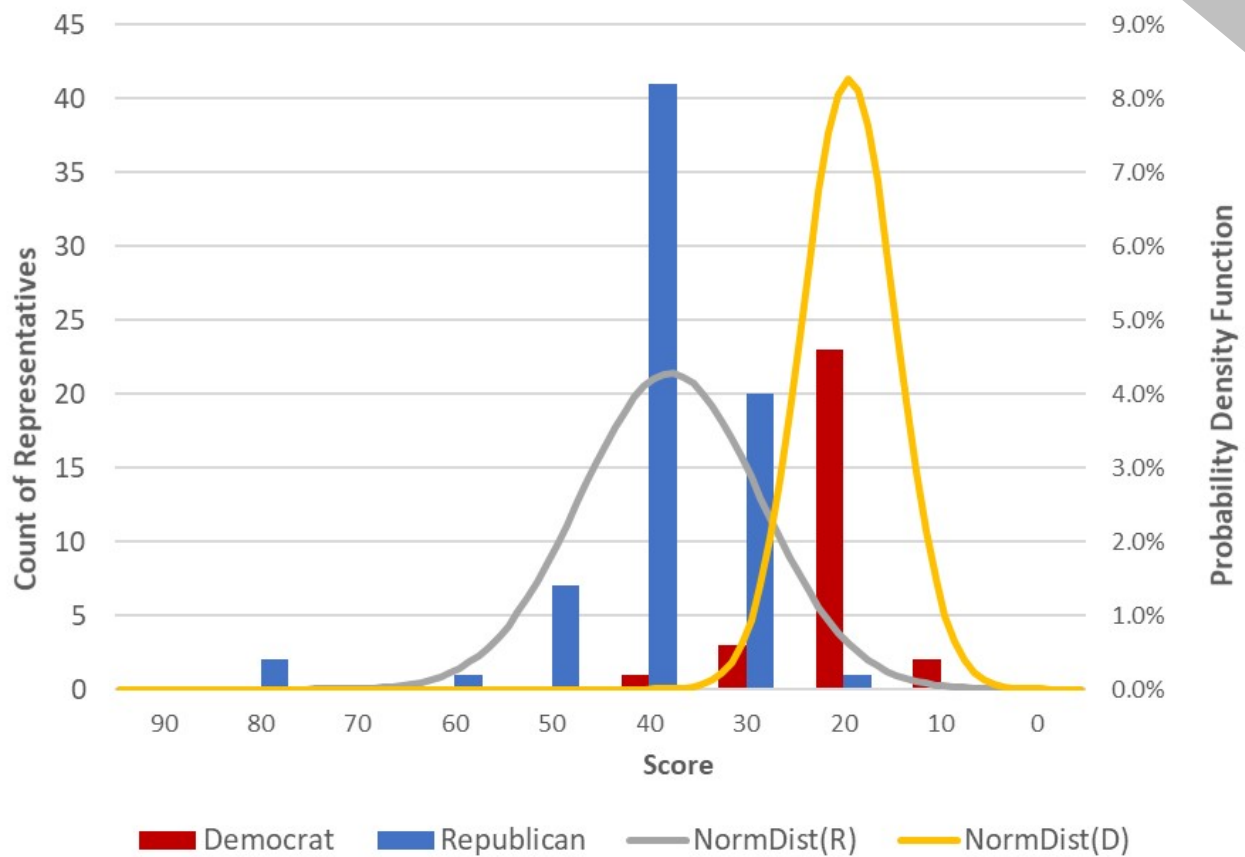


# INDIANAPOLIS

## Review

Spring 2022

'RETURN OF THE  
GOD HYPOTHESIS'  
Bookshelf, p.40



## A Legislature in Lockstep

"Few citizens possess much accurate information about political issues or the actions of politicians; nor do many citizens have much incentive to inform themselves better. Public Choice theorists, the scholars who study politics by using methods of economics, call this lack of knowledge 'rational ignorance,' Rational or not, its effect is the same: Almost any politician can, within rather wide limits, behave contrary to the interest of his constituents without suffering predictable harm." — Robert Higgs in "Crises & Leviathan"

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



Vol. 33, No. 2, Spring 2022

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## A FUTURE THAT WORKS

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

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

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

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# Arthur Russell Quilhot

I have a new phrase to add to your vocabulary and self-help guide: the Quilhot bid. It comes from Russ Quilhot, who hosted the weekly afternoon card games a group of us old codgers participated in. I played bridge with him Wednesday. On Thursday he died. It was one of those abrupt and unwelcome events that encourage us to put everything else in perspective.

I am tempted to say he was my friend, but that would be presumptuous. He lived for 89 interesting and productive years, and I knew him only for the last three. But we enjoyed each other's company, and his knowledge of history and zest for discussing it made our Wednesday afternoons informative as well as entertaining.

He was also a very good card player, and being his partner taught me something important about bridge. It's not always about the strength of the hand.

We would be having what players would call a bad run. All the good cards would be going to the other side, hand after hand, and we'd be getting our brains beat out.

Russ would sigh and say something like, "You know, it's no fun losing," look at his hand, then jump into the bidding with a reckless abandon totally unjustified by the cards he was holding.

He might have eight points and a couple of four-card suits, which an experienced bridge player will tell you is barely enough to support a partner's bid let alone make an opening one. But he'd do it anyway.

That was what we came to call the Quilhot bid, a damn-the-odds maneuver meant to at least shake things up if not turn them around.

And the thing is that he sometimes parlayed that unorthodox move into a winning hand. One of the secrets bridge players learn is that if the 40 high-card points (which we must obsessively count), are distributed more or less evenly, no one has a hand

worth opening with. But any two hands in combination could win a modest bid if one of the players has nerve enough to take a wild shot.

People who knew Russ longer and better than I say the way he played bridge was the way he approached life – not always intimidated by the weakness of his hand.

I don't doubt it. He played football for Purdue, then became a member of the elite Marine Corps. He was a successful businessman, then he and his wife Jeanette started a well-respected horse breeding and training farm at an age when most people would be thinking ahead to retirement. He

was the respected rather than feared patriarch of a large and loving multi-generational family. You do not have a life like that by always adding up the points and just playing the strong hands. Sometimes you have to take a chance on a weak hand.

I hasten to add that this is not gambling, at least as that word has come to be used. Since the Supreme Court opened the door to sports gambling, millions of Americans have bet and lost billions in physical spaces like casinos and digitally by merely

pushing a few buttons on their smart phones. On the recent Super Bowl alone, \$7 billion was wagered, a 10-fold increase over last year.

That is just stupid – desperate chances taken by foolish people against overwhelming odds, encouraged by unscrupulous governments preying on human weakness.

What Russ did, in cards and in life, was to trust that his experience, wisdom and skill would occasionally see him through when his position wasn't the strongest. It might seem like taking a chance, but it was in fact a calculated risk.

Think about that the next time something really important seems about to slip away from you, when you think you've already used up your best efforts. Sigh, take a breath, and make a Quilhot bid.



Russ Quilhot with a winning hand

— Leo Morris

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## A Legislature In Lockstep

*Someone is pulling the strings at the Statehouse and it isn't the voters.*

Jason Arp, an adjunct scholar of the foundation and for nine years a systems analyst and trader in mortgaged-backed securities for Bank of America, was reelected last year to his second term representing the 4th District on the Fort Wayne City Council.



It is a common complaint. “Our representatives aren’t representing us.” From the time that Aaron vainly crafted a bull out of his followers’ earrings and bracelets, our leaders have had trouble keeping their priorities straight. Today, we still are voting for legislators who are doing the will of almost anyone except those who voted them into office.

“What’s that all about?” Andy Rooney would be asking.

My explanation begins with the recognition that there is a common hurdle in attempting to gather popular support for ousting an incumbent or just changing policy. It is the tendency, not unique to Hoosiers, to favor the incumbent.

A 2021 study conducted by Ballotpedia.org found that nationwide 93 percent of incumbents in the 2020 elections won re-election, from county council and state house races all the way up to governor. California, whom many would say is in dire straits, came in with the lowest success rate for incumbents at 85 percent. Eight states had a perfect 100 percent re-election rate for sitting officeholders. In Indiana, state legislative incumbents won 94 percent of their races.

My experience in the election process spans state conventions, county party caucuses of precinct committeemen, state, local and federal office primary and general election campaigns. A common thread in this experience is the attempt to replace an incumbent, whether in a primary challenge or to fill a vacancy.

Obviously, filling a vacancy gives us the best odds of success in an open primary. That is rare, however, as most vacant seats are sorted at party caucuses. There, the county chairman has the advantage of having appointed the precinct committeemen who cast the votes in the caucus.

So after 10 years of managing campaigns and being a candidate, I have found the only real path to office is knocking on doors and appealing directly to voters in a primary campaign against an incumbent.

The problem with this model of retail politics is that generally speaking constituents like familiarity. In their eyes, the problem always lies in another district. “Our guy does a pretty good job down there” is a familiar comment in my northeastern corner of the state.

But as will be apparent in the data presented below, they are not doing a “pretty good job” if that means representing the views of their constituencies.

The public’s perception is skewed by an untrustworthy media, plus a bombardment of franking and campaign literature from the incumbents themselves coupled with a human disinclination to fire someone. But in reality, we can boil it down to old-fashioned ignorance.

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*Nothing written here is to be construed as reflecting the views of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation itself or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before the legislature or to further any political campaign.*

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People simply don't know who is representing them or how they vote.

Dr. Robert Higgs poses the problem in his 1987 book, "Crises & Leviathan":

"Certainly, the assumption of fully informed voters is untenable and misleading. To assume that the typical voter is completely ignorant would approximate the truth more closely. An authority on public opinion has reported that Americans can name their astrological sign more readily than they can name their representative in Congress. To suppose that political actors know precisely how an electoral outcome will be linked to a specific policy action and hence to a particular redistribution of wealth is to push the assumption of complete knowledge to an absurdly fictitious extreme. As James Buchanan has observed, 'the electoral process offers, at best, a crude disciplinary check on those who depart too much from constituency preferences.' Elections Occur infrequently. Few citizens possess much accurate information about political issues or the actions of politicians; nor do many citizens have much incentive to inform themselves better. Public Choice theorists, the scholars who study politics by using methods of economics, call this lack of knowledge 'rational ignorance.' Rational or not, its effect is the same: Almost any politician can, within rather wide limits, behave contrary to the interest of his constituents without suffering predictable harm."

### The Need for a Scorecard

Readers of this journal would expect that Republican legislators describing themselves as "conservative" would be respectful if not enthusiastic about the right of private property. It is embedded in the doctrine of Lockean theory embraced by our founders. Unfortunately, that is not what the data tells us.

A number of years ago while running a political action committee, this writer began putting together scorecards of our Legislature to

### ILLUSTRATION 1: Scorecard Criteria



**SCORING FOLLOWS** a set of criteria focused on the defense of private property: Does the legislation increase taxes; does it increase government; does it impair the rights of people to use their property (regulations, etc.).

determine where our greatest opportunities were. The scorecards allowed me to see which districts were poorly represented, that is, had representatives voting contrary to the view of their electorates.

The results were a shock. Many districts voted 65-70 percent Republican but had a representative who voted more like Democrats than conservatives, increasing taxes or eroding private property rights. Indeed, this was the norm.

At that point, though, my political life took a detour when I was elected a city councilman. The state legislative scorecards were put on hold — until now.

### The Criteria

Picking up where I left off, I became familiar with similar efforts in other states where the technology to put scorecards together and deliver them online was being perfected. We partnered with developers who had launched these applications successfully in Pennsylvania and Texas.

Our scoring follows a simple set of criteria focused on the defense of private property: Does the legislation increase taxes (money is property), increase government (taxes fund the additional government), impair the rights of people to use their property (regulations), and so forth.

*(Illustration 1)*

Over the six-year history currently available at IndianaScorecard.org we scored 400 total bills. (*Illustration 2*) During that time there has been an extraordinary expansion in the role of government in the life of ordinary Hoosiers.

There have been numerous and varied tax increases (Indiana now has the 7th highest gas tax in the country). These include food-and-beverage taxes to fund multi-million-dollar stadiums and convention centers.

The General Assembly passed laws enabling the IEDC (Indiana Economic Development Corporation) to be involved in more private businesses and even the public schools. We've witnessed the creation of the Indiana Destination Development Corporation (IDDC), a new government-sponsored entity to grant or lend money for the creation or maintenance of visitor "attractions" to boost tourism to the state.

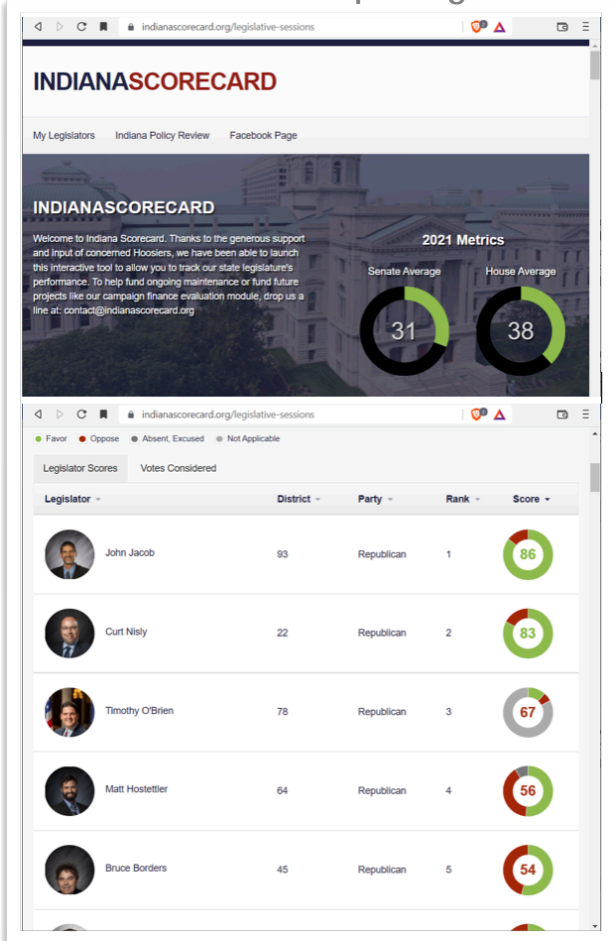
Various new development commissions were started as well, and the Central Indiana Transit Authority was expanded to facilitate mass transit in Indianapolis at the expense of taxpayers in the so-called "collar counties." One legislator went as far as to introduce a bill to create the office of the Indiana Music Commissioner to incentivize producers to record music here in the corn belt. (Unfortunately the bill did not receive a hearing or a roll-call vote for a score to be assigned to it.)

In all, there has been a growing expectation that government is to have an expansive role in economic development in Indiana, an expectation vigorously promoted by the political class and reflected in our legislative data. This transfer of economic decision-making from entrepreneurs to bureaucrats is seen in the proliferation of bills to that effect, i.e., the expansion of the IEDC cited above.

## Reading the Scores

While this type of government growth will not be reflected directly in any chart of government expenditures as a percentage of GDP, the freedom of individuals to make these choices on their own is nevertheless reduced, and over time the resilience and innovation that are features of

## ILLUSTRATION 2: Sample Page



THE DESIGNERS of IndianaScorecard.org say they provide everything you need to mount a primary challenge except the shoe leather. Visitors to the site can look up a representative or senator by last name or district by scrolling the columns (which can be set in descending or ascending order). Each legislator's entry displays scorecard rank, percentage score, committee assignments, district map, summaries of, and the legislator's vote on, criteria bills with links to the full text of the legislation. Finally, there is the legislator's campaign finance information including lists of top donors and top payees.

laissez-faire economies will depreciate to a point that real economic growth falters and is simply replaced with inflation. This is the same outcome as when government growth outstrips the growth of private industry, but at a slower pace.

Over and above this dismal economic trend is an erosion in the freedom of an individual to control his or her life — again, a foundational principle defining what it means to be American.



**TABLE 1: Six-Year Average Scores**

	HOUSE					SENATE			
	Democrat	Republican	All	StDev		Democrat	Republican	All	StDev
2021	24.3	43.3	38.0	11.8		21.2	33.5	30.8	9.0
2020	27.9	36.4	34.3	9.9		33.0	45.7	43.1	11.5
2019	31.3	45.0	40.5	11.8		23.0	45.5	42.8	13.6
2018	27.7	46.0	41.4	11.7		34.4	44.0	42.3	10.1
2017	33.8	51.8	46.9	11.7		27.9	44.4	41.4	12.4
2016	28.4	34.6	33.5	11.4		21.1	38.6	35.1	16.6
6 year Avg	28.9	42.9	39.1	11.4		26.8	41.9	39.2	12.2

**THE INDIANA LEGISLATIVE** voting record for the last six sessions tells a story of failure — the GOP's failure to live up to its promise of small and limited government. The average Republican score (42 percent) was barely in the coin-flip range.

Based on these criteria, an evaluation of the voting records of the Indiana General Assembly portrays a failure of the party in power to live up to its own billing, that is, as a party of small and limited government. We took a sample of between 20 to 40 votes a year over the past six sessions, votes that had some element related to private property according to the criteria. The average score across both parties in the House of Representatives for the entire period was 39 percent. That may not be that surprising, but the average of 42 percent for Republicans was. (*Table 1*)

Looking at the score distribution for just the 2021 session, we see what looks like a bell-shaped standard normal distribution skewed toward the low end of the score range and a kurtosis that is attributed by the “fat-tail” of the outliers in the 80-percentile area. Given the possibility of potential ranking dispersals, this tight congregation of results around the mean described by the 12-point standard deviation has certain implications. If you exclude the minority party's representation in the dataset, the standard deviation shrinks to 9 points, furthering suspicions. (*Chart 1*)

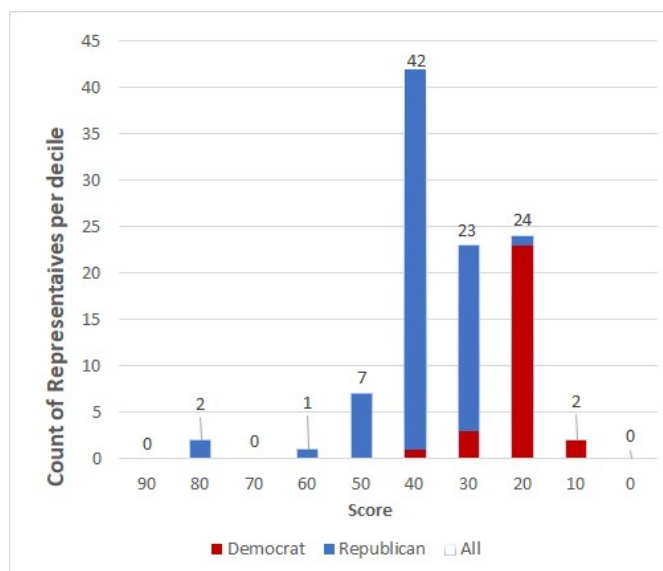
This pattern holds in the House for the six years of study, while the Senate has threatened to break out of this mold a couple times, once in 2016 and again in 2019. Perhaps the retirement of the president pro tem after the 2018 session led to less coordination in 2019. The Senate's 2016

pattern, however, alludes attribution.

Perhaps a better way to examine this is as a bimodal distribution or simply as two regimes, split upon party lines.

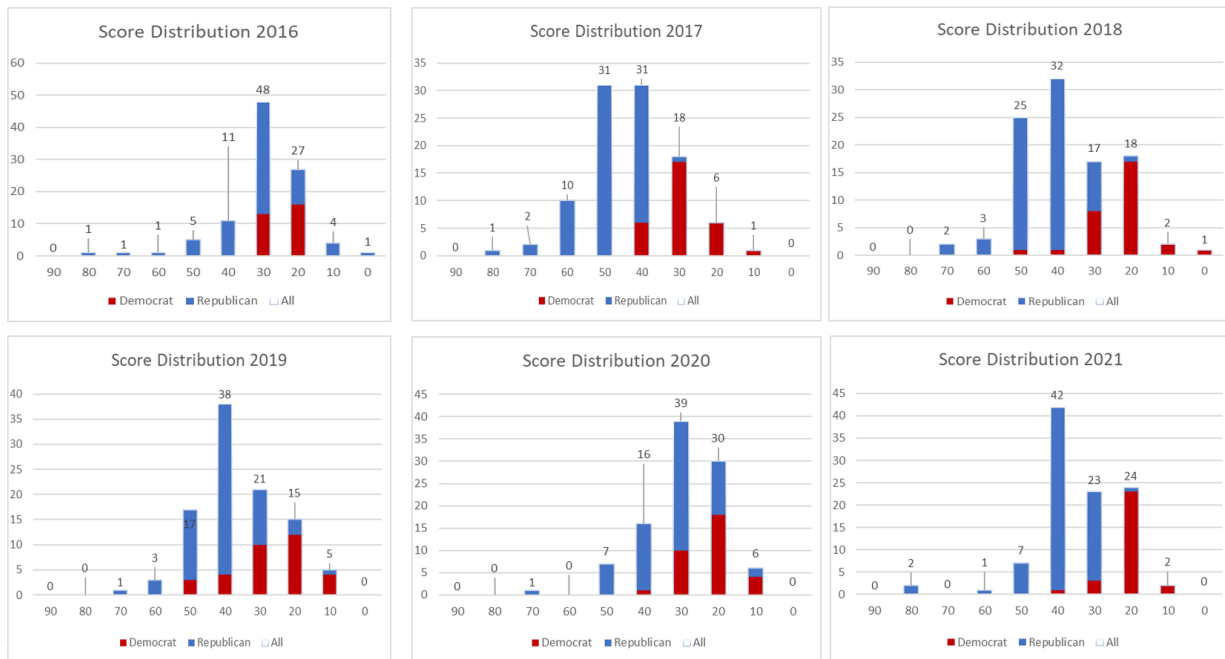
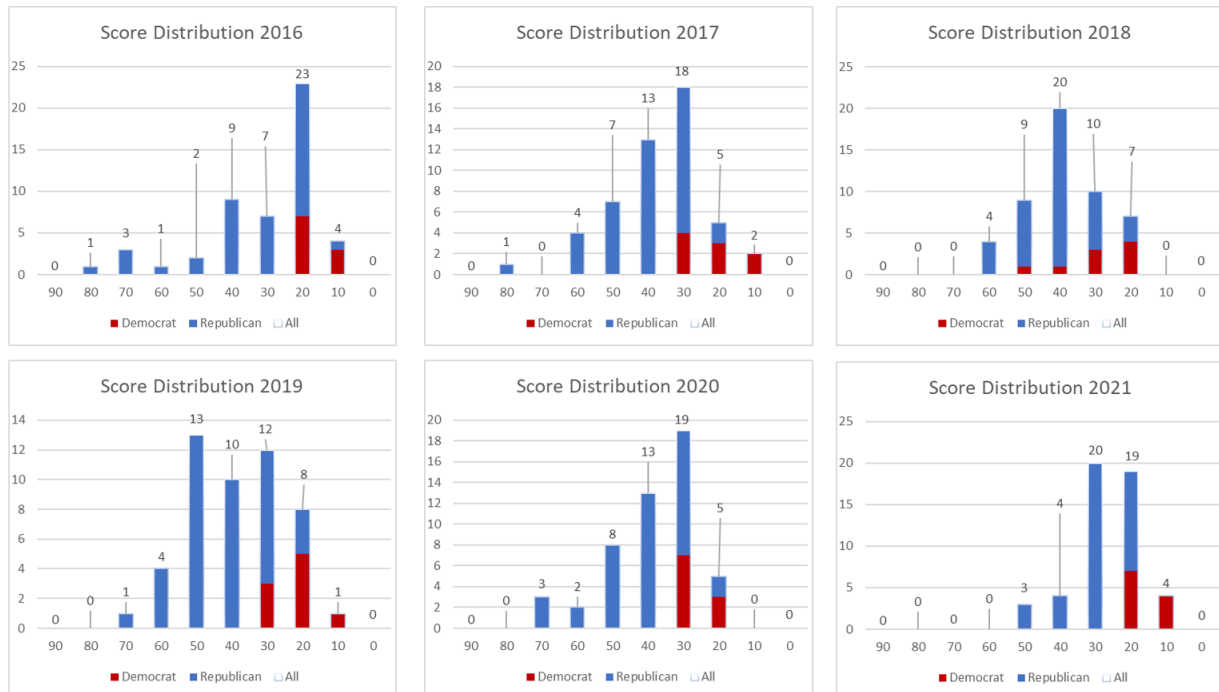
Again, just looking at the data for the 2021 session, we find an average score for Republican representatives of 43.3, with a 9.3 standard deviation. For Democrats the average was 24.9 with a 4.8 standard deviation.

This bifurcation allows us to observe the probability-density functions for each, revealing something rather interesting. Each of these data plots shows that the members are casting their votes in a tighter pattern than would be expected from a normal distribution of the same characteristics. For instance, in a normally distributed data set we would expect 50 Republican legislators out of the 72 (69 percent)

**CHART 1: Score Distribution, Indiana House 2021 Session**

**THE TIGHT CONGREGATION** of scores on criteria bills invites implications other than individual Republicans from all parts of the state are in full agreement on a remarkable number of complex issues all of the time. If you exclude the minority party's representation, the standard deviation shrinks to a mere 9 points, raising more suspicion that the vote is manipulated.



