

# INDIANAPOLIS

Review

Winter 2022

18 YEARS OF  
REPUBLICAN  
RULE  
Renn, page 11

**CHILDREN  
IN MASKS**

Moss, page 23



## Trains Nobody Needs

Any passenger train system that requires its own dedicated infrastructure will not be able to compete against highways, airlines and freight railroads. There is no guarantee that the technology will cover the cost. — *Randal O'Toole, page 6*

*“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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- ▶ Emphasize the primacy of the individual in addressing public concerns.
- ▶ Recognize that equality of opportunity is sacrificed in pursuit of equality of results.

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# Wednesday Whist

## Chesterton's Fence

It is the simplest of public policies, both infinitely practical and politically inarguable. It is known as "Chesterton's Fence." John F. Kennedy swore by it. Our generation has no idea what it means. It frames our New Year's resolution.

The principle behind it is that reforms should not be made until the reasoning behind the existing state of affairs is understood. It comes from C.K. Chesterton's "The Thing":

"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."

Chesterton is not alone in the observation. It is found throughout our literature and theatre. In Robert Bolt's "A Man for All Seasons" Sir Thomas More uses a similar argument to famously challenge his reformist son-in-law. The poet Robert Frost comes to the same conclusion in "Mending Wall." Scripture is replete with its warning, beginning in Proverbs 22:28, "Do not move an ancient boundary stone that your fathers have placed."

It is difficult to think of a single fence or stone that this generation has left in place — sex before



C.K. Chesterton

marriage, the nuclear family, the individual over the state, the lives of innocents, justice under the law, equality of opportunity, the sanctity of private property, and finally the actual fences, both at our borders physically and in our Constitution legally.

Even the 4/4 time of Rock 'n Roll has fallen before the cacophony of a new music.

So, what do you do when you have torn down a fence that kept the bull from trampling the corn, kept a neighbor neighborly, kept the devil in his hole?

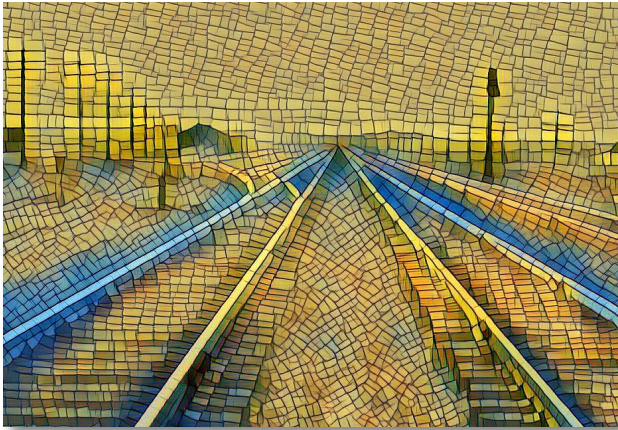
You might think it would be to restore the status quo ante, to get the bull back into the pasture. Not really. The first thing is to admit there is even a problem. And that, pathetically, is where the public discussion is mired.

Washington, the corporate media and the education establishment would have us believe that progress is being made, that there is no connection between the flattening of Chesterton's Fence and the catastrophes that have ensued.

Thus they must argue, however self-evidently stupidly, that inequality is equality, that history is selective, that science is ultimate, that war is peace, that parents are superfluous, that citizenship is arbitrary, that cultures are interchangeable, that men are women.

Our hope for the new year is that such distractions will fail, that our generation will be held responsible, that both the purposes of the fences and our dereliction in tearing them down will come to be understood.

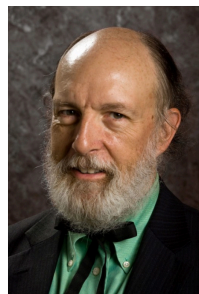
Then, if it is not too late, if this society has not been irreparably weakened, a subsequent generation will know to build them anew. — *tcl*



## Trains Nobody Needs

*Indiana has signed on to a rail plan that will rival that of California in both waste and inefficiency*

Randal O'Toole, an adjunct scholar of the foundation, is a transportation and land-use analyst. He is the author of "Romance of the Rails: Why the Passenger Trains We Love Are Not the Transportation We Need." A version of this article originally appeared in his *Antiplanner* newsletter as Policy Brief No. 127 and is reprinted here with permission.



In 2009 and 2010, the Federal Railroad Administration gave the state of Illinois \$1.39 billion to improve tracks between Chicago and St. Louis to allow passenger trains to go up to 110 miles per hour, saving one hour of travel time. The agency also gave the state \$370 million to buy 88 passenger cars and 21 locomotives to operate more frequent trains in this and other Midwest corridors such as Chicago-Detroit.

Pretty much all of that money, along with about \$500 million in state funds, has been spent. Yet, more than a decade later, Chicago-St. Louis passenger trains are no faster and no more frequent than they were in 2009. The same happened in other Midwest corridors, including Chicago-Detroit, Chicago-Twin Cities, Chicago-Omaha, and St. Louis-Kansas City, where

collectively \$1.6 billion was spent yet speeds and frequencies remain the same. Of the equipment ordered to serve these corridors, only four passenger cars and one locomotive have been delivered.

Naturally, Illinois and other midwestern states are eager to spend more money on projects like this. After all, who wouldn't want to spend billions of dollars with no expectations that the spending would actually produce any results?

Fortunately for them, the infrastructure bill recently passed by Congress included \$36 billion for "federal-state partnership for intercity passenger rail grants" (see page 1008 of the bill). That's more than three times as much money as the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) gave out for high-speed rail projects during the Obama administration. Of this \$36 billion, "not more than \$24 billion . . . shall be for projects for the Northeast Corridor." Since the Northeast Corridor has a \$66 billion backlog of maintenance and capital replacement needs, pretty much all of that \$24 billion will go into that corridor. That leaves \$12 billion, which is more than the FRA gave out during the Obama administration.

### The Midwest Rail Plan

In November, Midwestern states signaled their readiness to spend a large share of this \$12 billion by publishing a final Midwest Regional Rail Plan. The plan calls for a Chicago hub with spokes radiating to Detroit, Pittsburgh, Columbus (via either Fort Wayne or Indianapolis), Cincinnati, Nashville, Kansas City (via St. Louis), Omaha and the Twin Cities. The plan says this system is "close to 3,100 route miles" (based on Amtrak and other railroad timetables, the actual total is 3,037 miles if the Indianapolis-Columbus option is taken and 3,061 miles if the Fort Wayne-Columbus option is used).

Perhaps to avoid association with the controversial California project, the plan does not emphasize the term "high-speed" rail (the California High-Speed Rail project could cost \$100 billion, more than three times the \$33 billion that was initially estimated). Where



**AMTRAK'S 'WOLVERINE'** on its way from Chicago to Detroit in 2010. Though more than \$600 million of Obama's "high-speed" rail money was spent on this route, trains today are no faster nor more frequent than they were when this photo was taken.

California planned to build dedicated high-speed lines for the entire length of its routes, the Midwest plan calls for building dedicated lines only in the countryside between Chicago and Detroit, Chicago and Ft. Wayne, Chicago and Nashville, Chicago and St. Louis, and Chicago and St. Paul. The trains would use tracks shared with freight trains in the cities and in outlying areas such as St. Louis-Kansas City, Indianapolis-Cincinnati, and so forth. The dedicated lines would be capable of running passenger trains faster than 125 miles per hour, but the plan doesn't mention trains running at the 220mph speeds promised by California.

By my count, this means construction of approximately 1,500 miles of new rail lines. Although tracks capable of moving trains at, say, 150 miles per hour would cost less than ones that can move trains at 220 miles per hour, they would still be expensive. The Midwest Plan estimates total capital costs of \$116 to \$162 billion. That would allow for \$70 million to \$100 million per mile for new construction with enough left over to upgrade most of the remaining shared tracks to allow for speeds up to 110 miles per hour.

Once the system is built, the plan projects that it will carry 17 million to 33 million riders a year. Projected fares of \$1.5 billion to \$1.9 billion a year would "nearly" cover operating costs.

Both of these claims are highly optimistic. The Northeast Corridor has more people than all of the urban areas on the Midwest plan's map. Moreover, those people are more compactly located on a single, 457-mile route instead of being spread across six main routes averaging 456 miles each. The biggest city in the Northeast Corridor is smack in the middle instead of being at the endpoint of the various routes. All of these factors make the Northeast Corridor more amenable to passenger train ridership than the Midwest. Yet, in 2019, Amtrak trains in the Northeast Corridor carried just 12.5 million riders.

In addition to ridership projections that are too high, the Midwest Plan's projections of operating costs are too low. The plan's ridership projections depend on running trains about as frequently as those in the Northeast Corridor. Yet Amtrak spent \$1.3 billion operating trains in the Northeast Corridor in 2019. The Midwest is not going to be able to operate trains in six corridors for just 15 to 50 percent more. With ridership lower and operating costs higher than projected, there is no way that fares will "nearly" cover operating costs.

#### **A Defective Model**

A major flaw in the Midwest Rail Plan is its hub-and-spoke model. That works fine in the

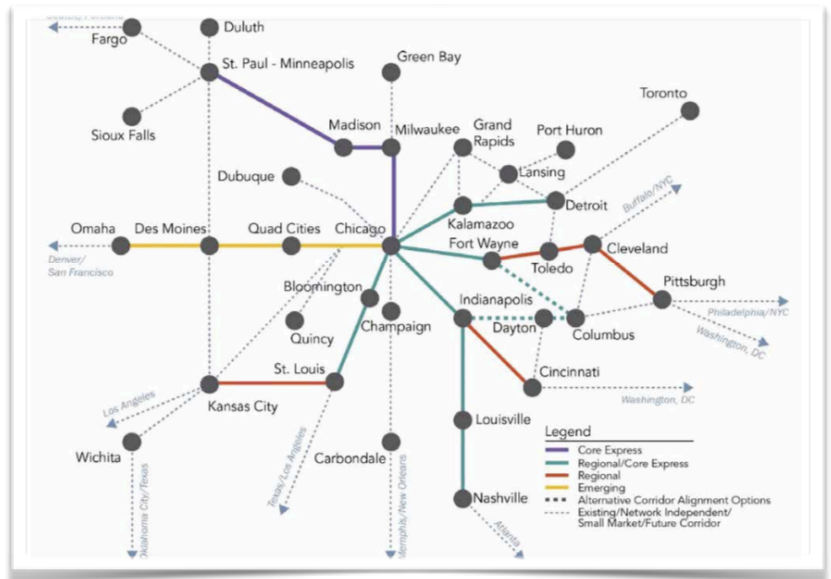


Northeast Corridor where there are just two spokes going in opposite directions, but with six spokes going in all directions it leaves out a lot of potential trips. The plan argues that the connectivity offered by the system will increase ridership by almost 50 percent over the ridership of the individual routes. In other words, someone going from Milwaukee to Indianapolis might take the train with a connection in Chicago.

Going from Kansas City to Nashville, however, would also require a trip through Chicago, almost doubling the miles. Pittsburgh to Cincinnati is almost three times as far by Midwest rail as on the highway. Minneapolis to Omaha on the Midwest rail route is more than three times as many miles as by car. Even Kansas City to Chicago is inconvenienced by the diversion to St. Louis, which adds 130 miles to the trip. By comparison, airlines and buses can directly serve any of these routes at little extra cost.

Most of the major city pairs on the Midwest rail map are currently well served by airlines at fares competitive with likely rail fares. According to kayak.com and Southwest.com, Chicago-Twin Cities are served by at least 25 non-stop flights a day at fares starting at \$59. Chicago-Detroit has at least 22 non-stop flights a day at fares starting at \$64. Chicago-Nashville has almost 20 non-stop flights a day at fares starting at \$59. Chicago-Cincinnati, Chicago-Cleveland, Chicago-Columbus, Chicago-Kansas City, Chicago-Louisville, Chicago-Omaha, and Chicago-Pittsburgh all have 10 to 14 non-stop flights a day, all at fares starting at \$59 to \$64.

Even if Midwest rails are built to 150- or 180-mile-per-hour standards, trains would rarely be time competitive with air travel. The plan's proposed use of shared rails in major urban areas would mean that trains could only go 20 to 30 miles per hour in those sections, greatly adding to total travel times. Trains stopping at downtown



**THE MIDWEST RAIL PLAN:** Purple and green are routes that would be mostly built new and dedicated to passenger trains; orange routes would mostly use shared but improved track at speeds up to 125 mph; yellow would use shared track at speeds up to 90 mph.

stations might be a bit more convenient to travelers with downtown destinations than air travel, but most people don't have downtown destinations. According to a pre-pandemic analysis of downtown jobs, only 14 percent of jobs in the Chicago urban area were in downtown Chicago. For other midwestern urban areas, the average was just 9 percent. That means that, for most people, air travel is likely to be as convenient (and much faster) than rail travel.

The airlines also serve many of the non-Chicago city pairs without requiring changing planes in Chicago. Kansas City-Nashville has at least three flights a day with fares as low as \$64. Minneapolis to Omaha has three non-stops a day with fares starting at \$149.

The only major cities that don't have non-stop flights to Chicago are cities that are close by, such as Indianapolis and Milwaukee. That's what buses are for. According to wanderu.com, there are currently at least nine buses a day between Milwaukee and Chicago with fares starting at \$14. There are at least 20 buses a day between Chicago and Indianapolis with fares starting at \$23.

Both airfares and bus fares are competitive with Amtrak. For example, current Amtrak fares



between Chicago and the Twin Cities, Chicago and Pittsburgh, and Chicago and Omaha all start at \$59. Amtrak fares from Chicago to Indianapolis start at \$23. The similarities between Amtrak fares and air and bus fares indicate that Amtrak is attempting to be price-competitive. The difference is that the airlines and bus companies were making money before the pandemic while Amtrak was not.

“Passengers enjoy the scenery between St. Louis and Chicago,” reads the caption to an early Amtrak publicity photo. Passengers are also enjoying the many empty seats: Amtrak’s 2019 performance report says that its Midwest trains normally fill only 38 to 59 percent of their seats.

The pandemic, of course, hit all of these carriers hard. The airlines and bus companies were able to respond by reducing frequencies. Amtrak has only one train a day in each direction in most of these corridors, and reduced them to three times a week until October 2020, when it returned to daily service.

The frequencies cited above for airlines and buses are probably lower than in the pre-pandemic era. Since air travel, at least, is recovering faster than Amtrak ridership, airlines will probably soon return to pre-pandemic frequencies. The bus industry is in a state of flux, with Stagecoach having sold Megabus to Variant Equity in 2019 and FirstGroup having sold Greyhound to Flixbus in 2021. However, the industry remains competitive and should mostly recover from the pandemic.

Many airlines use a hub-and-spoke model, but they generally have multiple hubs. The most profitable airlines, such as Southwest and JetBlue, don’t use that model. The hub-and-spoke model is one reason why urban transit carries less than 1 percent of passenger travel in the country. Applying this model to intercity passenger service just helps to guarantee its failure.

### **Environmental Costs**

Passenger-train advocates will respond to comparisons between air and rail travel by saying that electric-powered trains can contribute lower

greenhouse gas emissions than airliners. That might seem to be a valid argument on the West Coast, where most electricity is generated by hydroelectric dams. It is less valid in the Midwest, where most electricity is generated by burning fossil fuels. The job of converting all electric power plants in the Midwest to renewal sources of power will be made much more difficult if those power plants have to also power transportation.

Moreover, greenhouse gases are also emitted by construction, especially construction that uses a lot of concrete and steel, which railroad tracks do. A study of California high-speed rail estimated that construction would produce 9.7 million metric tons of carbon-dioxide equivalent greenhouse gases, and that it would take 71 years of operational savings to pay off that cost. Since rail facilities must be substantially rebuilt, requiring many more greenhouse gas emissions, about every 30 years, the operational savings would never pay off the greenhouse gases emitted during construction.

California was projecting that its high-speed rail line would attract nearly 32 million riders a year, which is at the upper end of the Midwest Plan projections. Since the Midwest Rail Plan calls for almost three times as many miles of new construction as in California, there is no chance that it could ever recover the greenhouse gases emitted during construction.

### **Effects of the Pandemic**

The Midwest Rail Plan recognizes that the coronavirus “will continue to have significant impacts on travel.” However, it “assumes that intercity travel behaviors will resume in the long term with a growth rate similar to pre-pandemic ridership levels.”

That’s a bad assumption, as the pandemic is likely to permanently change public acceptance of all forms of mass transportation. Even if the current pandemic ends, people will be more sensitized to the chances of catching other communicable diseases in crowded areas such as trains and planes. It is likely that a lot of short-

distance air travel, for example, will be replaced by travel in private automobiles.

Regardless of public views, the pandemic has also accelerated the migration of jobs away from downtowns and the migration of people away from big cities. This means that plans such as the Midwest Rail Plan will have fewer people to serve as more people and jobs will be located in places that are not convenient to railroad stations.

Even the assumption that the growth rate of post-pandemic travel will be the same as before the pandemic is bad for rail, as rail travel has been steadily declining in importance to Americans. In 1990, the average American rode Amtrak 24 miles, falling to 19 miles in 2019. While air travel boomed, growing by more than 120 percent between 1990 and 2019, Amtrak travel grew by just 6 percent in the same period. A prediction that pre-pandemic travel patterns will resume is a prediction that says the Midwest Rail Plan should not be implemented.

### Other Problems

The Midwest plan has several other problems. The plan necessarily requires that the states acquire 1,500 miles of right-of-way. Landowners in both California and Texas strongly resisted right-of-way sales to high-speed rail projects. While the states implementing the Midwest plan will have the power of eminent domain, right-of-way disputes will add to political controversies and create potential delays.

Wherever the states don't buy right-of-way, they will have to negotiate the use of private railroad tracks. When Amtrak took over passenger service in 1971, the nation had a huge surplus of rail capacity. Thanks to deregulation, that surplus no longer exists. The railroads are going to resist giving the states access to much of their physical plant, especially at the frequencies that the Midwest plan contemplates.

There is also the sheer cost of the project. The \$12 billion in the infrastructure bill will be spread across the country, and if the Midwest gets the same share as it did the Obama funds, it will only get about \$3 billion of it. That will barely pay for

the feasibility studies required to build a \$116 billion to \$162 billion project. Where is the rest of the money going to come from?

Even if money were available, midwestern states have not proven themselves competent to spend it. The \$370 million orders for new passenger equipment went through a succession of three companies before one was found capable of fulfilling it (maybe). Illinois' spending of \$1.9 billion on the Chicago-St. Louis corridor with no positive outcomes after 12 years is hardly reassuring.

### Is This Trip Really Necessary?

Not counting Pennsylvania, one corner of which would be served by the rail plan but isn't part of the Midwest, the states served by the plan already have more than a million miles of roads, nearly 38,000 route-miles of railroads and more than 4,400 airports. The Midwest Rail Plan proposes to lay a network of expensive new infrastructure on a region that already has plenty of infrastructure. That new infrastructure will not be able to compete with transportation that uses the existing infrastructure, which is why it will require such large subsidies.

As I noted in another policy brief, "any transportation technology that requires its own dedicated infrastructure will not be able to compete against highways, airlines and freight railroads because the cost of building enough infrastructure to make the technology useful and the risk that the technology will fail to cover its costs will both be too great."

Moreover, I added, the kind of "infrastructure that is most likely to succeed is infrastructure that can be used by a wide variety of transportation": passenger and freight, private vehicles and public carriers, small vehicles and large. Both airports and highways meet these criteria; expensive rail lines dedicated solely to a few passengers do not.

The Midwest Rail Plan is another disaster waiting to happen. Taxpayers can only hope that little of it gets funded because it is all likely to be wasted. ♦

# Indiana Under Republican Rule

*The GOP may not have been able to improve the state's economic rank but it could have taken better care of its largely conservative citizenry*

Aaron M. Renn, an Indianapolis-based policy analyst, is a columnist for *Governing*. His work appears in the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.



Republicans keen to tout the supposed superiority of their preferred economic model often cite booming Sunbelt states like Texas or Tennessee as evidence that it works. They don't talk as much about less successful red states like Kansas or West Virginia. A look at solid red Indiana and its poor performance shows the limits of these policies. Absent favorable external factors like warm weather, the approach has failed to generate demographic and economic success in states like Indiana.

The Hoosier state has had a Republican governor since Mitch Daniels was elected in 2004. It has been a Republican "trifecta" state, with GOP majorities in both houses of the legislature, since 2011.

When Daniels was elected, Indiana's per capita disposable income was only 90.5 percent of the U.S. average. The governor's top priority was raising the state's lagging incomes; indeed, Daniels said his administration's "central

objective was to raise the disposable income of Hoosiers." His strategy for achieving this was business-centric, focused on "building the best sandbox for businesses to play in."

When Indiana became a Republican trifecta state, its average disposable income had actually declined to 89.5 percent of the national level. By 2019 (pre-pandemic),<sup>1</sup> it had fallen slightly to only 89.4 percent, and during the pandemic it dropped to 88.7 percent in 2020. In short, under Republican leadership the state's relative incomes started out low and got even lower.

But rather than a purely Republican failure, this underperformance should be seen in the context of regional decline. The entire region that can be called the "Old North,"<sup>2</sup> a 23-state area including the Great Plains, the Midwest and the Northeast, has experienced similar struggles for decades, regardless of the party in power or the policy model pursued. Growth and prosperity appear to be more dependent on external or macro factors than most politicians of either party would like to admit.

This calls for a modified strategy for red states in these areas, one that directly serves the preferences and aspirations of their voters rather than pursuing indirect strategies like chasing after business investment. Red state Republican politicians need to start caring

much more about their voters' priorities than they presently do. This is particularly important today, when most of our major institutions have fallen under the sway of progressive orthodoxy, leaving Republican state governments as one of the few powerful institutions remaining that can stand up for conservative citizens.

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A version of this article originally appeared in the Nov. 20 issue of *American Affairs* magazine. It is reprinted here with permission: (<https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2021/11/indiana-under-republican-rule-pro-business-policy-disappoints-outside-the-sunbelt/>)

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<sup>1</sup> Other than total population, all economic and demographic data in this article uses a date of 2019 where possible, to avoid pandemic-related effects.

<sup>2</sup> Great Plains: Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota. Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, West Virginia, Wisconsin. Northeast: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont.

### The Rise of Indiana Republicans

Mitch Daniels is ranked as one of the great leaders of his generation. He is serious, competent, courageous and politically astute. Coming into office, he inherited a budget deficit that he quickly converted into a surplus of more than \$1 billion through relentless cost cutting. Nicknamed “the Blade” for his approach to budget cuts, Daniels is the rare Republican who is the real deal as a fiscal conservative. His early fiscal moves paid dividends when the Great Recession hit state revenues across the country.

While forced into some service cuts, Daniels’s fiscal management resulted in less pain than in other states. After the recession, Indiana rebuilt its surplus, which remains so high — nearly \$4 billion — that the state began issuing tax rebates to citizens. Indiana is one of only about 15 states with a AAA credit rating from all major agencies.

In addition to budget cuts, Daniels also implemented a major tax reform package that paired a 1 percentage point increase in the state sales tax with a more-than-offsetting property tax reduction and constitutional cap on property taxes, limiting homeowner taxes to only 1 percent of the property value. This was combined with strict limits on local property tax levies and the requirement to hold a referendum for certain construction projects.

Beyond fiscal matters, Daniels carried out a large number of other reforms too numerous to list, including passing a “right to work” law allowing employees to opt out of union membership (as in the South), adopting Daylight Savings Time statewide, restructuring the state’s economic development agency and implementing new software and administrative processes at the state Bureau of Motor Vehicles that eliminated infamous lines and poor customer service. While cutting spending generally, he increased funding for transportation, largely through a \$3.9 billion windfall from a 75-year lease of the state’s toll road to a private consortium.

Daniels became a national darling for his accomplishments in Indiana and had many

supporters as he considered a run for president in 2012. He ultimately decided against running and instead became president of Purdue University, where he reprised much of his playbook from state government and earned national attention for freezing tuition.

His successor, Mike Pence, was also a fiscal conservative, one who had often complained about his own party’s spending habits while a member of Congress. Although Daniels had already cut most of the fat in state government, Pence took advantage of the state’s strong fiscal position to cut the state income tax and other taxes by \$500 million per year. His other moves included expanding school choice and trying to focus K–12 education on career and technical training oriented toward creating skills for the state’s employer base.

Pence’s tenure as governor is best known, inside and outside the state, for the dispute over a new Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Originally seen as a piece of anodyne legislation modeled after the similar federal law, RFRA unexpectedly drew the ire of corporate America, which threatened to shun the state. This was in essence the first of the modern-day corporate boycotts of states over social policy. Indiana was completely unprepared for it and quickly capitulated, amending the bill to remove the portions that had provoked corporate opposition.

Pence was never popular with the Mitch Daniels wing of the Indiana GOP. And RFRA and its fallout further turned the metropolitan Republican establishment against him. His acceptance of the nomination for vice president could be seen in part as stemming from his unpopularity in those circles. Pence, however, actually implemented two initiatives directly benefitting the state’s metropolitan regions. One was the creation of the Indiana Biosciences Research Institute, a public-private partnership in downtown Indianapolis. The other was the Regional Cities Initiative that provided tens of millions in funding for capital improvements in the Fort Wayne, South Bend and Evansville areas.



Pence was succeeded in 2017 by former Mitch Daniels campaign manager Eric Holcomb, who maintained a generally conservative, business-centric course. Still in office, having won reelection in 2020, he has been careful to avoid the kind of public relations problems Pence encountered with RFRA. Indiana has not featured prominently in the coronavirus debates, for example, as Holcomb tended to follow the lead of other Republican governors, like Ohio's Mike DeWine, in imposing restrictions at the pandemic's beginning and likewise following others in lifting them later.

A resident of Indianapolis, Holcomb has favored the interests of the metropolitan establishment. He helped underwrite nonstop flights from Indianapolis to San Francisco and Paris (now suspended by the pandemic), for instance. He also implemented a 10-cent increase in the state's gasoline tax to keep Indiana's highway budget well-funded, a rare Hoosier tax increase. Flush with cash from federal coronavirus aid, he's recapitulating Pence's Regional Cities Initiative with a \$500 million competitive grant program.

Holcomb has been less popular with the Republican base. Shock polls showed the Libertarian candidate winning up to 25 percent of the vote in the 2020 gubernatorial race. Holcomb quickly rescinded his unpopular coronavirus mandates (although he reimposed some restrictions eight days after winning reelection). Still, Libertarian candidate Donald Rainwater won 11.4 percent of the vote, more than double the previous record for a statewide election.

Indiana's governor is constitutionally weak, in part because only a simple majority is required to override a veto. Indiana's General Assembly has continued to promote many conservative moves on its own. It preempted local tenant protection ordinances, for example, and it also eliminated most state protections for wetlands.

While some Tea Party types still complain, nearly the full panoply of conservative policy solutions has been implemented during this

period of Republican governance. The state is fiscally austere, with little to no debt, billions in reserves and a AAA credit rating. It has a favorable tax climate, with the Tax Foundation ranking it ninth in the country for its business-friendly tax environment. Regulations on businesses are also light, and it's still a right to work state. Indiana has well-funded infrastructure, the one form of spending most conservatives like. It makes heavy use of public-private partnerships and promotes school choice. Chief Executive magazine ranks Indiana as the fifth-best state in the country for business.

### Disappointing Results

Yet the economic and demographic results of this policy set have been meager. Measured since the pre-Great Recession employment peak in 2007, Indiana has only grown its job base by 5.8 percent, trailing the national average of 9.4 percent.

But headline job growth is one of Indiana's better statistics. As noted above, under Republican leadership, Indiana's disposable incomes have declined relative to the national average. Since 2000, the state ranks a dismal 46th in median wage growth, and the growth in median earnings has been at only half the rate of the rest of the country. Only 42 percent of workers in the state earn a living wage (adjusted for cost of living) and have employer-provided health insurance.

Some of this poor performance may be due to the composition of the state's economy. Indiana is heavily dependent on manufacturing, with 17.1 percent of its jobs in the manufacturing sector, by far the largest share of any state. And much of this industry has been squeezed by foreign competition in recent decades. The state is also home to a large and growing low-wage warehousing sector. By contrast, growth in high-wage sectors and in entrepreneurship has lagged. Republicans make excuses for the state's low incomes by touting its low cost of living. But many places are equally cheap, including booming Sunbelt states like Tennessee.

Some of these grim statistics were revealed in a series of reports commissioned through the Indiana GPS project (Growing Prosperity Statewide), which were prepared by the Brookings Institution and American Enterprise Institute at the request of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership. These reports also showed that Indiana's productivity in advanced industry sectors is declining relative to other states. In part, this is because Indiana lags in technology investment. Furthermore, Indiana ranks 39th in its share of jobs in new companies, the major source of job creation, and has more old firms than young ones.

Indiana's demographics are also weak. During the 2010s, the state's population grew by only 4.7 percent versus a national average of 7.4 percent. Its population growth rate has been decelerating since 2000. During the 2010s, the state grew at less than half the rate it did during the 1990s, when under Democratic gubernatorial leadership. Most of this drop mirrored the national trend, but Indiana's growth rate declined more rapidly than the nation's as a whole. Large portions of the state are either stagnant or declining in population. Over half of the state's counties — 49 out of 92 — lost population during the 2010s.

Weak population growth translates into weak labor force growth. The Indiana Business Research Center at Indiana University forecasts that the state's labor force will rise by only 1.6 percent between 2015 and 2045, with 70 counties expected to see declines in their labor force as early as 2025. This implies that the era of job growth in Indiana is nearing an end, since it is impossible to add jobs without workers to fill them. The state also lags in educational attainment, with only 26.9 percent of the state's adults holding a college degree, 42nd in the nation.

