Dictionary in the Corner

One important rule of writing, one I too often break, is to choose words carefully with the intended audience in mind. For example, don't use a lot of technical jargon if you are not writing for a technical audience. The same goes for using college-level words if your readers do not hold college degrees.

A good friend, a self-appointed critic of my op-ed columns, lets me know if I use too many big words that cause him to consult a dictionary to figure out what I am saying. I'm sure this has nothing to do with the fact he is a liberal and I am a conservative; he surely wouldn't judge my vocabulary by an ideological standard.

His complaint about having to go to the dictionary to understand what I have written reminds me of one of the most irritating things about my grammar-school education. A student asks the teacher how to spell a word and the

teacher tells the student to “look it up in the dictionary.” How? The student doesn’t know how to spell it and dictionaries are arranged alphabetically. Get the first several letters wrong and good luck finding your word.

Before I go on a rant about unreasonable teachers, I need to remember that my wife is a retired English teacher. Language arts she calls her favorite subject. It seems to me that, given all the grammar, spelling and pronunciation rules, it ought to be called language sciences, but I am just being argumentative.

Seriously, dictionaries have always fascinated me. It probably goes back to that huge dictionary in my grade school classroom that was on a stand in the corner. Every time I went over to it to look up that word I didn’t know how to spell, I would get distracted reading the definitions of other words on the page. It’s a good thing I didn’t know at the time that according to an NPR report the word “run” has 645 different meanings or I would still be standing in front of that dictionary turned to the Rs.

Ever since I was sprung from the incarceration called mandatory school attendance, my favorite dictionary is the Oxford English Dictionary, the OED. The additional information it gives for each word is absolutely intriguing. One can learn the history of the word, when it came into usage in the English language and whence its antecedents. It’s not just terse definitions; it is whole essays for words we assume have always been there.

The history behind the OED is interesting in itself. An author I enjoy reading is Simon Winchester. One of his books, “The Professor and the Madman,” is about the origination of the OED. Many of the original entries were furnished to the editorial team by a scholar who was sentenced to a psychiatric hospital for murder. The book is great but I suggest giving the movie a pass.

The OED contains 273,000 head words, the basic entry in the dictionary. By the time one counts all the derivatives and combinations, the number of entries exceeds 600,000. Think about your teacher using the OED for your weekly vocabulary test.

I should admit to doing quite well on those vocabulary tests back in the day. Credit it to all the time I spent standing at that huge dictionary in the corner or just to a well-trained memory. The

problem these days is the continued deterioration manifesting itself in that memory.

I don’t think I could even pass those grade-school vocabulary tests today, let alone ace them. The problem seems to be in the recall function of memory, not the recognition function. I know what a word means when I see it but it is an even chance of my recalling a specific word when I am trying to use it.

Perhaps that is what my friend is trying to tell me. If I can’t think of the word I want, then I shouldn’t be using it. That may be good advice, but sometimes there is that one perfect word that gets the meaning across. If that causes my friend to go to his dictionary, so be it.

But there is hope for school children and my critical friend. According to Wikipedia, the 25 most common words in the English language make up about one-third of printed material. Increase the word count to 100 and you have half of printed English. I realize this includes all the common prepositions, articles and conjunctions that do yeoman’s work in every sentence but there are only a few handfuls of them.

Perhaps I should make a New Year’s resolution to restrict my writing to those 100 most common words. Given the rate my memory cells are going AWOL, that might be a good idea. — Oct. 23

The ‘Rechurching’ of America

In unsettled times people of faith turn to prayer. This phenomenon can be seen in history, such as the number of revival meetings in American Civil War army campsites. There are no atheists in foxholes, so the saying goes.

Given the constant bad news about violence and killings, it is not surprising that public statements about prayers for the victims and their families are also in the headlines. Prayer vigils seem to spring up spontaneously, especially on college campuses among young people.

Is this simply a visceral reaction to today’s most egregious violent acts or is something else going on here?

The trend for church attendance and formal religious affiliation has been steadily downward. A study by sociologists Ryan Burge and Paul Djup was published in 2023 under the title “The Great

Dechurching.” I’m no sociologist but I can attest to observing this during my lifetime.

This dechurching phenomenon is due more to drifting away than to outright rejection. No doubt COVID encouraged this. Then there is the general cultural deemphasis of permanent commitments to most everything such as jobs and residences but also church membership.

More recent data gives hope that this trend is reversing. Pew and Barna research studies have borne this out. A recent Barna study showed that 66 percent of adult Americans now respond that their Christian faith commitment is important in their life. Compare this to 52 percent just five years ago.

What may be the most significant finding is that this increase is largely in the younger generations, millennials and Gen Z. Boomers are essentially flat, although there is evidence of an increase among men.

This same trend reversal can be seen in Europe, a continent that has been almost entirely secularized in the last century. The increase in church attendance in Britain is 50 percent, mostly among young men. Especially notable is the church attendance surge at parishes located near college campuses such as in Oxford.

Other studies have found increasing numbers of people who pray regularly, suggesting that statements of prayer support for victims is not simple posturing. Again, this is more prevalent among younger adults as an IPSOS survey documented.

A third datapoint is Bible sales. Twenty plus percentage point increases in sales have been reported by the major Bible publishers. Bible reading has increased but at a lower rate. Perhaps this is a trailing indicator for the primary behavioral change.

Even during the dechurching years, the number of people who said they were spiritual but not religiously affiliated rose. Could this be the group that has triggered the increases in the more traditional religious activities such as church attendance and Bible reading? Is self-professed spirituality just another way of describing someone seeking answers to transcendent questions?

A Family Research Council survey of young people attempted to delve into the reasons why

these generations are leading this reawakening. What the survey found is that young people “are tired of being lied to.” They are “yearning for the truth,” a truth that they certainly won’t find in Washington DC or Hollywood.

One can sympathize with their disillusionment about the world they are inheriting. They are confronted with the futility of expecting the world to get better but it always seems to get worse. We Boomers rebelled against our parents’ generation, quick to criticize their shortcomings but never articulating an achievable route to our dream of a better society. What we left was a landscape of spiritual decay and helplessness, an open invitation for a self-centered nihilism to blanket all.

This can’t be all there is, our young adults rightly ask. They intuitively sense that the only sure outcome from pursuing a lifestyle focused on pleasing oneself is misery. It seldom turns out the way we want. What is left is an aimless pilgrimage through a spiritual wasteland, seeking but not finding.

It is during the most challenging times that a flight to faith can be observed. This is especially true during periods of intense persecution as history instructs us. The fact that there were more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in any previous one tells us something about the world in which we live.

The perceived disconnect between Bible sales and regular Bible reading could be resolving itself as the need for spiritual comfort has never been greater in my lifetime. It takes no intellectual stretch to anticipate that the two indicators will come together. It just makes sense; as one Bible publisher asked, “Why buy the book and never read it?”

St. Augustine, in the conversion account in his “Confessions,” tells us it began with an encounter with a child’s voice commanding him to “Take up [the Bible] and read.” Fortunately for the Christian church, Augustine did just that.

Americans, and Europeans, are increasingly finding that advice pertinent in these unsettled times. Are we on the cusp of another Great Awakening? — *Sept. 22*

The Bookshelf

Edmund Burke

Edmund Burke was a philosophical hero for us Young Americans for Freedom undergraduates back in the Nixon administration. In large part this was due to Russell Kirk's biography, "Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered," that had just been released.

In recent years Burke's status has been brought into question by factions within the conservative movement, no doubt inevitable given the splintering of conservatives into multiple factions. I really don't understand the current infatuation with Leo Strauss, perhaps the leading anti-Burke cheerleader. I really should read more from and about Strauss. But that can wait.

Instead, I chose to read a new Burke biography, actually a joint biography of Burke and Charles Fox, by James Grant. "Friends until the End: Edmund Burke and Charles Fox in the Age of Revolution" (W. W. Norton & Company 2025, 417 pages plus notes, \$28 hardcover at Amazon) traces the parliamentary careers of the two men as allies on most issues until the French Revolution, the "end" of their friendship as the subtitle says.

Their backgrounds could not have been more different. Burke was an Anglo-Irishman of modest means with taints of Roman Catholicism in his heritage. Fox's grandfather was reputed to be the richest commoner in the kingdom due to legal graft taken from his government position as army paymaster. Both ended up all but bankrupt, due to Burke's outspending his middle-class income and Fox's gambling away his family's great wealth.

What they shared was heartfelt opposition to King George and his Tory cabinet, both men identifying as Whigs albeit of different temperaments. They were allies in opposition to Britain's handling of her American colonies,

especially during the expensive War for Independence, and during the interminable yet unsuccessful impeachment of the governor general of the East India Company for alleged corruption.

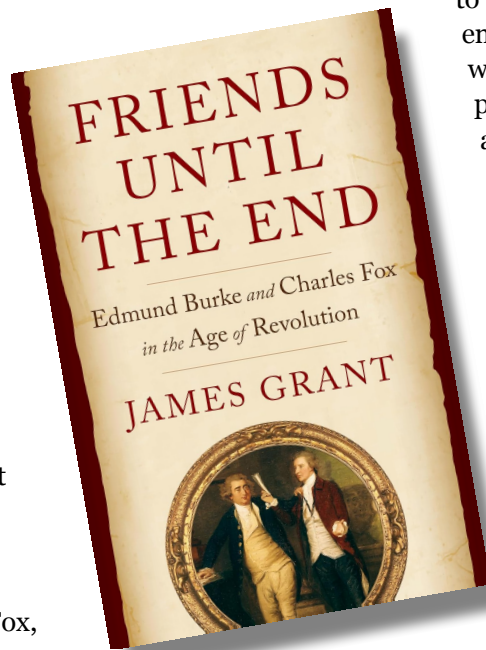
Their common opposition grew from different roots, a difference that ultimately caused their rift during the French Revolution. Grant does a yeoman's job of tracing this across several decades of parliamentary activity. Fox seemed to be motivated primarily as a gadfly, enjoying his backbench sarcasm, which was both political and personal against King George III and his chief minister Lord North. Burke's motivation, meanwhile, was driven by concern for those unfortunate enough to be harmed by British imperial excess, particularly those in America and India.

Following all this gets complicated as Britain's two political parties, the Tories and the Whigs, were not clearly defined in Hanoverian times. A Whig such as Fox or Burke could sit with the opposition during

a Whig ministry. Burke, more than Fox, made a career out of his principled opposition.

The end game was that the two split irreconcilably over the French Revolution, especially as it became more and more violent. Grant explains the root cause of this split was Burke's intractable devotion to the British constitution, a structure he believed could address any deficiencies in its governance given time and serious thought. Fox was ready to throw it all out to achieve his ideals.

Grant credits these two men and their split as the defining moment for our modern conservative and liberal ideologies. Burke anchored everything in the superiority of the British constitution, a document organic to British culture and one serving "to save sinners from ourselves." Fox, on the other hand, went all in with the French revolutionaries' belief in the perfectibility of man based not on the Christianity but on atheism. Well, eventual perfection at least. Meanwhile, the Terror



and Napoleon would steer the course for the great unwashed.

There is substantial detail in this book about how the House of Commons operated during the Hanoverian dynasty. Speeches could go on for hours or sometimes days. Burke was particularly loquacious; his outstanding speech-making ability was often self-defeating by going on too long. James Boswell described Burke the speaker as always enthralling but seldom persuasive. This was Burke's greatest weakness — an inability to know when to shut up. Grant blames this on his “passionate, sometimes inconveniently expressive conscience.”

Burke's strengths were his appreciation for the sanctity of the constitution and his understanding of the importance of freer trade in a mercantilist environment. He was also a family man as we understand it today. When not attending sessions in Commons, he went home while Fox went to all-night gambling houses where he lost consistently.

The book is long and the detail sometimes hard to grasp. Party discipline was something not exercised in any effective way as factions within and across parties developed to support current or prospective ministries. Fox played that game better than Burke, serving as foreign minister on two occasions, once in opposition to Lord North and once as his ally. It's hard to follow all the players without a scorecard, but Grant tries to walk us through what is most important.

One wonders if Grant ran out of steam by the time he reached the French Revolution. Burke's “Reflections on the Revolution in France” is one of his masterpieces but is treated almost as an afterthought despite its influential status, now more than then. But it is a long book with much of it devoted to laying the groundwork for how the two men became allies.

The book's strength lies in its clear characterization of the two men. Fox gives the reader the impression of someone who is not serious, a political dilettante who is self-indulgent as his driving motivation, almost a buffoon. Burke is his opposite but too often driven to acerbic rhetoric. His speeches are loaded with superlatives and frequent assertions of facts that have no basis. (Reminds one of you know who.)

What I found most surprising in the book is the fact that Edmund Burke, so influential with our Founding Fathers and us YAFers from the 1960s, had almost no influence in Parliament. His crusade to impeach Warren Hastings for corruption took years of parliamentary time in both Commons and Lords but still failed miserably. His reform bills went nowhere. That said, it is his writing that has a lasting impact on our American republic and those of us who still cling to Enlightenment era classical liberalism.

Burke's legacy is not what he contributes to today's political debate, although it ought to factor more than it does. Rather, it is its influence on the Founding Fathers when they were most philosophically impressionable. Burke's fingerprints can be seen all over the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, even if modern minds choose to ignore them.

Listening to the Law

Supreme Court nominations are great political theater, great, that is, if you enjoy the spectator sport our uncivil civic discourse has become. But there is an educational aspect to this verbal sturm und drang. For example we have become educated on the interpretative methodology of originalism, the methodology used by those who look to the Constitution's original meaning for understanding.

