

INDIANAPOLIS

Review

Summer 2020



HOBBITS,
WARDROBES AND
WORLD WARS
Schansberg, p. 12

The Soul of Civil Disobedience

'For to the just all the evils imposed on them by unjust rulers are not the punishment of crime but the test of virtue.' — Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensism 354-430 AD

“When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.”



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A FUTURE THAT WORKS

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Wednesday Whist

Minding Chesterton's Fence

*Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got 'til it's
gone?
They paved paradise, put up a parking lot*
— Joni Mitchell, “Big Yellow Taxi”

(April 13) — Now that all of America has had a chance to experience sudden, traumatic change, perhaps we can better appreciate conservatism's celebration of thoughtful, gradual change.

Followers of that philosophy are often caricatured as fierce opponents of all change, hidebound defenders of the status quo, however squalid it might be, against the tiniest encroachment of noble, selfless progress.

But let's presume that “thoughtful conservative” is a redundancy rather than an oxymoron and consider the words of Edmund Burke, “Rage and frenzy will pull down more in half an hour than prudence, deliberation, and foresight can build up in a hundred years.”

The true conservative welcomes change, but only when it is built on a solid foundation. That requires examining what we have so we know which part of it is valuable and which is not. When we replace something old with something new, we must examine not just the possible consequences but even the consequences of the consequences.

That sentiment is best expressed in the story of Chesterton's fence, which has become a sort of defining credo of conservatism:

“In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, ‘I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away.’ To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: ‘If you don't see the use of it, I certainly

won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.’ ”

If a fence exists, there is a reason for it. It didn't just appear. It wasn't put there by lunatics or people walking in their sleep. Fences are built by people who carefully planned them out and “had some reason for thinking [the fence] would be a good thing for somebody.” Before we dismiss previous generations as fools or knaves, we might try to understand why they did what they did. Only then may we safely dismantle their creations.

The fence metaphor is from G.K. Chesterton's 1929 book “The Thing,” in which he vigorously defended the Catholic faith, but it applies to any tradition, institution, value or human endeavor some people hold dear and other people would dismantle overnight if they could.

A human endeavor like the American experiment and the fierce devotion to freedom that undergirds it.

Those of you who have been ambivalent about America — on the fence, as it were — how do you feel about it now that we've had a brief glimpse of life without it? Does it change your mind about those who prefer that this new normal become permanent, making no pretense of easing into it?

If you like the shortages, the lack of amenities, the inability to go where you choose, welcome to Bernie Sanders' socialist diagram of the future. If you like the sacrifices and the sense that someone is always watching to make sure you sacrifice your fair share, welcome to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal.

The loss of our identities as unique individuals, as we are herded into subservience to some perceived greater good such as a well-ordered society or a pristine planet, might be a nightmare to most of us. But it is a grand vision to some.

When ordinary life returns — or at least as much of it as we can reclaim — we'd better cherish it and be willing to fight for it. Those who see it as a dystopia won't let our fragile fence around it stop their fevered march to utopian madness. —
lm

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The Soul of Civil Disobedience

*From St. Augustine
to Angelo Codevilla*

Mark Franke, an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review and its book reviewer, is formerly associate vice chancellor at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.



“Thirty-one percent of likely U.S. voters say it’s likely that the United States will experience a second civil war sometime in the next five years, with 11 percent who say it’s very likely.” — Rasmussen Reports, June 27, 2018

(April 12) — First it was sanctuary cities, primarily on the West Coast, that declared their police would not comply with requests from federal immigration officials in enforcement of actions directed toward illegal aliens (undocumented immigrants to the woke crowd).

Then there appeared Second Amendment sanctuary cities, refusing to enforce state gun possession laws within their boundaries.

Principled protest against tyrannical government? Civil disobedience directed by

conscience against immoral law? Philosophical libertarians echoing the Founding Fathers? Extreme libertarians or even antinomians?

Although each of these perspectives has a role, these examples are really quite different. What we have here is one governmental unit refusing to enforce, or indeed acknowledge the legitimacy of, a law duly promulgated by a higher governmental unit. But we’ve been here before.

Most have a passing knowledge of the Alien and Sedition acts passed during the John Adams administration. (Most don’t know, however, that one of the four, the Alien Enemies Act, is still on the books.) These were passed by the Federalist majority in Congress against the opposition of the Democrat-Republicans. Since the party of Jefferson and Madison controlled both the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the Commonwealth of Virginia, these founders got the state legislators to declare the acts unconstitutional and therefore incumbent on the individual states to “interpose” their veto. It was not without controversy, however. Washington and others, including many Democrat-Republicans, were appalled that such a disunion-like action had been taken.

The Kentucky and Virginia resolutions spawned progeny that led to later crises. The Nullification Crisis of 1832 was a direct, philosophical descendant as South Carolina nullified the Tariff of Abominations within its borders and determined to prevent federal tariff collection at its ports. Only a carrot and stick approach — a compromise tariff by Congress as the carrot and a threat of federal military action by Andrew Jackson as the stick — ended the crisis . . . at least for a time. To come were the Fugitive Slave Act and the Dred Scott decision, ultimately leading to the election of Abraham Lincoln, secession and war.

The disunion so feared by George Washington occurred. The issue of higher government authority, the sovereignty of a central government over against the states and the idea of limited government all contributed to the eventual civil war. (And yes, revisionist editors at the New York

Times, there was more to it than just a Dutch slaver landing in Virginia in 1619.)

So much for the historical precedent. Or is it? None of us lived back then so it is difficult if not impossible to appreciate the intensity of emotions then as compared with now. Given the words and actions bombarding us in the daily news, are we hurtling toward another civil war?

There are some who think so, some who one would usually consider well-thought and well-intentioned. Here I am not speaking of those who feel they can safely disregard any law they don't like or promulgations from government officials whom they declare "illegitimate" by whatever mental gymnastics their fragile and facile consciences require. The concerning development is talk of civil disobedience from classical liberals who hold the Founding Fathers and their principles dear. In short, it is our side joining the disunion group now.

Perhaps the intellectual midwife of this line of conservative thought is Boston University professor Angelo Codevilla. He has written often about the threat to liberty by the American ruling class, those self-appointed arbiters of everything bent on enforcing strict conformity of thought and speech in compliance with their total reconstruction of society. Codevilla is not sanguine about the vast middle ground of America's being able to protect itself against these cultural totalitarians. He supports the Second Amendment sanctuary cities approach and encourages more to do likewise on issues like shutting down abortion clinics, confident that no president will send in troops in response. He calls this "separation" rather than "secession."

Unafraid to use the "secession" word is F. H. Buckley, a George Mason University legal scholar, who has written about the corruption of the political class and presidential power usurpation. Now he addresses the secession issue by pointing to the examples of disunion occurring across the



Memorial Day Freedom Rally (Robert Hall, Grassroots Conservatives eNews)

globe, even in the West. He argues that these countries generally are happier in a "smaller is better" atmosphere. He does not, however, advocate a full breakup of the United States. His solution, one he names "Succession Lite," is really a return to assertive federalism. This is no more or no less than America's brand of home rule. Buckley sees this as a way to keep the U.S. united as a nation while freely tolerating regional and local differences.

(Ostensibly this is the theoretical justification behind the Oregon counties that are talking openly about joining the state of Idaho to free themselves from what they see as Oregon's overreaching progressive elites. The same can be said of just about any county in Illinois chafing under the yoke of "what Chicago wants, Chicago gets" and please pay up, thank you.)

And finally there are the radicals who see, and perhaps wish for, a full civil war. One would think these are extreme libertarians or Leninist true believers, anarchists and nihilists in an unholy alliance. Yet they are not confined to the urban slum or isolated mountain retreats as in past centuries. They are getting attention in this world of unending news cycles.

The fear of uncivil action escalating to full war is serious enough for about a third of respondents to see it likely, according to a recent Rasmussen poll. Over half think the media's coverage of Donald Trump encourages potential violence. These reactions cross the political spectrum with some differences in which side to blame. An interesting footnote is that Rasmussen did the same polling in Barack Obama's second year and

found similar results although with smaller percentages in the “fearful” categories. One can’t help but think we are heading toward some sort of Armageddon if you believe the polls — or even if you just watch the pandering by cable news networks.

Forgive me for taking much too long to get to why I began writing this piece, which is: What’s a Christian to do?

Turn to Scripture, of course, where we are instructed on how we are to live in this world. (My Lutheran theology calls this the kingdom of the left hand.) Consider these admonitions:

- There is the Fourth Commandment (or Fifth, depending on your numbering system) about honoring and obeying those in authority above us. This is the only commandment which includes a promise, that of a long life as a reward for faithfulness to our superiors.
- Christ’s command to render unto Caesar that to which he is entitled. This illustration spoke specifically to payment of taxes but is easily interpolated to cover the entirety of the Fourth Commandment’s term “honor.”
- His passive obedience before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, accepting their authority to try and punish him using questionable jurisprudence.
- Paul’s and Peter’s teaching that secular government is ordained by God and we must be subject to it, these writings coming in a time of increasing persecution. Both were martyred, voluntarily accepting their fate.

So are Christians called to be entirely passive in face of mounting persecution? I point to two historical instances when devout men of faith struggled with this very question.

Augustine of Hippo, one the most influential of the church fathers and a personal favorite of mine, wrote at a time when so-called barbarian Germans were overrunning the western Roman empire and soon to reach his home province in north Africa. His insightful theological

masterpiece, *The City of God*, was written as pastoral counsel to the faithful whose worldly anchor — Rome — was suddenly lost to these barbarians. It is his formulation of “the Two Kingdoms,” one of God and one of man, which still informs Christianity today. We live in both worlds and at times must keep them separate under obedience to both, all the while hoping they do not come into conflict.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer faced these same issues progressively over time as the banal evil of the Nazi regime became more apparent and impossible to accept. He, like Paul and Peter, was martyred rather than deny or compromise his faith. His protestations began within the church as he and several others held true to their confessions by creating a synod in opposition to the Nazi takeover of the Lutheran-Reformed official church of Prussia. Their Confessing Church did not compromise with the Nazis in matters of worship and personal piety yet did not actively plot to overthrow the regime. Bonhoeffer personally did participate in the resistance movement through his affiliation with the military intelligence service (*Abwehr*), which was itself a hotbed of resistance, mostly as a courier between the German resistance and sympathizers in Allied countries. He was executed with other *Abwehr* leaders just weeks before his concentration camp was liberated by the U. S. Army.

Bonhoeffer acted out Augustine’s abstraction of the Two Kingdoms in conflict. Bonhoeffer’s conscience found the tipping point between passive opposition and active disobedience. So why did it take him so long, one might ask. After

“THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS and poets of the West — from Aeschylus and Euripides, to Shakespeare, Hobbes, and the American Founders — understood the chaos and lust for power that lurk beneath civilization. Thanks to the magnificent infrastructure of the rule of law, we now take stability and social trust for granted. We assume that violence, once unleashed in the name of justice, can easily be put back in the bottle. It cannot.” — *Heather Mac Donald*

all this was the Nazis with their death camps and all. Rather than fall into the arrogance of presentism, judging the past by today's information and standards, it would be profitable to read the history of Weimar and Nazi Germany during the 1920s and 1930s before World War II. One can't help but get the sense of being a frog in a pot that seems to be warming.

That was then and this is now, some say. Perhaps, but tell that to a Canadian pastor who faithfully proclaims scriptural teaching on marriage and family in violation of national law and in the face of governmental threats prohibiting such sermons. Or to Christian photographers or bakers who refuse to supply bespoke gay products for same-sex weddings. Or to uncounseled others who have found persecution in the workplace because of their faith.

When the U. S. Supreme Court overturned state laws requiring marriage to be between one man and one woman, several pastor friends of mine threatened to refuse to perform marriages as agents of the state. I thought then, and still do, that was a gross over-reaction and abdication of the pastor's call to serve his flock. In fact, no pastor to my knowledge has been forced to marry a couple against his church's teaching or his conscience in Indiana or any other state — so far, at least.

And now comes COVID-19. While most states invoked a 10-person limit for all gatherings, several jurisdictions overtly ordered churches to cancel their worship services. Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam declared gatherings exceeding this admittedly arbitrary limit would be subject to criminal charges. He mentioned religious services specifically as being subject to prosecution and possible jail time. One should not be surprised that a state that is attempting to invalidate the Second Amendment should also toss out the First for good measure.

Not to be outdone, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear trumped its neighboring state (sorry, Commonwealth) and ordered officials (state and

“IF YOU WILL NOT FIGHT for right when you can easily win without bloodshed; if you will not fight when your victory is sure and not too costly; you may come to the moment when you will have to fight with all the odds against you and only a precarious chance of survival. There may even be a worse case. You may have to fight when there is no hope of victory, because it is better to perish than to live as slaves.” — *Winson Churchill*

local police presumably) to troll church parking lots on Easter Sunday to record license plate numbers. Miscreants would be given mandatory 14-day quarantines by health officials. The mayor of Louisville jumped in, banning all Easter services including drive-ins at which worshippers remained in their cars. A state judge quickly issued a restraining order for Louisville, citing the mayor's edict as “unconstitutional,” “beyond all reason” and something one might expect to read in “a dystopian novel.”

Closer to home, the Allen County, Indiana, Commissioner of Public Health announced one Saturday that all Sunday services were to be canceled. Not so fast, declared the state Attorney General, who opined that the Allen County ban was unconstitutional because it was specific to religious gatherings.

Most constitutionalists would agree, I assume, that statewide bans on large gatherings during public emergencies are not necessarily in violation of the First Amendment so long as they are comprehensive in inclusion. It is when the decree appears to *de facto* (Virginia) or *de jure* (Kentucky) to single out religion that it crosses the line. It is comforting that such a line exists for the 21st-century judiciary, whose constitutional role is to protect the liberty of citizens against the usurpation of government. The Declaration of Independence, anyone?

In sum, COVID-19 is a textbook case study for reconciling absolute rights with public need. Those churches which held services in opposition to state or local decrees may have been theoretically within their rights but it is difficult

for most lovers of liberty to be willing to die (perhaps literally) on that hill. There are better legal test cases for this, including those cited above.

Two more personal experiences from the past come to mind.

Shortly after Barack Obama took office, he announced his intention to address all the nation's school children by live broadcast. A teacher at my Lutheran school did not want to receive the broadcast as he disagreed with most of the Obama agenda. Our pastor counseled him that he was bound by the Fourth Commandment to allow the president his airtime, but he certainly was not obligated to incorporate his educational proposals into his curriculum. Rendering unto Caesar under the Fourth Commandment still held writ, regardless of this conscientious teacher's personal beliefs about limited government under God.

The second example is even more personal. I volunteer for Big Brothers-Big Sisters in its Real Men Read program. I read to second graders at a nearby public school. The first book this academic year was about a black high school girl in Birmingham, Alabama, during the early civil rights movement. She decided that she would go to jail in protest of segregated public buses. She sat in the whites-only section, was arrested and went quietly to jail. The book's goal was to make her a heroine, but I amplified this with a discourse on when and how civil disobedience is appropriate. Here are the points I made to these seven-year olds, all of it, incidentally, arguing against the rioting this summer in our cities:

- Be sure you are acting in accord with a higher-level principle rather than just your own prejudice or pique. I counseled them to avoid self-indulgent, self-important narcissism without ever using any of those adult words.
- Do not resort to violence and never harm anyone else by your actions.
- Never deny others their rights by demanding yours. This includes inconveniencing others who are going about their lawful business. Shouting down speakers, blocking entrances to

businesses, vandalizing the private property of others, etc., is not civil disobedience; rather it is simply undemocratic, and often criminal, behavior.

- Be willing to accept the legal consequences of illegal activity, even when you believe the law is immoral or unconstitutional.

So where is the Augustine-Bonhoeffer line between righteous civil disobedience and just plain disobedience to the law? For the Christian this is not easily determined. We have Peter's declamation to the Sanhedrin that we should obey God rather than man, but God's perfect will is not always properly discerned by imperfect man. Too often, those who say they refuse to obey a law are abrogating to themselves the right to know God's will.

My own church body, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, has tried to maneuver this labyrinth on the immigration issue. We are committed to perform acts of mercy to the least of these His brethren (see Micah 8 and Matthew 25) while still owing obedience to the state. My synod's response to the crisis has been to care for these unfortunates by providing for their basic needs and helping them through the immigration process to legalize their status, but never violating the law by employing them illegally or circumventing public benefit requirements. This is on our dime, not the public's, and it is a demonstration of our compassionate faith.

So what is a devout Christian who is also a classical liberal to do?

We have been blessed in America not having to face the gut-wrenching, life-threatening scenarios that confronted Augustine and Bonhoeffer. I fear we are lurching toward one, however, even though our discourse hasn't reached the fever pitch of the 1850s — as yet. At least no congressman has caned another on the floor of the House of Representatives. One could have predicted, though, that our national leaders' rhetoric would incite such violence, if not from our elected representatives themselves then from their less controlled and controllable acolytes on the college campuses and in the urban centers.

The Anglo-Saxons had a prayer for strength during the age of Viking depravations. Now the Vikings' ideological progeny are at our gates and it will take strength on our part to hold them off. Maybe the Angelo Codavillas and F.H. Buckleys are right and we should face up to the test now before it becomes a bloody *auto de fe*.

It is the Christian in me, however, that pushes back on this analysis, believing that intelligent people of good will can find a compromise solution to a dispute.

Putting this Pollyannaish nature aside, however, leaves me with the unwanted realization, reinforced by the pictures of urban rioting, beating and looting, that many today are not of good will and certainly not acting intelligently.

Which takes us back to first causes — politically not theologically. The battle is between

classical liberals in the Founding Fathers mold and radical progressives (who have gone well past the Wilson-Roosevelt-Johnson idea of the welfare state in favor of a revolutionary, confiscatory, command economy by *force majeure*.)

The Constitution has no truck with them, hence their vehement attacks on it and its principles, and it is only time before they launch an assault on the Declaration of Independence. After all, wasn't it written by white male slaveholders?

One should never end an essay this way, but I just don't know the answer. I do know that we had better figure it out if our nation is to survive as the land of the free as the Founding Fathers constructed it. We owe it to our grandchildren to secure these blessings of liberty. ♦

Civil Disobedience: A Reading List

To learn more about St. Augustine, his "City of God" is probably more than most readers care to tackle, given its length. The last third contains his theology of the two cities and can be read in a few hours. It is in the public domain. Garry Wills has written a short biography, "St. Augustine" (Lipper/Penguin 1999, 153 pages, \$12 Amazon paperback) as part of the Penguin biography series. When reading Wills, one must bear in mind his tendency to interpret backwards to "fit" Augustine into our times.

- Eric Mataxis' excellent "Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy" (Thomas Nelson 2010, 591 pages, \$24 Amazon) is highly recommended. He quotes Bonhoeffer frequently and extensively so that one almost feels like he is reading Bonhoeffer directly.

- Angelo Codavilla's published books tend to focus on international relations and America's war-making, no surprise there since that is what he teaches. However, "The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What to Do about It" (American Spectator 2010, 147 pages, \$8 Amazon paperback) addresses some the issues raised in this essay. Now writing from the Claremont Institute, his columns appear from time to time on Internet searches.

- I suppose I must add Henry David Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" to this list. I read it as an undergraduate and my bias still holds against his tendency toward antinomianism. Still, it is a classic in the field and in the public domain.

- F. H. Buckley's book "American Secession: The Looming Threat of National Breakup" (Encounter Books 2020, 169 pages, \$14 Amazon) makes his case for a "soft" secession that maintains the nation but devolves most political and cultural decisions to state and local levels. I guess he is arguing for tolerance, that erstwhile watchword of the political left no longer even visible in the progressive rearview mirror. A recent op-ed in the New York Post summarized this approach quite elegantly and can be found by internet search. — *mf*

Eric Schansberg

Hobbits, Wardrobes and World Wars

Eric Schansberg, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the foundation, is professor of economics at Indiana University Southeast.



(April 28) — If you're into C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, or the impact of the World Wars on society, religion and culture, I'd definitely recommend Joe Loconte's book, "A Hobbit, A Wardrobe, and a Great War." In particular, he details the counter-cultural beliefs of Lewis and Tolkien about faith and free will, war and heroism. Along the way, he also explores the role of "iron sharpening iron" relationships — friendships, teachers and authors — in their faith and in their writing.

Friendship with God and Man

Loconte describes Lewis' faith journey in detail. Well before "The Chronicles of Narnia," it begins with an early, growing atheism after being raised in the Anglican church with its "ugly architecture, ugly music and bad poetry" and sermons that seemed "vapid and irrelevant." (87) With the influence of an early teacher, William Kirkpatrick, Lewis embraced logic and reason (of a sort), defending his atheism with the fashionable arguments of the day (88). For Lewis at the time, Christianity was one false myth among many.

Lewis' conversion to Christianity had many catalysts. Loconte describes Laurence Johnson, a friend to Lewis during WWI. Johnson was a man of conscience who took his principles for granted and lived them out in a compelling manner (98). After the war, Lewis formed a lifelong friendship with Owen Barfield. They disagreed on everything, but had mutual admiration and challenged each others' thinking. Barfield was

especially helpful in convincing Lewis about his bias against tradition and his simplistic embrace of scientism and materialism (126-127).

Then, Loconte turns to the impact of Lewis' friendship with Tolkien, starting in September 1931. "Their exchange — an encounter between intensely creative minds over the meaning of Christianity — should be ranked as one of the most transformative conversations of the 20th century." (129) Their chief debate was over the nature and origins of myths: Lewis believed they were man's effort to understand the world; Tolkien saw them emanating from God to convey something true about the world (130-131). Eventually, Lewis was persuaded that the Dying God had entered history, lived a life, gave his life, and conquered death — the True Myth — leading to Lewis' step from one faith to another (133).

Fifteen years before the fateful conversations with Tolkien, George MacDonald's "Phantastes" had plowed up the fallow ground of Lewis' imagination — on myth, aesthetics, creativity and, eventually, the Divine (82-83). MacDonald had a heavy influence on both authors. They "were attracted to the genres of myth and romance not because they sought to escape the world, but because for them the real world had a mythic and heroic quality. The world is the setting for great conflicts and great quests: it creates scenes of remorseless violence, grief and suffering, as well as deep compassion, courage and selfless sacrifice . . . Their depictions of the struggles of Middle-Earth and Narnia do not represent a flight from reality, but rather a return to a more realistic view of the world as we actually find it." (xvi)

Loconte also discusses the importance of friendship in general. In this, I was reminded of Wesley Hill's fine book, "Spiritual Friendship," on the underestimated value of robust relationships. Beyond iron sharpening iron, they advanced each others' professional pursuits. Tolkien helped Lewis find a publisher and secure an academic position (179). Lewis was essential to Tolkien persevering to publish *The Lord of the Rings* (136) and even nominated him



for the Nobel Prize in Literature (179). "It is hard to think of a more consequential friendship in the 20th century." (xiv)

Both also benefited from gathering with sets of friends. "The Inklings" are the most famous example (134), but Loconte discusses other, earlier groups. And the theme of friendship echoes throughout their fiction — a key theme in both Lewis' "Chronicles of Narnia" and Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings." After all, the first volume of the latter includes "fellowship" in its title.

The friendships also gave them the intellectual and emotional strength to be counter-cultural. They were "swimming against the tide of their times." (xiv) All of this "makes the literary aims of Tolkien and Lewis all the more remarkable: they steadfastly refused the sense of futility and agnosticism that infected so much of the output of their era." (142) But peers helped them blaze that trail.

On Heroism and War

To Loconte, heroism is where Lewis and Tolkien "depart most radically from the spirit of the age." (188) Modern heroes usually win through their own abilities, with some impressive firepower thrown in for good measure. Relying on a supernatural being seems like "a cheat" (188)—both to good literary tastes and to the nature of

man. But their heroes portrayed a combination of Divine provision and their participation.

Both wrote at length about free will, providence and their "mysterious intersection." (152) The tragedy of WWI had undermined belief in free will, so their work was counter-cultural here as well (155). Likewise, diminished free will tempted from individual responsibility toward determinism, fatalism, and resignation (162-164).

In contrast, both authors repeatedly depict choices — often, painful decisions, in the midst of exceedingly difficult circumstances. And when their characters fail, there's still grace — something that was usually in short supply under contemporary cultural beliefs. Ultimately, the Ring is destroyed by "a sudden and miraculous grace" (189) — ironically, through Gollum — rather than Frodo or the Fellowship.