Additionally, to the extent Indiana is doing well, most of this success is concentrated in the metropolitan Indianapolis region. Metro Indianapolis accounts for 31 percent of the state's population but saw 74 percent of the state's population growth in the past decade. It also has a

disproportionate and growing share of the state's educated residents. Its share of the state's young adults with college degrees grew from 39.7 percent to 44.1 percent from 2000 to 2019. Areas outside of metro Indianapolis are thus performing even more poorly than already weak state-level averages would indicate. But even Indianapolis itself has largely grown by drawing in people from the rest of the state. Almost 90 percent of its net in-migration is from the rest of Indiana, a big difference from Sunbelt boomtowns like Austin, Nashville and Raleigh, which have a national draw. In effect, Indianapolis has grown by draining the rest of the state.

In the end, Indiana built its sandbox, but not very many people or businesses want to play in it, and the ones who do don't have much money. The state attracts few new residents on net, and the businesses that are locating there are predominantly low-wage employers taking advantage of the state's lower-skilled, poorly paid workforce.

Republicans like to talk about running government like a business. If Indiana actually were a business, shareholders would replace the management after such a poor showing.

### **The Decline of the Old North**

But just as it would be a mistake to offer the growth rates of Tennessee, Texas, or Idaho as proof that conservative policies always work, it would also be a mistake to do the opposite and use the struggles of places like Indiana or Kansas as proof that they always fail.

Putting Indiana in a regional context shows the challenges facing any philosophy of governance. With the (likely temporary) exception of North Dakota, driven by the early-2010s oil boom, no state in the Old North has done especially well. And only two major metropolitan regions in this entire area, coastal New York City and Boston, have fully transformed themselves into models of 21st century success (though even they have their problems, of course).

Apart from North Dakota, the fastest growing state by population in the Old North is Minnesota,

which grew 7.6 percent, a mere 0.2 points higher than the national average, ranking 19th in the country. At the same time, the Old North accounted for seven out of the 10 slowest-growing states. Of the 23 Old North states, 19 had net domestic out-migration (that is, more people moving out than moving in, excluding international immigration). This includes Minnesota, which has relied heavily on Somali refugee resettlement to achieve population growth. And just as Indianapolis draws most of its new residents from the state of Indiana, other relatively successful metro areas in this region, like Columbus, Ohio and Des Moines, Iowa, also overwhelmingly draw from their home state hinterlands.

Because the number of jobs a state can support is largely determined by its labor force, weak demographics translate into weak job growth. This region did do better on jobs than population, however. New York, Massachusetts and South Dakota joined North Dakota in the top 20 states for job growth from the pre-Great Recession peak in 2007 to 2019. But New York and Massachusetts were anchored by two metro areas that successfully reclaimed their historic “superstar” status. In New York, 82 percent of the total statewide job gains during this period were in the five boroughs of New York City. Indiana’s job growth may have trailed the nation, but it ranked in the top half of the Old North. Some Old North states have done better than Indiana on per capita income, even if partially offset by high costs of living in some of these locations. But as we will see, this is largely a result of historical factors; these are places that were already high-income long ago.

What’s notable about the generally weak performance of these 23 states is that they have different demographic origins, settlement histories, geographies, divisions between urban and rural areas and governance. Vermont may be a purported socialist utopia and New Hampshire the “live free or die” state, without an income or sales tax, but both struggle with the common demographic problems of northern New England.

Illinois is as solid blue as Indiana is red, but most of Illinois is a poorer-performing version of Indiana. Its only real economic strength is in Chicago, itself an underperformer still in a long period of relative decline, and a metro area that has consistently failed in its quest to transform itself into a coastal-style superstar city.

In short, economic and demographic weakness is the norm among states in the Old North region. Indiana’s performance is more or less average compared against regional peers.

What common factors explain the trajectory of Indiana and the Old North? One is that they are places with winter. Economist Ed Glaeser documented that since 1960, warmer places have grown faster than colder ones. He showed that from 2000 to 2010, population growth in counties where the January temperature was higher than 43 degrees was over 9 percent on average, while in counties with average January temperatures below 43 degrees, it was under 2 percent. Though the recent growth of colder Idaho and Montana may complicate this picture going forward, it’s clear that warmer winters and population growth have gone hand in hand for some time, favoring the South and West.

There’s not much that states in the Old North can do about their winters. Indiana, in particular, also lacks natural amenities such as mountains or oceans. Much of the northern two-thirds of the state is monotonously flat, with vast expanses of corn and soybean crops.

Glaeser also notes that educational attainment, the share of adults with a college degree, is a driver of population growth. But educational attainment is even more significant in determining per capita income. Specifically, the share of adults with college degrees is a key factor explaining variations in per capita incomes. At the metropolitan level, about two-thirds of per capita income variance can be explained by college degree attainment levels, according to economist Joe Cortright.

But what explains these variations in college degree attainment rates? There are many theories

about what will draw the college educated, but growth in the share of people with college degrees is correlated with historic college degree attainment. The higher a region's college degree attainment in the past, looking as far back as 1940, the higher its growth in the percentage of adults with a college degree is today. In other words, much of today's variation in educational attainment levels and incomes is a result of factors with roots deep in the past.

Thus Indiana's poor educational attainment mostly explains its poor showing in per capita income. Unsurprisingly, the state has always been poorly educated. Sociologist E. Digby Baltzell noted a correlation between the presence of antinomian religions like Quakerism among a region's founding population and poor development of public education. Indiana had a strong 19th century Quaker presence and today still has more Quakers than any other state. Indiana also had a larger contingent of southerners in its founding population than any other midwestern state, which also contributed to the devaluation of education. Indiana historian James Madison noted that in the 1840 census, the state's literacy rate trailed all northern states and four southern ones. Indiana was the last state in the Midwest to pass a compulsory school attendance law. Given the state's socio-religious origins and long-standing educational deficiencies, it is unsurprising that it has had persistently low incomes, especially as the American economy shifted toward postindustrial services that reward higher education levels. While Republican leaders in Indiana may not have reversed this trend, they didn't create it.

Looking around the Old North region, one will see many states that are a lot like Indiana: low population growth, a stagnant labor force, many shrinking counties, weak job growth and limited success at attracting higher-wage, new economy industries. While many Old North states are better educated and thus have higher incomes than Indiana, this results from factors originating far in the past. These commonalities seem to defy all differences in governance. It's analogous to the

problem of low fertility rates in developed countries: many different regions of the world, encompassing a range of cultures, are faced with a similar problem, but no one has yet found an effective solution to reverse the trend and increase birth rates.

### **Prioritizing Businesses over Citizens**

It is questionable whether many of the fundamental challenges facing Indiana and other states in the Old North could readily be fixed by any state-level policy decisions, given the wide diversity of approaches that have already been tried in the region. States do choose how to respond to such conditions, however, and these choices have a big effect on their residents. Indiana's Republican leadership, exemplified by Mitch Daniels, has chosen to prioritize the preferences of businesses, or at least a subset of them, over those of its citizens. The sentiment is captured in the state's slogan, "a state that works," which is emblazoned along with a sprocket logo on the side of the state office building in downtown Indianapolis. In practice, Indiana has pandered to low-wage employers and sided with businesses over citizens in many policy disputes.

An example of this approach in action is the state's recent preemption of local tenant protections. Indianapolis Star investigative reporting documented dangerous conditions in many of the city's rental properties. This included the presence of lead at one hundred times safe levels, nonfunctional heating and plumbing and electrical problems. In response, the city passed a tenant protection ordinance that required landlords to provide tenants with a notice of their rights and prohibited landlord retaliation against tenants who report violations to the city. This modest ordinance was too much for the state legislature, which passed a special purpose law to preempt it.

Indiana's substandard nursing homes underwent a similar experience. The Indianapolis Star also exposed how the state's nursing home industry had become, in essence, a giant financial fraud. Medicaid reimburses nursing homes owned



by county hospitals at a higher rate than other nursing homes. In Indiana, county hospitals exploited this rule by acquiring 90 percent of the state's nursing homes, then contracting with the previous owners to provide operations. The increased reimbursement rates were diverted away from nursing home operations (Indiana ranks 48th in the country in nursing home staffing levels) and directed to the county hospitals, which used them for building projects and increased executive pay. The state GOP also passed a special purpose law in 2016 to shield county hospitals from having to disclose their salaries, making it hard to know how much executive salaries went up in some cases. The Star documented numerous cases of poor nursing home care leading to amputations and broken bones, as well as to fatal head injuries and violent assaults. This low standard of care carried over into the pandemic. Over 20 percent of Covid-19 patients in Indiana nursing homes died, compared with a 13 percent national rate. The state GOP's response was to pass a law providing nursing homes with expansive immunity from liability for deaths in their facilities.

Moreover, under Republican leadership, Indiana has eagerly embraced the parasitic casino industry. The state has 13 casinos and ranks fifth in the nation in gross gaming revenues, just behind Mississippi. Casinos are well known for preying on the poor, with between 30 to 60 percent of all casino revenues coming from a small number of gamblers, likely addicts. The state, and the localities where casinos are located, are also addicted to gambling and the tax revenue it brings.

Indiana's more respectable businesses are often low-paying as well — as attested to by the abovementioned wage and income figures — with poor working conditions and limited prospects for advancement. This includes many low-wage manufacturing and distribution businesses. The trend is highlighted by Governor Holcomb's push to end supplemental pandemic unemployment benefits of \$300 per week in order to pressure recipients to take one of those jobs.

Higher-paying, white-collar or technology-related businesses have actually been frustrated with the state's approach to governance. Earlier this year, a group of over 60 Indianapolis businesses signed an open letter urging the state to stop interfering in local affairs.

### **A Alternative Strategy**

Indiana's Republican leaders have failed to achieve their own stated goals. The Republican playbook simply did not work there, just as former governor Sam Brownback's tax cuts in Kansas also failed. But the persistent, widespread failure of Old North states to achieve demographic and economic growth should give would-be reformers pause about the prospects for any policy approach to produce materially better results. Anything Indiana might do differently has almost certainly been tried elsewhere in the region.

In light of this seeming dead end, how should red states like Indiana, govern? If they continue to see weak population and job growth regardless of state policy, then what should they do?

In such an environment, Old North red states like Indiana should reorient their philosophy of governance away from a business-centric strategy toward a citizen-centric one. Their focus should be on directly improving the standard of living and quality of life of their existing population.

Whether a policy that improves citizens' quality of life works to attract new residents and businesses or not, it will at least benefit those who already live there. Rather than "a state that works," Indiana should seek to become "a state for living in." Obviously, this will involve some level of support for business. But the North Star for policy makers should be the direct impact on current citizens of the state. The question should be: How will this improve our people's lives?

A start at articulating this new citizen-first philosophy was provided by Rep. Jim Banks in his "working-class memo." Banks represents Indiana's Third Congressional District in the state's northeastern Republican heartland. In his memo to House GOP Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, Banks observed, "We are now the party

supported by most working-class voters. . . . The vast majority of the Republican conference doesn't want to return to a GOP-era that neglects working-class voters. . . . House Republicans need to consciously promote policies that appeal to working-class voters." Banks's areas of focus in this memo were related to federal policy, but its themes provide a framing for animating state and local policy as well.

Banks's definition of the working class is broad, ranging from custodians to small business owners. It certainly includes the average Hoosier resident, who is a noncollege-educated conservative Republican voter. Republicans obviously need an appeal that extends beyond the working class. But the needs and preferences of the working-class Republican voter should be front and center in the state in a way that they are not at present.

Indiana's working-class Republican voters are unhappy with their party. In 2016, exit polls in the primary revealed that half of GOP voters in the state felt "betrayed" by their party's leadership. The record showing of the Libertarian Party in the 2020 gubernatorial race shows this sense of betrayal is not limited to the federal level.

This new approach doesn't mean abandoning all traditional conservative governing principles. Fiscal discipline will always be important. Taxes and regulations should be limited. The marketplace generally should be favored. But there are three principles that should be incorporated into the Republican governing philosophy to reorient states like Indiana toward a pro-citizen approach focused on the needs and preferences of the average constituent. These are: invest in improving citizen well-being, invest in the state's places and protect citizens from coercion and abuse by other public or private actors. Of course, these principles should be pragmatically applied to fit within the macro environment and the state's cultural context.

*1. Invest in the well-being of the state's people.* A state's wealth is ultimately in its people, but Indiana has long lagged in investing in its citizens. Undoubtedly, the character of the state is

less friendly to this sentiment than that of many other states. Indiana has long had a Jacksonian, small-*l* libertarian cultural streak, and is famously slow to change the status quo. A fear of government overreach surely played a role in Indiana being a laggard mandating school attendance more than a century ago.

But the larger conservative movement has also worked hard to delegitimize the very idea that Republican voters should expect their elected officials to do anything for them personally. Ronald Reagan's infamous quip about the nine most terrifying words in the English language—"I'm from the government and I'm here to help"—is a classic example of this attitude. While it would perhaps be too cynical to suggest a conscious strategy on this front, the suggestion that government is always the problem, never part of the solution, and that government is inherently dysfunctional, works to preemptively relieve Republican elected officials of any responsibility to govern in their voters' interests, or even competently. In addition to sowing a general distrust of government, conservatives have also long painted attempts at elevating the welfare of citizens as an inherently leftist form of social engineering deriving from the Progressive Era. In fact, such reform movements have a distinguished pedigree that is as old as Christianity and Western civilization.

Values like thrift and hard work are permanent, but a mentality of pure self-reliance or pulling yourself up by your bootstraps is anachronistic for most people in the 21st century. America today is a postbourgeois society in which most citizens are dependent on and largely at the mercy of powerful, impersonal forces and institutions they can neither fully understand nor control. Today's increasingly monopolistic, tech-driven and globalized world has badly disadvantaged working-class people and families in Indiana and the United States.

Far too many working-class Hoosiers are no longer able to rise from disadvantaged backgrounds, to an extent which would have been hard to imagine even 40 years ago. Today, their

lives are marked by the prevalence of single parenthood, the explosion of hard drugs like opioids and meth, the scarcity of working-class jobs offering a real career track, the physical decay of their communities and other challenges. Indiana's obesity and smoking rates are well above the national average, while its coronavirus vaccination rate is below it. Conditions like these in the working-class world have been widely documented by scholars as diverse as Charles Murray and Robert Putnam.

While these situations call for humility and prudence, Republicans must see it as part of their job to help their people build a life in the face of these headwinds. The state is fiscally flush, which provides it with the capacity to invest. For example, it could start by providing financial relief to families with a nonrefundable state child tax credit that increases in value for each additional child. This would build on existing family-friendly legislation such as a recent law exempting children's internship or paid job training income from counting towards a family's benefits eligibility income cap.

Indiana also needs to improve its public health. The state should finally pass a proposed \$2 per pack increase in the cigarette tax, with proceeds dedicated entirely to smoking cessation and anti-opioid efforts. As documented by RAND and other researchers, Indiana's health care system is expensive but mediocre in quality. It's one area where the state's costs are still too high and need to be brought down. Also, the only policies available on the state's ACA health insurance marketplace are essentially repurposed Medicaid networks. It is impossible for Hoosiers to buy high-quality health insurance on the ACA exchange, and this urgently needs to be corrected.

The state's educational system also needs reform. Indiana is increasingly attempting to direct noncollege-track students, who are the majority of the state's children, toward the short-term labor needs of businesses. According to Ball State economist Michael Hicks, children as young as sixth grade are being tracked to become truck drivers.

Indiana's K-12 education system should not be an outsourced training department for the state's low-wage employers. Instead, the focus should be on ensuring children have a foundation of literacy and basic math skills. Career-oriented training should be in skills that will last in a dynamic, rapidly changing environment. Skilled trades like plumbing or welding probably fit the bill. Or, for example, consider the approach of the college-alternative bootcamp Praxis. Praxis teaches participants primarily soft skills like sales and marketing, business writing, customer service and project management. Unlike rapidly obsolete employer-specific technical skills, many of these have broad applicability in the market, including to entrepreneurship, and will be useful throughout a person's entire working career. Indiana should look at teaching these sorts of career skills in high school rather than employer-bespoke ones.

The state should also work to ensure that local governments, which have been fiscally pinched under the state's property tax caps, can provide quality services to their citizens. One example is public transportation, where state Republicans rightly granted Indianapolis the ability to raise funds to expand public transportation in a city where 10 percent of households lack a car.

And yes, the state should implement additional regulations that improve working conditions for Indiana citizens. For example, the state has repeatedly declined to pass a pregnancy accommodations bill that would require employers to give pregnant women basic protections such as the ability to go to the bathroom when needed. The current legislation on this is toothless. Allowing pregnant women to go to the bathroom is hardly an onerous antibusiness regulation. It is puzzling why state Republicans would side with employers like warehouses over their own pregnant voters when the owners of those warehouses are mostly large corporations that have fully embraced the "woke" party line and are actively hostile to conservatism. There are surely many other basic, pro-worker

rules that could be passed without compromising the state's business climate.

2. *Invest in the state's places.* Fixing economic or social problems through government action is difficult. But many physical investments in places are simple matters of engineering. Cleaning up brownfield sites, remediating lead paint and water pipe hazards, repaving streets, upgrading playgrounds and other projects can easily be done. The only limiting factor is money.

This is one area where Mitch Daniels himself changed his own approach. As governor, he railed against "gold-plated projects" and vetoed local government capital projects he felt were too expensive. As president of Purdue University, however, he has been a master builder, investing in world-class facilities and public spaces he would have undoubtedly castigated as governor — all while freezing tuition too.

Indiana Republicans are already pivoting in this direction. The new \$500 million competitive grant program for local capital improvements is a good move. The state is also setting aside hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade its own facilities, ranging from the fairground swine barn, to a new state archives building, to state parks. It will be spending \$250 million to replace its decrepit interstate rest stops. Whether the state will derive any tangible marketing benefits in attracting out-of-state visitors and firms is an open question. But it's certain that Indiana's own residents will appreciate the new facilities.

None of these measures are likely to fundamentally alter the demographic and economic trajectory of Indiana. Any material change in the fortunes of Old North states is likely to come from external macrosocial or macroeconomic factors rather than state government action. But these initiatives will benefit Indiana's people. A traveler stopping at a brand-new rest stop, a family vacationing at an upgraded state park inn, a pregnant warehouse worker who can go to the bathroom when she needs to, a person without a car who can take a new bus route to a job, a renter whose landlord is forced to fix the furnace, a family of three with a

new child tax credit — all are people whose lives could and would be directly improved by state action.

Accepting the significance of macro factors does not mean policymakers must submit to a fatalistic view of the future. Indiana's leaders should also continue looking for ways to increase growth rates and incomes — and not just in the cities: One way to do this is to attract newcomers to exurban areas and hinterlands that are often overlooked. While Indiana's major cities will be the economic engines of the state and need to be appropriately supported, the fact is that they are well positioned to do much of their own marketing. The state could instead focus its clout on bolstering rural and small-town areas, touting its authentically historic towns and wide-open spaces as an opportunity to acquire land and a more human way of life in a digital age. Many smaller places in the West are successfully doing this now.

Indiana should also bolster what higher-wage industries and knowledge economy assets it has. Purdue University, in particular, a top-10 engineering school, is the crown jewel in this area. When Mitch Daniels retires, the school should hire someone from MIT, Stanford or Caltech to build on his legacy and aim to raise its academic stature further. Legacy industries like pharmaceuticals and orthopedics, where Indiana is a national leader, or the emerging ag-tech field and technology start-up cluster in Indianapolis, should be helped where possible. Another possibility is leveraging Purdue's top-level agricultural expertise to focus on helping scale up the state's high quality artisanal farmers into major producers without compromising on quality, the humane treatment of animals, and so forth.

3. *Protect citizens from ideological coercion and abuse by public or private actors.* Today, most major social institutions have internalized an elite progressive ideology, commonly known as "wokeness," that has little appeal for the majority of ordinary citizens. This includes the media, colleges, the government bureaucracy, arts and



cultural institutions, most foundations and even corporate America. The institutions that remain conservative or, at the very least, non-woke, such as churches and religious groups, are usually subaltern ones.

State and local governments are some of the few powerful institutions where conservatives retain some control. Thus, a prime emerging responsibility of elected leaders at the state level, especially in red states like Indiana, is to use the power of their offices to protect their communities against ideological coercion or abuse from other institutions. Red states must not only be willing to aggressively challenge any federal government overreach; they must also be willing to resist coercive behavior from the private and nonprofit sectors.

This approach will be difficult for state-level Republicans to embrace. Being “business-friendly” has historically been core to their identity. But today, big business has become a key enforcer of the progressive line in America. In this environment, being business-friendly and embracing a Republican agenda that goes beyond neoliberal economics are incompatible with each other. This is true even after social issues, as traditionally understood, are taken off the table. Look at corporate retaliation and threats against Georgia over its voter-integrity law, for example.

This doesn’t mean becoming antibusiness, but rather red states like Indiana do need to start protecting citizens from ideological coercion by big business and from exploitation by abusive industries. For example, Indiana has joined other states in filing antitrust lawsuits against Big Tech monopolies, and could do more on issues ranging from economic concentration to political censorship. But the bigger issue in Indiana is abusive industries like the aforementioned slumlords and nursing homes. Well-documented issues with these need to be addressed to better protect Hoosier citizens from physically dangerous conditions. And any future expansion of parasitic industries like gambling needs to be categorically rejected.

While Indiana is a very red state, left-wing institutions in blue cities and other blue states can

and do still leverage their power against conservative citizens. The state must limit their ability to do so. For example, the public health profession too often acts as an extension of the political Left. While Indiana should spend more on public health, it should also limit the reach of Indiana’s public health officials to only bona fide health matters: the collection of statistics, infectious disease control, smoking cessation, anti-drug efforts, obesity reduction and the like. All Indiana public health officials should be legally prohibited from engaging in any efforts related to or involving gun rights, racism, climate change or other such matters that are not legitimately part of the public health domain.

Furthermore, the state should protect free speech on campus by requiring all state universities to adopt the Chicago Principles on Free Expression (as Mitch Daniels has done at Purdue). It should also provide standing for students to sue public universities that fail to protect their rights to free speech, and require universities to provide due process to the accused in their disciplinary processes. Likewise, the state should empower parents to resist the encroachment of leftist ideologies around race and gender into their K-12 classrooms.

The state attorney general should be given jurisdiction over criminal matters where county prosecutors subvert the rule of law (such as when the Indianapolis prosecutor announced he would no longer prosecute marijuana possession) or in areas of statewide concern such as holding opioid producers accountable for crimes they may have committed. And the state should require the attorney general to approve any consent decree entered into by any unit of government in the state in order to prevent Democratic-controlled municipalities from using sue-and-settle techniques to give leftist nonprofits control over public policy.

This will require a more sophisticated understanding of today’s political dynamics. For example, unhappy with the city’s response to the 2020 riots in downtown Indianapolis, in which two people were killed, the state passed a law enhancing penalties for rioting. But leftist

prosecutors still do not actually have to prosecute rioters at all. All this law did was to hand those prosecutors another weapon that they can potentially use against conservatives in the future.

In their efforts to increase growth rates and raise incomes, Indiana's Republicans might consider positioning their state as the best destination for conservatives in the Old North. It's a structurally red state that, unlike many in the South, is in no danger of going blue. Indiana development agencies spend more effort trying to convince outsiders of their (inauthentic) progressiveness than simply embracing the state's solid conservatism. If Indiana Republicans did implement conservative voter preferences and aggressively defended their voters' priorities, that might be a draw in itself.

All this will require vigilance and constant activity by red state governments. But it also requires a recognition that culture war counter-offensives cannot substitute for citizen-centric investments. Voters should hold politicians accountable with respect to their cultural priorities, but that cannot become an excuse for basic incompetence or a failure to invest in the state's people and communities.

## Serving Constituents

The policy specifics will differ in other states, but this overall formula is widely applicable to other places, and can work outside the Old North as well. In fact, large, booming states like Texas and Florida are in an even stronger position to implement conservative voter preferences and stand up for their people against powerful institutions.

Red state Republicans should by all means keep an eye on their budgets, tax environment and business regulations. But just as important, they should adopt a citizen-first philosophy based on the responsibility to protect their people and deliver tangible benefits to them, not to build sandboxes for warehouses, unscrupulous businesses and other low-wage employers. Neither woke moralism nor small-government dogma should absolve politicians of the responsibility to deliver tangible benefits to their citizens.

Republicans, in particular, must take care of their actual voters. ♦

# Children in Masks

## *An Indiana Doctor Writes his School Board*

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‘Fifteen days to flatten the curve,” the first of many Covid lies, has become 19 months to flatten the country. Indeed, the collateral damage from the lockdowns and other devastation visited upon us by the regime have far exceeded the costs of the Covid virus itself. But in a largely secular nation, many of our countrymen have found a new religion, the religion of Covid. Like all religions, it has its sacraments. The Covid sacraments include the vaccine and the mask, and the docile worship of Anthony Fauci, the grand mufti of the public health establishment.

Masking in general is an abomination, but masking school children is particularly egregious. Given the ideological challenges at the federal and, often, state level, it is at the local level where we may be most successful at exerting influence regarding Covid policies. It is through such grassroots activism that we may preserve our rapidly deteriorating nation or, at least, create safe zones or “sanctuaries.” In the wake of the turmoil surrounding the Loudoun County (Virginia) school board and elsewhere, I, thus, share my experience with my local school board on the matter of masks.

I presented my case against masking school children before the school board on three occasions, in May, July and September of 2021. In May, Gov. Eric Holcomb had lifted the statewide mask mandate, but not for schools. I called each

of the members of the board and the superintendent in advance of the May meeting urging them to lift the mask mandate for the school as well. At the meeting, I explained that school age children were virtually invulnerable to Covid but they were the ones most traumatized and adversely affected by masks. By rights — and the “science” — if we were to lift the mask mandate in stages (I preferred lifting it completely), it should have been children first. The board, though, was unwilling to challenge the state, and the children remained masked until the end of the school year.

In July, the pandemic seemed to be ebbing. I spoke again before the board and urged them to prepare for the inevitable surges in Covid cases that would come later in the year. I asked them to resist the temptation to institute further mask mandates. I explained that we had never enacted such policies before Covid despite the many instances of infectious diseases far more deadly to children that have come and gone through the years. We should, I advised, reject masking children as a “new normal.” Rather, we should return to the old normal and never mask again. The next surge, as it happened, would arrive not in months but weeks in the form of the “Delta variant.” Predictably, with the start of classes, the board issued a mask mandate.

In September, I sent a letter to each of the school board members in advance and spoke again at the meeting. The written statement was important because dozens of local doctors and nurse practitioners had sent a letter urging the school to — amazingly — mask the children. It was, therefore, vital to have a physician counter their arguments formally, in writing and with references.

I included 26 citations in support of the points made in the letter, aka “the science.” The local school board, to their credit, and midst opposition, agreed to implement a voluntary mask policy thus sparing our children, age five and above, the indignity and harm of forced masking eight hours a day, five days a week, ad infinitum.

The pressure for a mask mandate, however, endures. We must remain vigilant. Herewith is my letter:

*Dear Board Members and Superintendent:*

*We have all experienced the calamity of the Covid pandemic over the last 18 months. Far more devastating, however, has been our reaction to it (1,2,3). The lockdowns, shutdowns, shelter-in-place, school closures, social distancing, quarantining, testing, contact tracing, and masking have had little effect on the trajectory of the virus but have exacted an enormous price on all of us while conferring no advantage. Variants have now arrived, and they, too, will continue to mutate and spread, no different than influenza. There will be no returning to zero-Covid. We must accept this and take science-based, targeted (4,5) precautions without harming our economy, society, schools — and children. Indeed, the collateral damage, not of the virus but our reaction to it, has been far worse than the virus itself, a great self-inflicted wound (6,7).*

*But of all the examples of unintended ruin that have occurred, perhaps the most egregious has been from the masking of children. We have known from the beginning of the pandemic that the at-risk populations are the elderly and the sick, specifically those with significant comorbidity. (8) If you are under 70 and healthy, you are relatively immune to Covid, with a recovery rate of 99.95 percent, greater than the flu for which we never undertook such excessive measures.*

*For the 18-and-under cohort, the risks are vanishingly small. A review of total deaths in children (under 18) in England following SARS-CoV-2 infection during the first pandemic year found a death rate in healthy children of 1 per 2 million cases. This cohort included 12 million children and showed an overall survival rate of 99.995 percent. (9) While the Delta variant has been more contagious in all age groups, including under age 18, the severity in children remains unchanged (26).*

*Children are also not spreaders, particularly when asymptomatic. They are blessed with robust immune systems and are able to fight off the virus promptly. Teachers face no increased risk of Covid from students. Schools have not increased the spread of Covid (10).*

*The mask, further, confers no benefits. Neither for children nor adults. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) director Dr. Anthony Fauci himself said as much in February of 2020 before reversing himself when it became politically expedient to do so (11). Other high-level members of the medical establishment pre-politicization of Covid have also criticized the use of masks: “Seriously people — stop buying masks.” So tweeted then Surgeon General Jerome Adams on Feb. 29, 2020, adding, “They are not effective in preventing the general public from catching Coronavirus.” The World Health Organization (WHO) Health Emergencies Program Executive Director Mike Ryan, on March 30, 2020, said that “there is no specific evidence to suggest that the wearing of masks . . . has any particular benefit” (12).*

*Masks, including N95 respirators, do not prevent the spread of infection including bacteria and far smaller viral particles. The N95 label states clearly that the mask will not “eliminate the risk of contracting infection, illness or disease” (13,14). Surgical masks and commonly used cloth masks, often worn for weeks, are utterly ineffective and can themselves be sources of cutaneous and respiratory infection, as they are frequently contaminated not just by viruses but bacteria, fungi, and parasites (15). Some contaminants are known pathogens including organisms causing pneumonia, TB, Lyme disease, food poisoning, meningitis, Staph infections and others (21).*

*Large randomized controlled studies conducted before the age of Covid, and before masking became politicized, showed no benefit of N95s over surgical masks in protecting against the flu. “Among outpatient health care personnel, N95 respirators vs medical masks . . . resulted in no significant difference in the incidence of*



*laboratory confirmed influenza” (16). Medical masks are widely recognized as being ineffective in preventing the spread of viruses and so apparently are N95s.*

*In a review of 14 randomly controlled studies<sup>12</sup> that examined the effectiveness of masks in preventing the transmission of respiratory viruses, eleven suggested that masks are either useless or counterproductive. One randomized control study found that cloth masks allowed 97 percent of particles through, and may actually increase the infection risk (18).*

*India had 81 percent mask compliance in February 2021 and cases soared 2966 percent. Cases peaked two weeks later and then went down. Two months into Israel’s reinstated mask mandate, cases are up 7,970 percent (17, 19, 20). Masks had no effect on the transmission of the virus.*

*Masking children causes a host of other health problems. These include claustrophobia, increased heart rate, dizziness, headaches, nausea, stress, skin infections, sinusitis, reduced immune resilience, lack of empathy, and increased emotional stress. There have been increases in self-harm, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder and tics (10, 22, 23, 24, 25).*

*In summary, masks do nothing to prevent the spread of the virus in children or adults. They also have adverse effects and can themselves become contaminated and transmit deadly pathogens. Children remove, touch, and even trade masks. There is no reason to mask children — or anyone.*

*A voluntary mask policy may be appropriate given the level of misinformation and panic created by the media, medical establishment and government, but never a forced mask mandate. Individual students may wear masks if they or their families choose. Other students should be able to attend school without masks. Based on the science and other valid reasons, I request that you end the mask mandate immediately. Please, stop masking our children. ♦*

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# Leo Morris

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## You — Yes, You — Are a Miracle

(Dec. 6) — Do me a favor. Pause for a moment today and consider what a miracle you are.