Related to the originalists are the textualists, or maybe they are two sides to the same coin. I will leave that distinction to one of my attorney friends to explain.

Another group are those who use terms like a “living” Constitution and argue that the Constitution must be reinterpreted to adequately address the nation's current needs. If I oversimplified this school of legal thought, it's only due to my suspicion of its lack of fidelity to what the Founding Fathers wrought.

I recently learned a new designation for this approach — purposivism — an interpretive methodology that looks to why legislation was enacted and to apply this purpose to judicial thinking. For this I owe thanks to Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett and her recent book “Listening to the Law: Reflections on the Court and Constitution” (Penguin Random House 2025, 246

pages plus notes including the text of the Constitution, \$20 hardback at Amazon).

“Listening to the Law” is an insider’s view of how the Supreme Court works and how the justices think about their cases. It is written for the layman and should be mandatory reading for the armchair critic of Court decisions. If you think you understand a Court’s opinion based only on news headlines, Justice Barrett will quickly disabuse you of that notion.

The first part of the book is a limited autobiography of her ancestry and her legal career. Her family life gets appropriate emphasis. One gets a glimpse of a typical, upper-middle-class family with two professional parents working while trying to raise a traditional family with a houseful of kids. Good introduction, Amy; this immediately gets us on your side.

Barrett states her judicial philosophy up front: She strives to check her personal preferences at the courthouse door so that she can review each case on its merits. She used the analogy of Odysseus’ being tied to the mast while passing the Sirens so that he doesn’t hear their seductive song. This does not imply a mental tableau rosa; her self-described approach is carefully informed by legal precedent as well as her originalist rubric.

Her discussion of the personal relationships between and among justices disrupts what many Americans choose to believe about the Court. For example she talks about the close personal friendship between Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsberg, two justices who appeared to be opposed on most hot-button issues. Barrett describes their differences as arguing, not quarrelling, an approach she recommends for the rest of us when with others who disagree. Good advice, that.

The popular image of a Supreme Court split down Republican-Democrat lines just doesn’t align with the facts, as Barrett reports them. In her tenure on the Court, one with a 6-3 Republican

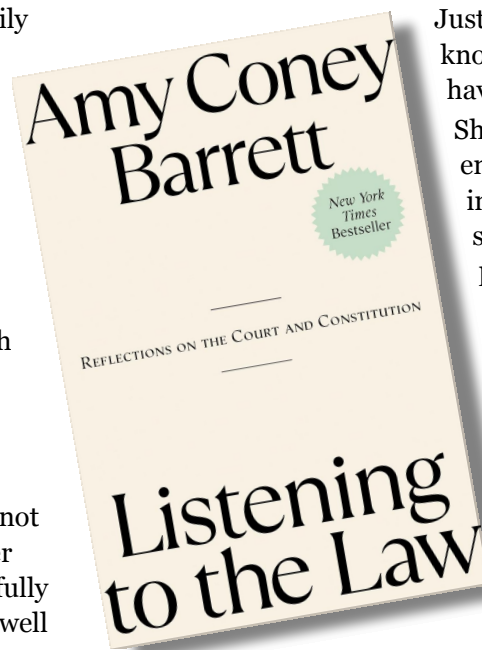
appointee majority, approximately half of the cases resulted in unanimous or near unanimous decisions. The other half had multiple alignments of majority-minority opinions and only several handfals broke down based on political party appointment.

Barrett describes this as a “baked-in need for compromise.” It’s what allows the Court to function productively. The justices have to get along in what she calls “an arranged marriage with no option for divorce.”

Barrett’s chapters on how the Court works are quite interesting. One learns the importance of the law clerks, similar to Congressional aides, and the close personal relationship between a Justice and his or her four clerks. Barrett knows this relationship from both sides, having served as a Scalia clerk herself. She explains the process for granting emergency relief, which I found quite informative in this age of judge shopping to get what one wants politically. It takes more than a single judge to go along; the plaintiff must show a reasonable possibility of at least four justices to agree.

Her description of the writing of the majority opinion also demonstrates how compromise is crucial to the decision-making process. Sometimes it is only negotiation on minor issues that achieves a majority for a clear decision. The role of Chief Justice is integral to this process as he works to get as many justices to sign on with the majority as he possibly can. The fact that half all decisions during Barrett’s tenure were unanimous or near unanimous is proof of John Roberts’ success at this.

I could pick a few nits with Barrett’s writing style, such as always using the feminine pronoun for an indefinite or mixed group, but my most concerning issue is with her apparent belief that the Constitution is too difficult to amend. To my classical liberal way of thinking, that is one of its strengths. That said, she is not advocating wholesale rewriting of this venerable document, just an easier path to update it to address new issues that rise to a basic law level.



Barrett is not embarrassed to credit Justice Scalia with his influence on her judicial career. She clerked for him and learned from him how to approach difficult cases. The Martin-Quinn score for Scalia is more conservative than Barrett's but they may grow closer as she works through more terms on the Court.

Barrett is criticized on the right for some of her votes on hot-topic issues, seen by "true" conservatives as a desertion of principle. Reading her book leaves me with two possible explanations for her putative ideological lapses. First, her application of the originalism rubric is the primary tool in her toolbox. Her interpretative analysis of the Constitution is informed more by the Founding Fathers than by any current political movement. Second, her understanding of what is under the hood in Court proceedings enables her to work toward achievable majority opinions that are as non-disruptive as possible.

At least that is my layman's take on Amy Coney Barrett's self-described role on the Court. Your mileage may vary, but you can only know that for sure if you read this book. It will be worth your time.

The Saudi Transformation

Saudi Arabia is a complex nation, containing a whole bunch of conquered Bedouin tribes content to live off the largess of the ruling house of al-Saud. Most of the nation's workforce, which is limited by a general lack of work ethic among the aforesaid recipients of governmental transfer payments, is employed by the government and under rather relaxed work standards. What happens to this flow of benefits when the flow of oil revenues stops?

That is the question foremost on the mind of Mohammed bin Salman, crown prince and son of the current king. "MBS," as he is universally known, who has big plans to modernize his nation

by diversifying its economy. He also sees Saudi Arabia as a major player in world affairs and not merely an American dependency for aid and defense. He might just pull it off, as Wall Street Journal veteran Karen Elliott House suggests in the biography "The Man Who Would Be King: Mohammed bin Salman and the Transformation of Saudi Arabia" (Harper 2025, 250 pages plus notes, \$24 hardcover at Amazon). House has covered Saudi Arabia since the 1970s so her take on this is worth noting.

It helps to understand how the government of Saudi Arabia works, or doesn't as is often the case. The king is all-powerful, at

least until he is overthrown. The

present Saudi kingdom was established in 1932 by Abdul Aziz and has been ruled by his family ever since. Upon Abdul Aziz's death in 1953, he was succeeded by first one son and then another in accord with tribal tradition. The current king, MBS's father, is the last of Abdul Aziz's sons so the throne will pass next to the grandsons' generation. Grandson MBS has entrenched himself in power by hard line, often brutal, confrontations with other members of the al-Saud family who enjoyed a degree of power — and profit — sharing. That can get complicated when there are over 300 royal princes, all direct descendants of Abdul Aziz. MBS will be the next king . . . unless there is a coup, which isn't likely given his control of most everything in Saudi Arabia.

House rehearses many of the sea changes ordered by an impatient, reform-minded MBS under his 2030 strategic plan. To achieve these goals, MBS had first to break the stranglehold of two important power centers, the royal princes and the Wahabi religious establishment. He achieved the first by imprisoning the princes in a luxury hotel until they signed over their wealth and resigned their governmental positions.

The Wahabi hierarchy was emasculated by MBS's ordering the religious police off the streets where they served as a secret police force to enforce strict Muslim regulations. Societal rules were relaxed or abandoned, especially for women,



a recurring theme of the book. Western-style entertainment offerings were opened for young Saudis.

That accomplished, MBS had to address fundamental societal and economic problems. As House describes it, Saudi Arabia operated like a first-class hotel with citizens checked in at birth and served by others (generally foreign workers) for life with the government picking up the tab. This sounds a lot like the woke agenda among American young people, doesn't it? It wasn't just the royal family who benefited, but all Saudis. The royals just benefited to a much higher level. In 2016, MBS removed these "benefits" from most of the al-Saud family.

House informs us of the extent of royal family largesse. There are more than 10,000 royal family members supported by a total family net worth of \$1.4 trillion. At least there used to be. Much of that wealth has come under the control of King Salman, which means under the control of Mohammed bin Salman.

MBS had to address family political power in addition to the excessive benefits. There were three different military commands, each held by a prince from a different branch of the family to prevent coups. MBS removed each commander and consolidated everything military under his personal control.

Getting the economy under control has proven much more difficult. Saudis aren't accustomed to doing real work or paying retail for staples like energy. MBS needs to walk a fine line between reform and his government's accepted legitimacy.

House does an excellent job of walking readers through the dizzying maze of MBS projects and reforms, so many that it is nearly impossible to keep them all straight. She calls this his shotgun approach, trying to do everything at once. Perhaps a better analogy is throwing everything at the wall, hoping something will stick.

But the greatest threat to his success is the poor human rights record of his and his predecessors' administrations. The religious police may have been defanged but Saudi Arabia is still a controlled society. No dissent is tolerated, and offenders have a tendency to simply disappear. High profile cases, such as the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi,

have made it difficult for MBS to maintain good relationships with western nations. The diplomatic gaffes with the Biden administration are parade examples of this.

All this global opprobrium has resulted in MBS' courting of other powerful dictators in the world, particularly Russia and China. What this portends for the American-Saudi relationship, once a workable and practical friendship, is ominous. It isn't just the oil, which the United States doesn't really need anymore, but the loss of a friendly, rational state in a volatile Middle East that is the most unsettling.

House is partially sympathetic to MBS. She sees him as the best hope to moderate Islamic extremism, which of course is a good thing especially if he can keep the lid on the Middle East powder keg. The other side of the coin is Saudi Arabia's movement away from its American dependency to an independent status, such independence based on close ties with America's enemies. Will the strong arm rule of MBS, now crown prince but soon to be king, prove a stabilizing force for the geopolitical system or ultimately just one more point of escalation in a perilous world? Can the United States afford this ally to become an unreliable one?

Civic Bargain Book Review

One hears the word democracy so often these days — and in so many contexts — that it has lost its meaning. There is the tiresome charge that anything Donald Trump does is a threat to democracy on one hand and on the other hand a rather pedantic academic argument that we are not and never were a democracy, being a republic instead. One is tempted to just tune it all out if it weren't for the fact that we are facing an existential threat to our American polity, whatever you choose to call it.

Call the United States a democracy or a republic or a representative democracy, whatever you will, but in the final analysis the terminology is not what matters. What does matter is how our form of participatory governance plays out in the public sphere, a deteriorating space subject to increasing levels of incendiary speech and actual violence.

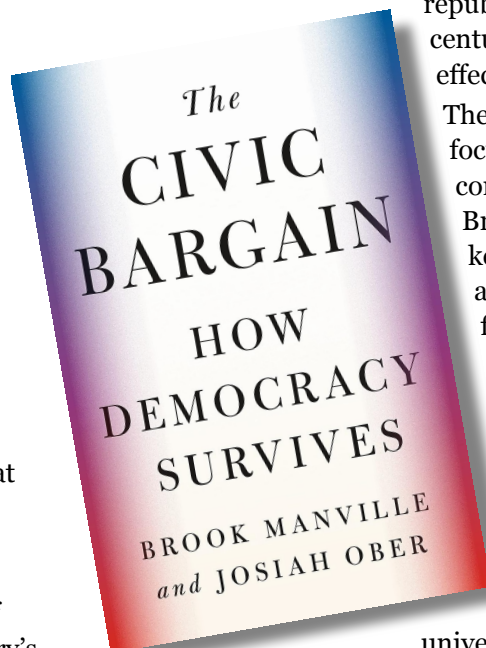
Brook Manville and Josiah Ober have a solution to offer us in their book "The Civic Bargain: How

Democracy Survives” (Princeton University Press 2023, 269 pages plus notes, \$16 hardcover at Amazon). They ground their solution in a foundational definition of how democracy works. Just understand that they use the term democracy in its broadest and commonly understood sense, not necessarily restricted by a technical political science definition. The United States is a democracy for their purposes.

A working democracy exhibits seven characteristics, all of which are fundamental to its ability to survive. A functioning democracy has citizens with no boss except for each other, provides security and welfare, defines citizenship, has citizen-led public institutions, functions through good faith compromise, and promotes civic friendship and civic education.

The authors begin by looking at three previous democratic-like polities before addressing the American one. They begin with classical Athens, the birthplace of democracy. It was probably history’s closest example of pure democracy but it still had its problems. My criticism of their rehearsal of Athenian democracy is that they tend to gloss over its uncontrolled excesses, such as the legislated execution of ten victorious generals due to their casualty totals during a battle in Sicily. They mention the incident and then move on. To me the incident represented a lapse into mobocracy, which a pure democracy has no power to prevent. The execution of Socrates is another example of the mob’s unchecked power if an instigator can get enough votes.

We rightly recognize Athens for its contribution to our understanding of democracy but it was Rome that most influenced our Founding Fathers when they were creating an American government from whole cloth. Rome’s overthrow of its Etruscan kings in favor of annually elected magistrates also can be applauded. Yet that republic fell due to mobocracy played out as street theater, giving way to the side that could shout the loudest and eventually kill more of its opponents.