Given their wartime experience, their depictions of war were realistic. Tolkien began writing in camps and hospitals during the war (60). His description of the "Dead Marshes" matches the description of soldiers in the Somme Offensive (74). The hobbits seem to be modeled after ordinary soldiers, at least in their innocent pre-war days (75). Like the soldiers, the hobbits could not "perceive how the fate of nations depended on their stubborn devotion to duty." (77)

War provided much of the "raw material" for Lewis and Tolkien (xvi). Their overarching themes are "embedded in a narrative of brutal, physical warfare" (165). (On the same page, Loconte quotes a stanza from a Thomas Hardy poem that ends with the poignant phrase, "of ravaged roof and smouldering gable-end"). Yet their work cannot be seen as cavalier acceptance of either pacifism or warmongering (xviii). Their characters often exhibit courage, honor, and nobility. But as ex-soldiers, Lewis and Tolkien did not — they could not — glamorize combat (121).

Tolkien includes "scenes of anguished refugees throughout his works." (166) In the great battle between Gondor and Mordor, "its dead are too numerous to count . . . it leaves the victors 'weary beyond joy or sorrow.'" (166) Lewis is gentler, given that his primary audience is children — but still stark enough (168). For both, war is not "an opportunity for martial glory, but . . . a grim necessity . . . a striking lack of triumphalism; we find instead amazement and gratitude for surviving . . ." (168)

The lines between Church and State were blurred considerably during WWI in a combination of nationalism, civil religion and holy war (33-34). "Cross and Crown must be kept together." (36) Looking back, after the carnage, it is strange to imagine. But it was true for both sides in the conflict. (Loconte argues that Germany and Prussia were even worse in this regard [39].) Of course, for believers, all of this is troubling and reminiscent of the Two Beasts — the State and False Religion — in Revelation 13.

As for the soldiers, Loconte quotes Richard Schweitzer: "The religion of 90 percent of the men at the front is not distinctively Christian, but a religion of patriotism and of valor, tinged with chivalry, and the best merely colored with sentiment and emotion borrowed from Christianity." (49) As is still the case today, "Christianity" is often an amalgam of civil religion, cultural norms, middle class ethics and the trappings of ritual.

Loconte echoes numbers similar to what one reads in Adam Hochschild's excellent book, "To

End All Wars." In the 4.5 months of the Battle of the Somme, there were 1.2 million dead and wounded — for just short of nothing in military terms (62). Overall, millions of soldiers dead and wounded. Tremendous loss of young life in Russia, France, Britain and Germany. Even the U.S., despite its late entry, lost more than 100,000 men (106). And then there are the civilian deaths from starvation, disease, and the Armenian massacre by the Ottoman Turks — the first large-scale example of genocide in the 20th Century.

The Role of 'Progressivism'

Not surprisingly, "Progressivism" is woven throughout Loconte's account — with its immense confidence in human progress. The worldview was at its high-water mark coming into the war — as both men were coming of age. Disillusionment — and recovery from some of its errors — marks the period after the war, when both men began to write in earnest.

Darwin's theory was dominant in terms of biology — along its implications for philosophy, economy and society, when over-extended in combination with scientism and materialism (12-13). One of the downsides of early Progressivism was a weighting of technology and "progress" over nature. Loconte talks about Lewis and especially Tolkien's displeasure with this (6, 8-10).

Subsets of Christianity had also added the "social gospel" of human advancement (14). Amazingly, this included a penchant for eugenics (15-21), which Lewis and Tolkien both critiqued implicitly in their narratives. (In addition to their frequent emphasis on freedom and dignity, note Tolkien's creation of "orcs" by the Dark Lord Morgoth and Lewis' themes in "Perelandra.")

The Progressives fostered optimism that the days of the great (religious) wars were over (2-3, 27-29). "Progress" also meant a greater ability to conduct war more efficiently when needed. Unfortunately, the progress didn't include ethical advances in when or how to conduct it (22-23). Loconte quotes Paul Bull here: "The Age of Progress ends in a barbarism such as shocks a

savage. The Age of Reason ends in a delirium of madness." (47)

Once war was over, the Progressive faith was renewed a bit through Woodrow Wilson's call to peace through government, treaties and the League of Nations. Loconte observes that all over Europe, public places were named for Wilson (103-104). But the promise was not fulfilled and this aspect of the faith was short-lived. Moreover, war was followed by "the three horsemen": the Spanish Influenza, atheistic communism and Italian fascism (111-114).

Much of the post-war blame was put instead on liberal democracy, Christianity and Western Civilization, leading to tremendous cynicism (105, 122-125). This impacted norms in literature. Loconte counts about 400 novels from the 1920s and 1930s that saw war as "inherently ignoble and irrational." (120) Both Tolkien and Lewis wrote in contrast to — and as opposed to — this norm.

What didn't get enough attention: those in power can easily have or develop twisted develop values that are inconsistent with human dignity

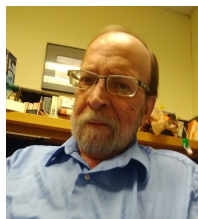
and worth. Of crusaders, "however noble the motives may be, they easily become twisted by the thought of glory and the taste of power." (158) Usually, through "a subtle and gradual perversion . . . the universal temptation to exploit, dominate, and control the lives of others" (159). And the power of groups and peer pressure, quoting Lewis in *This Hideous Strength*: "to make men do very bad things before they are yet, individually, very bad men." (161)

As Loconte notes, "the major disillusionment of the 20th century has been over political good intentions." (159) This has led to interventions ranging from ineffective economic "stimulus" to gulags and killing fields. But good intentions cannot — well, should not — satisfy for long.

Both Lewis and Tolkien call people to something beyond intent — toward lives of purposeful decisions, robust fellowship, heroic self-sacrifice toward higher ends, and working toward freedom and dignity for all. May we follow in their footsteps — within the magical worlds we inhabit and the mythical dramas we enact. ♦

Leo Morris

Leo Morris, columnist for The Indiana Policy Review, is winner of the Hoosier Press Association's award for Best Editorial Writer. Morris, as opinion editor of the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel, was named a finalist in editorial writing by the Pulitzer Prize committee.



Pierre the Cat, a Diversion

(May 18) — Pierre the cat was a once-in-a-lifetime pet, and some of you will know exactly what I mean.

He is the one you tell the same stories about over and over to friends more tolerant than they should be. He is the one you compare all other pets to. He is the one that makes you realize each animal might show common species characteristics but also has a unique personality.

He is the one you never forget, and can't think about without the ache of loss.

It might be because he was my first or perhaps because he chose me. He was a six-month-old stray who wandered in from the alley, ambled up to the group of us sitting on the back patio and jumped right up in my lap.

Whatever the reason, Pierre and I had a special bond I have never been able to duplicate. And there is only one way to describe it. I know those of you who go on and on about animal "companions" bristle at the concept of "ownership," but, sorry, that's the way it was.

That cat owned me.

And he did what any responsible cat that owns a person (human companion) would do. He trained me.

That required Pierre to first teach me his special language. It takes patience to make dim humans understand the various feline signals that specify certain demands must be met, but he had admirable persistence.

He was an inside-outside cat, and he had a distinct meow telling me he wanted to go out. It was quite different from, for example, his "move that footstool back where it belongs" meow or his "fill my water dish" meow. It was "meeee-row" and it meant, "Open this door, now!"

He had a whole ritual designed to get me out of bed if he thought I was sleeping in too long. First, he would stand by the bed and yowl. When I ignored that, he would get on the bookcase headboard, lean over and smack me on the forehead. When that failed, he'd hop up on the dresser and start knocking things off.

He developed an early warning signal to let me know a thunderstorm was coming. He'd go a third of the way down the basement steps and just sit there, and up to an hour later, the storm would come, even if had been bright and sunny when he started. He never got it wrong. Not once.

He perfected a hissing, back-arching, fur-popping way of telling me I had failed in my responsibility to control the weather, which he deployed with the first snow of each year. He always forgot what snow was, until he meee-rowed the front door open and stepped into it. He'd let out a "Yeow!" and rush back in, shaking his paws, then run to the back door and demand to be let out there. Surely the awful white stuff wasn't behind the house, too

With my education almost complete, Pierre then proceeded to train me in the retrieval of hamburger balls, the ultimate expression of cat dominance.

One time when I brought home a pound of hamburger with my store order, I pinched off a piece for him, put it on the floor and watched him gulp it down without chewing. It became a ritual after that pound of burger for me, a pinch for Pierre. Eventually, I started pulling off several pieces from each new pound, rolling them into balls and putting them in the freezer wrapped in wax paper.

Zoom forward a few months, and we had developed a routine that lasted for Pierre's 19 years in this world.

He'd find me wherever I was sitting and put his front paws on my knees and stare at me until I got up. Then he would lead me into the kitchen and lean into the refrigerator, his paws stretched up to the freezer. I'd get out a hamburger ball while he raced around the corner to the microwave. He'd sit there until he saw me pop the hamburger in, then run back to the middle of the kitchen right to the spot where he knew I'd place his thawed-out beef.

That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

I have now reached the point where I'm supposed to tell you why I decided to write about a cat. Public affairs columnists aren't supposed to just pluck topics out of the air. We're supposed to engage the reader's interest by being relevant, which requires us to find a news peg on which to hang our rambblings.

I don't have one of those, unless it's a negative one. I just got sick and tired of COVID-19 — reading about it, thinking about it, arguing about it, writing about it. I was especially weary of all the politicians, TV pundits and other deep thinkers pretending to be smarter about the virus than they really were, the more expert they tried to sound, the more convinced I was that many people are, alas, educated beyond their potential.

So, why not a simple bit of whimsy about a creature who knows what he wants, when he wants it and whom to get it from, who is just exactly as smart as he needs to be and not one whit more?

If that sounds selfish, petty, disrespectful and grouchy, just mark it down to my upbringing. Pierre trained me well.

Choose . . . While You Still Can

(*May 11*) — I like being asked. It means I have a choice. I can say no.

Not that I always do.

They've been asking me, over and over during this stay-at-home pandemic, to support our local restaurants. If I don't help them stay afloat by using their carryout and delivery services, their

dining rooms may be closed forever once the crisis has passed.

It's been a pleasure to honor that request, even for a few restaurants I didn't normally frequent and one in particular I'd been semi-boycotting because it took the owners months too long to remodel and they screwed up the menu in the process.

Fast-food chains, let's face it, have corporate giants behind them and will survive, but a world with only Taco Bells and McDonald's would be a much poorer one. A diverse feast of local cuisine is an important quality-of-life component, and I'm more than happy to do my share.

That was not my attitude a few years ago when asked to support the Komets, our city's semi-pro hockey team, and my answer was a resounding no. I don't remember the exact argument, but the gist was that I should go to a game because if I wasn't there for the Komets, the Komets wouldn't be there for me.

But I did not care even a little bit if they were not there for me. A sporting event is an amusement, and if it doesn't amuse me, I'm not buying a ticket. Don't hate me, rabid fans, but I never got hockey and never will. You might as well ask me to champion the metric system or buy a Jackson Pollock painting.

Now, perhaps you think my choices are stupid or even contradictory and unjustifiable. But you should heartily endorse my ability to choose how to spend my money, just as you should celebrate when you can make choices with your money.

Talking about the choices we make can help us define, for ourselves and each other, the limits of our selfish instincts and our commitment to the greater good. It's a movable line, and nudging it a little this way and then a little that way is one of the privileges of civilization.

Of course, we get to make fewer and fewer choices these days, because the government doesn't ask. It tells.

It told us, for example, that we must support efforts of the Shreveport Opera in Louisiana to take its performances before public school students, so the National Endowment for the Arts

(NEA) cut a check for the program using our tax dollars.

Now, that check represented a tiny portion of the NEA's \$155 million budget for last year, and that total was itself a minuscule percentage of the federal government's \$4.4 trillion budget. Little bitty drops in a gargantuan flood of crazed spending. It might seem a trifling thing to get all hot and bothered about.

But it's exactly the point that it is small enough to understand and therefore focus our irritation on. We can relate to having to choose between eating out and seeing a hockey game while we're also supporting opera in Shreveport and a drama school in Danville, Ky., and a library in Madison, Wisc., and an "intergenerational arts project," whatever that is, in Phoenix, Ariz.

If opera is such a necessity for the quality of life in Shreveport, La., why in God's name can't the people of Shreveport take care of it?

It's also a good symbol to illustrate just how far we've gone beyond the original idea of the welfare state of simple decency, providing a basic level of food and clothing and care for the least capable among us.

The government spends roughly \$140,000 a second, more than \$8 million a minute, \$500 million an hour, \$12 billion a day, day in and day out, all year long, an obscene amount of it on things the government should not even be involved in.

We are inching ever closer to a couple of tipping points that will redefine this country forever – when half the country pays no income taxes at all, and the ones who do foot the bill will see their total state, local and federal tax bill top 50 percent. When that happens, the government's chief function will be to confiscate wealth and redistribute it, and this will then be a country more about demanding compliance than seeking permission.

Most of the focus during our national quarantine has been on the breathtaking speed with which the country ground to a halt and our short-term choices were drastically curtailed. Not enough attention has been given to how the

mechanics of the breakdown will hasten the arrival of those tipping points.

After deliberately killing one of the most thriving economies in American history, created by millions of Americans making billions of individual choices, the government tried to breathe a little life into the corpse with spending that is incomprehensible even by today's standards.

The COVID-19 relief bills total nearly \$2.5 trillion already, and nobody thinks the government is done yet. Never mind how much non-health-related pork is tucked into the legislation. Never mind what it will do to the deficit, which was already nearing \$1 trillion. Never mind how much will be added to the already staggering \$23.5 trillion national debt.

This was the moment when all of us – politicians from both ends of the political spectrum, Americans from all walks of life – decided that none of it mattered. The numbers are just too big to deal with, and it's all pretend money anyway.

But what happens when we realize it all does matter, when we stop thinking about getting out of the house and making small choices again and start thinking about that point down the road when most of our choices are gone?

Don't ask.

Indiana's Branding Problem

(May 4) — I was going to write a wry but pointed column about Indiana's coming search for a new tourism slogan, something along the lines of, "Wave on your way to Michigan" or, "Thanks for not stopping by."

Our past attempts to snare visitors with a catchy phrase have always come up embarrassingly short. "Honest to Goodness Indiana" conjured up an aw-shucks image of Andy and Gomer whittling on the front porch. "Restart Your Engines" made it sound like our car might stall once we crossed the state line.

And remember "Wander Indiana"? Boy, there was an invitation to a thrill-a-minute vacation.

Now that Gov. Holcomb has announced the coming end to our house arrest, I thought, perhaps it's time to re-evaluate some of the things that made us self-conscious in the attractive-destination sweepstakes – like the lack of year-round perfect weather, natural wonders and multiple cities large enough to house a snobby elite.

Maybe those are, in fact, good things that we should exploit. Having lots of people around all the time, especially with a high percentage of strangers (who knows where they've been?), just creates a hothouse for nasty viruses. If we'd been a better magnet for wayfarers, COVID-19 would have hit us a lot harder.

But then I came across a startling statistic.

As of a few weeks ago, in a ranking of states with the highest number of per-capita virus cases, Indiana came in at 15.

Now, maybe that statistic is misleading, or maybe there are other facts that will add greater context, but doesn't that seem a little too high? Shouldn't we have done better than that?

But at least we will be able to find out rather easily once this is all over. A chief virtue of federalism, other than each state being able to craft its own economic development slogan, is that local officials can better respond to local conditions and can be more easily held accountable if they screw up.

Of course, that also means we give those officials a stupefying amount of power in emergencies. For all the federal bloviating and promiscuous spending of non-existent money, it is strictly within the purview of Holcomb and the 49 other governors to shut down an economy and then bring it back.

And Holcomb has handled things pretty well. He hasn't become a clout-wielding control freak like some governors or an incompetent buffoon like others. He has behaved reasonably in an unprecedented situation.

His recovery plan could be a tad better, though. Considering the state's economy was destroyed almost in one bold stroke, a two-month, five-stage crawl-back seems a little plodding,

despite overwhelming public support for a gradual return to normality.

And the plan is so nuanced and incremental that I'm sure I'll always be confused about whether I'm in compliance. Is this the week I'm allowed to be part of a 50-percent-capacity crowd or are we up to 75 percent? May I linger in the restaurant over a second cup of coffee, and is it on Thursday or Friday when I'm not allowed to wear yellow?

His slogan could use some work, too.

"Hunker Down Hoosiers" was a marvelous slogan for his stay-at-home order, despite the grammatically appalling missing comma. "Hunker" calls to mind "bunker" and makes us think of bravely banding together as the enemy virus bombs rain down on us.

But "Back on Track" is really lame as a recovery slogan. Back from where? The detour we intentionally drove onto? Frankly, this is the "Restart Your Engines" of post-virus catchphrases.

This state will never get anywhere, on tourism or pandemics or anything else, unless we get this jingle problem whipped. A good slogan is everything.

Honest to goodness.

My Local Newspaper, RIP

(April 27) — The newspaper that employed me for more than 30 years has ceased publication. It feels like a death in the family, and I've been trying to imagine the obituary:

"The News-Sentinel, 187, native of Fort Wayne, Ind., born in 1833, died in 2020 of natural causes. Cherished by loved ones, true friend to the community. Preceded in death by generations of informed residents. Survived by a handful of ink-stained wretches."

RIP.

The current publisher says operations are merely being suspended due to the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic, and "market conditions" will be evaluated with an eye toward a possible return.

With apologies, that sounds pretty lame.

In the first place, dead is dead. There is no coming back.

In the second place, blaming COVID-19 for the paper's demise is like saying a gunshot victim died from his poor diet. If the virus was able to deliver the final blow, it was only because the patient was so vulnerable already. The debilitation of advanced age was a factor and, as the epidemiologists like to say, there were underlying conditions.

To be blunt, too many people stopped reading newspapers, especially in the evenings a few hours after the News-Sentinel hit doorsteps.

Circulation peaked above 60,000 but was below 10,000 when the paper went digital only in 2017 and let go all but eight employees. Seven of those were gone in less than a year, and the lone remaining reporter was furloughed last week. The paper withered away, and it was difficult to watch the long, slow decline.

I may be projecting, but I like to think the city's sense of loss is as great as mine.

A good newspaper is more than a receptacle of news and information, greater than a purveyor of opinion and entertainment. It is a gathering place with its own atmosphere and personality. Those who go there get not only an understanding of their community but a sense of their place in it and a glimpse of how everything fits together in the sweep of history.

Civic virtue springs from institutions and traditions that bind people together in a common goal. The church. The charity. The library. The school. The family.

The newspaper. Without it, our bond is a little weaker, our shared vision a little less clear.

But I must also realize, as hard as it is to acknowledge, that the world still turns and time moves on. Newspapers are disappearing because people no longer believe they need them. News is available in too many other places, more plentiful and faster. Advertisers find other formats more efficient.

Add newspapers to the list of things that no longer serve a useful function – the typewriter and telegraph, the icebox and slide rule, the mimeograph and pager, the phone book and carbon paper. Each era has its own buggy whip, discarded by the churn of capitalism's creative destruction.

That churn is produced by a dynamic economy as revolution and evolution meet, with technology advancing and society adapting, which raises an interesting point. We have just seen one of the most productive, prosperous and growing economies in American history reduced to rubble in a few weeks by our government's draconian reaction to the coronavirus.

We might soon discover, in a rather brutal fashion, some things that we thought still served a useful function were in fact already teetering on the edge of obsolescence.

A couple of us got to talking recently about the first thing we might do once the virus peaks and our stay-at-home orders start being lifted. Eat at a restaurant. Go shopping. Vacation at a beach resort or take in a ballgame.

We probably should have added a caveat – things we might do, if they are still available. Some of our favorite restaurants will have disappeared, and we'll have to get used to new ones. Online shopping will have replaced more of our brick-and-mortar outlets, and Mom-and-Pop operations might be gone altogether. Large gatherings of any kind, whether for music or art or county fair sideshows, might struggle mightily. Some of our new habits might be hard to let go of in our nervous public forays.

It will be a confusing, scary landscape, and a lot of people will be looking for help in navigating it.

The kind of help newspapers, for all their faults, once provided. In the last great pandemic, from the Spanish Flu of 1918, TV and radio were not in American homes. Telephones were starting to appear, but they needed operators, many of whom had succumbed to the virus. People had no choice but to turn to newspapers.

And some of you might remember more recent disasters, like that great blizzard in 1978, Fort Wayne's flood in 1982, the Palm Sunday tornadoes. Newspaper circulation spiked as battered Hoosiers sought both information and a sense of connection.

Fort Wayne still has one newspaper left, though its circulation and influence continue to erode. I hope the stubborn souls who still toil there, and at all the other surviving periodicals in the state, step up for one last heroic effort. And I hope they are joined by the brash new breed who claim to own the future.

Before this year, we might have been more patient in waiting for the Twitters and Facebooks and Instagrams to mature into responsible, civic-minded outlets. Newspapers, after all, did not just spring up overnight in their present format. They grew and evolved over time.

Seems a little more urgent now.

COVID-19 'Normal' Insanity

(April 20) — As a journalist, I appreciate the job our TV news folks are doing to keep us informed during these trying times. But, honestly, they're starting to wear me out.

It apparently hasn't occurred to them that, with only one story to report, they're bound to repeat themselves. So, at the risk of being the only nasty guest at the happy party, allow me to list the things I'm really tired of hearing.

Please stop telling me to "hunker down" and "shelter in place" and practice "social distancing." Covid-10 is a highly contagious virus. I understand that — I'm not an unruly second-grader needing constant admonitions from an exasperated teacher.

Quit reminding me that if we "trust the process" we can "flatten the curve" and "reopen the economy." I don't even know what the process is, and since we've been inexcusably negligent on testing, I don't believe we can even find the curve, let alone figure out how to flatten it.

Don't keep calling it a "milestone" when a new high is reached for number of people tested,

number of people who've contracted the virus and, especially, number of people who have died. It's just ghoulish, OK?

And start denying airtime to empty jibber-jabber purporting to predict the future. Gov. Eric Holcomb recently tried out, "We're still in the woods, but we can see the clearing ahead." That's lame, but not as bad as "light at the end of the tunnel," which I actually heard twice on the same day. It got old during the Vietnam War and has not improved.

I would especially like to ban two phrases that have really overstayed their welcome:

The new normal. When people say this, they sometimes mean "things are different from what we're used to," and sometimes they mean that "even after this mess is over, things are never going to be the way they used to be."

Either way, it's a stupid thing to say. "Normal," like "average," is a moving target.

Every time you add something new to the mix, you change the average. Say you're computing the average height of 10 people, and it comes out to 5 foot 7; you add or subtract a person, and the average changes to 5 foot 6.9 or 5 foot 7.1. Would you go on and on about the "new average"? No, because it means absolutely nothing in the real world.

Neither does "new normal." My normal on one day is not the same as my normal on another day because I don't do the same things every day. And your normal is not the same as mine or anybody else's.

But people keep saying it, and it's shorthand for what they really want to say, which is, "Life is really awful right now, and nobody knows how to make it better, which means life is going to stay awful, so deal with it."

It is a depressing, defeatist attitude, and I want nothing to do with it. Reject the new normal.

And, finally, the worst of the worst:

We're all in this together. Well, we are and we aren't.

It's true that we're all afflicted with the same fear, but we're each facing it alone, hunkered

down and sheltered in place while we practice social distancing. This banal expression of solidarity, after the first few dozen times, sounds suspiciously like “misery loves company,” especially when uttered by evening news anchors who are sitting 10 feet apart. The next time I hear it, I swear I’m going to call one of them up and say, “In it together? Fine, come on over. We’ll share a six-pack, then I’ll take a little nap while you clean my house.”

Hearing the phrase now makes me feel like I’m at a funeral.

As a shallow youth, I hated funerals because they seemed like a cynical enterprise to suck money out of the grief-stricken. But as I got older, I began to see their useful purpose.

When a loved one dies, even if it was totally expected and we thought we were ready for it, there is a sudden hole in our lives that leaves us numb and reeling. The ritual of the funeral – friends and relatives mouthing inane but comforting sentiments like “So sorry for your loss” and “I promise it will get better” – helps us cope with that initial, paralyzing heartbreak.

“We’re all in this together” is that kind of inane but comforting sentiment. And that was fine to get us all over the immediate agony of loss. But now it’s as if the funeral is just going on and on. Funerals are supposed to be brief and cathartic, not endless and excruciating.

The old normal is dead. Got it. Let’s bury that sucker and move on. The world still turns, and time doesn’t hunker down for anybody.

Thoreau Quarantined

(April 6) — Finally, I understand why Thoreau was such a contented man in his little cabin at Walden Pond. He had made himself safe from the deadly scourge of a virus attack.

I do wonder how Henry David would handle COVID-19 and the resulting social distancing and near-mandatory self-quarantining.

Would he still be delighted in the hypnotic tap dancing of a rainstorm, the skittering of woodland

creatures in the night, the soft moan of wind in the trees?