**CHART 2:** House and Senate Score Distribution 2016-2021 Sessions**HOUSE 2016-2021****SENATE 2016-2021**

**THE TIGHT CONGREGATION** of votes shown in Chart 1 holds in the House for the six years of this study. The Senate, however, threatened to break out of this mold twice, once in 2016 and again in 2019. Interestingly, the retirement of the president pro tem after 2018 the session may have resulted in less coordination in 2019.

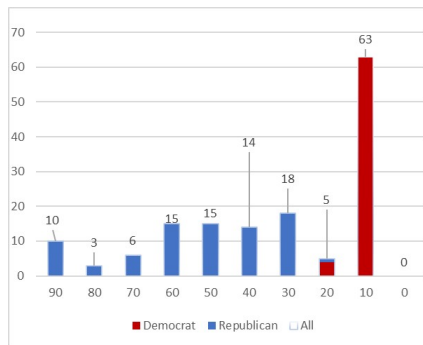
to have scores within one standard deviation of the 43 percent mean score, whereas 60 (83 percent) actually placed within the 9-point standard deviation.

In other words, there is a control exerted that is beyond explanation of simple probabilistic distributions.

Members who voted more in line with our criteria (respectful of private property) were far outside the mean. The two high scores of 86 and 83 were a full 4.6 and 4.2 standard deviations above the mean, respectively. These two were both outside the GOP regime, both statistically and literally, as we will see in a minute.

The 2021 session was no aberration. We took the six-year sample and compiled descriptive statistics for each session for the Republican caucus. The 43.5 average for the period and the 9.6-point standard deviation show how typical the

**CHART 3: Texas “Fiscal Responsibility Index” Score Distribution 2021**



COMPARING INDIANA and Texas, Republican members there appear free to vote their conscience. This is in contrast to the tight pattern we observed in charts 3 and 4 with Indiana House Republicans. The difference is that Texas does not have caucus campaign committees.

2021 session was. The large number of members within the single standard deviation score zone is persistent in each year. Again, this is not a normal or “random” distribution; there is a continual force directing voting patterns away from the criteria’s ideal and toward other ends.

(Chart 2; Table 2)

### The Texas Model

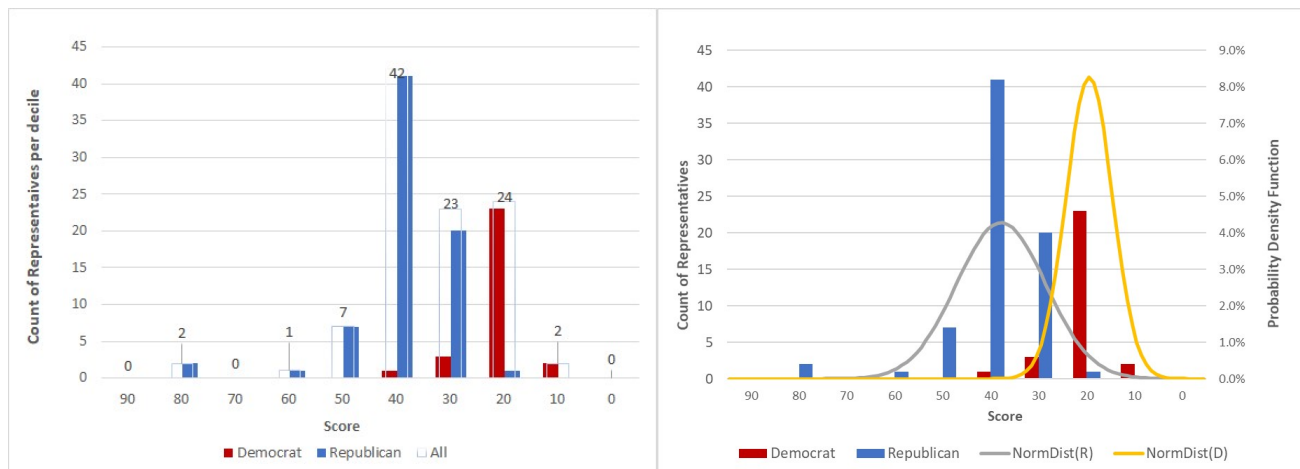
Compare these results with the Texas Fiscal Responsibility Index, which uses similar criteria. The score distribution among Republican members of the Texas House of

Representatives shows a more

evenly dispersed arrangement — so much so that it doesn’t conform to any characterization of a normal distribution. (Chart 3)

The average Texas Republican House member scored 57.4 with a 19.2 standard deviation. Where the Texas Democrats (14.2 average score with a

**CHART 4: Score Distribution for the House 2021 Session Showing Bi-Model Distribution Curves (at right)**



**WHAT WE SEE HERE** is more evidence there is control exerted beyond what can be explained by probabilistic distributions. These data plots show that the members are casting their votes in tighter pattern than would be expected from a normal distribution. We would expect to find 50 of the 72 Republican legislators (69 percent) to have scores within one standard deviation of the 43-percent mean. In fact, fully 60 of the legislators (83 percent) placed within the 9-point standard deviation.

3.5-point standard deviation) are more or less in lockstep as is the case with Indiana Democrats.

Republican members in Texas, however, appear to be free to vote their conscience or meet the needs of their constituents. This is in bright contrast to the tight pattern we observe with the Indiana House Republicans, and that is despite the fact the Texas House GOP has only an 83-67 majority.

The differentiating factor is that Texas does not have caucus campaign committees. In Indiana, however, the House is dominated by the House Republican Campaign Committee (HRCC).

## The HRCC System

The author was introduced to the HRCC after running a Republican primary election challenge campaign for a state representative candidate in 2014. We defeated an incumbent Republican in the May primary and were promptly invited to the HRCC training class. As the treasurer of the campaign, I was there to understand the entries needed in order to participate in the HRCC system.

Here we heard from the staff of Markit Red, which operates HRCC, and the then Speaker of the House, Brian Bosma. It was clear that HRCC

was the dominant force in Indiana campaign finance. All Republican members are expected to participate. We were dazzled with the numbers in their presentation, claiming control of over \$10 million dollars per campaign cycle. That's over \$140,000 per Republican House member. To put that in perspective, we had just spent less than \$20,000 to defeat an incumbent endorsed by the popular governor, Mike Pence.

The way the system works is the HRCC arranges fundraisers for a candidate or candidates and invites lobbyists from a variety of interests. There may be a mix of industries, or if there is a specific program related to a current piece of legislation the fundraiser may be limited to lobbyists from a specific industry. In attendance may be representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, different business interests represented by "public affairs" firms, as well as other politicians looking for support.

The HRCC asks the attendees or their agents to make their checks to the candidate's campaign. A member of the HRCC staff attends the meeting, collects the checks and tallies the take for each event per candidate. The checks are then given to the candidate to be deposited in their own campaign accounts. About a week later, a bill is sent to the candidate's treasurer from the HRCC

**TABLE 2:** Indiana Republican House, Six-Year Statistics

Session	Average	Stdev	Total Rs	Members within 1 Standard Deviation					High	
				Actual	"Normal"	Actual	"Normal"	StdNml	Score	Sigmas
<b>2016</b>	35.6	12.6	69	56	49	81.2%	71.0%	68.3%	81	3.6
<b>2017</b>	53.0	8.4	70	51	48	72.9%	68.6%	68.3%	81	3.4
<b>2018</b>	46.7	8.4	70	52	48	74.3%	68.6%	68.3%	75	3.4
<b>2019</b>	45.0	9.5	67	52	46	77.6%	68.7%	68.3%	78	3.5
<b>2020</b>	37.5	9.6	66	51	46	77.3%	69.7%	68.3%	75	3.9
<b>2021</b>	43.3	9.3	72	60	50	83.3%	69.4%	68.3%	86	4.6
<b>Average</b>	43.5	9.6	69.0	53.7	47.8	77.8%	69.3%	68.3%	79	3.7

**THERE IS A CONTINUAL FORCE** evident here and in Chart 4 directing voting patterns away from the conservative ideal and toward other ends. The 43.5 average for the six-year period and the 9.6-point standard deviation show how typical the 2021 session was. The excess of members within the single standard deviation score zone above is persistent in each year. Again, this is not a normal distribution.

for half of the proceeds of the event. Depending on the candidate, there may be several of these events in a year, or just one.

In aggregate, this system not only funds a central campaign committee through the direct contributions of its members but it politically captures the members in two ways:

1. The members have reason to be concerned if the HRCC leadership loses confidence in them. A portion of the \$10 million-per-cycle war chest may go to a primary opponent or simply be withheld.

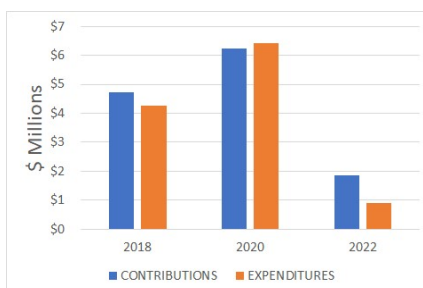
2. The member may be deprived of access to the system itself. Officeholders grow dependent on the network of lobbyists, public affairs units and key contributors arranged by the HRCC. Lethargy sets in and the representative is reluctant to engage in that retail politics mentioned earlier, asking friends and constituents for money and knocking on doors for votes. It is easier to drink wine and collect checks at an HRCC fundraiser.

With the HRCC system in place, it takes only a nod from leadership to move the legislation this way or that.<sup>1</sup>

## Plugging in Campaign Finance

Given the nature of the findings related to the legislative scores and the system of control in place over our elected representatives, it became clear that IndianaScorecard.org was going to need to be able to share campaign finance information with its readership. We contracted with Transparency USA to provide the data.

**CHART 5: HRCC Finance Summary by Election Cycle**



**THE SINGLE LARGEST** recipient of HRCC expenditures is the private political consulting firm of Markit Red LLC at nearly \$2.9 million. The total of payments over the five-year period to Markit Red was a whopping \$9.3 million.

Excluding national and local races, where the data is collected by the Federal Election Commission and the various county election boards, the source for our campaign finance data is the Election Division of the Indiana Secretary of State's Office. Just looking at the 2020 cycle, we see statewide political contributions to candidates and PACs of all parties or special interest groups totaling \$108.7 million with expenditures for that election of \$109.5 million. Candidates committees comprise about 45 percent of the total with PACs making up over half.<sup>2</sup>

A look through the top 10 list for candidates and PACs we see the Republican governor overwhelming leading all candidates and the Indiana Republican State Committee as the top PAC. Following the incumbent governor, are two Attorney General candidates, the Secretary of State, the Speaker of the House and finally the Democratic Party's gubernatorial challenger. Of the PACs, the HRCC is followed by a mix of other party-related PACs, e.g., the real estate agents, the teachers' unions.

If you have any doubt about how firmly Republicans control the wheels of Indiana government, look at their overwhelming fundraising advantage. What is even more striking about the HRCC total is that it actually controls more than twice the reported figures because it arranges much of the contributions from outside donors to the individual candidate committees. The \$6-million figure in the campaign finance

<sup>1</sup> HRCC Campaign Finance Filings: Indiana Secretary of State, Election Division, Campaign Finance; <https://campaignfinance.in.gov/PublicSite/SearchPages/CommitteeDetail.aspx?OrgID=374> (Copies of documents cited in the footnotes also are available by writing the author.)

<sup>2</sup> Transparency USA: Indiana Campaign Finance Summary 2020 Cycle; <https://www.transparencyusa.org/in/?cycle=2020-election-cycle>

filings would be closer to \$12 million in terms of leverage on the legislative body.<sup>3</sup>

Our data set in the Transparency USA system goes back to 2017, so at present we have five years of contributions and expenditures for every PAC and candidate required to report to the Indiana Secretary of State's Election Division. Continuing our focus on the HRCC, we see roughly 50 percent more in expenditures in the 2020 two-year election cycle than the 2018 cycle. Given the presidential-gubernatorial election cycle coincides with house races, this makes sense. (The drop you see in the 2022 cycle only reflects that there have not been any filings for 2022 as of this writing; the 2022 cycle data is only 2021 filings.)

### Who Pulls the Strings

Looking at the entirety of the HRCC filings over the five years of data, there is \$12.9 million in contributions and \$11.6 million in expenditures.<sup>4</sup>

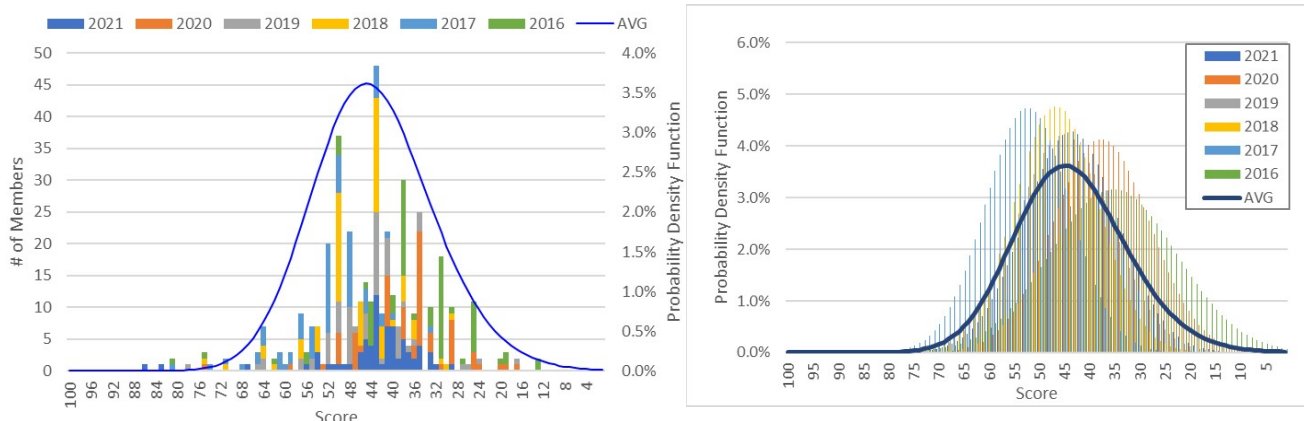
The single largest recipient of the HRCC expenditures is the private political consulting firm Markit Red LLC at nearly \$2.9 million. As mentioned above, Markit Red is responsible for the operations of HRCC. In fact, their employee is

listed as the custodian of records in the HRCC's organizational filings with the state. The total of payments over the five-year data set to Markit Red from all reportable sources in the campaign finance database, which includes candidate and party campaign committees, is a whopping \$9.3 million. (*Chart 5*)

The unveiling of IndianaScorecard.org and the tools now available to the public through its new campaign finance data partnership with Transparency USA makes it possible to monitor and research our state Legislature in one seamless environment.

Nearly all the data used to compile this essay was gathered from our website, meaning that users can do a variety of investigations of their own. To aid in doing more in-depth inquiries about industry-specific campaign finance activity, we are beginning an effort to augment our database with donor categories. This will allow us to dig deeper into who is influencing our Legislature. It is a good guess that the mere existence of IndianaScorecard.org will be an influence of its own. ♦

**CHART 6:** House Republican Scores 2016-2021 Compared with Normal Distribution Curves (at right)



<sup>3</sup> Ibid. House Republican Campaign Committee 2017-Present; <https://www.transparencyusa.org/in/pac/house-republican-campaign-committee-374-legislative-caucus/?cycle=2017-to-now>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Markit Red LLC 2017-Present; <https://www.transparencyusa.org/in/payee/mark-it-red-llc/?cycle=2017-to-now>



# Morris

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## A Truth-in-Legislation Act

(March 7) — The Indiana Senate recently demonstrated what seemed to be a prime example of legislative thuggery in action.

A bill was before senators that would have, among other things, changed the burden of proof from parents to schools in certain special education disputes. They not only defeated the measure but bullied its sponsor, Republican Dennis Kruse of Auburn, into changing his vote so that the bill could go down by a rare unanimous vote. Then they laughed and cheered.

Trouble was, the bill had received bipartisan support in the House and passed there 57-43. No senators took questions or bothered to explain their votes. An advocate for special education students said senators should be embarrassed for the way the bill was handled from start to finish because, “unfortunately, the losers are students with disabilities and their families.”

It’s just the sort of high-handed behavior so many critics say a legislature with supermajorities in both houses is inclined to indulge in.

State Police Superintendent Doug Carter, a Republican normally in sync with legislators, became one of those critics when the General Assembly seemed poised to eliminate Indiana’s gun carry permit requirements despite his objections.

“This is a problem with the supermajority,” he said. “It stifles, prohibits and oftentimes limits public debate.”

But the striking thing about the special education example is not how common it was but how rare it seemed. For a body with the power to do whatever it wants, the General Assembly seems like an awfully timid bunch sometimes.

What legislators like to do with a touchy subject like carry permits in previous sessions or, in this session, a bill that would restrict the teaching of certain subjects in the classroom, is to play to both sides so they can pretend to be the rational mediators in the middle.

The pure version of the bill will be passed in the House. Then it will go over to the Senate, where it will be amended beyond recognition so it can be dropped or killed. In some cases, as with the gun bill in the past, onerous riders are added that supporters just can’t accept. In others, such as the classroom legislation this year, the bill is so watered down it becomes meaningless.

When such bills are put out of their misery, legislators can then say to rabid detractors, “See, we’re not as crazy as you thought we were,” and to the rabid supporters, “Well, sorry, but you can see we tried.”

It’s sort of a passive-aggressive approach to constituent management. Sadly, this approach works, and will continue to work until constituents get tired of being managed.

The interesting thing is that in neither case – the rare instance of bullying or the more common disingenuous approach – do citizens get the honest information they need to understand what legislators are doing. In the former, lawmakers don’t say anything. In the latter, they say so much on both sides of the issue that nothing can be trusted.

Perhaps we need a truth-in-legislation act.

One measure the General Assembly did pass this session, without despotic swaggering or weaselly dissembling, requires school boards to provide time for the public to comment at meetings. Hoosiers could benefit from such a requirement for legislators, along with a provision for immediate expulsion for the first lie told.

But then the chambers would be empty, and who else could we get to designate the mastodon as state fossil or bravely tell Russia it can no longer buy Indiana farmland?

## Who Owns the History?

(Feb. 28) — The Kokomo Tribune has published a fascinating story about teachers-in-training at Indiana State University and their nearly universal disapproval of proposed state legislation that would limit how race and other topics are treated in the classroom.

Some of their comments are quite revealing.

“If we attempt to teach history without controversy, then we will not be able to teach at all,” said one prospective teacher who wanted to impart the sins of Andrew Jackson.

“It concerns me that this is even being proposed because why would we not want our kids to know about the bad things that happened in the past,” said another, who likes to draw parallels between McCarthyism and how LGBTQ people have been treated.

If the bill passes, said a third, it’s like, “oh, I can’t teach history correctly, the way I’ve been taught it.”

Two things can be inferred from these comments.

First, it is accepted beyond dispute that what Hoosier legislators want to do is create a history curriculum with all the bad stuff left out. Make no mention of slavery or Jim Crow or the treatment of Native Americans or women’s struggle for equality or anything else that will make the U.S. seem less than perfect.

But this is clearly a deliberately distorted slam against lawmakers. What they are attempting, in their usual clownishly bungling way, is to balance the overly negative views of America being filtered into classrooms.

Second, these future teachers really, really, really are eager to get into those classrooms and start teaching all the bad stuff. They can keep telling us there is no nasty, old Marxist-inspired critical race theory in Indiana classrooms (nothing to see here, move along, move along), but

obviously its rotten-to-the-core view of this country has taken hold.

But perhaps I am being just as unfair to these prospective teachers as I think they are being too much like legislators. Maybe they also want balance, an honest look at both the good and bad in our history.

We are in an epic struggle over who owns the past, and our schools are the front lines of that struggle. We can no longer pretend that we are done with the past, that it will behave and stay put where it belongs. Whoever controls the past owns the future.

Even when we can agree on events to put in and events to leave out, reach a consensus on when and where the which happened and who said what about it, we will stumble on the why it happened and how it matters today. For that, we must bring to bear the default assumptions and baseline principles of our own worldview.

I can’t remember why, but recently I found myself delving into the Magna Carta. I found a lot of articles about how overblown its reputation has become – the fact that it was never really followed, was rescinded within a year, was not the first time a king had given up power, and on and on. But I also found plenty of information about its influence, how it cemented the idea of due process of law, how it moved Great Britain to its system of common law, how inspired some of the founders of this nation.

Accepting all of the good and bad as accurate, it is up to me to decide whether and where I would place the Magna Carta on humankind’s journey from tyranny to freedom. If I had children in school, that’s what I would want from their teachers – all the good and bad, along with the intellectual tools to put events into perspective.

And I understand how hard that is for teachers to do, considering the different ways they are pulled by so many interest groups. I don’t think I could do it. Most of the future teachers in the Tribune story said something like, “We should just be left alone to teach.”

But teach what on whose behalf? I know I’ve said this so often some are getting sick of it, but

we'll never decide that until we decide as a society what this country is and should stand for.

One student teacher in the story said that “if parents want to control what their children learn, then perhaps they should . . . take it upon themselves to maybe home school their child or place them in a private school.” That was the most honest comment in the whole story.

And, alas, perhaps an indication of where we are headed.

## Zero Tolerance for the Word Police

*(Feb. 14)* — A white teacher in Chicago was fired recently for using the N-word in class.

She wasn't trying to be offensive. She was explaining to her world history class why the former name of the Washington Commanders football team was so offensive and compared it to the N-word, making the mistake of saying the actual word.

The teacher of 41 years explained that she was just trying to make things clear for her students, apologized and said she would never say the word again. But administrators fired her anyway, saying in an announcement that the word was “never acceptable in any gathering of, or setting with” the school.

That was so insanely wrong. To virtually ban a word without taking context into question gives the already poisonous epithet more power than it deserves, unfairly punishes people who have done nothing wrong, and infantilizes a whole group by pretending that they can't tell the difference between a deliberate insult and reasonable discourse.

At about the same time, a 2019 video surfaced of the newly elected black mayor of New York calling white police officers “crackers.”

He was speaking before a friendly audience and very much did intend to demean the group he was speaking of.

But he fessed up and apologized profusely (“New Yorkers should expect more from me and that was inappropriate”), the head of the police

union graciously accepted, and life moved on. No harm, no foul.

Certainly, there was a double standard at work, but still it was a much more mature, civilized way to handle things. The adults were in charge.

Instead of saying “crackers,” I almost used “the C-word,” just to be flip, but decided that would be too clever by half.

For one thing, cracker (or any other pejorative for white people) doesn't have the same level of toxicity as words denigrating other peoples, especially the N-word. And, yes, I know why that is so in the context of this country's history, so no need to kindly remind me of my white privilege.

For another, I was afraid it might be confused with the other C-word, the real one, that is sometimes used to demean women. That is such an awful term that it gets my vote as the second-ugliest word in the English language, and maybe it should even be tied for first. The first time someone's language flummoxed me was when I heard a woman use the word against another woman she loathed.

For what it's worth, I was born and raised in Eastern Kentucky, so I am irritated, sometimes mildly, sometimes not, by the H-word, which some of you will recognize as the pejorative for Appalachian-American.

The newspaper I worked on for many years actually used the word in a headline, about some people arrested for some nonsense or other in a trailer park.

I tried to tell the copy editor why the term was offensive, but she patiently explained to me that the word did not refer to everyone from Appalachia, “just the white trash ones.” That sounded awfully familiar, so I decided not to pursue the conversation further. That was the second time language flummoxed me.

I wish I could work up more outrage about the word, but it's hard to do so when it has all but entered the vernacular. There's even a bread by that name, for goodness sake. And the more I think about it, the diminishment of a word's power by usage over time is probably healthier for society than its weaponization by banishment.

What's happening, I think, is just another iteration of the zero-tolerance policy that has afflicted us of late.

The policy of no weapons in school is taken to such an extreme that kids are expelled for drawing a picture of a knife or eating a candy bar into the shape of a gun. The teacher does not have to exercise judgment and risk being wrong.

The rule against selling liquor to minors is so rigidly enforced that grizzled senior citizens are asked to show ID. The store clerk does not have to think and cannot be blamed for anything.

A company's policy against sexual harassment is such that telling an off-color joke is treated the same as demanding sex from an underling, never mind that instead of a safe environment, a culture of fear is being established.

The N-word is so evil that merely hearing it spoken by some people will cause civilization to unravel, so no exceptions permitted, no explanations allowed.

Time after time, on issue after issue, we are taking the path of least resistance, the one depending the most on emotional overreaction and requiring the least amount of thinking. Zero tolerance, alas, means just what it says: No tolerance.

Tolerance requires judgment and perspective and nuance. We are turning away from reason and embracing simpleminded judgmentalism. No B-word needed here – leave your brains at the door.

### A Generation Bereft of 'Snow Days'

*(Feb. 7)* — Because I am an old man, snow scares me. Sometimes, I think it is downright evil.

It weighs down the lines to my house, ready to snap them and plunge me into the cold and dark.

If I try to escape, I will find it piled on the porch, ready to grab my feet out from under me, or waiting on the walkway, enticing me to grab a shovel and fall over in a sweaty heart attack.

And if I make it to the car, I will start it with trepidation, knowing that every patch of white might have hidden depths to trap me in the

middle of nowhere or a bottom layer of ice that will send me careening into oncoming traffic.

I can only wait it out, nervously hoping for enough stretches of sunlight to turn into a thaw. Last week's snowfall, the late but still unwelcome first major storm of the season, meant 48 hours of anxious dread.

It was not always so.

In my youth, snow was a pure pleasure.

It was to build a fort with, to be guarded by a carrot-nosed snowman and defended with hard-packed balls of winter fury. It was to slide down, wherever there was the slightest incline and cardboard boxes could be procured for those of us without sleds. It was for running through and falling down in.