The authors deserve credit for their explanation of the gradual development and eventual collapse of the Roman republic, explaining its rather complicated structure for conducting elections and passing legislation. They are correct that it worked for centuries due to a shared willingness to find compromise between the elites and the hoi polloi.

But then one day, it didn’t anymore. The republican façade was maintained for a century or two afterward to hide what effectively was a military dictatorship. The longest chapter of the book is focused on the evolving constitutional history of Great Britain. The authors specify seven key points in time when democracy advanced against monarchy. The first era was pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon England as a proto experiment in democracy within a limited context. Each successive era was triggered by some kind of agreement between king and citizens, first advancing the nobility and subsequently giving near total power to a universal electorate through the House of Commons.

Give the authors credit for chunking out British political history as they did, focusing on key events that moved the governing power dial toward democracy. My criticism is that they miss a key fault line in the current British constitution — the lack of an effective balance of power. Neither King Charles nor the House of Lords can effectively check any anti-liberty actions coming out of the House of Commons. I stand in good company in this criticism; I’m sure John Adams would agree with me.

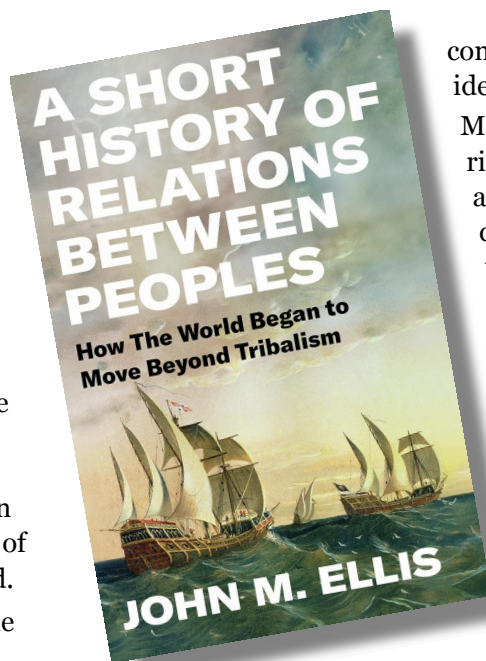
The chapter on the United States is a shorter one, with the focus directed at the gradual but unrelenting progress of the American polity’s expanding participation to previously disenfranchised groups. One gets the sense that each significant political compromise in our history produced a “two steps forward, one step backward” outcome. The authors are clearly unhappy with our modern-day political discourse’s stridency and belligerency, a threat to their bargain model.

Essentially, their point is that our Anglo-Saxon heritage brought over with the early colonists established participatory democracy from day one but with limited voting rights. The fundamental “bargain” for America was set with the adoption of the Constitution. The book’s discussion of its ratification, while brief, is a good overview of the democratic principles outlined in *The Federalist Papers*. The section on the role and potential dangers of political factions is worth the read.

The two common themes of the book are the essential democratic condition of having no boss, meaning no single authoritative head of state, and of a goodwill effort to strike bargains among competing interests. The problem for us today is that we have failed absolutely in meeting the condition of civic friendship, essential for good faith bargaining in maintenance of democracy.

Democracy advances, the authors maintain, through this bargaining process. It is one of compromise, with imperfection tolerated to achieve desirable results. The perfect must not be allowed to become the enemy of the good. Political opposites, the term opponents is not appropriate here, are to be viewed as friends in a common cause and not enemies to be trodden down. Human nature tends toward tribal solidarity instead of this civic friendship. Watch cable news to see what the authors fear.

There is a solution to American democracy’s decline: civic education. This involves more than restoring civics to our public school curriculum; it is something that continues into adult life through our public interactions with each other. Democratic principles should be backyard and cocktail party topics for discussion, my analogy not theirs. The authors bemoan the decline in public service engagement, including military service. They have no use for today’s strident demand for the dominance of diversity rather than a democratic celebration of what unites us. Progress will come from a recognition of what we hold in



common instead of the false god of identity politics.

Manville and Ober are probably right but perhaps a tad optimistic about changing our non-civil civic discourse. They close their book with a call to action, one based on the courage of ordinary citizens to act. That’s how our forebears built our democracy, through collective action often sparked by individual initiative. If it worked before, it ought to work again. Shouldn’t it?

A Short History of Relations between Peoples

Consider this: Instead of being responsible for slavery’s existence, western civilization can be credited with ending it.

This proposition is an underlying theme in John M. Ellis’ “A Short History of the Relations Between Peoples: How The World Began to Move Beyond Tribalism (Encounter Books 2024, 107 pages, \$18 hardcover at Amazon). In fact Ellis credits the British Empire for taking the lead by eliminating the Atlantic slave trade.

This goes against all conventional progressive doctrine, which reduces the cause of most problems to placing blame on white people. Ellis confronts this conceit frontally and he makes his case by a careful reconstruction of the world in 1500 compared to today.

The world at the dawn of modernity was a geographically segregated place, with ethnically homogeneous peoples living apart from others without any significant physical contact among them except for war. The primary emotion was one of fear of the unknown. The civic structure was tribalism, focused on security and protecting food supplies.

Then three things happened: The Age of Discovery linked Europe with Africa and America; the printing press led to a publication explosion and a concomitant increase in literacy; and the Reformation altered the religious and political landscape of Europe. Over the next five centuries

disparate peoples mixed through exploration, colonization and trade.

Ellis borrows the motto of the International Chess Federation — *gens una sumus* (we are one family) — to describe the evolving understanding of the commonality among all human beings. This is a recent development made possible by the advancement of western civilization and its ethos throughout the globe. Rather than repressing non-European civilizations, it has enhanced them by freely sharing its fundamental premises such as human rights, liberty and representative government.

The role of the great imperialists, the British, is declaimed as the crucible in this cultural advance. They didn't stumble into all these great ideas, Ellis writes; they created them. Just compare the current state of affairs in the Anglosphere (those nations once part of the British Empire and English-speaking) to the rest of the world.

The point of it all is to understand the people of 1500 as people of 1500, not 2025. Ellis explains that European explorers took unfamiliar people as they found them. Ofttimes this included observing local practices of slavery, ritualistic torture, human sacrifice and cannibalism. He does not apologize for the role of Christianity in addressing these practices that we now find reprehensible but credits it with being a fundamental contributor to their demise.

He does not give a stamp of approval for everything the Europeans did but reminds us to think of them as they thought of themselves, without the intervening centuries of learned sensibilities.

Ellis concludes by turning woke orthodoxy on its head by delineating its “damaging myths and delusions.” He debunks six planks in the woke platform.

First, the charge that white prosperity is due to the fact that it was stolen from non-whites. The simple fact is that white European descendants have produced most of the technological advances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Non-whites will catch up, as post World War II history shows.

Second, the “we are all one family” mantra is assumed to be timeless and therefore retroactively applied when critiquing the past. Instead, it has slowly developed since 1500. Prior to that, the

concept would have been completely alien to everyone everywhere.

Third, the Age of Discovery is viewed as evil people oppressing innocent natives. Instead, the discoverers helped bring isolated peoples into the modern age.

Fourth, there is the tired charge that European explorers stole native land. This is based on the ludicrous assumption that the extant natives at the time had lived there peacefully since time immemorial, completely ignoring the on-going conflict among competing tribes attempting to displace others.

Fifth, contemporary college curricula developers insist that racial balance is mandatory in reading lists. The inconvenient truth is that until just recently, most artistic expression and scientific achievement were produced by Europeans and other whites. Shakespeare just didn't have a peer; neither did Bach. There is no getting around that.

Sixth, current inequalities are due to white greed, theft and racism. Ellis provides enough argument against this throughout the book but he concludes by worrying how this pervasive myth has dominated the educational system.

I want to make two points in closing this review. First, Ellis criticizes conservatives for describing what we hold dear as western civilization. This gives the impression of ignoring ancient contributions such as the introduction of farming in Mesopotamia, the Hebrew Bible and the cultural contributions of India. Fair enough, but the handle has worked for us.

Second, something doesn't quite sit well with his defense of *gens una sumus* as the directing premise of progressive ideology. How does “we are all one family” reconcile with identity politics and the deconstructionist penchant for emphasizing differences while ignoring what we share as humans? Dividing the whole human race into oppressors and the oppressed is not “we are all one family” thinking.

Perhaps it makes more sense to think of *gens una sumus* as two distinct axes. The vertical axis is the historical one, tracking time, while the horizontal axis distributes current humanity by whatever difference one wants to emphasize.

Progressives apply the brotherhood of man concept vertically into the past. Ellis is correct that

comparing 1500 to 2025 is neither valid nor fair. Our sixteenth century ancestors would not have the slightest understanding of what our modern progressives are preaching. Meanwhile, progressive orthodoxy can be comfortable in driving divisions into the human race on the horizontal axis so as to maintain their oppressor/oppressed dichotomy.

This thinking is inconsistent at best. Hypocrisy is a better term for it, and a dangerous hypocrisy at that. Just listen to our uncivil dialogue on nearly any issue.

These are nits I am picking. His thesis is one all conservatives can agree with and his arguments against progressive, racist ideology are spot on. The book is worth reading in that it presents a new dialectic to use in confronting wokist thinking. —

Mark Franke



Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

The Outstater

A Word for our Times

solipsism | 'säləp,sizəm | *noun*. The quality of being self-centered or selfish. In philosophy it is the view or theory that the self is all that can be known to exist.

“Solipsism” is a good word. More use can be made of it. The late Charles Krauthammer used it to characterize persons who assume that the whole world “works something like suburban Boston.” It can be expanded to describe those who think the world resembles one or another movie they’ve seen.

It also can be used to describe the motivations of a typical Statehouse legislator. You might assume he is in Indianapolis doing the people’s business as our friend and neighbor. More likely, the self-realization struck him on election that he now has the best job of his life, cannot imagine getting a better one and intends to hold onto it at all costs (yours).

There was an instructive exchange during yesterday’s “Face the Nation” (CBS). Secretary of State Marco Rubio was being grilled on the capture of Nicolás Maduro. The hostess said she was “confused” that others in the regime were not also arrested.

“You’re confused?” Rubio asked incredulously. “I don’t know why that’s confusing. It’s not easy to land helicopters in the middle of the largest military base in the country.

He lived on a military base. Land in three minutes, kick down his door, arrest him, and read him his rights and leave without losing any American assets. You’re asking why didn’t we do that in five other places at the same time?”

Does anyone check the credentials of our network and cable experts other than they look good on camera and can be fitted with earphones? Do they read books? I thought not.

The reality, however much we wish it otherwise, is that beyond our borders there is no dependable justice but what we have the power to carry with us. There is no “international law” dispensing order and fairness to every corner of the globe because, thank God, there is no international authority that we must obey.

Javier Milei’s unconfused reaction to the news from Venezuela was about right: “¡Viva la libertad, carajo.” (Long live freedom, damn it.). — Jan. 5

'Alabama 27, Indiana 24'

The late Bob Bartley, editor of the Wall Street Journal editorial pages, understood the intrinsic value of journalism. He imagined a campfire of prehistoric hunters where one in the circle had a better memory for game trails than the others. That member of the party earned privileges (a Mammoth rib perhaps) irrespective of his tactical contribution to the hunt.

That prescience, that value, has disappeared for reasons to be addressed in a moment. We are all dimly aware of it but the rush of crises and events makes it hard to quantify. Every once in a while, though, it becomes clear that our news “experts” are fools.

Indiana University’s 38-3 victory over Alabama in the quarterfinals was such an instance. My Grok assistant helped me gather examples:

Paul Finebaum (ESPN/SEC Network personality) strongly favored Alabama, emphasizing the Crimson Tide’s experience and implying Indiana would falter under pressure against a blue-blood program. Post-game discussions highlighted how wrong this take was, with Finebaum later focusing more on Alabama’s poor performance than a misjudgment of Indiana.

Josh Pate (host of “Late Kick with Josh Pate,” often on CBS/ESPN platforms) confidently

predicted an Alabama victory, even appearing on podcasts like “Bussin’ With The Boys” to back the Tide. After the blowout, he acknowledged the miss, whining: “Never thought I’d live to see the haters be right about me.”

These, please know, were grown men whose only job was to assess the straightforward factors in a single game of manageable complexity, a boys game. They had masses of data, plenty of time and lifetimes of practical experience at their disposal, plus access to game film, practices and locker room interviews. It was not rocket science.

Yet, many writers picked Alabama outright, citing momentum from their first-round comeback win over Oklahoma. For instance: One Roll Tide Wire contributor predicted Alabama 30, Indiana 28, calling it a potential upset driven by health and momentum. Others, like certain IndyStar/Tuscaloosa News panelists, leaned Alabama in non-rain scenarios (e.g., Alabama 27, Indiana 24).

Given the game’s importance, it is shocking how many got it spectacularly wrong — Alabama’s worst loss since 1998. The game in reality underscored Indiana’s legitimacy under coach Curt Cignetti and Heisman winner Fernando Mendoza, while exposing Alabama’s struggles in the post-Saban era. Not one sportswriter anywhere in the nation got that even close to right.

Why? I don’t think sportswriters or their news counterparts try anymore. The goal has become self-aggrandizement, Internet clicks, boosterism and opinion manipulation, not accurate predictions and certainly not the truth.

And there is the perpetual flyover snobbery. A network reporter cornered Cignetti after the game to ask whether he had been worried that his team could sustain success “on the big stage.” He shot back, “Why, because we’re Indiana?”