Or would he be binge-watching cable news when he wasn’t reading old emails, trading insults on Twitter, Skype-chatting with Aunt Edna in Cincinnati, desperately scouring his Facebook feed for the latest celebrity gossip and ordering delivery pizza just to have someone to say, “Hi, how’s it going?”

I ask because there is a difference, I think, between isolation as a voluntary experiment and isolation as an official edict, seclusion that is chosen and seclusion that is imposed. It is the difference between being Superman in the Fortress of Solitude and Sir Walter Raleigh in the Tower of London.

A couple of experts will back me up.

One is my sister, who had looked forward to reveling in slothful retirement, sleeping in and never again having to make a list of work-related chores. Now, she feels trapped and confined because she can’t go out to lunch with her girlfriends, a principal diversion for her.

“I never did get used to going to the popular spots like downtown,” she told me on the phone, from a safe distance in another city. “There was never any place to park.”

“Bet there would be now, though,” I told her.

“Sure, but there’s nothing to do there now.”

“Boy, there’s just no pleasing you.”

The other expert is me. I have lived alone since my divorce and haven’t really minded because, frankly, I’m pretty good company. I don’t get mad if I never pick up after myself, and I don’t nag me about getting a haircut, leaving the toilet seat up or drinking straight out of the milk carton.

But lately, I’m getting just a little tired of myself. My taste in music could stand improving, I never tell any new jokes and, no matter how hard I squint into the mirror, I don’t get any better looking. I’d give myself a good talking to, but I know I wouldn’t listen.

I need my office spouse back, the one human connection I most regret losing when I retired. (I used to say “office wife,” but that was before

inclusiveness and sensitivity swept through the workplace. For all I know, the correct term these days is office significant other or office life companion.)

The office spouse, for those not familiar with the corporate environment, is the one person at work you can always be yourself with and not fear reprisal or rejection. You can say anything, no matter how politically incorrect, blasphemous or just plain stupid, and not be judged for it, and that person knows she has the same freedom with you.

It makes the most hostile work environment a little more tolerable. And, because the whining and griping tend to cover a range of non-office topics, the sense of well-being created by the exchanges carries over far beyond the 40-hour work week.

So, it would be lovely if my former office spouse would stop by for a few minutes, staying well back from the front door of course, just long enough to listen to me rant and rave a little. I wouldn't even mind if she felt like nagging me a bit.

Thoreau needed an office spouse. (He was a writer, correct? So, the Walden Pond cabin was his office.) It might have made him a little more tolerant of the limitations of social intercourse and the communication shortcomings of his fellow human beings.

Contrary to popular belief, Thoreau was not trying to escape all human contact, merely those encounters he deemed too superficial to be enriching.

He complained that society is "commonly too cheap" and lamented that people "meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of that musty old cheese that we are . . . We meet at the post office, and at the sociable, and about the fireside every night; we live thick and are in each other's way, and stumble over one another, and I think that we thus lose some respect for one another. Certainly less frequency would suffice for all important and hearty communications."

Take that, you thick, musty louts who thought it might be the civilized thing to do to say a few polite words to a friendly fellow.

Thoreau did enjoy companionship with visitors to Walden Pond, two in particular, with whom he spent long winter evenings "when the snow falls fast and the winds howl in the woods."

One was an old settler, "a most wise and humorous friend" who told him "stories of old time and new eternity; and between us we manage to pass a cheerful evening and pleasant view of things." The other was an "elderly dame" whose memory "runs back farther than mythology, and she can tell me the original of every fable, and on what fact every one is founded . . . A ruddy and lusty old dame who delights in all weathers and seasons."

There you have it. Two old coots who didn't burden Thoreau with that "more frequency" thing. Thanks for amusing me, you can go now.

Something else that's not commonly known about Thoreau. That brave stand he took about willing to be imprisoned for not paying his taxes to protest slavery? The one that led to the famous essay on civil disobedience?

He spent only one night in jail – one stinking night.

He was bailed out. Anonymously. But probably by a relative. One who didn't hang around to chit-chat, just in case misanthropy should be a communicable disease.

Calamity and Lost Liberty

(*March 30*) – It is worth noting, in the thick of our great national quarantine, that we have gone in a heartbeat from an ordinary civil society to a step short of martial law.

That's something worth thinking about. And worrying about just a little.

As the War on Terror was being rolled out – Lord, has it been nearly two decades? – I wrote an editorial for the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel warning that we should not be casual about sacrificing any of our civil liberties because we might never get them back.

Some rights are almost always lost in a time of war. That's just the way it is.

Lincoln suspended habeus corpus during the Civil War. During World War I, the First Amendment was put on hold. In World War II, more than 100,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned with no due process.

We have always accepted such infringements because we recognized the greater common threat and understood that such extraordinary measures would be temporary. The war would end, victory would be declared, and life would return to normal.

But “terror” is a tactic, not the usual enemy, and defeating it is not a simple matter of routing an army, securing a border or planting a flag. Who can say when terror has been vanquished and victory achieved? If the fight goes on forever, how can we risk giving up our weapons?

In more ways than can be counted, America is a far more authoritarian nation than it was before 9/11, and there is no end in sight for the war on terror.

And the suspension of our liberties has been a bipartisan effort, for what that is worth. The National Defense Authorization Act, giving sweeping powers to the executive branch, was passed under George W. Bush. An expanded version signed by Barack Obama gave the president the power to hold any American in military detention indefinitely.

The parallel between extremist terror and the coronavirus is not perfect. Neither respects national borders, but a virus at least has an arc – a definable beginning, middle and end.

It can come in waves, however. The threat of a global pandemic will always be with us in an increasingly crowded, mobile world. What we are asked to give up now, we might be told we have to do without forever.

Two things need to be said, I think.

The first is that that government at all levels – from the chief executive to the smallest-town mayor – will issue clearly unconstitutional orders during the crisis. In fact, they already have. I scoured Indiana statutes for authorization of Gov.

Eric Holcomb's recent edicts. All are defensible, but some are highly questionable.

But the second is that nobody is going to seriously call our officials on these actions in the middle of efforts to flatten the pandemic curve – we are too invested in the “we're all in this together” heroic struggle. We rightly value safety first.

I won't belabor the point. In fact, I feel a little disloyal even bringing it up.

But let's please pay attention and keep our ability to consider, in hindsight, rationally and systematically, what we have done and whether it was effective enough to have been worth it.

Our federal system of diffused power has shown remarkable speed in amassing and exercising breathtaking control of its citizens. And those fiercely independent, freedom-loving citizens have shown remarkable ease in submitting to that control.

The government now knows it can tap into that kind of incredible power. And it knows we can reflexively get used to it.

Necessity can become habit. And habits are hard to break.

Serenity in Times of Trouble

(March 23) — Some years ago, life as I knew it was put on a sudden and dramatic hiatus in the form of an inattentive driver who attempted to cross U.S. 30 near Plymouth in the path of our car.

My left hip was broken and, this being before insurance companies decided an overnight stay was sufficient for anything less than a heart attack accompanied by a brain tumor and multiple gunshot wounds, I spent weeks in traction at a hospital in Michigan City.

The experience was at first frightening and then by turns sobering, frustrating, annoying, humbling and excruciatingly boring – all the gifts an extended convalescence can bestow.

But it was also liberating.

I had been abruptly yanked from the accrued anxieties and regrets of day-to-day existence – the

home-work balancing act, the meetings and deadlines, the worry over paying bills, the messiness of relationships, the tallying of small victories and defeats against my betters and lessers – and sidelined on the injured-reserve list.

All I had to do was relax in my bed and let others minister to me. What needed to be taken care of in the world outside that hospital room would be done by others or simply would not get done. It was no longer my concern. There was literally nothing for me to worry about.

It was an opportunity to re-examine my whole life, what I had done with it and where I wanted to go with it. Delivered from the mental clutter that tunnels the vision, I could look at everything with a fresh perspective.

What a gift.

It might not seem so right now, but that is a gift we have all just received.

With astonishing speed, the coronavirus has pulled into the path of the whole world, putting life as everyone knew it on sudden and dramatic hold. We are asked to shelter in place when we can and practice social distancing when we can't, with the simplest, most taken-for-granted privileges of ordinary life slipping from our grasp.

We are still in the early, frightening stage now. We wonder how long the dystopian nightmare will last, who will survive it and what society will look like when it's all over. And, as was said many times about our "war on terror," how will we know if and when it is over?

But we will ease into the other stages of extended convalescence – the frustrations and annoyances and sheer boredom. If we don't let these inevitabilities overwhelm us, we will also be able to appreciate the liberating force of abrupt change. We will have the opportunity to re-evaluate our relationships with each other, as friends and family and neighbors, as citizens and just as fellow human beings.

I notice that the coronavirus commentaries are starting to move beyond the bullet-point lamentations to focus on speculation about the long-term effects of the crisis.

Actually, a lot of it is pretty short-term. How many restaurants and other retail outlets will succumb and how well will the economy recover? What will this hurt or help the president's re-election campaign? How much of education will migrate online?

As the commentators extend their speculation, they unfortunately tend to let their existing predispositions guide them. As in: Hey, urban planners, how's that idea of herding people into cities and cramming them on public transportation looking now? Or: Gosh, deficit hawks, could that possibly be you we hear calling for an immediate cash infusion to save small businesses?

My favorite self-serving, dueling set of predictions is that the coronavirus scare will, a) kill the silly climate change fraud because we now know what a real disaster is, and that's not it, and, b) strengthen the noble climate change battle because people are now being taught how they must behave to save the planet.

The speculation is harmless and most, if not all it, both short- and long-term, will be wrong. This is an unprecedented event in modern times, and there are just too many variables, and they will combine and recombine in ways we can't even imagine.

I have my own idea, of course. I think the most probable outcome is the strengthening of two existing trends – our dependence on the federal government and our migration to an ever-more-digital existence. Those trends, not coincidentally, reinforce each other.

But I am likely wrong, too, so I won't put too much of my self-esteem into that package. I'd rather talk about the gift of reflection we have been given and my hope that we don't squander it.

As I, alas, squandered most of mine.

I'd like to report that my brush with death and subsequent bedridden-induced introspection forced me to undertake hard decisions and made me a much better person. But the truth is that day-to-day realities were too powerful and started crowding back in as soon as I got out of the hospital.

The one thing that survived was a clearer, stronger sense of something we all already know but ignore or at least don't think about much: That we are each in charge of our own lives, until we are not.

Up until that turning point, we relinquish our autonomy, letting our course be dictated by habit and obligation and inertia, by our time, place and culture, by the explicit or inferred expectations of others. Then, when that moment of realization comes that circumstances have forced us into uncharted territory, we flounder.

Since that time, I have at least come to appreciate my limitations, as I think Dirty Harry once said. I can figure out what's important and what to let go.

Yeah, sounds a lot like the serenity prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

That's not a bad core philosophy. And not the worst sentiment we could come out of coronavirus with.

We had a gift after 9/11, too, and used it to come together as a country, standing together and supporting each other. For about 15 minutes, until day-to-day reality set back in.

We seem to be finding each other again, neighbors looking out for each other, even our politicians reaching across the political divide. May it last longer this time. That's something we can choose to change.

Stupidity Is Also Contagious

(March 16) — If enough people do something utterly stupid, you have to do it, too.

That's an Immutable Law of the Indifferent Universe that I just made up at the supermarket the other day. Having completed my run at the coffee section and the bread and donut aisle, I was confronted by nearly empty shelves that once held bathroom tissue.

Well, now . . .

I had spent days making fun of all those idiots who created the great toilet paper crisis of 2020

by stocking up on that commodity to somehow stave off the Wuhan/Corona/COVID-19 virus, or whatever we're calling it this week. And it suddenly occurred to me that I would probably have to join them.

No matter what I thought of them, if they had created a great enough shortage, there wouldn't be any toilet paper when I needed it, unless I bought it right then and there. So, I added a six-pack of triple-roll, two-ply to my cart, even though I had at least a month's supply at home already.

I saw it not as following the herd but running with it so as not to get trampled underneath it in the mad rush.

I almost added a good supply of bread and milk to boot until I remembered that, no, that's what we're supposed to buy when the first half-inch snow of the season panics us. Protocols must be observed.

What is it about our psychology that leads us to completely ignore the possibility of danger until it's too obvious to ignore, then try to alleviate our concerns by going overboard in a silly and ineffective way?

If we're so worried about lasting out a storm, how about some bottled water, canned food and a few fruits and vegetables to go with the bread and milk? If staying pristine through the pandemic is a concern, why not add some soap, shampoo and toothpaste to the toilet paper?

It turns out we are afflicted with something called "zero risk bias," in which, economist Yves Herman explains, "people prefer to try to eliminate one type of possibly superficial risk entirely rather than do something that would reduce their total risk by a greater amount.

"Hoarding also makes people feel secure. This is especially relevant when the world is faced with a novel disease over which all of us have little or no control. However, we can control things like having enough toilet paper in case we are quarantined."

There is a more sensible way to handle things: Be prepared.

The federal government has long recommended keeping enough food, water and

other supplies on hand to last at least 72 hours in case of any disaster like a flood or an earthquake. (See list here: <https://www.ready.gov/kit>). Anybody got even that? How about the two-week supply it now says we should have for a pandemic? (See <https://www.ready.gov/pandemic>).

My brother in Hill Country is way ahead of the curve on this. He has enough food, water and other necessary supplies to last up to 12 months, and he could lay in enough liquid propane to go even longer. Take that, disaster; don't mess with Texans.

Of course, when we say "disaster," we tend to think of something sudden and unexpected, a destructive force that pounces and then moves on, leaving us to pick up the pieces and get back to normal.

Some people seem to think this pandemic will get worse and worse as time goes on, ever fewer places to go and things to do as more and more people close up gathering places and shelter in place. Our very idea of normal might change.

Remember the terrifying first half of Stephen King's "The Stand" in which the world's population was decimated by a flu-like illness? Remember "On the Beach," where the last few people left alive after a nuclear war waited for the end in Australia?

I trust it won't get that bad, that our health systems will be able to cope with the outbreak and that our officials will stop fighting long enough to fully utilize them.

It was just a few weeks ago that I wrote, "Somewhere between paralyzing panic and self-defeating indifference, there is a common sense approach that says, let's wait and see and consider the evidence as it comes in."

I still think that, which means I had nothing new to say and shouldn't even have written about the subject. But that's all there is in the news – so many other people are writing about it that I decided no one would read this column if it were about anything else.

If enough people do something utterly stupid . . .

But whatever happens, I will have enough toilet paper.

Goodbye, Indiana Beach

(*March 9*) — Sorry, Hoosier tourists – you've just been given one more reason to cross a state line in search of that perfect day trip.

Indiana Beach, the amusement park operated on the shores of Lake Shafer in White County for nearly 100 years, has been shut down by its corporate owners in California.

When all the chin-scratching trend watchers speculate on reasons for the closing, a couple will probably stand out.

One is the indifference (or greed, some would say) of big business. The original, local owner sold the place to a New York outfit that apparently didn't do much before selling it to the Californians, who made some improvements but could still only eke "marginal profits" out of the place.

The other is the evolving nature of entertainment. People have so many ways to amuse themselves at home these days that the idea of fighting traffic and crowds just to stand in line somewhere isn't quite as attractive as it once was.

Both of those theories are quite reasonable, and I have reasons to appreciate each of them

I spent most of my career at a newspaper that succumbed to the local-to-corporate disassembly line. Yes, it likely would have fallen to the digital revolution in any case, but I can't help but feel it ended up on blocks in the derelict front yard of old media sooner than it had to.

And heaven knows I spend enough time at my keyboard doing things that I once did by venturing "outside" (you remember it, I'm sure). I won't say my Amazon shopping killed Sears and L.S. Ayres, but you can probably blame me and my ilk for Kmart.

But, being one of those chin-scratching trend watchers myself, I naturally have to look for the bigger picture.

Which, I think, is this: As humans are fragile and life is brief, so are the expressions of our collective enterprise impermanent. We resist that fact with every fiber of our being, but it is true nonetheless.

Indiana Beach is but one of a list of disappearing Hoosier attractions. The most recent are the auctioning off of Amish Acres in northeast Indiana and the entire town of Story being put up for sale. But the list is long – the 100 Center shopping destination in Mishawaka, a Ferris wheel and roller coaster on the beach in Michigan City. Ogden Dunes had a 200-foot ski jump and Porter had a planetarium.

We can all add our own personal losses to the list of places generally missed.

Mine would include the restaurant where my family gathered in monthly, merry celebrations, lost to the last big recession; and my high school, sacrificed to the imperatives of racially balanced education. Oh, and of course, I remember a thriving urban center before malls sucked the life out of it. Who in Indiana doesn't remember a downtown that "isn't what it used to be"?

When we lament those losses – and we all do, each and every one of us – we are really yearning for the return of a past we can never recapture.

The stories about Indiana Beach quote family after family talking about visits to the park being a

tradition, sometimes going back generations, parents taking the children to the attractions their parents took them to. That history is what families feel slipping away – the amusement park is just a symbol of it.

Rescuing Indiana Beach or Amish Acres, which some entrepreneurs are hoping for, won't bring the nuclear family back into focus. Reviving my favorite restaurant won't reunite my family members now scattered in multiple cities in different states.

When I drive by my high school, which has a second life as an administrative center, I can feel the ghosts of my past. But those students in the yearbook I drag out occasionally – frozen in eternal youth – are still together only in my memory. We have all moved on.

That is what people do; we move on. And those who come after us have their own ideas about what to do with what we left behind.

That's what I want to tell city leaders desperately trying to recapture downtown's glory. People concentrated there for a reason, and they dispersed for a reason, too. Let the city move on. Let it grow and change and create new memories for the next generation.

That's what I want to tell them. But it would be pointless. They won't listen. They can't. ♦

Special Report

Richard McGowan, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, has taught philosophy and ethics cores for more than 40 years, most recently at Butler University.



Deaths of Despair, Journalism, Men and Women

(April 24) — Journalism should be about the real world, not the world of ideology unless the writing appears on the opinion pages. And when journalism addresses the real world, it should do so inclusively and with diversity in mind, as many media outlets trumpet.

Before the pandemic, the medical problem *du jour* was ‘deaths of despair,’ the deaths attributed to alcohol, drug abuse, and suicide. The Los Angeles Times had an article on deaths of despair on Nov. 26, 2019; Newsweek had an article, “What are So-called Deaths of Despair? Experts Say They are on the Rise,” on Jan. 14, 2020; and The New Republic reported on “Why Deaths of Despair are Rising” on March 10, 2020; and even Foreign Affairs got into the act with “Will America’s Mortality Crisis Spread to the Rest of the World,” from its March-April 2020 issue. Not to be outdone, the New York Times addressed “Dying of ‘Despair’ in America” in its Sunday Review, March 8, 2020.

The LA Times article, “Suicides and Overdoses Among Factors Fueling Drop in U.S. Life Expectancy,” stated that “Women, who have always lagged well behind men in suicide rates, have begun taking their lives at a growing rate since the 1990s. Their rate of death from liver disorders, long a rarity among females, climbed too.” While calling attention to women’s increased suicide rate, the article made no mention of gender differences or disparities. Also, the article did not address the increased suicide rate and alcohol abuse among men.

The Newsweek article on deaths of despair noted “the racial health disparities” about those deaths. It mentioned no other disparities.

The New Republic presented a much more balanced portrait of deaths of despair. The article stressed that while whites appear to be afflicted more, deaths of despair are prevalent among the lower economic class and not just whites: “the crack cocaine epidemic — which leveled the black working class — was reproduced in the white working class as the opioid epidemic. As crack cocaine in its time preyed disproportionately on blacks, opioid deaths fixated (until only recently) on whites.” The article concluded that “a specific racial cohort . . . is dying in alarming numbers, it is indicative of a larger historical trend in which the working class, as a whole, loses.”

Foreign Affairs did not trust an article on deaths of despair to journalists. Instead, it went straight to the co-authors of the book, “Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism,” namely Anne Case and Nobel Prize winner Angus Deaton. Here is what they had to say about disparities:

“The increase in mortality is similar for men and women, although the base rates for women are lower; women are less likely to die by suicide than men and less likely to overdose or succumb to alcohol.” They added that “African Americans did not figure greatly in this trend until 2013.” Case and Deaton observed that “the increase in deaths of despair has been almost exclusively among Americans without a four-year college degree.”

The New York Times article fixated on that observation, “over the past three decades, deaths of despair among whites without a college degree — especially those under age 50 — have soared.”

Two graphs on deaths of despair accompanied the article, one labeled “Without a Bachelor’s Degree” and another labeled “With a Bachelor’s Degree.” Among the article’s recommendations is that “Governments at all levels should help more people earn college degrees (like B.A.s) and meaningful vocational degrees.” The article never mentioned any disparities except between those with and those without a B.A.

None of the preceding articles mentioned male-female disparities except the article by the original researchers Case and Deaton.

However, a look at the data regarding deaths of despair show a huge disparity from the year 1900 that continues to the present. Prior to 1959, data from the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee's "Long Term Trends in Death" (Sept. 5, 2019) reflect the deaths of despair only from suicides; data for succumbing to alcohol or drug abuse were apparently unavailable until 1959. In 1900, men committed 15.2 suicides and women 4.7 per 100,000 people, or, men committed suicide about three times the rate women did.

That pattern still holds.

Data from "Long Term Trends in Death" show that per 100,000 people in 1960, men experienced 25.2 deaths of despair and women 7.8 deaths. In 1980, men experienced 34.1 deaths of despair per 100,000 people and women experienced 11.4 deaths. In 2000, men experienced 35.6 deaths of despair while women suffered 10.2 deaths per 100,000 people.

Deaths of despair have always shown a whopping disparity between men and women. If deaths from despair are a blight, policy should have been and should now be directed toward men to help them out. The policy could have and should have started in 1900 — unless losing one sex to deaths of despair compared to the other sex is acceptable.

And if earning a B.A. is the *sine qua non* for avoiding deaths of despair, data on who earns those degrees is relevant. A cursory look into the history of earned B.A. degrees by sex shows that the school year 1981-82 was a watershed year as it was the first year females earned more B.A. degrees than males: men earned approximately 473,000 B.A.s and women earned 479,000 degrees. In fact, women have earned more B.A.s than men every year since. In 2016, women earned about 1,100,000 B.A.s compared to men's 822,000 degrees.

I can only speculate that the year Title IX programs were put into effect coincides with the year that women began to outnumber men in

college. Young men saw that women were the preferred sex. Affirmative action programs bolstered the message that women were the preferred sex and men were the wrong sex. That's quite a message and one I received often as I sought jobs during the 1980s.

As it stands today, women continue to be preferred as undergraduates. If Case and Deaton are correct and if the New York Times' "Dying of Despair in America" is correct in stressing the importance of earning a Bachelor's degree, then woe be it for men. Men are in for an unfortunate trend in deaths of despair over the coming years, not that journalists will notice the sexual disparity.

It is no surprise that the U.S. Joint Economic Committee can state "No wonder, then, that the rate of deaths from despair is about three times higher for men than for women." Journalists and policy makers should be concerned about that disparity, since they would be more inclusive and value diversity more. For example, if earning a B.A. is the key factor in lowering the number of deaths of despair, and women earn 58 percent of those degrees, programs like affirmative action should be geared toward men.

The latest medical issue is COVID-19. According to the Center for Disease Control, as of April 22, 2020, 12,223 men and 8,827 women have died from the virus, or, men constitute 58 percent of the deaths. In a refreshing change, the New York Times addressed the disparity on April 7, 2020. It would be nice were that kind of coverage — inclusive coverage — were more common. ♦

Links

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_318.10.asp Data available on who earns degrees

<https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/republicans/2019/9/long-term-trends-in-deaths-of-despair> A link in this site enables data on deaths of despair to be accessible.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm>

The Franke Bookshelf

The Conservative Sensibility

I don't know what to make of George Will anymore. Having enlisted in the Never Trump brigade, he acts the part of MSNBC's domesticated conservative. But is he still a conservative? Yes, he is. Will's "The Conservative Sensibility" (Hachette Books 2019, 600 pages, \$16 hardcover through Amazon) is defense exhibit number one, no additional evidence required.

This may be the most important book I've read in the past several years. Through its pages Will covers conservative thought by applying its historical antecedents to contemporary issues. He quotes others extensively, both conservatives and liberal/progressives, as he presents what can only be considered an indictment of American society as expressed in her politics and culture.

This is a difficult review to write simply because the book is a difficult one to read. I was constantly stopping to make notes on Will's assessment of current affairs and his prescription for correction. I don't think I ever spent as long working through a book as I have on this one. (OK, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* excepted.) It was not because this is a poorly written book. Quite the opposite; it is that good.

And it is long. One recommendation I would make is to read his introductory chapter carefully. That will give a sense of why he thinks like he does. The rest of the book uses this philosophical basis to tackle what he sees as wrong with the world.