It was to reluctantly come inside from, to drink hot chocolate and let our feet thaw before heading out again.

The pleasures of snow lasted into our teens, not so much as adventure but as a brief retreat from drudgery. We listened hopefully to the radio in the kitchen for the weather report – here in Fort Wayne, it was WOWO-1190, as part of the Little Red Barn program – for those magic two words:

Snow day!

For that small span, no rushing between classes, no last-minute check of homework, no drowsy study hall or hideous cafeteria food. Just freedom, to do anything or nothing, sweet for its serendipity, sad for its brevity,

Somewhere in our young adulthood, we began to experience the challenges of snow – the way it slows things down and rearranges schedules and turns simple travel into a nightmare. But they were challenges we gathered our resolve for and met steadfastly.

And if the challenge was big enough and our response touched with enough grace, a life experience was born that became a story ever larger with each telling, until it assumed mythical proportions. It's like being in the military – we gripe and whine every minute of it, then spend the

rest of our lives extolling its transformative virtues.

“Yeah, boy, the blizzard of ’78, just about killed me. My wife and I decided to walk the half-mile to my office, and we got turned around somehow, lost and with no sense of where we were for hours and hours. It was sheer luck that we didn’t freeze to death.”

The truth is that it was a couple of blocks, and we were disoriented for about 10 minutes. But what kind of story is that?

I was watching TV the other day, cursing under my breath as the meteorologist revised upward the total amount of snow expected, when I saw something that made me start reflecting on life’s snow journey, from the happy abandon of youth to the nervous worries of age.

It was a list of the schools that would be closed the next day, but I could tell that there would be no happiness in the announcement for some students, because right after many of the “snow day” listings was another bit of information: “e-learning day.”

Lord, what some of these students have gone through.

They get locked out of school for months on end, stuck in front of terminals for lessons their teachers don’t know how to get across, losing precious education and accruing mental health deficits, having to cope not only with a new learning environment but also the upheaval of their parents’ lives. Then, they get to go backed to school, but masked and distanced into isolation with no scientific justification, perhaps having to listen to the adults around them arguing endlessly about mandates and freedom and contentious curricula.

Finally comes one day of blessed relief, possible freedom from the misery, a chance to be just a kid again, at least for a moment.

But, no, kids, no joy for you. Back to that computer terminal.

We – and I mean everyone, both the people in charge during this pandemic and those of us who have enabled them – will have a lot to answer for in the way the response has been mishandled.

But one sin above all will stand out.

We are making our children old before their time.

## Picking a Court Nominee

*(Jan. 31)* — A presidential candidate promises to put a woman on the Supreme Court. Some idealists say it is identity politics at its worst. But pragmatists know it is a naked political strategy, meant to address weakness in a certain segment of the constituency.

Ha, ha, got you. I’m talking not about Joe Biden’s pledge that will result in the court’s first black female justice and get him back in the good graces of his zealous leftist base, but about Ronald Reagan’s pledge that made Sandra Day O’Connor the first woman on the court and shored up his support with female voters.

Just trying to get you ahead of the curve on where this conversation will go. Republicans will decry the sins of woke politics, pointing out along the way the irony of the court hearing an affirmative action case at a time when the newest justice is an affirmative action appointment. Democrats will dish out a giant helping of the logical fallacy *tu quoque*, which is Latin for, “So’s your old man!”

In addition to Reagan, Democrats will surely drag George Herbert Walker Bush into the debate. When it came time to replace Thurgood Marshall on the bench, Bush did not pledge to replace him with another black man, but to do otherwise would have required the kind of political bravery that does not get one to the White House.

Bush kept insisting that, despite the narrowness of his search, the resulting pick of Clarence Thomas gave us the most able constitutional scholar imaginable, a claim that was met with widespread derision. Biden will make the same claim, and get the same reaction.

Republicans just lucked out with Thomas in that he turned out to have a brilliant mind and a fierce devotion to constitutional principles. Some of the arguments he’s made in dissent will live long after the political turmoil that spawned them.



Joe Biden should be so lucky.

Presidents do not always get what they expect in a judicial appointment. Just consider Dwight D. Eisenhower, who chose unassuming moderate Republican Earl Warren, who joined the court and promptly turned the country upside-down with a series of decisions that used the Constitution as a living-document plaything.

I'm reminded of a scene in "Bananas," one of the films from Woody Allen when he still made comedies.

The brave, defender-of-the-downtrodden head of the freedom fighters has just won the war to liberate his country from the evil dictator's whims and makes his first speech as the new president:

"From this day on, the official language of San Marcos will be Swedish. Silence! In addition to that, all citizens will be required to change their underwear every half-hour. Underwear will be worn on the outside so we can check. Furthermore, all children under 16 years old are now . . . 16 years old!"

There was a lot of crazy lurking in that freedom fighter, and all it took to bring it out was the sudden realization that he was now supreme leader for life. Not unlike the crazy that can be unleashed in a Supreme Court justice who suddenly grasps the implications of a lifetime judicial appointment.

This brings up a serious point. For the good of the country, we do need the best nominee, and for that to happen, a president needs to search the widest possible field. Any time the search field is narrowed, for whatever reason, the odds of getting the best candidate are reduced.

That is the essence of the whole affirmative-action debate. Supporters insist they are widening the field to include previously overlooked groups. The truth is that they are narrowing it by ensuring that those previous groups get no serious consideration this time around.

And we generally get what we aim for. If the goal is the best people possible, we will have that but are guaranteed nothing else. If the goal is the most diverse group possible, we will have that but are guaranteed nothing else. We can insist on

individual rights, one of those pesky constitutional principles, or throw it overboard. Pick one.

Ha, ha, got you. You probably think I was referring to the fact that, in committing himself to choose a back female lawyer, Biden was narrowing the field of candidates to about 2 percent of the population. I meant his nominee will likely come from an even smaller percentage, lawyers who graduated from Yale or Harvard, which also describes every current court member but one,

The exception is the newest member, Amy Coney Barrett, who graduated from Notre Dame Law School in South Bend and was on the faculty there when tapped by Donald Trump. How in the world did she sneak in?

Don't get me wrong. I'm glad a Hoosier is on the court, even a non-native who came to Indiana later in life. She's certainly more representative of the state than Chief Justice John Roberts, who grew up and went to private school here before moving on and becoming just another Ivy League member of the ruling class. Judging from their actions on the bench so far, we are much less likely to see latent crazy erupting from Barrett.

But she is a lawyer.

The Constitution doesn't require justices to be lawyers. It doesn't require anything in fact, not regarding age or gender or race or even citizenship. We could, following the advice of William F. Buckley, just pick someone at random out of the phone book, if we still had phone books. That would truly widen the field to everyone in the United States.

Which, yes, I know, means we would likely get a nominee that knows little and cares less about the Constitution.

Like that's never happened.

## The Law and its Trade-offs

*(Jan. 24)* — A criminal whose guilt is obvious gets off on a technicality, and the great debate begins. You've undoubtedly heard it, in real life on

the news or in detective fiction in print or on the screen.

Lock the criminal away despite the technicality, says one side. It's a perversion of justice to let the guilty escape punishment just because police didn't dot every "i" and cross every "t" in pursuit of, say, a valid search warrant. What about the victims' rights?

No, says the other side. We have to let the criminal go – otherwise, it will encourage police to keep on "forgetting" proper procedure. Those technicalities protect not just the obviously guilty but anyone who might become a suspect, which could be any of us.

I bring the issue up not because there is an easy answer to the binary dilemma but because there are a couple of pertinent examples floating around in this session of the Indiana General Assembly.

In a recent column on one of the Legislature's more spectacular screwups – the plan to ease prison overcrowding that ended up creating overcrowding in most county jails – I included some flippant remarks about lesser bills (meaning little harm would be done) under consideration. One of them would change the way turn signals are enforced.

Under current law, motorists are required to signal 200 feet before a turn or a lane change, which is problematic in dense, urban areas. Under the new law, a turn signal would be required, but when it is engaged would be left to motorists' discretion.

Basically, I wrote, a law that can't be followed would be replaced by one that can't be enforced.

Har, har.

But then I got an email from an attorney in Columbus who let me know there was more to the proposed change than I had supposed.

"As you probably know," he wrote, "law enforcement officers need probable cause to pull over a driver. My sense is that they often have decided that a car looks suspicious before they begin looking for probable cause. What many officers appear to do is spot a car they want to pull

over and then follow them until they commit a traffic violation.

"Failure to signal for 200 feet before a turn or changing lanes shows up regularly in police reports as grounds for pulling someone over. After the stop, a call is made to K-9 to do a 'free air' sniff while walking around the vehicle . . . When the K-9 alerts or indicates drugs inside, a search of the interior of the vehicle is conducted."

Perhaps, he said, "reducing that type of probable cause might reduce stops, searches and criminal charges. Perhaps that would result in a reduction of jail population. Or maybe law enforcement will just follow vehicles until another traffic offense is found."

The other example involves the proposal to remove the handgun carry permit requirement for law-abiding citizens. This is truly a clash of great ideas.

On the one hand, it is absurd to require a government permit for a constitutional right, such as the one to bear arms. Would First Amendment advocates appreciate needing a permit to freely exercise their right to speech or religion?

On the other hand, removing the permits would make it harder for police to keep track of those who should not, for reasons of public safety, have easy access to handguns. Even many Second Amendment stalwarts seem persuaded by this argument.

But listen to a law enforcement official defend the permits:

"Marion County Prosecutor Ryan Mears said that eliminating the handgun permit would take one more investigative tool away from police officers and prosecutors who utilize the low-level charge as a pretext to examine a gun owner's criminal history and to test and trace the firearm to determine if it has been used in another crime."

In the turn signal example, we have a law that is generally ignored by police, unless they want to stop a suspicious vehicle. In the carry permit example, we are making it easier to catch some criminals by depriving all citizens of a constitutional right.

In neither case do we have an easily understood law that is uniformly applied to all citizens all of the time, which brings up the real question: What do you think of selectively enforced laws? Always wrong? Always justified? Sometimes necessary but can go too far?

There seems to be a great experiment under way today in selective enforcement of the law in some of our biggest cities, including Indianapolis. Ironically, this has resulted not in safer streets but in an explosion of violent crime. Does that change your opinion?

Which brings up another question. Which would be easier, to rid the streets of millions of guns, or to keep the thousands who misuse them off the streets?

But that is a different column.

## Covid and the Djokovician Line

*(Jan. 17)* — It's an issue that has long engaged my attention: Where do we draw the line between autonomy and subjugation, between when we should be left alone and when we must be made to conform for the common good?

I have strong libertarian instincts, so I have always argued for the minimum government necessary to protect us against threats to our lives and property, and that otherwise we should be free to pursue our own interests and flee our own demons. The laws should be few but well defined, clearly explained and enforced equally against all offenders.

That viewpoint gives us an obvious place to draw the line: If my actions would harm only me, let it be. If they could harm others, a case can be made for government intervention.

But we can see a problem with that simple demarcation just by looking at Indiana traffic laws.

Prohibitions against driving under the influence are entirely justifiable because the drunken driver endangers everybody else on the road. Mandatory use of seat belts and motorcycle helmets should be on the other side of the line,

since we only risk our own lives with noncompliance.

Indiana, alas, cannot handle the distinction. Seat belts are mandatory; motorcycle helmets are not. And the reason is not complicated: politics. Motorcycle riders have an active lobby. Car drivers do not.

That dilemma – the implementation of necessary and understandable law complicated by political considerations – has been brought into sharper focus by the Covid pandemic and the response to it. We should now be thinking much more deeply about the relationship between governors and the governed.

That relationship may not have been broken, but it has certainly been sorely tested, because the government has squandered the faith of the governed without which we lack the trust civil society needs to exist.

Time and time and again, we have been misled about – well, everything. Masks. Vaccinations. Social distancing. The chances of serious effects, hospitalizations, death.

It could be said that our politicians lied to us in a cynical attempt to curry favor with one group and demonize another group, or merely to savor the sense of power the emergency gave them.

Or we could be less cynical and say we have succumbed to a mistaken idea of science. Starting with global warming alarmism, we were encouraged to view “the science” as settled truth instead of a trial-and-error search for the truth. Now, with the pandemic, we expect the scientific “answers” to always hold instead of being subject to change as more data emerge. The pairing of politics, which is about short-term answers to immediate concerns, and science was always a bad marriage; we should be beginning to understand just how dysfunctional it is.

In either case, we keep repeating the same mistakes. Given the low threat level to everyone except the elderly and those with underlying conditions, the economy should not have been shut down, and incalculable damage was done to a whole generation of children by closing their schools. Yet, with every wave of new-variant

infections, there are those who call for those same responses, and too many who willingly accept them.

Early in the pandemic, I wrote that another crisis, similar to this but worse, would surely come, and we should learn from this episode to better handle the next one. Today I really wonder if we are capable of that.

As I write this, Novak Djokovic, the No. 1 tennis player in the world, has been kicked out of Australia and denied the opportunity to compete in that country's Open tournament because he refused to get the Covid vaccine, despite the fact that he had suffered through the virus and thus had better immunity than the vaccine could give him.

They could have forbidden entry to the country in the first place, but they let him come and then jerked him around for 11 days before sending him on his way. Not for any valid medical reason but because, in the words of one analysis, "he was seen as someone who could stir up anti-vaccine sentiments."

I feel for you, pal, I really do. A line was crossed here, but not by you.

## Short Session Agnosia

*(Jan. 10)* — Everyone will have a favorite piece of legislation to root for or against this session of the Indiana General Assembly, so there is a chance some of the lesser bills will escape attention.

Here are three I'll be monitoring.

House Bill 1013, which would designate the mastodon as the state fossil.

Senate Bill 81, which would require the teaching of cursive writing in Indiana schools.

S.B. 124, which would change the rules governing when Hoosier drivers must engage their turn signals.

I like the mastodon bill because it is utterly inconsequential, costing nothing, affecting nobody, leaving not a single wrinkle in the fabric of our lives.

The cursive bill could be described as meddling in local education affairs, but it has roughly zero

chance of passing. Sen. Jean Lessing has been on a quixotic mission to improve our penmanship for years.

Hoosiers might be alarmed at the turn-signal bill, since most of us drive. But never fear. Current law requires signaling 200 feet ahead of a turn, which is problematic in urban areas, since many intersections are fewer feet apart than that. So, the new standard would be to signal, period, the distance left to the driver.

Basically, a standard that can't be complied with will be replaced with one too vague to matter. But it's such a trivial issue that it's hard to work up any resentment except mild irritation.

Useless. Pointless. Mildly irritating. That says a lot, doesn't it?

On the other hand, a bill was just introduced, aiming to reform prison sentencing, that is none of those things. Or, rather, the goal is to un-reform prison sentencing in order to correct a blunder the Legislature made nearly a decade ago.

In 2013, legislators thought they had a brilliant idea to partially empty the state's embarrassingly overcrowded prisons. The lowest-level felons would go not to prison but to county jails, where, in the words of The Associated Press, they would receive "intensive local probation, work-release or addiction-treatment programs that would help prevent them from becoming career criminals."

In one way, it worked all too well. The number of inmates being sent to state prisons dropped by about 40 percent a year, for a total of nearly 6,000.

But legislators did not exactly do due diligence to find out whether counties could handle a jail population that exploded by 60 percent. As a result, "most of the state's 92 jails" are "overcrowded, understaffed and ill-equipped to deal with the influx of people with addiction and other mental health issues."

You'd think that having to cope with such a colossal misjudgment would give legislators a little humility, make them a little more cautious about what they know, a little less ambitious about what they think they can fix.

But no.

This is the short session, with the two-year budget safely in place, when legislators should attend to loose ends and errant contingencies. Indiana has an embarrassment of riches – hundreds of millions of federal funds floating around and a state surplus that is approaching 30 percent of the budget. Lawmakers should just give us a tax cut – even a modest one – and return home to praise for a job well done.

Instead, they are debating legislation that would have profound effects on the everyday lives of Hoosiers, on everything from how their children will be educated to how their employers must deal with a pandemic. They will plow ahead regardless of how little they really know about local conditions, let alone local desires.

Heaven only knows what they will have to undo in 2031.

By the way, in addition to a state tree, flower, song and seal, we can be proud to boast of a state insect and a state snack. But before we worry about a state fossil, shouldn't we designate a state fish and mammal?

You may print your proposals. Cursive isn't necessary.

Yet.

## Partisanship and Education

*(Jan. 3)* – Indiana Republican lawmakers are considering several issues related to public schools for debate during their next legislative session, begins the story in Newsweek, “including potentially adding the choice to be identified on the ballot with a particular political party when running for a school board seat.”

The reaction has been entirely predictable.

Adding politics into the races is “a really bad idea,” said trans-partisan former state schools Superintendent Jennifer McCormick, who was elected in 2016 as a Republican but has since changed her party affiliation.

“I think the people who will be encouraged to run are those that are going to be good soldiers for these political agendas,” McCormick said, according to the Associated Press. “It's hard to find good people who want to do it for the right

reason, and they're out there, but it's tough. And then you layer this on — it's a whole other layer of difficulty.”

I am reminded of the times as a rabid IU basketball fan (back in the Bobby Knight days) when I noticed that the retaliatory foul was so often the one that got called. The refs would miss the initial foul but see the one committed in response, and that's the one that was noticed.

Republicans are not seeking to add partisanship to school boards. They are reacting to the partisanship they already see there. There is a conservative education agenda and a progressive education agenda, and Republicans think the progressive agenda is winning handily. They merely want to level the playing field, or at least make it more transparent by giving voters a better idea of candidates' core philosophies.

And that retaliatory foul, rather than the precipitating one, is what Democrats, journalists and educators are calling.

Basketball is such a good metaphor for Indiana, let's try another comparison.

If you've observed a group of rabid fans watching a game, you will have learned that all the refs are crooks. And here's the amazing thing: All the bad calls the crooked refs make – for which they obviously have been handsomely paid – are made against whatever team the rabid fans are rooting for. It's the most cosmic unreported conspiracy in history.

That's where we are with public schools today. Conservatives think the other side wants to tear down everything that's made this country great. Progressives think the opposition wants to hold on to everything wrong with the country. And neither side thinks the refs will ever call the game fairly and honestly.

And when parents – you remember them, the ones who give up their children to these institutions – try to get more involved, the bureaucrats in Washington call them domestic terrorists.

How in the world did it come to this?

My parents never made a single complaint, or even raised a single concern, about what was



being taught in the schools I attended. Neither did the parents of any of my friends.

They weren't bad parents. It wasn't that they didn't care what we were being taught. It's that they trusted the schools to give us what we needed to make our way, consistent with the lessons they tried to instill in the home.

For a growing number of parents, that trust is no longer there.

I realize I've said this before, and heaven knows I will say it again, but public education was once a trusted enterprise because it transmitted our civilizational culture from generation to generation, our Western values and American ideals. We no longer agree on the worth of that culture. We are fractured as a country, and now our schools transmit our sense of disconnect.

Right now, schools are just a symptom of our great divide. But ultimately, they will help sharpen and perpetuate it, or be our best way out of it

First, we need to rediscover our common ground. If not, we will end up with two separate paths – a public school system for one group of Americans and a private-home school combination for the other – that will forever perpetuate two separate Americas.

It doesn't really matter whether we call school board candidates Democrat or Republican or nonpartisan. The game is bigger than that. And before we look for honest refs, we need to agree on the rules.

## Paring to the Basics in 2022

*(Dec. 27)* — My sister Judy made our mother's famous – within our circle – yeast rolls for Christmas dinner this year.

They were a little heavier than the ones we remembered, but tasty nonetheless. She vowed to keep trying until she got it right.

That was exactly the reaction I had the last time I tried to make them. Tasty but not quite light enough and, if truth be told, not as wonderfully fragrant. I, too, pledged to keep practicing.

I doubt if either one of us will get the perfect batch we yearn for. Following someone else's recipe, even if step by exact step, won't take into account all the nuances and subtleties that can't be reduced to words on paper.

It's not even a real recipe. Our mother had made the rolls so many times that she didn't measure ingredients in the traditional sense. Some of this, a little of that, and her experience told her when things were right. It only became a set of printed instructions when Judy made her go through the process while she took meticulous notes.

And the rolls weren't even our mother's unique creation.

Our father was a cook in the Army, specializing in baking. Early in the marriage, my mother looked through one of the cookbooks he had brought home. She found the recipe for yeast rolls and did a little math, figuring out how to make it serve a small family instead a company of 200 men.

Maybe it's just a family legend, but if it's not true, it should be. It embodies the first important lesson I learned about cooking: Don't be afraid to pare. What you subtract can be just as important as what you add.

That lesson was reinforced when I created my oft-requested breakfast quiche dish.

I discovered the casserole – which uses hash browns instead of pastry for a crust – at a bed & breakfast in Hill Country, Texas, and started playing around with it until I had a version to call my own. Then I started serving it at work for a group I was part of that did birthday and holiday carry-ins.

It turned out there was something in that recipe that at least one person didn't like. One hated onions, another couldn't stand mushrooms, nobody especially wanted green pepper. Eventually, I reduced the recipe to the bacon-cheese-egg-half & half concoction that became famous (again, within a certain circle).

As my mother had adapted my father's recipe for her family, I adapted mine for my friends' tastes, using the same technique: Pare, pare, pare.

I should mention here that I offer my baking advice with a certain amount of authority, not as a professional, but as a committed amateur of longstanding zeal.

My father knew a number of mountain crafts, like how to cane-bottom chairs and carve objects out of coal. By the time I was aware enough to learn them, he was too ill to teach them, so I looked for some other way to connect with him.

That is how I came to take an adult-ed class in baking at the local Ivy Tech campus.

There I learned many things, including the essence of bread making, which I think is worth sharing.

All you need are two numbers: five and three. To make bread, mix five parts flour to three parts water. And that's it. Yes, you throw in a little yeast for leavening and a little salt for taste, but if you know five parts flour to three parts water, you can always bake bread, any time any place.

From that baseline, you can get creative. Add the fats, the eggs and milk, favorite herbs and spices, pieces of fruit or bits of vegetable, a fabulous array of ingredients from which to choose that can add magic your next loaf.

You can do that by poring over the millions of recipes in books and online, but, personally, I recommend just experimenting. Add a little of this and a little of that, secure in the knowledge that bread making is an ongoing adventure, not a one-shot reach for perfection.

But first, strip it down to the basics as a starting point. Five parts flour, three points water. Pare, pare, pare.

If you want to make that a metaphor for life, stripping down your existence to the core of what's most important to you before worrying about the add-ons, feel free. This is the end-of-year cycle in which people do that sort of thing.

Just be careful of the yeast and salt. Lots of trial and error there.

Happy New Year.

## Welcome to the \$1.25 Store

*(Dec. 20)* — I'm not an economist, so I can't delve too deeply into the intricacies of inflation.

But I think I'm as qualified as most people who write about economics in that I can talk about Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations" all day long without having actually read it.

And I do know a thing or two about dollar stores and dime stores.

A lot of consumers reportedly freaked out — were "aghast," as one writer put it — recently when the Dollar Tree chain announced it was upping the price on most items to \$1.25, a 25 percent across-the-board increase.

"Dollar and a quarter store doesn't have the same ring to it," one columnist quipped. And Consumer Reports was prompted to issue a list of suggestions for dollar store shoppers, such as "Your options on each item could be pretty limited" and "Not many carry fresh fruits and vegetables."

What? You mean I can't just stroll into a dollar store with my meticulously crafted list and satisfy all my shopping needs?

All I can say to those aghast consumers is, welcome to my world.

I grew up in a time and place where those of limited means who weren't desperate enough to shop at the Salvation Army went to a place called the dime store. It was technically a five-and-dime store, but nobody called it that.

Even as a 10-year-old clutching my sweaty change, I was smart enough to realize there were a lot of items in that store costing more than a dime. It never occurred to me to wonder why it wasn't called the 19-cent store or the two-bit store.

What ended up as a nationwide phenomenon had begun on Feb. 27, 1879, when Frank Woolworth opened his Great Five Cent Store in Utica, New York. Yes, five cents for anything in the store, from candy and baseballs and drinking cups to writing books and fire shovels and purses, until the stores morphed into the five-and-tens, which had to finally set a top selling price of 20 cents in the 1930s.

That 20-cent limit was abandoned in 1935, which begat Woolworth's, the largest chain in the world for a while.

What we're talking about here is the sort of creeping inflation we can all live with, the sign of a healthy economy humming along, small increases in prices and wages that are so incremental over time we hardly notice until we read a story about decades past and mutter, "Dollar sure went a lot further back then."

What we're facing now, though, is Sudden Onslaught Inflation of the kind we haven't seen in about 40 years, drastic price increases that sweep like a tornado through a trailer park. We feel it at the gas station and the grocery store as we wonder how far the next paycheck will go. Today, we have to look back just weeks rather than decades to lament the reach of a dollar.

It's the kind of inflation even conservatives don't quite trust to Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of people acting in their own self-interest in a laissez faire economy. It's inflation that screams for government attention.

But it can be hard to move the government, especially when the message should be, quit doing so much harm.

We can accept that truly free markets aren't possible without government establishing guidelines so we all know we're playing by the same rules, things such as a currency and monetary policy to move on from bartering, enabling and enforcing contracts, trying to frustrate the destructive power of monopolies. But we should be afraid when it moves beyond umpiring the level playing field,

Contrary to popular belief, Smith saw the biggest threat of government not so much in its attempt to intervene in free markets, but to capture them. He detested mercantilism, the collusion of governments and big business to control the flow of goods and services to the point where individuals had no meaningful choices. Central planning does not work, whether foisted on us by governments, a monopolistic merchant class or a combination of both.