That request springs from a 10-year-old article I stumbled across so interesting that I set it aside to write about sometime in the future.

I guess that time is now.

Ali Binazir, writing for the Huffington Post in 2011, said he was intrigued by the oft-cited statistic, which he had just heard in a TED talk, that the odds of a specific individual being born were about one in 400 trillion.

Even if you just accept that number, beating the odds against your birth would be worth celebrating as the longest of long shots. But Binazir did a little back-of-the-envelope math and came up with even more astonishing odds.

He began by calculating the probability that two specific people — your parents — out of the billions on Earth would meet and have a relationship lasting long enough to have children at around one in 40 million. And you are the result of one particular sperm, which your father would produce 12 trillion of during his reproductive lifetime, meeting one particular viable egg, of which your mother would have had about 100,000.

“So the probability of that one sperm with half your name on it hitting that one egg with the other half of your name on it is one in 400 quadrillion.”

But that’s just getting started. You have to do the same calculations for your parents’ four parents and get similar odds for those specific people being born, then your grandparents’ eight

parents, and so on and so on back to the dawn of time.

What he ended up with was 400 quadrillion to the 150,000th power. That’s a 10 followed by 2,640,000 zeroes: “So what’s the probability of your being born? It’s the probability of 2.5 million people getting together . . . each to play a game of dice with trillion-sided dice. They each roll the dice — and they all come up the exact same number.”

The odds are so great as to be unimaginable, nearly incalculable. You should not even be here.

Yet, there you sit, reading this column, taking in the world around you through all your senses, thinking your unique thoughts.

A miracle.

My life has dimmed a bit today because it is missing a miracle.

I just learned that my Aunt Lou, having made it to her 90s, died in her sleep. She was the last of a generation in our family. Now, it’s just my brother and sister and me and all our cousins.

When my mother died, I experienced the same kind of grief I had when my father died years earlier, but something else, too: a sense of being adrift, cut off from my past and forced to carry the load alone that had been passed on generation to generation. With Aunt Lou’s passing, I feel that combination of awe and terror even more acutely.

As strongly as I feel that pang of isolation now, despite having achieved it so late in life, I cannot begin to imagine what it must be like to be orphaned at a young age, always yearning for the connections that most of us take for granted. If each individual is a miracle, each family is wonderment of multiplied miracles. I don’t know which is worse, to never know the wonderment or to have it and not appreciate it.

I doubt if my aunt thought about the miracle of life. She was a hill woman from a generation that knew doing your chores was the only way to stay one step ahead of hardship. But she lived the miracle. I never heard her complain, and she raised a good family. She didn’t break faith with her ancestors, and she gave the next generation everything she had.

I think there is a lesson in there somewhere.

History isn't just a passing of the torch or an accumulation of wisdom. It should be a celebration of miracles.

You can look at yourself as just one of the nearly 8 billion people now living and the 117 billion or so who have ever lived, here and gone in a flash, flesh crumbling into the dust of the ages, one more grain of sand on an infinite beach.

But you can also understand that among the vast sea of humanity, you are absolutely unique. There has never been another you, and there never will be.

You are a miracle. Don't waste it.

### **'Leftover' Memories Are Precious**

(Nov. 29) — I'm sitting here still eating turkey three days after Thanksgiving and thinking: Leftovers are food nostalgia.

By enjoying the dishes again, we can trigger memories of the holiday just experienced, savoring the good moments and ignoring the bad. We can focus on recalling the easy companionship of friends and family without reliving the anxiety of complicated preparations, the worry over who might be tardy or absent, the horror of being lectured about politics by people we see only once a year.

As I'm eating, I'm scrolling through "True Fort Wayne Indiana History," a public group on Facebook I can actually enjoy without suffering through bumper-sticker lectures on politics from people I would probably cross the street to avoid.

The nearly 10,000 members of the group post reminiscences of a time and place that still exist only within our collective consciousness.

And it occurs to me, as I sample the photos from a long-ago city, that nostalgia comprises the leftovers of the heart. It allows us to live in the glow of remembered happiness without considering the miseries small and large that often intruded.

There are photos of the old Maloley's supermarket, where my parents shopped when we first moved to town. My sister posted there,

"When my brother and I went to Maloley's for bread and milk in the '60s, it was 90 cents for a loaf of bread and a gallon of milk, and we got to keep the dime that was left. Good times."

She chooses not to focus on how far our family had to stretch a dollar in those days.

And there are photos of so many places I spent the hours of my youth. Murphys department store downtown. The GE Bowling Club on Broadway. Gardner's drive-in, the Roller Dome, the old train and bus stations, all those city parks.

I choose to remember a carefree innocence, every endless day with something new to learn, a new friend to make, a new horizon to see beyond. I choose not to relive the gnawing insecurities of how to fit in in high school, how to choose a lifelong career, how to negotiate the looming labyrinth of adulthood.

It is said that we are nicer people during the holiday season, kinder and more generous, tolerant and more forgiving.

Perhaps that is so, but it could also be that we go into the season more determined to tap into our better natures. We enter the holidays knowing there will be torments and tribulations, but also so much good will that we will have leftovers to carry us through to a new year. From Thanksgiving to New Year's Day is our annual pre-nostalgic state of mind.

I'm not suggesting that we should pretend happiness is everywhere at all times and that we ignore our own and others' misfortunes, only that there is a time to dwell on happiness. And this is that time.

It gets so tiresome listening to those who would take away the holidays or rename them to make up for this or that perceived sin of our ancestors, oppressions that we supposedly still perpetuate today, even if unwittingly. It is tempting to engage them, Twitter barb for Twitter barb.

But I'm inclined to seek out my better nature. I have my holidays and they can have theirs, however joyless they might be.

I will merely note that nostalgia is a necessary cushion for our sometimes dreary lives, and if



there is no happiness built in, there will be none to tap into. And if you squander so much moral outrage on how other people find fulfillment, you will have none left over when you really need it.

### **The Rittenhouse Trial: Hooray for Cameras**

(*Nov. 22*) — Now that the Kyle Rittenhouse trial has gone into the left-right proxy war history books, a couple of points to reflect on that might have gotten lost in the shuffle:

The first point is that this was about one young man citing self-defense as justification for killing two people and wounding another. Period. His acquittal should neither be celebrated as a great victory for the Second Amendment nor used as a rallying cry to recruit Black Lives Matter troops. It was a reflection of the jury's acceptance, after considering the facts presented to it, of Rittenhouse's claim that he was in fear for his life when he fired his rifle.

If you are a law-abiding citizen, this should be of interest to you, since your most likely use of deadly force will be to defend yourself or your property or to protect someone else. You might want to know the specifics of stand-your-ground and castle doctrine laws.

Indiana, for example, has one of the stronger stand-your-ground laws in that a self-defense claim does not require you to have retreated before using deadly force, as some states' laws do. On the other hand, if it can be shown that you were in any way the instigator of the confrontation, you cannot claim self-defense. If you shoot someone trying to break into your house, you're probably OK. But what if you take your gun to a neighbor's house on the same block and shoot a would-be intruder? What about a stranger's house on the other side of town?

The second point is that television cameras were present for gavel-to-gavel coverage of the trial, so anyone who wanted to could see just what jury members saw and judge the case as they did, on the facts alone as they rolled out one by one.

The remarkable thing, or perhaps the dismaying thing, is that so few did that, instead

willingly accepting the partial, misleading or deliberately fabricated bits of information served up by the press and dished out on social media. People started the trial with one view of Rittenhouse's guilt or innocence, took in the commentary that reinforced their views, and came away with their minds unchanged. If your opinion of this case is based solely on the relevant information of the case, well, you are one in a thousand. Maybe one in a million.

But the truth, as they say, is out there. The transcript of the trial will always be available for those who want to leaven their rhetorical rants with a small dose of reality.

As this is written, the Indiana Supreme Court has – finally – authorized the experimental use of cameras in four Indiana courtrooms. We have been perhaps the most reluctant state in the union when it comes to introducing modern technology into judicial proceedings.

The arguments for and against cameras – which pit the First Amendment protection of the public's right to know against Sixth Amendment guarantees of a fair trial – probably reflect the debates the Founders had over the Bill of Rights in the first place.

As a journalist, I have come down on the side of cameras, though recognizing their use is not without problems. The reason for the transparency of judicial proceedings was to protect the rights of defendants, and augmenting transparency with technology does not change that dynamic.

And now there is even another reason for cameras – simply to make the source material available.

It is the same reason to support the televising of congressional sessions and the publication of proposed city ordinances, giving those have the need to know – that would be citizens and taxpayers – what police call “best evidence.” Not what someone says about something, or what someone else opines about what someone says about something, but the actual something.

If we can't trust the media to give us the objective, unbiased information with which to

make rational decisions – and it is becoming increasingly clear that we can’t – we have no choice but to seek out original source material when we can and demand it when it isn’t forthcoming.

Not that many people will avail themselves of it, as the Rittenhouse trial has sadly demonstrated.

But at least it will be there. If just a few people watch a trial, to imagine what it would be like to be a jury member and consider the facts and the facts alone, it would be worth celebrating.

### In Error There Is Encouragement

(*Nov. 15*) – I bow to no one in my disdain for Governor Holcomb. After all, it is my duty as a political columnist to be a government watchdog, and as the state’s chief executive, the governor should be prepared to take his share of criticism.

I can’t be certain of how many negative columns I’ve written about him, but it must be north of half a dozen by now. I feel as if I could type “Governor Holcomb” in my sleep.

Which is apparently what I did last week.

In a column about how important constitutions are, I wrote, way down in the penultimate paragraph, “Governor Holcomb and the General Assembly are engaged in an epic battle over what the governor’s executive powers should be and how much control the legislature should have over its own actions.”

At least that’s what my brain said I wrote. What my fingers actually came up with was, “Governor Whitcomb and the General Assembly . . .”

Well, that blew up my email.

“Do you mean Governor Holcomb?” one reader politely and succinctly inquired. “Leo, you’re getting old,” another one said. “Ed Whitcomb was governor in the 1960s.” There was even an attempt at humor: “Was it that dadburn autocorrect?” one man asked. Only one reader responded to the meat of the column and offered his view that the courts, no less than the governor

and the legislature, are less than respectful of constitutional imperatives.

I take two lessons from this.

One is that, no matter how trivial errors are, readers will notice them and, more often than not, pounce on them, ignoring whatever point the writer was trying to convey. This is dismaying but understandable. I was reading a novel recently in which one character was said not to be “phased” by something, instead of the correct “fazed,” and it yanked me right out of the storyline I had been happily immersed in.

But the other is that most of the people who encounter my columns seem to read them all the way the end, which pleases me a lot more than it probably should.

Although I have strong feelings about the issues of the day and am less than shy about expressing them forcefully, I am not naïve enough to think I am winning hearts and changing mind. I suspect most people who read opinion columns these days do so either to reinforce their own views or to augment the scorn they feel for those with opposing views. Confirmation bias has become Americans’ default mode.

No, my less ambitious, and, I think, saner goal is merely to make sure my take on the issues is out there, unambiguously stated and logically argued. If that side loses in the end, it won’t be because it wasn’t plainly available.

So, if readers want to know my position in its totality, they have to make it to the end of the columns, which gives me my goal: To make the writing interesting enough to carry the ideas to the end.

And that’s not an easy task for someone trained in the “inverted pyramid” style of newspaper writing. As you may know, news stories were supposed to be written with the most important facts – the who, what, when, where, why and how – crammed into the first couple of paragraphs.

There were two reasons for this. One was to allow editors, if facing a space crunch, to trim the stories from the bottom up, confident nothing vital would be lost in the process. The other was to accommodate readers with short attention spans

– the majority, alas – who would seldom read beyond the second paragraph.

Newspapers are in decline, but attention spans are even shorter, and the new media springing up even more aggressive in compensating for them. Information consumers are invited to jump into and out of the middle of complicated issues, leaving with no more sense of nuance or perspective than they came with. We know more and more, and understand less and less.

Dragging someone to the end of a 600 or 700-word column, then, is a major victory, and I'm glad to have evidence that I accomplish it every now and then. Even at the cost of a hit to my reputation as a careful writer.

Thanks for indulging me. I feel so much better now. I hope that is a permanent change, not just a faze I'm going through.

## Indiana's Constitution Matters

(Nov. 8) — In this short-attention-span era, we'll read the headline and, perhaps, if we're not too busy, the first two or three paragraphs. Or we'll catch the 10-second radio bulletin and, occasionally, see the 30-second follow-up on TV.

Our partisan instincts nudged, we will then shout at each other across the great Red State-Blue State divide on Facebook and Twitter without ever learning the substance of the issue. We're like two families feuding generations after everyone has forgotten what started the feud in the first place.

Case in point:

The Arizona Supreme Court recently ruled – unanimously – against several provisions in state budget bills, including one that banned mask mandates in K-12 schools and one that banned the teaching of critical race theory. Conservatives howled in anguish and progressives shouted with joy. Let slip the dogs of overheated rhetoric!

But anyone who read beyond the headlines realized that the justices were not saying anything one way or the other about the specific merits of the measures. They simply ruled that the measures violated the provision of the Arizona

Constitution requiring individual bills to encompass a single subject.

With too many not noticing, the court had slipped a little bit of good government into its ruling. Legislators must actually follow the state constitution.

The constitutions in 41 of 50 states, including Indiana, contain a general single-subject rule, according to a 2014 study published in the *Valparaiso University Law Review*, but in most of them “the rules have effectively been rendered dormant due in large part to courts’ refusal to enforce the rule.”

Indiana courts are among those ignoring this provision. As the Indiana Court of Appeals has noted, “Indiana’s single subject rule is essentially a void constitutional letter despite a robust body of precedent solemnizing its significance.”

There are two important issues here.

The first is that the single-subject rule promotes good government.

The discussions among those drafting Indiana’s 1851 constitution made clear that the intent was to put restrictions on the actions of legislators, who could do pretty much anything under the 1816 constitution. Of particular concern was banning the practice of log-rolling, legislators doing favors for one another in provision-stuffed bills, which resulted in myriad laws of interest only to a few people, with none of them getting the attention and debate they deserved.

Not much discussed among the drafters but of related significance is that multiple-issue bills make it harder for Hoosiers to know the laws they must live by. Democracy can work only with a transparent government and an informed citizenry. Just consider the recently passed federal \$1 trillion-plus infrastructure bill and the still-under-consideration multi-trillion social spending bill. We likely never will know everything those require of us and from us.

The second issue is that constitutions matter, state ones no less than the federal one.

They set the ground rules for limiting the actions of government and clearly defining the rights of the governed. If they are not interpreted

to say what they mean and mean what they say, we are lost at sea and can never truly be free. With the U.S. Constitution battered for decades by those who want it to validate what they want and only what they want, our state documents are even more important.

Gov. Holcomb and the General Assembly are engaged in an epic battle over what the governor's executive powers should be and how much control the legislature should have over its own actions. Each side insists it is not pursuing selfish interests but intent only on fidelity to the state constitution.

It is fair to ask if they really mean it.

### A Mayor Redefines 'Citizen'

(Nov. 1) — Several years ago, I wrote an editorial about the effects of some policy or other on the citizens of Fort Wayne, and a copy editor gave me a hard time about it.

She wasn't assigned to the editorial page — we took care of our own editing and proofreading, thank you very much — but she felt entitled to offer her opinion anyway. Copy editors are like that.

"You are a citizen of a country," she told me, "not of a lesser unit like a state, county or city. It denotes a reciprocal relationship of rights and obligations that do not attach to the non-citizen."

Yes, they talk like that.

I argued with her.

"You're just being pedantic. If you look further down the list of definitions, you'll find that 'citizen' can also serve as a synonym for resident, someone who lives in an area."

Secretly, I thought she had a point. Though the word had come to have a more general meaning, its specific, original meaning was too useful to let it be lost in the ebb and flow of linguistic evolution. But if you allow a copy editor outdo you in anal-retentive nitpickery, you'll never live it down.

It turns out, however, that I was actually right. I was just ahead of my time.

Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry has proudly announced the creation of a new city

identification card for people who "for some reason" can't obtain a driver's license or valid state ID.

The purpose of the cards is to "promote inclusion, diversity and respect for all" by allowing "all citizens" to have access to important services. The cards won't allow people to drive or vote, but in other Hoosier cities like South Bend, Goshen, Elkhart and Plymouth, they have been recognized in places like schools, hospitals and libraries.

Clearly, the mayor does not really mean "citizens" in the original sense of "legally defined member of the country." He doesn't even mean "resident of the city." What he really means, which we may infer from inclusion, diversity, respect for all and "for some reason," is, take your pick, illegal alien or undocumented immigrant.

Whether he intends it or not, the mayor's choice of words obscures rather than illuminates.

I don't mean to be a hidebound word purist. I understand that our vocabulary is fluid, not static, that our language changes as we change. Sometimes we need new words, and sometimes old words are drafted for new tasks.

"Nice" comes from the Latin and once meant ignorant. "Cute" was the word for someone sharp or quick-witted. "Silly" meant pious or learned. "Brave" meant showy or gaudy. A "girl" was a young person of either sex, and "guy" meant grotesque in appearance.

But we're losing a whole class of words, their meanings that depict absolute certainties replaced with ones describing watered-down sentimentalities.

"Hero" was someone who displayed extraordinary courage above the call of duty; now it just means someone who does the decent thing. A "tragedy" was when someone of great potential who was brought down by his or her own character flaws; now it means any inconvenient mishap. A "friend" was a trusted confidante; now it is someone we interact with on Facebook. A "lie" was a despicable fabrication of the truth; today it is a forgivable indiscretion, unless, of course, it is the "big lie," which is whatever the other side most believes that you most disagree with.



Nobody wants to think in absolutes these days. Everything is relative, circumstances dictate the rules, root causes can explain everything. Are we changing the words to reflect the new reality or changing the words to help usher in the new reality?

A little bit of both, which I hope is taken more as cute than nice.

People like Mayor Henry want to live in a reality where there are no borders and they can believe all are treated inclusively and equitably as citizens of the world, and they also want to hurry that reality along. As to what reciprocal rights and obligations that might involve, well, those are other absolute words that could probably benefit from a little redefinition.

### The New Superman Fails to Inspire

*(Oct. 25)* — I've got a secret.

Bet you do, too. As a matter of fact, don't we all? Isn't it time we brought them out into the open so we can shine the light of truth on the shame hiding in the darkest corners of our souls?

I'll start.

I have always idolized Superman. As a nerdy, introverted high school student, I even dreamed of being Superman, as did thousands, perhaps millions, of my fellow introverted nerds.

Not just being Superman, of course, but of revealing myself as Superman. (Speaking of secrets, that's the hidden, unspoken reason for the success of all super hero tales, from the Scarlet Pimpernel through Zorro and the whole D.C.-Marvel universe, the idea that there is a private, better self inside of us who will astonish the world when they finally see it.)

This is the way I imagined it:

Karlinda (hot babe of my juvenile dreams): Oh, you're OK, Leo, for a mild-mannered high school student. If you could only be more like Superman.

Me: (whipping off glasses and outer garments): Silly girl, I don't have to be like Superman. I AM Superman.

Karlinda: Oh, Supe, fly me to your Fortress of Solitude.

Of course, the reality might have been a little different:

Me: I am Superman.

Karlinda: Funny, you look just like Leo but without the glasses and wearing a dorky costume.

Me: Is that you, Karlinda, or are you Clara? I can't quite focus.

Karlinda: Aren't I the one who's supposed to not recognize you?

As you may have already heard, there is a new Superman in town. Jon Kent, son of Clark Kent and Lois Lane, has taken over for his father. He is bisexual and has a boyfriend. Instead of crooks and Commies, terrorists and Nazis, he now pledges to take on evils like global warming and the deportation of undocumented immigrants. Instead of fighting for "truth, justice and the American way," he now fights for "truth, justice and a better tomorrow."

I'm trying to imagine a nerdy, introverted kid of today pretending to whip off his glasses and revealing his secret identity as this iteration of the Man of Steel, and I just can't wrap my head around it.

Can there possibly be millions, thousands, or even hundreds of kids who long to enjoy a same-sex kiss before flying off to battle global warming in order to somehow magically bring about "a better tomorrow"?

Didn't the original Superman have enough angst to deal with as a one-of-a-kind freak from another planet? Can we really identify with the sexual ambiguity, climate anxiety and nationalistic alienation on top of the sense of isolation he already felt?

And isn't he crossing a line? As a mere visitor to Earth, didn't his father have a sort of Prime Directive that let him fix problems he encountered but forbade him from interfering in planetary affairs? How dare his second-generation brat tell us we can't handle the climate that's been here for millions of years.

(Little fantasy world intersectionality there, crossing Superman with Star Trek. Oh, wait,

Intersectionality means something else in today's vernacular, doesn't it? Never mind.)

Come to think of it, considering the ambient zeitgeist, will this new Superman even have a secret identity? After telling the world everything about himself and repeating it on Twitter and Facebook for those who might have missed it, what can he possibly have left to hide? And as whom will he pose? A meat-eating non-recycling, cis-gen, Republican Christian from Indiana who has never read the New York Times? Oh, I forgot, near-sighted, too.

I think I might be accused of Overly Brooding Rightwing Seriousness to wonder if this new Superman will go to Afghanistan and lecture the Taliban on the use of pronouns before they cut off his head with a Kryptonite sword.

And I would certainly be labeled a planetary jingoist, perhaps an Earth chauvinist, to suggest he go back where he came from, even if I point out that his father never bothered to get a Green Card.

So I will merely paraphrase something said in a different context and observe that, if we indeed get the super heroes we deserve, we have become a very silly people. Just a little comic book philosophy whispered by my private, better self yearning for a role model.

## Education and the Great Divide

(Oct. 18) — If a group of parents request that certain material be removed from the classroom, that is not censorship or “book banning,” Is that a provocative statement? I don't think it should be.

Today's case study is from central Indiana.

Former Hoosier Julia Scheeres is “somewhat amused” but “entirely unsurprised” that her memoir about growing up in Indiana “has been targeted by a group of conservative parents who want it pulled from school libraries.”

She seems less offhand about those parents' reaction to her work, which one person at a Carmel school board meeting called “absolutely disgusting” and another criticized as the “type of trash” that “they will be teaching in every school across our country.”

The book in question is *Jesus Land*, which the author herself describes in a column in the *Lafayette Journal & Courier* as being about “two same-aged siblings – one Black, one white – struggling to find acceptance in a conservative Indiana town.”

Perhaps, she muses, the book's “themes of racism and intolerance hit a little too close to home” in Carmel. Furthermore, those parents aren't just fixated on sex but are “fearful of anything that challenges their worldview, which is overwhelmingly straight, white and evangelical.”

It's easy to see what Scheeres thinks of Indiana and Hoosiers. The state is an unenlightened, narrow-minded conclave of intolerant bigots. It is also not hard to understand why the residents of Carmel might resist that worldview being aimed at their children.

To further illustrate her perception of this great divide, Scheeres cites two different reactions to the currently fashionable notion of gender fluidity, one in Indiana and one in California.

A seventh-grade teacher in a South Bend suburb posted a “tour of her rainbow-colored classroom” in which she mentioned that she was going “to allow students to choose their own pronouns.” Alas, her video predictably “set off a firestorm” that ended with the school stipulating that only a parent could determine a child's gender.

“Contrast this with my seventh-grade daughter's first day of school in Albany, Calif., where a teacher displayed a Pride flag and allowed kids to choose their pronouns. My daughter reported that her friend, who identifies as ‘they,’ was thrilled to have found an adult ally, which in turn made my daughter glow with happiness, because love begets love.”

I'm going to go out on a limb here and suggest that encouraging seventh-graders to choose their own pronouns might be considered a radical idea in more than a few quarters. And saying that only a parent can determine an elementary school child's gender is not exactly controversial. How, and whether, that subject is addressed in seventh grade matters.

So does the handling of a diversity, equity and inclusion program of studies, whether it approaches the subject with an underlying theme of tolerance and respect or whether it sends the message that white privilege is the greatest sin of the age. It matters, in fact, what baseline assumption about the United States is accepted in the school. Is America a noble experiment with flaws but always improving? Or is it now, as it has always been, an oppressive gulag of victims and victimizers, beyond all redemption?

And this is more than a simple matter of calling out those who want this or that book banished from the classroom as bullies trying to thwart freedom of expression and freedom of thought. We have long passed the innocent days when parents politely objected to Huckleberry Finn or Ulysses, the school board listened respectfully, and the American Library Association rejoiced that we came out of the experience with our commitment to a pluralistic society still gloriously intact.

In Texas recently, an educator interpreted that state's law requiring "controversial subjects" to be presented from diverse, contending viewpoints to mean that a book on the Holocaust could not be taught unless one with "an opposing perspective" were also taught. Well, that ignited a firestorm of protest (there's that phrase again) from people who decried the absurdity of allowing such a monstrous lie to be taught in school.

The point is that almost everybody has something they don't want taught in schools, though they surely differ on what. Generally, people seek to keep only what they see as truth to be taught. Certainly, we can disagree on the why and how of slavery's development in this country. But who would argue for teaching that it didn't really exist or, slightly less absurdly, that it was beneficial?

What about climate change? A consensus has been reached, contrary to the scientific method, that it is a fact, not a theory, and that the effects will be nothing less than catastrophic without massive government intervention. Contrary opinions will not be entertained. Who among

those celebrating the teaching of Jesus Land would lament the exclusion of climate denial from the curriculum?

Who decides the truth? More important, in its absence, can we trust the public school system to teach the known and inferable facts completely and equip students with the intellectual tools needed to think critically about the world we live in?

At one time, we did. However we disagreed with each other, we were generally united in our belief in the basic goodness of the country and shared a common set of goals. The school system was the conduit we used to pass along our shared values and traditions, generation to generation. It was the repository of our culture.

I don't think that is true anymore. We are at war with each other, with vastly different ideas about what this country was, is, could be and should be. And those most vilified today for their narrow-mindedness and bigotry are not likely to back down, because they know very well that the other side, the one hurling the invective, is not exactly open to competing ideas. "Hey, this is a safe space, and you're hurting my feelings. Shut up and go away."

The education establishment's gross mishandling of the Covid pandemic has greatly accelerated the trend toward home schooling and private education. Unless we can begin to agree again on a common set of shared values, which accommodates vigorous but civil debate, we are headed for a stark public-private dichotomy in our children's education.

That won't be good for them or the country, because the war will then just go on, generation to generation.

## Redistricting Is Power Delineated

*(Oct. 13)* — Here's the remarkable opening sentence of one of the many stories about the Hoosier GOP's "disputed" and "contentious" redistricting plan:

"Two independent analyses of Indiana's redistricting maps say the districts drawn by

Republicans are heavily skewed in favor of Republicans.”

Seriously? The party in charge of redrawing election maps redraws them so that it stays in control? How in the world did that happen?

A little clarification here for those who don’t think about politics all the time.

When Republicans say they did their best to keep districts compact without breaking up cities or counties unnecessarily, what they mean is: We can do whatever we want, deal with it, or, more bluntly: Nyah, nyah, nyah.

When Democrats say Republicans are being unfair, what they mean is: We want more seats in the legislature, and you won’t give them to us, waaaah.

And when “objective, neutral” observers such as the League of Women Voters say an independent commission needs to redraw the districts to protect voter interests, what they mean is: Let more Democrats win.

This is not about Republicans losing control. Voters statewide tend to vote for Republicans about 60 percent of the time, so the GOP would likely keep the legislature no matter how the districts are drawn. It’s about them continuing to win 70 to 80 percent of legislative seats to keep their super majority.

And it’s not a tale of rapacious Republicans and feckless Democrats.