Journalist once were taught to write as if their audience was the breakfast table of an average family. The point was that they should focus on a readership somewhat in a hurry, of diverse age and sex, individually intent on learning what was going to happen later that day, that week, that month (the weather, school closings, the economy, wars and of course their favorite sports team).

That’s why my favorite sportswriter, Red Smith, made a practice of filtering out the personalities and the hype to write only about what happened on

the field. He wanted his readership to have a better chance of predicting the outcome of next week’s game. We need to return to that. Go Hoosiers. — *Jan. 2*

Sharks Are Only Human After All

I admit to spending too much time trying to make sense of things. Why, for instance, do we provide aid, shelter and scholarship to foreign nationals who say they hate us? Nonetheless, it is important to keep tabs on the more egregious examples of softheadedness.

Here is the latest in my collection: A California biologist has come forward to explain to the unaware that a shark killing a woman was only an accident.

Greg Skomal, a marine biologist and the author of “Chasing Shadows: My Life Tracking the Great White Shark,” believes a shark may have targeted the 56-year-old woman in error, mistaking her perhaps for a nice, blubbery, tasty seal.

“There’s some account that she may have actually separated from the group because she’s a different, more proficient swimmer,” Skomal told NewsNation. “That might have isolated her. And this shark, you know, we think these are mistakes.”

Hey, mistakes happen. Back in the water everyone. — *Dec. 31*

Restoring the Family Farm

If you headed out into the Indiana countryside over the holidays you witnessed the dearth of family farms. As we noted in “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles,” George Washington and James Madison, farmers both, would be shocked to learn that farm and ranch families comprise less than 2 percent of the American population today,

That could change here as the administration of Gov. Mike Braun and Lt. Gov. Micah Beckwith turn its attention to regenerating Indiana agriculture. Executive Order 25-58 to “make Indiana healthy again” is a much-needed commitment by state government to focus on expanding access to local foods and direct-to-consumer sales.

The family farm has been in free fall for a generation. Corporate and large family farms produce 84 percent of our food and fiber while 2

million small farms and ranches (sales under \$250,000) produce 15 percent. Indiana lost 300 farms from 2021 to 2022. Still, the average size farm here is 270 acres, considerably smaller than the national average of 446 acres.

Please know that there is no free market in agriculture due to decades of regulatory micromanagement by the federal government and price subsidies conferred by taxpayers. To the extent supply and demand are at work, they can be seen in trends favoring locally produced vegetables, meat and poultry.

But USDA regulations place burdens on small farms that can least afford them. For example, in order to sell cuts of locally raised meat to nearby groceries or restaurants, farmers must send their animals to one of a limited number of federally inspected slaughterhouses, adding time and travel costs.

As with so many government-created problems, the solution is to quit doing what we are doing. Indiana can cut red tape to promote local farming for local consumption and make it easier for small farms and ranches to serve consumers. Hoosier farmers need freedom to distribute custom-slaughtered meat to consumers, restaurants and hotels.

But if less government involvement worries you, consider who has the most incentive to provide safe, healthy food: 1) bureaucrats who pay no penalty for overreach or misjudgment; or 2) private actors operating in a competitive market who risk going bankrupt if they fail their customers? Claims by government that it is improving our food health with mandatory inspections, regulations and restrictions should be put to the most rigorous cost-benefit analysis.

Economists know that while markets are not perfect, government can exacerbate problems due to misaligned incentives and political distortions. The future for Indiana agriculture, we argue, is a minimal government role enforcing contracts and fraud laws, and, when practical, smoothing the path of private initiatives.

So watch carefully the governor's attempt to upgrade Indiana agriculture. You will want to make sure it includes not just Statehouse rhetoric but the creation of standardized metrics to measure real progress in both the food health of Hoosiers and

the growth of Indiana's local food economy. —
Dec. 31

The Mystery of Property, 2026

*"Everything has already been said, but since no one listens, it is necessary to say it again." —
Andre Gide*

New Year's is the appropriate time to review lost lessons — resolutions unkept, certainly, but also those truths related by an earlier generation, a father or grandfather maybe, that were never fully incorporated into your operating manual.

I have one: It is respect for private property. In my childhood, it meant keeping off other people's grass. During my rebellious years, it was the selfish concerns of people older and richer than myself.

It is all that, perhaps, but a lot more. I have learned that it is what's holding our civilization together, albeit tenuously. Indeed, in comparison to the freedom to hold property, freedom of speech is a mere affectation, and social justice, equity and the resentments of a myriad of political identities are tragic jokes.

The founder of modern economics, Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), was asked to leave a statement for future generations, for all races, for all classes and for all identities. His response:

"Modern civilization which enables us to maintain 4 billion people (8 billion now) was made possible by the institution of private property. It is only thanks to this institution that we achieved an extensive order far exceeding anybody's knowledge. If you destroy that moral basis, which consists in the recognition of private property, we will destroy the sources which nourish present-day mankind, and create a catastrophe of starvation beyond anything mankind has yet experienced."

We hear from people who like to talk about their intention, their commitment, to saving the world, to banishing hunger and so forth. They are sketchy, though, as to how that might be done. They don't like to consider that such a profound task may not have a solution, only tradeoffs. That a moral base, a high-trust culture, might be critical to even incremental success.

Fortunately, the historian and social commentator Tom Bethell (1936-2021) did consider it. He carefully tracked the almost mystical role of property in his “The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages.” Therein he explained the necessary choice, the responsibility, that our generation is yet unprepared to make:

“The great blessing of private property is that people can benefit from their own industry and insulate themselves from the negative effects of others’ actions. It is like a set of invisible mirrors that surround individuals, households or firms, reflecting back on them the consequences of their acts. The industrious will reap the benefits of their industry, the frugal the consequences of their frugality; the improvident and the profligate likewise. They receive their due, which is to say they experience justice as a matter of routine. Private property institutionalises justice. This is its great virtue, perhaps dwarfing all others. We may say with the economists that private property ‘internalizes the externalities,’ or with the philosophers that it gives rise to ‘social justice.’”

Happy New Year, and yes, we will republish this next year. — Dec. 26

Rolling Boondoggles

As the usual boosters line up to cut more ribbons for the almost \$400-million Indy Blue Line (bus transit) in Indianapolis, our adjunct scholar Randall O’Toole is finishing work on his latest report. O’Toole, a reliable and well-informed downer on public transportation issues, concludes “the more we spend, the fewer people use transit.”

Here is his quote in the blog “Unleash Prosperity”:

“Transit has not relieved congestion. It hasn’t reduced greenhouse gas emissions. It hasn’t helped many low-income people, the vast majority of whom have their own cars and don’t use transit. All this has done is enrich a few special-interest groups. . . . Transit advocates talk endlessly about the advantages of transit over driving. Americans are paying for it but they aren’t using it.”

Another friend, Stephen Moore, an editor at the blog, says that taxpayer support for urban mass transit requires a lot of magical thinking. Indeed, in many cities it would be cheaper if taxpayers hired an Uber driver for every transit rider.

Indianapolis, with a higher-than-average two vehicles per household, would be one of them. — Dec. 14

Oh Goodie, a Casino

The leadership of my community is excited about a new economic boost that the mayor says is “too good to pass up.” Is it a tax break for local businesses? How about zoning reform, or more starter homes for young families? No? Reducing outdated permit requirements and regulations?

None of that. They are excited about a state-sanctioned casino. I am trying to picture the meeting with a prospective investor when he learns that our city’s most prized initiative is . . . well, a gambling house rigged against its citizen-customers in which the winnings pass through the hands of a government mafia before disappearing into the crony-capitalist ether.

But we are told this means millions for our community. We are told that by the two chief proponents — a mayor who thinks government grocery stores are a good idea and a car dealer who has developed rent-seeking to a fine art.

But don’t worry. The shiny suits will appoint a board to distribute by formula certain of the funds, those for do-good agencies, “humanitarian” non-profits to help improve mental health and combat homelessness, addiction and “other challenges” of a gambling-friendly polity.

This is happening at a time when mid-sized, traditional communities such as ours are becoming the coveted investment and development opportunities in the nation.

And if there is a single word to describe these prospering towns and cities, it would be “virtuous” with a lower-case v, meaning communities where people meet deadlines, self-invest, work hard and aspire to jobs that support traditional families.

There are ways to signal this priceless moral resilience. Welcoming a casino is not one of them.
— Dec. 6

Keeping the Peace

The King's Peace (pax regis) — Prior to the English Civil War, the common-law concept of maintaining public order.

Criminologists tell us that only a sliver of humanity is inherently “criminal,” that is, persons with a pathological disregard for others or their property. In New York City, for instance, just 327 offenders among 8 million citizens were responsible for nearly one-third of the city’s shoplifting arrests.

We can agree that it is important that recidivists, especially the violent ones, be separated from the law-abiding. So how do we distinguish them from those who have committed lesser crimes of, say, youthful indiscretion?

Easy. The one group keeps committing crimes and the other doesn’t. The New York figures above parse to 18 repeat arrests per shoplifter. Members of the second group often right themselves, and do so with or without grants to the sociology department for midnight basketball, gang interdiction and other silliness.

Statewide, Indiana’s recidivism rate is only about 30 percent. Not bad, as these things go. That percentage reflects the fact most of us in a functioning society, even those who have run afoul of the law, eventually acknowledge right and wrong.

A number of progressive judges and prosecutors, however, have thrown such discernment out the window. They treat every lawbreaker as if they were mere hooligans in need of “a good talking to.”

To understand how insane that is, we need to back up for a moment. We agreed it was important to keep those few dangerous individuals separated from society — locked up.

What is not so well understood is that it is not only to protect the rest of us individually but to protect us aggregately.

If such criminals are routinely released back into a neighborhood as some sort of perverse social statement, that neighborhood is doomed. (Black

Lives Matter could have spent its millions protesting that instead of defunding police.)

The late sociologist James Q. Wilson put his finger on it in his classic work, “Thinking About Crime”:

“If we are to make the best and sanest use of our laws and liberties, we must first adopt a sober view of man and his institutions that would permit reasonable things to be accomplished, foolish things abandoned and Utopian things forgotten.”

That sanity begins, Wilson argued, in the neighborhood, in conversations across backyard fences, at the laundromat, pool hall, corner bar, in beauty and barber shops: “The essence of the police role in maintaining order is to reinforce the informal control mechanisms of the community itself. The police cannot, without committing extraordinary resources, provide a substitute for that informal control.”

Instead, entire categories of crimes that should be subject to this informal control are dismissed as things the public must learn to tolerate — loitering, panhandling, disorderly conduct, open-air drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, unruly crowds, gang fights, vagrant camps, ignoring traffic laws, vandalism and so forth.

“Who is harmed by such ‘victimless’ crimes?” asks Charles Lehman of the Manhattan Institute in reviewing Wilson’s work. “The answer is clear: the community itself and the normative process by which it remains functional and safe.”

But if the community’s own leadership — playing racial, cultural or ethnic cards as is so often the case these days — doesn’t want to support the police in this effort, there is a limit to what even the National Guard can do. Sadly, such leadership, purposively or not, is signaling the rest of society to keep its distance. That will not work out well for anyone.

Corporate Media on the Dock

Here’s an idea: Ask the Indiana Secretary of State to deny incorporation for newspapers owned by out-of-state entities.

Preposterous? Somewhat. The legal hurdles would be daunting. It might be interesting, though, to hear corporate publishers testify under oath how they are functioning mediums for the First Amendment.

If allowed as a friend of the court I would enter two pieces of evidence to the contrary.

The first would be the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette's suggestion this week that when two unarmed members of the U.S. military are targeted and shot in the face only blocks from the White House by a Muslim on an overextended visa the response should be . . . wait for it . . . to withdraw the National Guard: "Hoosiers Deserve to Know Why Guard's Deployment to Washington Is Necessary."

The second would be an Indianapolis Star columnists assertion, also this week, that to oppose immigration is morally equivalent to using the playbook of the Ku Klux Klan: "New Anti-Immigration Group Is 1920s KKK Racism."

I would then yield to objections but not before asking the judge to cancel his subscriptions. — Nov. 29

The Star Explores Outstate Indiana

The Indianapolis Star has sent a team of intrepid newswomen to the far corners of the state to learn what we are about out here, heavy on those man-on-the-street interviews of hapless "average" Hoosiers.

One dispatch from the hinterland began, "The hills of southern Indiana look different than the manufacturing industry-dotted lakeshore in northwest Indiana or the at-times crowded suburban streets of Indianapolis' doughnut counties."

So although a sincere and appreciated effort at outreach, don't expect much in the way of profound insight.

Still, I wish I had run into one of them. I would have offered the foundation's 30 years of experience collecting the opinions of outstate Hoosiers, including those in its regular column fortuitously named "The Outstater." And I would have handed her a copy of our "Nine 'States' of Indiana."

The 2012 research project identifies and describes Indiana's distinct regions, too often lumped together as if the state were socio-economically flat. Although dated, I commend it to your attention here. Keep it in your files. It will come in handy.

The methodology was designed by Dr. John Gaski, our marketing expert, with the help of summer intern Cory Craig. It aggregates the various components of economic, political and social statistics to produce nine distinct regions based on variations within the data, including per capita income and quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) among other things.

A map from the article illustrates U.S. Census data relating the only fact our economists says is worth knowing, e.g., how many are coming and how many are going.

The mauve shading, covering virtually all of outstate Indiana, shows that Hoosiers are leaving — nay, have abandoned — the traditional hometown. Rural America, we were told at the time, had fallenverment, assumes that the chief executive will work to be king, the Parliament will scheme to sell off the silverware, and the judiciary will consider itself Olympian and do everything it can to much improve (destroy) the work of the other two branches."