We can only imagine how aghast Smith would be at the cozy relationship of Washington and Big Tech to control everything from what goods we can buy to what information we can see. And what would he make of the emerging economy in which, thanks to lobbying and generous campaign donations, we will buy everything from Amazon except a few trinkets still available at the dollar store?

And since he would have known that inflation is basically too many dollars chasing too few goods, we can be pretty sure he would recognize the federal government's pernicious role. We can't blame it for the shortage of goods (except, perhaps, for being asleep at the switch while the supply chain crashed and burned), but it is front and center in responsibility for the flood of dollars.

The Build Back Better plan to dump a few trillion more into the economy seems dead for now, but there are trillions already in the pipeline. We were treated last week to stories about all the glorious plans for spending the money in Indiana — \$50 million each for the Fort Wayne area, the South Bend area, the Indianapolis area . . .

Oh, boy, can't wait for the effects to kick in. I have my sweaty change ready for next month's trip to the \$5 store.

## Time Is Short for the Short Session

*(Dec. 13)* — Aren't you tired of all those predictably boring ceremonial solemnization stories in the news? The 5th or 10th commemoration of this, the 25th or 50th anniversary of that.

Wouldn't it be refreshing to see a remembrance in an off year?

So today, let us celebrate the 51st — nearly the 52nd — birthday of momentous events from the year 1970. And, in keeping with the spirit of the times, let's focus only on those things that have had a lasting negative impact:

The first Earth Day proclamation was declared, which, concurrent with the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, set the stage

for Why Aren't We More Like Europe globalism and We're All Going to Die climate panic.

The Vietnamization plan of President Nixon was unveiled, letting us know that this country could undertake no commitment so enormous, so invested with blood and treasure, that we could not just walk away from when we got tired of it.

The Beatles broke up, and Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin both died at the age of 27. Grunge, punk and hip hop were waiting in the wings.

The Chicago Seven were found not guilty of conspiring to incite a riot, which started the normalization of urban mayhem, and the Public Broadcasting Service was born, a seminal event in the fitting of unpleasantness such as urban mayhem into the approved narrative.

The Indiana General Assembly voted to add every-other-year short sessions to its usual biennial gatherings, which ensured that even fiscally prudent, skeptical-of-authority Hoosiers could never escape the grasp of government.

The inclusion of that last item, relatively insignificant, mostly unknown to the nation at large, might seem inappropriate. But, like the other events, it shows the long-term consequences, some unintended, of every act. And, unlike the other acts, this one can easily be remedied, which is a dead horse a certain columnist has been beating for decades.

The framers of Indiana's 1851 Constitution, still cognizant of the country's founding principle of the "least government" necessary to protect life and liberty, reckoned that one legislative session every two years would be sufficient, except when the governor, determining that the general welfare required it, called a special session.

But in 1970, legislators decided a two-year budget was too fraught with uncertainties, so decided to enact the short sessions.

The were meant to deal only with emergencies and unexpected contingencies, but of course that didn't last. No tax ever goes away, and no public official is ever satisfied with the amount of government we already have. If 2022 is like previous short-session years, about 800 bills will

be introduced, roughly 20 percent of them reaching the governor's desk.

Does the state really have that many "emergencies" to deal with? Do Hoosiers really need, 205 years after Indiana's founding, that much fine-tuning of their daily lives?

I say again, as I have every year in my journalistic history, let's stop the madness.

If there ever were a time to end the short session – at least on a one-year experimental basis – this is certainly that time.

For one thing, state coffers are chock-full of cash. Tax receipts have been much higher than anticipated, and the government's rainy day fund has exploded. Furthermore, billions are coming in from federal pandemic and infrastructure measures. There is no possible emergency that cannot be handled.

For another, legislators have already staked their claim on autonomy, picking a big fight with the governor over whether he alone can call a special session. If lawmakers take the position that they can meet whenever they want, they can't balk at not meeting whenever they want.

So, come, on, senators and representatives.

Thanks to Covid and the policies you have embraced, Hoosiers have been able to take time off from work and family gatherings and eating out and shopping in public, and many of their children have even had a year off from school. Take your turn. Enjoy a break.

And give the rest of us a few anxiety-free months.

Let somebody's 51-year anniversary list in 2072 include this item:

"Indiana legislators informed columnist Leo Morris that his decades-long quest to end the short sessions would be the subject of a summer study committee." See also, "Horse, beating a dead." (*The phrase, not the posthumous Jimi Hendrix album, his 123rd, with that title.*) ♦

# Franke

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## Christian Persecution Hits Home

*“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”*  
(Matthew 5:11 ESV)

(Feb. 23) — He did warn us.

Christians have been persecuted throughout history but always elsewhere. So why here? And why now? This is America, a nation founded on unalienable rights being granted by a Creator most everyone in 1776 assumed was the Christian God.

Growing up in the 1950s, everyone I knew went to church on Sunday. Well, almost everyone. Even those who didn’t attend church recognized the importance of Christianity as the basis for American society.

Even public schools had prayers, as I found out as I attended my first public school in grade nine after eight years in a Lutheran school. Nobody complained when our home room teacher opened each day with a prayer.

Witnesses in court ended their oath with “so help me God.” Legislatures opened their sessions with prayer as did many other civic organizations. The American Legion, of which I am a Son because of my father’s World War II and Korean War service, still has regular prayers even though the organization is technically “non-sectarian.” “God and country” are the watchwords for these veterans.

But this is not my father’s America. The news over the past several years is replete with stories of business leaders, public servants and others being “canceled” for stating they are practicing Christians. The Mozilla Foundation president and

the Atlanta fire chief are just two highly publicized examples of this intolerance, each having lost his job and income in outbursts of woke prejudice.

Western civilization is built on Christianity or the Judeo-Christian ethic if you will. Yet we have always been a religiously tolerant nation, thanks to Thomas Jefferson, George Mason and James Madison among others of our Founding Fathers. Note these words from the First Amendment:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;”

This liberty is first to be listed in an amendment that also guarantees free speech, free assembly and a free press. The concept of separation of church and state is not required in this amendment, certainly not to the extent of prohibiting religion’s “free exercise” or giving sanction to those who are determined to drive it out of the public square.

My parents, God rest their souls, would be appalled at what is happening now. The persecution is real but cloaked in a “bodyguard of lies” to steal a phrase from Winston Churchill. It is not even subtle now if one lives elsewhere from flyover country. We Hoosiers tend to be ten to twenty years behind the coasts, so surely it is headed here. And my grandchildren will have to survive the onslaught.

Do you think I am crying wolf? Then consider these two prosecutions in the ostensibly Christian West.

Justin Trudeau’s Canada has just promulgated a law that makes it a criminal offense to engage what is called “conversion therapy.” This apparently applies to anyone promoting heterosexuality. The fear is that it will be used against Christian churches and pastors. Canada’s track record of targeting churches during Covid lends credibility to this fear. Time will tell.

More worrisome is a current trial in Finland, where the government is prosecuting the bishop of the Lutheran Finnish Church and a member of Parliament for doing the unthinkable: quoting Holy Scripture on current issues. The Bible has now become a book of “hate speech” according to



these woke governmental officials. Note that about two-thirds of Finns hold membership in Bishop Juhana Pohjola's church and that the Finnish constitution protects free speech and the free exercise of religion. Be that as it may, using the word "sin" can be "harmful" according to the prosecution.

Even more ludicrous, ludicrous that is if it weren't so chilling, is the assertion that the Bible cannot overrule Finnish law even within a person's conscience. In other words a simple act of the Finnish parliament can invalidate all or part of Holy Scripture. It is one thing to choose to disbelieve what the Bible teaches and an entirely different thing to make it illegal for others to believe it.

If it is happening in Finland and in Canada, how long before the same thing happens in America? Was the hostile state authoritarianism Christian churches suffered during Covid merely the first salvo in a war to eradicate religious freedom and conscience?

Still, I take comfort in these words of St. Paul: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." (Galatians 6:7 ESV)

And it is strength that I take from these words of St. Peter during his trial nearly 2,000 years ago: "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29 ESV)

### **A Love of Poetry (Provided It Rhymes)**

(Feb. 16) — One enjoyment I get out of life is to engage someone in a conversation over a topic I know absolutely nothing about. If my interlocutor can make his point in grammatically correct and non-exclamatory sentences, I will listen and question him up to and past the point my wife gets embarrassed.

A case in point. My wife is from Terre Haute and most of her family still resides there. It wouldn't be accurate to describe her as an outcast but her family tends to look askance at me for inducing her to relocate permanently to Fort Wayne when we got married. Maybe sojourner best describes her status in the family.

Even though we live 200 miles away, we have always made a special point of attending as many family gatherings as we can. This was most important when our son and daughter were young. They had more than a few cousins of similar age and it was important to give them time with these cousins.

This past Christmas the family gathered as usual. For some reason I can no longer remember, one of my wife's nephews and I had an extended discussion about poetry. He follows a poetry genre which was new to me. He called it "angst" or "emo" poetry.

I admit that I am not an aficionado of poetry but, to be fair, neither am I reduced to playground limericks. I actually have read and admit to enjoying Victorian and Romantic poetry. "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold" and "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" are lines from two of my best-loved poems.

My favorite poets tend to be British. In addition to Shelley and Keats, I enjoy reading Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns and Rudyard Kipling. Scott's "Unwept, unhonored, and unsung" must be one the best ending lines of any poem. Then there is Burns' admonition to "see ourselves as others see us." Kipling's are so enjoyable for their simple verse structure and for saying so much in so few words. And he gets a bonus in my book because he is a poet who irritates the woke cultural barbarians.

One grade school memory I have is when the Library of Congress appointed Robert Frost as poet laureate. That made his work required reading by my teacher. I won't say that I loved reading him at the time but his words stuck and I remember many of them to this day.

"Good fences make good neighbors" must be a New England thing. We don't have fences in my northeast Indiana neighborhood and we freely walk across backyards to get from one house to the other. But then Hoosiers and New Englanders are different in many ways.

Of course the Psalms were required for recitation at my Lutheran grade school but I never quite understood them as poetry. You couldn't use any oral cadence when you recited them and, most objectionable of all, they didn't rhyme. Every other poem I memorized back then rhymed. Isn't that what poems are supposed to do?

The Psalms were meant to be sung, which brings me back to my wife's nephew and his preferences. He certainly educated me. Emo (emotional) or angst poetry is non-conformist with a heavy dose of anger. He told me it is generally not political like the protest poetry of the hippie era. Rather, it focuses on our culture and the real and perceived problems with it.

It is written mostly as song lyrics, or I should say used to be written as song lyrics. It has died out, according to this 40-something nephew, because it is too generational. In other words it does not appeal to Millennials. He doesn't think too highly of what passes today for emo poetry, but that is the way of all flesh as we age. Kids, today!

It is quotable, though. "I would rather drink hemlock than be like you." That's anger all right, but not a quote I intend to use anytime soon.

I'll stick with Robert Frost and the nineteenth century poets I read in high school. "But I have promises to keep. And miles to go before I sleep" sits better in my soul.

Why do I recall so much of Frost's poetry 60 years after memorizing it? The answer is quite simple. I like poetry which speaks to the better part of our nature or teaches a lesson in easily remembered phrases. And it rhymes.

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference."

A good piece of advice for living a life of curiosity and intellectual fulfillment. But another poet from my childhood, Yogi Berra, said it better. "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

## Whither Now the GOP?

*"Whither thou goest, I will go." (Ruth 1:16 KJV)*

(Feb. 9) — At risk of placing myself outside Scripture, I must confess I can't always buy into this sentiment. Sure, Ruth spoke these words around 3,000 years ago to her mother-in-law. My situation pertains to our current political climate, specifically the Republican and Democrat parties. That must serve to assuage my theological conscience.

Where can a classical liberal, one who holds Adam Smith in highest regard, find a home in today's acerbic and dysfunctional fever swamp that is our public life? Whither shall I go?

Certainly not back to the Democrat Party where I began my political allegiance. Northeast Indiana elected more than a few Democrats to local and statewide office back then. No more. Would the moderate and conservative Hoosier Democrats of the 1950's and 1960's even recognize what their party has become?

Democrat leadership is in fear of the radical progressives who somehow have achieved an absolute veto over any sensible proposal which doesn't march us ever onward to a socialist Armageddon. John Kennedy would be appalled, inspired no doubt to add a chapter to his book "Profiles in Courage" for Sen. Joe Manchin, valorously playing the role of the little Dutch boy trying to hold back the sea with one finger.

I'm unsure about the Republicans. The problem in my view is that the Republican Party can't reconcile its two wings. The big business wing of the Bushes and Romneys can't figure out where all their country-club friends went while the populist wing is being led by an egotist who cares only for himself and his crusade to punish anyone and everyone who hasn't paid proper obeisance. Then on the fringes are the ideological purists who seem bent on self-immolation at the slightest provocation.

Let's look at each group in turn. The old-style Republicans, caricatured with some accuracy as wealthy businessmen controlling the party from

corporate board rooms, hardly exist anymore . . . at least as recognizable Republicans. Think of Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb and the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. They are properly woke now, succumbing on nearly every political and cultural issue.

Think also of the Internet economy, where the richest Americans are in charge. Other than Elon Musk, a loose cannon if ever there were one, these business leaders are loyally following the radical progressive dictates regardless how extreme. They and their campaign contributions have left the Republican Party; the party needs to accept that and move on.

Then there is the blue-collar, working-class group which was inspired first by Ronald Reagan but truly energized by Donald Trump. Surely Trump isn't the only Republican leader who can speak effectively to their desires and needs. They may not be college educated but they intuitively understand that their prosperity requires a maximum of individual liberty and economic freedom. A candidate need only explain that in their words, as Trump did so effectively in 2016.

But they are following a false messiah. Trump got elected president because the Democrats nominated a candidate with a manner as egotistical and character as reprehensible as his. I was not alone in holding my nose when I pulled the lever in the last two elections. His popularity with so many of my friends is hard to fathom intellectually.

Maybe that is it. Trump's appeal is visceral, as is that of all populists. They speak to the souls of disenfranchised people and in a way they can understand. He certainly connected with Hoosier voters, carrying every county but four in both 2016 and 2020. I get that.

The problem facing the future of the Republican Party is to solidify this huge voting block under a philosophy rather than a man. Can the next Republican candidate pull Trump voters even if his name is not Trump? And make no mistake about it; the 2024 Republican candidate must be someone other than Donald Trump. Or

for that matter, other than anyone who thinks like a Bush or Romney.

This can only be accomplished through a carefully thought-out platform written in clear and forceful words understood by every voter demographic. Republicans must unify around a commonly held philosophy of government illustrated with specific legislative proposals which offer hope, both for those who want the chance to succeed and for those who want to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

My fear is that 2024 will be a contest between the two parties to see which one blows itself up first. Given the radicalism and ineptitude of the current administration, it is an election for the Republicans to lose. Unfortunately, they have proved adequately competent to do just that.

I apologize if I seem too much the cynic, but I have observed Republican electoral incompetence for too long at both the national and hometown levels. The pols might lose elections but what the voters lose is hope.

## The Political Changes of a Lifetime

*(Feb. 2)* — My 70 years on this mortal coil have seen changes unimaginable, to be sure. Cell phones, self-driving cars, video conferencing, countless TV channels, etc. This was the stuff of the Jetsons cartoons. Even the robotic maid Rosey is no longer futuristic.

Yet I have nothing on my maternal grandmother, who was born in 1890 and lived to be 105. The technological changes she experienced were even more fundamental to everyday life. Imagine her childhood: no automobiles, no telephones, no central heating, no indoor plumbing. My great-grandfather's farm still required a functioning outhouse during my adult life.

But it's not technology I see as the seismic shift in my lifetime. It is the realignment of the political parties.

I was born during the Truman administration but my first recollection of a president was Ike. We didn't have a television until late in the 1950's but there were plenty of pictures of his

grandfatherly image. It was an idyllic time, at least so far as my rose-colored glasses can see.

I didn't understand it at the time but there was a disconnect between how my parents voted and how they spoke of political leaders. I come from German farmer stock, along with most of the early settlers in northeast Indiana. These blue-collar voters were stalwart Democrats. If a Republican was elected to an office in the rural townships, it was due to his family connections or personal reputation.

Democrat though he was, Dad never spoke of Eisenhower in other than respectful tones. Certainly the Fourth Commandment's exhortation to honor our leaders played a part. It may have been that Ike led the invasion of Normandy in 1944, an invasion which Dad saw up close and personal. Or perhaps it was just a more congenial time.

Fast-forwarding to today, those Democrat townships now vote almost straight-ticket Republican. Why did they change?

I submit that they didn't. The parties changed on them.

Allow me an anecdotal piece of evidence. In 1988 during the Bush-Dukakis presidential campaign, my siblings had all come back to Fort Wayne for a shared visit. One night the topic became the election. Our dad, never one to miss an opportunity to hold forth, recited his catechism of political beliefs. It was the Bush campaign platform. I asked Dad if he planned to vote Republican for the first time. Absolutely not, he declaimed. It was the Democrat Party which was for the "little man." My pointing out that, according to his ideology, it was now the Republicans who best represented the "little man" was to no avail.

That was 1988 but it presaged what now is obvious to everyone. The factory workers, farmers and other blue-collar families vote mostly Republican while the elites and wealthy are Democrats.

Two further vignettes from my life serve to illustrate this shift. I used to split my ticket, voting Democrat at the local level while casting every

presidential ballot for the Republican candidate. I was actually a Democrat precinct committeeman in my early 20s. While I was quite conservative intellectually, I couldn't easily abandon generations of political loyalty.

In college I was a member of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a student group which attracted social conservatives and free-market classical liberals and libertarians under a big tent. I nominated Democrat Sen. Henry Jackson for president at the 1972 national YAF convention to a lot of cheers. It was obvious to me that he had the strongest national defense policy of any national figure. Ronald Reagan agreed, appointing many of Jackson's aides to key Pentagon and State Department positions in 1981.

But that was then, when the classification "cold war liberal" described a lot of Democrats. What happened? The Vietnam War played its role in the leftward shift of the Democrat party but there was more to it than that. Going through college in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I should have been more aware of the seductive allure of Marcuse, Alinsky and Nietzsche for so many young radicals.

Again, what we have now is a total flip-flop of the two parties in terms of the economic class of voters each attracts. The country-club set is hardly Republican anymore, or at least not willing to admit it publicly. Their big money goes to the Democrats now as studies of campaign contributions have shown.

And blue-collar workers shifted the other direction. Hilary Clinton's description of these erstwhile Democrats as a "basket of deplorables" says it all. So does Barack Obama's characterization of these same people as "clinging to guns and religion." Condescension is no way to win votes.

Meanwhile, our self-designated betters have their Hollywood and Manhattan parties to raise millions for favored progressive candidates while we hoi polloi here in flyover country keep voting Republican, confounding the media pundits. And what fun that is.



## So much for 'Biden the Unifier'

(Jan. 26) — What a disappointment. I hardly expected Joe Biden suddenly to become a classical liberal dedicated to recognizing natural rights and advancing individual liberty. I did hope, Pollyanna like, that he actually meant what he said in his inaugural address:

“Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this: Bringing America together. Uniting our people. And uniting our nation.”

He differentiated himself during the primaries as a more reasonable version of liberalism or progressivism. That seemed to work well for him then and in the general election, especially as he was cheered along by a slaving media.

That may appear harsh but remember what the New York Times wrote about Kamala Harris when she was selected as Biden’s running mate. “A practical moderate,” they wrote. Seriously? She scored a perfect 100 on the American for Democratic Action liberal/progressive scale and as the number one liberal/progressive on Voteview’s non-partisan scale. But then this “newspaper of record” also believes America’s true founding occurred in 1619.

I don’t know who is in charge at the White House, but his key advisors are not doing Biden any favors. And who writes his speeches? Compare this quote from his Atlanta voting rights bill speech with the one above:

“Do you want to be on the side of Dr. King or George Wallace? Do you want to be on the side of John Lewis or Bull Connor? Do you want to be on the side of Abraham Lincoln or Jefferson Davis?”

It doesn’t take an IQ above room temperature to know that Biden was referring to congressional Republicans despite the fact his roll call of bad guys were all Democrats. Does that sound like the language of a unifier? Of a self-proclaimed “President for all Americans”? Of a Senate veteran with the reputation of reaching across the aisle to form coalitions in support of moderate legislation?

The Republican Minority Leader, Sen. Mitch McConnell, said he “did not recognize the man at

the podium.” And this about someone McConnell said he has “known, liked and respected . . . for many years.”

Is this just a Washington Beltway phenomenon? Do the political, governmental and media elites there have a carefully choreographed dance that only they understand? Or can they truly be that hateful of each other? Is it all political theater? Or is it the worst part of human nature manifesting itself in juvenile behavior?

Regardless, shouldn’t the President of the United States rise above the partisan bickering? Ronald Reagan, Joe Biden ain’t.

Even presidents who weren’t stellar examples of statesmanship understood the political implications of their public pronouncements and their Oval Office bargaining. Think of Bill Clinton, who actually accomplished more once the Republicans took control of Congress. Biden might want to study both Reagan and Clinton as case studies for working with an opposition majority such as he will surely face after the 2022 elections.

It isn’t just the independents and moderates whom Biden is disappointing. It is no surprise that a conservative think tank like the Heritage Foundation would grade his first year as an abject failure. But when CNN gives him the same grade, that spells political trouble with a capital T.

Harry Enten of CNN concluded an analytical column with these words: “Unlike a lot of political figures recently, he ran on bringing people together. He has so far failed in that endeavor.” And this from a network which acted like it was an arm of the Biden campaign’s public relations department in 2020.

Biden’s political lieutenants surely can read the latest polling data. He is setting modern polling records for losing support of voters. One glance at the Real Clear Politics webpage should give pause to Biden’s campaign team. Especially worrying should be his drop among independents. Even more so should be the disturbing datapoint that he has suffered the greatest decline within the voter cohort age 30 and under. Even the Millennials are deserting him.



And the news just keeps getting worse. A recent Gallup poll found Biden to have the highest approval gap between the two parties' voters of any president since World War II. So much for unifying us all.

To be fair, this has been an observable trend for the last 70 years, surely a reflection on the increasing polarization of our nation. So is it our fault for electing polarizing leaders? Or are we merely sleep-walking along behind the Bidens and Trumps? Night of the Living Dead, anyone?

No doubt I am becoming as cynical as the Washington crowd. But I can't top these words from Biden's inaugural speech for cynicism:

"And so today, at this time and in this place, let us start afresh. All of us. Let us listen to one another. Hear one another. See one another. Show respect to one another."

Uh-huh. Unless, of course, you are among the 74 million "Jefferson Davises" who voted against him.

### The Good Things That Unite Us (mostly)

(*Jan. 19*) — I have given up all hope of returning to the day of *e pluribus unum*. I certainly don't expect anyone in Washington D.C. or the New York City media center to repent of their divisive ways and take on this noble cause.

So what? They don't dictate how I live my life or the way I interact with other people. Let them continue to be mired in Donald Trump's undrained swamp, rewriting history to suit their own prejudices and acting more and more as immature juveniles in their incessant name-calling of anyone who isn't marching lockstep to their ideology.

As for me, I don't intend to lead Thoreau's life of quiet desperation. I have too many good things in my life, things I should be thankful for receiving.

Let's talk about music. I have rather eclectic tastes in music, including baroque and blues and jazz and 1960s rock. The American Legion post I frequent usually has blues playing on the jukebox. One of the regulars supervises this and he has

eclectic tastes similar but not identical to mine. An added benefit is that the volume is carefully controlled so as not to be obnoxious.

I have a cousin who has a doctorate in folk music, specializing in Hoosier barn dances. Although he lives in Chicago, he visits frequently and stays at our house during his returns to Fort Wayne. He always brings his instruments and we are treated to a mini-concert on most of these visits. He has reawakened in me a love for that old-style music that is in my heritage.

When he was here for Thanksgiving, we had some new neighbors over and the husband brought his banjo so he could play along. That is another thing that brightens my life — neighbors. Our cul-de-sac is very close, helping each other with leaves and snow work and stepping up whenever one of us has an emergency. A neighborhood boy suddenly developed a brain tumor, blessedly now completely gone. We all had prayers in our hearts and support signs in our yards, violating our association covenants. No one complained.

We get together frequently on our patios in the summer and inside during the more inclement weather. One neighbor has a hobby of collecting vintage movies so we have irregular movie nights. And you can bet that as soon as one of us starts a project of any significance, the others ask if they can help.

We love to talk about our grandchildren, which are the most rewarding part of my senior years. Two of our grandchildren live nearby so they spend a lot of days . . . and nights . . . at our house. I volunteer at the school they attend so at least one morning each week I am the school bus. After a career in higher education, it is so rewarding to spend time volunteering at an elementary school. And I get to see my grandchildren during the school day.

Being at our church's school, I have the opportunity to be a role model for these youngsters. I am an all-purpose volunteer, doing maintenance projects and helping out whenever a teacher asks. One duty I have is to teach flag etiquette to the seventh- and eighth-graders who

post and retire the colors each day. I also train these boys to be acolytes at daily chapel, preparing them to be ushers at Sunday services after their confirmation.

If my life isn't joyful enough already, the calendar tells me that we are less than a month away from pitchers and catchers reporting for spring training. Baseball is the quintessential American sport — no violence but lots of strategic decision-making. The drama of a one-on-one confrontation between pitcher and batter is unique in that it is just the starting point for a team effort to produce either a run or an out.