Just across the border in Illinois, it’s the same play but with the characters all switched around. There, the Democrats have the nyah-nyah-nyah super majority, the Republicans are having a waaaah temper tantrum, and the neutral observer’s definition of fairness is, “Let more Republicans win.”

Fairness.

What a word to throw around about politics. What we’re seeing is a lesson in power. Those who don’t have it crave it. Those who have it want to keep it and increase it. So, the best thing to do, for those who would be subjected to that power, is to diffuse it, put roadblocks in front of it.

There’s another lesson in power – perhaps not a more important one but a more interesting one – in the fight between the governor and the General Assembly.

Indiana has a weak governor who would like to be stronger.

That’s not a criticism of Eric Holcomb’s character. His weakness is just a directive from the Indiana Constitution, which gives the General Assembly the ability to override a gubernatorial veto with a simple majority, rather than the, um, super majority required in most states, and he can’t exercise a line-item veto or pocket veto.

So, imagine his feeling of liberation when the Covid pandemic hit, and he could exercise emergency powers to protect Hoosier health. He liked that so much that he has extended his special authority for the 19th time, surely straining the definition of “emergency” to the limit.

And imagine his consternation when the General Assembly decided, hey, shouldn’t we have a say in this, and shouldn’t we be able to decide when to have a special session instead of waiting around for the governor to call one?

A judge has ruled in favor of the legislature, and the governor is mulling whether to challenge it. If he does, it will require an intervention by the Indiana Supreme Court. That’s called separation of powers, which our Founders wisely prescribed for the federal government but works quite well at the state level, too.

So, yes, it’s important who is in the General Assembly. If the Democrats had a bigger minority, the GOP might have to pay more attention to them. But if that means more legislation, what legislators do becomes more important.

And how much power they have, and who can check it. And what the governor wants to do and who will let him or stop him. And how the court will balance the competing interests.

Of course, all this has to put in perspective by voters depending on their baseline beliefs. Is the purpose of government mostly to decide what we



need and give us better lives? Or is it mostly to protect our rights and otherwise leave us alone?

Considered in that context, counting Republican and Democratic heads in the General Assembly gets close to “don’t sweat the small stuff” territory.

## Is Debt ‘Ceiling’ the Right Term?

(Oct. 5) — A modest request to news organizations: Please stop referring to the federal “debt ceiling.” It is a grotesquely inappropriate term.

It is preposterous to refer to something that is constantly being moved as a “ceiling,” which we all know is fixed in place forever. Remember that other ceiling metaphor – the “glass” one that women in business are trapped by? They can see through it, forever tantalized by the perquisites on the other side, but never breach it.

But that debt ceiling just keeps going up and up.

It was way back in 1939 when Congress passed a law that replaced various separate limits on government debt with the general restriction now known as the debt ceiling. The initial ceiling was set at \$45 billion. That amounts to about six hours of federal spending at today’s level, as of Friday, Oct. 1, per the Data Lab website.

The ceiling today, through a series of suspensions and other tricks too complicated to fathom, is about \$28.5 trillion, which is less than the current national debt, which will be about \$29 trillion and mounting rapidly by the time you read this. If the ceiling isn’t raised again – or suspended or otherwise finessed – dire things could happen, including a temporary and/or partial federal government shutdown.

Some of us think that wouldn’t be such a bad thing, but that’s another column.

That ceiling, by the way, is not to enable the government to keep borrowing and therefore spending. It’s just to cover the spending the government has already done. Suppose you sign the papers to buy a house, then sit down and figure out how much you have available to spend

and how much you need to borrow. That’s how the government operates all the time.

If you have the time, go online and look at a graph charting the increase of the debt ceiling over the years. Note the graceful upward arc. Our monstrous debt has been a happily bipartisan collaboration for decades, so any politician trying to score political points on the issue deserves nothing but withering scorn.

The same must be said, alas, for those brave few who claim to be fighting against the trend.

Consider an analogy.

Imagine America as a house with a basement. The debt is the rapidly rising water in the basement. When politicians call the flooded basement a crisis, what they end up arguing about is whether to keep adding to the water a quart or a gallon at a time. And those claiming to really understand the problem are proposing to remove the water a teaspoon at a time, and they expect us to be eternally grateful to them.

The basement analogy helps illustrate the uselessness of the ceiling terminology. We surely cannot let the water rise above the basement ceiling, because it would encroach on our habitat. We could, through heroic engineering feats, raise the ceiling, but that would also squeeze us out of our living space.

No, there is no ceiling, and our politicians know it. What they really think they are dealing with is the basement floor, which they think they can break through, making the hole beneath us ever deeper without hurting the foundation of the house above it.

Of course, that can’t go on forever without the whole house crashing around us, and everybody knows that, too.

In the meantime, you know what happens to a basement full of water. It gets dank and smelly, becoming a disgusting cesspool of disease-ridden pestilence.

Like a swamp, which brings up another modest request: Swamp, good word; don’t be afraid to use it.

## The Public's Right to Be Heard

(Oct. 3) — At the conclusion of a recent Allen County Commission meeting, the commission president became annoyed with a woman who refused to shut up when her allotted time expired under the public speaking rules. He warned her that people not following the rules risked having no public comment at all.

“Local government boards,” the newspaper article chronicling the meeting gently reminded its readers, “are not legally obligated to allow public comments at meetings.”

Too true, and a lot of Indiana government units are flirting with the idea of blessed silence at meetings, including Northwest Allen’s and other school boards. “The public” is just a polite term for a bunch of ignorant whiners and ill-informed complainers. Letting them run off at the mouth just slows things down and gums up the works.

Those inclined to complain would probably get little understanding from the Indiana General Assembly, which hammers out the details of major legislation in private meetings of the GOP super majority, letting the public see the result at the same time as the hapless Democratic mini minority.

Nor would they find a sympathetic ear in Congress, whose speaker seems proud of the fact that the public can learn what is in bills running thousands of pages only after the bills become law. Got a comment — oops, too late.

It’s the spirit of the age, isn’t it? On college campuses, professors can be fired for having the wrong opinion, and there are safe spaces where any opinion that makes any student uncomfortable is forbidden. Facebook and Twitter monitor their users for unorthodox opinions on everything from Covid to climate change and transgenderism, and even the president of the United States can be banned.

As someone who has spent a lifetime both offering and combatting opinions, who has always believed that a good, healthy argument is the surest path to the truth, I find this all more than a little distressing.

It was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in a 1983 column in the Washington Post, who observed that “everyone is entitled to his own opinion but not to his own facts.”

It seemed so clear then. Opinions were good or bad, based on the accuracy of the facts undergirding them and our evaluations of their significance, and in debating them, we discarded bits of misconception and glimpsed pieces of the truth.

Today, the line between facts and opinion is deliberately blurred by those who think they already know the truth and have the right, even the obligation, to shout down those who don’t accept it. And I wonder if those who applaud that reality have considered where we might be headed.

Moynihan, some will recall, though a Democrat and a firebrand liberal in many ways, was also a contrarian who for a time served in the administration of Richard Nixon. You remember Nixon. His appeals to the “silent majority” of Americans whose voices were never heard won him the presidency.

And it turns out he wasn’t the first. In 1919, ad executive and Republican Party supporter Bruce Barton wrote in Collier magazine of Calvin Coolidge’s presidential run: “It sometimes seems as if this great silent majority had no spokesman. But Coolidge belongs with that crowd: he lives like them, he works like them, and understands.”

I still believe that airing all the opinions is the best way to elevate the discussion. That’s how the country got started and why we have the First Amendment, because the Founders believed that “from many voices,” truth emerged.

Do you think otherwise?

If you think Coolidge was a lousy president, and you think Richard Nixon was nothing but a crook, do you still believe ignoring a wide swatch of the American people was a good idea? How about Donald Trump? His constituents felt that the ruling elite not only refused to listen to them but held them in utter contempt.

You think they’re not still out there? Perhaps when they get a chance to speak up, they don’t

follow the rules of public comment as well as they should. But they will be heard.

Sooner or later, one way or another.

## Our Crumbling Sense of Privacy

(Sept. 27) — I did some really stupid things when I was young and dumb. Who didn't?

Some of them were embarrassing, and some of them made me feel downright ashamed. But I recognized my failings and tried to learn from my mistakes, which is all any of us can do. I think I became a better person in the process.

But how would it have gone, I wonder today, if, at the depth of my self-loathing, one of my foolish actions made me the object of public humiliation and near universal vilification?

Not very well, I think. I'm not sure I would have come through such an ordeal as emotionally healthy as Monica Lewinsky apparently did.

Now 48, she should have spent her 20s and 30s exploring her limits and fine-tuning her life goals. Instead, she had to hide from worldwide infamy as the trailer park trash who nearly toppled a presidency. It took her into her 40s to reclaim her own narrative.

Lewinsky is scheduled to appear Jan. 25 at Fort Wayne Purdue's Omnibus Lecture Series, with a version of the "Price of Shame" speech she's been giving for the last few years, and it's anybody's guess what the students attending will get from it.

Most of them either hadn't been born at the time of her fling with President Bill Clinton or were not old enough to understand what it was about. They wouldn't have known about the power dynamics that put her through the grinder as the right roared to get Clinton and left moved heaven and earth to defend him.

They will understand, though, how a sexual predator like Clinton could have escaped his impeachment relatively unscathed. They have watched many such scandals come and go and seen how victim advocates like the #MeToo movement shout or stay silent depending on the status of the predator.

And they might have a glimmer of insight if Lewinsky calls herself, as she has in some iterations of the speech, "Patient Zero" for the kind of public shaming our social media have become notorious for lately. But I wonder of they will really get it.

"It was before the days of the internet sex tape," said an article in *The Week* in 2015, "but barely. Princess Diana had been photographed with a hidden camera while working out at the gym; Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee's honeymoon sex tape was stolen from their home and bootlegged out of car trunks. 'It was at the tip of the spear of this invasive culture,' said David Friend."

We were on the cusp then. The walls between public and private were crumbling, and we wondered what it would mean. I remember as an active journalist at the time debating whether our public figures deserved private lives or whether every intimate detail of their existence was a legitimate part of the electorate's right to know.

How naïve that debate seems now. The walls are all but gone, and no private life — that of the highest official or the lowliest laborer — is safe from scrutiny. The social media mob is there, always ready to pounce, always hungry for more.

It has become commonplace to see a news story about how much data on ordinary people is being collected and how widely it is being shared. Is there any place we can go where we are not monitored in one way or another?

Furthermore, the generation that includes the Purdue students has not only celebrated the walls tumbling down, it has collaborated in their destruction. Many of them have happily lived their entire lives online, broadcasting without embarrassment or shame every sordid little tidbit.

How many of them, like Monica Lewinsky in her young and dumb, days will do something stupid, broadcast it to the world and live to regret it?

This is not meant to excuse Lewinsky. She was an adult, responsible for her actions and their consequences. But so are we all,

## Learning to Speak Holcomb-ese

(Sept. 20) — I'm a little worried. I think I'm starting to understand Gov. Holcomb.

When he was talking about the Afghan refugees, he said he wanted Indiana to “be there on the back end” after the 14-day screening and vetting process. That means that if nothing goes wrong, the state will take all the credit for a job well done.

When he criticized President Biden's mandatory vaccination policy for private businesses, he said it was “a bridge too far.” That means the governor would love to issue such a mandate, but knows he can't get away with it in this state full of freedom-loving nitpickers.

When he was in Richmond, praising the economic potential of Wayne County, he said the county was “on the 50-yard line” and on the right “flight path,” that it had a “target rich environment” to attract companies and just had to “sell, sell, sell” itself because it already has the magic of “location, location, location.” He meant the state will gladly throw some money into the pot for whatever development scheme the county comes up with.

He sort of lost me when he went off on a tangent about something or other being “in Indiana's DNA,” but I still got the gist of his bully-pulpit, cheerleading-from-behind boosterism.

That's because of his increasing use of the business jargon ever present in today's corporate America, with which, unfortunately, I am agonizingly familiar.

I spent a career in newspapers, which were once peopled by half-drunk ne'er-do-wells who could always find a source and dig out the dirt but could not spell or parse a sentence and thought “professional standards” meant wearing the tie without the gravy stains on payday.

But even journalism was eventually taken over by The Suits, middle managers who spout catchy but empty phrases meant solely to keep the troops befuddled and convince the corporate bosses in a bigger city that the bottom line is always in sight.

So, while I can't help the governor “run the state like a business,” a pledge I'm sure he will make any day, I can help him with his apparent quest to sound like a businessman instead of an elected official.

To that end, a few suggestions for those times when the governor needs just the right cliché:

There is no “I” in team: You're just one taxpayer among millions, and I am the governor. Deal with it.

We need to think outside the box: This is probably unconstitutional, but that's the Supreme Court's problem.

Let's circle back to that: My public relations staff hasn't told me what to say yet.

It will be a win-win: You will love my idea and come to think of it as yours.

This is where the rubber meets the road: Whatever it was, I really mean it this time, because we're on the 50-yard line.

We need more boots on the ground: Because otherwise it won't matter that we're on the right flight path.

It's all about synergy: I don't know what that means exactly, but it sounds awesome.

We're facing some strong headwinds: If this doesn't work, it's not my fault.

It was a paradigm shift: I don't know what went wrong, but it wasn't my fault.

We have too many chiefs and not enough Indians: It's those damn legislators, and when the politically correct crowd complains on Twitter, I didn't really say that.

We need to tear down our silos: You're just not paying attention to me.

I could go on and on — the supply of corporatisms is endless. But I don't want to belabor the point.

I just hope the governor and I are on the same page, taking the 30,000-foot view so we are comparing apples to apples and getting the low-hanging fruit while avoiding the elephant in the room so we can run with it. If not, I have an open-door policy and never want it to seem like I'm just phoning it in. I'm ready for your two-cents worth,



governor – remember, there are no bad ideas, so just put your thinking cap on and ballpark it so we can wrap our heads around it.

And at the end of the day, be careful going forward where you put your stake in the ground, because it's just putting lipstick on a pig if you try to square a circle without due diligence.

This wasn't a one-off – that is not in my DNA – so I hope that wasn't a bridge too far.

### **Air Travel Is Back to Normal – Awful**

(Sept. 20, Somewhere outside of Wimberley, Tex.) – I'm sitting on the deck at the Roadrunner Ranch, my brother's place in Hill Country, Texas.

The good news is that real life still exists outside of the bitter political divide that seems to loom over everything these days, where people can visit with loved ones to talk pleasantly about everything and nothing at all. As I write, my brother and sister are enjoying early afternoon coffee, and the deer and gray foxes have finished lunch in the shade of the live oak tree and gone off to nap in the underbrush.

The better news is that my sister and I arrived here safely and in relatively good spirits, without any major headaches on our trip. If you've mostly sheltered in place in Indiana for the last year and a half and want to get back out there, you should be glad to know that air travel is pretty much back to normal.

Which is to say: just awful.

Well, not exactly just awful.

My friend Joe, who wrote features for the Michigan City News-Dispatch, was also the toughest movie critic I have ever met. Since he ended up in Chicago, editing Roger Ebert's copy, I bow to him as an expert on the subject. He had only three ratings for movies: stinks, doesn't stink and better than doesn't stink.

"But, Joe," I once asked him, "what about that rare movie that gets everything exactly right and shines as a beacon of film-making perfection? What would you call that movie?"

"Well, if I ever see one, I'll let you know."

I have adapted Joe's rating system, with minor alterations, for air travel. There are only three kinds of air-travel experiences: not quite awful, awful and worse than awful. Even if you do everything right, and there are no weather reschedulings or other act-of-God delays, not quite awful is the best you can expect.

To that end, seasoned traveler that I am, I offer two suggestions to take the edge off the awfulness.

The first is to go First Class. Yes, you're paying ridiculously more to travel in the same plane to the same destination. But if you're not a frequent flyer, if you get on a plane once a year instead of several times, it's worth the cost.

You are seated two to a row, not three. Each passenger has an armrest in the middle instead of having to share one. There is actual leg room. And the flight attendants treat you with more respect. If not comfortable, it is certainly less uncomfortable.

The other is to leave the car at home. Take an Uber ride instead of facing the nightmare of airport traffic at the beginning and end of the trip. Our driver was polite but not talkative (the perfect combination), the car was showroom-floor clean, and the trip was straightforward. Since the price is calculated ahead of time, the driver is not incentivized to take the long way around to rack up the miles and cost.

Still, air travel is air travel. And with our layover in Atlanta, roughly three hours of actual in-air time equated to 11 hours of travel hell, pushed this way and that like cattle in the chute, dumb beasts at the mercy of malevolent forces.

And, God, the masks.

Since we were flying on Sept. 11, the 20th anniversary of our national humiliation, we'd thought the trip would be permeated with gloomy chatter about terrorism and the haunting possibility we were flying on the wrong day.

But, no.

Sure, there were the suits on cable, mumbling on TV sets in the cavernous air terminals about the wonderful unity of the country back then and how terrible it was that we lost it, before they went

into the latest diatribe illustrating how they have helped orchestrate that disunity.

But otherwise, it was Covid, Covid, Covid, all the time, especially on the plane. The flight attendants let us know how very serious the airline was about the whole thing. Mouth and nose covered all times, and even if you're eating or drinking, masks back up between bites and sips. And if you don't comply, there can be civil and criminal penalties, and, oh, yes, we will kick you off the plane.

I thought one of them might be grinning when he said it, but who could tell, really?

I came to see the trip as a metaphor for where we've come as a country, huddled together but kept apart, anonymous behind our masks, wondering if we can ever touch down and resume our normal lives.

So, I will enjoy my time here even more than usual, trying not to think about the not-quite awful trip to come. If I let myself dwell on that, I might be tempted to have my lunch in the shade of the live oak tree then wander off to nap in the underbrush.

Maskless, thank you very much. It's a precaution, not a religion, OK?

## Natives and Newcomers

(Sept. 6) — Can you tell from the following three summaries which groups of Americans are being described?

Two million of them flooded into this country in the space of a few years. Followers of "an alien religion," they were also poor and uneducated, and it was feared they would both strain welfare systems and take over all the low-paying jobs. Large cities were overwhelmed. In Boston, a city of just 100,000 where 37,000 of them landed, they were "fated to remain a massive lump in the community, undigested, undigestible," according to historian Oscar Handlin.

On March 5, 1891, 11 of them were hanged or shot to death by a mob in downtown New Orleans. Between 1890 and 1920, they were the subject of about 50 lynchings throughout the country. Of the

New Orleans killings, The New York Times editorialized that the victims were "the descendants of bandits and assassins who have transported to this country the lawless passions . . . of their native country." They were no better citizens than rattlesnakes and "lynch law was the only course open to the people of New Orleans."

Their language was forbidden to be taught in schools or spoken in churches, hospitals or businesses. Their books were all removed from the library. Those still in the process of becoming naturalized citizens were ordered to report to the police station as potential enemy aliens. A Council of Defense sent spies into their churches to take notes and report back.

The first group were the Irish escaping the devastating potato famine that started in 1845. In addition to discrimination everywhere they turned, they were frequently accosted by anti-Catholic mobs, and a major political party (the American Party, aka the Know Nothings) sprang up because of the anti-immigration fervor they inspired.

The second group were the Italians. According to Public Radio International's The World program, they were "portrayed in parts of the media as ignorant, insular, superstitious, lazy, prone to crime, ignorant of the law, ignorant of democracy and prone to righting wrongs with personal vendettas and acts of violence. Even their food was seen as alien."

The third group were the Germans in my adopted home town of Fort Wayne. They poured into the city in the 1800s in response to ads from businessman Henry Rudisill's advertisements for hard workers, and by the 1890s, Fort Wayne was called 'a most German town' by The Chicago Tribune. By 1916, it was estimated that between 60 and 70 percent of residents were of Germanic descent, and this was reflected in everything from religion and education to street names and food.

But leading up to and during World War I, the anti-German hysteria sweeping the country was so bad that dachshunds, deemed a "German breed," were shot or kicked to death in front of their

owners. In Fort Wayne, there was a concerted and largely successful effort to eradicate all traces of German culture.

These examples are cited not to illustrate any profound truth but just to provide something to think about as Indiana prepares to welcome another wave of refugees, this one the result of America's feckless 20-year befuddlement in Afghanistan.

Anti-immigrant zealotry is not, current wisdom to the contrary always an oppression by white people against people of color. It is not always an attack by Christians on Judaism or Islam or other religions. It is not always directed at the most recent arrivals, as the Fort Wayne experience shows; the victims can best the victimizers in length of residence and even outnumber them.

Nativist sentiment is about attempts from the prevailing culture to maintain dominance and the efforts of minority cultures to find a balance between isolation from and immersion in the mainstream. It is as simple and complicated as that. And if you think that is unique to America or even especially harsh here, please just look at the history of dealing with outsiders of almost any other country. This is a relative paradise of tolerance and inclusiveness.

About 5,000 Afghan refugees are expected to arrive at Camp Atterbury in Southern Indiana in the coming weeks, and we can already hear the sadly familiar rumblings of the developing narrative: Hoosier yokels freak out over invading Islamic horde. Remember the rhetorical free-for-all about Syrian refugees just a few years ago?

A TV station took its crew to Edinburgh, the small town nearest Atterbury, and prompted the kind of prattle it wanted from the rubes – worries about the refugees' lack of English and money, whether they might be terrorists or have COVID. But the simple fact is that the town's population is 4,792, fewer than the 5,000 refugees expected and far fewer than the 10,000 that could be accommodated. That residents would feel overwhelmed is neither extraordinary nor unsurmountable.

I have seen the ebb and flow of tensions between natives and newcomers play out many times in Fort Wayne. I saw it with the Vietnamese, whose country I had been a stranger in. I saw it with the Burmese as they made our city their largest enclave in the country. I saw it time and time again with the steady influx of Hispanics over the years,

Each group made its own way in its own way, deciding how much to preserve of their own culture and how much to blend it with the prevailing culture. There is no set formula, and some groups have had more trouble adjusting than others, but it seems safe to say none have faced the kind of brutal suppression the Germans did more than 100 years ago.

It's called assimilation, and it should be a beautiful thing. There is not a stark choice as we seem to believe these days – stay isolated and separate or completely lose touch with one's heritage. There is a sharing, a give and take that gives us a rich culture that's a mix of many cultures. The majority grumbles then gives in, the minority resists then fits in.

Today we emphasize what makes us different rather than what we have in common, so faced with the false dichotomy, we choose the one that isolates us within our own tribes. Assimilation has become a dirty word.

Imagine a couple deciding whether to live together but both fearing a loss of autonomy as they contemplate accommodating the needs and whims of the other, so they each decide to live alone, forever.

Is that where we are today?

## Dress Code Redux

*(Aug. 30)* — On the one hand, the little kerfuffle at Fort Wayne's Northrop High School is too trifling to make a big deal of.

But on the other, it invites discussion because it is such a welcome sign of normality in a time when all traditional values are under constant assault.

And by “normality,” I mean the kind of dispute we had before the great Red State-Blue State divide, a topic worthy of spirited discussion but not weighty enough to start fistfights or break apart families.

While students elsewhere might be accusing their elders of systemic racism or pushing the boundaries of gender fluidity or agonizing over climate change while happily anticipating the death throes of capitalism, Northrop students are protesting . . . their school’s dress code.

To be fair, it is the dress code for all of Fort Wayne Community Schools, but a school system spokesperson is quoted as saying that Northrop “has new leadership, which is enforcing dress code more strictly than in the past.”

That makes the protest so understandable. No students like to think their contemporaries in other schools are getting away with something they can’t. Especially if they think the rules are being unfairly applied in their own school.

The crackdown “is only on the girls,” one student protester said, apparently in reference to the parts of the code forbidding exposure of the stomach and bare shoulders. “They can either ease up on females or they can make it equal to everyone.”

That has such a nostalgic, 1970s, “I am woman, hear me roar” vibe, doesn’t it?

In response, the FWCS representative expressed admiration for the students’ efforts: “We appreciate that students want to stand up for what they think is right and what they think is not right.”

Isn’t that just so darn polite? We can almost expect the students and administration to sit down over soft drinks and cookies to mediate their way to an agreement while “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” plays softly in the background.

I’m old enough to remember when a school’s “dress code” was whatever an overbearing teacher told a cowering student. Oh, maybe there was something formal – hammered out in secret in the faculty lounge by teachers smoking cigarettes and telling dirty jokes – but all the students needed to

know was, “Johnson, go home and cut those sideburns” or “Miss Johnson, cover up those knees.”

By the time my sister got to high school a few years later, administrators were reacting to social upheaval by enacting strict dress codes and making them ever stronger. She remembers her school’s being so draconian that she was not allowed to wear pants until her junior year.

And by then students had collectively decided to start wearing jeans, which amounted to a self-selected uniform. Since the students all had more or less the same appearance, there was no individuality expressed, therefore no disruption of the education mission, so the teachers were happy to let it slide.

That’s the whole secret both of dress codes and student reaction to them. They are efforts to dictate a uniform without actually creating a uniform. Or calling it that. And young people naturally rebel against uniforms by adopting the same kind of rebellious clothing, itself a uniform.

Most people, whether they admit it or not, are comfortable with the idea of a uniform, dressing more or less like everyone else in the group they interact with the most. So, it’s not about the uniform, but about who creates it.

I learned that in the Army. So many of my fellow soldiers complained about peas-in-a-pod conformity, being made to dress alike and march in lockstep and strictly obey every order, that they failed to recognize what a good disguise a uniform can be. Those who impose it are so focused on the outer homogeneity that they overlook the subversiveness of those of us nurturing our inner individuality.

That was the old Army, alas, when our military strived to be a meritocracy whose members of were forged into a single force with the sole purpose of defending the United States.

I can’t say what the uniform standards are today, but they can’t be very strict when our generals, along with high school students, are mostly concerned with systemic racism, gender fluidity and climate change.



But that is the new normality, and I think we've already established that I much prefer the old normality.

Which is hanging by a thread.

The Fort Wayne school spokesperson, while admiring the students' stand on principles, told a reporter that the district could review certain parts of the policy in the future, "but the dress code itself is here to stay."

That's the most normal thing I've heard in at least the last year and a half. It's enough to make an old man weep with gratitude.

### Stepping Away From Nation-Building

(Aug. 23) — On CBS-TV's Sunday Morning this week, a former Army sergeant who left parts of both arms and legs in Afghanistan came on and tried to say something positive in the face of our ugly retreat from that country.

He talked about being "angry, hurt, depressed and hopeless" after his injuries but finding solace in the fact that "Afghanistan wasn't all for nothing."

"We did good," he said of America's 20-year involvement, listing all the things we gave the Afghans: wells to provide fresh drinking water; schools to provide education for all, including women; hospitals to provide access to Western medicine; infrastructure, which improved the local economy by providing jobs.

"Those are all tools that the population will hopefully be able to use even after we leave."

Sadly, I think he was wrong. The Taliban to whom we surrendered the country are monsters whose goal is to kill or convert everyone in their path, and they will erase every good thing we think we've left there as they march Afghanistan back to its barbarous past.

It was painful to listen to him.

But it did force me to do something I'd been avoiding. For two weeks, I had resisted even

thinking about Afghanistan, let alone considering writing a column about it. Watching our ignominious withdrawal play out on TV was just too reminiscent of another debacle that left me feeling angry, hurt and depressed if not hopeless for much of my life.

I thought I had seen the worst of America's behavior when we left Vietnam, deserting the desperate people who had foolishly believed our promises and effectively telling our Gold Star families their loved ones had died for no good reason. I believed I could never again feel so ashamed of America.

I was wrong. It has been far worse this time because we had our own historical mistake to learn from and only the most willfully ignorant could fail to see it coming.

What possible insight could I glean from this farce worth writing about?

But I found a glimmer of good in the sergeant's words about what we left in Afghanistan — the wells, hospitals, schools, infrastructure. We have all of that in the U.S. and take it for granted.

And so much more. We have the rule of law and the respect for individual rights. We have tolerance for alternative lifestyles and dissenting opinions. We have an appreciation for other cultures. We have entrepreneurial zeal and courage to face the unknown.

Just imagine if we didn't have all that. Imagine this were a country where we had no rights except what ruthless fanatics decided we should have. Imagine being not a citizen of America, but of what Afghanistan will be very soon.

Too many Americans today seem in thrall to a small but noisy cadre of agitators who want us to see this country as institutionally racist, perpetually oppressive, deliberately divided into victimizers and the victimized. No matter how much progress we have made toward being a more decent, civilized nation, it is never enough.

It would be pointless trying to reason with the revolutionary provocateurs, but surely those being seduced by them can be persuaded to consider what their lives would be like if they truly lived in an oppressive society.

We cannot force our values on other people and expect them to stick, any more than we can hope the infrastructure we export can survive a backward regime. People have to seek those

values, as the many millions who immigrated to America have done. But those values have to be alive and well here, cherished and nurtured. Considering the bunch in charge these days, who seem as clueless as they are callous, we can't count on our political class. Many of them, in fact, are happily in the Evil America cheering section. So, it is up to us. But then, it always has been. ♦

# Mark Franke

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## The 'Public' in Public Schools

(Dec. 8) — I consider it a good day when I read or hear something that had never crossed my mind previously. Being induced to think anew about an issue from an entirely different perspective is stimulating and, on occasion, enlightening. I am always willing to rethink my position although, truth be told, I don't often change my mind. Still, there is value in the exercise itself.

To this end I will read almost anything that comes to hand. I subscribe to more than a few magazines and journals, changing subscriptions on a regular basis in order to freshen my perspective. One periodical I do not cancel in spite of its exorbitant subscription price is the Wall Street Journal. Its news pages are reasonably objective given the current lack of journalistic professionalism and its editorial pages are free to analyze the issues of the day without undue influence or rigid ideological dictates. In other words the WSJ manages to irritate just about everyone in any given week.