Along those lines, I would have said that we worry it's all bushwah coming out of the Statehouse and we would appreciate more help from her newspaper sorting it out. — Nov. 26

A Social Contract: Health and Human Capital

Salus Populi suprema lex esto (Let the health of the people be the supreme law) was Cicero's test of good government. It is the core social contract of our society, both the justification and the limit of state power. But an adjunct of this foundation, Dr. Berry Keating, will argue in the winter journal that Indiana is failing Cicero's test.

"The goal of the increases in insured coverage and spending has surely been to improve health outcomes, but life expectancy in the state has been declining since around 2010 and continues to trail the national average," writes Dr. Keating. "A 2022

public health commission highlighted dramatic disparities across counties, with gaps of more than a decade in expected lifespan between the healthiest and least healthy parts of the state.”

Dr. Keating is monitoring a range of health issues. There is one aspect, though, that a group of us, including a good number of state and county officials, think we can do something about — the denigration in how our food is grown and prepared.

It is a big issue but much of the work has already been done; it’s just being ignored. We have understood in detail for some time how Hoosier health is being undermined by poor agriculture policy. Our strategy, then, will be to gather the evidence needed to forcefully set a reasonable plan on the governor’s desk. He will be presented hard evidence, some of it alarming, attesting to the wisdom of sound, people-oriented, sanocentric agriculture.

For now, though, I would like to lay out a softer argument. I would focus on human capital, another factor in maintaining a healthy Indiana. It begins by at least noticing the disappearance of small towns — the historic font of the Hoosier spirit.

G.K. Chesterton, the English theorist, presented the challenge in his “Outline of Sanity” (1926): “To be free and to be independent is to be a part of something bigger than oneself. The idea is to get back to a society where people can live together as neighbors and not just as wage slaves or bureaucratic cogs.”

There is no good reason for Indiana to sacrifice its topsoil for export to global financial networks — and to do so without a thorough public discussion. Growing genetically altered corn to turn into energy does not get us ahead. There is much less reason, Chesterton would warn us, to throw away generations of human capital.

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

That is nowhere more true than in farming, where the notion that endless growth, a feature of industrial agriculture, is beneficial in all aspects. You can dismiss the next few paragraphs as nostalgic debris if you wish, but it is hoped my

memories usefully contrast with our current sense of self, of how we see the society around us.

I spent my early journalism career traveling the Midwest. The small towns of those years are gone or at least unrecognizable, as are the local implement dealers who could fix things, the lawyers on the square whom you could trust, the corner grocers who would let you sign a tab, the one-chair barbershops where you could speak your mind, the hardware stores where they actually knew something, the feed stores where they complained alternately about politics and the weather, the weekly newspapers that knew their readership and the restaurants with hot coffee and rhubarb pies.

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

Some blame corporate agriculture for all of this. Corporations, however, are following incentives, and those incentives can be changed without destroying profits. Corporate executives are not necessarily the enemies of Cicero’s *salus populi*.

Several of the towns on my route held annual “founders’ day” dinners where hometown sons and daughters who had “made good” in the outside world returned to be honored and to give a little speech.

I was always surprised by how impressive the accomplishments of the honorees, often corporate executives, and how sincere the pride of the townspeople, and how heartfelt the gratitude of both.

Even in town many families still had full gardens, and I mean full. My grandparents dedicated their entire backyard to a vegetable and fruit garden plus a crowded chicken coop, a drilled well and a bee hive in the oak tree. The “root cellar” was full of home-canned goods. No car, no central air, big front porch.

But again, there’s no there there anymore. It makes me sad that I cannot trust our ubiquitous suburbs popping up like tent cities around crime-ridden urban cores to raise the same quality sons and daughters as were honored at those founders’ day dinners.

For people who grew up among 4H clubs, classless basketball and sewing circles were truly diverse citizens with the advantages that implies. They were in daily contact with a wide range of personalities at all levels of society. Necessity taught them to realistically assess their own abilities and those of others to work toward common goals, and to do so without letting self-centered motives or envy get in the way.

You see, human capital as well as corn was being grown back then. We can have them both, and good health to boot. Stay tuned. — Nov. 25

Our Cultural Disconnect

With the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence ahead of us, we asked our assistant, Grok, to review recent polling on what American youth know about this founding document. I leave the results with you to decide whether we have reached a state of total cultural disconnection:

The Annenberg Public Policy Center's Civics Knowledge Survey asked the question of ages 18-29, "What does the Declaration of Independence do?" Multiple choice: 1) establishes the U.S. government; 2) announces separation from Britain; 3) defines citizenship; 4) protects individual rights.

Only 26 percent correctly identified it as announcing separation from Britain. Thirty-two percent thought it "establishes the U.S. government" (confusing it with the Constitution) and 21 percent picked "protects individual rights" (confusing it with the Bill of Rights).

The American Bible Society's poll asked young adults ages 18-29 to name "one right guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence." Twelve percent couldn't name any, and only 9 percent mentioned equality or self-government principles.

Grok offered this grim analysis of the polling in general: Although youth consistently underperform on specifics, they nonetheless hold strong opinions, some of them adverse. Fifty-five percent in one survey saw the Declaration as a "hypocritical promise" due to slavery's omission, boosting motivation on issues like racial justice. None of the polling delved into the world-changing aspects of the Declaration, that is, the cementing

under an eventual constitutional republic the relationship of the governed and the government as one based on individual liberty rather than on authoritarian rule. All of which is to say we hope you will be able to drag a young person — kicking and screaming if necessary — to our spring seminar, "What Every American Should Know about the Founding." There will be things said that he or she clearly needs to hear. — Nov. 21

Redistricting Disassembled

*O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on." (Othello 3.3.165-167)*

There is a way to make sense of the Republican rift over redistricting. You start by eliminating all the stated explanations:

There's no "overwhelming" public opposition. The cited opinion polls are suspect both as to source and methodology, especially in the way the questions are framed. To say you are "for" something as noxious and sausage-making as redistricting carries with it a social stigma, a no-no in opinion sampling. The negative responses are a given.

It's not about "fairness." Look, we're not only talking about politics but party politics. Parties, unless you believe their platform promises, are solely about winning elections, fairly or not. That groups like Common Cause are cheering for the redistricting holdouts should be your clue.

There's no "good" side of a redistricting battle. Indiana's 7th District, for instance, exists because Republicans wanted to "pack" black voters into a single district to make it easier for GOP incumbents in surrounding districts. And that is the hill that President Pro-Tem Rodrick Bray wants us to die on.

Which leaves us with what is at the heart of every political story — a hidden agenda. Could it be as simple as that Mike Pence, Eric Holcomb, Mitch Daniels and Rodrick Bray have gotten comfortable running Indiana these last several years and feel pinched by the new MAGA Republicans?

I know a couple of these fellows and can attest that there is nothing they would not do to protect Hoosier and Republican values — except, of

course, diminish their own influence in some way. They are mere humans, albeit powerful ones, and being dictated to by Donald Trump must grate. Trump derangement syndrome is a real thing.

But would they take a position that might endanger their own party's control of the U.S. House at a critical juncture in American history? A position that might, as Gov. Mike Braun has warned, diminish Indiana's influence in the White House and on Capitol Hill?

History is replete with examples to the affirmative. Shakespeare made a living turning them into plays. But you decide. — *Nov. 20*

A Defense of 'Christian Nationalism'

The generation now managing our words — the activist journalists and social-media influencers — seem to think nothing happened before they were born. No, they can't really believe that on mature reflection, but they do act like that in practice. And with that state of mind comes the compulsion to rename everything to fit the narrative of the moment.

A prominent example is "antifi" to describe the disgruntled among us, a segment of the human heart since the beginning of time. The current version is to be disgruntled about supposed far-right ideologies, white "supremacy," authority, racism, homophobia, xenophobia and so forth.

Note that "supremacy," as so many of the words being reworked, needs scare quotes because it has a new meaning. It now lumps all of Anglo-Saxon achievement (formerly called western civilization) with that sliver of humans of all stripes who think they are genetically or otherwise superior to their neighbors in every regard.

This new lexicon can get perverse. The term "antifa" itself is short for anti-fascist, a term favored by the early Communists to differentiate themselves from their fellow socialists in the Fascist movement. Now it infers opposition to Republicans, who have nothing to do with communism, socialism or fascism.

All of this Newspeak is wrapped into a series of articles by the Indianapolis Star, yesterday morning's installment entitled, "The Ku Klux Klan once ruled Indiana. Is its rhetoric returning?" The gist is that the Klan (something that happened

before the authors were born) is an example of something the writers want opposed (Christian nationalism).

Drill down a bit further and you realize that "Christian nationalism" is the authors' way of describing simply how Americans not too long ago thought of themselves. But again, this was before the authors were born so it must be viewed as either bad or irrelevant. In this case, it is bad — so bad that it relates to burning crosses and lynchings.

Nonetheless, for the purpose here I accept their term. As such, though, I would ask them to understand how an older generation came upon its Christianity and its nationalism. They might be surprised to learn that the descriptions are hard-earned.

Many of us, as in every generation, had to find our faith individually with false starts and backward steps, agonizing reappraisal and abject confession — we had to find our salvation, if you will. We wear the Christian label not as a badge but as an expression of extreme gratitude that recognizes our utter unworthiness. There is not an ounce of judgement to it.

The political scientist Charles Murray has written a new book, "Taking Religion Seriously," that tracks his own strenuous path to Christianity. The Star writers would do well to read it. There is much in there that obviously has never occurred to them, much that makes their portrayal of Christians shallow and ignorant.

I will lean on personal history to address the second part of the defamation. By "nationalist," the Star means not-right-thinking, that is, not a collection of definite ideas on the relationship between citizen and government as described in the Declaration of Independence but rather someone who doesn't understand that America is a fluid amoral, poly-cultural economic zone blazing a new world order.

That last, sad to say, would have been an acceptable definition for me as a callow student. I tacitly protested the Vietnam War, for instance, although my objection was more from the threat of being drafted into jungle combat than any sense of geo-political balance.

My year in Vietnam, however, taught me something quite else. All countries and cultures are

not the same. Everything is not relative. There are not two sides to every story.

And if a man is going to live an honorable life, there is such a thing as duty, a recognition that some ideas are worth fighting for — absolutes that touch on eternal truths, ideas more profound than today's headlines or Twitter posts, ideas that may not fit a generation's zeitgeist.

"Christian nationalism," is one of them. — Nov. 17

Rodric's Redistricting Guess

Indiana Senate Pro-Tem Rodric Bray and ex-governors Mike Pence and Mitch Daniels, in tacitly opposing a redistricting measure that would have improved the national party's position going into the midterm elections, have made a two-part tactical calculation — a political guess, if you will.

The first part is that the Indiana supermajority is a reflection of grassroots GOP popularity. The second part is that opinion surveys accurately show redistricting to be unpopular. Republican values and principles have nothing to do with it; this is just power politics.

But there is another way of looking at it. To wit, the Republican supermajority is a result of Hoosier disdain for national Democrat politics, more MAGA than GOP. Bray's predecessor, for instance, could have lost his last re-election had there not been a pro-Trump wave of new Republican voters, largely undiscerning of local politics.

As for polls discouraging redistricting, the topic is just too arcane for opinion surveys. Not one in 10 respondents could disassemble the issue meaningfully — just too many angles, twists and turns, both local and national. How many respondents, for instance, knew that the districts to be redistricted had been "packed" earlier by the Republican leadership to protect incumbents in adjacent districts?

Our guess is that the latter analysis will prove out in coming election cycles, and that the Pence-Daniels-Bray calculation will be seen as disastrous for Republican incumbents. Sen. Liz Brown of Fort Wayne has it right in her statement today on Pro-Tempore Bray's plan to kill redistricting:

"This is bad news for our conservative values. If Democrats take control of Congress, we will see

impeachment hearings, woke ideology and higher taxes thrust upon Indiana and the rest of the country. Indiana will be blamed. And how cowardly that we couldn't even take a vote. This is the time to stand up to Democrats who wish ill upon us, not cower to their demands."

"Pro Tempore," you should know, is latin for "temporary." — Nov. 15

'The Mamdani Effect' (Part II)

"We will prove that there is no problem too large for government to solve and no concern too small for it to care about." — Zohran Mamdani

I read that many cities are ready to make bids for businesses fleeing Zohran Mamdani's New York. I assume that Indiana metropolises will be among them. The question, though, is in what way does the leadership here disagree with Mamdani.

It is not clear to me that they it does disagree, or at least not emphatically, and certainly not outspokenly. Fort Wayne, for instance, proudly helps fund a government grocery store. The Indianapolis polity includes Islamists in numbers sufficient to nominate a mayor — and its Democrat Party, led by a Muslim U.S. Representative, seems fine with that.

Crime? Indianapolis ranks among the highest in the U.S. for both violent and property crimes. The overall crime rate now stands at 47 incidents per 1,000 residents, giving residents a 1-in-21 chance of becoming a victim — 89 percent higher than the national average. Indianapolis is safer than only 3 percent of U.S. cities. Will we be bragging about that?

Immigration? Fort Wayne is under investigation by the state Attorney General for its energetic pursuit of "Certified Welcoming" status from Welcoming America, an refugee-incentivizing nonprofit with the motto "Everyone Belongs." The city likes to talk about increasing in population but thanks to Catholic Charities and related groups a good part of that increase is 24,000 first-generation immigrants or 9 percent of the city's total population. More about that later.