I am trying to stay positive, but all is not well in my self-imagined nirvana of baseball. The players and owners are arguing over each side's cut of billions of dollars collected from us fans. I suppose that is a lot of money to everyone's thinking other than the Federal Reserve, but still. Do these people understand that the split won't matter if the season doesn't start on time? Shouldn't the commissioner knock some sense into them? Oh, I forgot. The commissioner is Rob Manfred, who views his role as keeping the woke mob happy. He doesn't have time to waste on solving baseball's most pressing problem: the time of games. And that is moot if they don't bother playing.

Needless to say, I am not a fan of Rob Manfred. I only bring this up as a cathartic exercise, which psychologists say is good for the soul. Maybe, but my soul is content with music, neighbors and grandchildren. And, come April, baseball. I hope.

## Now They Are Coming for Our Beer

*(Jan. 12)* — The Apocalypse is at hand. And it was Covid which brought it about.

No, I'm not speaking of the endless riots and protests in the major cities. Neither am I speaking of the lust for power exhibited by governmental officials at every level as they shut down businesses, schools and everything but their favorite resort spots. I'm not even referring to the cultural war that has sprung from the grassroots to demand accountability on what our children are being taught.

I am speaking of something much more pertinent to my quotidian existence. According to the Wall Street Journal, Covid has initiated a "take no prisoners" war between beer brewers and spirit distillers over who gets how much of American consumers' hard-earned disposable income.

This does not portend well for my retirement lifestyle.

I'm of German heritage, so beer is the closest thing to a secular sacramental drink there is. I like all flavors and styles, except India Pale Ales and fruity semi-beers. My taste changes with the season, moving into porters and darker ales in the bleak mid-winter and moving back to lighter ales and pilsners in the summer. My garage beer refrigerator is stocked with at least a dozen options at all times.

Add to that the fact that my taste for bourbon reawakened about 10 years ago, a taste I had in college but sensibly repressed when I got married as an undergraduate and had to move expeditiously toward graduation. While my demand curve for bourbon is rather price-inelastic, I have found several bourbons quite reasonably priced to justify keeping them to hand in my liquor cabinet.

Now one would think that this economic battle is an opportunity for the free enterprise system to work its wonders. Brewers and distillers would compete with new and better product offerings by lowering prices to gain market share and by having their advertising agencies up their game with clever and humorous commercials.

That's how it would work in Adam Smith's world; not so in the crony capitalism environment of Washington D.C. and the 50 state capitol buildings such as that impressive edifice in downtown Indianapolis.

To my point, see this quote from the Wall Street Journal article by the owner of the Samuel Adams brewery: "If [the distillers] succeed in changing state regulations, the beer industry . . . would face virtually permanent declines in volume, revenues and profits." Needless to say, he expects those lost revenues and profits to find

their way onto the distillers' financial statements. There are so many things wrong with that statement that I will point out only two.

First, it is obvious that Jim Koch, the brewer interviewed, sees the battle for consumer market share being waged at the governmental and not the retail level. It's not about putting out a better product at a lower price but about corralling powerful elected officials and career bureaucrats.

I have written in the past about the lunacy of liquor taxes at both the federal and state levels. Suffice it to say there are a lot of taxes at confusingly high rates collected all along the product pathway to the consumer. Is it fair that distilled spirits are taxed at approximately two-and-one-half times that imposed on beer? Not if you are a distiller.

It's not just the taxes on hard liquor. Remember Indiana's Beer Baron law that created monopoly sales districts for beer distributors? How about the state's law that regulated what retailers could sell cold beer on an exclusive basis, benefiting liquor stores over groceries?

The inconvenient truth is that no tax is truly fair. The government picks winners and losers every time it passes a law or promulgates a regulation. All those lobbyists in Washington and Indianapolis are there for a reason.

The second issue I take with Mr. Koch's statement is that he sees all this as a zero-sum game. His revenues and profits will simply cross a metaphorical street and jump into the pockets of some demon-rum producer. I would charge Mr. Koch with economic ignorance if it weren't for the fact that he clearly understands the economics of American statist capitalism. Business success all too often is earned in the hallways of government, not the open marketplace.

Seriously though, I really don't believe that the most dangerous threat to our societal well-being is the marketing war between alcohol-producing behemoths. Lawless central cities, authoritarian politicians and cultural barbarians all present much more serious threats to our liberty and our

progeny's welfare. It is all overwhelming when one dwells on it for any extended period of time. A sense of futility and helplessness is the inevitable outcome of such musings.

So a sense of humor is essential, especially in these near-apocalyptic times. It sure beats crying yourself to sleep at night. And a couple fingers of bourbon will help as well.

## A Simple Resolution

(Dec. 29) — Last year I was a casualty of hubris, the ancient Greek term for incredible egotism leading to stupidity. Maybe that's not the technical definition as a classical scholar would tell you but it describes my year perfectly. At least it is an accurate description for that aspect of 2021 relating to my fidelity in keeping my New Year's resolutions.

I had nine, taken from St. Paul's delineation of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Note that he uses fruit in the singular as these nine characteristics are all interrelated and dependent on each other. They exist in total or not at all.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. I should have known better than try to improve my exercise of all of these at the same time. I didn't fail miserably but I hardly met God's standard let alone my wife's. But I did try in my own imperfect way and perhaps there was value in the attempt. I just can't brag about my success, and I learned my lesson about setting impossible goals.

For 2022 I propose only one resolution. At risk of being anachronistic when it comes to the liturgical seasons, my resolution is taken from the first of the Great "O" Antiphons sung since the sixth century by the Christian Church during Advent.

Each of the seven antiphons recognizes an attribute or role of the coming Messiah. It is only the first which I find capable of being imitated by us poor mortals — wisdom. Fine, but why does the antiphon end with a plea for wisdom to teach us in the way of prudence?

Prudence?

I grew up in Waynedale, a small, blue-collar town in northeast Indiana which lost its independence in the 1950's to the evil empire of Fort Wayne. I don't recall ever hearing the word prudence until I got to high school and one of my English teachers had that as her name. I subsequently learned that it was a popular name for girls among the Puritans who settled Massachusetts and the Quakers who settled Pennsylvania. To a Waynedaler like me, it simply meant think before you act. In other words, don't do something stupid or take irresponsible chances. Forrest Gump could have grown up in Waynedale.

So what is the relationship between wisdom and prudence? Are they the same thing? Like with most questions I confront, I found that going back to classical thinkers helped me understand why wisdom teaches prudence.

An article posted by the Scholé Academy, an organization dedicated to classical educational models, straightened me out. The writer, Eddie Kotynski, equated prudence with discernment, an ability to see clearly and act on that sight. That sounds a lot like wisdom to me so its connection to prudence makes perfect sense.

Prudence requires the intellect and the conscience act in concert, but that is not enough. Knowing what is right and good is of little value without the will to act accordingly. It may prevent you from doing the wrong thing but that is only half the battle of living a life of prudence. Thinking prudently requires acting prudently. This is what the wise person does every day. That's the hard part.

Kotynski is clear on this. He calls prudence "a goal to be pursued and not an achievement to be had." That sounds to me like a plebeian yet realistic definition of a New Year's resolution. I just need to break it down into manageable chunks, simplest chunks to be addressed first.

So in 2022 I will avoid doing stupid things as best I can. Even If I am successful at that, I still haven't traveled far down the path to prudence. There is still the essentiality of doing the right

thing, which can only be done with discernment. I will go back to St. Paul one more time and adopt his admonition to do what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). I think my simple resolution just became more difficult.

Will I succeed? My recollection of high school and college grading scales is that 70 percent is a passing grade. Then there is the undergraduate's salvation, grading on the curve, which in this case is simply a Pharisaical argument that at least I am not as bad as others.

Perhaps I can convince my family and friends to apply this generous rubric to my actions although I don't want to encourage them to spend the year keeping score. That's already being taken care of in my household.

Meanwhile, there is that extra weight which so displeases my doctor.

## The Soaring Music of Christmas

(Dec. 17) — The human race is at once an intellectual one and a sensory one. Both capabilities serve to enhance our appreciation of the world and the people around us. Our better natures take substance when these act in concert.

There is no better time to experience this than Christmas. Christmas sights, smells and sounds are unique to the season.

I have young grandchildren and they don't get hung up on the intellectual difficulties of understanding the doctrinal issues of an Incarnate God and a virgin birth. To them it's simply Baby Jesus in the manger. It is only adults who try to rationalize this miracle into the tightly constrained and limited box that is the human mind.

Whether child or adult, we all can sense the difference of the Christmas season as we progress through Advent in preparation for what is the most significant event in human history. The parament colors in our churches change to Advent blue. Decorations begin to appear in businesses, at home and along our streets. Lots of lights, sometimes to the extent of garishness, never cease

to thrill the young child in each of us. Festivals of lights abound.

Yet it is the music that sets this season apart. Christmas music provides a sensory experience all its own. No, I'm not talking about "Grandma Got Run over by a Reindeer." Whoever wrote that song has a lot of explaining to do.

Think about the traditional Christmas carols. Of course the lyrics are unique to Christmas but even the music is set apart for this season. Are any of the traditional Christmas carol tunes used at other times during the year? Can you imagine the quiet chords of "Silent Night" being the background for a karaoke session at the neighborhood tavern?

No, Christmas music is written for a specific purpose by devout musicians under religious inspiration. Johan Sebastian Bach is arguably history's greatest composer and not only for the sheer volume of his work. Listen to his oratorio for Christmas Day and you will experience the divine surrealism of heaven on earth. And George Friedrich Handel's Messiah score simply cannot be heard without one's spirit soaring with the song of the angels. And he wrote that in two weeks?

Listening to Christmas music is one thing and a very good thing at that. It is even better to experience it in a place for which this music was written to be performed.

Envision the gothic cathedrals still found in many of our Indiana cities such as my hometown of Fort Wayne. Think of the soaring space rising upward to the vaulted ceilings and high, stained-glass windows filtering brilliant sunlight through prisms of color. Our medieval forebears, many of whom dedicated generations of their labor and craftsmanship to build these monuments to God, knew exactly what they were doing. Read Ken Follett's "Pillars of the Earth" trilogy to get an insight to the faith of these people, serf and peasant and lord all united in service to God.

OK, I realize that human nature is what it is, so the motivations of some may not have been pure. Yet look at what they produced. I have toured some amazing churches in Europe, built over

centuries and rebuilt as needed after each war. Even in a now secularized continent, the native citizens are proud of their cathedrals and reverential toward them.

Unfortunately, we all know what Christmas has become. Merry Christmas has given way to Happy Holidays so as not to offend non-Christians and secularists (although they all line up to get a paid holiday off work every Dec. 25). The 12 days of Christmas, Dec. 25 through Jan. 5, have been replaced with a pre-Christmas retail sales period which seems to start earlier and earlier each year. It is simply appalling how quickly Christmas and winter-season commercials are replaced with spring-oriented ones. Could Valentine's Day advertising please not start until at least the day after Epiphany?

Still, the faithful will survive this secularization of the most holy day of our calendar. It remains an official federal holiday with the name Christmas Day at least until our new political masters get around to purging it with something woke acceptable. I await Joe Biden's Christmas message to the nation, but perhaps I would be better served to tune in to Queen Elizabeth's message to her British subjects. That's a sad commentary about "one nation under God."

Santa Clauses, evergreen trees and LED lights notwithstanding, Christmas is in its essence a religious observation of an event that changed the world. It is a day when transcendence and imminence meet — when eternity and time coincide. Human intellect and emotion are unable to fully absorb this. That leaves only belief, which is enough. Just ask a young child. ♦



# The Bookshelf

## Return of the God Hypothesis

“Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe” (Harper One 2021, 450 pages plus extensive notes, \$24 hardcover) by Stephen C. Meyer is a lengthy but careful trek through the history of scientific thought about the universe. Meyer has a doctorate in the philosophy of science from Cambridge University and has written on the subject before.

The first section of the book deals with the history of the supposed battle between religion and science. Meyer argues that the great advances in scientific thinking happened only in the early modern Christian West. The fathers of the scientific revolution — Newton, Copernicus, Kepler, Boyle, etc. — were devout believers pursuing knowledge revealed by God in creation. Meyer walks us through the development of science during the Enlightenment, emphasizing its dependence on a Creator whose divine will is the foundation for all discovery. I particularly liked Meyer’s discussion of William of Ockham’s theory of parsimony, his famous Razor, as being based on reducing all experience and reason to its simplest expression which he found in the authority of Scripture.

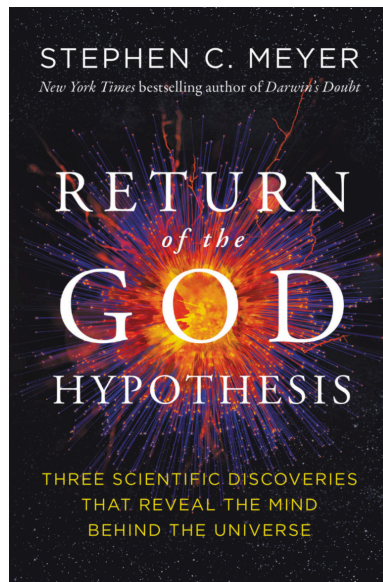
It is an unfortunate left turn during the Enlightenment which removed theistic interpretation from science as empiricism, logical positivism and scientific materialism became dogmas, although not always in agreement with each other. If the existence of God can’t be proved materially, then God must not exist and therefore all divine action excluded, per force. Which leads Meyer into a discussion of several stumbling blocks along the road to perfect knowledge of the universe.

Is the universe finite or infinite? How old is it, assuming it is finite? Is it ever expanding and contracting, or expanding into a spatial infinity? What is the relationship between time and space as each moves toward or away from infinity? Does space curve at its limits? As scientists debated, proved and disproved various hypotheses in solution to these questions, the theory known as the Big Bang emerged. The problem for the self-proclaimed atheists is that the Big Bang posits a creative event.

At this point the book gets quite technical for someone like me who has no science in his education. I recognize names like Einstein, Hubble and Hawking of course and actually could follow Meyer’s brief descriptions of their theories, discoveries and failures. To his credit he uses everyday analogies to explain things such as blowing up a balloon to simulate an expanding universe.

One problem an infinite universe presents is the dark sky at night. If there exists an infinite number of stars, then their light should converge to create perpetual brightness. It was Edgar Allen Poe who saved the day, if you will, by suggesting that these stars were so far away that even billions of years were not enough for their light to reach Earth. Seriously. When in doubt, just add a few billion years more to the theory.

Meyer moves briefly from physics to biology and exposes Neo-Darwinism as what Tom Bethell calls a “house of cards” in his recent book by the same name. He provides a thorough yet interesting explanation of how DNA, RNA, amino acids and proteins work to provide evidence of intelligent design to life forms. He quotes multiple scientists who have calculated the astronomical odds against any of these combinations developing by chance. One calculation resulted in a probability of a single protein resulting from chance as 10<sup>77</sup>. To put this unfathomable number



into context, the number of atoms in our entire galaxy is calculated as “only” 10<sup>65</sup>.

Then there is the Cambrian Explosion which left a nearly uniform set of fully developed fossils of approximately the same age. If Darwin had it right, this cannot be. Where are the gradual evolutionary changes over long periods of time? It is time for Meyer to apply formal logical systems to the question, and he does.

Materialists, which include Neo-Darwinists, use a type of logic called abduction. Abduction reasons the past from the present and arrives at possibilities, not certainties. This is what Sherlock Holmes did, although he called it deduction which is a different logical process that should lead to absolute certainty. It is the descriptive property of a premise pushed to its prescriptive concluding limit, arguing cause from observed effect. But abduction can be a valuable logical tool when used inferentially by examining and discarding other possible conclusions. While still not certainty, it can reach high probability by arriving at the best explanation. Meyer relies on abduction to “prove” that intelligent design is the most likely origin.

The crux of Meyer’s thesis is fully developed in chapters 12-14. It is here that he makes the case for an intelligence as the creative force in the origin of the universe and its design, and finally in the design of life itself. His explanation of abductive logic is well applied to refute any arguments advanced in favor of materialism, pantheism and deism, leaving only theism as the best supported cause of it all. To Meyer it cannot simply be an accident or an impersonal force, nor even a “create it and leave it alone” God. None of these arguments hold up when considering the huge improbability of a universe coming about, organizing itself and creating life.

Meyer spends five chapters debunking his critics, most significantly Stephen Hawking who has become the poster boy for atheistic physics. While I don’t pretend to understand all this, Meyer makes a cogent argument that Hawking’s theories work only if he introduces the concept of imaginary numbers into his equation. This borders on the logical fallacy of begging the

question, or assuming the conclusion in order to construct an argument to prove it. Meyer calls this a “mathematical trick.”

Since the materialists base their case on complex mathematical formulas including the use of imaginary numbers, the crux of the debate about the universe’s origins comes down to three options according to Meyer. First, these formulas exist solely in the human mind but somehow manage to produce a material universe. I wish I could materialize things just by thinking about them. Second, these mathematical solutions exist independent of human intelligence and exist in a non-material universe of ideas. At least this option has the support of Plato’s philosophy of forms. Third, the formulas exist and emanate from a preexisting transcendental mind. In other words, God.

To Meyer’s thinking, the third option is by far the most probable and the only one that can offer a reasonable solution. His three major topics for disputation—the origin of the universe from nothing, its inherent fine-tuning which allowed it to develop into a predictable materiality, and the origin of human life with its unique consciousness—can only be explained by a transcendent God outside of time, space, matter and energy.

Yet Meyer is quick to dismiss pseudo theistic-like theories. The deists and their one-and-done God, pantheists and their impersonal gods, and the “God of the Gaps” partisans who give God credit for unexplainable things only temporarily until science can explain things materialistically which, of course, is fully anticipated. It is only an activist, purposeful God that can meet the abductive goal of the most probable solution.

What Meyer makes clear is that Newton’s theistic science remains superior to Hawking, Dawkins, et. al., and their imaginary numbers, mathematical tricksterism and the “smuggling” of information into their theories to prop them up. He gleefully points out that all these mathematical formulas ostensibly proving purely materialistic solutions only work when an intelligent designer fudges them from outside.

What Meyer does not do is address the Genesis account of creation in six days, nor does he ever give any hint that he holds to a young earth chronology. His discussion of the Cambrian Explosion does not attempt to place it in time other than where the Darwinists already have assigned it. Perhaps that is the subject of a future book.

After spending three weeks working through this book, my brain is both stimulated and worn down . . . which I think is proof of law of thermodynamics about entropy. If I never read anything again about string theory, the universal wave function and, worst of all, Boltzmann brains, it still will be too soon. I think I need a “safe space” where complex scientific stuff is not allowed.

*Recommendation:* Excellent book even if weighted down with substantial technical background for cosmology and astrophysics. It will be tough sledding for the non-scientific but worth the time. Even very finite time . . .

### In the Hurricane's Eye

“In the Hurricane's Eye: The Genius of George Washington and the Victory at Yorktown” (Viking 2018, 280 pages plus extensive notes, \$17 hardcover) is Nathaniel Philbrick's third installment in his trilogy on the American War of Independence. (“Bunker Hill: a City, a Siege, a Revolution” and “Valiant Ambition: George Washington, Benedict Arnold, and the Fate of the American Revolution” are the first two published previously.)

Philbrick does not purport to write a comprehensive history of the war; rather, he focuses on key personalities at various stages of the conflict. George Washington is always front and center with Nathaniel Greene getting well-deserved attention in this volume. There are scoundrels aplenty: Horatio Gates, who I believe

gets off a little bit too easily given his negative contribution to the cause, and most of the French and British admirals who generally failed in their missions. Even Benedict Arnold makes a cameo appearance in his role as a British general and receives back-handed praise for the salutary effect his treason had on rallying support for the Patriot cause.

Much of the book centers on Washington's relationship with his new French allies, particularly the Comte de Rochambeau who correctly but frustratingly always acted in the best interest of France. If this coincided with what Washington wanted, good and well, but it often drove Washington to anger and despair.

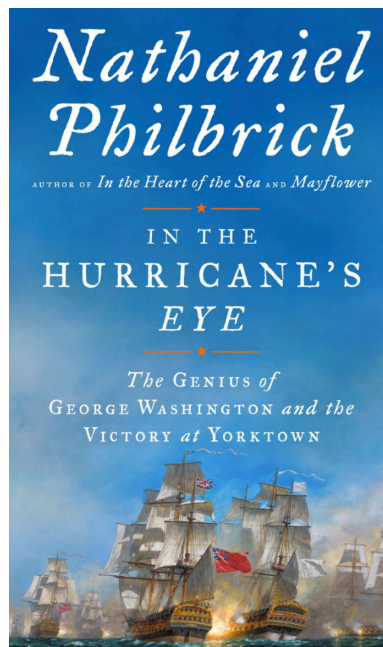
Philbrick paints a fair picture of Washington's strategic genius but asserts that

Washington blotted his copybook in his stubborn determination to retake New York City. Eventually he did give in to the counsel of his French allies and his American subordinates who all saw the incredible stroke of luck Charles Cornwallis presented by isolating his army on the Virginia peninsula. The author suggests that Washington took more credit than he deserved after the fact, but this does not tarnish the sheen of this icon's place in our history.

Of course the book takes the obligatory detours to preach against the evils of slavery and Washington's ambivalence toward

it. I take issue with Philbrick's assertion that Yorktown was where “the road to the Civil War began.” He bases this on the clause in the capitulation agreement that required Cornwallis return all former slaves with his army to their former masters. I think he overstates the case for making a civil war inevitable, but there it is.

His discussion of the politics within the Royal Navy is quite interesting. He pulls no punches on which admirals he admires and which he





considers grossly incompetent. In any event the British fleet arrived too late to affect the Yorktown outcome and then lost a naval battle it arguably should have won.

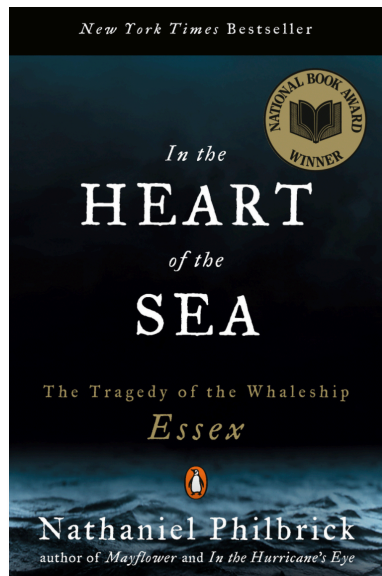
Philbrook deserves approbation for keeping his main theme in mind, that theme being the book's subtitle. In spite of Washington's occasional misjudgments and his sometimes irritating ego, the author still is a firm believer in the native genius of the man, his intellect and his character. While Philbrook never uses the term, he supports the Great Men theory of history. I agree; without George Washington there would have been no military victory in the war and probably no success as a new nation.

*Recommendation:* Decent if not comprehensive history of the war. Excellent character study of George Washington as commander in chief. Philbrook is one of my favorite historians, but see below.

### In the Heart of the Sea

"In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex" also by Nathaniel Philbrick (Penguin Books 2000, 301 pages, \$13 paperback) is the true story that served as the basis for Herman Melville's "Moby Dick." Philbrick lived for a time on Nantucket and became interested in its seafaring lore. Nantucket was the center for whaling, a necessary occupation in the early nineteenth century as whale oil was used in lamps. The Essex was attacked by a giant whale, obviously enraged by wounds from a previous whaling crew, and overturned the boat. The crew escaped in their longboats and then spent months in the open sea navigating by dead reckoning. Their suffering was indescribable, especially the decision to resort to cannibalism to survive. Fortunately, two diaries were saved for Philbrick's research.

*Recommendation:* This is a story of bravery, of desperation and of moral exigency. Fair warning.



"Travels with George: In search of Washington and His Legacy" (Viking 2021, 313 pages plus modest notes, \$15 hardcover) is the only Philbrook book that I didn't thoroughly enjoy. The subject of the book is following President George Washington as he toured every state in the new union. It is at once a travelog of late eighteenth century America and a reflection on Washington as a great man. Or, almost a great man. What caused me to grade this book below Philbrook's others is his propensity to launch into a sermon on the evils of slavery in what seems like every dozen pages or so. Washington, whom Philbrook generally holds in high regard, is even charged with an "unforgivable sin" for relentlessly chasing an escaped slave.

*Recommendation:* A decent book, just not my favorite of his.

### The War of Jenkin's Ear

When studying American colonial history in grade school, I was impressed and confused with all the wars our forebears undertook on behalf of Great Britain. The French and Indian War is best known but it was joined by King William's War, Queen Anne's War and King George's War, all of which were colonial sideshows of larger wars between the major powers in Europe and named for the reigning British monarch.

As I said, these were sideshows but important nonetheless as Britain used her colonial militias to distract the French. The most important of these also had the most unique name — The War of Jenkin's Ear. Other than its colorful name, most know little about this war. Journalist Robert Gaudi attempts to set the record straight in "The War of Jenkin's Ear: The Forgotten Struggle for North and South American, 1739-1742" (Pegasus Books 2021, 364 pages, \$21 hardcover) but I'm not sure if he succeeded at that.