Will begins by differentiating conservative ideology of the European tradition from the American. He views European conservatives as constrained by their devotion to conserving (if you

will) a class-based society and the religious and secular traditions appertaining thereto. Americans, in contrast, root their conservatism in the principles of liberty arising out of the Founding Fathers as expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Ours is true classical liberalism which he defines as the exercise of natural rights within a space of personal sovereignty.

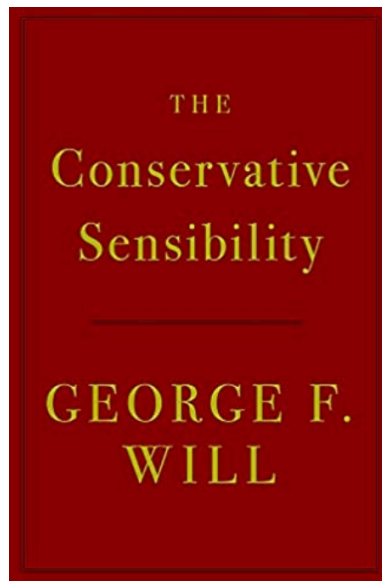
This is a distinction with a difference to Will's way of thinking. He calls America a "creedal nation" because we developed around a set of ideals rather than tribal affinity. Only by clarifying this continental distinction can one intelligently take on the ideological battle between American

conservatism and its progressive bet noire. He draws the battle lines with different metaphors such as Madison versus Wilson, Locke versus Hobbes, the pursuit of happiness versus the delivery of happiness, virtues versus values and so forth.

He defaults to a descriptive term for all that has gone wrong with the American republic: majoritarianism. Simply put, this is the philosophy that the majority rules because that is what democracy is all about. Maybe, but Will deftly distinguishes democracy from republicanism wherein the natural rights of all

must be protected against any and all comers, especially the majority.

It is on this framework that he makes an essential but somewhat confusing argument. Will favors an activist judiciary. Really? Yes, but one must read his argument carefully and get past his dislike of Justice Anton Scalia, certainly now enshrined in most conservatives' pantheon of Supreme Court good guys. Will considers Scalia a majoritarian because he looked at the Constitution solely from a practical sense. On the other and equally confusing hand, he seems to like Justice David Souter.



Let me try to explain because this is the section of the book that gave me the most difficulty. Will argues that it is the progressive movement which over American history has most favored judicial restraint. By this, progressives mean the courts should get out of the way of the legislative and executive branches and show proper deference to their actions. This is why we have the Deep State issue today with federal agencies legislating through rule-making and then adjudicating themselves through their internal administrative law judges. (Wasn't it Mencken who defined a judge as nothing more than a law student who grades his own exam papers? Prescient, wasn't he.)

What Will wants now is an activist court system that reclaims its equality with the other two branches. To reestablish this equality requires courts seeing their role in constraining government by holding it to the Constitution and its implicit and explicit protection of the rights of individuals. In other words, start applying Marshall's judicial review principle more rigorously to roll back legislative and administrative overreach. Courts, do your constitutional duty.

While this may give conservatives pause due to recent judicial branch rulings, his point is well taken. Courts should monitor government actions in protection of individual liberty, liberty being understood in terms of natural rights in a classical liberal context. Courts must protect us from the excesses of majoritarians using the powers of government to get what they want.

Will is no less critical of the state of higher education. He blames much of what has gone wrong there on the ideological conceit of presentism. Judging the past by modern sensibilities is a favorite ploy of progressives, something Will ascribes to ignorance and arrogance. He reminds them that they are tomorrow's past. "By [being] condescending to the past, they make themselves hostages to the condescension of the future."

And don't get him started on the post-modern worship of values. Will sees this as the "I'm OK;

You're OK" mentality run amok (my terminology, not his). He fervently desires a return to the day when virtues mattered and not subjective values. After all, Will says, Hitler had values. Washington had virtues.

Will's social and cultural commentaries are on point, provocative at times but always engaging. He is a thinker of the first order, and an educated one as he quotes liberally from other great thinkers both conservative and not. (Daniel Patrick Moynihan is one of his favorites.) That is one of the strengths of this book; it is a time trip through the development of American governance with the key detours and wrong turns revisited. It is an education in conservative thought and practice from an educated man. Not surprisingly this book developed over many years, its birth pangs occurring in a doctoral dissertation he wrote at Princeton.

His recurring theme that never disappears from the printed page is the struggle between those who follow the Founding Fathers in their vision for a republic based on liberty and those who don't and are working to overturn it. He clearly is in the former camp and has written a superior apology for it.

It is our creedal nation's set of ideals, a conservative sensibility, that he despairs of being lost to a progressive majoritarianism. He asks if conservatives have the "steely resolve" to inform Americans that their government has become "inimical to the virtues essential for responsible self-government." Why is our government inimical in this way? Because it fosters "both dependency and uncivic aggressiveness" in a citizenry always clamoring for factional advantage.

We conservatives must face up to the conundrum of advocating Adam Smith's free markets and their Invisible Hand as each pursues his own self-interest, all the while advocating restraint, morality and compassion. In a word: virtue. "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." Will is clear in what he sees as this past, one grounded in and constrained by the Founding Fathers and the

limited government, natural rights protection inspiring the documents they produced. Will is an originalist after all even if he doesn't like Scalia, so I suppose he must be forgiven for decamping to MSNBC.

This book is his convincing case in defense of our founding. Unfortunately, it may be just too scholarly for popular adoption. His prose is of the highest literary accomplishment and his logic nearly impossible to refute if one truly has an honestly open mind. Such people, unfortunately, are as rare in 21st century A.D. America as they were in Diogenes' 4th century B.C. Greece.

Recommendation: Unqualified.

Every conservative and libertarian must read this and then put it on his bookshelf for future reference.

Great Society: A New History

I was coming of age during the sixties, with the Kennedy-Nixon election the first in my life to keep me up all night following election results on the radio and then voting for the first time in the Nixon-McGovern election. Intense interest in politics was encouraged by several high school teachers and then my membership in an active Young Americans for Freedom chapter at my university. I flattered myself into thinking I knew what was going on in U.S. politics during this time but leave it to former Wall Street Journal editorial writer Amity Shlaes to serve me a long overdue portion of humility.

Shlaes takes on what some conservatives might call the third wave of progressive liberal overreach or what was marketed under the slogan, "The Great Society." And that's the name of her book "Great Society: A New History" (HarperCollins 2019, 511 pages, \$16 Amazon). Perhaps a more appropriate subtitle could be "A Secret History," as Shlaes goes behind the White House curtain to expose how this package of legislative initiatives truly was a camel's nose under the tent, ending

with Richard Nixon's throwing the tent wide open in 1971 with his wage-and-price controls and other command-economy policies.

The book begins with a discussion of General Electric's 1950's commitment to free market economics as preached by Lemuel Boulware and paid spokesman Ronald Reagan. GE took socialistic impulses head-on back then until eventually losing the political battle to Walter Reuther's brand of socialism disguised as social democracy.

Reuther's influence with Democrat leaders cannot be overstated, this in spite of his avowed

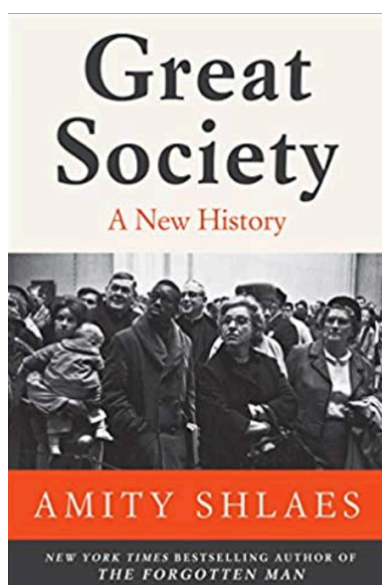
socialism. It was Reuther who started the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as a socialist front for his labor-union goals. These young socialist idealists never got the pure socialism they wanted but got close enough, causing "economic tragedy" in Shlaes' words. Eventually, as we all know, these idealists moved on to the Vietnam War and went public with their love for North Vietnam's communism

It was Lyndon Johnson, the consummate politician, who viewed federal programs as a means to cobble together a voting

coalition of beneficiaries. Johnson looked back to Franklin Roosevelt's successes with this strategy to be his guiding star. In Johnson's mind it was legislation that mattered, not the effects of the programs themselves which could be dealt with by bureaucrats. LBJ wanted signing ceremonies, then quickly to move on to something else.

An example of this is his appointment of Sargent Shriver, a Kennedy brother-in-law, to head his anti-poverty agency. Shriver, like Johnson, couldn't get interested in the details. It was grand ideas that motivated both men.

Still, yellow flags were thrown up within and without the LBJ administration, and Shlaes quotes several of these prominent Cassandras.



Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an administration insider, wondered aloud why no blacks worked in the agency created to address black poverty. A young economist, Thomas Sowell at Howard University, proclaimed that civil rights legislation was “barking up the wrong tree,” distracting the black community from looking inward to its own self-development. Barry Goldwater called the whole scheme just another “bread and circuses” governmental misdirection.

Shlaes makes a compelling case for how the Great Society rang the death knell for federalism, as Congress legislated that governors must accept federal demonstration programs in their states without recourse. Prior to this, a governor could veto a proposed program if he opposed it for any reason. The legislation also permitted direct federal involvement with cities and local governments, bypassing the state level entirely.

Then there was Johnson’s Howard University speech in which he declared that equality of results is the goal, not simply equality of opportunity. Shlaes recounts this in a chapter entitled “Looking for Socialism.”

Perhaps the darkest turn in the Great Society was when the focus shifted to training activists to protest and lawyers to litigate on behalf of faceless groups and Alinsky-like causes. It seems that left-wing idealists were finding that the poor, especially poor blacks, were not receptive to rich white kids preaching what was best for them. To their chagrin, the SDSers and other Great Society central planners learned that the poor have the same dreams as the middle class, as the priest of a poor church in St. Louis instructed them.

The courts did their share to advance this new supra-centralism. The U. S. Supreme Court in 1970 declared welfare benefits as form of property rights and therefore subject to constitutional protection. The minority opinion, supported by justices Hugo Black and Warren Burger, bemoaned the trend of federal courts to legislate by constitutional fiat without regard to the cost to government and society of its decisions. This chicken has come to roost in spades, if you will forgive the mixed metaphor.

It was in St. Louis that the Great Society came crashing down, literally. A key component of the Great Society was housing for the poor, urban renewal in its most pernicious manifestation.

The new Department of Housing and Urban Development funded a program to tear down what described as a slum, the term nothing more than a liberal euphemism for poor neighborhoods of single family homes, to build a huge development of high rise apartments named Pruitt-Igoe. This project was bureaucratic hubris at its worst, a Soviet-style complex of sterile concrete buildings with restricted elevators and no public restrooms. Single mothers were prioritized for occupancy, resulting in fathers leaving the families to maintain eligibility. The father was required to leave the state and if he returned, his family was evicted (“I’m from the government and I’m here to help you”).

Shlaes comes back to this liberal nirvana at the end of the book, as the buildings are demolished only six years after being built to so much fanfare. That St. Louis priest mentioned above had by then worked to get families *out* of Pruitt-Igoe rather than *into*.

The chapter I found most interesting was the one on Nixon’s Camp David weekend conclave of his senior economic advisors. For a group of putative free-market economists such as Herbert Stein, Paul Volker, Arthur Burns and George Schultz, these worthies produced a set of government actions that were stunning. I was an economic undergraduate then, a time when Milton Friedman’s monetarism was being taught as a crank alternative to orthodox Keynesianism. “We are all Keynesians now,” mocked Friedman in an I-told-you-so moment.

Perhaps though, Shlaes implies, one should not be so hard on this group neo-Keynesians. After all, if the president wants it, he gets it, regardless of your beliefs. These measures worked in the short run, assuming the short-run goal was the reelection of Richard Nixon. However, they produced disastrous long-term effects. And in this long run, we are not all dead as Lord Keynes once observed.

(Back to my undergraduate days, the next year we were assigned “The New Economics of Richard Nixon” by Roger Miller and Raburn Williams. I still have the monograph but couldn’t bring myself to reread it. (Shlaes does an effective job of explaining the how and why of the summit, albeit a depressing one, and that was enough for me.)

Shlaes is a good writer, using the language simply and clearly. One interesting trope she used is the TV show “Bonanza” as a metaphor for America, its unbridled optimism in the early 1960s making it the top-rated TV show until it is preempted by Nixon to announce his 1971 anti-free market package of governmental economic interventions.

Several informative graphs are included at the end of the book. One shows that federal programs begun under the Johnson’s Great Society now outspend Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, and have done so since early in the George W. Bush administration’s self-proclaimed “compassionate conservatism.” Another shows annual job growth since 1970 in right-to-work states exceeding the others by a full percentage point or more. Perhaps the most damning chart shows the national poverty rate stuck between 10 percent and 15 percent since the Great Society — managing, not curing, poverty in Shlaes’ opinion. One would only wish she had included more charts like these to visually attest her thesis.

Another interesting editorial addition is to head each chapter with a guns versus butter reflection of the percentage of GDP each commanded for that year. It begins as 9.0 percent guns versus 4.5 percent butter in 1960 and effectively equal near 7 percent in 1971. A graph at the end takes this comparison to 2000 when butter was just under 10 percent and guns near 3 percent.

Multiple those percentages by the growth in GDP over the period and you will clearly see

where federal budget increases have come from. In fact, the federal budget increased more during the Johnson and first Nixon administrations than during the entire two hundred years previously, according to Federal Reserve Chairman Burns in testimony before Congress.

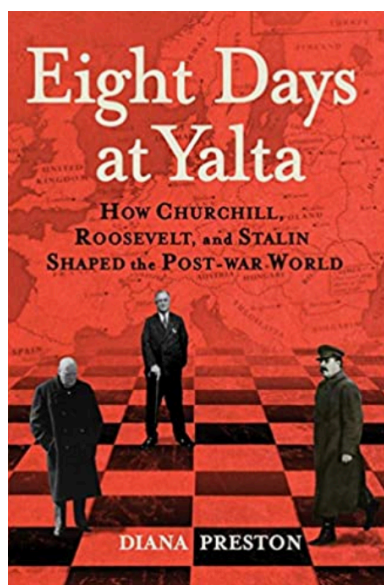
What I found most intriguing about the book was Shlaes’ ability to insinuate the reader into the thoughts and words of the protagonists. Her goal is to lead through what happened and why as the Great Society was being built. She ends her book in 1972 so there is not much retrospection on the social and financial cost of these programs. That may seem unfortunate to many readers but she does drop warnings, Greek chorus like, at multiple points in the book. But her emphasis is on the struggles of the people at the head of it all, the true believers and the skeptics as well. It is the skeptics for which she shows the most empathy. Consider two chapter titles: “Moynihan Agonistes” and “Burns Agonistes.” That is the reader’s insight into Shlaes’ insight of this saga.

Recommendation: Definitely, especially for us boomers who came to adulthood during this period.

Eight Days at Yalta

I’m not sure what I dislike about Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency more — his expansion of federal government power at the expense of both the states and individual liberty or his acquiescence to Josef Stalin’s machinations to build a post war communist empire. I’m still not sure after reading Diana Preston’s “Eight Days at Yalta: How Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin Shaped the Post-War World”

(Atlantic Monthly Press 2019, 398 pages, \$24 hardcover through Amazon) but I have a dollop more understanding why he allowed himself to be so used. The first third of the book walks the reader through the pre-conference planning before settling down to a day-by-day recounting of



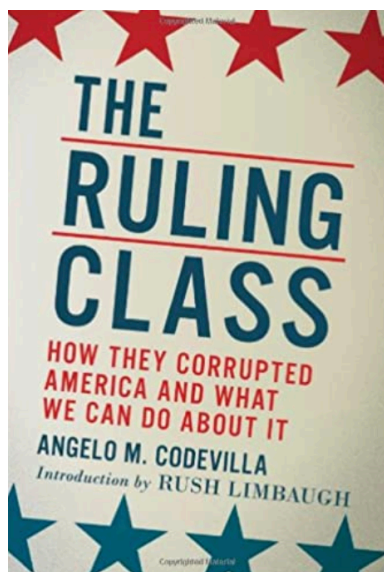
the Big Three plenary meetings. One learns of the staff meetings during the early part of each day, the one-on-one meetings between the three leaders and reflections by family members and close friends who supported Roosevelt and Churchill. (Roosevelt was a sick man as were the other two, but they were not weeks away from death as was FDR.)

Some of his geopolitical *faux pas* can be attributed to his tiredness but one can't escape his naivety. He did get what he wanted, though. He got his United Nations, a mixed success, and he obtained Stalin's agreement to enter the war against Japan, a post-war disaster in the making. He and Churchill both bear responsibility for condemning Poland to decades of Soviet rule but in their defense, the Russian army had already occupied it by the time of Yalta. The Poland negotiations may be the best part of the book, as Preston gives an intimate glimpse of what happened privately and publicly on that issue.

Still, the Yalta conference is *prima facie* evidence that international agreements with non-democratic rulers are all too often chimeras, placebos for those idealists who prefer anesthetization to having their mental utopias disrupted. *Recommendation:* Worthwhile if you are interested in the Big Three conferences.

The Ruling Class

Note to self: Never read a book that induces either rage or despair. Or both, as in the case of Angelo Codevilla's "The Ruling Class: How They Corrupted America and What We Can Do about It" (Beaufort Books 2010, 147 pages, \$13 paperback Amazon). Codevilla spends most of the book describing the Ruling Class, that one-third of America that despises the other two-thirds of us, the Country Class. It's easy to tell the difference, according to Codevilla, as it's the Country Class that marries, has children and goes to church. He



does a splendid job of describing them and us but he never really provides a roadmap for us "basket of deplorables" to take back our liberties by taking back our nation's government. He leaves one with the feeling that so thoroughly have we been anesthetized by the Left that we are incapable of effective response. *Recommendation:* Consult your doctor before reading if you suffer from high blood pressure.

Pax Romana

The concept of a *pax romana* impressed this young schoolboy historian back in the 1950s as part of my early fascination with all things Roman. Until one December, while practicing for our school Christmas service, I began to wonder why was the Christ Child needed to bring peace on earth when the Romans already had everything under control? Well, they didn't as Adrian Goldsworthy explains in his "Pax Romana: War, Peace and Conquest in the Roman World" (Yale University Press 2016, 513 pages, \$32 Amazon). It seems this Roman peace quickly disappeared as one moved away from Rome itself toward the outer provinces.

Perhaps Augustus' most crushing defeat was in a German forest in A.D. 9, just a handful or two of years after Christ's birth. This and other Roman wars are chronicled in a somewhat haphazard fashion as Goldsworthy organizes his thoughts around concepts, not historical sequence. He devotes large sections of the book to the administration of the provinces, using the relationship between Pliny the Younger during his Bithynian governorship and the Emperor Trajan, and also with Cicero (always a character of interest to me) as governor of Cilicia two centuries earlier. He seems fixated, in a good way, on the various Jewish uprisings using not just Josephus as a source but also the Gospels. And most of these insurrections occurred while the Prince of Peace was visibly on earth.

Recommendation: Make no mistake; Goldsworthy knows his Rome and his Romans.

What Ifs of American History

Counterfactual history doesn't always get the respect it deserves, but I find it thought-provoking. Whether you are a determinist or subscribe to the Great Man of History theory, counterfactuals have a stimulating effect for the contemplative among us.

Robert Cowley, founding editor of *Military History Quarterly*, is a one-man marketing department for counterfactuals. After publishing three volumes of European and world history counterfactuals in his "What If?" series, he added an American edition to the series. "What Ifs? of American History:

Eminent Historians Imagine What Might Have Been" (G. P. Putnam's Sons 1999, 298 pages, \$15 Amazon) assembles an A-list of historians to speculate on key points in our history such as Washington's escape from Long Island, John Tyler's accession to the presidency, Lee's lost orders, the financial panic of 1877 and the Cuban missile crisis. His essayists include well known authors like Caleb Carr, David McCullough, Tom Wicker, Victor Davis Hanson, James McPherson, Thomas Fleming and Jay Winik. Their proposed diversions in our history range from it really didn't matter much to nuclear devastation.

Recommendation: I read this about 10 years ago but current events compelled my return to it. You will be thankful history didn't take most of these turns. — *Mark Franke*

Backgrounders

Maryann O. Keating, Ph.D., a resident of South Bend and an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, is co-author of "Microeconomics for Public Managers," Wiley/Blackwell.



Penny-Pinching in a Crisis

(May 27) — The affluent generally have no need to second-guess themselves on spending. The rest of us do well to question practically every single expenditures in terms of our pocketbooks.

Is it appropriate to evaluate a national response to COVID-19 in terms of the dollar cost for testing of all Americans for COVID-19 paid either by individuals, corporations, Medicaid or Medicare? Facing such a serious crisis, is it unseemly to discuss cost versus benefits? Do government deficits and the national debt matter in these times?

The Federal Reserve (FED), acting as fiscal agent for the U.S. Federal Government, is required to either purchase or sell all new debt securities issued by the Treasury. This alone amounted to \$1.5 trillion in new debt securities issued during March and April of this year. U.S. government debt outstanding is estimated to reach 101 percent of GDP by the end of the fiscal year — up from 79 percent at the start of fiscal 2020.

Alan Blinder, former vice chairman of the Federal Reserve, writes that any concern about expansionary fiscal and monetary policy to deal with the economic fallout from COVID-19 crisis can be postponed until "tomorrow" ("On Coronavirus Debt, Heed the Wisdom of Scarlett O'Hara," The Wall Street Journal, May 14, 2020).

Because the FED is able to sell government securities today at super-low interest rates, both to the U.S. public and on world markets, Blinder anticipates no adverse consequences. This assumes, of course, that future annual percentage increases in GDP exceed both the rate of at which

the national debt is increasing and the interest rate paid by taxpayers to service outstanding debt.

What if, rather than selling securities to the general public, the FED holds these securities and thereby increases bank reserves that in turn result in monetizing a significant portion of this debt? Will this huge increase in the money supply cause inflation? Blinder thinks not and refers to our experience following the Great Recession of 2008 in which inflation was felt to be too low rather than too high.

Blinder, therefore, concludes that present government deficits and increasing national debt are neither worrisome nor unsustainable. However, Stephen Harper, a former Conservative Canadian prime minister, offers a different opinion. Writing on the fiscal response to COVID-19 of nations around the world, he suggests that massive doses of deficit government spending are neither required to get out of this crisis, nor needed in its aftermath ("After Covid, Government Will Have to Shrink," The Wall Street Journal, May 13, 2020).

Harper argues that although people turn to government in crises no amount of government spending can compensate for the tens of millions that have lost jobs and the thousands of businesses that have closed. He believes that following the pandemic the need will, and must, shift to jobs, growth and wealth-creation requiring more market activity and less government intervention.

Harper, citing the multiple sovereign debt crises of Mexico, Canada and Greece a decade ago, believes that the suggestion that governments can never run out of revenue is nonsensical. (COVID-19 spending, grants, loans, and contingent liabilities contribute to deficits on government financial statements requiring an immediate need for collecting more taxes or increases in the stock of our outstanding national debt.)

Unfortunately, the inevitable spending cuts and tax hikes needed to restore public sector viability will encounter serious resistance. Harper suggests that calls for increasing the limited

stipends to low income families and businesses are a factor, but the greater threat to sustainable government spending is the delusion of guaranteed maximum income for those laid off from public institutions and accustomed to higher salaries and benefits.

Harper concludes that in the absence of astronomical global growth, governments that fail to practice mild austerity will experience the brutal consequences of recession and stagnation.

Consider the difficulty of practicing austerity merely with respect to the testing of Americans for COVID-19, assuming reasonably that the full cost per test is about \$100 per person. Given a U.S. mid-2020 population of 331,002,651, four annual tests per person would exceed \$132 billion. Interest on the U.S. debt is estimated to be \$378 billion in fiscal year 2021. These two expenditures alone would account for over 13 percent of the \$3.863 trillion in expected federal government tax revenue in 2021.

Because the U.S., given the role of the dollar in world markets, can presently issue debt at relatively low rates, it is tempting to ignore the warnings of the former Canadian prime minister. The reality, however, is that for any country scarcity requires tough choices and a consensus on what is really important.

Populism: The Good, the Bad

(March 13) — When ordinary people feel that politicians and experts lack answers to important questions, they respond to leaders offering a complete change of course. Such changes are often referred to as being populist.

Populism is a political philosophy directed to the needs of the common people and advocating a more equitable distribution of wealth and power. In practice, however, many populist leaders show ambivalence toward representative democracy and instead exhibit a streak of authoritarianism. Unfortunately, populist policies, which can be economically unsustainable, often end up hurting the very ones they were supposed to help.