Media? Both Fort Wayne and Indianapolis have daily newspapers enthusiastic about the Mamdani approach, even if not by name. I may have missed

an editorial or two, but I have read nothing in the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette or the Indianapolis Star that Zohran couldn't have written himself. That is on topics such as rent regulation, expanded child-care services, city-owned groceries, equity tax reform, softer policing, immigrant protection, investment in homelessness services, more money for public education and investment in green jobs.

Heck, the Journal Gazette recently described the municipal budget as a "moral statement," that is, a sort of suggestion of noble intentions.

Nor do I have a good feeling about how the ruling class of our cities treats private property. Reuven Brenner, writing in the Wall Street Journal, addresses that concern. He warns that in a typical metropolis, real estate and personal taxes contribute the elephantine share of a city's revenue. His point:

"The biggest risk to political platforms promising increased taxes in a city drawing such sources of revenues is that all these are mobile. Real estate — or, as the French call it, *immobilier* — seems to be an exception. But while immobility is the characteristic material feature of land, it is financially mobile, in that its value can rise and fall. Politicians often make the mistake of ignoring this distinction when they tax it."

Brenner also cites the work of the historian Arnold Toynbee on the the role of immigration across 60 some civilizations: "(Toynbee) notes that the cultural impact of such an influx can be far-reaching, and that 'a melting-pot can easily turn into a powder-keg.' That happens when unskilled immigrants are unable to join the occupations that offer social mobility."

In their pitch for New York companies, Indiana cities cannot easily discount any of that. Let's hope that promotional photographs of our corn fields, barns and main streets (while they last) will fool the fleeing investors long enough to consider us as a safe haven. — *Nov. 14*

Picking Easy Targets

As a newsman I don't have high expectations for modern journalism but we are at a new low. The media's coverage of the

congressional decision to shut down government demonstrates how close we are to tyranny.

The press focused on the narrow issue of SNAP benefits rather than on the broader and more intractable issue of the congressional dysfunction leading up the shutdown. Why? Easier.

It allowed a single person, the president, to be painted as the villain. If you Google "Trump SNAP" you will not see a headline that even hints at the primary issue, that is, how does our system work if the judiciary can order the executive to spend money that the legislature is too paralyzed to approve.

Rather, the narrative was that the administration, out of meanness, was cutting welfare to needy families. I have a relative who gets her news from Today and The View. She sincerely believes that children were being sent starving into the streets. Her mind cannot be changed.

But another reading is that to deliver aide the administration blurred the line between executive and judicial authority as far as it dared under constitutional constraints. Granted, that is arguable too, and you can go back and forth on both the fiscal and legal details. Three points, though, stand out:

It is seriously troubling that one out of every eight Americans is dependent on the federal government for their "survival" at a monthly cost of at least \$9 billion.

Article I, Section 9 of the U.S. Constitution states: "No money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in consequence of appropriations made by Law."

There is a large number of Americans, perhaps well over a majority, who would ignore that article to applaud judges or anyone else for dictating government spending in the name of a good cause.

But left constitutionally naked, how long will it be before we are presented another emotion-tugging crisis created by one party or the other in which the ready solution is authoritarian rule? They say they want "no kings" but who do they think will run a system where money — and war, for that matter — can be ordered up summarily?

Given cultural shifts and our educational system, it is not surprising that the great part of the citizenry no longer understands how our

constitutional republic works, or, for that matter, how economics works. It is more difficult to excuse the willful ignorance of editors, reporters and commentators, whose job is to not only understand those workings but to communicate accurately their portend.

But here we are. There is not much hope to be offered, and certainly not an immediate solution. Democracy is too uncertain, and educating upcoming generations will take time that we may not have. The best I can do is refer you to an insightful article by our friends at the Liberty Fund in Indianapolis. The title is “Education for Freedom.” Here is the opening passage:

“In 1983, the Reagan administration commissioned a group of experts to produce a report on the state of education in the United States. The result was ‘A Nation at Risk,’ which marked a turning point in educational policy, aiming to restore excellence. The report was far from complacent. The experts barely made it through the third paragraph before delivering their verdict: ‘If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.’”

We should have put our universities into receivership way back then and started over. —
Nov. 11

The NIMBY of Data Centers

As usual, the emotional argument is winning the day, this time against data centers. If you mingled with the crowd of anti-Google activists at a recent library town hall in Fort Wayne you would have met precious few engineers and zero economists. Rather, the one hundred or so in attendance can be characterized as informationally deprived NIMBY crackpots determined to “stick it to the man,” as we used to say.

Our NAACP leadership has even gotten into the act, having noticed that proponents of a proposed data center on the southeast side of town tend to be wealthy white men on the west side.

OK, that is not entirely fair. There are legitimate concerns mixed in with all this (water usage, smelly diesel backup generators, displaced wetland

wildlife, jobs-to-subsidy ratios, etc.). Most of all, there was concern that data centers would hog electrical power and raise utility rates.

But one thing was sorely missing — someone to make the moral case for more and cheaper energy to power data centers or any future economic growth. And Indiana, with plentiful cheap coal, should think itself lucky that Google sees it as a likely site.

Nonetheless, our politicians and commentators are terrified of the issue, having watched the mob back down Google in Indianapolis and elsewhere. Into that breach, I reluctantly enter. At my side is Stephen Moore, a friend and economist whom my foundation brings to Indiana on occasion to discuss economic matters.

Focusing on the concern over power usage, Moore makes what you would think would be an obvious point: Economic growth and the prerequisite cheap energy are essential to human prospering. He recommends an ebook by Kathleen White of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a sister foundation of ours in the State Policy Network. It is provocatively titled, “Fossil Fuels: The Moral Case.”

“Her thesis is fairly logical when you think about it,” Moore says. “Affordable energy is the wellspring of life itself. We use it for food, shelter, clothing, (data centers) and everything that we need to live a productive life. She also notes that cheap energy is the great equalizer in terms of leveling living standards.”

Most simply, communities that come to grips with the need to supply cheap energy will prosper and those that don’t won’t. Packing the local library to complain about progress is not helpful.

This issue of the journal features an article by Shashank Chandrakumara arguing that Indiana’s ample supply of cheap coal is a competitive advantage in the data-center game. Indeed, data centers can be located at Indiana coal plants, many of which have been unwisely shut down in recent years.

What about those folks on the southeast side that the NAACP is championing? Moore reminds us that the poor benefit most from cheap energy. Keeping energy production up and prices low is one of the best anti-poverty programs. “What Ms. White is telling us is that policies that drive up

energy costs are immoral, because they deprive life and happiness from those at the bottom,” he says.

Moore summarizes the argument by posing a series of questions on relative morality:

- Is it moral to take money from taxpayers without their consent to support one industry (windmills, solar farms) over another (coal, natural gas, nuclear)?
- Is it moral to have an energy policy that intentionally keeps prices high?
- Is it moral to eliminate potentially jobs in the U.S. and ship them to China and India and Mexico when we have millions of unemployed Americans?
- Is it moral for donors to a political party who are invested in phony green energy plans to get a kickback on campaign dollars through tax breaks, tax carve-outs and other gifts?

I realize it sounds insane after these decades of false “climate change” prophesy, but why not try putting human welfare at the center of public policy? This would include encouraging economic growth with data centers and other developments even if that means a renewed reliance on fossil fuels to keep energy costs low for both industry and residences.

“The common-sense lesson,” Moore concludes, “is that a free-market policy is good economics and morally superior to any other policy anyone can think of.” And energy is the master resource, he reminds us. “To deny people reliable and affordable energy is to keep them poor and vulnerable — and this is inhumane.”

It was a lesson missed by the NIMBY crowd at their brightly lit and air-conditioned library. — Nov. 8

The Mamdani Effect (Part I)

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

Having worked with words all my career, I have admired the economists’ turn of phrase. Shakespearean almost, they pack a lot into a few syllables. My favorite is “rational ignorance,” the realization that certain things are so confused

that learning more about them would be a waste of time. Another is “moral hazard,” the risk that a person or entity will behave more recklessly when protected from the negative consequences of their actions.

Even before the rise of New York’s Zohran Mamdani, these thoughts came to mind watching a group of Republicans struggle with immigration and whether Islamism is a religion or an invading civilization.

It was one of those “listening” sessions that local politicians organize to tell us what a good job they are doing.

I was struck, however, by the unconcern over how this or that policy might affect actual citizens, even a policy as directly impactful as welfare for random immigrants. But the concern, mostly unspoken, was how the donor base might feel.

Regardless of what you think of politicians as a class, such decision-making is perfectly sensible. The media is fragmented and the leadership of the political parties has detached from their bases. The old hometown Chamber legislative committees are long gone. So to be fair, it is difficult for a politician to know what exactly his voters are thinking.

Donors are another matter. They will tell politicians precisely what they think — either face to face or through their ubiquitous lobbying groups. They will even write the laws for them.

Fortunately, we are not an oligarchy — not formally, not yet. We are a republic governed by a democratic process which assumes a connection between policy decisions and the public will. Indeed, it assumes that policy comes from below and not above.

But again, that has been flipped in recent decades. And although the good and decent politicians would have it otherwise they cannot honestly say they are answerable to their constituencies. At least one poll shows that as many as 70 percent of Hoosiers feel their views are left out of the democratic process. Indiana legislators, though, thanks to noncompetitive districts and special-interest money, are reelected at a whopping 97 percent rate.

The great economist Thomas Sowell sums it up: “It is hard to imagine a more stupid or more dangerous way of making decisions than by putting

those decisions in the hands of people who pay no price for being wrong.”

It should come as no surprise then that some officeholders can become walking “moral hazards,” that is, shielded from accountability and recklessly indifferent to your situation or mine. To survive we may have to abandon the comfort of “rational ignorance” and start paying attention.

Let’s call it the “Mamdani Effect.”

Grades — All Rhinestones Now

“Personally, I liked working for the university. They gave us money and facilities. We didn’t have to produce anything. You’ve never been out of college. You don’t know what it’s like out there. I’ve worked in the private sector — they expect results.” — Dr. Raymond Stantz (Dan Aykroyd) in the 1984 movie “Ghostbusters.”

A university, as any institution, is justified by its product and function, that is, the service it provides society. You might assume measuring that would be pretty straightforward. For universities assign actual, you know, grades.

You would assume wrong. Grades these past two decades have become relatively worthless as a measure of academic achievement, the supposed product of Indiana’s seven university systems (with operating expenditures totaling more than \$2 billion annually).

The late Norman Van Cott, an adjunct scholar of this foundation, sounded the alarm back in 2011 with an article for us, “Too Many Rhinestones.” He framed the problem this way:

“Colleges and universities routinely produce lots of things, including evidence about their students’ accomplishments and credentials. Students’ athletic achievements, for example, are reported with fanfare and detail. The measuring rods for athletic achievements don’t change over time— yards per rushing attempt in football means the same thing today as in previous years. But what if the number of inches per yard on football fields were falling at an unknown rate? That is, suppose that yards were getting ‘shorter.’ Yards per rushing attempt would be rising, but the statistic would have diminished information value, particularly for

making comparisons across time. Fortunately, a yard is still a yard in college football, but the same cannot be said for course grades as a measure of academic achievement.”

Despite strenuous efforts by Dr. Van Cott, Dr. James McClure, Dr. Clarence Deitsch and other adjunct scholars, the warnings were dismissed. These warnings included repeated expert testimony and data showing ongoing grade inflation.

In addition to a series of articles in The Indiana Policy Review (here and here), the Muncie Star Press and the student newspaper carried feature stories based on Van Cott’s work. Other newspapers around the state ran the article as an op-ed. But Ball State University (the example that Dr. Van Cott employed) initially denied that grade inflation was occurring. Even an inquiry by then state Sen. Jim Banks fell on deaf ears.

It would be inaccurate, however, to say the administration did nothing. Rather, you could say it did nothing substantive. There were the usual flak-catchers sent out to calm the waters and assure the public that all was well. An official task force was assigned and a report was commissioned, one that we described as “unfortunate” and dismissive of the evidence produced. The administration’s ultimate position was that it was up to individual professors to “maintain academic rigor.”

Whatever, almost 15 years later there is a new report, one more difficult to sweep under the rug of an Ivory Tower. It is “The Great Campus Charade” in the most recent issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education. The authors’ conclusion: “Students are learning less, studying less and skipping class more — yet their grades go up and up.”

The survey of eight flagship universities found that since 1990 average study time has fallen 40 percent while in 1980 only 15 percent of grades were A’s now it’s 47 percent.

And none of this takes into account inflated grades in the social sciences where the mere acceptance of identity politics, social-justice jiggery-pokery or Marxist fantasies constitutes “A” work.

“Grade inflation is a difficult problem decades in the making,” the Chronicle authors warn, “But by failing to act, universities risk eroding one of their most important assets: the credibility of their own credentials.”

Why would professors allow this? Well, it’s easier than sorting out which students did the reading and which didn’t. But why would administrations allow this?

Well, they would prefer to be judged by intentions rather than results, especially when billions of dollars are at stake. But why would we allow this? Well, that’s a hard question. — Nov. 3

The Municipally Privileged

“All government employees should realize that the process of collective bargaining, as usually understood, cannot be transplanted into the public service.” — Franklin D. Roosevelt

Has your city worked out its new budget with the cuts and adjustments made necessary by property-tax reform? Mine has done so, and in a long, torturous process inscrutable to the common man. But we do know one thing for certain: No city employee was inconvenienced.

We know that thanks to the crypto-Marxist on council who couldn’t resist this boast: “I am happy to say that we were able to not lay off any public servants. We have our employees still getting raises, so we’ve done the right thing in that way.”