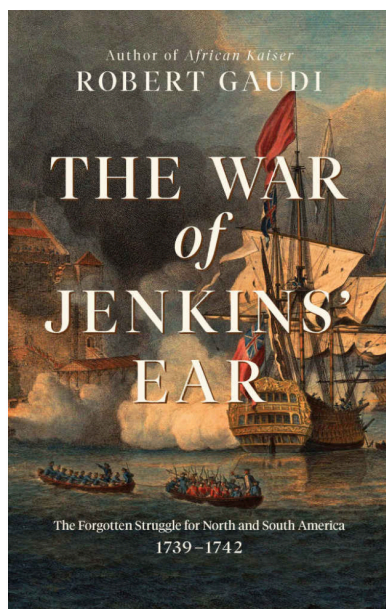
This is not meant as a criticism as he gives an excellent history of imperial struggle during the high point of the Enlightenment. The eighteenth century was an age of military genius, mercantilism, the birth of classical liberalism, American colonies coming of age and, most important of all, international trade. Gaudi takes up each of these themes in turn in what I consider to be a primer for that wonderful century.

His second chapter is perhaps his best. Entitled “Deep Background,” these 48 pages provide just that. One will learn about the dynastic ferment that was western Europe and all the wars between shifting alliances of the great powers, with repercussions for new world colonists both North and South.

He spends more than a few words explaining the economics of the slave trade, or technically the “Asiento de Negros” as it was referred to in several treaties among erstwhile belligerents. Gaudi asserts that no nation made a profit in this unfortunate business, at least not from human cargo. What the Asiento provided was the platform to engage in wholesale smuggling with the connivance of all concerned.

He also gives background on the great investment bubbles of the century, John Law’s Mississippi Company and England’s South Seas Company. These Ponzi schemes worked because the operators sensibly gave stock to high government officials and royal family members. Eventually, “irrational exuberance” caught up with them too.

Gaudi devotes chapters to several of the more colorful characters of the age: Admiral Edward Vernon, for whom Laurence Washington named his Potomac plantation; General James Oglethorpe, the moralistic founder of the Georgia colony; Blas de Lezo y Olavarrieta (Don Blass to the English), who almost single handedly saved Spain’s new world colonies from English arms.



Perhaps the most interesting point the author makes is to pinpoint the roots of America’s War for Independence in the treatment of colonial military volunteers. Britain authorized the recruitment of an American regiment to serve as equals with her own troops but local commanders reneged on the promise. Many were reassigned to ship crews and other menial labor. British officers made it plain these colonials were not trusted. In fact the term “Americans” may have been coined during this war to indicate disdain for these inferiors.

There is a chapter or two on the actual war, which ended badly for England. Incompetence at both the political and military level certainly played its part. In spite of an overwhelming advantage in men and materiel, Britain snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Gaudi’s thesis is that this minor war actually had major consequences. Spain retained her American colonies for another 80 or so years and was in position to assist the British colonies in their war for independence 35 years later. This was the significance of Britain’s defeat: the American colonists lost this war as Britain’s allies only to be strengthened for a future struggle.

What happened to the two protagonists who jointly served as the putative *casas belli*? Robert Jenkins went on to a career as a successful and respected colonial administrator while his tormentor Juan de León Fandiño was captured near the end of the war and sent in chains to England where he either was executed for piracy or died in naval prison.

*Recommendation:* Excellent history of the imperial century while providing one the few accounts of this unusually named war.

## Protector

Historical fiction serves a purpose, at least for me. It fills in background information on eras and events I know little about without the intellectual



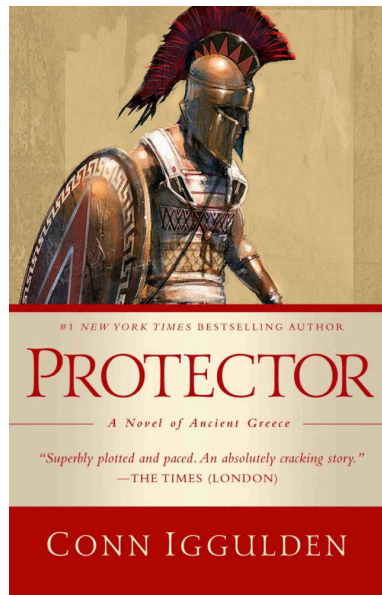
demands of working through some dense academic study. The key is to find an author who can get inside the head of the historical figures without bogging down the story with deep psychological studies based on lengthy soliloquys of their tortured thought processes. (Jeff Shaara, I'm talking about you.)

Conn Iggulden gets close to that line but doesn't cross it. At least he keeps the musings short and to the point. "Protector: A Novel of Ancient Greece" (Pegasus Books 2021, 397 pages, \$23 hardcover) recounts the epic land and sea battles between the semi-united Greek city-states and Persian emperor Xerxes. While there are extensive battle accounts, most of the book deals with the interplay among Athenian and Spartan leaders.

The battles are Salamis and Plataea, the sea and land victories by the Greeks which sent Xerxes packing. But it is the political interactions that fascinate the most: Athens vs. Sparta or Themistocles vs. Xanthippus vs. the Athenian Assembly. Twenty-first century America did not invent dirty politics.

I have always had doubts about Athens' being a good model of democracy. It too often resorted to mobocracy especially in the period subsequent to this book, the Peloponnesian Wars. Iggulden lays the foundation for that disastrous internecine fight in how he portrays a deep and fundamental distrust between Sparta and Athens. The way Iggulden tells it, it was only Athens' threat to ally with Persia against Sparta that brought Spartan hoplites back after their heroic but ineffective stand at Thermopylae.

This is not my period of avocational expertise so I can't validate or gainsay Iggulden. I give him high marks for his illustration of the tensions in Athens over its commitment to strict democratic practice over against the need for extreme measures due to the exigency of a war going badly.



(Athens is abandoned by its citizens twice prior to the Persians burning the city to the ground.) Could this be an object lesson to us as we argue over the measures taken by governmental officials to protect the public from covid?

War and book hero Themistocles is sent into exile once the Assembly can meet in a rebuilt Athens and he eventually escapes to Xerxes' court of all places to avoid an execution team sent by his enemies back home. This is a presage of Alcibiades fleeing Athens to enlist with Sparta in the

Peloponnesian Wars to escape a death sentence by a mob unhappy with the human cost of Alcibiades' victories.

Iggulden has written several novels about Athens and Sparta and has separate series on ancient Rome and the English Wars of the Roses. He even has one on the Mongols. I have read two of his Roman ones but nothing in the other series.

*Recommendation:* OK if you are interested in the historical period and want something light, or at least lighter than a serious history.

### Books I Couldn't Finish

*Reviewer's note:* I finally broke an old habit sustained only by my inherited German stubbornness. Something deep in my psyche absolutely insisted that any book I start must be read through to the end. I will blame being assigned the Journal's book review column as the reason for my overdue reassessment. I pick up a lot of books with titles which sound interesting but learn too often that I don't agree with the author's theme or find his writing style too turgid or pedestrian. With the permission of the editor, I will begin listing those books I send back to my local library unread and give a brief reason for that. I am assuming that if I don't like the book, much of the IPR membership won't either. Of course, your mileage may vary. Hence these notes.

**The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2020, 227 pages plus notes, \$21 hardcover) by Michael J. Sandel. I was attracted to what I thought was Sandel's solution to the problem of the excessive influence of the coastal elites. I was disabused of that notion in a hurry as he laments the election of Donald Trump as a sign of all that is wrong in America. He uses the recent college admission scandals as a case study in the abuse of American-style meritocracy. Fair enough, but what is the lesson to be learned? It was no surprise that he launched on a Piketty-like condemnation of income inequality, claiming the lower classes have not benefited from any economic advances and comparing us unfavorably to Europe's enlightened social welfare systems. Of course the poor have no incentives to raise their standards of living through education and work. That's when I put it down.

**Rescuing Socrates: How the Great Books Changed My Life and Why They Matter for a New Generation** (Princeton University Press, 238 pages, \$20 hardcover) by Roosevelt Montás. This is the story of the Great Books curriculum at Columbia University as told

by a former student and current professor. That's why I picked it up, expecting to read an apology (in the original Greek meaning of the word) for a liberal education. There is that but much of the book is devoted to the author's autobiography, a book genre I dislike and avoid at all costs. That was strike one. Strikes two and three were two of his four great thinkers of Western Civilization. St. Augustine — great as he is one of my favorite theologians and thinkers; Socrates — okay again although I was never sure where Socrates ended and Plato started when I took freshman philosophy; Sigmund Freud — hardly, to my mind, a usefully great thinker even though Freud anointed himself as the third great “blow” to traditional Western thought, Copernicus and Darwin being the previous two; and Mahandas Gandhi — certainly a great thinker but does not impress me with his universalistic concept of God as ultimate Truth. I actually made it three-quarters of the way through this book before skimming, and skimming at light speed, through the rest. His background history of the Columbia curriculum and defense of it against the anti-Western ideology prevalent today is probably worth the read. ♦

# Backgrounders

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



## SAT Bias? It's a Good Thing

(Feb. 1) — US News reported that Cal State University no longer requires the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). That is so the school system can “bolster the momentum building in the higher education community to drop the testing requirement as schools make more concerted efforts to diversify their campuses.”

Following this “momentum,” Indiana schools, public and private, also offer on a temporary basis “test optional” admission protocols, including Butler University, IU, Purdue and all their branch campuses, Notre Dame, Valparaiso, Franklin and the University of Indianapolis.

Is optional SAT and ACT testing the best policy?

PrepScholar, an online SAT/ACT preparatory site, observed that “research has shown that students from more affluent backgrounds consistently have higher SAT and ACT scores, so many schools are dropping the standardized test requirement so students from more disadvantaged backgrounds aren’t put at a further disadvantage during the college admissions process.” The assumption is that bias is at work and correlation equals causation.

In “What Matters Most for College Completion? Academic Preparation is the Key,” Matthew Chingos states that “Demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status consistently predict college enrollment and success rates. Troubling disparities between students of color and their white peers and among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds persist.” California educators observed that “High school GPA as a

predictor of college success results in a much higher representation of low income and underrepresented minority students in the top of the UC applicant pool, than do SAT scores.”

However, Anthony Carnavale, et al., says, “Results obtained from this experiment show that the current admissions system disproportionately benefits affluent Whites, and supports the argument that just as an SAT-only admissions standard isn’t the answer, neither is an admissions process without any standardization at all.”

Professor Meredith Frey wrote in 2019 “Fifteen years ago, Frey and Detterman established that the SAT (and later, with Koenig, the ACT) was substantially correlated with measures of general cognitive ability and could be used as a proxy measure for intelligence.” The research done by Frey and Detterman has been replicated by others to this end: “The SAT predicts college achievement, and a combination of SAT scores and high school grades offer the best prediction of student success. In the most recent validity sample of nearly a quarter million students, SAT scores and high school GPA combined offered the best predictor of first year GPA for college students.” Paul Westrick, et al., also looked at the validity of the SAT. They found that “SAT scores are strongly predictive of college performance — students with higher SAT scores are more likely to have higher grades in college.” They concluded that “Using SAT was a useful way to predict future academic performance.” Finally — and ironically — they discovered that “Colleges can use SAT scores to identify students who may be in need of academic support before they start college and throughout their college education.”

The conclusion is that the SAT appears unbiased and useful for assessing potential student performance. Nonetheless, I believe the SAT has a bias.

M.M. Jaeger investigated factors that influence educational success. He stated that “resources in the extended family compensate for lacking resources in low-SES (socio-economic

status) families, which in turn promote children's educational success. The main conclusion is that the total effect of family background on educational success originates in the immediate family, the extended family and in interactions between these two family environments." Socioeconomic status has little effect on educational success compared to a supportive "immediate family" and extended family of close relatives.

Other researchers have made similar observations: "Parental involvement variables that show promises according to their correlations with academic achievement are: a) reading at home, b) parents that are holding high expectations/aspirations for their children's academic achievement and schooling, c) communication between parents and children regarding school, d) parental encouragement and support for learning." Another article noted that "parental involvement . . . in children's schooling and children's academic adjustment (i.e., achievement, engagement and motivation) that were maintained over time" promoted educational success. As well, "parents' involvement was also positively related to children's social . . . and emotional adjustment." Further, parental involvement "negatively related to their delinquency." Finally and importantly, they found that "There was little variation due to age, ethnicity or socioeconomic status in the links between different types of involvement and children's academic adjustment."

Whatever the unalterable characteristics a child might display and regardless of SES, children fare well in school with involved parents who are caring and attentive to the child's education. Love and care trump ethnicity, race and socioeconomic status.

So yes, SAT scores are biased in favor of those kids, the ones with parents who care.

### **Wait, Here's More SAT Bias**

*(Feb. 4)* — When I was 7 years old, my parents forced me and my brother to read a book a week during summer vacation. "Forced" is the most

accurate word because my Irish twin and I had little or no use for books when so many other activities availed themselves — swimming in the Long Island Sound, riding bikes, playing guns in the woods, tossing a baseball around, climbing trees and just lying around in the grass. Instead, for several years, we had to read books. We thought our parents bordered on sadistic.

We moved in 7th grade and I met a kid named Gerry. His parents had the same rule, if you can believe it! Read books even during summer vacation. We became reading buddies.

In our youth, we did not know that our parents were on to something that researchers over the years have shown to be true. E. G. Spira studied low-income first graders who had trouble reading. They found that that "the divergence between children who improved and those who did not was established by the end of 2nd grade." Early grades appear to be important to children's ability to read.

The importance of reading proficiency in early grades, as differentiated from mere basic reading ability or below basic reading ability, has been demonstrated repeatedly. As one researcher said, "educators and researchers have long recognized the importance of mastering reading by the end of third grade. Students who fail to reach this critical milestone often falter in the later grades and drop out before earning a high school diploma." That researcher also found that "graduation rates for black and Hispanic students who were not proficient readers in third grade lagged far behind those for white students with the same reading skills."

Reading expands minds, young and old, though third-grade reading proficiency is crucial. As research for the Annie B. Casey Foundation put it, "For children, a critical transition takes place during elementary school: until the end of third grade, most students are learning to read. Beginning in fourth grade, however, students begin reading to learn." In 4th grade, various subjects are accessed through reading. Math depends on reading, history depends on reading,



geography depends on reading, and so on. And ability to read extends far beyond the early grades: “Not only does reading serve as the major foundational skill for school-based learning, but reading ability is strongly related to opportunities for academic and vocational success.”

Others noted the ability to read as the first component of educational success (my parents were clairvoyant): “Parental involvement variables that show promises according to their correlations with academic achievement are: a) reading at home, b) parents that are holding high expectations-aspirations for their children’s academic achievement and schooling, c) communication between parents and children regarding school, d) parental encouragement and support for learning.”

SAT tests do indeed measure accurately a student’s “general cognitive ability” and could be used as a proxy measure for intelligence, but they are biased. They are biased in favor of people who read.

As an endnote: After losing contact with Gerry for 45 years, I found his address. I wrote him a note thanking him for being a friend who encouraged reading in me. I told him I’d become a professor.

He wrote back, thanking me for getting in touch with him. “I’m a professor, too,” he added.

## A Gender Imbalance on Campus

*(Jan. 12) — President Daniels:*

I hope the school year began well and stays that way.

My friend, a proud Boilermaker, shares your missives with me, including your recent “Open Letter to the People of Purdue,” in which you lament the imbalance of men and women on campus.

I taught for over 40 years in higher education. My last stop, of 24 years, was Butler University, where I was an instructor (I dropped out of my career to raise our children). Prior to Butler, I was an associate professor, chair of the philosophy/ religion department, and director of the school-

wide required ethics course at St. Joseph’s College. In 1991, I originated the Men’s Studies area for the Popular Culture/ American Culture Association. I have been aware of, experienced, and researched imbalances between men and women for over 50 years.

The language I used in the 1970s provoked people to call me “an idiot leftist.” These days, I use the same language but am called “an idiot right-winger.” Thinking of equality as a principle has not changed for me or anyone enamored of Betty Friedan’s ideas and suggestions. However, the principle of equality found in her book “The Feminine Mystique,” has changed over the years from individual equality to group equality. The change means that individuals in some groups will be excluded from enjoying society’s opportunities and benefits.

For 40 years, the group identified as “men” or “male,” has been denigrated. The abundance of our society’s negative comments and attitudes toward men and boys has taught boys that they are the wrong sex. Why aspire to college? The trend in enrollment shifted back in the 1980s. Further, policy decisions are guided by the idea that one sex should be favored over the other. Affirmative action and Title IX have not been applied as principled legislation.

Higher education demonstrates as much when campuses have women’s studies majors but no men’s studies major, or women’s centers but no men’s centers — this despite the fact that men commit suicide four times as much as women and that men are two and one-half times more like to suffer a death of despair. That sort of data suggests a need for men’s studies and men’s centers on campus.

Please note that Purdue, which is an excellent school and one whose leadership — yours — I admire, is not alone. When I was at Butler, enrollment there was well over 60 percent female.

In order to regain equality, either by group numbers or on the basis of individual opportunity, research and policy must proceed beyond ideological cant. Here is research from a 2018 paper I wrote:



“That girls and women are not as involved in STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) may suggest bias against females. However, recent research based on data from almost a half million teens from 67 countries, suggests otherwise. A study published in *Psychological Science* in February “showed that girls performed similarly to or better than boys in science . . . and in nearly all countries, more girls appeared capable of college-level STEM study than had enrolled.” In short, women have the talent to enter STEM occupations. However, the study found that ‘paradoxically, the sex differences in the magnitude of relative academic strengths and pursuit of STEM degrees rose with increases in national gender equality.’ The researchers, Gijsbert Stoet and David Geary, concluded that ‘life-quality pressures in less gender-equal countries promote girls’ and women’s engagement in STEM subjects.”

Girls were as successful as boys in STEM subjects, but girls were considerably more skilled than boys in the cognitive area of reading. If young people are encouraged to choose careers and study by their strengths, boys would head toward STEM classes but girls could head in more directions. The irony is that the countries with the greatest gender equality, for example, Norway and Finland, had the least female STEM graduates. The research is relatively new so it must be understood with some caution, but the research surely calls into question a societal bias against females in STEM domains.

If women are more broadly competent, they are more likely to meet admission requirements in more diverse fields. One consequence is a higher female enrollment.

The problems associated with imbalances between the sexes, wherever they appear, cannot be fixed soon. Minimally, the “fix” must come at the high school level. More attention must be given to boys and young men so they see and can realize the possibility of non-traditional roles. Our society encouraged women to become doctors and it now has a nursing shortage. High schools encourage women to pursue STEM courses. Do

high schools encourage men to pursue “caring” careers?

Unless and until society includes all groups, we will continue to have the imbalances that you lament. And as your open letter to the Purdue community attests, you and I prefer inclusion to exclusion, equality to inequality.

## A Christmas Greeting from Adam Smith

*This year’s Christmas Letter is written as if by Adam Smith. I note that Smith was an ethicist first and an economist only second, writing “Theory of Moral Sentiments” in 1759 (without a revision) and “Wealth of Nations” seven years later (with five revisions before his death in 1796).*

(Dec. 22) — Glad Tidings, May your day be well met.

I write in the spirit of the times, that you would be more suitably disposed toward charitable acts in this most giving of seasons. And I ask that you may indulge me the spirit of charity as I use language from my books and do not always put pen to page anew.

Were such an indulgence granted, I would most humbly be grateful, for such indulgence would be consistent with my first book’s opening sentence: “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortunes of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it.” After all, “nature exhorts people to acts of beneficence,” though no recompense may be forthcoming nor gain made. In this glorious and festive season, set aside self-interest and pursue beneficence.

It may be added, too, that we realize more fully our humanity when exercising action based on “fellow-feeling.” It is as I said, “to feel much for others and little for ourselves, to restrain our selfish desires, and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature.” Think of that perfection during the year’s

season of joy. Go forth and greet others with the warmth of fellow feeling.

Reflect upon your good fortune and, particularly, take note of and care for the less fortunate among us. I observed that “The disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful . . . and to neglect persons of poor and mean condition . . . is the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.” As well, it is good practice to help the needy and the indisposed, for our fortunes may turn someday and we be among them — and “we suffer more . . . when we fall from a better to a worse situation, than we ever enjoy when we rise from a worse to a better.” We do well to concern ourselves with people in all stations of life, for life’s fortunes may turn against us.

You who have had great blessings in life, provide for others generously. It is sensible “that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more in that proportion.” You who have much, be thankful and give of those blessings. It is as I noted, “all for ourselves and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind,” but “if masters would always listen to the dictates of reason and humanity,” they would be led to kindness and, nay, gratitude for the chance to help others.

Let us all realize that every person’s “own interest is connected with the prosperity of society, and that the happiness, perhaps the preservation of his existence, depends upon its preservation.” I pray we be mindful of our blessings and attentive to those in “poor and mean condition.” Such care and attention are appropriate for this season and necessary in every season.

Be of good will and a glad heart.

Most faithfully yours, Adam Smith.

## Filling a Tax Piggy Bank

Thomas Heller, a Columbus resident and an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, writes on Tax Increment Finance and other assorted financery.



(Jan. 31) — Michael Leppert, a columnist and lecturer at Indiana University, recently shed light on the \$5 billion in taxes already paid and collected that the state of Indiana has amassed in a budget reserve fund. That is money now bubbling over 12.5 percent of general-fund spending levels and triggering an automatic refund to state taxpayers. Leppert argues that the state should not be in the business of stuffing a piggy bank with our taxes.

I agree, but Leppert apparently is unaware this same thing is happening at local governments, although it is far less visible — and far less reported — than the state’s bulging coffers. It is just as real, however, with many, many tens of millions of tax monies already paid and collected accumulating in various bank accounts with no plans to spend it.

Where I live, one TIF (Tax Increment Financing) district last reported an end-of-year cash balance of \$15 million, growing by \$3.5 million a year. They apparently can’t spend it fast enough. I have elsewhere projected it will amass \$40 million in unearned tax revenue.

Another TIF district is collecting tax revenues at three times the rate of its ongoing annual debt service. Ordinarily, bondholders are satisfied with a 25-percent bond reserve, but at this pace this district will build up another \$40 million reserve; it’s already reached \$13 million.

And a third TIF district has just been formed. Although the bonds it plans for won’t even draw upon its TIF revenues, that TIF already is poised to lay claim to new tax revenues from virtually all the developable commercial property for the next quarter century. All of this is a way to accumulate money beyond the public’s view.

That’s just in the city.

The county has a TIF that won't be able to address the increased truck traffic that its development will necessitate. The county already has granted abatements to the trucking firms who've committed to build terminal facilities there. And the state has provided them a handsome 25-percent tax credit for their facilities. (Our economic development guy didn't bother to inform the county commissioners or council of this when he presented their request for abatement.)

With all these special funds collecting taxes and stashing that money into idle bank accounts, we have to wonder who's in charge — and for whose benefit is this being done? Those are pertinent questions because we've seen the consequence: My city's property-tax rate has risen 36 percent since all this started.

Maybe Michael Leppert and the folks at Indiana University can suggest a remedy.

Jason Arp, for nine years a trader in mortgaged-backed securities for Bank of America, was reelected last year to his second term representing the 4th District on the Fort Wayne City Council. A version of this essay originally appeared in the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette.



## Let's Salvage Competition

(Jan. 21) — When I was a kid in the late 1970s, we had one telephone in our house. It was a drab green color and had a very long chord to allot the user some freedom to roam into the living room or dining room if they were adventurous. We could only talk to grandparents a state away for just a few seconds because the call was so expensive for a blue-collar family. Our aunt in Montana got to say “hello” once a year. This was life under the regime of a private monopoly mandated and regulated by the government.

Fast forward 40 years when the days of Ma Bell are a distant, not-so-fond memory, when we have a multitude of choices for communications, digital, cell phone, and yes even a home phone. All of that can be delivered by a variety of sources —

so many and at prices that people are able to talk for hours to relatives a thousand miles away.

A contributor to this leap into the future was the Reagan Administration's decision to break up the government-supported monopoly of telephone services.

I bring this market miracle to mind as an example of what can be achieved as the city I serve as a councilman suffers through the horrors of government-planned services through a monopoly provider. Regular followers of Fort Wayne politics may remember a resolution (R-19-07-36) I submitted in mid-2019 that called on the city administration to do away with the ordinance that prohibits single-family residential properties from privately contracting for garbage collection, thus breaking up a monopoly.

This prompted wailing and gnashing of teeth among Democrats and Republicans alike because it threatened to relinquish the control of a particular market. (If there is one thing politicians love, it's the appearance of control.) There were lots of heckles about the inability of people to handle this mundane task without government assistance. Most politicians believe history started today, thus they didn't remember that as recently as 2006 when thousands of Aboite Township residents were not annexed into the city yet. The majority of these homeowners had contracted with garbage haulers of their choice through their neighborhood associations.

A feature of the current mess is the contractor was selected by a process dictated by state law that requires municipalities to award the lowest bidder these types of contracts. This ensured that the winner has locked in a rate of revenue that has proven to be insufficient to meet shifting obligations (labor, gas, parts, maintenance) in an environment of shortages and rising prices. Their contract locked in their demise, and to make up for these issues the city has hired additional drivers and rented trucks outside the contract to try to keep the heaps from piling further.

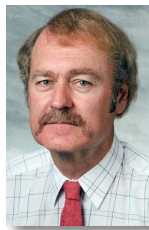
One of the beauties of the natural order (as opposed to arrangements coerced by the state) is the benefits that accrue in the way of “portfolio

diversity of the whole orchestrated by the particulars” — in our example, garbage contracts. The city government, however, enters into a single contract with a single provider for all the residents of single-family homes (apartments and commercial properties are free to contract as they like.) A failure of that single contractor affects 80,000 households.