The WSJ's latest assault on my mental complacency was an op-ed column by a Columbia School of Law professor, Philip Hamburger, who argued, incredibly, that public schools are unconstitutional. Unconstitutional?

Hamburger's argument is that education is nothing more or less than speech, that old-fashioned right under the First Amendment which gets in the way of progress in our brave new world. As such it is protected from government oversight and indoctrination. Since these are young children we are speaking of, parents have inherent rights about what is being taught.

Not so, according to the failed gubernatorial candidate in Virginia who found that a majority of his state's voters disagreed with his opinion that parents should butt out. Nor according to the National School Board Association which requested the U. S. Department of Justice to classify as domestic terrorists those parents who dare protest school board decisions. It is no coincidence that the right to petition the government falls under that same pesky amendment which guarantees free speech.

So are public schools unconstitutional? Apparently not in Indiana as our 1851 Constitution requires the state "to provide, by law, for a general and uniform system of Common Schools, wherein tuition shall be without charge, and equally open to all." Who would argue with Article VIII when it states that "[k]nowledge and learning, generally diffused throughout a community, [is] essential to the preservation of a free government"?

It has been a commonly held tenet among Americans that education is the pathway to a better future, the means by which each generation is better off economically than its predecessor. My blue-collar and agricultural ancestors certainly believed that, assuring that my generation became the first in the family to be largely college educated. It wasn't just the three Rs that mattered; civics education was equally important, instilling a love for and dedication to a nation built on individual liberty.

So how could a national consensus be so rapidly and effectively shattered in just a few years? I suggest that it is because the citizen frog in the pot finally realized that the temperature had risen to scalding level. The woke brigade has overreached and can no longer rely on its media allies for a coverup. Hubris will do that to you.

The progressives of the late 19th century who advocated a common school system thought they were in service to humanity and American democracy. To a large extent they were, but one must keep in mind that the guiding principle of early progressivism was that people could be perfected, even if having to be dragged kicking

and screaming into this unwanted nirvana. It really isn't surprising that their 21st-century progeny have lost patience with the pace of this march toward perfection.

Therein lies the irony. Professor Hamburger sees today's progressives, at least the most extreme in the group, as mimicking the tactics of those 19th-century nativists who saw public schools as reeducation camps for Catholics and immigrants. They see a homogenized and compliant America where the outliers, the politically incorrect in today's lingo, have been reeducated into conforming.

But again, many parents have had enough. And they are not powerless. There are approximately 100,000 school board members in the nation, presumably mostly elected locally in sometimes spirited campaigns. With the demise of township government in Indiana, it truly is the school boards which validate Thomas Jefferson's quote that "the government closest to the people serves the people best."

And the right to attend school-board meetings and speak on issues is fundamental to our democracy. Those of a totalitarian bent will see this as threatening, certainly threatening to their ability to shape our children into their progressive ideal.

So this has become the front line in the battle against the Deep State. Note the recent school-board elections across the nation that saw out-of-touch incumbents involuntarily retired. It is only a small step, yet an encouraging one. And we hoi polloi get to vote again in 2022. Don't you just love democracy, American style?

### Let Us Give Thanks for the Irritants

(Nov. 23) — I became discouraged last week about all the aspects of my life which seemed to be out of control, my control. I felt that I was never allowed to choose how to spend my time. Others were in charge, like puppet masters. Just call me Pinocchio.

My solution was to make a list of the things which were getting under my skin. The list did not

turn out quite as long as I anticipated but it still appeared to prove my proposition that I needed to do something about my life. Here is the list:

*Leaves* — This must have been a good season for the trees as my yard is covered constantly with leaves. The fall climate here in northeast Indiana generally alternates between days of rain and days of high winds, neither being conducive to blowing leaves regardless of what equipment I use. I don't know which is worse: not being able to blow leaves due to the inclement weather or having to blow leaves due to perfect weather. It is truly a Hobson's Choice situation and justifies my whining . . . at least until I take a moment to reflect on why I have leaves in the first place. Could it be because we live on a nice lot in a wooded subdivision, one that affords ample shade in the heat of summer and beautiful colors in the fall? Think of all the people in the world who live in arid climates, frozen tundras or even high-rise apartment buildings in densely packed cities. I will move this one from the debit to the credit side.

*Meetings* — I'm supposed to be retired so why do I have to go to some meeting nearly every day? They disrupt my carefully planned schedule of excessive leisure time and self-centered activity. I have early morning meetings, mid-day meetings and evening meetings. Enough, already. Why am I on so many boards and asked to volunteer at so many charitable organizations? Maybe, just maybe, it is because even at age 70 I still have the physical health and mental capacity to be useful to my fellow man. Too many people my age are either debilitated with declining health or, worse, still working just to make ends meet. My time is my own, which allows me to devote it to doing works of charity and helping organizations which hold the same values as I. This one moves to the plus side as well.

*Home improvement projects* — My wife has the impressive ability to propose a new home improvement project almost weekly. I don't know how she comes up with these, but I suspect it has to do with her fixation on the HGTV cable



network. Each project requires expenditure of both my time and our money, or I should say the kids' inheritance. I don't have time to take on these projects; remember all those meetings I need to attend and the leaves piling up in the yard? Sure, each project makes our house more livable and pleasant to the eye but it's my time she is commanding. Maybe the reason she wants me to do all these projects is that I can. In my retirement I have improved my handyman skills to such an extent that I have a volunteer job at my church's elementary school as a general purpose fixit man. And these projects give me an excuse to buy more power tools so that I have exactly what I need for the job. What's not to like about that benefit?

I guess I should concede that my putative irritation at these things is superficial at best and outright dishonesty at worst. Each makes demands on my time but only because I have been granted that time to give to others. No one would ask me to do these things if I were in a nursing home or non-ambulatory in some other manner. And I do get to choose which volunteer duties I take on but, truth be told, I haven't learned how to say no to good causes.

This Thanksgiving I am going to take this catalog of irritations and file them away in the cluttered attic of my memory where I am not likely to find them again. Instead, I will focus on the good things in my life. These are part of a different, more useful catalog—that of undeserved blessings. A few of these, in no order of importance, are my health, my family, friends and neighbors, my family's financial security, my church and all the things I take for granted. Then there are those power tools I bought which make each day a new opportunity for enjoyable and productive activity.

But most important is my family — my wife, our children and their spouses, and the grandchildren. Especially the grandchildren.

### Let iGen'ers Rewrite the Constitution?

(Nov. 17) — A government professor at Skidmore College, a liberal arts institution in

upstate New York, recently wrote an op-ed that was carried in my local newspaper. My wife, who reads this newspaper faithfully, recommended the column to me since it was about one of my favorite subjects — the United States Constitution.

This professor, Beau Breslin, argues that our Constitution is outdated and doesn't reflect opinions prevalent in today's society. Specifically, it does not reflect the beliefs of the iGen'ers, young people in their mid-twenties and younger. If I understand his point, he contends that the Constitution should reflect the majoritarian view of the present time as these are the people who must live under it.

And he believes that the iGen'ers, the group most representative of college students, should be given a chance to rewrite our Constitution to construct a polity more suited to their philosophy. He would send them to Philadelphia to give it their best shot.

I can sympathize with this suggestion, at least to an extent. College years are a time for unconstrained idealism even at the cost of erratic ideology. There is a conceit among every generation of college students that if only their elders would get out of the way, they could make things a whole lot better. The Greeks called this hubris. I know; I was there myself 50 or so years ago.

One example from my dissolute undergraduate days will suffice. I was a member of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), the conservative-libertarian alternative to the left-wing radicalism of the time. We decided one day, or rather late one night, to write the perfect constitution for a student fraternity. Of course the Greek letters had to symbolize YAF, except for the inconvenient truth that the Greek alphabet has no letter F. With undaunted egos we did some research at the library — there was no Wikipedia back then — and discovered that there was an archaic Greek letter, digamma, that looked a lot like an F to us. Problem solved. Upsilon Alpha Digamma was born.

This constitution was packed with every political science theory and historical precedent

we could recall . . . and more than a dollop of nonsense. We were playing at this. No one, not even we ourselves, took us seriously. No matter; we were quite proud of our efforts at irrelevancy.

Therein lies the practical objection to the Skidmore proposal. Putting a bunch of inexperienced, self-indulgent young people in a room certainly will produce more heat than light. Their new U. S. Constitution would prove as unworkable as our erstwhile effort at fraternity-building.

The more serious objection is that Breslin's premise rests on an assumption which is dangerous to democracy — that the majority should always get its way regardless. Federalist Papers 10 and 51 spoke to the threat of a tyranny of the majority. One of the fissures at the Constitutional Convention was between large and small states. No document emerged until the small states were satisfied that their interests and liberties would be protected. The Electoral College, the last compromise reached, is a case in point.

Is our Constitution a failure because it doesn't give government enough power to impose solutions on us simple citizens who are inexplicably wrapped up in our anachronistic principles? Is a more activist government needed to move us along to the "more perfect union" envisioned by the Founding Fathers?

Activist government is nothing more nor less than a waypoint on the path to tyranny. If the government is to be "active" across a whole line of social and economic issues, it perforce means passivity on the part of individual citizens. In other words it requires a surrender of individual liberty and responsibility.

Yet, in this professor's mind, this current generation should not only have a right to rewrite the Constitution, it should be the only one allowed to do so. The iGen'ers are the least partisan generation in his view and not bound by tribalism. Isn't identity politics a particularly pernicious form of tribalism? He also calls them libertarians. Seriously? Isn't it the iGen'ers who demand safe spaces from unwelcome ideas and what they call

microaggressions? How canceling speakers represents libertarianism is beyond my ken.

Still, youth should be a time for unfettered thought processes producing ideas that may be irrational, unreasonable and hardly practical in the real world. But there must be adults in the room. By adults I mean those who have lived more than a decade or two with real world responsibilities like jobs, families and mortgages.

By all means, give them their heads. Maybe they will come up with an ingenious constitution for our nation. Just don't bet that individual liberty will be the guiding principle for this new enlightened effort at self-government.

## Reflections on Veterans Day

(Nov. 8) — As I reflected on Veterans Day this year, several different emotions were evoked. So in no particular order, here they are. But first a disclaimer.

My father was a veteran of D-Day and that qualifies me to be a Son of the American Legion, an organization I have proudly served at the local, regional, state and national levels. The American Legion exists to support veterans just as one would expect but also to teach and to preserve the great principles on which our nation was founded. Justice, freedom and democracy are prominent in the organization's preamble. In fact I am writing this at my local Legion post, a location which serves as a muse for much of my perspective on our state of affairs.

My first point of reflection is the different attitude Americans have about current and former service members. I recall how my friends were treated when they returned from Vietnam. Recently I was reminded of this while listening to internet radio on a cross-country drive for a family reunion. The host of the show was playing music from the 1970's and he told a story about a uniformed serviceman who got into a New York City cab. He told the cabbie that he had just returned from Vietnam, to which the cabbie responded, "Who cares?" That was more polite than some of the things these men heard.

Things are different now but perhaps they are changing again, and not for the better. The military is doing it to itself, or at least the military leadership is. There have been way too many news reports of military brass imposing woke ideology on those under their command. I am not the only one who wonders if the Pentagon is more concerned about being seen as politically correct than defending our nation.

The botched withdrawal from Afghanistan is revealing. I mention this in the context of an open letter signed by approximately 180 retired flag officers (generals and admirals) demanding that the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff resign over the Afghan withdrawal. Their point is that either these top officials agreed with this inept plan and are therefore incompetent, or they opposed it yet it was implemented by President Biden over their objections, in which case they should resign as a matter of principle. (In the interest of full disclosure, one of the signers is a close friend — a friend whose judgment I trust implicitly.)

While I am on a negative trend, one more question has occupied my overtaxed mind. Another friend told me he doesn't know what a veteran is anymore. Without going into his thought process, one that has challenged me on more than one occasion, I think I see his point. A veteran used to be someone who fought in a war. Our last declared war was World War II but one can argue that America has been in a state of war ever since 1945. Congress apparently agreed and so opened up membership eligibility in the American Legion to all who served from 1945 to the present. Have we been at war continually since 1945? The world is certainly not safer today than it was back then so I would say yes.

Enough of the melancholy. Nov. 11 is an important day, and not just because it is the date that an armistice was signed to end World War I. One interesting coincidence is that Nov. 11 was observed as St. Martin's day in the medieval church. Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier and early convert to Christianity. Upon coming across a naked beggar, Martin cut his military cloak and

gave half to the beggar. Another friend — and I am truly blessed to have so many intelligent friends — explained that the Latin word for a military cloak was *capellanus*, which is the etymological root for our word chaplain. I know several current and former military chaplains, all of whom serve in the spirit of St. Martin. Is all this simply coincidence? Perhaps.

I want to end this reflection of Veterans Day on a high note. I am a volunteer at a Lutheran elementary school and the first-grade teacher suggested I should look at Veterans Day through the eyes of her six-year-olds. Here are a few of their statements about the importance of this day:

"We celebrate veterans who serve for us in the military."

"[It's] a day to remember and thank our veterans."

"[It's] a day to show how we love our veterans."

"It's a special day and you will see lots of flags."

"It means we celebrate our soldiers and some went to war."

We adults make things way too complicated. I plead guilty to that charge. I think I should spend more time with those first graders.

## Returning Civility to Our Discourse

(*Oct. 13*) — America was built by a group of people who disagreed about many things but still found enough common ground to write our Constitution and forge a stable republic. The battle for ratification had its elevated oratory, to be sure, but the new nation began in an environment marked by enthusiastic optimism for what the future held.

The feel-good times lasted only a few years, as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton soon squared off in a series of anonymous *ad hominem* attacks on the other in putative service to their policy disagreements. Even the iconic George Washington could not prevent this slide into what was called factions. He warned against it in his farewell address.

The elections of 1800, 1824 and 1828 were especially divisive and then the slavery issue

upped the political decibels over the next thirty years to an unsustainable level, the result being 650,000 deaths. Things seemed to calm down after the Civil War, no doubt due to the nation's reflection on what it had allowed to happen.

The next hundred years or so appear to have been relatively calm, at least in retrospect. Our history books point to the hot issues of time as aberrations in the relentless advance of progress. Political parties still existed and fought vigorous election campaigns but the nation moved forward.

So much for the brief history lesson.

When, and why, did things deteriorate to the point of toxicity we experience today? My notion is that it was Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court that became the tipping point. Instead of a look at the nominee's eminent qualifications as a jurist, the process degraded into a political free-for-all ineffectively covered by an ideological fig leaf. A new slang word, Borked, entered the language, defined by Merriam-Webster as "to attack or defeat (a nominee or candidate for public office) unfairly through an organized campaign of harsh public criticism or vilification." Things have been heading south ever since.

No wonder I prefer to live in a cocoon of my own making. I try to keep the unpleasantness of life out by pretending it doesn't exist. My problem is that I read too much, risking upset of my smug world. Two recent articles wrenched me out of this self-indulgent complacency.

Chad Wolf, acting secretary of homeland security in the Trump administration, wrote in Heritage's Daily Signal newsletter about the daily organized protests in front of his home. The protesters blocked his street for about an hour each time while shouting through loudspeakers. What surprised me about Wolf's account was not that these illegal protests happened, which are all too frequent occurrences these days, but that several of his neighbors participated.

Neighbors? Didn't these people realize they must live together? They don't have to be bosom buddies but still. This was suburban Washington so maybe the social mores are different there from

what we observe here in Indiana. Perhaps the red-hot rhetoric coming from the corridors of government burns through residential neighborhoods located too close to the source of the fire.

I live in a middle-class neighborhood where, no surprise here, most families are conservative. One couple, best described as 1960s liberals, probably votes differently from the rest of us each November but they are numbered among our closest friends. We socialize several times each week and help each other out when needs arise. It is inconceivable that political differences would get in the way of a deep friendship. We certainly won't be protesting in their front yard any time soon.

The second article was a column in *The Spectator World*, the U. S. version of the venerable British magazine. "How to Argue with Your Family" was the headline that caught my eye. Surely this was a humorous take on dysfunctional family gatherings. Ah, no. The columnist, Mary Kate Skehan, was serious about how to prevent blow ups around the dinner table, especially at major holiday get-togethers.

Skehan's advice is actually quite good. She summarized it as "defuse and de-escalate." In other words keep the gas can away from the bonfire. It is unfortunate that such advice is even necessary.

Even though my family is mostly conservative, we have our liberals and even an extreme progressive or two. They are still welcome at our table and we invite them to visit and stay with us as often as possible. We focus on what unites us, our family.

Finding common ground can be difficult but surely it is possible among intelligent people of good will. People can see the same problem but prefer different solutions, sometimes incompatible solutions in a political sense. Then you just have to agree to disagree and move on.

Friendship can rise above most differences. A generous application of civility in our discourse will serve us well. And, dare I say it, it is the American way.



## Is Stupidity a Dominant Gene?

(Oct. 6) — Several weeks ago the Wall Street Journal ran an op-ed column entitled “You Are Living in the Golden Age of Stupidity.” That got my attention, even without my wife’s not-so-subtle hinting I should read it.

The author, Lance Morrow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, wrote a humorous yet thought-provoking analysis of America’s seeming fascination with being and doing stupid. Forrest Gump was right, according to Morrow.

Why are we like this?

I blame it on my generation, the baby boomers. What have we not gotten wrong? We were raised in what arguably was the best decade of the twentieth century. Is there anything one can criticize about the 1950’s? OK, there was the Cold War but we school children didn’t live in constant fear of a nuclear bomb exploding over our playground. We did the hide-under-the-desk drills and then went on with our uncomplicated lives.

Doors and automobiles were left unlocked and kids played throughout the neighborhood while understanding the closest mother was in charge. And yes, back in those days mothers stayed home to provide full time parenting for their own and their neighbors’ children.

We were raised by what is now called the Greatest Generation. I beg to differ. America’s greatest generation included the 55 delegates who gathered in steamy Philadelphia during the summer of 1787 to produce the most noble governance document ever penned. Still, our parents deserve recognition for growing up during the Great Depression and living through the economic and social disruptions caused by World War II.

Then again, they also raised us.

Talking recently with a group of friends my age, we semi-seriously concluded that the world cannot reverse its downward trend until we all die. Morbid perhaps, but there is some truth in that. Just think about the generations that followed us. In other words, raised by us.

I certainly don’t understand all the generation naming conventions, but it is clear to me that each generation seems more self-absorbed and self-entitled than the previous. Perhaps that is just a 70-year-old curmudgeon blaming everything on the young, but I think I have a case.

My career, for my sins, was spent in higher education as a financial and enrollment executive. I recall one freshman orientation program, the day when incoming students were preached the gospel of successful college life. The speaker told the group that they should expect to study two to three hours outside of class for every hour spent in the classroom. “You’re s— me!” a voice resounded throughout the lecture hall. This student, one of the most self-directed generations ever if you believe all that nonsense about millennials, probably never had to do any homework or other work outside the classroom. He was a graduate of a no-fail school system which just kept pushing students along, no matter how much they learned.

These are the children and grandchildren of us baby boomers. What have we wrought, to fracture Samuel Morse’s famous line? We should fault ourselves for how dystopian America has become. The child is the father of the man if Wordsworth had it right. Sure, we blame it on our parents who can blame it on theirs and they on theirs, ad infinitum. I hold to my premise that mine is the generation which ruined everything. Well, almost everything. We probably made something better but nothing comes to mind at present. Consumerist toys don’t count.

In spite of my apparent generalizing above, I don’t want to make simplistic assumptions about groups of people who are still individuals even when they appear to be running with the herd. Identity politics is a non-starter in my book and a dangerous one at that. The diversity officer at my university, and we did have one, told me I didn’t need his training because I saw each student as an important individual who deserved my help. It was no coincidence that he and I both were devout Christians who believed in equality before God.

I have spent my life trying my best not to drop people into pre-defined buckets, pre-defined by my or others' prejudices. I am hardly perfect but I do try. Not watching mind-numbing cable news helps me focus on seeing everyone as an individual rather than as an automaton acting like the zombies in those horror films we all watched as teenagers. Just because you look like someone else, and every generation has its enforced conventions of dress and speech, doesn't mean you have forfeited your individual intellect and will. Is this a generalization of my own conceit?

"All generalizations are false," wrote Mark Twain, "Including this one."

Exactly.

### Coveting: Our Favorite Deadly Sin

(Sept. 29) — I attended a Lutheran elementary school, grades one through eight, back during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. It was a traditional education with a lot of memorization — presidents, state capitals, books of the Bible and so forth. I still can recite those lists but it gets tougher with each passing year.

The key to our memory work, as we called it back then, was the Small Catechism written by Martin Luther as an aid for fathers to teach their children. It was organized around what are called the chief parts of the faith such as the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments. In addition to the historic text of these doctrinal statements, Luther wrote simple explanations that could be memorized . . . of course . . . and recited upon request. And trust me, we were requested to daily.

What gave me the most problems back then were the two commandments on coveting. We Lutherans split coveting into two commandments for some reason I never knew. Graven images were out; coveting was doubled down. I didn't even know what coveting was and I had to memorize two separate commandments and their explanations.

These days I am a volunteer at the Lutheran school my grandchildren attend and memory

work is still emphasized, so much so that it is part of daily chapel. Last week it was the Ninth and Tenth commandments, the coveting ones, so as I sat in chapel I recited them and their meanings with 100 plus children.

I got some of the words wrong but, in my defense, the vocabulary has been modernized. For example we now are instructed not to covet our neighbor's donkey rather than his ass. Not all modernization is bad.

One aspect of Luther's theological genius is that he taught the commandments as more than "thou shalt nots," interpreting the commandments through the positive actions God demands. So with the donkey in question, we are told not to entice it away from our neighbor but urge it to stay and do its duty. Be assured; if my neighbor ever gets a donkey, I definitely will urge it to stay and do its duty.

Maybe I didn't understand coveting during my formative years, but I certainly do now. Just follow the news. The underlying motivation for the "tax the rich" political agenda is based on covetousness. They have something they don't deserve and we want it. Rather than be joyful about my neighbor's good fortune, I am told that it rightfully belongs to me.

It is no longer a simple matter of keeping up with the Joneses; it has devolved to resenting what the Joneses have and believing that you are more deserving of it. In a word: coveting.

Having sat in chapel reciting with the school children, I could not help but reflect on how covetousness has become the invidious foundation of our culture. My thoughts then went from there to our political environment.

Why is it that one of our major political parties has built an economic agenda with coveting as the underlying principle? Is it to motivate the voters by appealing to their baser instincts? And why does the other major political party have such difficulty in explaining its economic agenda in simple terms and supporting it with all the objective data that make its case? Must emotion trump data?

It is easy to blame the career politicians for our dysfunctional system but we need to remember that we voted for them, at least a majority of us did in each individual case. We can blame the national media for its deliberate distortions and lack of journalistic professionalism but then we keep tuning in, increasing their ratings and their ability to sell advertising.

They appeal to our covetous natures because it works for them, to get elected or to sell merchandise. The Ten Commandments and the church's seven deadly sins included covetousness because it is an all too prevalent part of human nature. That lesson is not lost on our political and media elites.

Even Aesop understood this. Recall his fable of the dog with the bone in its mouth which saw its reflection in the stream and thought it was another dog with a bigger bone.

Coveting did not lead to happy endings in Aesop's day nor will it in ours. Yet we as a nation seem unwilling or incapable of being led by the better part of our nature.

I am being unfair, in at least one respect. God did not ordain the commandments just so we could judge others. He meant them to be personal for each of us. So I better look inwardly at my propensity to covet that which is not mine.

Fortunately for me, another of the deadly sins is sloth. My defense is that I am too lazy to covet. Do you think St. Peter will buy that excuse at the pearly gates?

## Constitution Day

*(Sept. 15)* — Compromise. This word wouldn't score well on a favorability scale these days. People today, and not just politicians, seem to pride themselves in their rigidity of opinion and ossification of rational thought processes. We seem to be living in a world driven to ideological destruction and too many of us are cheering it on.

So what is different about our generation compared to those before? I would propose very little; at least that is my reading of our history. This defect of the human condition has challenged

the well-being of our nation in the past and is certainly challenging us now.

This Friday, Sept. 17, is Constitution Day by act of Congress. When Congress passed the bill setting this date, it had the hope that citizens would take a moment to reflect on the genius of our founding document, on its resilience in speaking across generations and on the immutability of its basic principles of limited self-government. Colleges and universities which receive federal student financial aid funds, and essentially all do with a few notable exceptions such as Hillsdale College, are required by the law to offer educational programs for their students on this day. And if any group of citizens need this instruction, it is college students.

What I find most intriguing about the Constitution is how it came about. The group of men who gathered in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 were not there to sing kumbaya around a campfire. They were as opinionated as we are today, if not more so. Just read about some of the debates held, ostensibly behind closed doors but carefully documented for posterity by James Madison and other diarists inside the hall.

There were ideological and practical differences which divided the delegates from day one. Small states recognized the importance of acting together to preserve their standing relative to the large states, which likewise saw benefit in joint action to effectively exercise their presumed power. The Virginia and New Jersey plans were the first salvos in the battle between these two groups.

This was a battle of practicality, the division of power among the states in the new order. The largest states — Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and New York — were understandably unhappy with the one state-one vote rule under the Articles of Confederation. The smallest states — Delaware, New Hampshire, Georgia and Rhode Island — likewise were understandably concerned about becoming irrelevant if things were changed in too radical a fashion.

Underlying all this debate was an ideological divide between those called federalists and those described as anti-federalists. This was the crucible of the convention's debates. How much power and authority would be centralized in the general government, as it was typically called back then, and how much would remain with the individual states? This was no easy question to resolve; it influenced most of the individual decisions taken.

The Virginia Plan created a powerful national government and weakened the individual states to anachronisms. I exaggerate here, but not by much. The New Jersey Plan did just the opposite, maintaining powerfully sovereign states with a central government only incrementally more powerful than under the Articles of Confederation.

What to do? Give up and go home? This is where the first great compromise in American history literally saved the day. Proposed by Roger Sherman of Connecticut, a state right in the middle of the large-small continuum, the Connecticut Plan put in place the governmental structure we have today. The House of Representatives would be the local voice of government, democratically elected by small constituencies and representing the voice of the people. The Senate would represent the states in equal proportion, providing a modicum of protection for the small states. And the President would be elected by the people but mediated through the states in the Electoral College.

Sherman's proposal is rightly called the Great Compromise of 1787. Without it there would have been no United States of America. Still, it only passed by one vote. We Americans have always been contentious to a fault.

The call to this convention stated its purpose as amending the Articles of Confederation but the delegates quickly realized the old structure could not support a new nation with large ambitions. What they produced is, in my opinion, the greatest charter of governance ever put to paper. Flaws it may have but it has survived for 235 years as the foundation for an exceptional nation built on personal liberty and economic opportunity.

Our beloved Constitution was birthed by compromise but must be defended resolutely against those who see it as a stumbling block to their goals of political and economic power. On this day of remembrance, let us rededicate ourselves to a document that has not only made us a great people but, most importantly, has kept us a free people.

## The Sad End of the Boy Scouts

(Aug. 25) — I recall, just barely, reading James Burnham's "Suicide of the West" back in my undergraduate days. While not being able to recall most of his arguments, I believe his point was that we are doing this to ourselves. He blamed liberalism, in its modern and not classical definition, for an erosion of our moral and spiritual foundations.

Jonah Goldberg borrowed that apocalyptic title for a recent book in which he blamed the woke movement for attacking the fundamental values of our American polity. His is more of a classical liberal's viewpoint but if you want to read 400+ pages of mostly depressing prose, be my guest. I haven't made it through it yet but I will keep trying.

I find it at once incredible and incredulous how quickly our political, cultural and business elites rolled over in the face of this onslaught. Take the Boy Scouts as a microcosm of this self-induced death march.

Membership in the Scouts has declined by nearly two-thirds since 2019. This decline is in spite of the national organization's well-publicized commitment to the current gods of diversity and inclusion — they now have a chief diversity officer — and they have opened membership to girls. Declined in spite of? Perhaps because of.

Sure, they can blame Covid for the decline. Every other negative trend is blamed on Covid these days, with some justification, but mostly Covid simply accelerated what was already headed downhill. There is also the embarrassing settlement of decades old sexual abuse claims to the tune of \$850 million, better than \$1,000 per current scout and being assessed in large part to



local councils since the national organization is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Pressure from woke cultural warriors and the LGBT lobby surely had something to do with all this. Despite winning a First Amendment Supreme Court case in 2000 upholding its exclusionary membership policy, the Boy Scouts national leadership determined to get on-board the woke train before it left the station. It seems the pressure was not applied directly to the Boy Scouts; observers inside and outside the organization point to major corporate sponsors and national board members as the targets and the actual pressure points. Moral cowardice among this crowd shouldn't surprise anyone anymore.

I saw this cultural battle firsthand. The Lutheran church I attend sponsored a Boy Scout troop for boys in our school as well as the general public. Elders of the church served as adult leaders and activities had a religious component. Parents knew that and voluntarily chose our troop for their sons.

Five or so years ago, our leaders were called to a meeting at which they were warned to expect a ruling from the national organization that we could not enforce traditional membership or leadership standards. New rules were in the offing and we would not receive a religious exemption from them.

Shortly thereafter I spoke with the national vice president of our church body, who was involved in discussions with the Boy Scouts to allow for religious liberty at the troop level. He was not confident of success. His premonition proved accurate.

We were ready when the dictate came down. Our troop leaders had been authorized by the congregation's voters assembly to return the Boy Scout charter and recharter with Trail Life USA, a similar organization which respects religious liberty and actually encourages a faith component in the boys' training. The transition was smooth and our troop now has a larger membership than before.