Really? My Grok assistant tells me that in a typical mid-sized city as much as 70 percent of the budget is dedicated to public-employee compensation (salaries, wages, insurance, benefits and pensions).

How can those outlays not only remain untouched, bad times and good, but ratchet up year after year? In fact, nationally, wage growth for public-sector employees now outpaces the private sector for the first time outside a recession in a generation. Aren’t they eventually going to, you know, run out of other people’s money?

All of that is said acknowledging that productive, hardworking public employees make the city work. Indeed, they are the only ones who actually know how it works and should be rewarded accordingly. Still, there is hardly any human

endeavor where at least a number of those involved are not superfluous, overpaid or just plain useless.

Are we never to apply that reality to the public work force — especially when budget cuts are deemed necessary? Not even if it is understood that unions, as all monopolies, create higher costs and diminished efficiencies?

Probably not.

The reason is mandatory public-sector collective bargaining. The public-sector unions would like us to think of them as traditional unions. They are not. Traditional unions operate within a market economy. It would make no sense for them to bankrupt their industry and destitute their membership.

Public-sector unions are under no such constraint. Their bargaining demands, unaccountable to the public good, have been the chief cause of fiscal default in cities throughout the nation. Economics predicts as much. We use this example in our “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles”:

“Say that the cost per person of giving your city’s firefighters a \$1,000 raise is \$8 a year or 16 cents a week. Politically, there is little risk for the mayor. Few will notice the extra \$8. Those receiving the extra \$1,000, however, will be activated — and they will engage in activities to encourage and even increase additional wealth transfers, that is, voting for the mayor and council, lobbying, campaign contributions and so forth.”

It’s almost as if it was a bad idea to give government workers the power to hire and fire their bosses.

Budgets as ‘Moral Documents’

The Journal Gazette’s contention this morning that a budget was a “moral document” was the last straw for some of us readers.

A budget is anything but a moral document. The Declaration of Independence and the Communist Manifesto are moral documents. A budget, rather, is an absolute, its etymology tracking to the Old French for “wallet,” that is, how much money we have.

Councilman Russ Jehl and others deserve our respect for their efforts to keep the fiscal discussion within the bounds of the practical.

The Journal Gazette, however, has itself become nothing more than a “moral document,” without curiosity about facts, definitions or the connection between intentions and consequences, its assertions hanging in the air untethered to reality.
— Oct. 30

DST: It's that # \$ percent & Time Again

Most of Indiana will be setting clocks back one hour this Sunday as the state leaves Daylight Saving Time, an insane contraption of the legislative mind and a chrono-biological insult to the citizenry.

When Indiana approved Daylight Saving Time (DST) in 2005 it opted for Eastern instead of Central time at the urging of the newly elected Gov. Mitch Daniels and the state Chamber of Commerce, which said it would be better for business, a claim since contended.

In any case, the Indiana General Assembly passed Senate Enrolled Act 127 after intense debate, first clearing the Senate narrowly but then failing 49-48 in the House on first vote. It then passed 51-49 on a revote, thus repealing the Eastern Time exemption from DST (with 12 counties sat aside).

Confused? Good, you are beginning to understand. The change put the state on “double fast time” for part of the year, forcing children to travel to school and wait for buses in pitch darkness. The situation is summed up by our Dr. John Gaski in *Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles*:

“What kind of cynical mentality on the part of federal bureaucrats and Indiana state government officials would lead them to recklessly or even knowingly endanger children just for a political end? Or maybe it just didn't occur to them that forcing children to go to school in the dark could lead to trouble.”

You don't want to know what heroic machinations would be required to change it back.
— Oct. 28

Oops, Budgets Require Priorities

Here's how my city is going to meet the challenges of taxpayer-friendly changes in how property taxes are applied: It's going to pretend nothing happened.

The Legislature has reformed the state's property tax system to provide relief for homeowners and businesses through phased increases in homestead deductions, new tax credits and expanded business personal property tax exemptions. In other words, city councils are going to have less money to play around with. In reaction, the mayor has promised to deliver the same services. The city controller will use the same budget strategy she has used previously, hoping it will work this time.

Isn't that a definition of insanity? For we have been through this before, i.e., city revenues fall short, we blame someone else, and we continue as usual. Here is a headline from 2012, different council, different mayor, same controller, same crisis:

“Changes Likely, Council Says, to Fix City Fiscal Concerns.”

What the controller recommended then and now is incremental cuts across the board. A sternly worded letter earlier this month sent department heads searching the sofa cushions for spare change. The department heads are back and we are still \$20 million short.

About the same time as that 2012 headline was sounding the alarm, Maj. Ryan Cummins, formerly chairman of the appropriations committee of the Terre Haute City Council, was touring the state for this foundation. He told city officials and newspaper editors that unless their cities took dramatic action they most certainly would continue to face fiscal crises.

Cummins warned that the remedy would require more than incremental measures, that is, curtailing cell-phone use, take-home vehicles and the like. It would require setting priorities.

“Imagine that your city is coming up \$7 million short this next year,” said Maj. Cummins (being wildly optimistic), “Common sense, fiscal reality and municipal budgeting should — I repeat, should — come together to recommend

selling, privatizing or bidding out anything that is not an essential government service.”

My city operates two golf courses on valuable land. Its many properties, including transportation systems, could be sold or privatized to provide an income stream. It has built millions of dollars in jogging trails and river walks. There are entire departments, beginning with the woke Metro Human Relations Commission, that could be eliminated. It operates a parking garage and has a stake in a government-run grocery store, of all things.

Cummins said even those cuts would not be enough. A council has to be willing to take on the collective bargaining units of the police and firefighters and their pension demands. In a typical Indiana city, public-safety spending consumes 70 percent or more of property-tax revenue.

“You can tinker around the edges saving a few thousand here and there but it will hardly dent the dollar amounts needed to address the typical municipal shortfall,” Cummins later wrote for *The Indiana Policy Review*. “It is only by confronting head-on the personnel costs for local government that a resolution can be crafted that is in the best interests of all citizens.”

A budget can reduce local government to its proper size and function, Cummins said, which is the protection of life, liberty and property from force or fraud. “If you consider that statement for a moment,” he said, “you realize that it means the elimination of a good portion of what your city government is now doing.”

Cities wouldn’t finance downtown buildings, or sports facilities, or drive nearly empty buses around. The unnecessary costs in capital, operations and labor could remain in the pockets of citizens. And most important, government would be small enough that average citizens could tell what it was up to.

Finally, Cummins noted that over the last 60 years, state and local government spending has increased to a rate 13 times the increase in private-sector earnings. If you were a councilman, wouldn’t that sort of unsustainable divergence jump out at you after a decade or so? But that would take political courage, and that’s not in the budget this year. — Oct. 22

Millions Gather To Express Total Ignorance about Political System

Regarding this weekend’s “No Kings” marches, we cannot do better than the satirical *Babylon Bee*:

“Millions of Americans took to the streets today in order to express to the world their total and absolute ignorance about the political system they live in.

“Several major cities including Boston, New York City and Chicago saw over one hundred thousand residents show up to proclaim their abject incomprehension of governance.

“‘The world needs to understand how incredibly little we know,’ said local man Roger McMahon, who had joined the march. ‘I really do not think the greater population appreciates how completely uneducated and illiterate we are when it comes to our own political system. That’s why I’m here marching. We’re going to join our voices together and let the message ring loud and clear that we are uneducated rubes in desperate need of a middle-school social studies class.’” — Oct. 20

The Indiana Daily Student, RIP?

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . .” — First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

The First Amendment is written as clearly as humanly possible. That won’t matter, of course, to those who see earnest but callow Indiana University journalism students as a bulwark of democracy. Last week, you could hear the wailing in Bloomington as the school’s new business plan shut down the costly print edition of the ever so woke *Indiana Daily Student*.

The newspaper, a ho-hum phantasm of what college students imagine is crusading journalism, has managed to lose heaps of money despite a measure of operating grants, private donations and public funding that any other Indiana paper would consider lavish. Nor would most Indiana mediums expect to prosper providing a pro-Palestinian platform after the Hamas massacre.

And you can skip over the paper's *raison d'être* as a means of teaching students the basics of a journalism. Look, journalism is only nominally a career these days with trust in media approaching statistical insignificance, thanks largely to the advocacy style fashionable in J-schools. (I think it was Mark Twain who said you could learn all you need to know about journalism in two months on a country weekly.)

But overall, the paper is similar to those when I was a student editor in the 1970s, at best an effort to poke adult authority and at worst an expression of the socialist impulses of adolescence. The difference is that after several decades of onslaught by the social-justice warriors we now are experiencing radical-youth fatigue.

What is important is that neither freedom of speech nor democracy is imperiled. The First Amendment isn't a license to be disagreeable on someone else's dollar. The students and their faculty advisors don't own the newspaper, the university does. They can't force the rest of us to pay for their pretend journalese or give them access to state property. There is a reason we have the word, "sophomoric."

Finally, it is interesting that the letter of protest from the IU journalism faculty didn't rest on any authority so lofty as the 1787 Constitution (to which the professors may or may not owe allegiance). It cites only an internal 2024 departmental memo:

"The Journalism faculty at Indiana University are (sic) appalled by Chancellor David A. Reingold's decision to cut the print edition of the *Indiana Daily Student* hours before publication. This move broke with the Student Media Action Plan, threatened the editorial independence of our student journalists and breached the core values of journalism that we discuss every day in our classrooms."

To underscore, the Amendment doesn't guarantee the students anything — not their editorial independence, not protection from having their values breached or from having their feelings hurt. It only prohibits the government from abridging their right to publish their own newspaper. In this case, then, activating the attendant "freedom" would require a

profitable business plan, one that markets to that slim demographic willing to pay for undergraduate *fol de rol*, an inflated commodity.

So, freedom of speech is not the issue. Rather, the administration might rightly argue that fiscal management is the issue, that and "donations" from outside political interests. And again, the students forgot to actually pay for any of this themselves.

Nonetheless, there is an opportunity here. The faculty could imbue an adult understanding of liberty and its responsibilities.

More specifically, they could teach that the value of journalism is in accuracy and prescience, not in ideology. It is a good bet, though, that the university will reverse itself, folding on this moral test as it has on every other one this era, which, of course, is the real problem. — Oct, 20

The End of Race Gifting

Mass media regularly finds itself on the wrong side of public opinion. Readership, please know, is approaching statistical irrelevance. It is understandable then that corporate outfits such as Indianapolis's *Capital Chronicle* are leaning heavily on contrived polling to support their points of view.

What, for example, do Hoosiers think about redistricting? Without context, it is a question unsuitable for standard opinion sampling. It pertains to that part of democracy most resembling sausage-making. Nobody wants to think about it much.

That does not deter the *Chronicle* editors in their drive to get the desired, self-affirming headline, "New Poll Reports Majority of Hoosiers Oppose Redistricting."

But do we really? According to whom and compared with what? Ask a couple of hundred of us on a busy day and a good number are likely to say we favor a simplistic solution to a complicated problem just to get off the phone. Or worse, choose a response that we think is the most socially acceptable.

And missing from the coverage is what Hoosiers might think of the current redistricting map. They would be surprised to know that it gives one racial group (blacks) its own congressional district, a

privilege denied others. You won't be seeing any poll on what we think about that.

Andre Carson of the 7th District sits in Congress solely for the color of his skin. Given his extreme Islamist voting record, he could not be elected in any other configuration. Nor is prejudice a factor or justification. There are 15 blacks in Congress from white-majority districts. It is the government, not voters, obsessed with skin color.

It would be news to the Chronicle staff and readers that the issue is now before the Supreme Court of the United States, to wit, whether any specific race has an unconstrained "right" to be elected.

The case is *Louisiana vs. Calais*. It arises from a lawsuit filed by white voters against the state of Louisiana for drawing a majority-black congressional district under pressure from an Obama-appointed federal judge. The suit alleges that a racially gerrymandered district violates the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection clause.

"Would that mean fewer members of the Congressional Black Caucus?" asks Scott McCay in the *American Spectator*. "Sure, maybe. It does mean the character of successful black politicians will necessarily change. It means we would likely see more Harold Fords and fewer Sheila Jackson Lees (or Andre Carsons)."

And here is Justice Brett Kavanaugh this week in oral arguments over *Calais*:

"This Court's cases, in a variety of contexts, have said that race-based remedies are permissible for a period of time — sometimes for a long period of time, decades in some cases — but that they should not be indefinite and should have an end point."

But the Chronicle, self-satisfied behind its "scientific" polling, can't be bothered with historical debates. Its coverage of redistricting reads like a rushed internal memo, not a serious effort to understand either democracy, the law or the Hoosier mind. Of all mass media's sins, such attempts to outright deceive are the most grievous. Don't subscribe to them. — *Oct. 16*

War of the Worlds II

A learned professor of my acquaintance argues that we have become an "unserious" people. I not been sure how to test his theory — COVID, AOC and the Obama Library being indicative but not decisive. That was until the arrival of 31/ATLAS.

I am referring of course to an interstellar object, possibly a comet, possibly an alien craft, that our advanced astronomical equipment first noticed in July and will come near the sun later this month.

Let us dismiss out of hand the boring comet theory, advanced only by boring scientists boringly fixed on the boring available evidence, which is boringly difficult to collect and interpret. This, remember, is a test of whether we are a serious people.

More interesting are the "observations" by purportedly credentialed social-media sources that 31/ATLAS appears to have headlights and be hollow (as if it were a spaceship). Also, it is shedding metals in a peculiar mixture and it has an odd tail, that and its course has varied slightly as if it were under some sort of navigation.