In contrast, in a market-based arrangement there would be many contractors — and if any were to fail, neighborhood leaders could just hire another of among the many. Competition would drive better customer experiences, technological advances and maintain prices that satisfy the customer’s desire for economy and the vendors’ ability to meet their obligations.

As people who claim to live in the Land of the Free, we should be brave enough to allow market forces to work to our advantage, to help pick up the garbage.

John Gaski, Ph.D., an adjunct scholar of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation and an associate professor of marketing at Notre Dame, is a longtime registered Democrat, and occasional registered Republican — intermittently, never simultaneously.



### The *Fili*-busted Race Card

(Jan. 14) — So the Democrats are playing the race card against the GOP on the Senate filibuster rule, calling Republicans “racist” if they oppose the old custom’s ad hoc elimination. What a surprise. The Democrats play the race card against everyone and everything that stand in their way on any issue, no matter how hypocritical it is for them, i.e., the political group with the most racist record of any major party in American history. Recall slavery, the Confederacy, segregation, Jim Crow, eugenics, Bull Connor and the Ku Klux Klan, just to name a few Democrat distinctions.

Of course, today’s Democrats fully expect their shameless, race-mongering posture to succeed,

for two main reasons: 1) They know their liberal Democrat media accomplices won’t call them on it; and 2) they think the racial-minority target of their propaganda is too stupid to see through the hoax. (This is actually a demonstration of reflexive but disguised lib-Dem racism, perhaps the most common residual racism variant remaining in contemporary America.)

OK, add another reason for Democrat overconfidence: chronic Republican meekness in the face of political bullying. It is remarkable indeed how often lib-Dems get more mileage out of lying than conservatives and Republicans get from telling the truth.

Those who favor a public-policy process resistant to the infection of propaganda can hope national Republicans find a way to do better this time, or a fili-busted U.S. Senate will soon further the radical Democrat aim of a one-party leftist dictatorship imposed on America via total Democrat control of all elections.

A permanent socialist dictatorship, that is, as millions more illegals gain the franchise as reliable Dem voters. (Note, for emphasis, the nature and consequences of every leftist dictatorship in world history, and what that portends for us.) Therefore, here are some public communication suggestions for the flat-footed, ham-handed, and spine-challenged Republicans at this make-or-break juncture for America’s future as a free country: Essentially, you can jujitsu the lib-Dems decisively and easily by emphasizing the racism aspect of the filibuster issue even more than they do, but in reverse. How so? Try the following, for a refreshing change.

Remind Americans, especially the minority population, how the Dems, unlike current Republicans, really did use the filibuster for racist reasons during the civil rights era. That the Democrats had a KKK alumnus as their Senate leader as recently as Robert Byrd is a fact that needs to be trumpeted much more. (No one ever said the Repubs are good at political marketing.)

Remind minority voters how lib-Dems are insulting their intelligence on the closely-related matter of the S1 and HR1 bills, the “vote-stealing”



legislation initiative eliminating voter ID, for which neutering the Senate filibuster, at least once, is the key to the kingdom. Specifically, in saturation TV and Web video, run footage showing prominent Democrats claiming, in effect, that U.S. minorities are too unsophisticated to have the ID credentials necessary for voting. The minority audience will surprise the lib-Dem plantation masters by accurately translating the “unsophisticated” insult for themselves.

While we are at it, while hoisting lib-Dems on their own racism petard, speak the truth they fear most, to wit: What would happen to U.S. Democrats if the entire black underclass suddenly became wealthy? They would never win another election, that’s what — and Democrat political strategists know it. This is why we should suspect that the Democrat Party intentionally sabotages black opportunity. Democrats need a perpetually dependent underclass of disaffected voters. (This cynical political motive also accounts for the Democrat infatuation with recruiting more illegal aliens into the country.)

One more point deserves to be aired out because it could resonate with a broad audience: Aren’t we tired of how the Democrats slander our country as racist? And where did this “white supremacist” trope come from all of a sudden? (It came from Democrat focus groups which revealed that the old “racist” smear was getting stale from overuse.) The United States is far from a racist nation, as international Pew poll results verify — not to mention the double election of one Barack Obama. Anti-minority racism has actually become not only passé but the most socially unacceptable trait in American society. To be called a racist is now worse than being called a murderer. Real white nationalists and supremacists are a numerically insignificant fringe group in the U.S. Lib-Dems, however, need to stoke the largely mythical perception of present-day American racism because they believe they derive power from it.

This latest resurrection of the Democrats’ most vile sophistry is a ripe occasion to meet it head on, and to quash it once and for all. It is past time for

the feckless GOP to stand up to the schoolyard bully. “Go ahead, lib-Dems, bring it on” should be the attitude for Senate and other national Republicans. Unfortunately, if they have the stomach to use this bolder approach and the IQ points to perceive the opportunity, it will be a first.

Otherwise, if Republicans continue as the lib-Dem punching bag, say farewell to the United States of America — and not just the United States “as we know it.” How long do you think it will take for our new radical leftist rulers to shred the Constitution, dynamite Mount Rushmore and change the very name of the country they have always hated? What a desperate position for our nation to be in: Our last line of defense against the long-dreaded socialist takeover of America and a future of leftist tyranny is this present crop of Republicans — and an erratic Democrat named Joe Manchin (whose wife has now been put on the payroll of his party’s machine). The lib-Dem scheme seems to be working. Heaven help our country.

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## Critical Race Theory 101

(Jan. 7) — In September 2020, President Donald Trump issued an executive order prohibiting federal agencies and federal contractors from requiring employees to undergo diversity, equity and inclusion training. The order barred training that had divisive concepts such as race or sex stereotyping and scapegoating. Immediately, the radical left (aka the Democrat Party) went ballistic.

Among the content considered divisive is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Reports indicate that over 300 diversity, equity and inclusion training sessions were canceled as a result of the order. Over 120 civil rights organizations and allies of the Democrat Party signed a letter condemning



the order. Of course, they are back on the schedule since the change in administrations.

It started on day one of the Biden administration. That's when Joe Biden signed an executive order saying America suffers from "systemic" racism and promised to advance "equity," a concept mandating that everyone have the same outcomes. And as used by the liberal left, equity is about tearing some people down rather than lifting everyone up.

During the last year, the national media frequently reported numerous protests by parents of public-school students as well as others. These protesters object vigorously to the imposition of CRT in the nation's classrooms. U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz recently said that "the federal government should not be funding the training for a Marxist ideology that teaches people to hate America."

CRT is an offshoot of Critical Theory (CT), which was first presented to the world in the 1930s by German Marxists in academia. Critical Theory is said to be any approach to social philosophy (their term, not mine) that focuses on reflective assessment and critique of society and culture in order to reveal and challenge power structures. With roots in sociology and literary criticism, it argues that social problems stem more from social structures and cultural assumptions than from individuals. It further argues that ideology is the principal obstacle to human liberation. (In other words, it's never the individual's fault, it is always the fault of someone else, such as the oppressors and America's institutions.)

The left wants to hide the origination of CRT as a part of the Marxist ideology of Critical Theory that has now inculcated higher education. Even a former dean of the college of education at one of Indiana's prominent public universities had a research specialty in Critical Theory, publishing numerous articles and books on the topic. Critical Theory has been around in academic circles for over 75 years but has found a

new home in the nation's schools under a variety of disguises.

Back to CRT; what exactly is it? The term seemed to appear out of nowhere at statehouses and at political rallies. Over the past year, it has morphed from an obscure academic discussion point of the left into a covert intrusion into the public schools. And CRT has become a political rallying cry of conservatives.

Critical Race Theory is a way of thinking about America's history using the lens of racism. Leftist university academics developed it during the 1970s and 1980s in response to what they viewed as a lack of racial progress following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s.

In the mid 1970s, some academics coined the term in a way that it cannot be confined to a static and narrow definition but is an evolving and malleable practice. CRT critiques how the "social construction" (their term, not mine) of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate "a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers."

It would be helpful if a more specific description of how a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers could exist in America, considering all the civil rights laws that the United States of America has enacted and operated under for well over a half century. But again, CRT centers only on a claim that racism is somehow "systemic" in the nation's institutions, and that these institutions function to maintain the dominance of white people in society.

The architects of the theory argue that the United States was founded on the theft of land and labor. CRT proponents believe that federal law has preserved the unequal treatment of people based on race. Their evidence is anecdotal; neither do they identify specific federal laws that perpetuate such unequal treatment.

Proponents also believe race is culturally invented. By that they mean that race is a "social construct," the product of social thought unconnected to biological reality.

As such, CRT rejects claims of a merit-based or colorblind society, arguing that it is the systemic nature of racism that bears primary responsibility for reproducing racial inequality. So, anyone who claims that he or she is colorblind is not actually colorblind, no matter how sincere.

The most troubling of these arguments is that merit must be rejected (can we spell “socialism?”) Our nation was built on the concept of meritocracy. Employees that produce more work with better quality than others should be hired and rewarded. Those who contribute most to society are rewarded as well.

Many observers view these and other concepts underlying Critical Race Theory as an effort to divide Americans by rewriting history and convincing some white people that they are inherently racist and should feel guilty because of their advantages. But again, CRT advocates fail to provide evidence of these advantages other than the anecdotal.

CRT also has become a catchall phrase to describe racial concepts that conservatives find objectionable, such as “white privilege,” “systemic inequality” and “inherent bias.” Leftists push the idea that equal opportunity is not enough but equity in outcomes must be achieved. This is the precise definition of socialism: everyone treated the same whether they are productive or not.

CRT therefore admonishes white people for being oppressors while classifying black people (and sometimes people of other races too) as hopelessly oppressed. They call this “white privilege.”

Simply put, Critical Race Theory argues that U.S. social institutions (e.g., the criminal justice system, education system, labor market, housing market and healthcare system) are laced with racism embedded in laws, regulations, rules and procedures that lead to differential outcomes by race. Leftists overlook the six decades of racial progress since the civil rights laws were enacted on the federal level, and states long ago enacted their own set of civil rights laws.

Nor have leftists proven that unequal outcomes have been directly caused by racism. Unequal outcomes can have a variety of additional causes, such as: single-parent families, poverty, lack of education, minimal or no training, poor attitude, lack of work ethic and personal intellect factors.

There is no question that there is a history of racism in America. But it is not as prevalent as it was 75 years ago. Sure, there are some people of all races that one could call racists. But only laws can be legislated, not the heart. There are just too many federal and state civil rights laws that protect Americans from racism to conclude that America is a racist country. A few examples of areas protected by these laws are employment, housing, public venues, public school education and voting rights.

Fifty years ago, the law school in Indiana from which I graduated, began admitting minorities over some majority-race applicants with higher undergraduate grade point averages and higher Law School Admission Test scores. No loud voices of opposition were heard. Affirmative action (which favors minority races over majority race) in employment and education matters has been implemented for the past six decades.

With all the opportunities government has afforded to minorities during the last half century and more, it does not appear that a caste system exists. Leftists would want all Americans to view American society as a feudal system with two fixed classes, the oppressed and the oppressors, but nothing could be further from the truth. There clearly is still upward mobility available for all Americans.

*Notes: Proponents of CRT also argue that race intersects with other identities, including sexuality, gender identity and others. CRT advocates propose that racism is not a bygone relic of the past. Instead, it argues that the legacy of slavery, segregation and the imposition of second-class citizenship on black Americans and other people of color continues to permeate the social fabric of this nation. Again, only the slimmest of evidence is offered by the*

*proponents of CRT. Their most general conclusions are based only on isolated anecdotal experiences.*

There is compelling evidence that CRT is being taught in many of America's K-12 public schools. In Greenwich, Conn., middle school students were given a white-bias survey that parents viewed as being part of the theory. In Frankton, Indiana, a teacher observed that CRT was being taught under the guise of "social-emotional learning." A quick Internet search reveals numerous other instances where CRT is taught to America's students.

A future article will address which organizations are covertly pushing CRT upon the nation's school children, why they are doing so, and reveal why CRT is dangerous to America's school children and to the nation.

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## Chanukah, Christmas and Western Civilization

(Dec. 15) — Chanukah, the festival of lights, is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the victory of the Maccabees (or Hasmoneans) over the powerful armies of the Seleucid (Greek) Empire under King Antiochus IV.

King Antiochus, in 167 BC, in a show of force, forbade important Jewish observances such as keeping the Sabbath and circumcision and he dedicated the ancient temple in Jerusalem to Zeus. In the town of Modi'in, Antiochus' soldiers forced a village elder named Matityahu to sacrifice a pig before a pagan altar. Matityahu refused. When another Jew complied, Maatityahu killed him and another Greek official.

This sparked a three-year rebellion against the Greeks and their Jewish allies, some of whom

accepted Greek or Hellenic culture. Matityahu and his sons, the Maccabees, fought to maintain the ancient ways of the covenant. At first, the Maccabees and their motley fighters employed guerilla tactics but eventually formed regular forces and routed the Greeks. In 164 BC, the Maccabees entered Jerusalem and rededicated the temple, removing pagan influences, thus the name "Chanukah" or rededication.

It was a most unlikely victory. But because of it Judaism survived. Without this victory, history would have been profoundly altered. In the absence of Judaism, Christianity, which followed more than a century later, would never have emerged.

Chanukah is a victory of religious liberty, of the weak over the strong, of righteousness over tyranny, of light over darkness, a miracle. But there was another miracle. Jewish tradition holds that when it was time to light the Menorah in the Temple, there was only enough pure oil for a single day, but it lasted eight days after which it was replenished. And the men that had been soldiers and were now priests and scribes knew that their victory over the mighty Greek army was not just by force of arms but through divine providence. That God walked among the defenders of Judaism.

After the Greeks fell away, there was a brief interlude of Jewish independence in Israel but then the Romans conquered the Holy Land in 63 BC (Pompey). Life under Roman rule was difficult and there was another rebellion in 70 AD. General Vespasian destroyed the Jewish kingdom and King David's ancient capitol fell for a second time. Many Jews died or were enslaved. There rose again a savior in 135 AD, Bar Kochba, but in the end his rebellion also crumbled before Rome's might (Emperor Hadrian). Jerusalem and the Temple were ploughed under with salt and hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered. Jerusalem was resettled. Rome renamed Israel, Palestina, reaching back to Israel's ancient foes the Philistines to conceal its Jewish past. The exiles went forth as slaves and rootless wanderers. And the long night began.

But the Chanukah flame continued to burn in the hearts of the Jewish people who dreamed of returning to Israel and Jerusalem. For 2,000 years it burned in villages and cities across the seas and the continents. And the exiles returned to reclaim their patrimony. In 1948, out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the modern state of Israel was born, its fledgling forces defeating the five Arab armies that attacked it at the moment of its birth with the intent of annihilation, another miracle. And so the Chanukah lights continued to burn in Israel, sometimes flickering but still illuminating, nearly 70 years later.

With Christmas upon us, there is also a light that burns for Christians, under assault in the West by the secular left and around the globe especially within the Muslim world. It is symbolic that in the darkest time of the year, Christian teaching tells that the logos or the word was made flesh in the form of a newborn baby, the baby Jesus, a Jew, under a star, a light for the world to drive away the darkness and bring redemption and hope.

That Chanukah and Christmas are closely linked in the calendar is fitting for the message they each bring. The two faiths, Judaism and Christianity, taken together as the Judeo-Christian tradition, is the foundation of Western and American civilization. Western nations are the greatest in the world because they are informed by Judeo-Christian principles. It is in

the West where human rights, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, music and the arts, science and technology have flourished and where slavery was ended. These are the nations that inhabitants from the rest of the world seek to live. It is in Western nations where citizens are most free and enjoy the greatest prosperity. It is not an accident.

We must dedicate ourselves to preserving America, the West, and Western civilization, by preserving its Judeo-Christian tradition. The light of Chanukah and Christmas must continue to burn, and illumine the night, pushing away the darkness that is always present, the norm for most of history. They should guide us and our nation and the West for all time. It distinguishes us from the rest: our values, our devotion to truth, knowledge, goodness, beauty, and reason, the belief in the sanctity of the individual made in the image of God, while rejecting the moral and cultural relativism of the post-modern left and the totalitarian threat of unreformed Islam and the Chinese Communist Party. We must rededicate ourselves in our current battle as the Maccabees did against the Greeks and as Israel did against the Arab armies that sought its destruction in 1948 and has done ever since against its many enemies.

The spirit of Chanukah and Christmas should inspire us. Happy Chanukah and Merry Christmas to all. ♦





Thomas Hoepker, Sept. 11, 2001

# The Outstater

## The Holcomb Doctrine

(March 3) — After all these years covering politicians it is hard to admit they still terrify me.

This week it was particularly so, beginning with Joe Biden's blunt assertion that we shouldn't worry about nuclear war. Is there something he isn't sharing? Do we have a secret weapon that will render all of the mad men in the world harmless?

He didn't say. But if Biden, who has misjudged so much, says we shouldn't worry about nuclear war, we should be very worried about nuclear war.

And former Vice President Mike Pence promised to drum out of the Republican Party any "apologist for Putin." Would that be anyone in the next presidential primary who might disagree with his position?

Then came Pence's man Eric Holcomb to declare Tuesday that Indiana was in effect going to war with Russia. Governor Holcomb's executive orders (issued in the middle of the fire and brimstone of full-scale shooting and bombing 5,000 miles away) are worth repeating here for their vapidly alone:

- The Indiana Public Retirement System will evaluate investments into the state retirement accounts that may involve the Russian ruble.
- The Indiana Office of Technology will continue to strengthen critical state

infrastructure to protect the system from Russian cyber-attacks.

- The Commission for Higher Education will request that public colleges and universities report all Russian funding received for programs, research and grants.
- The governor encourages Hoosier businesses and companies in Indiana to evaluate their future business relationship with Russia.

How exactly Vladimir Putin will get the message was unclear. Indiana does not have a Russian consulate.

Also, there is the matter of consistency. Holcomb is unconcerned that students sworn to the Chinese Communist Party now make up an income stream (tuition) at Indiana universities comparable to that provided by the state of Indiana itself. Nor did he pause to think that the random Afghans he so warmly welcomed earlier this year might involve security risks.

What is worrisome, however, is not necessarily limited to Holcomb's decisions. It is his thought process. Holcomb sees no problem with trying to set foreign policy from a governor's seat, or at least aping the recommendations of friends in Washington. We are to believe he was able to untangle in days, perhaps hours, an event that has turned global politics upside down and will be studied in war colleges for generations.

It is as if these people think foreign policy — indeed, going to war — is merely a matter of determining who is a good guy and who is a bad guy.

It is of course more complicated than that. There is the question, "Compared to what?" Assessing the moral standing of insular regimes operating in foreign cultures executing multiple strategies along shifting fronts is a tricky business. It is often an irrelevant one. Adolph Hitler and Osama bin Laden aside, it is rarely obvious who is the greatest threat to U.S. interest at any given time.

And that — our national interest — is what a serious discussion of the Russia-Ukraine war should be about. It is so far outside Holcomb's job



description his comments can best be understood as delusions of grandeur.

## Chicago Politics, Indiana Style

(*March 1*) — What kind of city would you have if venal operators could be rewarded with municipal contracts relative to their political contributions — aside of course from the obvious moral degradation?

Let me help answer that. You would have a city that functions to serve arbitrary goals, ones that conform not to citizen priorities but to the scheming of individual campaign contributors.

That means construction of oversized parking garages, half-empty convention centers, superfluous river walks, grandiose mass transit, heavily subsidized stadiums, apartment buildings and hotels, etc. Overall, look for an excess of concrete and rebar overseen by squads of politically connected lawyers, engineers and architects managing stacks of legal and financial filings, permits and licenses all paid fees a third higher than normal.

There will be a public-relations agent, preferably the publisher of the local paper backed up by the Chamber of Commerce, to proclaim all of this “progress.” Taxpayers will be assured that the tens of millions of dollars to be paid by future generations is well spent. There will be full-color architectural renderings (you know the ones, with happy miniature people walking around). Officials from every floor of city hall will be trotted out to describe the civic glory that’s to come.

Finally, you will have to hide that none of this is cost effective, truly functional or sustainable. Citizens must not know that these new facilities do not justify their cost, that routine maintenance will require additional, yet unannounced, withdrawals from the municipal treasury. And nobody but nobody needs to know that if this or that project goes bankrupt it will be taxpayers, not the developers or nominal owners, who must make the bonds good.

Economists call this “rent-seeking,” that is, engaging in or involving the manipulation of

public policy or economic conditions as a strategy for increasing profits.

That’s just a Chicago thing, you say.

Oh really? The political action committees of former South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, now in charge of Joe Biden’s nationwide infrastructure projects, accepted money from at least 23 companies later awarded more than \$33 million in contracts for city projects, according to the *Daily Mail* and the *New York Post*.

The newspapers say that the companies, their executives and spouses donated a total of \$253,700 to Buttigieg’s campaigns, and won at least \$33,280,000 in contracts between 2011 and 2019. In two cases, firms reportedly were awarded contracts by South Bend’s Board of Public Works on the same day they donated to Buttigieg’s campaign.

In Fort Wayne, Councilman Jason Arp, writing in *The Indiana Policy Review*, documented how contributors to re-election campaigns for Mayor Tom Henry netted more than \$126 million in city contracts *in a single campaign* on less than \$1 million in contributions.

Before you get all righteous and demand another layer of complex campaign reforms, know that the point here is not that men can be corrupted. That we have long known. The point is that this is perfectly OK with us, the voting public. The political players involved win re-election handily, even get promoted. There is no outcry from the editorial pages. The courts are unconcerned.

This is so even though the cognizant understand that such corruption caps growth and discourages investment. If we were serious about economic development, breaking up these pay-to-play games by tossing out the office-holders at the table would be the first step.

We do not appear to be serious.

## Cronyism: The Republican Malady

(*Feb. 24*) — Have you ever wondered what’s wrong with the Indiana Republican Party? No, I don’t mean blithely welcoming large groups

of random Afghans that we learn may have included security threats now in hiding. And no, I don't mean sending the head of the state police to the Statehouse to override the Second Amendment.

My complaint concerns economics, what you would think would be a GOP strong point. It is epitomized in a bill this session that would strip the right to buy property from those whom the Indianapolis Star labels "slumlords." It was able to attract a couple of GOP sponsors, both Statehouse veterans, committee chairmen even.

You are spared my reading of the role private property plays in Western Civilization. Let us just say that the bill does the opposite of what the sponsors may intend, i.e., improve the lot of low-rent tenants. There is a charitable explanation for that and a cynical one.

The bill applies draconian penalties (the loss of ability to make a living) to those individual operators trying to supply rental housing on the lowest margin. In doing so, it puts the government between landlord and tenant. The results are familiar and predictable: fewer renters, fewer units and higher prices. The legal cost entailed in avoiding or even understanding the bill's definition of a so-called slumlord (it takes up 42 lines of the legislation) would by itself pressure rents upward, and without improving safety or living conditions for the poorest of the poor.

Economists tell us this is exactly the type of law that Democrats, bureaucrats and mandarins love, one that defines a problem in a way that excludes a private-sector solution and then underfunds it so they are the exalted managers of a scarce resource.

We expect Republicans, though, to recognize that individuals have individual strategies for life. A friend remembers being delighted as a young man to find an unfurnished, unpainted apartment above a frequently robbed liquor store. It allowed him enough left over in his paycheck to maintain a car and a social life. Another was happy being apartment rich but cash poor.

Good for them. Those are called choices. They support rental properties along a range of price

points — or should if government would stay out of the way.

It is possible that our two GOP legislators don't appreciate the steepness of the slope on which their measure slips. Indeed, neither got above 50 percent on IndianaScorecard.org, an independent rating of votes that trouble private property.

That's the charitable explanation. Now for the cynical one.

Both GOP sponsors list the Indiana Realtors PAC and the Indiana Multi-Family Housing PAC among their campaign contributors. At risk of assigning obvious motives to the obviously political, could those groups represent interests that would form public-private "partnerships"? The kind that hoovers up government subsidies in the name of "affordable" housing? For precisely the tenants once served by the now denigrated "slumlords"?

And while we're throwing names around, can you spell "crony capitalist"?

## The Lost Art of Defenestration

*(Feb. 18)* — Some of us are getting a handle on how the Legislature works: Somewhere in the continuous rounds of lunches and dinner parties, the leadership is told by the most activated lobbyists that a certain set of issues is to be given priority this session. All else must jockey for a place on crowded committee calendars.

OK, that's the way political rooms have worked since the reign of the Tudors. What is new, what could be called post-politics politics, is that those promoting patently stupid ideas are not beheaded.

Everything must be taken seriously, and the daft ideas proceed along with the corrupt until the former ceases to endanger campaign funding or can be compromised into the democratic ether — or, horrors, becomes obtuse, unworkable law.

An example from this session is a mercifully short-lived plan to at least figuratively put body cameras and, if possible, Vulcan mind probes, on public-school teachers. This was debated as if it were a sane reaction to sloppily

taught American history. (What, exactly, do principals do these days?)

If we're going to video anyone it should be the legislators themselves, members of what Will Rogers called a criminal class, one well below the skill set, the intelligence and the real-world acumen of any teacher in any classroom at any level. Ankle monitors would be useful.

Another example headed our way — from France, but not anytime soon we hope — is the idea that 13-year-olds should have the right to choose whether they want their mother's or their father's surname.

Defenestration would be appropriate in this case but all someone need say is, "It's only fair." That will launch a campaign. No legislator will dare stand athwart the Statehouse steps to respond, "Begone, you fools, and may God save your children."