This has happened across the nation. The Mormons formed their own scouting organization and returned all their charters. Other church-based troops did the same. Trail Life, for example, is pushing toward a thousand chartered troops.

The Boy Scouts were already membership-challenged with changing social mores which deemphasized and even demonized such traditional values as faith, fatherhood, families, masculinity and patriotism. It could have served as a beacon for those who fervently want to perpetuate in their sons those same values which have served us so well. Alas, the national leadership chose to be swallowed up by the nihilistic flavor of the month. Their participation numbers demonstrate that many Americans voted their disapproval with their feet.

Regardless of the cultural wilderness enveloping us, there is still a remnant which holds to traditional Boy Scout values — duty to God and country, moral uprightness, loyalty, obedience to authority, dependability and helpfulness to those in need. They and their sons and grandsons can no longer find that in the Boy Scouts . . . assuming the Boy Scouts even can continue to function as an organization.

Rest in peace, or good riddance? Either way, it is a sad commentary on where America is headed.

### **Absolutes Define a Culture**

*(Aug. 18)* — I am blessed in having many exceptionally intelligent friends, several of whom deserve the adjective brilliant. Most have doctorates in something and I don't hesitate to query them on every occasion which presents itself.

One such friend is a semi-retired theology professor. Every time I listen to him, I feel like my mind is about to explode. He is enlightening and humbling at the same time. My reaction to hearing him is usually, "I never thought about it like that."

In a recent sermon to seminary students, he asked a simple question: "Tell me a time when the entire reality which lies outside the psychic self is

denied, when the substance and the foundation of identity is on the vagaries of psychic instabilities.”

I have an above average knowledge of human history so that should have been easy. It wasn’t.

I began by mentally rewinding every chapter in my undergraduate western civilization textbook. What I managed to recall was that every major period was anchored on certain foundational and universal truths. To be sure, these universals were challenged at pivotal times such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment but these were calls to replace part of that foundation, not eliminate it and leave a void.

The foundation was an objective one, even when challenged. The purpose of these challenges was to question what was true, not to deny truth itself. Whether all the successful challenges improved the common understanding of truth is a legitimate question. I would suggest not, even mostly not. Wrong or not, our ancestors accepted the existence of universal truth; the only debate was about what was truth.

I first was confronted with a subjective understanding of truth in an undergraduate ethics course. Those were the days of situational ethics and “I’m OK; You’re OK” memes. I was the only student who believed that truth was objective and universal. Everyone else didn’t. This was 50 years ago.

I recall studying Socrates’ statement that “I know that I cannot know anything.” The smart aleck college freshman in me immediately responded, “How can you know that?” Unfortunately Socrates’ thoughtful skepticism was radicalized and eventually degraded into nihilism. If you are not sure what nihilism is, just watch the news.

It has certainly gotten worse in the half century since those college years. I’m not sure I can clearly explain the differences between modernism and postmodernism or when someone flipped the switch between them. No doubt it was a gradual progression, or regression, but it has certainly accelerated in the past three or four years in its tacit acceptance by our hubristic ruling class.

Maybe it’s not philosophical. Perhaps it is simple humanity. The Ten Commandments end with admonishments against coveting, wanting what belongs to someone else. One of the seven deadly sins of the early medieval church was envy. That is about as self-centered as one can be.

A recent speaker I heard blamed it on consumerism, which he defined as “what’s in it for me?” That is simplistic yet accurate in its own way. This prompted another college memory, that of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The pinnacle of human existence for Maslow was self-actualization, rather egotistical to my way of thinking. I sure got tired of hearing about Maslow.

This flies in the face of that self-evident truth so elegantly asserted in the Declaration of Independence as a series of unalienable rights. The quasi-atheist Thomas Jefferson acknowledged these to be “endowed by [our] Creator,” a statement of objective reality. We don’t self-actualize these; we begin with them as gifts from God if Jefferson is to be believed.

If reality is viewed as totally subjective within myself, where does this lead? To what can I anchor myself when times get tough? In a word: nothing. I am out there all alone. Perhaps that is what Henry David Thoreau meant by “lives of quiet desperation,” lives void of meaning which grasp material things as an ineffective sop.

Maybe the refuge is in narcissism. The narcissist gives every appearance of being self-actualized. Think of our two previous presidents, both accomplished narcissists who never showed any self-doubt. Then reflect on where we are today after 12 years of their leadership.

Western civilization, built on a foundation of universal truths, brought about stunning advances in fields such as philosophy, theology, literature, art, government, science and medicine. If we pretend that there are no universal truths, we fool only ourselves. Culture itself is put at risk.

Culture matters, and we have inherited a cornucopia of great and beautiful things. It is incumbent on us to preserve it, advance it and pass it on to the next generation. Without the

transcendancy of absolute truth, our cultural heritage is nothing more than a curiosity cabinet of geegaws.

It is, it must be, something much more than that.

### The Supreme Court: What's Next?

(*Aug. 4*) — I wouldn't want to be on the United States Supreme Court even if I were qualified. It seems those poor justices can't even come close to Abraham Lincoln's observation that you can please some of the people all the time let alone all the people some of the time.

It begins with their confirmation hearings which are nothing less than public campaigns of character assassination reminiscent of the Salem witch trials. Somewhere, sometime in your past you may have done something that can be blown out of all proportion by the current mob of self-appointed puritans residing in the U. S. Senate and the national media. No matter if it is true or not. Just ask Brett Kavanaugh.

It doesn't end with your confirmation. The witch hunters are still trying to salvage something out of those false accusations to impeach Justice Kavanaugh now that he is serving. No matter that the FBI debunked them quite handily.

They can't impeach all the justices they don't like so Plan B is to stack the court with an adequate number of tame justices to override the current majority. That ploy has a mixed history, the most recent incident being a stain on the FDR legacy.

Then there is the occasional oral threat to rule my way or else by the current egotist-in-chief residing on Capitol Hill. This usually receives immediate rebukes from the civility minded, which provides a modicum of encouragement for the future of our republic.

I suppose the justices have developed tough skins for this kind of bare knuckles political discourse. The Constitution does insist they serve for life so they can shrug it off, at least publicly.

But it must hurt when their putative supporters turn on them after one or two

decisions which don't pass muster. Social conservatives are disappointed that the new conservative majority on the court hasn't aggressively reversed much of the unfortunate decision-making during previous terms. Judicial activism, so rightfully deplored when exercised by liberal judges, is now expected from conservative judges as a matter of political payback. It's the adult version of the schoolyard defense, "He did it first."

There is even a philosophical fig leaf for this kind of thinking, called "common good originalism." Developed among Roman Catholic conservative thinkers, it sets moral law above the Constitution. I'm all for moral law but the other side has its opinion of what is moral and what isn't, and I don't like their opinion. What is to protect the rest of us from a temporary majority trampling our rights in the name of a specious morality?

For conservatives to use their current court majorities at the Supreme Court and at the district level is "the end justifies the means" kind of thinking. It is short sighted in that the other side will have their day as well. It is hypocritical in that it is being advocated by some, like the common-good originalists, who should be supportive of what the Constitution actually says. And it will ultimately fail.

One can't help but wonder if some of our conservative brethren oppose an activist judiciary only when it rules the wrong way. Understand the point here: these conservatives want the judiciary to legislate rather than review, just like progressives demand.

Judicial activism should be abhorred, unless one uses the definition suggested by George Will in his recent book, "The Conservative Sensibility." I was shocked when I first read in the book that he argues for more judicial activism, which I thought was the last thing that thinking conservatives wanted. Then I finally understood what he is proposing. The courts, in Will's opinion, should be quite active in reviewing laws and executive branch actions to ensure they comply with the Constitution. His concept of judicial activism is

not to be a de facto legislature but to act as the brakes on legislative and executive overreach.

To do this, the justices absolutely must review cases strictly as they are presented. Ofttimes this produces a narrowly worded opinion that stays within the confines of the case they heard and to the disappointment of those who wished for a broader decision. Individual cases should not be viewed as invitations to trespass on legislative prerogatives. We are suffering from too much of that kind of judicial activism.

Justice Anton Scalia, a hero to many originalists, made the point succinctly in a 1992 dissent. “Value judgments . . . should be voted on, not dictated.” It doesn’t require a Ph.D in constitutional law to understand that is what the Founders had in mind by assigning legislative authority to Congress, executive authority to the President and a referee function to the Supreme Court. John Marshall got it exactly right in his Marbury decision.

We either believe in the Constitution or we don’t. I do.

### **Combining Baseball and the Army**

*(July 28)* — There are a lot of benefits of retirement, likely many more than I realize or appreciate, but one is enough free time to follow my local minor league baseball team. The Fort Wayne TinCaps are High A this year with a roster of players who hope to be only one or two steps away from the majors.

Fort Wayne has produced a lot of major leaguers over the 28 years of the franchise. The most successful in monetary terms is Fernando Tatis Jr., a current wage slave of the San Diego Padres to the tune of \$340 million.

Fort Wayne has always been a baseball town. The Fort Wayne Kekiongas played in the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players, the first professional league prior to the formation of the National Baseball League. (Yes, that National League.) Unfortunately the Kekiongas went broke in 1871 but only after making the record books for winning the first game ever played under the auspices of a professional baseball league.

Even with no more Kekiongas, the city wasn’t done with making baseball history. The first professional night game was played under lights in Fort Wayne in 1883 according to local lore even if not uncontested among baseball historians.

So much for reminiscing about a time before I was born. Coming back to this year of grace, my lifetime love of baseball has been stoked to a white-hot heat now that I can afford both the money and the time to hold season tickets. When still gainfully employed, I would attend TinCaps games (or Wizards as they were absurdly named when they first came to Fort Wayne) as often as time allowed. It wasn’t nearly often enough and I was jealous of my retired friend who had season tickets. Several years ago my wife asked me what I wanted to do for Fathers’ Day and I replied with one word: TinCaps. That day I resolved to buy season tickets so I could go to all the games

I wanted seats near my retiree friend so I ended up next to the visitor’s dugout at field level. There are better views of the field but I won’t move. I have made new friends of the other season ticket holders as well as the ushers assigned to our section so going to the game is a fundamental part of my pathetic social life.

The best thing about my seats is that I am right at the on-deck circle for the visiting team. This gives me the opportunity to talk to the batters as they come out of the dugout. I don’t heckle; 30 years as a volunteer assistant coach in Division I men’s volleyball left me with no tolerance or respect for hecklers. Instead I compliment them on great defensive plays, previous home runs or other impressive athletic feats. Most respond, if only with a thank you, and those who don’t are likely too intense on preparing for their next at bat.

Last week the Dayton team was in town and their right fielder put on an offensive and defensive show. He made two spectacular diving catches the first night, got a couple of hits and ran the bases with abandon. Checking his biographical information, I learned that he is a Hoosier from Zionsville and a graduate of West Point. West Point? My neighbor, a retired Army



colonel, was with me that night and he didn't think the Army allowed newly commissioned officers to take a sabbatical to play professional sports before serving their military obligation.

Thank you, Internet, as we discovered that this young man is the first West Point graduate to be granted leave to play professional baseball before assuming his army career. The next night I brashly called out to him as he passed toward his dugout before the game and he immediately came over. We talked for about five minutes about his army career in the air defense artillery and the expectations the army has for him.

Jacob Hurtubise understands his responsibilities to represent the Dayton Dragons and Cincinnati Reds while still representing the United States Army. Although officially commissioned as a second lieutenant, his teammates have begun calling him "Colonel." No wonder. In an interview with MLB.com, he said, "If my jersey's not dirty, I did something wrong." After the first game of the series, his jersey was reasonably clean but his pants were shredded at the back pocket and on the side from his slides. He did nothing wrong which this grizzled old fan noticed. And his teammates should promote him all the way to field marshal.

Eventually the army will get Lt. Hurtubise back but, based on what I saw last week, it won't be anytime soon.

## A Non-Athletic Career

*(July 21)* — As I sink deeper and deeper into my dotage, I try to husband what brain cells are still functional for what matters most. That means being discriminatory about what I allow inside my cranium. To start, I pay no attention to popular culture. I absolutely refuse to watch movies or I don't listen to music if the original composer is still living. I haven't seen a contemporary TV show in decades, at least not voluntarily.

I do read a lot and often come across a name I haven't heard before. Indiana Policy Review columnist Leo Morris wrote last week about an amazing gymnast, whose name I have already forgotten. As is my wont, this triggered the bank

of memory cells which remembers the past in a selective manner. In this case the memory was of my underwhelming athletic career.

Morris mentioned a study that the average child's athletic participation ends by age 11. That is certainly true of my stillborn baseball career. My misfortune was to get bifocals at age nine, making it difficult to decide which pitched baseball coming at me to swing at.

Youngsters are resilient, so I transferred my attention to golf by getting a job as a caddy. By the time I reached high school, I was working in the pro shop and playing golf every chance I got. The problem was that those chances became fewer and fewer in number as I was working six days per week from sun-up to sun-down. I think that was probably in violation of the wage and hour laws for teenage employees, but I loved it . . . except for the unpleasant reality that my inadequate golf skills were deteriorating rapidly due to lack of exercise.

That should have put paid to my athletic career except for a chance discussion years later during a Friday night happy hour over a favorite adult malt beverage. The university that employed me had started a men's volleyball program and the new coach was trying to generate a following. He asked me to be an honorary assistant coach and sit on the bench at home matches. I agreed despite the fact that I knew absolutely nothing about volleyball at this level.

This went on for a few years until one of the other assistants told me either to become useful or to get lost. I was assigned the job of charting the other team's offense with the goal of being able to predict the opponent's next play. At risk of immodesty, I actually became proficient at this. My trademark was a specially built clipboard that held six full size sheets, one for each rotation. (A volleyball rotation is the way the six players arrange themselves on the floor and it changes with each new server.)

I did this for nearly 30 years, helping out during the good years and the bad. The best year was 2007 when we played in the NCAA Division I national championship final match. The

experience of walking out on the floor of St. John's Arena at Ohio State that night is one memory that I will always cherish.

There is something about the camaraderie that develops among a coaching staff which served together for so many years. Long bus rides, killing time at the hotel before an evening's match and Saturday morning team video sessions all helped in building what have become lifelong friendships among us coaches and our wives.

It wasn't all fun but even the bad memories can morph into amusing anecdotes given enough time. For example I was personally cited with an NCAA violation for giving a free ticket to the pastor of my church. It seems that the NCAA, guardian of the sanctity of amateur athletics, is quite restrictive on complimentary tickets used by volunteer coaches who must be watched closely lest they err. I stand with pride along such NCAA miscreants as John Calipari, Jerry Tarkanian and Kelvin Sampson in the NCAA hall of shame. Unfortunately, no alumni offered to buy out my contract to get rid of me.

All good things must come to an end so I eventually retired with the other senior citizen coaches and we turned the team over to a younger generation. I still attend all home matches, at least those which allow fans in this Covid world. The current coaches see that my family and I are put on the team pass list. I'll risk another NCAA rules violation to keep close to the team that received so much of my time.

Would I trade those years for anything this world has to offer? No way, except maybe for more grandchildren.

## A Health Checkup for Patriotism

*(July 7)* — Having passed three patriotic observances — Memorial Day, Flag Day and Independence Day — provides an opportune moment to reflect on the status of patriotism here in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

What is its status? That depends on whom you ask, where you look and at what you look.

If one spends the day in front of the television watching national news channels, one can't help but conclude patriotism is dead or in hiding. The talking heads, apparently in some kind of competition for the most extreme statement trophy, will leave your mental health in a witch's brew of "gloom, despair and agony" and "deep, dark depression; excessive misery" to quote song lyrics from the down-home philosophers of the 1970s hit TV show "Hee Haw."

A recent book, "Fears of a Setting Sun: The Disillusionment of America's Founders" by Dennis Rasmussen, argues for just such a failed ending for our republic based on what the author saw as the pessimism expressed by most of the Founding Fathers in our nation's early years. If one buys into Rasmussen's premise, Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Hamilton all despaired of the new constitutional republic's ultimate fate. (He does note that Madison was the optimist in the group.) Yet here we are, 245 years later and still kicking.

But kicking how? What we see on TV and in sports stadiums are professional athletes kneeling during the National Anthem, demands for Old Glory to be replaced with something appropriately woke, the asinine 1619 Project pushed by what used to be considered the newspaper of record, and on and on. Even the Statue of Liberty is now under attack. Is our nation on the brink of a self-ignited implosion? Yes, if your only perspective is cable news or national newspapers. It was a good run for the USA but it must be over . . . and deservedly so.

Not so fast, at least if we refocus our perspective right here in Indiana. This is what I heard and saw over the past weekend.

I counted 72 American flags flying on my short cul-de-sac, not counting red, white and blue bunting and ribbons nor the U.S. Army flag flown by my veteran neighbor. There were plenty more throughout my addition.

My wife and I attended our minor league baseball team's annual Fourth of July home game in downtown Fort Wayne, a sellout as always. The stadium provides the best seats for the city's

fireworks display, with their launching being carefully coordinated with the end of the baseball game. The home team TinCaps lost but that didn't dampen the crowd's enthusiasm. There was a stirring tribute to military personnel and veterans in attendance. And, of course, nearly everyone wore red, white and blue.

People seemed to be in good moods everywhere this weekend, even those working in retail outlets. Were they extra friendly due to the holiday or was I just looking for the good in my fellow man? Either way, it's a plus for patriotism.

The number of personal fireworks displays all over town was stunning. How much money did these people spend to provide a show for their friends and neighbors? Even though a modicum of restraint would have been welcome, especially during the week leading up to the Fourth and after midnight on Independence Day proper, I would rather hear all the fireworks than face a community that just doesn't care about celebrating our independence.

One of the most divisive issues today is immigration. I have an opinion for the long-term solution to this but won't presume to offer it here. Instead, I would rather think about why these millions have risked so much to come here,

whether legally or illegally. Could it be that America offers more liberty, more economic freedom, more personal safety, a higher standard of living and so forth than wherever they used to call home? Isn't this attestation of America's continuing to be that city on a hill dreamed of by the early European settlers? I can't but conclude that "these huddled masses" are indeed "yearning to breathe free" and it's the United States that best can deliver on this promise.

I'm no doctor and I didn't stay at a Holiday Inn last night but I will give a mental-health prescription anyway. Pull the plug on your cable TV even if only for one day. Don't get into any political discussions with anyone, even those with whom you know you agree. Smile at everyone you meet. Think only good thoughts about others and your own situation. Be thankful you live here and not where your immigrant ancestors did.

Maybe I just moved Thanksgiving Day into July. And maybe that holiday ought to be celebrated monthly. It can be, and it doesn't take an act of Congress or a presidential declaration for all us to do so.

God bless America! ♦

# Backgrounders

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## K-12 Education: The Ignored Policy Options

(Nov. 20) — The recent statewide elections in Virginia have brought K-12 education back to the front burner. A former Democrat governor lost — in a state handily won by President Biden a year ago. The chief causes: declining popularity of Democrats on the national stage (compared with 2020) and trouble with K-12 on the campaign trail in Virginia.

But, really, outside of a war on our soil, what public policy topic is more important than K-12? It's important at a Macro level. An economy cannot prosper if its people are not educated. It's important at a Micro level. What's worse than a young adult with an 8th-grade education going into a global economy? Beyond economics and personal finance, it's difficult to estimate the impact of a poor education on personal choices, citizenship, democracy, crime, etc. Or from another popular angle, if one is concerned about "systemic racism," what other topic is bigger?

We largely trust K-12 to government — with its "market share" of 85 percent in public schools. For most parents, there is one public school option — the school closest to your house. So, for many people — in particular, those with fewer financial resources — the only significant choice is a single government-run entity with tremendous monopoly power over them.

As an economist, it's surprising that so many people have so much faith in a system like this. Imagine a "public restaurant" system that operates the same way. Food is really important and we're unimpressed by food stamps as a policy to get food to the indigent. So, the government

decides to run a restaurant in every neighborhood with free meals for all, financed by taxpayers.

To make the analogy more apt, you probably can't cook at home. (That'd be too difficult for most people — like homeschooling.) And you probably can't afford private restaurants — on top of the taxes you pay. So, most people will go to the government-run restaurant in their neighborhood. What are the incentives in such a system for the restaurant managers? What concerns would we have? What problems should we anticipate?

First, we'd expect trouble with quality. In the restaurant analogy, the food could be fair or poor. The service could be good or lousy. There might be some extra hair in your food. If you're not satisfied, what are you going to do about it? Not much. In the case of K-12, quality is the greatest concern for inner-city schools. Family structure-stability is surely a significant problem here. But a government-run entity with monopoly power can hardly be expected to be the ideal approach.

Second, you'd expect trouble with bureaucracy and cost (to taxpayers). Government entities are famous for inefficiency. With education, we see a high proportion of non-teaching personnel (compared with private schools). And taxpayers spend about \$15,000 per student in K-12 — \$300,000 per classroom of 20. In Indiana, it's about \$12,000.

Third, you'd expect "menu troubles." Maybe every night is "Burrito Night," but you don't like burritos. Too bad. In the case of education, it's the "social menu" that often annoys: mask mandates and vaccine requirements, sex education and what to do with "gender," new math and how much standardized testing. Independent of your positions on such topics, the larger issue is the one-size-fits-all approach of a government monopoly. Somebody is bound to get bent.

And this is what happened in Virginia. Concerns about one school system's approach to a sexual assault. Concerns about "Critical Race Theory" in the curriculum. Concerns about schools being closed (or not) and students being masked (or not) during Covid. Concerns about



school boards that seen as unresponsive. And one of the candidates (a former governor) who said “I don’t think parents should be telling schools what they should teach” in the final debate.

Why have we settled for this system and these results in K-12? Unfortunately, few people really care about the poor. (Democrats generally prefer lip service, bureaucracy, and powerful interest groups. GOP’ers generally just don’t care.) The folks who are excited about “systemic racism” strangely apply their concern to a few policy issues, ignoring larger topics such as K-12. But now in Virginia — and probably beyond — the middle class has been awakened, since the powers-that-be are seen as messing with their children.

If one is pro-choice on K-12, how could we increase competition in the market and choice for parents? First, you could allow people to attend the government-run restaurant of their choice. Second, you could allow certain government-run restaurants to operate with lower budgets and much more discretion. (This is akin to “charter schools.” Indiana has had these for years; Kentucky recently allowed them, but hasn’t funded them yet.) Third, you could do “backpack funding” — where the monies follow consumers to private or public providers. (This is what we do with housing vouchers, food stamps, Medicaid/Medicare, and the G.I. Bill for higher education.)

Producers never want competition; monopolists want to preserve their power. But the stakes are too high — for the poor and the middle-class, for the individual and the country. Let’s promote choice and competition in K-12.

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## Questioning the Jobs Rhetoric

(Oct. 19) — Americans are awakening to the fact that political rhetoric concerning job creation is no longer so reassuring. Why exactly are

politicians so focused on efforts to increase labor force participation? Will policies intended to increase participation actually be effective?

U.S. job growth this September came in 300,000 jobs short of what economists predicted. In August, the gap was almost half a million short. These figure are surprising since the rate of those actually seeking a job in down and the \$300 a week federal supplement to standard state jobless benefits expired in late August. A mismatch between available jobs and those to which individuals aspire is one explanation. However, there is something more at stake.

The labor force participation rate is the percentage of the population 16 and older that is either working or actively looking for work. The labor force participation rate for Indiana peaked at over 70 percent in 1995 and was just 62.9 percent in August of this year. Will participation return to its pre-pandemic level? Or, does this change reflect a long-term shift?

Generous family paid leave policies, subsidized daycare and free community college tuition are being proposed to encourage labor-force participation and job training. However, similar policies abroad are associated with decreased labor force participation and lower economic growth. For example, Italy offers 22 weeks of maternity leave at 80 percent of previous earning; France, 16 weeks at 90 percent and Spain, 16 weeks at 100 percent. A 62.6 percent participation rate in the U.S. contrasts with 49.7 percent in Italy, 55 percent in France, and 57.7 percent in Spain (“The Entitlements of U.S. Decline,” the Wall Street Journal, October 7, 2021).

It is uncertain that policies designed to increase labor force participation, even those targeted at lower-income households, will be effective. Government policies can nudge behavior in a particular direction, but, in a free country, personal decision-making overrides government incentives. Politicians can entertain a vision of ideal labor force participation and imagine that with just the right policy mix that goal will be realized. However, every working-age person is uniquely motivated to realize personal goals.

Jobs are essential for most people, plus offering satisfaction and connection with society. However, some personal discretion remains in determining how much time and effort each individual is willing to allocate to earning wage income.

Policies may temporarily incentivize people to accept a job, but cannot consistently fool rational people into extended rates of labor force participation when wages adjusted for inflation are expected to decline and be taxed at a higher rate.

With state and federal marginal taxes on wage income approaching 50 percent, workers at all income levels may be questioning how the wedge between wages earned and take-home pay affects their future. They may be willing to take advantage of any pro-job entitlements, but regret having half of their paycheck pay for services which they do not value for which they are not eligible.

European cradle-to-grave transfer programs are financed by the middle class via value-added and payroll taxes. The combined employer-employee social security tax rate is 36 percent in Spain, 40 percent in Italy and 65 percent in France; this compares with approximately 13 percent in the U.S. Value-added taxes in most European economies are around 20 percent compared with similar, but significantly lower, sales taxes in the U.S.

Is it being too cynical to suggest that politicians are less interested in supporting job creation than in maximizing tax revenue? If declining real take-home compensation reduces taxes generated from labor-force participation, politicians will be forced to consider alternate sources of revenue to realize their political agenda.

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## The History of Slavery

(Oct. 21) — Advocates of Critical Race Theory (CRT) being taught in schools would

have an easier time convincing others if they did not start history in the year 1619 and looked at more than one country. But advocates of CRT may not want to look past that year because of what history shows.

Historians have observed the “geographical ubiquity of slavery,” and the “institutionalized unfreedom” of people, including the land that became America, largely populated by indigenous peoples. Christina Snyder’s book, “Slavery in Indian Country: the Changing Face of Captivity in Early America,” noted that “Captivity and its most exploitative form — slavery — was indigenous to North America, it was widespread” among North America’s populations. Theda Perdue’s book, “Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society 1540-1866,” stated that “Early Europeans who came into contact with the Cherokee described an indigenous institution they called ‘slavery.’ In 1540, for example, the chronicles of Hernando de Soto’s expedition reported the presence of ‘masters’ and ‘slaves’ among the natives they encountered.” Another scholar said that “Though the Cherokees practiced slavery, there is no word for ‘slave’ or ‘Negro’ in their language.”

The Encyclopedia Britannica noted that “some of the best documented slave-owning societies were the Klamath and Pawnee and fishing societies, such as the Yurok, that lived along the coast . . . Life was easy in many of those societies, and slaves are known to have sometimes been consumption goods that were simply killed in potlatches.”

In short: Before Columbus landed and long before the first slave ship landed in what is now America, slavery existed among the indigenous peoples in many regions of what is now America. Defenders of CRT may see it as a quibble, but slavery in the land that became America began more than 400 years ago. And if it is a quibble, then the history of the indigenous populations, the Maya for instance, count for nothing.

The Tarlton Law Library at the University of Texas reported that “The Maya had a system of serfdom and slavery . . . There was an active slave trade in the Maya region.” Commoners and the

upper class owned slaves. Discounting slavery by the indigenous populations of North America suggests indifference toward the Mayan civilization and other pre-Columbian peoples.

Before the first slave ship landed on North America, slavery existed on other continents. In the late 1980s and 1990s, many black scholars, and white scholars too, argued that blacks produced Egyptian civilization. But that civilization enslaved Hebrews.

In fact, an active slave trade thrived in Africa prior to the arrival of European slave traders in Africa. George LaRue's "Indian Ocean and Middle Eastern Slave Trade," from Oxford Bibliographies, observed that "Although slavery and some regional slave trading existed in earlier eras, the spread of Islam in the 7th and 8th centuries led to increases in long-distance trading in both the Middle East and Indian Ocean regions, but with initially rather different patterns.

Africa became a new source of slaves." Commenting on the slave trade, another scholar noted 20 years ago that "only the Christian slave trade to America has been studied by archaeologists. The much longer duration (over 1,000 years) of the Islamic slave trade to Asia and of the Dar el Islam in North and East Africa is at present" poorly researched.

However, African history has been researched well enough to document an energetic slave trade by Africans of Africans before any contact with European slave traders. Keith Bradley's article for "Historical Essays," stated that "During the Trans-Saharan slave trade, slaves from West Africa were transported across the Sahara desert to North Africa to be sold to Mediterranean and Middle eastern civilizations."

The geographical history of slavery, including African slavery, has received little attention from the advocates of CRT, which looks only at one country.

Slavery and its consequences involved all continents and all races. That is what a full and more complete CRT curriculum would teach and should teach. Then there would be less hostility and more peace in America.

## Muslims and 9-11

(Sept. 6) — Our country recently marked the 20th years since the terrifying events of Sept. 11, 2001. Newspapers printed articles both inspirational and tragic regarding the events of that day. Most newspapers also included articles on the bias faced by Muslims. For example, the Wall Street Journal had an article on Sept. 13 entitled, "Growing Muslim Population Sees Fear, Acceptance."

Closer to home, the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette printed an article on Sept. 7 entitled, "Two decades after 9/11, Muslim Americans still fighting bias." The article stated, "A poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research conducted ahead of the 9/11 anniversary found that 53 percent of Americans have an unfavorable view toward Islam, compared with 42 percent who have favorable ones. This stands in contrast to Americans' opinion about Christianity and Judaism . . ."

The Indianapolis Star had a Sept. 7 article entitled, "Muslim Americans organize to fight bias after 9/11." Not to be outdone, USA Today printed a Sept. 9 article, "Breaking Stereotypes: How 9/11 shaped a generation of Muslim Americans," that stated "Anti-Muslim bias continues today." In fact, each year around Sept. 11, newspapers have had articles remarking that anti-Muslim bias is problematic. For the record, I agree — any sort of anti-religion bias is deplorable and should not exist.