That last has drawn quibbles from the boring quarter that perhaps the estimate of its weight was wrong in the first place thereby charting a wrong predicted course. After all, it is 130 million miles away traveling at 42 miles per second.

Searching my book shelf for enlightenment, I find a work on the general subject by the famed psychologist Carl Jung, "A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies." Jung dismisses such sightings not as evidence of extraterrestrial spacecraft but as a contemporary myth emerging from the collective unconscious — a shared reservoir of archetypal images and symbols in the human psyche. I defer to my assistant, Grok, who apparently has read the book, which I never got around to doing:

"Jung suggested that these objects represented mandala-like symbols of wholeness and unity, often appearing during times of global anxiety (such as a tariff war) as projections of inner psychological turmoil or compensatory visions for a fragmented world. Jung emphasized synchronicity, where external events like UFO sightings mirror internal psychic states, without definitively claiming whether the phenomena

were physical or illusory — an archetypal phenomena rather than literal visitations.”

Got that?

In recent days, however, the “analysis” on social media has jumped over the question of whether or not it is a comet, let alone an archetypal phenomena. The focus now is directly on why an alien society sent it.

One theory is that an engineered craft would be a cheaper message than radio signals, which, we are told, take huge amounts of energy to generate over interstellar distances. A space ship, once it is launched at the necessary speed and a course plotted, is relatively free — or so they say.

That settled, we are now trying to understand what the interstellar visitors want with us. Those theories vary wildly, of course, but seem to coalesce around the need to impeach Donald Trump. —
Oct. 13

The House of Bayh

With Beau Bayh crossing three state lines to begin his ancestral run for high office here, what better time to reconstitute Indiana as a sovereign kingdom?

The state already owes fealty to the Bayh family, this being the third generation of their civic reign. No, none has been particularly distinguished but achievement is not the justification of monarchy; it is adaptability in the interest of stability. The Bayhs, a family without discernible principle, are a perfect fit. Beau, for example, nominally a Democrat, is running tactically as an independent (the Bayhs can afford the best polling.) The rise of the House of Bayh encourages those who would cut through the democracy hogwash and just crown a king. True, there are only whispers now but after Mike Pence and Eric Holcomb how much worse could we do?

And how many of our highly elected gentry remain engaged here in any meaningful way? Their fortunes and interests lie elsewhere. Our nonprofit foundation has sent speaking invitations to three ex-governors without generating even the courtesy of a staff reply. An advantage of monarchy is that the king has an actual interest in the kingdom, if for no other reason than to have property and subjects for heirs to tax.

There are other advantages. Here are the editors of Liberty Matters:

“Monarchy as a form of political order leads to an emphasis on the longer term and the durable. It is not incompatible with change or reform, as the history of many monarchical regimes demonstrates, but it means that change will typically be gradual and piecemeal rather than total and radical. This should be welcome even to those who want change because it means that change will be more likely to survive and have legitimacy. That legitimacy leads to the widely noted empirical reality that monarchies (including crowned republics) are more stable and resistant to political radicalism and extremism than other kinds of polity.”

It is pertinent that the 1787 Constitutional Convention thought it wise to endow the U.S. presidency with kingly powers, namely the veto, appointments, commander-in-chief authority, stronger in some respects than those of King George III himself. There was talk of electing the president for life and referring to George Washington as “his majesty.”

And James Madison implied that he could only argue against a monarchy if he could be assured an independent press. (The most recent Gallup poll finds 70 percent reporting limited or no trust in the media, a record low, with 34 percent reporting “none at all.”)

What about individual liberty? Sadly, it is easy to imagine a constitutional monarchy that would better protect the principles of the Declaration of Independence than our congress and courts. Elena Woodacre, also writing in Liberty Matters, makes a tangential argument:

“Monarchy is not static, for it to endure over centuries, or even millennia, it must continue to evolve in line with changes in society. A failure to adapt or keep in step with political and societal changes risks the institution being seen as irrelevant.”

And monarchy is no less inclined to tyranny than is democracy; historians no longer bother to count the elected who became tyrants. Ideology? Woodacre notes that the most liberal governments in the world are monarchies — namely Norway, Sweden and Denmark. U.S. News’ current ranking

of “Most Progressive Countries” was topped by Japan, with Sweden fourth and Norway, Denmark 12th and 14th. These same four monarchies all were in the top 15 of the magazine’s overall “Best Countries.”

A favorite take on monarchy is from a 1910 visit by Theodore Roosevelt to Vienna. Roosevelt famously asked Franz Joseph I, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, how he viewed the role of a modern monarch. There was a pause before the emperor replied: “My job is to protect the people from their government.”

Maybe that’s something useful that the young Bayh could do here. — Oct. 7

Count Me Uncivilized

“A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps both.” — James Madison

The first annual Project Civility Summit has adjourned to much hope and acclaim in our lovely, homogenous Carmel. In addition to the “leadership training” that such summitry always presumes to provide, one of the more creative ideas was something called “porching,” a grassroots movement encouraging community engagement and conversation.

I could go through the rest of the agenda but you get the idea — an egghead version of Rodney King’s 1992 cry, “Can’t we all get along?”

Well, no, we can’t, as it turns out. The experiment with classless, multicultural democracy faces daunting challenges post George Floyd. They start with the fact that the only Americans who still take it seriously are wealthy white liberals, race grifters and the mass media. But its problems, unfortunate and unfashionable though they may be, deserve to be intelligently assessed. Again, for the hundredth time, this country was not built as a democracy. It was built as a constitutional republic. That means it may deny the wishes of one group or another, even a majority, to ensure liberty for the individual. The late economist Walter Williams was surely correct:

“Democracy and liberty are not the same. Democracy is little more than mob rule, while

liberty refers to the sovereignty of the individual. The Founders knew that a democracy would lead to some kind of tyranny. The term ‘democracy’ appears in none of our Founding documents.”

And please know that classlessness or multiculturalism is ironically more difficult to sustain in an open society such as ours. There’s no reason to believe that we as a nation will fare better in this regard than Mugabe’s South Africa, say, or Caldera’s Venezuela or a dozen other societies where “one man, one vote, once” came to be the rule. It is not explained by a lack of civility but by game theory. Let Grok lay out the logic:

“The open system’s strength (impartiality) becomes its fatal flaw against defectors (immigrants, cultural marxists, ethnic identities, etc.). This prediction aligns with historical precedents, that is, the recurrent fall of high-trust empires to infiltrative groups.”

Here is the progression:

Short-term — Defectors gain footholds (e.g., ethnic enclaves in business/politics), appearing “meritorious” while siphoning benefits and outwardly conforming to merit rules to gain entry/power (e.g., assimilating just enough to access jobs, institutions) but inwardly prioritizes identity.

Medium-term — Defectors alter rules (e.g., from merit to identity metrics), reducing overall efficiency (lower trust, innovation). The system’s initial cooperators face relative decline — higher costs (integration, conflicts) without returns.

Long-term — The system loses legitimacy (why cooperate if defectors win?). Merit erodes into cronyism; trust plummets (diversity correlates with lower social capital). Game theory predicts convergence to mutual defection: Even cooperators adopt identity tactics to survive, but by then, the original openness is dead — replaced by fragmented tribalism or authoritarianism.

Pretty grim, huh? And left unaddressed in Carmel was how to maintain civility while a defector group abides murder as an expression of social grievance or another group insists rape is justified as religious conquest.

What would change our prospects is if these initial defectors from our constitutional system

could be convinced that it protects their own life, liberty and property just as it does those whom they would supplant or degrade.

That seems unlikely at this writing. Relating even the settled history of Western Civilization is now considered racist. A Gallup poll of U.S. adults this summer asked: “How proud are you to be an American?” Generation Z (ages 18–28) mustered an anemic 41 percent, mostly scoring in the “only a little proud” cross tab.

One risks despair asking how many in this generation have read the Declaration of Independence let alone have grasped its profound and world-shaking import. They have been taught a simplistic definition of America as a place where equality of results (rather than of opportunity) is guaranteed to anyone who can set foot here, period. That will render the Declaration moot as well as erase great swaths of the Constitution.

Getting together on your front porch, at that point, won’t make a difference. — Oct. 3

I.U. and the ‘Stupid Stuff’

“We can require public universities to return to strong and mandatory core curricula, which challenges students to think, brings them together around shared knowledge and ideas and prepares them for lives as productive and engaged citizens.”

— Andrea Neal in “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles.”

Give some credit to the Braun administration for reigning in Eric Holcomb’s Indiana Economic Development Corporation. New board members such as Roanoke’s Richard Waterfield have injected common sense in what was meant to be only a gentle encourager of hometown investment, not an experiment in neo-mercantilism.

Now, on to Indiana universities the incubators in recent years of all sorts of unpleasantness, turmoil and silliness. Compared with untangling the IEDC, fixing our higher education system should be a snap — just quit funding the stupid stuff.

Like what exactly? A course at Indiana University, “Understanding Diversity in a Pluralistic Society,” simplistically divided students

(and all Americans) into “oppressor” and “oppressed” identities. Relatedly, strike anything offered for a bachelor of arts in African American or African Diaspora studies plus gender studies, billiards, bowling and the history of rock ’n’ roll. We don’t need to mention any money spilling over to the on-campus Kinsey Institute, that great normalizer of deviancy.

So the Indiana Commission for Higher Education should be applauded for taking up the recommendations of our “Indiana Mandate: A Return to Founding Principles.” The commission announced this summer that Indiana University is suspending or eliminating more than 100 such dubious academic programs. And it has only scratched the surface. Any marginally practical, mentally balanced Hoosier going through the I.U. academic catalog will find hundreds more courses and a good number of departments that can be eliminated without adverse effect on the state’s intellectual health — rather, that can be eliminated to its great betterment.

The problem is not just the stupid stuff, it’s what has been left out. I hope someone can prove me wrong, but I don’t see at any Indiana university a solid base for understanding Western Civilization other than a stray course or two. Nor can I find a full appreciation of the contribution that the thousands of settlers in the Midwest and Great Plains made to the wealth of this nation — an achievement that historians consider unprecedented and, one would think, a pertinent topic for study at an Indiana university.

Instead, we are left with flotsam and jetsam of the woke movement. As observed by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and quoted in our “Indiana Mandate:

“Students still learn things on college campuses, of course, but too often, they are allowed to graduate having learned little of lasting importance. They have taken a set of classes on specialized topics, but they have no way to connect these ideas together. They take courses that relate to their preexisting interests and identities rather than those designed to broaden their horizons and challenge their preconceptions. Thus, when they leave school, often in tremendous debt, they have aged, but often they have not grown.”

At the same time, many universities have become centers of progressive group-think, stifling conservative voices among the faculty and student body. This is from the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, again as quoted in “Indiana Mandate”:

“Free inquiry has been replaced by ‘safe spaces’ and the shouting down of anyone who speaks out against anti-Western ideologies and the cult of victimization. Bureaucracies that smack of the old Soviet Union enforce a code of political correctness infusing every aspect of university life with suspicion and resentment. Having banished all but a tiny remnant of conservatives and even most liberals from the professoriate, universities become ever more determined to undermine all aspects of American culture and higher learning.”

In summary, the excesses and hubris of academia are coming to roost. In 2010, three-quarters of Americans rated having a college degree as “very important.” Today, only about a third believe that, and a quarter of people believe it is “not too important” at all.

Education expert Richard Vedder of Ohio University tells the blog *Unleash Prosperity* that no industry or profession has had lower productivity gain than universities – with the possible exception of prostitution.

We’ll leave it at that. — *Sept. 26*

Rep. Carson’s ‘Racism’ Falls Flat

Well, if all you have is a hammer everything looks like a nail. And so goes U.S. Rep. Andre Carson’s recent depiction of Indiana Republicans as “racist.”

Last month he posted this on X: “We must stand united against extremism that endangers our community and democracy — including against racist redistricting that threatens to silence Hoosier voices.”

But this is not about racism. It’s worse than that; it’s about politics. Carson is upset that redistricting which secured him a seat in the first place will now take it away by cracking the 7th District and making it more diverse (we thought that’s what everyone wanted).

Political nerds will remember that Carson’s district was handed to him by a GOP-controlled legislature after the 2020 census. It concentrated a high number of Democratic voters — particularly blacks from urban areas of Indianapolis and Marion County, a tactic known as “packing” that minimized Democratic influence in surrounding districts. Indiana Republicans can be too clever for their own good.

But now that Carson has pulled the race card he will want to explain why incomes for hispanics and asians rose in 2024 but incomes for blacks fell. Blacks are now almost 25 percent poorer on average than even newly arrived hispanics, and that is true despite that most blacks have been in the U.S. for several generations and the massive welfare expansion during the Obama-Biden presidencies.

Most troubling, though, for Carson’s “racism is holding us down” posture is the economist Thomas Sowell’s finding that black immigrants from Africa are generally more successful than black Americans born here.

There is an explanation that Carson may want to avoid. It is that the social-justice programs he has helped champion have destroyed the black family. The economist Stephen Moore of *Unleash Prosperity* elaborates:

“Sure, racism may still play a part in this story, but we think the single biggest factor behind this American tragedy has been that roughly half of black children now grow up in a single-parent household. The abysmal schools run by teacher unions in inner cities play a major role too. Worst of all, the modern welfare state has become a poverty-creation machine with black America as the victim.”

Andre Carson owes Hoosiers, especially black ones, an apology. — *Sept. 17*



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

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Review

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