Sebastian Edwards, an economist, in analyzing populist experiences in Latin America,

distinguishes between “classical populism” in which leaders rise to power using nondemocratic means and are subsequently deposed and “new populism” which takes place under democratic rule. Traditional populist leaders tend to be staunchly nationalistic, opposing foreign investors and, in many cases, nationalizing multinational firms. New populists, both those who are right and left leaning, champion national identity and lament the loss of cultural heritage. Both types are characterized by protectionist policies, expansion of government and increased minimum wages (“On Latin American Populism and Its Echoes around the World,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Fall 2019, pp. 76-99).

Prior to a populist leader gaining power, a deeply dissatisfied population experiences economic stagnation or depression, rising prices for basic necessities, corruption and a high degree of income inequality. Once in charge, populist leaders ignore constraints on public sector spending and expand the domestic money supply.

At first, populist policies appear highly successful, as wages and employment react positively to the stimulus of increased demand. However, bottlenecks in supplying certain goods and services emerge, inflation rises, domestic investment declines, and a black market for foreign currency develops. The government responds by making periodic wage adjustments and offering subsidies for food and transportation.

In the prelude to collapse, price controls are intensified and business owners are portrayed as greedy or even criminals. The domestic currency is devalued and defaulting on foreign debt is considered. Real wages fall. Following this disaster and prior to regaining fiscal stabilization, household income, particularly for poor households, declines to a level significantly lower than that when the episode began.

“New populist” regimes are less likely to rely on money creation to redistribute income. Therefore, some inflation is tolerated initially as intrusive government controls and restrictions redirect income to particular groups. Inevitably,

private investment is negatively affected due to uncertainty with respect to risk. “New populists” often increase the wages of government employees and may even promulgate new constitutions to further their redistributive goals.

Venezuela during the Chavez and Maduro administrations and Argentina under the Kirchners are examples of “new populism” in Latin America. The Venezuela experience evolved into hyperinflation along with economic and political collapse, as well as a massive out-migration. Under the Kirchners, Argentina experienced high but not hyper-inflation that ended in 2015 with a peaceful democratic transition to a new government led by Mauricio Macri.

In these and similar cases, the central bank is able to finance massive increases in public expenditures. It does this by its willingness to purchase government debt and provide credit to government-owned enterprises. In such regimes, an independent central bank is the first line of defense. However, one of the first steps taken by populist leaders in Latin America, according to Edwards, is to weaken or eliminate central banks’ attempts to constrain government deficits (p. 90).

A few countries in Latin America, such as Panama and Ecuador, use dollars for public and private transactions. Having abandoned local currencies for the dollar, populist leaders in these countries, like state governors in the U.S., cannot use monetary policy to implement their agendas.

However, the populist Correa administration in dollarized Ecuador was successful at first in reducing inequality because it was able to finance public debt with revenue from its oil reserves. When oil prices declined in late 2008, Ecuador restructured some of its sovereign debt with loans from China. In 2017, the new Ecuadorian government, aware that residents prioritized both price stability and dollarization, reverted to a tighter fiscal policy aimed at stabilizing and reducing the government debt-to-GDP ratio.

The similarities between Latin America and other part of the world are not confined to history. Some scholars argue that there are good and bad

populists. A good populist creates an environment in which family, faith, learning, trading and society flourishes. A bad populist distributes coercively and tries, or pretends, to implement unsustainable popular measures.

After some time, however, deviations from sound economics are problematic. Consumers are hurt by protectionism. Excessive regulations slow growth and investment, and anti-immigration policies create bottlenecks in labor markets. Debt and unreasonably easy monetary expansion create bubbles and high inflation.

The first and foremost lesson to be learned is that “bad populism” feeds on injustice and corruption. Candor between those who rule and those harmed by existing policies is critical. However, one fact cannot be ignored: Excessive reliance on public sector debt to achieve policy objectives ultimately leads to disaster.

Eric Schansberg, Ph.D., is professor of economics at Indiana University Southeast, and an adjunct scholar for the Indiana Policy Review Foundation.



The Degeneration of the News

(May 20) — 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.

COVID-19 and the USPS

(April 23) — You may have heard that the Post Office is in the hospital with COVID-19. Part of the problem is that it has some pre-existing conditions. It enjoyed something of a sheltered and spoiled childhood. But that led it to becoming soft and flabby later in life. It has also endured capricious parenting — with regulations that have made its life more difficult. And it’s grown quite old, so it tends to be stuck on tradition and set in its ways.

Now, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) wants a “bailout.” (Hey, who doesn’t?) It’s been subsidized by taxpayers for years, but things have gotten more serious. The Post Office would be on the way to the ICU and likely death — if not for its rich parents (the federal government — well, taxpayers).

The USPS lost \$8.8 billion last year — and this year will be worse. It has been designated as an “essential business,” so it remains open during the lockdowns. Our current macroeconomic woes are making things more difficult. But its problems are clearly persistent and systemic: operating with chronic budget deficits and producing services inefficiently in a sector dramatically impacted by technological advance.

As with some other businesses, its flaws have been more clearly revealed by the crisis. The weaknesses are especially evident when struggling businesses are in sectors that haven’t been hit that hard. They ought to be OK, but are not. Government budgets and pensions are in a similar position. When governments have spent recklessly, then the tough times are that much tougher. You might say that economic downturns tend to reveal the “co-morbidities” in business and government.

Over the last decade, USPS revenues are down slightly. Prices are up and shipping volume has doubled. But marketing mail has dropped a bit; overall mail is down 15 percent; and first-class mail is down 30 percent. On the cost side of the ledger, the Post Office has the same number of workers as in 2013 and 6 percent more vehicles. It’s difficult to imagine that this makes good business sense in the face of stable revenues and advances in automation.

The Post Office has some inherent advantages. The government subsidizes shipping from overseas, especially China. It also subsidizes magazines and junk mail (thanks taxpayers). And the USPS has been granted a monopoly in first-class mail. (Do you know that you don’t own “your” mailbox?)

Having a monopoly is usually helpful for profitability. But the USPS also faces two key problems. First, their employee compensation includes pensions and supplemental health care to Medicare in retirement. Most of the labor market has transitioned to “defined contribution” plans — where you and/or your company put money into a retirement account that you control. Among other advantages: if your company goes

under, you still have your retirement account. But pensions and retirement health care are pay-as-you-go liabilities — promises by an employer to pay retirees as long as they live.

It’s easy to see why the private sector has moved away from these risky plans. But governments and their employees don’t face as much risk. They can bury the costs where the general public won’t pay much attention. And the government’s promises are seen as more secure, since they can tax us.

Beyond that, it’s not clear how such promises pensions should be financed. Actuaries can estimate how much will be needed and how much “should” be set aside — assuming life spans, rates of return, etc. But there is no simple answer to what percentage of anticipated future spending should be “in the bank” today or added each year. In 2006, Congress believed that these plans were dramatically underfunded and responded by drastically increasing the amount that the USPS had to pay into its funds — a significant part of its budget woes since then.

Second, the Post Office’s business model is obviously obsolete. Imagine that you were starting the USPS from scratch. You might offer home delivery for free — once maybe twice per week. (What mail do you receive at home that couldn’t wait a few days?) People could pay for more service if they want. Businesses would be offered a range of paid services. The Post Office wouldn’t receive any subsidies. And it would easily be profitable — with its monopoly in first-class mail and its monopoly power as one of a few companies in the package delivery industry.

Federal provision of mail services is actually encouraged in Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution. But this doesn’t imply that the government must deliver mail — or do it so inefficiently. Without dramatic changes to its retirement benefits and its business model, it should not receive any more subsidies or a bailout.

The ‘Progressives’

(April 8) — In his book, “Profiles in Corruption,” Peter Schweizer documents abuses of power among key national Democratic politicians. He calls them “progressives,” but the targets also include those who are generally considered “moderate” among those on the Left. Even so, his focus is motivated by their common desire to greatly expand the size and scope of government. Of course, all of this is meant to improve the world, at least as long as it’s run by elites like them.

The book’s title is a spoof of John F. Kennedy’s famous book, “Profiles in Courage.” In contrast to the selfless and courageous service that could make government more effective, Schweizer is asking what our most avid big-government politicians have done with the power they wield. Quite reasonably, he notes that their checkered pasts make it problematic to honor their passion to wield even more power.

Schweizer’s decision to ignore Republicans serves to narrow the field, but otherwise it’s an unfortunate choice. It leads to the perception that he’s a partisan hack. And certainly one could do a similar book on Republicans, motivated by their exaggerated or hypocritical claims to be “conservative” — fiscally or otherwise. Surely, he missed bigger fish in the GOP to describe smaller fish among the Democrats. Still, the book is worth a read, as far as it goes.

Whatever biases he might have, Schweizer certainly seems thorough — with 90 pages of endnotes. And apparently he’s accurate. Although his reports are blistering, I only see a few partisan rebuttals on-line rather than a parade of lawsuits accusing him of libel. (My only critique was his characterization of Elizabeth Warren on bankruptcy law. After reading and writing about her three books on public policy, I’m deeply troubled by her staggering hypocrisy on policy. Schweizer’s criticism there, however, seems unwarranted.)

Early in the book, Schweizer takes a brief poke at the media. But his entire book is an indirect indictment of their failure to report on such

things. He talks about Hillary Clinton (and the Clinton Foundation) in his introduction. And he provides smaller chapters on Eric Garcetti (mayor of Los Angeles) and Sherrod Brown (senator from Ohio and a potential choice for vice president) to fill out the book. But his top targets are six of the most prominent candidates for President in the current primary season.

Schweizer critiques Kamala Harris and Cory Booker for campaign-finance shenanigans. He criticizes Harris and Amy Klobuchar for selective enforcement of laws when they served as district attorneys — especially Harris, for the apparent connections to donor interests. (He also tags Klobuchar for her trouble with high levels of staff turnover.) He underlines how massive corruption continued unabated in Newark under Booker — as well as his unseemly connections to Mercury Public Affairs and the Mueller investigation. And he details a staggering array of corrupt dealings in the Biden family — with son Hunter (in tandem with Devon Archer), sister Valerie, son-in-law Howard Krein and brothers James and Frank.

(Along the way, Schweizer also provides a variety of interesting biographical nuggets: Harris is a mix of Jamaican and Indian ancestry, with the latter influencing her religious beliefs. And she had an affair with Willie Brown — a prominent California politician, 31 years her senior — who helped to advance her career. Cory Booker has been active in and influenced by Judaism. And he is descended from slaves and slave-owners, making his argument for reparations seem especially strange.)

Schweizer describes Warren’s use of “Native American” to advance her career, as well as her lucrative corporate consulting and the political connections she used to profit her daughter and son-in-law. He points to Bernie Sanders for evasion of campaign finance information and enriching his family (girlfriend and then wife, Jane — as well as her daughter Carina and son David). Schweizer also discusses at length the unfortunate tenure of Sanders’ wife as president of now-defunct Burlington College. And ironically, given their rhetoric, Schweizer notes that Sanders

had few investments in “socially responsible” funds, while Warren had none.

Even though all of these politicians frequently talk about income and wealth inequality, they are part of the top tier in terms of income and wealth. More important, they’re part of “the 1 percent” in terms of power. It seems naïve and damaging to give them even more weight. Schweizer makes clear that their use of power has been abusive, corrupt and regressive — rather than admirable, conscientious or “progressive”.

The Co-Morbidity of Debt, ‘Stimulus’

(April 1) — COVID-19 is causing all kinds of trouble — for physical, mental and economic health. Policy-makers are trying to limit the pandemic’s spread while dealing with its implications for individuals, companies, and the economy.

For individuals, Congress and President Trump have chosen a dual approach. They’re mailing checks to everybody, and there’s assistance for those who have lost their jobs — an expanded form of unemployment insurance.

With assistance, there is a general trade-off between two desirable goals: well-targeted and delivered fast. Targeted is better — for key efficiency and equity reasons (it’s less costly and why should people receive help if they don’t need it?).

But the bureaucracy may not be able to execute a targeted policy quickly enough to help people in need. It takes time to process so many unemployment claims. And even with mailing out checks, if you don’t have direct-deposit information already on file with the IRS, you probably won’t get the money anytime soon.

For small business, the government is providing subsidies, deferring loans and taxes. Again, one worries about whether the bureaucracy will be nimble enough to implement these well. And for larger businesses, the government is subsidizing loans. The chief concern here is cronyism. In all of this, the broad problem is whether government

activism in practice will work (nearly) as well as one would hope.

One implication: Our leaders are calling this “stimulus,” but that doesn’t make it so. Even if some of the pieces are stimulating, it does not mean that it will help overall. We only need to remember the Great Recession under Presidents Bush and Obama to see that “stimulus” does not always stimulate.

Another concern is that this new spending of \$2 trillion is additional deficit spending — when the government has already amassed an impressive national debt and has made promises that amount to liabilities (Social Security and Medicare). With any government debt, there are ethical and practical issues. When and why should we make future taxpayers pay for stuff today? (The best examples are long-lived infrastructure; the weakest contexts are redistribution.)

With COVID, serious illness and death are more likely if there are underlying health conditions such as heart or respiratory ailments. These are called “co-morbidities.” It’s the same with our debt. This deficit spending, by itself, might be tolerable. But another \$2 trillion — on top of the current \$24 trillion and an estimated liability of \$50 trillion to retirees — could be fatal.

As in personal finance, there comes a point where one cannot recover from debt. Either the debt gets too large or the underlying resources to finance debt are diminished. Our economy is dealing with both right now: more debt and less GDP. How much debt and liabilities can we incur before the promises are incoherent and people will no longer loan us money at the same low-risk interest rates — or eventually, at all?

When that happens, the only option for an individual is bankruptcy. Government can do the same — reneging on the debt altogether or devaluing the debt (e.g., paying it back 50 cents on the dollar). Government can also print money to pay the debt — leading to rampant inflation.

Default and inflation are devastating to those who have those resources, especially the retired. Both are painful for an economy and common in

less-developed countries — a big part of why they remain “less-developed.” At what point would our first-world problems become third-world sorts of problems?

If we survive this round of borrowing, the growth of government in a crisis usually leads to bigger government in the long-run — even after the crisis has ended. The nature of government spending and bureaucracy is that it’s easier to add than to subtract. (Robert Higgs describes this beautifully in his classic book, “Crisis and Leviathan.”)

Why don’t people take government debt seriously? For one thing, we’re spending someone else’s money. Another problem: Trillions are so large that it’s incomprehensible. It’s helpful to use what I call the “rule of 12.” Since we have one-third of a billion people in the U.S., every billion dollars will cost the average person \$3 — and \$12 from the average family of four. Trillions are more challenging, since it’s one thousand billions. But it’s still the same math: one trillion works out to \$12,000 in future taxes from a household of four; \$2 trillion is \$24,000.

Debt is useful in one way. If you follow the issue long enough, you can tell who’s a partisan. When their party is in control of government, debt is never as big of an issue as when the other party is in control. (This is especially galling for Republicans, who often claim to be fiscally conservative. Similarly, Democrats should be thumped for avidly advocating military interventionism and pounding the working poor and middle class.)

But it’s never a good look to be a partisan for lousy groups. We can hope they’ll self-quarantine soon.

A COVID-19 Basic Income

(*March 25*) — You may remember Andrew Yang. He was a Democratic candidate for President who had a surprisingly successful run. He didn’t have any political experience. And unlike most of his competitors, he brims with joy and thoughtfulness about policy. His most

intriguing (and popular) proposal is to give every American \$1,000 per month.

With COVID-19, some politicians have been pitching similar proposals — at least temporarily, during the crisis. As usual, it would be better — at least on paper — to target the assistance, more effectively, to those in need. As such, quicker and more liberal unemployment insurance and health care for the newly-unemployed makes more sense, assuming the government can do this well.

The fancy term for this is “Universal Basic Income (UBI),” that is, everyone should have (or be given) enough income to survive. The idea has been around for decades and championed by thinkers and politicians on the Left and the Right. (As a budding young economist, I remember reading about it through Milton Friedman.)

Yang motivates UBI from his concern about the impact of technological advance on the labor market. This is always a factor in the “churn” of the market. But he believes this time is different — along the lines of a crisis, particularly for less-skilled workers. (His favorite example is truck drivers being replaced by self-driving vehicles.) I’m confident that his worries are exaggerated — that our current technological advances will not be much more disruptive than what we’ve seen in the past.

But there are other reasons to consider UBI. A year ago, I read Charles Murray’s nice little book on the topic, “In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace the Welfare State.” His argument is that UBI would be better than our current welfare system — cheaper, less intrusive and fewer disincentives. If America insists on a significant “welfare state,” a well-constructed UBI would almost certainly be better.

Murray’s UBI proposal is that all Americans ages 21 and over would be offered catastrophic health insurance coverage and \$10,000 per year by the federal government. (High cost-of living states might choose to supplement this. If not, many people would choose to move to lower cost-of-living areas.)

Yang’s proposal kicks in at age 18, but Murray is wiser in proposing UBI at age 21. This is crucial, since the habits created between ages 18 and 21

will change the way that the UBI is perceived. Someone in college will not be tempted (much) to leave college to rely on the UBI at 21. Someone who works after high school for three years is less likely to be tempted to leave a job, income, and career path to rely solely on the UBI at 21.

The UBI would replace all other federal welfare programs. People could opt into the UBI or stay with their current arrangements. As Murray explains, aside from people at or near retirement, most people will choose the UBI. (Again, states might supplement these efforts — particularly, to help those with children.)

One advantage is immediately obvious: the dog's breakfast of current federal welfare programs for the poor would be replaced by a cash grant that is simpler, more efficient, and less prone to promote disincentives to work, to save, and to form and maintain a two-parent household.

Unlike welfare programs, all people would receive the UBI, so it would remove the stigma for receiving “assistance”. It would reduce the disincentives to work because you would still receive UBI, even if you earned quite a bit. It would reduce the disincentive to save. Currently, recipients can have their government benefits reduced or even cut off — if they save “too much.” And it would reduce the disincentives against two-parent households among the poor, since current programs are often conditional on not being married.

Conservatives will applaud the UBI's efficiency and reduced disincentives on work, saving and family formation. Liberals will appreciate resources for the needy, the removal of stigma for welfare and disempowering the bureaucracy that tends to dehumanize recipients.

How would we pay for the UBI? It turns out that the current set of entitlement and welfare programs are more expensive. Murray recommends a modest UBI reduction rate between \$30,000 and \$60,000, so that those above the poverty line receive less from the UBI, reducing its costs. (And we might expect wealthy

and liberal people to refuse the payments, lowering costs further.)

Murray's concerns are clearly valid. Society cannot afford to destroy incentives to work, save and raise children in two-parent households. And taxpayers cannot afford the current system of entitlements and welfare programs. The UBI would be a big improvement over the status quo. Thanks to Murray and Yang for promoting the idea.

Virus to Test Education's Worth

(March 18) — Economists talk about the “human capital” and “signaling-screening” aspects of education. The impact of the COVID-19 virus on schools and students allows us to consider these two ways in which schooling is useful for individuals and society.

Human capital is the role of education in building general and specific skills. In elementary and secondary schools, it is foundational — basic knowledge and basic skills in literacy, fluency, numeracy and socialization. In college, human capital accumulation ranges from improved oral communication, critical thinking and time management — to the ability to execute laboratory work, create artwork and interpret balance sheets.

More human capital is good for those acquiring the education — and for society at large. A more educated population is more likely to be productive, to invent and innovate. Those with more education tend to stay out of trouble and have less turmoil with family stability and structure. The educated are better able to withstand the dynamics of labor markets. And so on.

Signaling-screening is the extent to which education allows employees to more effectively “signal” and firms to “screen” applicants. For example, people who graduate are generally sharper than those who do not. High schoolers who take more Honors and AP courses typically work harder than those who do not. Students with a 3.5 GPA are usually more disciplined than those who have a 2.5 GPA.

As such, schooling can be valuable, even if it is not relevant to a job. It's still useful to distinguish between those who jump through a hoop and those who do not. Getting over a hurdle of educational attainment often indicates greater future productivity. If so, it's important to individuals — and to society — to promote effective matches between firms and employees. At the extreme, even if school taught nothing useful in terms of human capital, it would still serve vital purposes as signaling-screening.

In college, the extent of human capital and signaling-screening varies by type of school, by major, by course, by teacher effectiveness, etc. Some majors are quite focused on specific human capital aspects. If you're an accounting major, you'd better learn how to do accountancy. An economics major acquires more general skills — and the degree has more signaling-screening, since its material is relatively challenging. Whatever degree you get, it has value — in signaling that you're probably sharper than those who didn't graduate.

COVID gives us an opportunity to think about these distinctions. What happens when colleges cancel half of a semester? What happens when schools switch to e-learning or on-line (especially when it's cobbled together in a hurry)? “Education” is reduced, but how much are human capital and signaling-screening reduced?

Full-time college students need eight semesters to graduate. So, half of a semester is about one-sixteenth of their education. Would we expect their skills to be 6 percent lower as a result? Of course, e-learning and other adjustments will reduce the loss, but how much human capital will they forfeit? (And does it matter whether one is a chemistry or history major?) Or think about elementary and secondary schools. If students lose one quarter, do they lose one-fourth of a year in terms of human capital? (It'll be fascinating to see if economists can measure this effectively in the future.)

From a signaling-screening perspective, there's some reason for concern, but probably not much. Missing part of a semester is not likely to

dramatically change the probability that people graduate. And so, the value of education as a signal and screen should be largely unchanged.

I'll close with a related anecdote. I wonder about the extent to which college education helps with the human capital aspect of “good citizenship.” A few weeks ago, I participated in a panel discussion at my university on religion and “tolerance.” In the Q&A part of the event, a student talked about an aspect of her college education. From what she said, it seemed likely that her “education” on that topic had been one-sided — even though she imagined that she had been “educated” in the true sense of the term.

This seems to be a common outcome these days. People imagine they're far more knowledgeable than they are — that they have more human capital than they really do. Worse yet, they often combine their “knowledge” with intolerance and self-righteousness — a perverse form of ignorance. In these contexts, less time in the classroom may actually be helpful. Then again, I'd bet the problem extends well beyond the classroom.

Richard Moss, M.D., a surgeon practicing in Jasper, was a candidate for Congress in 2016 and 2018. He has written “A Surgeon’s Odyssey” and “Matilda’s Triumph,” both books available at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Contact him at richardmossmd.com or Richard Moss, M.D. on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



When Red State Governors Act Like Blue

(May 15) — My state folded. The people didn't fail; our government did. Specifically, our governor. Indiana is a red Republican state with two Republican U.S. Senators, seven (out of nine) Republican Congressman, a Republican Statehouse and Senate, and, ostensibly, a Republican governor. Gov. Eric Holcomb is his name. With Republicans like him who needs Democrats.

Holcomb won the governor's seat in a series of unlikely events. He had never before won elected office. A state GOP apparatchik, he was a behind-the-scenes character. He had run for the Senate in 2016 against two Republican congressmen, Marlin Stutzman and Todd Young. Unable to compete politically or financially, the lackluster Holcomb quickly withdrew.

But then lightning struck.

When Mike Pence's Lieutenant Governor, Sue Ellspermann, left the ticket in 2016 to head Ivy Tech, then governor Pence tagged Holcomb to be his running mate. Donald Trump then tapped Pence for the vice-presidential slot. This opened the door for Holcomb to ride the Trump/Pence coattails to the governorship of Indiana.

Holcomb has since dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic like any Democrat governor would. Only he is not a Democrat, and Indiana is not a Democrat state.

On March 23, Holcomb announced a stay-at-home order through April 7, subsequently extended to May 1. The arguments against such a draconian, one-size-fits-all, statewide lockdown are many.

Selective, targeted, or more "surgical" interdiction, as Dr. David Katz referred to it in a widely read op-ed on March 20 in, of all places, the New York Times, makes sense in light of the growing knowledge of the at-risk, vulnerable populations. These are the elderly and infirm who should be quarantined for their own protection. The risk of dying from Covid-19 for the young and healthy approaches zero. Selective quarantining of vulnerable populations, such as are found in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and hospice makes sense. Closing schools full of young, healthy children does not.

Among many absurdities in the Holcomb shutdown was a halt of so-called "non-essential" or "elective" surgery, a misleading term that suggested interventions along the lines of breast implants or facelifts and not medically necessary, albeit non-emergent, procedures. These would include diagnostic studies, biopsies, cancer resections, gall bladder surgery, hernia repair,

pediatric, neurosurgical, orthopedic and cardiac procedures, chemotherapy, radiation and treatment of brain aneurysms. These are medically necessary, yet Holcomb foolishly grouped them into the fictitious category of "elective" surgery. We have heard nothing about the number of patients who have died because of the non-treatment of life-threatening non-Covid-19 medical conditions.

Holcomb and other governors introduced the notion of "essential businesses" as if they could make such an arbitrary distinction. All companies are essential to their owners, employees, customers and suppliers. Many businesses had to close, some likely never to reopen.