What is even worse than having a bias, though, is acting criminally motivated by the bias.

While newspapers routinely make an annual condemnation of the anti-Muslim bias that exists in America (and other parts of the world), Muslims and Muslim institutions are not the leading target by way of religion bias. The FBI Hate Crime Statistics show that in 2019, of the 1,715 victims of hate crimes, 60.2 percent or 1,032, of the victims were Jewish institutions or people. That compares with 13.2 percent, or 227, of victims that were Muslim, 3.8 percent, or 66, of victims that were Catholic, and 1.4 percent, or 24, of victims that were Protestant. The Jewish

population suffered the most hate crimes in 2019 — and it has ever been thus.

In 2002, the year after the cataclysmic horror of 9/11, hate crimes against Jewish institutions and people numbered 1,084 incidents, Muslim institutions and people suffered 170 incidents, Catholics suffered 71 incidents, and Protestants suffered 58 incidents of hate crimes.

The American population is about 2 percent Jewish and about 1 percent Muslim, so if both religions were targeted proportionately, Jewish victims would be double the Muslim victims. Instead, Muslim victimization is about 22 percent, not 50 percent, of Jewish victimizations. Jewish victims are targeted more than twice as much as Muslim victims.

Americans may say they have unfavorable opinions about Muslims, as compared to Christianity and Judaism, but when it comes to acting on unfavorable opinions, Jewish entities are the most afflicted.

I suppose headlines, such as “Two decades after 9/11, Jewish Americans still lead victimization data” or “Jewish Americans organize to fight bias after 1776,” won’t fit the current narrative as the articles above do. However, it appears as though the editors at newspapers think misdirection is okay if it sells newspapers.

#### Sources:

2002 Hate Crime Data: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2002/hatecrime02.pdf>

2019 Hate Crime Data: <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/tables/table-1.xls>

### Holcomb Welcomes the Afghans

Margaret Menge is an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation and a veteran journalist living in Bloomington. She has reported for the Miami Herald, Columbia Journalism Review, InsideSources, Breitbart, the New York Observer and the American Conservative. Menge also worked as an editor for the Miami Herald Company and UPI. A version of this essay was distributed by Center Square — Indiana.



(Sept. 9) — Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb said recently that he wants to help Afghan refugees coming to southern Indiana to resettle in the state and get jobs in Indiana.

“I can’t tell you how many businesses have said, when can I start hiring?” Holcomb said at a news conference Sept. 1.

News had broken earlier that about 5,000 Afghan refugees will be temporarily housed at Camp Atterbury, the National Guard base south of Indianapolis.

“I want to help those who aided us,” Holcomb said, adding he wants Indiana to “be there on the back end” after the Afghans have been screened and vetted — which is to take 14 days.

“I do believe that folks will fall in love with Indiana as much as we have,” he said.

Camp Atterbury is being readied for the arrival of the Afghans, said R. Dale Lyles, adjutant general of the Indiana National Guard. He said the first group could arrive as early as Sept. 3, and he is expecting they will arrive in increments of 1,000.

Camp Atterbury is an old Army base now operated by the Indiana National Guard, which uses it as a training facility and to test equipment. It sits on 46,000 acres of mostly flat land about 40 miles south of Indianapolis. It has dorm-like barracks, a dining facility and a medical clinic.

There is also a permanent garrison on the base. The garrison command consists of 220 soldiers whose job it is to run Camp Atterbury.

To process the Afghans, Lyles said they’ll have the assistance of 800 soldiers from Fort Hood, who will provide police protection and also medics and nurses, and also members of the Army medical command at Fort Knox, who will come to Camp Atterbury to help do medical screening of the Afghans.

Lyles said Holcomb had asked him to go deeper and think about how Indiana can help the Afghans who are coming to Indiana.

“We’re going to try to help them become assimilated into America and to become Americans just like the rest of us,” he said, adding



that the Indiana National Guard will help the Afghans to obtain driver's licenses.

All of the Afghans who will be arriving have been vetted in Afghanistan and also on arrival on U.S. soil, Lyles said. At Camp Atterbury, they will all have to remain on the base for 14 days, after which those who have a 'special immigrant visa' will be able to move about freely in the southern Indiana area, leaving the base when they choose. Those who have Priority 1 or Priority 2 visas will need more vetting before they are able to leave, Lyles said.

He said the base will have a "robust package of medical providers" who will provide medical care to the evacuees. He said all will receive all required vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine.

When asked by a reporter how the Afghans will be vetted, Lyles said: "We know who they are . . . We know what their visa requirements are, and we know that they are safe."

Holcomb started the new conference by recognizing Cpl. Humberto Sanchez, of Logansport, who was one of the 13 Marines killed in Afghanistan last week, saying he served so that the Afghans could "enjoy and appreciate that very same peace and security that we do right now."

He said countless employers have asked when they can start hiring the Afghan refugees, and that one told him: "I'll hire 450 of them right now, as soon as they are cleared."

As soldiers are working to process the Afghans in the coming days and weeks, representatives of non-governmental organizations will be coming to the base to work on resettling Afghans in permanent or semi-permanent housing in various locations around the United States.

When asked by reporter whether Camp Atterbury had the capacity to hold more than 5,000 refugees, Lyles said it does and he indicated that Indiana would be open to taking more than 5,000 evacuees if needed.

He said the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security are providing funding for the housing and care of the Afghans, and he has had no problem accessing the funding to pay for the mission.

"There is no burden on the state for this. This is a complete federal mission" said Lyles. "All of that money is being sent right now through the Army budgeting office. It's been made readily available to Camp Atterbury and we have no issues right now with the funding that's coming in order to do this."

The Afghans, he said, are expected to stay at Camp Atterbury for "single-digit weeks" following the 14-day vetting period. This would mean that the first group of Afghans to arrive would be leaving Camp Atterbury by Nov. 21, at the latest. But Lyles said the Indiana National Guard is able to keep the Afghans at Camp Atterbury longer, if necessary. ♦

# The Bookshelf

## To Rule the Waves

“To Rule the Waves: How Control of the World's Oceans Shapes the Fate of the Superpowers” (Scribner 2021, 312 pages plus notes, \$23 hardcover) by Bruce D. Jones is not an easy read but it is an engaging one. Jones, a foreign policy analyst at the Brookings Institute, has written a book that is part nautical history, part primer in the economics of trade, part case study of the giants of the shipping industry and part warning about the growing challenge of China.

Jones has structured his book to take on each of these foci with more than a little intermixing, making it difficult to always follow his overarching theme. He hurls data at the reader rapid fire, embedded in the text rather than by tables. And there is a lot of data to absorb.

For example he begins with the fact that 85 percent of all international trade is transported via the oceans. This then leads into the importance of the large shipping companies, with the Danish company Maerck as the focus. These ships need ports, so Jones discusses the largest ports in the world with Shanghai receiving special attention. Ships get to ports by sailing through sea lanes that can be bottlenecks at the best of times and military chokepoints at the worst, all protected by the U. S. Navy in our role as the only superpower.

Jones provides a history of the major sea powers in the modern era: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and the Americans in order. He is a Mahan disciple in that he believes that world dominance is achieved through control of the key sea lanes, those that carry international trade.

The United States Navy gets well-deserved attention in the book as it is still seen as the

international arbiter of freedom of the seas. At least for now. The elephant in the room is always China which is building its navy to challenge the U. S. particularly in its “Near Seas,” defined as a 200 mile radius outward. A quick scan of the military or foreign affairs journals will bring up more than a few articles about China’s aggressiveness against Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam and others on the Pacific Rim over the islands in this contested sea area.

China’s strategy is built on a three-part plan to achieve parity if not dominance in world trade. It

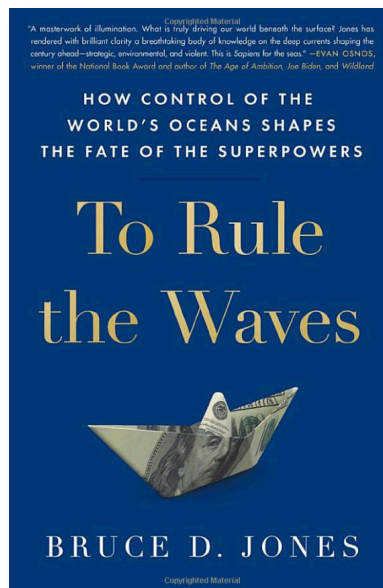
focused first on commercial shipping, then moving to a blue water navy and finally with its somewhat overhyped Belt and Road initiative. All this is designed to develop a forward defense for its trade routes. The question remains: Is China simply acting defensively to protect its trade or is it militarizing to challenge the United States? China builds its commercial ports for easy conversion to military use, according to Jones, so the question is pertinent.

Jones takes several side trips to cover ancillary topics that help support his Mahanian thesis. He

gives a brief history of modern piracy and the international cooperation which defeated it, although he questions the altruism of China’s involvement in this. China again.

Jones’ history of the shipping industry is fascinating. He walks the reader through the engineering genius that developed standardized containers and ship design, allowing for construction of huge ships larger than American nuclear carriers. Computerization made possible efficient loading and unloading of containers at the large ports as well as accident-free navigation through the highly trafficked straits.

He also makes a defense of sorts for America’s loss of industrial jobs. Approximately three jobs were created domestically in the financial sector



for each job lost in manufacturing. Our economy is now half finance and service, driven by the fact that 90 percent of international trade is denominated in U. S. dollars. Jones acknowledges that this has led to domestic unrest; he mentions the rise of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump as proof that Americans are not happy with this. Or at least those in the heartland. He cites Trump's oft mentioned map of his electoral support, flyover country, against support for Hillary Clinton, coastal- and shipping port-based.

Jones' chapter on oil is quite informative. He provides a history of Houston's rise as the premier American oil port. He takes pains to point out that despite America's status as a net oil exporter, we are not energy independent due to the types of oil we produce versus what we need to refine for domestic needs. He takes care to point out the strategic issue of the key chokepoints in oil shipping — Hormuz, Malacca, Bosphorus — and how easily these can be closed by naval action. He makes one additional interesting point: Other than America, most oil companies are government-owned which is why innovation occurs here rather than elsewhere.

So where are we headed strategically? Jones examines the historical responses to national conflicts such as blockades. The problem with blockading is that it will disrupt the trade of our allies as much as our putative adversaries. If the U. S. Navy is ordered to blockade China, will our allies which are also China's trade partners support us? Jones is not sanguine about the probabilities.

He does point out one significant advantage America has — its submarines. We have a technological, doctrinal and numeric advantage in submarines but for how long? China, of course, is determined to close the gap and it has the assistance of the Russian submarine fleet as an

ally. Perhaps America can offset that somewhat with India's growing fleet of submarines.

Jones' final chapters focus on climate change, not with a political rant but with an understandable explanation of the oceans' role in absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> and how oceanic temperatures change over time. He is not a Greta Thunberg alarmist; rather, he lays out several policy options the United States can pursue in cooperation with other nations without demanding a silver bullet. He is a globalist in the sense that he sees the U.S. as a coalition leader. He argues that Margaret Thatcher was a true visionary in this regard, but unfortunately ignored by her contemporaries.

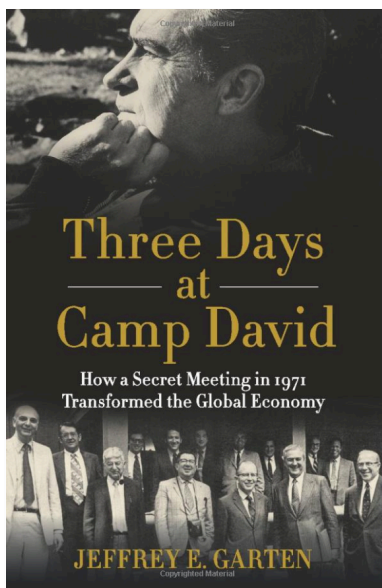
There is too much in this book to cover here. It took me a long time to read as I was constantly making notes, most of which did not make it into this review. (You can thank me later.) It was partly Jones' writing style, which tossed data at the reader like a video game, but then he was taking on a complicated and complex subject. His conclusions are somewhat equivocal. He is no Donald Trump fan but neither did he even mention John Kerry. He sees danger and opportunity at the same time with an altered but fundamental role to be played by America and its navy.

And don't forget China.

*Recommendation:* Read this book if you are interested in oceanography or international trade or are worried about China. Just plan to spend some time with it as the text is packed with data.

### Three Days at Camp David

Back when I was an undergraduate student, struggling with the more esoteric concepts in my economic classes, one of my professors started class one day informing us that Richard Nixon had closed the gold window. What was the gold window? Perhaps his explanation of this played a significant role in my decision to change my major



to economics. That, or his quote from Milton Friedman that “we are all Keynesians now.” My prof was a monetarist, which was the only non-Keynesian alternative at the time, and he understood Friedman as complaining rather than declaiming.

I never quite understood why Nixon did that, given that it went against all the economic principles that the Republican Party espoused. I have a much better insight into the why now that I have read “Three Days at Camp David: How a Secret Meeting in 1971 Transformed the Global Economy” (HarperCollins 2021, 326 pages plus notes, \$18 hardcover) by Jeffrey E. Garton. Garton, a former Yale business school dean and undersecretary of commerce, writes with an insider’s understanding of how government works at the highest level.

Garton organizes the book in a useful way, first introducing the background to the economic crisis of Nixon’s first presidency then detouring to provide mini biographies of the major players before moving on to the weekend in question and concluding with a post-mortem on the effects of the decisions reached. He writes neither in an academic nor a bureaucratic style, making the story easy to follow. He also does a yeoman’s job of explaining difficult economic topics such as foreign exchange rates and trade imbalances.

Much of what happened then had its origin in Nixon’s psyche, one that always looked for an opportunity to do something bold and unexpected. That, and his realistic appraisal of his chances for reelection if American economic indicators (trade imbalance, inflation and unemployment) continued their negative trajectory.

Garton is incisive in his understanding of the inner workings of the Nixon administration, especially the power exercised by John Connally. Connally shared Nixon’s love for the bold move and had the force of personality to steamroll everyone who got in his way. Another that wielded significant influence was Peter Peterson, the White House chief for international economic policy.

Nixon wanted a comprehensive plan, details to come, so the package included import tariffs, job creation incentives, budget cuts and tax cuts. The two big items getting all the attention were ending the quasi-gold standard for currency exchange and implementing a wage and price freeze. This so-called freeze grew like Topsy into semi-permanent control administered by a burgeoning bureaucracy, but this is the way of all government.

Nixon’s speech announcing this new plan was quite popular with the American public but generated quite the opposite response in Europe and Japan. Extended negotiations with these nations eventually ended the gold standard per Bretton Woods so that was a victory for the Friedmanites in the administration. Wage and price controls ended as they always do, with the floodgates opened for significant inflation once controls were lifted.

Garton ends the book addressing the major criticisms of the Nixon plan but concluding that ending the gold standard was worth it. He also makes an unfavorable comparison of Nixon’s motivations and actions to those of Donald Trump, unfavorable to Trump that is. He sees the mess Trump left as an opportunity for Joe Biden to make things right again. I wonder how Garton would grade Biden’s economic performance after a year in office?

In the final analysis Garton notes that Nixon’s actions were nothing less than stealing part of the Democratic platform. Other than labor unions, Democrats enthusiastically supported the plan. And Nixon got reelected in a landslide.

Coming full circle to where I started this review, in a subsequent macroeconomic class we were assigned a monograph by Roger Leroy Miller and Raburn M. Williams entitled “The New Economics of Richard Nixon: Freezes, Floats, & Fiscal Policy.” It did a decent job of explaining Nixon’s moves but I think I like Garton’s book better. But then, Garton had the benefit of 40 years perspective.



*Recommendation:* Highly recommended and accessible to non-economists. Gold bugs might want to give it a pass.

## Checkmate in Berlin

Over the past two or three years I have been studying the allied conferences during World War II, paying particular attention to the last ones which saw the ascendancy of Joseph Stalin and his machinations to establish a post-war communist empire. It is clear in retrospect that Franklin Roosevelt, sick man that he was, succumbed to Stalin's overpowering personality and convinced himself that Stalin could be trusted. (See my review of Diana Preston's "Eight Days at Yalta: How Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin Shaped the Post-War World" in IPR's summer 2020 Journal.)

It didn't take long for the realists on the ground in Berlin to learn of Stalin's perfidy. Giles Milton tells this story with lucidity, perhaps too much so, in "Checkmate in Berlin: The Cold War Showdown That Shaped the Modern World" (Henry Holt and Company 2021, 315 pages plus notes, \$23 hardcover). The book will raise your blood pressure.

The hero of the story is Col. Frank "Howlin' Mad" Howley, American commandant in divided Berlin and the first to realize Stalin's true intent for the western half. Milton is less complimentary about the other western military governors, especially the French who were more interested in stymying British and American plans than stopping the Russians. He gives grudging respect to several Soviet commanders for their audacity in controlling events, at least at first.

The book begins with the military conquest of Berlin and the Soviets delaying the Western Allies from occupying their sectors, giving the Red Army more time to systematically loot commercial and

private property. The western military governors were held out of the city during the looting by command of their political overlords so as not to provoke the Russians. Roosevelt's naivete remained deeply rooted in White House councils long after his death.

It also gave the Communist Party time to insert its proxies into the western part of the city with the intent of gaining full political control. Walter Ulbricht and his cronies had been prepping in Moscow for just this moment. Bullying tactics against the Social Democrats brought about a

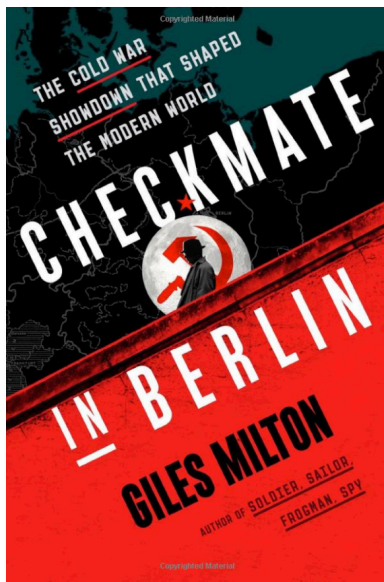
putative merger with the German Communist Party heading into the first city elections, followed by masterful propaganda and outright bribes to voters. In one of history's ironies, the united socialist front was soundly defeated at the polls as Berlin's citizens saw the danger in electing a Soviet puppet government.

"Don't get mad; get even" was the operating principle for the Soviet high command. Nuisance interruptions of traffic flow, utility delivery and food supplies were a constant reminder whose army was there in strength. GRU agents kidnapped scientists and

technicians from all sectors of Berlin and shipped them and their families to Moscow until the western allies reciprocated with experts residing in the Soviet sector.

Gen. Lucius Clay begins in the story as just one more official blinded by Stalin's blandishments. Eventually, though, he joins Howley as a born-again realist about Soviet intentions. He played a key role in convincing President Harry Truman to ignore his appeasing advisors and forcefully respond to the Berlin blockade with the Berlin airlift, one the most impressive logistical operations in history.

The airlift covers the last third of the book, with multiple accounts of individual sacrifice among the air crews and ground personnel. Even



Berliners contributed by hauling rubble by hand to an open area to build a third airport to receive supplies. Milton recounts a heartwarming story of American air crews attaching candy bars to parachutes made of handkerchiefs to drop on the groups of children watching planes land from behind a security fence.

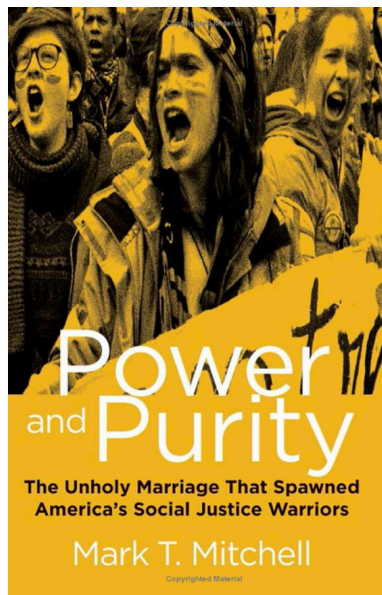
I wish Milton had given a few more pages to Stalin's surrender after it was clear his intimidation would not work. Instead he devotes the last chapter to the founding of NATO and maybe that is fitting. He quotes several of the foreign secretaries at the charter's signing to show how attitudes toward the western democracies' erstwhile ally had changed. Too bad Howlin' Mad Howley wasn't there. He made it possible for NATO to be formed . . . and ensured there was a Berlin to defend.

*Recommendation:* Quite informative. I thought I understood the issues in post-war Berlin. Now I truly do.

## Power and Purity

What do you get when you mate Nietzschean philosophy and seventeenth century New England Puritanism? No, this isn't a lame joke in need of a groaner punchline. Rather, it is the theme of Mark T. Mitchell's "Power and Purity: The Unholy Marriage That Spawned America's Social Justice Warriors" (Regnery Gateway 2021, 256 pages \$9 hardcover).

Mitchell begins the book by dissecting Nietzschean philosophy and its pernicious influence on today's radicals. He follows by



tracing seventeenth century Puritanism through to these social justice warriors. The combination of these two aberrant viewpoints is the unholy marriage which is destroying our society.

Friedrich Nietzsche's central theme of the lust for power is the motivating force which drives human thought and action, if you buy his philosophy. He saw nothing immoral in this as there could be no God or universal truth. It is when members of the Social Justice Movement (SJW) marry this to their puritanical zeal

for punishing vice as they see it that their destructive political movement gains traction. They think of themselves as avenging angels, if I may use religious symbolism to describe these devoutly anti-religion crusaders.

Mitchell points out the disconnect here, the hypocrisy if you will, of the SJW. Somehow they subconsciously know it themselves and therefore are condemned to perpetual frustration, according to Mitchell. This can only spur them on to increasing radicalism with progressively (pun intended) unsatisfiable demands.

Mitchell concludes that our culture is faced with only two options — the will to power or the will to truth. Is it Nietzsche or Christ? Nietzsche declared God dead in 1883; God declared Nietzsche dead in 1900. That, to my way of thinking, settled it.

*Recommendation:* Quick read but thought-provoking. His thesis makes sense and contributes to our understanding of the SJW movement . . . and perhaps to our strategy for defeating it. ♦



Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

## The Outstater

### Voilà! Democrat Violence Reduction

(Nov. 15) — The observation is made that Democrats have a much better strategic approach than Republicans. For them, winning office by hook or crook and staying there no matter what is the simple goal. Republicans — sometimes but not always — tie themselves in knots trying to define issues, encourage moral decisions and illustrate constitutional principles.

Thus Democrats are more free to make promises to donors and the electorate that they know cannot be kept, that are in fact impossible and to which they have no intention of being bound. Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett's anti-crime program is an example.

The elements of the program in effect promise troubled Indianapolis neighborhoods that crime rates can be reduced without actually catching any criminals. It is hugely popular among voters of a certain type.

But like many Democrats lacking the mirror of serious press criticism, Hogsett tends to forget that his positions are based on hooey, that they have no connection with the problems in whose name they are furthered.

Such is the Violence Reduction program under the city's Office of Health and Public Safety. No, it has no connection to the police department or, as

closely as we can tell, to any actual violence reduction.

The program seems to be charged with showing up at crime scenes to comfort victims, and in the words of its director, "interfacing with community members and making relationships that last." That and a lot of "engaging the community and trying to give some people hope that this isn't, you know, hopeless."

That assertion was weakened last week when that same director of violence reduction resigned because, for her at least, the situation did seem hopeless. "There's only so much murder people can take mentally and emotionally," she told the Indianapolis Star, "it takes a toll on you after a while."

One might think that having your director of violence reduction resign because of a surfeit of violence would prompt some agonizing reappraisal. Not so. The intrepid mayor's office was full steam ahead, praising the program and its management on the day the city murder rate hit a historic high.

Among the accomplishments listed was increasing the violence-reduction funding available in 2018 for neighborhood grants (from a pittance of \$300,000 per year). Now the city has a three-year plan that will allocate \$45 million toward anti-violence community grants with another \$37 million expected to go toward group violence-intervention programming, according to the Star, plus the hiring of 50 additional "peacemakers" in coming years.

And the former violence reduction director? She plans to spend more time with her family.

We would quip that "you can't make this stuff up" except that Indianapolis Democrats obviously can.

### Article I, Section 5, Clause 2

*"Each House may determine the Rules of its Proceedings, punish its Members for disorderly Behavior, and, with the Concurrence of two thirds, expel a Member."* —Article I, Section 5, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution

(Nov. 12) — Sometimes we have to say it if only because nobody else will say it: Indiana’s Andre Carson, as a member of the House Intelligence Committee, played a miscreant role in what is becoming the largest and longest-running scandal in American political history. He should be expelled.

The reference of course is to the Democratic National Committee’s and Hillary Clinton’s counterfeit report using the FBI to cripple a political opponent.

This, please know, was not simply politics as usual. Carson, who had access to the most pertinent if not all of what is now being revealed by Special Counsel John Durham, was a lead voice testifying to a grand lie known as the Steele Dossier. The resulting damage to the reputation of national institutions and the ongoing distortion of the democratic process is impossible to measure. It may be irreversible.

For this, Article I, Section 5, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution was written. Five member of Congress have been expelled under that clause in our history. Andre Carson would be the seventh, right after Adam Schiff.

Unlikely, to be sure. Nonetheless, here is Carson from his lofty seat in the committee’s hearing room during the heady days before his four-year fraud was outed:

“The dossier written by former MI6 agent Christopher Steele alleges that (Donald) Trump agreed to sideline Russian intervention as a campaign issue, which is effectively a priority for Vladimir Putin. There’s a lot in the dossier that is yet to be proven, but increasingly, as we’ll hear throughout the day, allegations are checking out. And this one seems to be as accurate as they come.”

Except, as Byron York writes in his column today, it didn’t check out and it wasn’t “as accurate as they come.” Again, it was a carefully crafted lie. Carson, with longtime ties to the Clintons, surely knew it. As York reports:

“Steele’s ‘sources’ were mostly one man, Igor Danchenko, working at the liberal Washington

think tank Brookings Institution, in some cases passing on allegations from a Democratic activist in the Clinton circle, Charles Dolan, who passed on gossip and stuff he read in the newspaper as intelligence from sources close to Trump.”

Indiana cannot be anything but ashamed. And if 7th District voters won’t dump Carson, he should be shunned by the rest of us as not only the worst of politicians but the worst of men.

Don’t expect to read anything about this in his hometown newspaper.

### A Self-Destructive Polity

*“Wrath is cruel, and anger outrageous, but who is able to stand before envy? — Proverbs 27:4.*

(Nov. 10) — Observers of local city councils are puzzled by the ineffectiveness of new voting blocs elected in recent years. They rode in on a clear mandate to improve the lives of constituencies in economically distressed quarters of their cities, that and ensure something they called “equity.”

The question is raised, though, whether these blocs aren’t more interested in chastising the prosperous districts than improving their own — to be driven by resentment, in other words, high-minded and politically correct resentment but resentment nonetheless.

A harsh judgment, to be sure, but a review of the blocs’ councilmanic initiatives is telling. Their projects and programs rarely address disincentives inside their districts. They typically seek to command action or money from outside their districts.

These are in the name of affordable housing, convenient shopping or other worthy goals but, again, they all depend on taking money from someone elsewhere and giving it to the politically designated herein. As such, their projects are highly publicized but predictably limited and transitory, benefiting well-connected individuals rather than the community at large. In general, their economic-development strategies resemble those used in Gary, Indiana,



for the past couple of decades — plenty of complex TIF districts and regional taxing units managed by obscure authorities.

Please know that most of these same goals could be achieved by simply getting bungling, intrusive city halls out of the way. On council shelves are dozens of measures — if not opposed by these blocs — that would repeal restrictive neighborhood zoning, relax work regulations and professional licensing and generally benefit anyone investing in the disadvantaged areas.

Instead, political energy is wasted in oddly apolitical rancor. The blocs' reaction to rioting, for example, was not an emphatically expressed concern over damaged property or a call for public safety but a demand that police officers, assumed to be racist, jump through purifying hoops — the wearing of body cameras, attending social-justice training sessions and such. And most perverse, high crime rates in their districts are tolerated so long as the larger community can be blamed in some way.

To understand all of this you must appreciate the power of envy to divide and destroy. And because the members in these blocs see themselves above all as advocates of social justice (liberals, some might say) they cannot bring themselves to champion the one thing that ameliorates envy — the natural right of each of us regardless of race or address to protect and own property.

For there is another way to look at property. Aside from its role in Western Civilization and the socio-economic model that has brought even the most disadvantaged of us historic prosperity, a right to private property has a moral aspect. It is emblematic of the Golden Rule, i.e., we would treat someone else's property as we would have others treat our own.

The sociologist Helmet Schoeck has thought carefully on the subject. He concludes that the desire to level things regardless of productivity or merit, to punish one group by arbitrarily transferring wealth and power to another,

springs from an inability to come to terms with personal resentments:

“The merciful effect of private property is evident, though it is seldom recognized. It is not the cause of destructive envy, as the apostles of equality are always seeking to persuade us, but a necessary protective screen. Even where there have ceased to be any enviable material goods or where these have for some reason been withdrawn from envy's field of vision, there still is the evil eye and envious, destructive hatred directed against the other person or group. It might almost be said that private property first arose as a protective measure against such envy.”

Schoeck's test is a simple one. Let's take one of those measures off the council shelf, one that doesn't threaten others with higher taxes, forced consignment or a demand for social tribute, but rather directly and only improves the lives of the disadvantaged constituency. Let's see if anyone in your particular bloc will vote for it.