The columnist and culture critic, Theodore Dalrymple, has thought through to the root of this insanity for us. Here is his conclusion:

"Preemptive appeasement seems to be the main stance of the political class faced by such pressure groups: Not believing in anything much itself, except in its own survival, it is prepared to defend nothing, resist nothing and fight for nothing."

Defend nothing, resist nothing and fight for nothing — that is the motto of this governor, this House Speaker and this Senate President Pro Tem. It is their expertise. They call it leadership.

What a sad employment.

### **\$50,000 Indy 'Peacemakers'**

*"Last week, Biden talked about being tough on crime. This week, the Biden administration announced funds for crack pipe distribution to 'advance racial equity.'" — Sen. Tom Cotton*

(Feb. 8) — Here's an idea: To slow the crime wave in Indianapolis, Mayor Joe Hogsett is repurposing some loose federal dollars to raise an army of 50 "peacemakers." It is a brilliant plan, but perhaps not in the way you are thinking.

These peacemakers join a crime-fighting force of three dozen or so other social-justice groups ("interceptors," some like to be called) coordinated by the Indianapolis Office of Public Health and Safety, not to be confused with the politically incorrect and socially insensitive Metropolitan Police Department.

Although the effort is barely underway, the office has sent sharply worded letters to 83 people identified as most likely to blow their neighbor's head off. And please understand that the peacemakers are not just off-the-street dopes — or at least not any more. They are paid from \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year.

That's the brilliant part. Imagine what a Democrat machine can do with 50 energized highly paid neighborhood organizers working five days a week 12 months a year in the inner city just checking on things? Well yes, being registered to vote is an important part of health and safety, or at least getting your mail-in ballot(s) into the proper hands.

But even brilliant ideas have detractors. The Indianapolis Star quotes Rick Snyder of the Fraternal Order of Police as relating the plan to an upside-down funnel: "We are dumping all of these resources into the top end, but, because we have a prosecutor that is soft on crime, you are seeing all of this flowing out the bottom end, and you cannot keep up with the flow."

Snyder doesn't get it, does he? That is the most appealing part, that it doesn't produce extra work for the prosecutor's office in the way of arrests and bothersome court cases. It doesn't cost, you see, it saves.

In the event, however, that the mayor's plan doesn't catch on with the general public, he might want to look at what Cleveland is doing five hours to his east.

There they have a simpler idea. They demonstrate to those criminals most likely to commit homicides that if they illegally carry a gun they will be off the street for a long time. This does not involve campaigning for broader and more restrictive gun laws but merely enforcing ones on

the books. Here is Tom Hogan writing in this week's City Journal:

"The U.S. Attorney's Office in Cleveland is taking advantage of the fact that violent crime is heavily concentrated among relatively few offenders. In general, less than 5 percent of perpetrators are responsible for over 50 percent of violent offenses. By targeting violent felons carrying guns or dealing drugs, federal prosecutors are going after that precise cohort. This enables the incapacitation of violent offenders without sweeping up low-level miscreants."

This minimalist approach, that an unarmed felon is less likely to murder someone than an armed, drug-addled one, has proven effective in New York City, in Boston and in Richmond, Va., where homicides were reduced by 33 percent in one year and by 50 percent in a decade.

In Indianapolis, that would mean 89 lives saved just this year — no, not enough, sadly, to swing a mayoral election.

## Trash Incompetence

(Feb. 2) — An early Steve Martin skit advised his audience on how to avoid paying taxes on a million dollars. "First, get a million dollars. But what do you say when the tax man asks why you didn't pay your taxes? Two simple words, two simple words in the English language, 'I forgot.'"

That's how government handles mistakes. It "forgets" what went wrong and continues as if nothing happened.

Here is an example from — where better? — Washington, D.C. As the failure of Lyndon Johnson's "great society" became apparent to both Democrats and Republicans, Patrick Moynihan was brought back to Washington from Harvard by Richard Nixon to fix things. He proposed a plan to incentivize work with limited income supplements. The historian Myron Magnet summarizes the realpolitik of that experience:

"As a wise ex-senator once explained to me when I suggested an improved replacement for an existing federal program that would cost no

more than the old, I would in fact end up doubling the cost, since Washington never kills old programs but leaves them to run alongside new ones. So Moynihan and Nixon found. No one was willing to abolish Medicaid, housing subsidies and the like. The new program would just be a hugely costly add-on. In 1970, Moynihan fled back to Cambridge, his plan dead."

The precept is now playing out on the front page of my hometown newspaper. Our mayor, with complicit leadership on Council and some help from the Legislature, entangled the city in an unworkable garbage-collection contract with a single citywide provider. The contract, in a purblind search for the lowest bidder, locked the winner into a rate of revenue short of that needed to meet shifting obligations in a Covid-Biden environment of both shortages and rising prices.

This resulted in the trash hauler declaring bankruptcy. And now, with lawyers involved, as many as 80,000 residents are without dependable trash pickup, some for more than a month, and the city is desperately leasing trash trucks and training city workers in an attempt to alleviate the bollix. And yes, that means the mayor is authorizing overtime pay, accruing pensions and health benefits, and leasing at exorbitant rates.

If you have read this far, you need to know that the city, or at least large parts of it, once was served by multiple trash companies contracting with individual housing associations. Such a system would have avoided the current situation.

An out-voted friend on Council, a former banker, laments the lost opportunity: "One of the beauties of the natural order, as opposed to arrangements coerced by the state, is the benefits that accrue in the way of 'portfolio diversity of the whole, orchestrated by the particulars.'"

But rather than return to the way things were done before things came undone, the mayor is likely to sign a new citywide trash contract pretty much like the old contract with a new vendor at higher rates than those awarded the old vender —



and much higher than those in individually negotiated contracts with association-based vendors.

To summarize, here is William Voegeli writing for the Claremont Review of Books on “Activist Government’s Crisis of Competence”:

“Any willingness (by government) to take stock and make fundamental changes is episodic, at best. Progressivism’s focus on the future works against revising past achievements and correcting old mistakes. It is hard and unpleasant enough to fashion policy kludges today that are backward compatible, adequately accounting for the accretion of previous initiatives and the compounding challenges they pose. It is even more difficult and unusual for today’s politicians and activists to be backward custodial, to evince any sense of responsibility for keeping the ramshackle contraption in working order, much less redesigning the beast to account for lessons learned since it was put on the road.”

And so it goes, as Kurt Vonnegut never tired of reminding us.

## The War Against Landlords

(Jan 28) — “When the rent isn’t paid, there’s trouble,” is a line from a Hemingway novel I remember for some reason. Perhaps it is because paying the rent is where the rubber meets the road in our economic system — an ugly absolute unlike the softer irritants of inflation, interest rates, Internet fees, etc. As such, it is the bane of those who imagine they can change the world with a sweep of the legislative hand.

That was the story of a bill this session that, according to a journo-activist at the Indianapolis Star, “would have put the state in step with 45 other states by implementing tenants’ rights to enforce basic habitability standards in their rental homes.”

There’s a lot to unpack in the Star’s treatment of this issue, particularly the assumption that the unfettered workings of the rental market do not sufficiently punish landlords with uninhabitable square footage. There also is a naive acceptance of

politically constructed tenant “rights,” a fanciful concept outside the contractual relationship of a basic rental agreement.

Please know that the Star in this regard conforms to what is all the rage in newsrooms. Young journalists see this issue as Pulitzer material, their ticket out of Indiana to somewhere significant. You can expect exposés of real and exaggerated landlord abuse to crop up regularly on the front pages.

But there is little eagerness to dive deeper into the economics of renting and, specifically, what happens when government steps between landlord and tenant, when it enforces legislatively defined “standards.”

I can save the Star some time there: You get either New York’s rent control (expensive or rationed) or Chicago’s Cabrini-Green (free but unlivable). Stuck between is the mom-and-pop landlord renting to lower-income and sometimes desperate tenants, the ones who make teary fuel for the anecdote machine.

It is only the small landlords who invest in the lower segment of the market. They do so in hopes of building a retirement nest egg or some degree of financial independence or even generational wealth. Those all are worthy goals in this society.

Look, I’ve seen their books, and the operating margins will not survive much more erosion from regulations. Distant corporate landlords can better take advantage of tax and other incentives, and they can move up the property ladder or otherwise reduce their exposure to troublesome regulations.

What was proposed, then, would have discouraged the very landlords most attentive to tenant complaints while eventually reducing the number of bargain rentals. Clearly, a better understanding is needed of the role of personal responsibility and the dynamics of private property, which, by the way, is an actual “right” dating back eight centuries to Magna Carta.

To be honest, on this issue there are no solutions only trade-offs, as Thomas Sowell is fond of saying.

But paying rent may be the typical journalist's total experience with serious economics. Moreover, he or she has been taught that the world is one big happy family where contractual boundaries are meaningless. Property? Too few tell school children these days why it is not OK to slip a match-box car into their trouser pockets and take it home.

I asked an economist friend to expand in that direction. "In our twenties," she said, "we should begin to consider that every adult we encounter is not a parent willing to serve us. Will such persons ever give up declaring what is due them and be grateful for the efforts of those trying their best to deliver a service? And if a person grows up learning only to criticize, will they avoid producing anything that others can criticize?"

Let's hope that doesn't prove out in Indiana. For like it or not, in an adult world, "affordable" housing ends up being what both tenant and landlord can in fact afford. Childish wishing recast as legislative folly does not change that.

## Running Hospitals by Decree

*"You can avoid reality, but you cannot avoid the consequences of avoiding reality." — Ayn Rand*

(Jan. 24) — The Statehouse leadership has written a letter — sternly worded, mind you — warning Indiana's health providers, among the most powerful lobbies, that if they don't lower hospital and medical costs . . . well, something will happen.

Senate President Rodric Bray and Speaker of the House Todd Huston told 20 healthcare executive to work together to match Indiana's health care costs to the national average or the state will "pursue legislation to statutorily reduce prices" — in three or four years maybe.

Hah, when has that ever worked? It is pathetic on two levels: First, it assumes it has never occurred to hospital and insurance executives that Hoosiers might prefer lower prices; and second that the state can command pricing without ruinous consequences.

Moreover, it encapsulates how the leaders of the GOP super majority see themselves — running the state as members of a crony board of public-private interests issuing directives and memos guiding us to regulatory bliss.

There of course are ways to lower hospital and medical costs but they involve the state getting out of the way by freeing up markets and discouraging monopoly, actions that anger powerful people and go beyond nasty letters.

Those serious about the issue are commended to the winter 2015 Indiana Policy Review, "Where Did Your Doctor Go?"

## Equality, not Equity, You Dope

(Jan. 20) — If Hoosiers have ever wondered what it would look like to have a real Republican governor, a comparison of press releases announcing state diversity directors offers a glimpse.

In Virginia, newly elected Gov. Glenn Youngkin issued an executive order replacing "equity" with "equality" in the title of the state's diversity director, formerly a member of the Senior Foreign Service Selection Board for the U.S. Department of State.

Youngkin made clear that the position would be refocused on promoting ideas, policies and economic opportunities rather than quotas and preferences. "The director's experience in government, nonprofits and the private sector will guide us as we ensure that the government is working for all Virginians across our diverse Commonwealth, especially when it comes to economic opportunity for all Virginians," Youngkin said.

Back home in Indiana, Gov. Eric Holcomb announced his new Chief Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity Officer with the gusto of a Chicago neighborhood organizer. The governor's office said the new director, formerly a public-relations officer at Notre Dame, will focus on "improving state government operations as well as drive systemic change to remove hurdles in the government workplace and services the state provides." The new director herself added that she

will use the office to “drive cultural change” by increasing equity and inclusion — a sneaky way of establishing quotas, others would say.

Indiana Republicans might pay more attention to their choices in primaries this next cycle.

## Testing the Boundaries of ‘Extremism’

*“Our mission is to marshal the best thought on governmental, economic and educational issues at the state and municipal levels.” — the Indiana Policy Review Foundation*

(Jan. 17) — A columnist at the Indianapolis Star is said to have privately described members of our foundation as “extremists.” Fair enough. In our 33 years we have never quarreled with how others might label us.

That said, a review of the Gannett Company’s positions as expressed in editorials and in front-page articles by “explainers” (a new journalism title) puts any calumny from that quarter in perspective.

It may be fun for journos born after the fall of the Iron Curtain to imagine a society that takes from each according to his or her commandeered bank account and gives to each according to his or her politically determined need. They wouldn’t want to live there, though. It is unnatural — so much so that governments that have tried to enforce such an abominable arrangement have had to shoot, hang, starve or guillotine (whatever was cheaper) half their citizenry.

That would strike some as extreme.

And what is normal about thinking you can pick your sex as easily as changing a Hollywood wardrobe? Ditto for a world where mothers, normally the very model of altruism, are told they can kill inconvenient children, or where “family” is defined so broadly it welcomes dysfunction. Or determining criminal arrest, prosecution, incarceration and now even healthcare by demographic vector?

How about rewriting the history of a great nation to conform to a worldview formed in a bull session in a sophomore dorm? Or suspending the laws of economics to ignore the dynamics of

private property and the differences resulting from labor, ambition, opportunity, productivity and choice?

Who believes they can reorder a scout troop, a corporate board, a school staff, a police department or a congress on the basis of melanin count and somehow maintain functionality or, for that matter, civil peace? Do we need to mention the surrender of national borders to random immigrants?

How about those who think that given enough time and money they can teach monkeys to talk? Or refuse to consider the most recent discoveries in physics and cosmology because at the moment those disciplines favor a theist rather than an atheist explanation of the universe? Who have never questioned a theory of life’s origins put forward almost 200 years before the invention of electronically enhanced microscopy.

Finally, we do not argue with the Star that both culture and education can change human society for the better. We would try to explain, however, that these evolve within a framework that is prescribed by divine will, natural law or both.

Is that extreme?

If so, the more of it the better before this nation falls flat on its face.

## Surviving Sotomayorism

*“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.” — Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

(Jan. 8) — Sonia Sotomayor’s path to the Supreme Court of the United States has been marked by plenty of firsts. Sotomayor, of Puerto Rican heritage, was nominated by President George H. W. Bush to a seat on a U.S. District Court (the youngest nominee ever), and later by President Barack Obama as the first Hispanic judge to the highest court.

And her comments yesterday, confusing the distinction between federal and state power as well as quoting wildly off estimates of easily

verifiable material, would make her the first member of the court in our era from the “mimic generation.”

This is the generation in a repeating cycle identified by the historian Arnold Toynbee in his study of 60 ancient civilizations. It is characterized by an authoritarian leadership style focused on the wearing of title and decoration rather than on finding solutions or on assessing reality.

The legal scholar Laurence Tribe predicted as much in a May 9, 2004, letter to Obama advising against the Sotomayer nomination:

“Bluntly put, she’s not nearly as smart as she seems to think she is, and her reputation for being something of a bully could well make her liberal impulses backfire and simply add to the fire power of the Roberts/Alito/Scalia/Thomas wing of the Court . . .”

This type of person — a stereotype, if you will — is constantly trying to guess how a real judge or legislator or councilman would act in a given situation. “Supreme Court judges don’t make stupid factual mistakes,” their syllogism goes, “and since I am a Supreme Court judge I must not be making stupid factual mistakes.”

Be forewarned that this “mimic” generation follows a “creative” generation but precedes a “failed” generation.

You can see this at work on your city council. There will be a group, still small if you are lucky, that is incurious about the facts of a particular matter as long as they are properly and personally berobed as “councilmen.” They also may expect, even demand, to be addressed as a particular kind of councilman, i.e., a “caring” councilman or a “conservative” councilman, and that is regardless of voting record.

As you would expect, their official decisions are based on the shallowest of rationales, often the unquestioning acceptance of narrative labels such as citizen “shareholder,” a woman’s “choice,” economic “development,” racial “equity,” tax “investment,” “fair” pay, “running government like a business,” and so forth.

The Republicans on my city council recently drummed out a member their caucus for challenging such empty terms. The quality of both government service and accountability will suffer accordingly.

But here is the most disturbing thing to me: Toynbee was writing about an entire generation not just its leadership cadre. Thus, a Sonia Sotomayor can be confirmed unanimously by a Senate panel after being nominated by both a Democrat and Republican president, all blithely endorsed by an inattentive electorate and a fawning media.

Like it or not, she is us.

## Crime: Back to the Basics

*(Jan. 4)* — The director of “the Bail Project” makes a convincing case that his group is not responsible for the revolving door that is returning violent criminals to the streets of Indianapolis. His self-description in a letter last week to the Indianapolis Star, however, is of the fox-in-the-hen-house variety:

“After all, we are only a charity that helps the poor, and our larger objective is to ensure the presumption of innocence applies equally to all regardless of race or wealth. It’s a worthy goal. Moreover, it is not The Bail Project who sets bail. Judges do.”

So, the Bail Project is not the problem. It is merely a well-financed group of social-justice jackasses attempting to destroy our society by turning it against itself. The fault, implies the director of the jackasses, is the criminal justice system itself.

I couldn’t agree more. For if you have a crime problem you have a prosecutor problem. It is the single elected office that can lead a community-wide campaign to do what is necessary to preserve rule of law and protect life and property — and that includes whatever changes are needed outside the office’s immediate purview, whether that is more jails, more discerning judges, more efficient legal staff or improved police tactics.



Blaming the Bail Project, then, is a diversion. The focus should be on a process that has become dysfunctional. Having a few years behind me, I may be able to help get us back to the basics.

I always wanted to be a juvenile delinquent but never got the chance. At first, things were promising. Our town of 25,000 had the highest per-capita juvenile crime rate in the nation. The Hispanic gangs fought both each other and the Germanic gangs, contrariwise and vice versa. The pool tables at our recreation center (built with city tax dollars to “keep the kids out of trouble”) were covered with gang signs, racist threats and other impudence carved out with switchblade knives.

The summer of my 7th-grade year, however, a new prosecutor and juvenile-court judge took office. The worst of the boys in muscle shirts and ducktails smoking hand-rolled cigarettes around the pinball machines were “sent away” to juvenile detention. (Have I sufficiently dated myself or should I mention that the Wurlitzer in the corner played Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins incessantly?)

From that moment onward, the town was idyllic. I lost the opportunity for an exciting life of petty theft and aggravated assault. The only options were football, baling hay and, later, journalism school, a different set of misdemeanors altogether.

Why, similarly, isn’t the crime problem in Indianapolis being addressed?

To be honest, there are a hundred reasons, all politically viable, beginning with misplaced racial sensitivities and ending with enormity of scale. And there are the times . . . they have changed.

Still, an old man can hope that a summer will come when things are set right, when the adults of the community decide to protect their young men, to tether them to schools, families and time-honored values, not set them adrift to be used as pawns in a game without rules.

## Hard Times and Cracked Pots

*“We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance*

*produces character, and character produces hope.” — Romans 5:3-4*

(Dec. 26) — Is it possible to experience life’s problems and crises without expecting the help of government? I am not being flip; human-interest stories are rare that do not involve some sort of centralized, institutional or statist assistance, where instead someone overcomes pretty much on their own.

I know, I know, it doesn’t fit the media’s victim narrative. But an awareness of what some have nobly or courageously endured might add perspective to the stream of trouble and woe that is the daily news.

That thought occurred last night during my family’s holiday movie excursion to “American Underdog,” the Kurt Warner story\* featuring Brett Varvel, son of our friend Gary Varvel.

Later that night, researching the background of a favorite singer, I learned that the only job she could get to start was delivering singing telegraphs. She turned that into her “big break” — without a scholarship, or an equity-boosted SAT score, or a sense of entitlement, or the leverage of a government agency.

This all struck me as amazing by today’s standards, and it started me counting off similar stories, current and historical, from my immediate circle. I remembered another friend, a future ballerina for the New York Metropolitan Opera, who as a girl had raised money for dance lessons by selling fish worms at the side of the road.

In a short time I came up with an inspiring list of people, rich poor, young and old, who individually had overcome not only challenges but great trouble and strife — tragedy even. I’ll bet you could do the same.

Please know that your list, although perhaps involving the saddest of events, will not be made up of exceptional stories, or at least not considered so by those who lived them. The listed will have done what they had to do to get where they wanted to go and be who they wanted to be. And, again, you will not be able to find where they

were given much institutional help. They did it pretty much by themselves and in their own way.

How do we explain this?

There indeed is an explanation . . . now, stay with me here . . . which can be understood through the study of Japanese pottery.

The artisans of the centuries-old Kintsugi school take cracked pots and rejoin the broken pieces with a lacquer mixed with powdered gold, silver or platinum. Broken dinnerware becomes a work of art, more valuable than the whole.

Psychologists as well as pastors tell us that something like that can happen when we face travail. Clinicians call it “post-traumatic growth,” and it isn’t particularly rare.

Scott Kaufman in Scientific American reports that 61 percent of men and 51 percent of women in the U.S. say they have been “broken” by at least one traumatic or challenging event in their lifetime. Many not only did not develop the much-publicized post-traumatic-stress disorder but unexpectedly thrived in the aftermath.

Kaufman does not imply that any of these individuals welcomed the suffering, or that they would not have found success without it. He means only that we have the capacity to overcome, and to do so in multiple and highly personal ways.

He identifies seven areas of growth reported by subjects experiencing trauma and challenge: greater appreciation of life; greater appreciation and strengthening of close relationships; increased compassion and altruism; the identification of new possibilities or a purpose in life; greater awareness and utilization of personal strengths; enhanced spiritual development; creative growth.

The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl has put it all into a sentence: “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

No council ordinance, legislative law, congressional act or presidential order is required.

*\* Full disclosure: In the movie, Warner is shown using a few dollars in food stamps before applying for a job stocking shelves at the same store.*

## Racial Accountability

(Dec. 20) — Here’s a question for our racial-reckoning era: Why would Indiana media, however diminished, ignore the single most accurate predictor of crime and mortality in black youth? That is, the absence of a father in the home, something described in detail almost 60 years ago in Sen. Daniel Moynihan’s famous report to Congress.

Before you yell, “racism,” know that this isn’t a black thing. Charles Murray and others have observed the same dysfunction in white families without fathers.

But the author and social commentator Heather Mac Donald argues that the media holds a double standard, that white parents are held accountable while black parents are not. She can cite case after case.

Nonetheless, the focus should be on the record number of killings of young black men at rates unimaginable to an earlier generation. Last year, the U.S. homicide toll topped 20,000 victims, more than half of them black although blacks are less than 13 percent of the population. Their killers were overwhelmingly other blacks.

Again, if that concerns you, and your concern isn’t merely to play into a narrative serving some other agenda, how do you ignore the evidence regarding the absence of fathers in the black home, the breakdown of the nuclear family?

With that question in mind, dive into an article in this weekend’s Indianapolis Star, “Black Residents, New Black Panther Party Seek Solution to Violence, Food Deserts.”

There is a hint deep into the story that some of those gathered at the Hovey Street Church of Christ in Indianapolis are troubled by the dissolution of the family. The reporter, though, doesn’t follow up. She is more interested in the participants’ views on the killing last year of a black youth by a white claiming self-defense

during the summer riots — that and a search for what would seemingly be the self-evident reasons grocery stores are scarce in high-crime areas.

Nor did the Star article reflect any great interest in sure-fire tactical solutions such as statistically pinpointing high-crime blocks and, generally, jailing more perpetrators (its editorials argue against that).

In summary, the Hovey Street group may have held strong opinions on the importance of a father in the home but they didn't make it into the story. Maybe the Star thinks its readership couldn't bear to hear such unwoke blasphemy.

A counterpoint, however, was set by the chairman of the New Black Panther Party of Indiana. "Our community is out of control," he told the Star in arguing that the black community needs to first of all help itself. "This government, this city, is not doing anything to help us."

If he had added that little of the \$22 trillion this nation has spent fighting poverty actually benefited the typical black family he would have made an even stronger argument. For since the "war" on poverty was declared in 1964, one on which government has spent three times the cost of all our actual wars, the black family's situation has only gotten worse.

We are at a point where Jason Riley of the Wall Street Journal pleads, "Stop helping us, you've done enough already." Riley is referring sardonically to government spending that has discouraged what once was a tradition of strong black American families.

If after its downsizing the Star still has a library, that book should be in it. And the economists Thomas Sowell and the late Walter Williams have earlier books on the subject. It is time to read them.

## El Duce Would Be Pleased

*(Dec. 16)* — The Fort Wayne councilman was questioning his city's quasi-official economic development director on how a state regional grant might be used.

The first question was from whence the money (\$50 million or so) had come.

The answer led down a rabbit hole of agency acronyms to nowhere in particular but did not exclude the possibility that it was our money to begin with.

The second question was whether the executive had thought about using the money to offset the local tax burden — a sort of reverse economic development?

No, it was explained, that was not part of the program design.

Well, who designed the program?

The state.

As in fascism? the councilman wanted to know.

## The Red Guard at Purdue

*(Dec. 16)* — A good chunk of Purdue University's bottom line is provided by enrollment fees paid by students from China. Indeed, it is comparable to that the school receives from the Indiana Legislature.

But these students, unlike most legislators, have pledged allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

So what happens when Purdue's educational mission conflicts with the CCP party line?

A professor there found out when he referred to the coronavirus as coming from the Wuhan Province of China. Several students complained and his class syllabus was promptly changed.

"He still sees no wrong with it," a student told the campus newspaper. "I really do want him just to learn, to actually see the perspective on why it's not OK."

As in Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution? ♦



*"The Battle of Cowpens," painted by William Ranney in 1845, shows an unnamed patriot (far left) saving the life of Col. William Washington.*