Consider the devastation of not the pandemic, but rather our reaction to it, to the economy, healthcare system, supply lines, schools, tens of thousands of shuttered businesses and tens of millions of unemployed Americans — a horrible self-inflicted wound. How has it come that Indiana, a very red state, would have followed the same failed policies of deep blue states? Particularly when there are eight states that did not issue blanket lockdowns? They are close to Indiana geographically and, although not identical, are at least similar demographically. These include North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Arkansas and Iowa. Also included are Wyoming, Oklahoma and Utah.

Source: Worldometer

Deaths per Million as of May 6:

IN: 207

IA: 70

OK: 65

NB: 43

ND: 41

SD: 38

AK: 28

UT: 21

WY: 12

Unemployment Rate as of April 30:

IN: 16.8% (7th highest in the nation)

IA: 14.9%

OK: 14.9%

ND: 14.1%
AK: 13.2%
WY 10.1%
NB: 10%
UT: 8.4%
SD: 7.2%

Indiana, with a total of 1,377 deaths or 207 deaths per million, saw an unemployment rate of 16.8 percent. New York, with 25,436 deaths and 1,378 deaths per million, had an unemployment rate of 10.5 percent. On the other hand, South Dakota had 34 deaths, or 38 deaths per million, and an unemployment rate of 7.2 percent.

Holcomb, like so many others, sought to “flatten the curve,” but succeeded only in flattening the Indiana economy.

The author Daniel Horowitz rightly complained about Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz’s lockdown of that midwestern state, its low death rate but devastatingly high unemployment rate in comparison with New York. Walz, however, is a liberal Democrat governor of a blue state. How much worse is it when it is the Republican governor of a red state with a Republican monopoly on state power?

The problem with Holcomb is the problem with Republicans in general and the Indiana Republican Party. They are terrified of stepping out, of bucking the liberal mob, of standing up to the Covid-media.

Why not, for example, seek the aid of recognized experts and researchers in the field, many of whom have written of their opposition to total shutdowns, and have developed an alternative account? Individuals like John Ioannidis, David Katz, Scott Atlas, Knut Wittkowski, John Geach and others, could have assisted in formulating a coherent, science-based argument to counter the false narrative thrust upon us by the Covid-media and their universe of manufactured lies. Instead of following the herd, he could have educated, reassured, and ultimately liberated the state and its people from the panic and hysteria that have consumed the nation.

The justify themselves as “following the science,” a sickening phrase used endlessly by a litany of political and moral lightweights as if it were a sacrament instead of the fraud that it is. Holcomb, like so many others, actually abandoned science. He imagined himself a bold leader making a painful but necessary decision rather than a quisling who sidestepped the opportunity to benefit his state and set an example for the nation. He could have challenged the tyranny and fascism on display in many blue-states by, indeed, “following the science.” Selective quarantining of vulnerable populations was needed, not blanket shutdowns of entire states.

Rather than protecting Indiana, our economy and healthcare system, our students, schools, and churches and our civil and religious liberties, Holcomb found his inner Mussolini and locked them all down. He conferred not with his Republican base, the Statehouse and Senate leadership or the respected experts but with blue-state Democrat governors.

Again, with Republicans like him who needs Democrats?

Rethinking the ‘Deplorables’

(May 6) — My neighbors hunt. They can survive in the forest, hills, lakes, and rivers, here in Indiana. They understand the world of nature, its vicissitudes and barbarism. Appreciating its transcendent beauty and cadences, they also accept its fierce cruelties. They do not worship nature. They seek reconciliation with it that they may endure and protect their loved ones. They admire the natural world, its towering majesty and microscopic complexity, but they do not hold it on a pedestal, pristine, and viewed from a distance. Theirs’ is a realistic appraisal of nature and its vagaries, and what they require to survive.

Coming from the Bronx, I was acquainted with riding the subway or bus or navigating the busy and often treacherous streets of New York. There I learned to survive in the city, but I knew nothing of hunting, fishing, or surviving in nature. Coastal elites have disdain for those schooled in such things. They assume that food, water, and other

necessities and amenities just appear. They lack awareness of the complex grids, structures, and platforms that maintain their comforts. Or the sources of the electricity that powers their computers and air-conditioning. Or of the gasoline that fuels their cars. They do not appreciate those who make these daily, secular miracles possible, the commonplace wonders of modern, electronic civilization.

Many Hoosiers preserve food. Some steam or pressure can. Or dehydrate, pickle, freeze-dry, smoke, or salt items. Knowing how to farm, they cope with caterpillars, aphids, and cutworms; and guard against hedgehogs, fungi, and lack of rain.

Some have gas tanks and generators. They have water filters, propane stoves, purifying tablets, first-aid kits, pick-up trucks, drills, hammers, and wrenches. They can repair a car, a machine, or a leaking pipe. And yes, they also know how to install wifi, use computers, navigate the internet, and operate smartphones.

They have guns and ammunition. Well trained, many are veterans, serve in the national guard, or law enforcement, and are defenders of the 2nd amendment. They have shotguns, bolt action rifles, AR-10s, and other semi-automatics. They own handguns and an array of shells, including expanding, home defense rounds. Many have night vision, tree stands, bows, arrows, camouflage, trail cameras, scents, GPS devices, and 2-way radios. They hunt duck, quail, and deer. Floating down a river or walking the fields, they recognize the rhythms of the animals they track and pursue, their migration and trail patterns, driven by the weather, mating seasons, and food sources.

Some love to fish. Equipped with bait, rods, reels, nets, and spears, they cast for bluegill, catfish, and carp.

It is a different world from city dwellers who know only of going to a grocery or ordering online. They are ignorant of nature, although they worship it in a paganistic way, atheists as they generally are. They believe in nothing, so they believe in everything. Global warming concerns them though none would change their lifestyle to

reduce their carbon footprint. They are uninformed of the history of climate patterns, the solar cycles that drive the weather, the ice ages and interglacials that occurred well before the industrial age. They blindly accept the panicked predictions of flawed Global Climate Models, not unlike the hysterical Corona Virus forecasts that called for the Black Death and forced the unnecessary crashing of our economy. They would abhor nature if they actually had to live in it.

But these metropolitans, gentry liberals, and globalists, scornful and sarcastic, enclosed in leftist coastal ecosystems, have their opinions confirmed daily by everyone around them. Predictable and conformist, they hilariously imagine themselves wild and free, and look down at those who know so much of nature, who can live and flourish in the wild. Hunters, fishermen, food preservers, and preppers do not idolize the environment. They just respect it. Such people, blue-collar types often, farmers, oil workers, mechanics, and coal miners, make the lives of the urbanites possible. They provide them with power, goods, food, and water that they may live and sneer.

But if the power grid went down from a solar event or an EMP (electromagnetic pulse) device, or if the economy collapsed, the denizens of flyover country would survive. Probably not so our sophisticated urbanites.

They would soon realize that their clever turns of phrase, condescending smirks, allegiance to “diversity,” abortion, and the rejection of God, would mean nothing before the fury of nature and nature’s God. It would be a distant and aloof nature, whose whims had formerly been kept at bay not by Greenpeace, Sierra Club, or the ACLU, but by truckers, electricians, and refrigerator repairmen.

Their fatal conceits would vanish in terrified moments as nature delivered its cruel blows. Their high-minded rhetoric, progressive orthodoxy, navel gazing, and self-absorption would dissolve before the acid rain of Gaia’s

indifferent wrath. The financiers, media types, and hip Marxist professors would not do well. The anointed ones, the ruling class, and other pompous visionaries would descend to savagery in a war of all against all. But the country bumpkins would get by. Some may not even blink an eye, for they already anticipated this, and had spent their lives preparing.

In the age of Corona, a time of plague, with the economy crumbling, hospitals closing, streets emptied of life, perhaps the rootless cosmopolitans may want to reconsider their contempt. What is certain is that our elites, in the media, academia, and elsewhere, cloistered in liberal ghettos, amongst fellow members of the chattering class, would not survive without the welders, assembly line workers, and equipment operators. Those whom they refer to as hicks, rubes, and deplorables who cling to their guns and Bibles. Maybe they should thank them. But don't hold your breath.

Armageddon for Red China

(April 16) — The Chinese Virus, also known as Covid19 or the novel corona virus (highly bigoted against the producers of Corona beer, which is made in Mexico), is treated like no other illness in the history of the planet. It has caused enormous damage to the nation as much from government reaction to it as the medical consequences of the disease itself. It was also completely preventable.

The virus emerged from Wuhan, China under uncertain circumstances. Some have speculated that it was part of the Communist Chinese biowarfare laboratory in Wuhan where it escaped and mistakenly entered the population at large. Or it may have been a zoonotic virus arising from a live, “wet” market. A Chinese ophthalmologist in Wuhan who has since died from the disease was one of the first to break the news. The Communist Chinese regime silenced him and others to avoid losing face or creating uncertainty about China. This coverup went on for six weeks until the world came to know of the problem. If China had been forthcoming, even by as little as three weeks, it is

estimated it would have reduced the number of cases by 95 percent and limited global spread.

Part of the China coverup included silencing its experts, taking away credentials from five U.S. media outlets, and expelling journalists from the New York Times, Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal. China launched a disinformation campaign blaming the U.S. Military for spreading the virus. Playing the victim card, China even descended into identity politics claiming at the time that President Donald Trump's banning of Chinese from entering the United States on Jan. 31, 2020, was racist, a charge eagerly embraced by the Red Chinese American media. The American press went further into overdrive in defending the totalitarian regime when it accused President Trump of racism for referring to the virus as the Wuhan or Chinese virus despite having used the same terms repeatedly themselves. Puppets for the World Health Organization, like the American media, have parroted Red Chinese propaganda.

Trump has engaged in a number of unprecedented steps to impede the spread of the Chinese Virus, including banning travel from China, Europe, the UK and Ireland, sealing our borders and declaring a public health emergency. He has formed a task force headed by Vice President Mike Pence, held daily press conferences, worked with state governors and invoked the Defense Production Act. Trump has also signed the historic \$2.2 trillion Corona Virus Stimulus bill, with a dizzying array of spending and funding options. More than half the states have imposed lockdown measures, quarantines, “sheltering in place” and “social distancing,” disrupting the activities of more than 100 million people and halting the operations of thousands of businesses. The impact of placing much of the country under house arrest, the abridgment of civil liberties, and shutting down vast segments of the economy has been crushing.

In the last two weeks of March, there were 10 million jobless claims, already exceeding the 8.7 million claims filed during the Great Recession 2007-2009 from peak to trough. The stock market entered a bear market with the Dow plunging 23

percent for the quarter, its worst since 1987. Oxford Economics estimated there will be 24 million lost jobs and a 14 percent unemployment rate in April, well above the 10 percent peak reached during the Great Recession. GDP is expected to fall by 9 percent in the first quarter and 34 percent in the second quarter, the worst since World War II.

The pandemic shatters several sacred myths held by governing elites. These include religious devotion to open borders and globalism, the rejection of nationalism and the nation-state and absolute allegiance to free trade, particularly with China. Many American companies outsourced their manufacturing to China, creating enormous profits for themselves on the backs of Chinese slave labor while eviscerating the American heartland. For the privilege of investing in China and having access to its vast market, the Communist government forced companies to give the regime majority ownership and its proprietary intellectual property. In time, the regime created its own version of the company, stealing its technology and eliminating the American competition.

Yet we foolishly went along with this scam for two decades. In so doing, we knowingly jeopardized our national security, devastated our labor force, and placed our supply chains for critical products at risk. We suffered through massive trade deficits, the loss of manufacturing, the lowering of life expectancy, increases in suicide and drug dependency and the wiping out of communities, littered like so many carcasses through the midsection of the country.

Even more delusional was the notion that through trade Red China would liberalize and become a more open, democratic, law-abiding member of the international community. The Chinese government, however, is a Leninist regime, a totalitarian police-and-surveillance state that has no intention of relinquishing power. Nor will it abide rights or freedoms for its subject population. Instead, it persecutes and imprisons them, crushes dissent and commits human rights abuses and atrocities against marginalized

communities such as the Uighurs, Tibetans and the Falun Gong.

Through tax, regulatory, legal and other incentives and remedies, the U.S. must return manufacturing, recreate supply chains within the country or with allies, wean the nation from China, delink our economies, stop flooding our universities with Chinese students and treat China as an “evil empire” and strategic threat far greater than the Soviet Union. We must have free trade, but an America First free trade that benefits the nation and our workers. The cost of globalism has proven too high.

Ken Bisson, M.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, holds a bachelor of science in chemistry and a medical degree from Indiana University, Bloomington.



The Myth of Universal Testing

(April 21) — I did not vote for Trump in 2016 and I will not vote for Trump or Biden in 2020. I am a medical doctor with no allegiance to Republicans or Democrats. If leaders of either of these parties get something right, I rejoice. When either of these parties get something wrong — unfortunately far too often — I call them out.

As a physician, I have struggled to help my patients understand the scientific limitations of all medical testing. The public wishes to believe that test results are 100 percent accurate. That is never the case, and wishing it were so is dangerous. Using only tests that are 100 percent accurate would mean using no medical tests — zero.

Instead, we use tests that have fairly high accuracy and cautiously try to interpret the imperfect results we get. Physicians have to use the best tests available in the wisest manner. From my medical school days we were cautioned to “Treat the patient. Do not treat the test result.” The first thing to do when a test result did not agree with what we could see in our patient, was

“repeat the test.” It was never 100 percent accurate.

Today I am frustrated that our public health experts are not frankly refuting claims that universal testing for Covid-19 is essential “before we reopen the economy.” Our Indiana State Health Commissioner avoids the difficult math behind the truth about universal testing by simply saying, “We have plenty of tests for those who truly need them.” That is true but is incomplete. The chief medical officer for the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH), Dr. Lindsay Weaver, told physicians this week that today’s best RT-PCR test (for the presence of the Coronavirus that causes Covid-19) has a sensitivity of 70 percent among patients ill enough to need hospitalization. Among people who have mild or no symptoms, it is perhaps only 30 percent sensitive.

Simply put, the best laboratory test we have for identifying the SARS-CoV-2 virus misses 70 percent of all infected people tested when used for anyone other than the most ill.

How can that be? Stay with me for one simple example. The ISDH trending data suggest that the virus has infected perhaps 2 percent of all Hoosiers (remember, our documented cases represent only the fraction of all infected who became ill enough to be tested). If we employed universal testing for every 1,000 healthy-feeling Hoosiers, 20 would actually be infected. Of those 20 with the virus in their system, six would test positive and 14 would show a false negative result. The six with positive results will self-isolate for 14 days to limit the spread. The 14 with a false negative result will continue spreading the virus, just as they would have done with no testing. Perhaps they will even abandon social distancing after being misled by their universal testing false negative.

The low accuracy of the Covid-19 test is a relatively small problem when its use is restricted to people who are sick enough to be admitted to a hospital. Independent of their test results, all of these patients will be treated as if they are infected and all will eventually test positive on repeat tests

done days later. However, the test’s low accuracy is a massive problem when used to test the healthy general public. Among the general public, it is likely only 30 percent sensitive. Are you ready to have nurses expend scarce personal protective equipment to insert an eight-inch swab far enough into your nose to reach the back of your gagging throat, to obtain a test result that will miss your infection far more often than it detects it? How many of these expensive tests should be purchased for 6.7 million Hoosiers? How many times do you wish to test every Hoosier to obtain such misleading results — weekly, daily?

All of this is explained well by Bayes’ Theorem of Mathematics. Only highly specific and sensitive tests qualify for screening a population that has a low probability of a positive test. (For math geeks, Google “Bayes’ Theorem — Math is Fun.” You can then contemplate the additional problem caused by the dozens of false positive results produced for every 1,000 tested.)

Again, testing healthy individuals with the best Covid-19 tests we have is worthless (or worse). Getting a negative test result means nothing when you are feeling well — tomorrow you may be ill and have a virus level high enough to possibly give a positive result. Many of today’s demands for universal testing seem to be politically motivated attacks — not based on scientific reality.

We repeatedly hear, “How can we open the economy before every American can be tested?” The medical reality is this: The most reliable evidence of Covid-19 activity in your community is whether there are currently folks becoming ill. As long as there are infected people in a community, a few of them will become sick enough to need the hospital. When no one is showing up for admission to the hospital with Covid-19 illness, your community has no active virus infections (at the moment).

So what is a governor to do? The proper role of our elected officials from the president down to county commissioners is to pass along the best advice of our health experts and let individuals make their own decisions. No president has enough information to dictate what is best for

every state. No governor is wise enough to dictate what is best for every county. Only the individuals who know their own family needs and their own available resources can choose what is best for their family.

Hoosiers must not remain in lockdown until the false “magic bullet” of universal testing occurs. It never will be done because it cannot provide meaningful results among the general population. We can resume activity most safely by being vigilant to identify each new case of Covid-19 when one of us becomes ill, and then isolating all known recent contacts. Targeted testing of these individuals, along with healthcare workers and others in higher risk jobs, is necessary. Whenever Covid-19 activity has fallen for 14 days (as may be the situation in Indiana now) we must cautiously get back to work and monitor for every new case. Masks and social distancing will be with us for some time as we get back to work.

The Coming ‘New Normal’

(*March 22*) — As a retired physician I have been following the developments of the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic with interest. I think there will continue to be great disruptions to our economy for the short term. We are all becoming familiar with the obvious disruptions to our “old normal” routines. But I believe a “new normal” will be developing in several months.

My contemporaries are all too fond of saying, “That’s the way we’ve always done it.” But how it has always been done is rarely the best way something can be done. Innovations always lead to improved methods of accomplishing tasks, and Americans are great improvisers.

Today, the need to keep our healthcare workers as safe as possible has led to a rapid increase in the use of tele-medicine. Many types of routine office visits can be conducted remotely with modern technology. Grandma would say, “Not exactly new technology — I have been on FaceTime with my grandchildren every week for years.”

Cancer doctors are constantly interacting with patients who have compromised immune systems.

In this crisis time, they are being more vigilant than most of us in trying to minimize the risk of acquiring the infection and inadvertently passing it on to their vulnerable patients. Using tele-medicine for all their visits (other than surgical procedures) can greatly reduce the risks faced by their patients. I expect this will become the new normal for many types of health encounters in the future — an improvement that will have been “sped up” by our need to cope with this emergency.

I am quite optimistic about the opportunities that will develop after the first month of experiencing widespread infections. Once it is confirmed (and I fully expect it will be) that after someone has recovered from their infection, they have immunity and cannot be carriers, amazing changes will occur. This army of the recovered will lead our economic comeback. Unlike our required behavior now (stay home, avoid others, do not go to work, etc.) these heroes will be able to do the things in most need now — safely provide hands-on services. Recovered physicians can care for the ill Coronavirus patients while their colleagues can better avoid those infected. A Covid-19 recovered oncologist will be the safest physician to interact with frail patients who must avoid the infection.

The same will be possible in many industries. These folks will be the most valuable employees for some time. Imagine a restaurant staffed with employees wearing tee shirts confirming they are “Covid-19 Survivors.” Business as usual can resume for that restaurant when they open back up just for folks who have been infected, recovered and no longer need to stay home. Within months, there will be millions of “survivors” to resume doing business and to work where they are most needed and valued. Education, healthcare delivery and commuting habits are all important parts of our economy that can possibly become unexpectedly and dramatically improved by the innovations we develop in the coming months.

This pandemic is a terrible burden and the costs will be with us a long time. However, we should remain optimistic that the eventual

recovery will provide opportunities for a better future. Only our refusal to recognize these opportunities will hold us back.

John F. Gaski, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, is associate professor, at the Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame, specializing in social and political power and conflict. Dr. Gaski is a long-time registered Democrat, and long-time registered Republican — intermittently, not simultaneously or sequentially. A version of this essay appeared in the April 16 *American Thinker*.



The Media's Macabre Dance

(April 20) — In reporting daily to the media and public, President Donald Trump recently had the audacity to speak in hopeful terms about a drug treatment for coronavirus that has shown promise. That is literally all he did but apparently it was enough to set off his critics among the liberal Democrats and liberal Democrat media. (It is overdue to apply that compound modifier to the ultra-partisan yellow journalism in today's U.S.)

Trump's innocent remark was only days ago, but since then the American left, especially the media, has engaged in a rabid campaign against the referenced medicine (hydroxychloroquine) even though they have no real basis for such a reaction. That is, the drug's medical efficacy — which many physicians all over the world have been endorsing because of safe use — is clearly an issue beyond the technical competence of the mainstream media establishment. This suggests an ulterior motive for them. What could it be? The possibilities:

1.) Maybe the liberal mainstream media is honorably motivated, for once. Perhaps they sincerely believe — without apparent justification — that the drug is too dangerous and would do more harm than good. But if driven by genuine, humane concern, surely even the most lightweight media stars would have noticed the contemporary reports about hydroxychloroquine's relief of coronavirus along with absence of serious side-

effects. They have seen news of the same favorable clinical results the rest of us have. The media (or real doctors) could argue insufficient medical cost-benefit ratio, but the danger-to-health hysteria is not supported by evidence. Moreover, the coronavirus-hydroxychloroquine issue is in or near "right-to-try" and "nothing to lose" territory, so there is little realistic downside for prescribing the treatment — as verified by physician behavior. An honorable media hypothesis therefore does not add up, is internally incoherent and can be discounted.

2.) The liberal Democrat media could possibly be afflicted with Trump derangement syndrome so severely that they can no longer think straight. Although conceivable, even the angriest CNN and MSNBC celebs or the ones with lowest SAT scores should sense, by instinct if nothing else, the non-viability of their jihad against hydroxychloroquine. Even lower life forms can tell when they are too far out on a limb, as the lib-Dem media are on hydroxychloroquine. That is, even the media's reptilian-type collective brain can discern a threat to self-preservation. What if the drug works? What if it works as well as it appears to be working? That outcome would leave the lib-Dem media humiliated with the meager remnants of their credibility in shambles. Too risky, therefore not a good bet, so an unlikely answer because the lefty media's actions are contrary to their own self-interest — with perception of that interest such a low bar that even media hacks can meet it.

3.) Recognizing the cognitive capacity of any sentient human, even mainstream media organisms can see and hear the numerous reports of hydroxychloroquine success, as stipulated. Yet they still advocate desperately against its use, with obvious morbid and mortal potential consequences. The liberal mainstream media is, frankly, trying to scare Americans into not using or allowing the use of hydroxychloroquine treatment. (New York Governor Cuomo has even restricted its use in his state.) They pursue this gambit despite the corresponding lethal implications.

Although the danger of judging motives in discourse is well-established and noted, therefore only adduced as a last resort, we may be at a juncture when such a judgment is indicated, by process of elimination. The lib-Dem media can perceive the recklessness of their practice of medicine without a license. Even now the balance of extant evidence is cautiously in support of hydroxychloroquine—based on mass medical use, not this observer’s unqualified opinion. The media know full well that scaring people away from using an effective medical treatment can cause fatal casualties. That, apparently, is their intention because they aggressively perpetrate the cynical scare tactics nevertheless. Perhaps they despise Trump so much that they relish the prospect of more American coronavirus fatalities, just to damage the President. The liberal Democrat media are playing politics, deadly politics, with a national emergency.

Severe criticism, yes, but still mild compared to the way the left groundlessly calls Donald Trump a mass murderer. Recall how the lib-Dems regularly accuse their opponents of what they, themselves, are doing (e.g., collusion with Russia) — and now they accuse Mr. Trump of wanting to kill people. Logical analysis points in the opposite direction.

Politics is everything to the lib-Dems because big government is everything to them. Their sordid, grisly conduct during the current phase of the coronavirus crisis seems to align with that maxim, and also confirms the worst suspicions about their nature. It is past time to call them on it.

John Pickerill, an engineer and adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, recently moved from Indiana to Colorado. He advocates for individual liberty, free market economics, private property rights and constitutionally-limited government.



A Government in the Way

(April 10) — U.S. government bureaucracy prevented the private sector from containing the

coronavirus in America. And now, governments in the U.S. are attempting to clean up the mistake by violating our civil rights and economic freedom.

South Korea has proven a pandemic can be contained without these totalitarian measures. According to World Health Organization data, South Korea and the U.S. both reported their first case of coronavirus about the same time, Jan. 20 and Jan. 22 respectively.

South Korea reacted quickly. According to Reuters, Korean health authorities met with 20 medical companies on Jan. 27 requesting they make an effective test kit immediately and promising the companies quick regulatory approval. One week later they approved the first company’s test kit. Soon after they approved another, By the end of February, South Korea had drive-through testing centers in place and were testing thousands daily. Within seven weeks they had tested more than 270,000 and identified 8000 infections.