A suggestion would be to repeal a city's business personal property tax, an action which state law now permits for every Indiana city. Without the tax on equipment, the disadvantaged areas represented by the blocs, because property and buildings there are underpriced, would have an immediate advantage. Relocating businesses and new businesses, year in and year out, would bring more and better-paying jobs than does the occasional public-private boondoggle.

The problem, we predict, will be that it would be applied uniformly (equitably) throughout the city and therefore offer nothing in the way of shaming others for being better off.

### Indy Crime: It's Decision Time

(Nov. 2) — When did crime become a plot device? It happened somewhere along the way to approving Mayor Joe Hogsett's \$1.3-billion Indianapolis city budget, the richest in history. It sailed through all the committees untouched on the promise that it was necessary to properly fund crime “control.”

Crime, you see, does pay. Democrats now have a wealth of dollars to hand out to their civic action groups (whose swollen staffs might be useful as election-day organizers). The Republicans can point to the budget items labeled “public safety” and tell their hapless constituents that something is being done.

But it’s just political drama; nothing is better on the streets.

October ended as the deadliest month in the city’s history. There were at least 34 Homicides, 80 people shot and 24 stabbed. All of this, please know, in a subset of the population that may amount to less than 0.5 percent but is responsible for as much as 75 percent of homicides.

And only a fraction of the money said to be for public safety will go to tactical operations, i.e., catching and jailing killers. Most will go to toward efforts to fight the eternal unhappiness of poverty, despair and injustice. Those are the reason crime rates are so high, or so people like the mayor believe.

“The progressives say that the streets will not, cannot, and perhaps even should not be safe until such root causes have been addressed,” writes William Voegeli in the current issue of the *Claremont Review of Books*. “Decency and pragmatism, then, both demand policies that comfort those afflicted by societal failures through humane social programs, rather than efforts to discipline lawbreakers through coercion.”

Such an approach, first articulated by Eleanor Roosevelt, has a miserable record. In fact, as the political scientist James Q. Wilson famously noted, crime rates began to rise sharply in the 1960s at the very time when economic opportunities became larger and barriers to advancement became smaller.

Social disadvantage, then, doesn’t seem to be the begin-all-and-end-all explanation that the mayor would have us believe it is. His strategy, commendable and fitting for church and social work, does not translate into a policy that keeps neighborhoods safe.

The Pew Research Center, using statistics from the FBI and Bureau of Justice, found that in 2020 slightly fewer than 50 percent of all violent crimes were reported to the police. Of those that did get reported, slightly fewer than 50 percent resulted in an arrest, the charging of a suspect and a referral for criminal prosecution. Voegeli asks us to combine the two statistics to see that roughly 80 percent of violent crimes did not result in anyone being prosecuted. And the likelihood that any particular property crime was prosecuted was about 6 percent.

That doesn’t leave much real crime-stopping to either fund or defund.

For the problem is not money but determination, Voegeli argues: “Twice, the Declaration of Independence links physical safety, human flourishing and government legitimacy,” he reminds us. “Governments are instituted to secure our inalienable rights, it states, including the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Further, people have the right to establish a government based on whether its principles and organization ‘seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.’”

If Indianapolis citizens believe that is true — safety for each one of us, regardless of race or address — then they will need more effective representation, the kind that understands the broad economic and social benefits of prosecuting crime regardless of any psycho-socio factors.

That, or they can continue as they are, betting that the Founders were wrong and that the mayor and his \$1.3 billion can remake human nature by decree, that somehow — and rather quickly — the city can cajole criminals into giving up crime.

Considering these past few years, it’s sad we’re even discussing this.

## Youth, Alas, Is Overrated

(Oct. 27) — How does one become a conservative, or more accurately in our case a classical liberal? Progressives like to think it is because we have been brainwashed somewhere along the way. That is the kindest view. Others

think we are too dumb or selfish to appreciate the Left's vision.

Actually, it's not that complicated.

Conservatives are made by time, or the lack of it.

Youth, someone said, is overrated. When our lives stretch out in front of us we have time to dally with socialism's promises. Why not? Maybe it will work this time, maybe it will reorder society so all is more equitable and fair, where risk is minimized and money, hard work are no longer a concern and, most important, that an undeserving older generation is properly chastised.

There has to be a better measure of worth than dependability and productivity, we thought. Who needs economics anyway, we asked. And if necessary, we could always change course later when we were in charge.

Time, though, passes. Age is a trustworthy teacher. We are not too many years into adulthood before we notice that certain "experts" tend to be more prescient than others, that merely holding strong feelings that things are wrong, that they must be changed immediately at all cost, doesn't always translate into workable policy. In fact, it rarely does, there are those pesky unintended consequences.

Gradually, like it or not, maturity and the pressures of adult life improve judgment and accountability. Becoming pragmatic (and boring) isn't something for which we can take pride, and it certainly isn't flattering, but it is the way life goes. We become discerning in the Biblical sense.

A favorite playwright, David Mamet, became a conservative in such a way at the age of 60. He traced his path in a famous essay for the late *Village Voice*. I urge you to read it in full but here's an excerpt:

"As a child of the '60s, I accepted as an article of faith that government is corrupt, that business is exploitative, and that people are generally good at heart. . . . But in my life, a brief review revealed, everything was not always wrong, and neither was — nor is — always wrong in the community in which I live, or in my country. And, I wondered, how could I have spent decades thinking that I thought everything was

always wrong at the same time that I thought I thought that people were basically good at heart? Which was it?"

Mamet, now 73, has compiled a list of "experts" driven by the ideology of his former self. It includes Prof. Frederick Lindemann, a close adviser to Winston Churchill who delayed installation of London radar, and Trofim Lysenko, science adviser to Stalin, whose agricultural theories starved more than 10 million people. Both men were lauded to the end of their days. We can safely add to that list CDC experts, public school administrators and woke generals.

His point is that when an adolescent mindset comes to autocratic power it becomes a monster: "We are all, in a sense, fools, since no one person can know everything. We all have to trust others for their expertise, and we all make mistakes. The horror of a command economy is not that officials will make mistakes, but that those mistakes will never be acknowledged or corrected."

We began to cull from our lives the experts whose predictions never turned out to square with reality, who, however promising, inspirational or authoritative, turned out to be a waste of time. First to go was PBS, the *New York Times*, the *Indianapolis Star* and the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette* followed by the Republican and Democrat Parties and finally anyone even remotely associated with the U.S. Congress or the Department of Justice.

We were left with a small, motley group trying to make sense of the world as it is, trying to prepare us as much as is humanely possible for its twists and turns. Those were the conservatives, although it was a while before we dared speak their name.

Throughout, we never abandoned our hope for our fellow man or woman. Rather, we were taught by age to husband our resources in his, her or them's defense. We could no longer justify spending days in the ungrounded pursuit of reflexive and perpetual empathy. So, what explains Nancy Pelosi, 81, Joe Biden, 78, or Bernie Sanders, 80, or for that matter George W. Bush, 75, or even Eric Holcomb, 53?

## The Stadium Game Plays Out

(Oct. 15) — In any discussion of economic development the success of our publicly financed baseball stadium is invariably trumpeted. It is surrounded by similarly financed masses of concrete and rebar, e.g., a convention center, apartment complexes, parking garages and now an abandoned factory transformed into a mixed-use district “of innovation, energy and culture.”

All very exciting, but the eco-devo vision doesn’t work without the thought — the myth, actually — of thousands of baseball fans pouring new money into an otherwise humdrum downtown.

But what if no baseball team will play here? For the team, please know, is a contract tenant with a sweetheart deal. The stadium’s debt load is backed by taxpayer dollars. What if the team owners decide to locate elsewhere, just walk away? What if there is a grander facility somewhere else with a more attractive incentive package?

That, for sure, would leave a big hole in the center of downtown, baseball stadiums being highly specialized pieces of architecture not easily converted to anything else. Happily, the romance of the “American pastime” would seem to argue against that depressing thought. Another team would simply walk in, the good times could roll on.

But wait, there is an even more troubling prospect. What if the courts knock down the house of cards that is professional baseball? Specifically, what if baseball loses the card that says it is exempt from antitrust law?

That exemption is on shaky legal ground. Justice Neil Gorsuch suggested in a recent majority opinion that it may soon be vulnerable to challenge: “Whether an antitrust violation exists necessarily depends on a careful analysis of market realities. . . . If those market realities change, so may the legal analysis.”

The executive director of Advocates for Minor Leaguers interprets those words as signaling that the Court is inviting litigation.

Matt Welch, writing in the current issue of Reason Magazine, quotes Sen. Mike Lee (R–Utah) arguing that professional baseball “has used its judicially fabricated antitrust immunity to suppress wages and divide up markets for decades — conduct that is plainly illegal, and sometimes criminal, in any other industry.”

If that happens, if the court lifts the exemption, it is unlikely that the typical city council will be able to keep up with the twists and turns as market forces reshape how baseball teams choose where to play.

It would be another costly lesson of the disaster tempted when politicians use your money to play real estate developer.

## The Jan. 6 Record Set Straight(er)

(Oct. 14) — We owe to the Claremont Institute some insight into the unholy mess that was Jan. 6, 2021, and the fateful decision of the Vice President to certify the election of Joe Biden as President. It is not what we have been told.

The narrative to date is that the Vice President had little choice when presiding over the Joint Session of Congress. It says that he either had to certify the electors or single-handedly overturn the will of the people. The Vice President has said his decision was the only “American” thing to do.

But Claremont Senior Fellow John Eastman, acting as counsel to the President of the United States during the 2020 elections in December 2020 and January 2021, disagrees. Two days earlier he had offered a more measured option.

Eastman says the Vice President was not asked to “overturn” the election. Rather, he was advised to consider requests from state legislators to pause the proceedings for a week to give time to the state legislatures “to assess whether the acknowledged illegal conduct by their state election officials had affected the results of the election.” If the state legislatures had found sufficient illegal conduct to have altered the results, and as a result submitted a second slate of electors, he advised the Vice President that he should regard Congress and not the office of the



Vice President as having the authority to choose between the two slates.

“The scenario I recommended to the Vice President was that he accede to requests from numerous state legislators, including the President Pro Tempore of the Pennsylvania Senate, to delay the proceedings long enough for the legislatures in the contested states to assess the impact of acknowledged illegality in the conduct of the election,” says Eastman. “Indeed, I explicitly stated to the Vice President during an Oval Office meeting on Jan. 4 that even assuming he had constitutional authority to reject contested electoral votes, it would be ‘foolish’ to exercise any such authority in the absence of the state legislatures actually having certified the alternate Trump slate of electors.”

Similarly, the Jan. 6 riot at the Capital continues to be described as an “armed insurrection” although we now know that only five persons of the thousands present were found to have a firearm, some of them away from the scene or only after rioters had dispersed, and one of them a DEA agent. Compare that with what you would find in a sweep of West 29th Street in Indy on any Saturday night.

And the Secretary of Homeland Security says our southern border is “closed,” Jen Psaki describes the evacuation of Kabul “a success” and in Chicago shootouts are not prosecuted if they are a matter of “mutual combat.”

It once took years or even decades before history could be twisted into the desired shape. Today with a complicit media it can be done on the fly and in real time.

And that, lest we be confused by the Washington fog machine, is called lying.

### Indiana's Equity Czar Gets Paid

(Oct. 13) — It is painful to follow the public discussion but somebody has to do it. I can tell you that it is devoid of what most of us would recognize as common sense, let alone that necessary to continue a democratic republic.

Gov. Eric Holcomb, an always ready example of the haplessly shallow, was defending his

decision this week on how to fund the office of the state’s office of equity, inclusion and opportunity, the creation of which he lists as a historic achievement.

A Texas firm reportedly put up \$1 million to cover the five-person office and its initial programming. Holcomb’s spokesperson told an approving Indianapolis Star that the cabinet-level seat was created through the extraordinary action of an executive order because of the “importance and urgency of the work.”

The governor’s office cited the Indiana Constitution, which plainly states that all of its prohibitions and requirements are suspended in the event he declares an issue important or urgent.

Just kidding . . . back to the quality of the discussion.

Obviously, one can understand in a limited tactical sense why in a time when corporations are being punished for not being sufficiently anti-racist that a corporation would want to fund a state’s anti-racist commissar. But the “critics” of Holcomb’s action — no conservatives having been consulted — confine themselves to finely shaved ethical points.

Indiana University’s Paul Helmke, a former mayor of Fort Wayne and the deadest ear you will find in Republican politics, told the Star that he cannot recall this ever happening, the assumption being that if Helmke had heard of it happening then it might be okay.

And even if he personally hasn’t heard of it happening, Helmke assures us that everyone involved is “well-intentioned,” citing the Indiana Constitution’s disclaimer that all of its prohibitions and requirements are suspended if everyone is well-intentioned.

Just kidding again.

Finally, Jill Long-Thompson, a former Indiana congresswoman who wrote a book on government ethics and is the deadest ear you will find in Democrat politics, thinks it is a dangerous precedent — but not for reasons you might think. Long-Thompson, missing the point entirely,

wants to use taxpayer money because it is such a good idea.

So are we foolish to wish that somewhere it could be recognized that a Republican governor is defending nascent fascism, a form of socialism?

Both Mussolini and Lenin established state-driven economic models that incorporated market-based mechanisms into government programs. Lenin's politics are recognized as the first modern-day version of fascism and state-corporatism.

This definition has been swept down the memory hole. Dictionaries now refer to fascism exclusively by its supposed "right-wing" element, actually just the cronies and inside dealers forever present in government systems of all types.

And yes, the distinction may be asking too much of a Republican administration that frets over the political incorrectness of the state name and imagines that 7th-century Afghan cultural norms can be melded into Hoosier society.

## The Biden Indifference

(Sept. 30) — Conservatives can stop scoffing at Joe Biden's statement that his \$3 trillion-plus spending plan won't cost anything. The rest of the world, and increasingly large numbers of Americans, think the same way.

What he means is it won't cost the government anything. That is because he intends to raise taxes to pay for it, and as his press secretary explained earlier this week it would be "unfair and absurd" for businesses to pass that cost down to customers.

These people are idiots, not comedians.

But their assumption, again, is widely shared. Indeed, it is the default setting, i.e., that governments ultimately own everything and have the authority to determine which of their citizens have behaved well enough to access some of it. Forcing citizens to receive inoculations is a no-brainer for them.

There are differences in degree and application, but that is how Mexico is run, how France is run, Germany is run, the Middle East,

sub-Saharan Africa and of course China — everywhere except in what Dan Hannan of the British House of Lords has aptly called the Anglosphere, a group of economic miracles including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Outside that sphere you are free only to do what the government of the moment allows. But inside the sphere you are free to do whatever a historic constitution hasn't specifically proscribed.

Big difference. It is why Singapore is not Indonesia, why Hong Kong is not China, It is why Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere despite more than \$13 billion in international aid in the past decade, is not the Dominican Republic.

And don't think this is just over-the-horizon stuff. If you have followed your Indiana city council these past few years,, Republican or Democrat, you will have noticed it is more and more in the Biden model than in the Hannan one. Businesses and individuals increasingly must wait for a council to decide whether this or that is OK.

The Indianapolis City Council recently threw the housing market there into confusion by overturning a zoning decision unfavorable to "affordable" housing. Property rights? The Indianapolis Star this morning labeled those opposed to plopping low-income subsidized housing in your neighborhood as being on "the dark side."

Development and housing values are on hold wherever that sentiment prevails.

It is no surprise that all of this is acceptable to the media; it makes covering politics so much easier. Our local newspaper rarely feels compelled to report the rationale of those on the losing side of a vote. Whatever the council rules, you see, like some sort of politburo, is the important news, not the democratic-constitutional discussion surrounding it.

Thus Nancy Pelosi can say we will have to wait until the 5,593-page spending bill is passed to find out what's in it. She isn't being flip. She means it.

So there's nothing funny about any of this. Yes, Joe Biden is one of the duller tools in the

Washington shed but he has proved to be a good mimic of the nation's mood.

## The Lost Art of the Quirky

(Sept. 27) — Other than solid information on which to base viewpoints and life strategies, the thing I miss most in my morning reading is quirkiness. There's no time for those little stories that remind us how heroic — and how ridiculous — is the human race.

Yes, I have examples.

There was the item in the microfilm archive of a man passing through town in the 1850s on his way to California. He was herding 1,000 or so turkeys on foot. And there was the woman who carved a full-sized Harley-Davidson motorcycle with moving parts out of granite.

There is the philharmonic conductor arrested for taking a shotgun to the flock of Merganser ducks that had defecated on his riverside dinner party. And the courageous music reviewer who lost his job for describing a Gustav Mahler composition as sounding like “a fire in a large zoo.”

A master of this school of journalism was Jim Fisher, an old friend and the oft-quoted “man at the next desk” for much of my newspaper career. Seriousness was foreign to Fisher's makeup. The job was supposed to be fun, he insisted, and at \$95 a week why else would you do it? Jim chewed tobacco because it was cheaper than smoking.

Dropping out of Princeton to join the Marines, Fisher made a journalism career scouting the Midlands for the ultimate quirky story. He was good enough to be given a regular feature slot on the MacNeil/Lehrer Report at PBS. He won an Emmy there, chaw and all

Fisher was on the scene for the famous Yellville, Ark., turkey drop that later became an episode for “WKRP in Cincinnati.” In a Thanksgiving promotional stunt, a local service club unwittingly tossed a couple of dozen turkeys (the flightless domesticated kind) from an airplane onto a crowded shopping mall.

In the television version, the segment ends with the always clueless station manager Arthur Carlson saying, “As God is my witness, I thought turkeys could fly.”

It is said that Fisher could wander into a town the size of a teacup and find a man who repaired lutes. He can show you a city ordinance that outlaws “quacking” and give you an account of when Chetopa, Kansas, declared war on the 7th Calvary.

Fisher interviewed a man-wife herpetology team that had spent three decades using radio trackers trying to prove Box turtles never range farther than a mile from their hatching . . . until one blew up their hypothesis by inexplicably heading in a beeline for Florida. They named him Sinbad.

Jim famously covered the “funeral” of Mrs. Gladys Rogers, a southern Missouri woman, in dry ice, who for an hour and a half before a crowd of 200 was the subject of an attempted resurrection. Fisher's eye for detail included the observation that the frozen Mrs. Rogers was resting in a chest-type freezer (with legs), not the portable kind that sat directly on the floor. “The family felt that style of appliance was more decorous,” wrote Fisher.

And there was the corn farmer during Jimmy Carter's oil crises who had meticulously kept books proving he made more money farming with a mule.

Fisher can find on a map the site of a pioneer Mennonite settlement on the Great Plains in the 1860s that was hit by two tornadoes from different directions on successive days even before the wagons could be unloaded. The tenacious Mennonites didn't leave, they just built underground.

Fisher knows the reason that “deputy coroner” was such a coveted title during the Depression (you got to keep the wedding rings). He can tell you how they breed Roller Pigeons to fall in a seizure but recover just before they hit ground (most of the time). He can introduce you to a suburban couple who built an airplane in their basement.

This could go on considerably longer but I refer you to “The Best of Jim Fisher,” his anthology. You will be lucky to find a copy. Fisher’s style of journalism is out of fashion, not that he gives a damn.

You should care, though. We need quirkiness in our lives. Editors today are the most serious of men and women, all focused on saving the world from those who think differently than themselves.

Fisher threw water on that. His clip file documents that we’re all in this together, that man is not perfectible in this world, that life has risks and takes unexpected turns, that there is wisdom in failure, that endurance leads to character and character to hope, that government not only can’t fix everything it rarely knows what’s wrong.

Jim has retired. I miss talking with him.

### ‘Infrastructure’ Is an Open Spigot

(Sept. 23) — Dr. Maryann O. Keating, author of the cover article for the fall journal, is an expert on the economics of infrastructure. Even she was surprised, though, to learn that some Indiana cities don’t prioritize or even coherently define infrastructure in their spending.

A real-time example crossed our desk this week — too late, unfortunately, to accompany the Keating article but one that illustrates her points.

In lopsided votes, both Fort Wayne and Allen County approved a combined \$4 million gift — and that is the correct word — to a smallish national business (400 employees). The money was needed, the company president said, to relocate six miles across town to new office space.

Those dollars came from budget categories that could have been used for traditional infrastructure projects, sidewalk repairs and such. And as one of only three dissenting councilmen put it, “If we help each and every business move into a new office there won’t be much left for roads.”

There’s more . . .

The new space not so coincidentally is in a controversial downtown renovation project, one

made possible by politically driven grants, bond arrangements and special considerations (\$300 million for its first phase).

As such, the developers were largely paid up front and had no need to market test the project. Leasing the space, therefore, has become a challenge, one with a political aspect to it.

The company receiving the \$4 million moving grant had already signed a lease benefitting from a rate partly subsidized by taxpayers.

Nonetheless, supporters intimated that if the \$4 million were not forthcoming the company might break its lease — a risk, it was said, that the community could not afford to take.

And just so you don’t confuse this with the run-of-the-mill corruption, know that three of four likely candidates for mayor were involved in the decision, two of them Republican.

None of the three asked why we would spend so much money to help a company willing to casually break contracts or one that after signing a lease feigned surprise to learn there would be moving costs.

In sum, our local politicians, instead of doing the mundane work of municipal government, chose to elevate themselves to full partners in what they viewed as a glamorous commercial venture. And in doing so, they threw out the cautions and warnings of Dr. Keating and so many others.

We are left to repeat one of our favorite public policy observations. It comes not from an expert or even an academic, although it strongly supports their research. It is from a regular businessman, one of the fellows leaned upon to finance this economic-development circus:

“If our politicians are going to pretend to be developers, we’re going to have to elect smarter politicians.”

### Save the Babies; Don’t Pay Rent

(Sept. 18) — The Indianapolis Star has its entry for the 2022 Pulitzer Prize. It is “Do it for the Baby: Indianapolis Renters Plead to Stave off



Evictions as Moratorium Ends.” The co-authors are Ko Lyn Cheang and Binghui Huang. Published yesterday, it is a certain winner.

If you are too busy to read the entire thing, here is the gist: Rent is unfair.

Ms. Cheang and Ms. Huang observe the cardinal rule of any good Pulitzer entry by never seriously testing the premise on which their article is based. It is their assumption that the 93,000 Indiana households (including 84,000 children) that the Star counts as in danger of eviction have good reasons for being behind on their rent — every single one of them.

But the article also reports that Indianapolis has received \$187.6 million in federal money to help households cover rent. Added to that is the unreported resources of thousands of relatives, churches and charities willing to help with cash gifts in emergencies.

That amounts to a lot of money, which raises a question: Why didn’t Ms. Cheang and Ms. Huang think to ask any of their subjects how they were spending their money if not for rent? And if the pandemic left the 93,000 flat broke wouldn’t that be driving a sharp increase in applications for township relief payments?

These payments, granted, are not typical government handouts. They require documentation of real and immediate need. The check goes directly to the landlord in most cases, and townships can require proof of Income, receipts for payments (bills, etc.), tax returns for the previous year, identification and birth certificates (for children) – dependable data, in other words, not political estimates.

So could there be factors at work other than landlord avarice and a willingness to sacrifice babies? Could a Republican governor enforcing a rent moratorium, perhaps, give people the idea that paying rent is optional, that they can move their rent dollars to another budget category?

We don’t know because neither up-to-date township numbers nor the mal-incentives of political agency were part of the Cheang-Huang analysis. What you got was a heap of teary nihilism, something that modern Pulitzer judges

not only appreciate but require. One paragraph summarized the Star’s approach:

“Indiana law effectively requires judges to only consider one primary factor when deciding eviction cases — whether you have paid rent. Given there are few, if any, viable legal defenses for non-payment of rent in Indiana, an eviction is virtually a foregone conclusion in many cases.”

So the problem, as shocking as it may sound, is that Indiana unfairly insists that the ultimate defense for not paying your rent is paying your rent, and if you don’t pay your rent the property owner can find someone who will pay the rent.

The solution, it is implied, is: 1) transfer more money, more quickly, from people paying their rent to people not paying their rent; 2) make eviction an abstract never actually applied in the real world; and 3) make all housing “affordable” by decree.

That is certainly good Pulitzer material, but before the Star clears space in its trophy case it might want to take a closer look at the other half of this equation.

Earlier this year The Indiana Policy Review asked a member of the hated landlord class to open his books. We wanted to see how much blood he was sucking from the tenant body.

His annual income statement, the one he uses to file with the IRS, showed roughly \$12,000 profit on \$40,000 rental revenue, less \$7,000 for debt service and \$6,000 for depreciation, leaving a net taxable income of -\$1,000.

“There’s no margin for rent moratoriums,” the landlord told the journal, “especially for those of us who have debt we are servicing. A few months of lost rents can result in a shortfall that prevents an owner from making mortgage payments, potentially falling into foreclosure himself.”

Economics sure has a way of ruining a good story.

## Holcomb Opens the Door to Biden's Conflagration

*"A year before planes crashed into the World Trade Center, George W. Bush denounced airport security procedures that 'racially profiled' Arab air travelers as potential hijackers and promised to end air travel safety discrimination against Arabs." — former National Review columnist Steve Sailer*

(Sept. 14) — There seems to be a misunderstanding. Gov. Eric Holcomb has the impression that things are going well for average Hoosiers out here, so well that they can shoulder the extraordinary troubles of any godawful spot on the globe.

Maybe we can clear that up.

Stop! We're not doing that well. Many middle class Indiana neighborhoods are downright fragile. That is especially true of our small towns.

First, in my neighborhood you won't see much of that "privilege" they are always talking about. Maybe a hard-working parent has been able to save enough to help young marrieds with a part of a down payment. Most, though, feel lucky to have enough in the bank to cover more than a month of expenses.

Few know where they would find comparable work if they lost their current job. That anxious thought is only aggravated when the political class decides it is time to raise taxes again or impose costly regulations on their current employers.

Nor does it help to know that it's supposedly for their own good. Climate control, zoning restrictions, social justice programs and health and safety edicts are not only arguable in the long term but discourage investment that might create new or better jobs immediately. Has the governor checked on the cost of food and transportation lately?

Hoosiers know — even if their elected representatives have forgotten — that their income is based on their employer's profitability and their own productivity. They are not stupid.

Even choosing where and how you want to live is becoming problematic. The Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing law (AFFH) passed in the Obama years promises to turn neighborhoods into social science petri dishes. The Biden administration would use the AFFH penalties to put an end to suburban single-family housing.

Washington is determined that we live in precise numerical racial balance in high-rise apartments, work for the government, take the bus, and now it wants to decide which foreign nationals live next to us. Surely, local elected officials would share our concern.

That, it turns out, was too much to ask. Hoosiers learned last week that their governor is perfectly okay — enthusiastic even — with suddenly moving in swaths of people from 7,000 miles away all from a drastically different culture, a violent one if history is judge. Holcomb told us during a photo shoot at Camp Atterbury (where the Afghans are being held for transition) that they will "learn to love" Indiana.

Maybe, maybe not. Maybe they will continue a discordant lifestyle — only next door. These people were not homeless, they chose to leave their homes, to in effect time travel to America. Many of these immigrant "parolees" simply took advantage of confusion at Kabul Airport to board an evacuation flight.

That is their total investment in America — queuing up. What willingness have they demonstrated to assimilate? On top of it all, the Biden administration is gearing up to pay charities \$2,000 for each Afghan they settle in Indiana and elsewhere. Rep. Jim Banks, an Afghanistan War veteran, released a report this morning from the Republican Study Committee on Biden's broader plans for Afghan resettlement that is terrifying. A summary:

"The Biden administration has requested the House add policy riders to the government funding bill being considered later this month. Those riders include \$6.4 billion in funding for Afghan refugee resettlement and language that would give any unvetted Afghan national flown into the United States between July 31, 2021 and

the end of the next fiscal year lifetime welfare and a path to citizenship. The riders also make it clear these benefits are extended to relatives.”

No matter, Holcomb’s National Guard Adjutant General assures him that every single one of them — as many as 5,000 in Indiana to date, and the Indianapolis Star thinks we have room for more — has been checked out, vetted, deemed “safe.” Is he lying or is he just reality challenged?

In the local Sam’s Club a few days ago there was a group in niqabs (only eyes showing). They were being led around by a burly “husband.” How is that going to work out?

Again, we expected our elected officials to share our concerns. But Mitch McConnell says he would be glad to have some Afghans in his neighborhood. And great news, Holcomb reports that Indiana employers are lined up to hire them. Who? Where? Doing what?

Some believe the numbers will soon multiply and will eventually change the nature of the area in which they settle. Most immediately, it will strain the school systems, public safety and social services in the smaller communities. The Washington Post reports that towns assigned Afghans cannot even afford the needed extra English-as-a-second-language teachers. Will local citizen be asked to subsidize their own displacement?

And could this bunch be inherently different than America’s historic immigrants? A 7th century attitude perhaps? The Pew Research Center tells us that more than 90 percent want to live under Sharia law. Did the governor ask his new friends from afar their opinion on, say, stoning wives for adultery, the death penalty for apostasy, honor killings?

What is the record of other communities that have experienced such a sudden influx? There are examples in Europe and Great Britain (compare London’s 2002 census with the one only a decade later). And in the U.S. (the Indianapolis City Council might want to organize a bus tour of the Cedar-Riverside area of Minneapolis, now known as Little Mogadishu). You are challenged to find a criminologist who thinks this will be anything but a catastrophe.

Whatever, the governor spent a sunny September afternoon shaking hands for his publicist’s camera at Camp Atterbury.

When did you last see Holcomb in your town just checking on how you were doing — not whether you were voting Republican, but how you were really doing? Is your way of life worth protecting too?

You should wonder. — *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 33rd year