Then, by sharing results quickly and broadly, their people had the information they needed to voluntarily take action. Those infected self-quarantined. Those who tested negative knew they were safe to go back to work and school. “Testing is central because that leads to early detection. It minimizes further spread,” said Kang Kyung-wha, South Korea’s foreign minister, “And it allows health authorities to quickly treat those who have the virus. That’s the key behind our very low fatality rate.” Their government didn’t stop their economy or shutdown the country. Since early March they have contained their outbreak and have very few new infections, with their case rate stabilized at about 200 infections per million population.

Meanwhile in the U.S., our case rate at this writing is 730 infections per million population and climbing rapidly (as of the World Health Organization report on April 4. Two months after the disease was detected, many Americans still can’t get tested due to a limited supply of kits. U.S. labs only processed 352 tests in February, according to MarketWatch. On March 18, Reuters reported that only 60,000 tests had been run by

public and private labs combined. The U.S. had little idea of how many were infected or where they were concentrated.

So why haven't we been able to contain the virus in the U.S.? According to investigative journalists Brett Murphy and Letitia Stein of USA Today, the responsibility lies clearly with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration. First, the CDC was supposed to develop the first coronavirus test permitted in the U.S. but botched it badly. When it distributed its test kits to state labs in early February, those labs discovered the test kits were flawed and produced inconclusive results. The CDC promised to fix it quickly, but by the third week of February there was still no fix. In late February, labs were told they could now send samples to the CDC and have results within 24 hours. "That was a bald-faced lie," said Dr. Debra Wadford, director of the public viral disease lab in California. At that point she was waiting four to five days on test results from the CDC.

Meanwhile, when public and private labs offered to help by developing their own tests, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) actually increased restrictions on them after the emergency was declared. On Feb 24, the Association for Public Laboratories pleaded with the FDA to lift restrictions on labs making their own tests. It wasn't until Feb 29 that the FDA began rolling back those restrictions. "During those lost weeks in February, federal officials missed their chance to contain the outbreak before it swept across the country, unseen," say Murphy and Stein.

Had the U.S. government simply taken South Korea's approach in January and worked with labs and medical companies instead of against them, we could have quickly ramped up testing. Individual Americans would have had the information they needed back in February to avoid spreading the coronavirus. Americans testing negative would be back to work and school already.

And now, state governments are taking a totalitarian approach, commandeering entire sectors of the economy and shutting them down, prohibiting citizens from assembling in groups or leave our homes in what feels more and more like martial law. Exercising one's religion has been suspended. Nowhere in the Constitution is government granted authority to do such things.

This remedy will be worse than the virus. Many businesses might never reopen. Over 10 million Americans filed for unemployment in March. The stock market has crashed harder than the Great Depression and taken retirement funds with it. The government's answer is a \$2 trillion "stimulus package" even though it is already \$24 trillion in debt. How will it pay for it, especially since tax revenues have fallen drastically? The Federal Reserve is printing trillions of dollars which could very well trigger hyperinflation and destruction of the dollar and bond market. The federal government is starting to take control of private businesses through the so-call National Production Act.

Again, early testing could have avoided all this. Government got in the way of that and now we're all suffering for its incompetence. The likely economic depression will have us all suffering for years to come.

The late T. Norman Van Cott, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, was the longtime chair of the Ball State University Economics Department.



The Myth of Marketplace Chaos

Editor's Note: Although Indiana's price-gouging law refers only to the price of gas during a state of emergency, Gov. Eric Holcomb, reacting to reports of high prices for certain items in high demand during the Chinese coronavirus epidemic, is urging citizens to file a complaint with the attorney general about unexpected price increases. We think the author had a more informed perspective.

(April 4) — Buyers and sellers have conflicting objectives. Buyers want low prices. How low? As low as possible. Sellers want high prices. How high? As high as possible. Sounds like a recipe for chaos in the marketplace, doesn't it? Lots of Americans think so. The mind-set has pervaded our nation at least since Franklin Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal.

This notion of marketplace chaos is bogus, however. Never mind the fact that many otherwise intelligent Americans have embraced it. Also bogus is the companion notion that reconciliation of buyers and sellers' conflicting objectives is possible only if government economic "czars" prescribe the terms for buyer/seller interaction.

Just because buyers want prices as low as possible doesn't mean they're not willing to pay higher prices. What someone wants to do doesn't indicate what they're willing to do. Take peaches as an example. As long as their price is less than the consumption value people attach to peaches, buyers will benefit from buying them. Similarly for peach producers. Just because they want a price as high as possible doesn't mean they won't be willing to sell as long as the price is greater than alternative selling options.

It follows that as long as there is a range of peach prices simultaneously less than buyers' consumption valuations and greater than sellers' other selling options, mutually beneficial opportunities exist for buyers and sellers to interact in the marketplace. Buyers won't gain because sellers lose, nor will sellers gain because buyers lose. Buyers and sellers simultaneously gain. Chaotic? Hardly.

What if the above range of prices doesn't exist? Simple. Peaches will not exist either. Indeed, absent simultaneity of buyers and sellers gaining, there will be no markets. This doesn't sound chaotic either.

Peach buyers naturally gravitate to lower-cost producers. These producers will be able to — not want to — sell at lower prices. Cost is a yardstick for opportunities given up. Giving up less of other things to get peaches means you can have more of other things.

Peach sellers desiring to sell at higher prices instinctively search for buyers willing to — not wanting to — pay higher prices. These are the buyers who value peaches more highly. Any other assignment of production tasks or consumption benefits lowers peaches' contribution to overall living standards. Chaotic? Not so.

All this occurs as a consequence of buyers and sellers of peaches trying to enhance their own well-being. Market participants, in other words, unintentionally do good for others while intentionally doing well for themselves. Or as Adam Smith put it in his 1759 treatise, "Theory of Moral Sentiments":

"... he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was not part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it."

So what do peach buyers and sellers need to know to participate in the market? Precious little. All any buyer needs to know is the price and his or her maximum willingness to pay. Buyers need not know anything about their counterparts' willingnesses to pay or personal characteristics. Likewise, buyers need not know personal information about sellers. Nothing chaotic here either.

A peach seller only needs to know the price and his or her minimum acceptable price — that is, their next most lucrative selling opportunity. This means that sellers, like buyers, don't need to know their counterparts' minimum acceptable prices or personal characteristics. Nor do they need to know any details about the buyers with whom they interact. What's chaotic about this? Nothing.

Nevertheless, the marketplace assembles all this information about the terms on which buyers and sellers (individually) enter the marketplace. Any buyer or seller knows precious little, but the full panoply of information is operative in the marketplace. Pretty amazing if you ask me. Forces are at work that continually push to get peaches

produced at minimum cost and consumed in their higher valued uses.

What would a peach czar need to know in order to match the marketplace? Everything! In order to get peaches produced at minimum cost, the czar would have to know everyone's minimum acceptable price. Similarly, to get peaches to their highest consumption valuations, the czar would have to know everyone's consumption valuations. What's the likelihood of this? Zero.

It makes no difference how many computers the czar has or how high his or her IQ. They will not be able to match a marketplace where individual participants need know almost nothing about those with whom they interact. Anyone who thinks czars can match the marketplace is either profoundly stupid or delusional. Friedrich Hayek labeled them subject to a "fatal conceit." Did he go too easy on them? I think so.

One should expect market conditions to change. Indeed, buyers' consumption valuations can obviously change, either across the economy or in segments of the market. Likewise, sellers' alternative selling options can change. Do these changes breathe some life into the marketplace chaos notion? No. In fact, the result is quite the opposite.

Let's consider a product other than peaches. Chainsaws and generators following a hurricane that sweeps up the Atlantic coast bringing downed trees and electric-power outage for many Americans are a great example. The immediate consequence would be an increase in consumption valuations for chainsaws and generators in the affected areas. The prices of these items will rise in these areas.

These price rises will have two important consequences. First, it increases the cost of selling chainsaws and generators in areas not hit by the hurricane. As a result, sales of these items will fall in the unaffected areas. What happens to these "unsold" chainsaws and generators? They go to the hurricane-struck area to take advantage of the higher prices there. The higher prices also provide an incentive for chainsaw and generator

producers to increase production. For whom? Again, residents of the hurricane-struck area.

It follows that the marketplace has a mechanism to assist those suffering from hurricane damage. That mechanism is the higher prices. They reallocate existing production and increase production. Information requirements for buyers and sellers are unaffected. All they need know is the price and their respective willingnesses to pay and selling alternatives.

Most know, of course, that prices of items like chainsaws and generators are not permitted to rise following hurricanes. Most state and local governments freeze such prices at their pre-hurricane levels. This means that affected residents are denied the marketplace's mechanism for easing their plight. They are left with concerned citizens in the rest of the country and government agencies trying to provide assistance, none of which possess sufficient information about the higher consumption valuations of the items they dispense.

If you want to know a true recipe for a chaotic marketplace, imagine again what would happen if the peach market were administered by a czar. That the czar would have any idea about peaches' lower cost producers and higher valued consumption outlets is ludicrous. Likewise for the czar knowing what price(s) will result in all potential trades being consummated.

Rather than buyers competing among themselves, and sellers competing among themselves, based on price and quality issues, buyers and sellers will be competing for the attention of the czar. In other words, competition shifts from the economic marketplace to the political marketplace.

The "coin of the realm" becomes political "money." What is this latter money? How about campaign contributions to those in power? How about bribing the czars? What about various forms of racial, ethnic and ideological discrimination? Similarly for a policy of rewarding your friends and punishing your enemies? Chaos?

You bet. Chaos accompanied, moreover, by a decline in living standards.

Inflationary Economics in the Black Death

(*March 27*) — The Black Death ravaged Europe, starting in Italy, in the middle of the 14th century. Substantial percentages of entire populations died — estimates range between 30 and 60 percent. Maybe 75 to 200 million people.

Would it have made any difference for overall living standards if Spain could have tapped on its subsequent influx of gold from Central and South America? That is, would the substantial increase in the money supply have somehow mitigated the adverse economic consequences of the plague?

The short answer: No. Production had declined because there weren't as many people around to produce. More gold would be chasing fewer goods and services, a sure-fire recipe for inflation. Indeed, prices would have risen without the new gold, because the same amount of money would be chasing fewer goods and services. More gold would mean even higher prices. There is no evidence that inflation is a source of higher productivity, then or now.

That it would have been the Spanish bringing the gold to Europe. They would have been “first-spenders.” They, in effect, would be the beneficiary of what is called an inflation tax on money or seigniorage. This is how governments throughout history have been able to command resources by printing and spending new money.

In other words, the gold influx redistribute claim over a shrunken economic pie from the rest of Europe to the Spanish. Sure, people would have had more money but the Black Death shrunk the pie, regardless of how much new money they had.

Jumping forward almost seven centuries, what parallels can we draw between the Black Death and the coronavirus? The fatality rates are obviously different, but that's beyond the focus of what follows. The COVI-19 virus has resulted in production facilities being shut down, movement of people is restricted, and people are urged to stay home. This shrinks the economic pie. People

aren't dying, but because they're not producing they're “dead” economically.

Amazingly, the government's response to the shrunken economic pie parallels my thought experiment with the Black Death. Like dogs returning to their vomit, government does what it does best: Spend other peoples' money for the supposed benefit of yet other people. Like the new gold, The Federal Reserve System floods the economy with new money and competition ensues to come up with spending boondoggles.

Oh, sure, handing out billions of dollars via various spending boondoggles ostensibly targeted at those hit hard by the decline in national income may give the impression of having avoided the cost. Ditto for having the Federal Reserve System flood the economy with new money.

No matter how you slice it, however, the pie is still smaller. That won't change until production facilities reopen and people are allowed to move around. At best, the boondoggles and new money redistribute claims over the now smaller economic pie. They don't avoid the cost of lost production.

The boondoggles do provide political cover for those enacting them. An electorate unschooled in economics falls for their hook, line, and sinker — seemingly every time. So it is with our government's attempt to offset the consequences of shutting down economic activity. Lots of pomp and circumstance signifying nothing save the creation of yet more spending constituencies feeding at the public trough.

Jason Arp, for nine years a trader in mortgaged-backed securities for Bank of America, was recently reelected to a second term representing the 4th District on the Fort Wayne City Council. Arp has served on the Redevelopment Commission, the Community Legacy Investment Committee and as co-chair of the Finance Committee of the Common Council.



City Business as Usual?

(*April 2*) — Recently, our city council had its first somewhat regular meeting since the

beginning of the great coronavirus panic. Something that night struck me as odd.

The schools have been closed. Restaurants, bars and entertainment venues have been shuttered. All “non-essential” businesses such as hair salons and music shops have been closed. Landlords are being told they can’t evict for non-payment of rent. These draconian actions are and will continue to have drastic negative economic consequences.

But during this meeting it became clear that the city administration somehow thinks it is immune from all this. That night, the council approved two leases totaling \$16 million for new vehicles for the city. Many of these were for the utilities, parks and administrative departments. Only about \$6 million was for squad cars and fire trucks. Yet we were told that all the leases were essential for the business of the city.

In an exchange with the deputy controller, it became evident that the city is still expecting to collect taxes as if nothing has changed. When asked about expected delinquencies, the administration’s response was that people paid their taxes in the mortgages and those have been in escrow for months. In reality, 60 percent of the property taxes in our county bare from non-residential sources, and nearly half of the residential properties do not escrow. Many residential properties are rentals or don’t have mortgages.

The coming period of 30 percent unemployment caused by the various government edicts will have a dramatic impact on tax collections. When the owners of the retail and commercial institutions don’t get their monthly rent checks from their shuttered tenants, it’s likely they’ll hold off on paying their property taxes. When landlords for the masses of unemployed service workers don’t receive rent, they may delay payment until the second half of the year.

These are not sky-is-falling predictions. This is a likely scenario that could cause severe shortfalls exacerbated by bonding of TIF districts. For instance, general funds may have to make the scheduled interest payments for projects like the

baseball park that depend on retail shopping centers, namely Jefferson Point.

At that meeting, I asked the administration for a pro forma analysis showing the impact to each department of a drop in revenues. To date, council has not seen it. While in the real world things are anything but business as usual, the government sector seems to think it can go on spending without breaking stride.

The Virus and City Finance

(March 16) — On Friday the 13th, I attended an emergency meeting of local government officials regarding the Wuhan Virus or novel coronavirus. A variety of city and county elected officials were convened for a briefing from the county health department. After an assortment of scary words, like “pandemic,” “quarantine” and “police power” were pronounced, we were treated to a few statistics, none different than what you are seeing on the news. These were married to news clippings from the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic. Ultimately, we received encouragement to keep our hands clean and avoid large groups.

My constituents need to know, too, that this will have especially severe financial costs for my city and many other Indiana cities whose council majorities have borrowed on the foolish assumption that such an event would never occur, a misjudgment to be addressed later in this article.

As I write, of course, the ultimate course of the Wuhan Virus episode is unknown. For all we know it could end up having health effects on this country anywhere on a scale between the annual flu and the 1918 version. Given the uncertainty and lack of tangible information, it is unprecedented to close the schools for nearly a month and cancel all meetings of groups larger than 250 people.

In my 46 years I’ve only seen this level of anxiety once, the days following 9/11. My church, and many others around the country did not hold services this Sunday. This is the only time I can ever remember this happening. The level of fear of something that may be a threat is astonishing.

One can be fairly certain, however, that these actions by government agencies, whether justified or not, are going to have material consequences on the economic outlook for the remainder of the year, perhaps longer. Whether masses of people are going to get sick from the virus remains to be seen, but without doubt millions are going to lose their jobs because of the actions being taken now.

Individuals, businesses and governments in the U.S. have accumulated debts that have in aggregate approached the levels prior to the last recession. High levels of debt increase earnings ratios in good times, however a downturn in sales and economic activity often means bankruptcy. Those who have borrowed for their catering business or restaurant will be cutting expenses and laying off employees, if not closing their doors forever. The employees will be buying fewer TVs and cars. The government's reaction to a possible virus epidemic has ensured a sharp recession.

As a city councilman, I have to worry about whether the city government will be able to continue to provide the services needed to protect the lives, liberty and property in the manner taxpayers have come to expect. An economic downturn will mean lower tax revenues than recent years. Since the council majority spends nearly every penny we receive, a reduction in revenue necessarily means a decrease in expenditures.

The bigger problem comes from the level of financial leverage the city has taken on. Through bonding (direct loans) or structured leases (same effect as borrowing) the city has amassed financial obligations that have to be paid first. Economic development projects to construct garages, office towers and apartments have been made the first fiscal priority. Again, when the inevitable economic downturn occurs, these bonds and leases have to be paid in order to avoid bankruptcy. That means the reductions in spending will have to occur in police, fire and street-department budgets to the extent they don't have longterm contracts.

The disregard of financial prudence in the fat times ensures that lean times will be even leaner.

The city will have to decide whether to further raise taxes in order to maintain the level of critical services citizens are accustomed to, or to allow the number of police officers and firefighters to dwindle.

On the other hand, fiscal prudence during good times allows people in all walks of life to live fearlessly during crisis. That is the lesson usually taught by hard times. Clearly, most government officials didn't learn it a decade ago in the last recession. They never do.

John A. Teevan, D.Min., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, has worked in economics, theology and intercultural relations. He studied economics at Princeton before attending seminary. Dr. Teevan was a pastor for over 30 years and founded the Social Concerns Committee of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.



Phase II of the Coronavirus Struggle

(March 23) — Our economy is disintegrating, but we are getting a good start on COVID-19. We can handle a few weeks of staying home, but now isolation is turning into a shutdown disaster that could economically harm virtually every American. A stepped program, however, could address both concerns in what could be called a phase II of this struggle.

We can begin by recognizing our progress, sobering up to realities and taking deliberate steps. The first reality is that COVID-19 is a virus that exists worldwide and that, as all viruses, will reach virtually everyone on earth in the next year or two. Even our extreme isolation cannot adequately prevent exposure for long.

The second reality is that the best way to fight COVID-19 currently is with the antibodies in the people who have had the disease or who have been vaccinated.

The third reality is that COVID-19 is not the only threat to American people; an economic collapse will soon have its own devastating effect.

The alternative to these twin disasters is suggested in four steps:

Lift Many Restrictions in Early April — Once preventative measures are in place, gradually lift restrictions. What is meant by “in place”? We will have learned to do social distancing well. We will have protective clothing, masks and test kits and we will have started to produce ventilators at a WWII pace.

Let Those under Age 60 Return to Work — Since it is the over 65 age group that is more vulnerable to COVID-19, let people under that age go back to work. Reopen restaurants, retail stores and malls, businesses and factories in early April. Allow meetings of up to 500.

Continue Isolating Restrictions on Those over 60 — Isolate the vulnerable part of the population. Continue restrictions on nursing homes and similar hotspots. Limit large sports events until conditions support ending that restriction.

Resume Normal Education — Allow children and smaller colleges to resume classes by May 4 so they and their teachers and administrators can finish the school year in some normalcy.

To summarize, yes, many will get COVID-19 but they will be the less vulnerable and they will form that essential recovered core of

those with antibodies. The fear of infecting those at risk is far from zero but again COVID-19 exposure is coming over the next years in any case. Finally, if a vaccine appears this spring, we can move into Phase II even more confidently.

If these recommendations seem wild, consider that by late summer there will be a massive and unprecedented closure of businesses large and small. Virtually everyone will be in danger of unemployment. The federal government, at the least, will be tempted to nationalize the hospitals, drug companies and medical suppliers. Some degree of social chaos is likely. Moreover, a move against the United States by foreign enemies at this moment of vulnerability will become a real possibility.

Since it's impossible to perfectly protect both the economy and citizens from a virus of this sort, the choice is a hard one between: a) a thoughtful easing of COVID-19 restrictions based on progress toward full protection; and b) putting the businesses and jobs of every American at risk in a decimated economy.

We do not have to burn down the house to get rid of the mice. ♦



Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

The Outstater

A Typical 'Helicopter Drop'

A friend, trying to make sense of the then new government-subsidized economic development programs, came up with a word picture that seemed to work. It envisioned money falling from the sky at a certain time and place — a helicopter drop.

Carrying the idea far as it would go, it could be imagined this would create local development not only from the value of the cash fluttering down from above but from increases in property values below. Among the immediate beneficiaries, unavoidably, would be those with advance knowledge of where and when the drop would occur — the corrupt, in other words.

But back then, economic development, or eco-devo, was the rage. So we treated the idea as mere fun, assuming that the economic elements involved, had we fully understood them, were more complicated than our little word picture.

We were wrong.

A study this spring by the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA) looked carefully for any economic value added over a period of three decades from a multi-million-dollar economic-development project in a Chicago suburb— a mega helicopter drop, if you will.

In 1989, Hoffman Estates, a suburb of about 51,000 northwest of the city, entered into an

Economic-Development Agreement (EDA) to induce the Sears, Roebuck & Company (now bankrupt) to relocate its headquarters there. The agreement contained subsidies and tax breaks totaling \$242 million.

In addition to 10,000 new jobs, Sears promised to encourage the development of “a wide range of first-quality office, light industrial, research and commercial facilities providing a variety of new employment opportunities consistent with the needs of northeastern Illinois.”

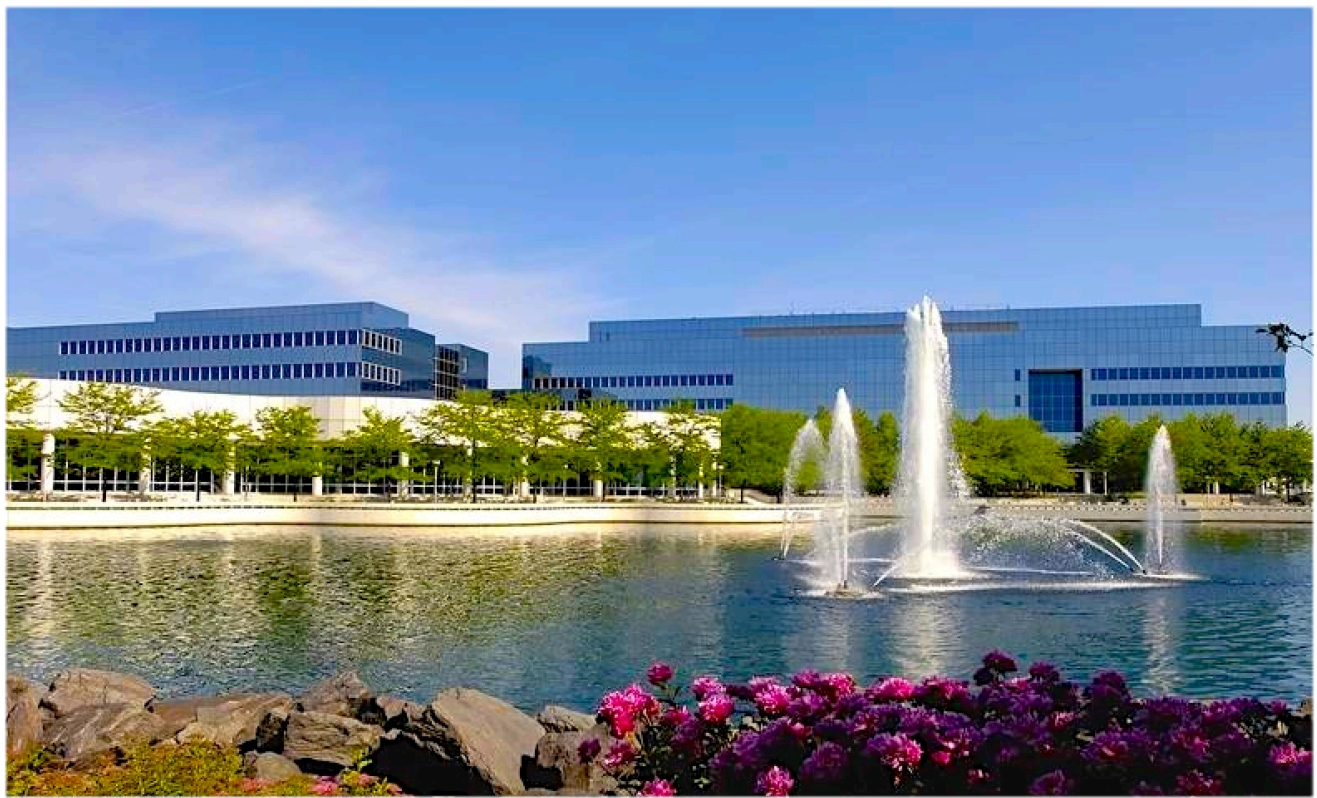
The outcome? The \$242 million had the effect of our friend's helicopter drop. That is, the “lucky” few nearby picked up some falling cash but life in the neighborhood quickly returned to normal.

In the language of the CTBA study:

“After the first nine years of the Sears EDA, the growth in total EAV (Estimated Annual Value) for Hoffman Estates not only slowed but actually began to converge with that of the control group municipalities, which were similar in composition to Hoffman Estates but did not employ an EDA over this sequence of time. For the non-TIF areas of Hoffman Estates, the results were even worse. Beginning in the year 1994 and continuing through 2017, EAV growth in non-TIF areas of Hoffman Estates under performed all the other municipalities in the control group.”

And what about those jobs?

“Labor force outcomes under the Sears EDA fared even worse. For the first nine years of the Sears EDA, covering the 1989 to 1998 sequence, the size of the labor force in Hoffman Estates grew 1.9 percent slower in comparison to the Control Group. For the full duration of the Sears EDA, including its extension through 2017, the size of the labor force in Hoffman Estates grew 2.5 percent slower than in the control group. The model suggests the impact of the Sears EDA on employment is likely negative, but to what extent it had a causal relationship with employment seems limited. That said, development under the Sears EDA failed to generate the promised growth of 10,000 jobs in Hoffman Estates.”



The Sears, Roebuck & Co. headquarters, Hoffman Estates, Ill.

In conclusion, and at risk of pushing our word picture too far, if you see money falling from the sky, know that it is yours and you will be unlikely to recover any of it.

Nixon's Revenge: Modern Media

(May 15) — in the pandemic era is a painful experience for the aged journalist. It reminds us of the wallow that our profession has become — an abandonment of historical purpose that even without the Internet explains the low esteem in which we are now held.

It is sad that this essay must start with the obvious. Polling shows approval percentages for large media so low they correspond to the number of people who might be wandering around at any given moment drunk, stoned or otherwise mentally impaired.

It is worthwhile, though, to backtrack and pick up where things ran off the rails. You should know that at some point “journalism” ceased to be

recognizable as journalism at all. I happen to know the day, the exact moment.

And no, there wasn't a sudden turn to the Left. Soft-headedness has been a constant among young reporters (although once tempered by gimlet-eyed copy editors). Rather, it was a single movie seen by millions of young high school and college students at the very time they were struggling with what, if anything, they were going to make of their lives.

I remember the premier showing of “All the President's Men” in the spring of 1976 in Columbia, Missouri, home of what was then one of the top journalism schools in the nation. I was back on campus from a first job as a general assignment reporter.

As someone with at least a yeoman's knowledge of the difficulty collecting absolutes on deadline, I was unprepared for the reaction to Hollywood's depiction. “This is it,” my friends seemed to think. “I can do this; I can meet sources

in underground garages and ask politicians hard questions that topple them from power.”

To give you an idea of the romantic pull, here is the Rotten Tomato's review (93 percent approval):

"A taut, solidly acted paean to the benefits of a free press and the dangers of unchecked power, made all the more effective by its origins in real-life events."

Paean, indeed. We since have learned that the events were not that “real-life” and that the presidency, which was constrained by a constitution, was not the unchecked power. Rather, it was glorified journalism.

But the damage was done. Enrollment at journalism schools swelled, increasing by 7 percent a year into the 1990s, fed by adolescent minds who could imagine themselves as a scruffy Dustin Hoffman if not a handsome Robert Redford.

From that moment, journalism was not about providing dependably accurate facts, however mundane, to a loyal readership. It was about destroying at any cost surrogate Richard Nixons — a careless deputy mayor, an over-the-hill county chairman, a stumbling city auditor, whoever was vulnerable and handy.

Please know that today's working journalist, even the senior editors, have known nothing else.

Political scalps have become the thing. If the story doesn't involve bringing down some politically incorrect figure, it isn't a story. Community journalism, the noblest of livelihoods, has become only a stepping stone to the big-time corporate papers and networks.

Reasons to subscribe were shunted aside. Gone were fully staffed business pages, society pages, even obituary desks and cop shops. In their place came expanded political coverage — front-to-back commentary, actually. Then there were the new “lifestyle” pages, focused on the imaginary lives of readers that never were.

Our national press conferences? They became a rowdy peppering of once-dignified elected offices. Insolence and provocation ruled, often with rude interruptions and politically tinged

challenges to the veracity of the hapless soul in front of that day's gaggle. Self-aggrandizement was behind each question, all detached from verifiable fact.

I will let Conrad Black, a leading journalist of my ilk, wrap this up:

“The national political media are primarily a sewer, accorded about a third of the level of approval from the public that the president enjoys. Their chief purpose appears to be to misinform and to destroy the first president in living memory who has called them the unprofessional rag-tag band of hypocrites that many of them are.”

The free press that Redford and Hoffman grew rich romanticizing? It come to be disgraced and endangered by their very prodigy.

Bluebird-ology

(May 9) — We owe to Nobel Physicist Niels Bohr our definition of an expert. He is someone, preferably from out of town, who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field.

I am an expert — in bluebird-ology.

More narrowly, I am an expert on how to get the ugly, bad-mannered chirpy house sparrows to leave the beautiful, indigenous bluebirds alone so they can build a nest in your backyard and sing their song of spring, a reassuring, soft, low-pitched chortle.

So please don't ask me questions about kingdom, phylum, class or order. And no, I don't know about mating habits, migration patterns, incubation or much else concerning bluebird private matters. I leave that to ornithologist and others with way too much time on their hands.

I began the path to bluebird mastery late one winter 28 years ago. The hometown newspaper had printed plans for a bluebird box. It was



recommended as a family project, so my son Tim and I headed to the workbench, pounded out our version and installed it on a shaky pole in the backyard.

Now, a bit of bluebird lore: The native Americans believed that the bluebird call warded off the powers of winter.

As a bluebird expert, I know that to be true. Within an hour of our installing that first box, a bluebird pair arrived. Their call was sounded and the weather turned. We have heard a bluebird in our backyard every year since, just as winter first begins to break. (My son, incidentally, became a bluebird expert just like his old man, managing a bluebird trail at his college's nature preserve.)

But back to the bluebird nemesis, those nasty little brutes the house sparrows. It is important to know that they are usurpers, rightly and legally classified as pests. You will not find them mentioned in any of the myriad laws protecting seemingly every other species that flies, swims or walks on earth. In short, they do not have to be treated with respect, or even kindly.

The pushy, obnoxious bird was introduced into New York City (where else?) in the mid-19th century to control linden moths, whatever they are. I learned that from the woman minding the counter at our corner hardware store.

I had purchased what is known in northern Indiana as an Amish sparrow trap, the last of about \$300 worth of mistakes in sparrow management equipment. I asked what to do with the sparrow once it was trapped.

"Well," the grandmotherly woman said, "you can drive them out into the country and set them free . . . or you can stick their heads into your car exhaust pipe for a minute or so. That's what I do."

That last did not strike me as a healthy father-son activity so we made a few trips driving trapped sparrows to the country before looking for a better way.

We found it in what is called the Gilbertson-style bluebird house. The Gilbertson a PVC cylinder made to look like birch bark. Bluebirds like it, sparrows do not. More specifically, the female sparrow does not.

At this point you need to know that a pair of sparrows, all things being equal, will defeat a pair of bluebirds for any nesting hole — every time — and that includes in my frustrating and expensive experience those specially engineered bluebird boxes with the latest anti-sparrow devices.

Your job is to make sure that all things are not equal, especially the food supply.

That means giving the bluebirds something for which to fight, i.e., mealworms. Bluebirds love the creepy little things, sparrows could care less. You will need a plexiglass-enclosed feeder box with bluebird-sized holes to keep out the blasted starlings and such. You fill the feeder box with a couple of handfuls of mealworms, the dried kind you can buy at the lawn-and-garden store.

Later, when the eggs hatch you will need live mealworms from a tackle shop, a couple of 500-count boxes for each bluebird brood. If they are too expensive, order a mealworm farm kit.

But the dried mealworms will get the bluebirds' attention. An ample supply will buff them up to a point they can chase off even the most persistent buck sparrow.

Next you employ that Gilbertson cylinder. Don't be discouraged when a buck sparrow takes possession by sitting atop it making that irritatingly monotonous call to prospective mates. He will even place a few pathetic twigs of ownership inside, his idea of macho. Throw them away.

Yes, the little devil may fool one of the less discerning females but when she goes inside she won't like the cylindrical layout and will leave him alone sitting woefully atop the Gilbertson.

Finally, in the rare case where a block-headed female sparrow shows signs of sticking around, turn the cylinder hole to face the pole and deny her access. Turn it back around when she gives it up and you spot bluebirds again. The hole should normally face away from prevailing spring and summer winds.

The bluebirds will drive away the buck sparrow, move into the Gilbertson and incubate a clutch of smallish blue eggs, laid a day at a time. In a few weeks there will be baby bluebirds (if the

exact number of eggs or days is important to you, again I say call an ornithologist).

The Gilbertson cylinder is easy to detach so you can show the babies to the neighborhood children as often as you wish. The bluebirds don't mind much. They seem to like humans, or at least are bemused by us. Indeed, after a season or two they will flit around your head at mealworm time as if in a Disney movie. Some of our earlier bluebird boxes were mounting on our daughter's busy swing set.

A final tip or two: Locate the nest away from any brush or garden plants that a snake might use as leverage to get its head in the hole, especially after a rain when snake sniffers are optimized. Also, you might want to install a raccoon-squirrel baffle.

There, that should do it. Your backyard will be graced with happy flashes of bright blue and your winters will be short.

You can take it from an expert. Guaranteed.

When Government Breaks a Promise

(May 7) — Margaret Menge, hit on an interesting story this week. The Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the people responsible for making insurance payments from the money collected by force from Hoosier paychecks on the rationale that it would be available in an emergency, seem unable to fulfill that promise.

"The thing about unemployment compensation that a lot of people sort of know, but sort of forget, is that it's not welfare. It's insurance, with the premiums paid by every employer in the state," Menge writes.

Some of you might wonder why that is news; government always fails us to some degree. Others, though, can be excused if they more or less expected government, state government anyway, to keep a simple promise of safeguarding communal savings to prevent people from starving when they lose their jobs through no fault of their own.

Economists have a name for that. It is "self-obviating idealization," the observation that people assume away the very problem the state is supposed to be solving. That is, it is assumed that the Indiana Department of Unemployment Insurance is in some way insuring the employment (or employment income) of Indiana citizens.

"What we're observing during the coronavirus timeline is that most people are making exactly these ungrounded, unjustifiable assumptions about the state and its policy tools," writes David D'Amato for the American Institute of Economic Research. "They are laboring under the delusion that the state is a kind of godlike actor, positioned above and outside of human beings, their societies and their relations. This is a way to avoid the felt psychological distress that would come from confronting some of the cold facts about the situation at hand."

D'Amato goes on to say that in fact: 1) the state is made up of human beings who are no less fallible, selfish or prone to error than anyone else; and 2) we actually know very little about the attributes of most problems the state has promised to solve, e.g., a new and mysterious virus coming out of China or the unemployment that government itself in part ordered.

So when the Commissioner of the Department of Workforce Development announces proudly that his agency fielded over 1.1 million phone calls last month, he is being honest and forthright, even transparent. Unfortunately, it doesn't have much to do with the fact that an uncounted number of Indiana citizens haven't gotten unemployment checks more than four weeks after they applied, or why so many of us, including our reporter, cannot get through to an amply paid staff on the phone.

Nor does it explain why our representatives in the Legislature blithely handed the commissioner or anyone else in Indianapolis the power to extract money from Hoosier businesses on what turns out to be a false promise, one that anywhere outside of government would be understood as a fraud.

Our Little Bighorn

“There is, to put it mildly, a huge spread (in the predictions) — the difference between a death toll on par with the number of people who die from injury and violence annually in the U.S. and one that’s closer to the number of people murdered when the Chinese communists moved to suppress counterrevolutionaries between 1950 and 1953.” — “Why Is It So Hard to Make a COVID-19 Model?” FiveThirtyEight, March 31, 2020

(April 28) —The virus is teaching us that there’s such a thing as bad data. I’m not sure we knew that before. Indeed, for decades any sort of data has been unquestioningly turned into headlines, not to mention the junk numbers spewing out of a polling industry that has descended into sophistry.



“Women Found to Be Safer Drivers than Men,” is an early example in my files. The Associated Press report, smirkingly cited by the woke as science debunking misogyny, was bunk itself. The report ignored that men at the time were driving twice as many miles as were women.

Recently, and in regard to the pandemic, our adjunct Ken Bisson, a physician, warned that the data on COVID-19 testing must be read in careful context before being set in a headline, let alone put into public policy, especially that seeking to override a free economy.

“The best laboratory test we have for identifying the SARS-CoV-2 virus misses 70 percent of all infected people tested when used for anyone other than the most ill,” he noted by way of example.

And what kind of data do you collect when cash-strapped hospital administrators learn they can charge double if they count “probable” deaths, those who die incidental to testing positive for the

virus, the same as they count those who die solely of it? In summary, we have begun to notice that all of this — the data — varies widely, and without an explanation equal to the seriousness of the situation.

None of this has slowed the headline writers. Our emotions are tossed this way and that each day as modern journalism twists the numbers to fit the narrative of moment in this “war” against a virus.

War? Bad data certainly can be fatal, if that is what’s meant. Another adjunct of our foundation, the late Norman Van Cott, an economist, addressed this point several years ago in warning that the government’s inability to gather data correctly may be the difference between chasing enemies and being surrounded by them — that is, to lose an actual battle.

So it was for the 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1875. We now know that Gen. George Armstrong Custer, the historic face of white racist arrogance, may or may not have respected native American warriors but he almost certainly was given bad data on them.

Van Cott, writing in the *Journal of Economic Education*, noted that a primary source of military intelligence for the U.S. Army at the time was the count of Native Americans on reservations. The more warriors on the reservations should have meant fewer out on warpaths.

“But who counted the Indians?” Van Cott wanted to know, a question repeated so often here that it has become an office trope.

The answer, according to a historian of the battle, Evan Connell, was government experts — agents paid by the number of Native Americans they counted, a processing error that would cost General Custer and his men their scalps:

“Connell reports that reservation agents’ salaries varied directly with reservation populations. This provided an incentive for the agents to overstate the count. In Connell’s words, ‘... an agent foolish enough to report a decrease in population was taking a bite out of his own paycheck.’”

The agents “counted” 37,391 Native Americans on reservations before the battle but later only 11,660 could be found there. Custer thought he was running to ground a relatively small party of warriors when in fact he was facing three times as many.

In our current battle, this pandemic, will government get the data straightened out in time to organize its forces?

Keep washing your hands.

The COVID-19 ‘Washed Ups’

(April 13) — Being in the age group shown in daily charts and graphs as the most vulnerable to the Wuhan virus, a wordsmith friend is trying to decide whether he is the flotsam of this pandemic or the jetsam.

Whichever, he is coming to realize that his group is that which the other age categories are content to cut loose, to leave to their own devices, letting the COVID-19 chips fall where they may so they can return to business as usual.

So be it, but let's keep our terms straight.

“Jetsam,” his dictionary says, is the wreckage of a ship or its cargo found floating on or washed up by the sea, “people or things that have been rejected and are regarded as worthless.”

That doesn't sound right — or, fair, for that matter. The friend's age group includes combat veterans, Internet pioneers, medical geniuses, not to mention the fathers, mothers and grandparents of the ship's crew.

“Flotsam,” on the other hand, seems more gentle, even applicable to the current crisis, just a little push overboard. It is unwanted material or goods that have been thrown from a ship “and washed ashore,” especially material that has been discarded to lighten the vessel.

Much better, to the friend's mind.

And he chooses to focus on that “washed ashore” part. He would like the discussion to narrow down exactly the shores upon which he is apt to be washed.

The preference, all things being equal, would be the white sands off Destin on the Gulf of

Mexico. But if a foreign shore is required (in the interests of social distancing) there would be no objection to Whitehaven Beach off Whitsunday Islands, Australia.

Let the debate begin.

Preserving ‘Journalism’

(March 31) — A friend passes along a heartfelt plea from the editor of my city's corporate newspaper. The editor is asking us, with information on the Wuhan virus being so critical, to pay for a digital subscription and thereby help “save journalism.”

The friend was inclined to respond favorably. First, though, he wanted to think a bit about what sort of “journalism” he might be saving.

It would be the sort described by Dr. Marvin Olasky in his classic history of American newspapers as “oppression journalism.” This school has prevailed for several decades now and maintains that humanity's problems arise not from personal corruption but from external influences. The role of journalists, it says, is to put a spotlight on those influences. “The hope is that if man's environment is changed, man himself changes, and poverty, war and so on, are no more,” Olasky writes.

That, as it has turned out, hasn't been much help predicting the human experience. The pictures that these journalists paint never seem to hold fast to the canvass. And for those of us who admire the late Robert Bartley, the great Wall Street Journal editor, prediction or prescience should be journalism's chief goal. It is how editors gain the trust of a readership, and that trust is what attracts advertising revenue and keeps cash register ringing — whether it be print, broadcast or digital.

This means careful attention to factual details so that readers have the best information to anticipate the events of their day, week or month — the weather, sports contests, political outcomes and so forth. The effort is never perfect but readers need to know that is the overarching attempt, rather than to lecture them on this or that.

The corporate ownership model failed to meet this challenge. Specifically, it was never able to duplicate the efficacy of an individual, local owner, perhaps irascible, minding the political cliff in the newsroom and enforcing day in and day out a defined standard of accuracy and tone.

So what would happen if the pleas of the corporate newspapers are ignored, that readers like my friend decide they can't afford its particular brand of journalism? Aren't particularly interested in saving it?

Nothing much. The staff of any newspaper or media outlet includes plenty of talented journalist who understand Olasky's point. They could step up almost immediately to man a new product under a more workable ownership model. Local investors would be available as well, some of them willing to accept profit margins lower than that sought by the corporate chains.

The current management, architects of a professional disaster of historic proportion, could be sent into well-deserved exile to their Gulf vacation homes to grumble on about the unworthiness of President Trump.

A Bolt of Sanity Out of the Eco-Devo Blue

(March 26) — In the midst of crisis, with pretense stripped away, the truth can strike like a lightening bolt.

That was the case at a recent meeting of my City Council. When the governor shut down restaurants and bars in advance of the Wuhan Virus it was made clear that what we had been told was economic development had precious little to do with developing anything — rather, that it was about who could crony what capital and how much.

First some background: The rationale behind the local food and beverage tax was that the money would be used in ways (enhancing entertainment venues, building sports stadiums, shopping attractions and such) that on the drawing board at least would increase business for those working in food and beverage. It was one of

those win-wins that politicians love to pull out of their hat.

So the tax was gathered into a special fund to be used as seed money for the grand restoration of an old manufacturing plant near the so-called economic-development corridor.

The Capital improvement Board committed \$45 million to the never-got-off-the-ground project, some of that to have been bonded but a good hunk of it from the food and beverage tax. The total local commitment was a whopping \$65 Million, including \$10 million from a municipal legacy fund and the remainder from county and city economic development budgets.

Boom. Now comes the lighting bolt. A former councilman, Mitch Harper, broached an idea in casual conversation — hold on to your seat — of returning the money to the restaurants and bars that now need it to stay alive. Yes, returning tax money, their own money that had been unwisely entrusted to the care of local government.

Harper's successor, Jason Arp, introduced the novel concept to the Council this week. Here is his thinking:

"Last night, in the council members comments segment of our meeting, I put forward the idea of a council resolution that would ask the administration to work with the Capital Improvement Board to take the unallocated balance in the Food and Beverage Tax fund, a fund that had been reserved for the ill-fated Electric Works project, and return it to the restaurants and bars that paid it into the government coffers. At this time of extraordinary hardship for dining and entertainment venues, it seems that we, their local government, could return to them the money that they could sorely use to weather this storm."

Thud. The local newspaper squelched the idea for 24 hours, finally tucking it in a political gossip column. The electronic media never picked it up, so the idea in effect is a public policy secret.

Nonetheless, Arp plans to formally propose the measure after the Easter recess. It will fail miserably. By then, the other councilmen will have been briefed on how the world works by the

gang of lawyers, bankers, architects, engineers and other rent-seeking political donors with their fortunes linked to the \$65 million.

These are men and women, please know, who will work devilishly hard to funnel those millions in their own direction, whatever project they must use as justification. The restaurateurs and bar owners, however, even with justice and logic on their side, will have been too busy keeping their businesses afloat to write so much as a letter to the editor.

It is a reminder of an economic principle: The few who have great sums to gain by rerouting public money will be more politically effective than the many from whom only small amounts are rerouted. Once the multi-million-dollar fund was created, and its specific use and management obscured in the eco-devo labyrinth of appointed commissions and extraordinary fiscal arrangements, the outcome was certain: It would be squandered on high-cost schemes related to the general good only in the imagination of the promoters.

We will never know how many actual, existing restaurants and bars would have been saved by Harper's idea — saved, of course, with their own money. Nor will we know how many would have gone on to prosper, adding branches and employees in true and natural economic development.

But again, that isn't the point. It hasn't been the point for some time.

Holcomb to the Ramparts

(March 21) — With the Wuhan virus upon us we are gaining perspective on the Holcomb administration's leadership style. It boils down to this: If there is the possibility of criticism, based on even the most narrow or isolated of anecdotal misfortunes, principle is thrown out the window.

The tenant-landlord relationship is an example. The administration, fearing an Indianapolis Star photo of some evicted tenant or another sitting forlornly by some curb, suspended centuries-old laws of private property regarding foreclosure and eviction.

Does anyone think that this couldn't have been worked out by landlords and tenants themselves? Indeed, a landlord's incentive during such a time would be to practice grace as long as possible (it's costly and difficult to find new tenants in hard times). There already are stories, off the media grid, of landlords lowering or delaying rent until the Wuhan epidemic subsides. It is a good guess that even without Holcomb's postured intervention there would be zero actual evictions in the next few months.

So, what was accomplished other than to project the governor's good guy image? Nothing. Well, not entirely. Now, going forward, there is a disincentive to invest in the lower end of Indiana rental properties. Investors avoid contracts that can be voided on the public-relations whim of a soft-headed governor.

This is the same governor, please know, who carefully avoids associating the Wuhan virus with China, pointedly referring to it as the innocuous and meaningless COVID-19.

Why is that important? Well, maybe I'm just a word guy but it reveals a dead ear to the fundamentals of liberty. Confucius said it: "When words lose their meaning, men lose their liberty." And so did George Orwell: "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four; If that is granted, all else follows."

Finally, one would think that Holcomb, who was among the 19 governors lauded as "friendly" by the Chinese government, a professional politician having returned from a hugely expensive trip to China only weeks ahead of Novel Coronavirus saying how wonderful things were there, would want to be more circumspect on this topic.

Hoosiers should be asking themselves why that is not so.

Save Us From Our Saviors

(March 20) — My friends know that I tell these stories too often, especially in chaotic times. So I promise to keep them short on the chance they

might guide those fashioning Indiana public policy today.

First, the San Francisco earthquake of 1989 (also called the Loma Prieta earthquake, perhaps to avoid upsetting San Francisco realtors) caused 63 deaths, 3,800 injuries and an estimated \$6 billion in damage. This, please know, was a time when CNN was a reliable news source, largely because it couldn't afford a full lineup of talking heads. Something would happen and video crews would be sent to simply record it — without shallow commentary or harebrained analysis.

It was during one of those lapses in the fancy that has become journalism that a film crew happened on a San Francisco policeman walking down a quake-devastated street. He was yelling up to apartment windows, "Nobody's coming to help you (immediately)." He was warning the citizens inside that they should find water and tend to the injured.

I have always believed that he saved more lives than the emergency crews arriving hours or sometimes days later.

The second example is that of the late David Perlini, chief of staff under Fort Wayne Mayor Winfield Moses. Perlini, who went on to become Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Administration, tried over the years to explain to me how he set his priorities, met challenges, particularly in street and highway maintenance. He said it was not so much a matter of planning as it was trying to keep up with where people wanted

to go, to keep up with the "market" of vehicular traffic.

From there I make an admittedly dangerous leap to economics and philosophy. Ludwig von Mises is surely right that the real trouble begins when — marauding barbarians, locust plagues and epidemics aside — we abandon the ideas necessary to safeguard a prosperous society. Here he describes the fall of the Roman Empire:

"The marvelous civilization of antiquity perished because it did not adjust its moral code and its legal system to the requirements of the market economy. A social order is doomed if the actions which its normal functioning requires are rejected by the standards of morality, are declared illegal by the laws of the country, and are prosecuted as criminal by the courts and the police. The Roman Empire crumbled to dust because it lacked the spirit of classical liberalism and free enterprise. The policy of interventionism and its political corollary, the Fuhrer principle, decomposed the mighty empire, as they will by necessity always disintegrate and destroy any social entity."

Let us pray once more that those making public policy decisions in the weeks ahead understand the importance — the miraculous power even — of preserving individual liberty and its responsibilities. — *tcl*



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

INDIANAPOLICY *Review*

A journal of classical liberal inquiry observing its 30th year