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POLITICAL REVIEW



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Dear reader,

I have to admit it, I love February. I love the abundance of pinks and reds, the candy hearts, the rare but beautiful sunny days punctuated by snowstorms and sneaking out of school to go skiing. I love the emphasis on love that we share with family, friends, roommates, and partners.

There's one thing that seems to be missing: love for ourselves. Whether it's a reflection of pressures we put on ourselves or outside forces, everyone seems to be fighting a battle with themselves. Paradoxically, when you're fighting yourself, you can't win.

Maybe you've given up on your New Years' Resolutions; maybe the weight of mid-terms is filling your backpacks with hefty textbooks and late hours in the library. Believe me, I'm right there with you. Life never seems to slow down and everything else seems to stack up.

If you resonate with this, you're far from alone. According to Forbes, about 70% of adults experienced burnout in 2022. Burnout extends beyond physical fatigue - it can also reflect mental and emotional exhaustion, a lack of energy to do even things you might typically enjoy. It's often in a success driven mindset that we forget that taking time for ourselves is just as important as taking time for work and school.

Taking care of yourself is an expression of self-love! My hope for you all this month is that you take a minute and be your own valentine.

XOXO,

MEGAN BAIRD
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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“COLLEGE V. LIFE EXPERIENCE” 5

BY BRENDAN ARMSTRONG

Last semester I took one of my favorite classes at BYU, ECON 461: Economics of Education. A large portion of what we covered in class included analyzing the importance of a college degree and whether a degree actually provides necessary skills that employers wish to see from college graduates. In short, do college grads have higher capabilities? Does the content of the classes they take provide them with abilities and knowledge that those without a college degree don't have? Or, on the other hand, does that degree rather just signal to employers that college graduates have a certain set of skills because they're graduates? Even more pressing, do prospective employees even need a degree to obtain those skills that employers seek from potential hires? If I were to answer all of these questions right now, I'd say "it depends" to all of them. The future of university degree attainment is certainly unknown.

As recent trends highlight, many employers are no longer requiring college degrees. Just over a year ago, Governor Cox announced that state government positions in Utah would no longer require bachelor's degrees in employee recruitment and further encouraged local governments and private sectors to follow suit [1]. His reasons for doing so align with other movements across the country, particularly those that state that degrees have become "a blanketed barrier-to-entry" and don't necessarily mean that those with degrees are more qualified than those without. In fact, the Burning Glass Institute found that the percentage of jobs requiring a college degree fell from 51% in 2017 to 44% in 2021 [2]. Organizations like Apple, IBM, Delta Airlines, and Hilton are just some of the major companies that are following this trend and choosing to value life experience over a diploma. With major companies like those, it's not surprising that the percentage is declining.

Financially speaking, it might make sense for some to not attend college. Student loan borrowing is on the rise, particularly in the last 20 years as the cost of college tuition and fees have more than doubled [3]. Average student debt now hovers around \$30,000 with many taking decades to pay it back depending on the career they pursue afterwards. It certainly is up to the individual to perform a cost-benefit analysis to ensure

that obtaining a degree is worth it. For example, I had a friend growing up who decided he wanted to become a plumber. After working as an apprentice for a plumbing company for a couple of years, he attended trade school, getting it paid for entirely by the company he worked for. After graduating, he continued working for that company and remains debt-free with plans to start his own plumbing business. While he could have attended college to obtain a business degree to help kickstart his business, he decided that wasn't cost-effective and is now enjoying the benefits of a career without college attendance. That was definitely the right move for him.

Evidently, college isn't for everyone. Nonetheless, there are still many benefits that exist for those who do choose to attend college. For example, college graduates on average get higher-quality jobs, they fare better during recessions, and they likely are to earn higher wages than their counterparts without degrees [4]. The act of obtaining a diploma, despite the debt that most likely will be incurred, proves to pay itself off with time due to the varying benefits that come with having a degree. Forbes found in September of last year that a college degree "is still one of the best investments a person can make." [5] Despite recent changes in college attainment and employment trends not requiring degrees to enter certain jobs, it is evident that obtaining a degree will pay itself off and lead to better outcomes for college graduates.

Now, I understand the irony in that this article is being written at a university, primarily to a student-based audience. As a reader, you likely aren't going to suddenly drop out of college because there exists a body of evidence saying that you might not need a degree. Yet maybe there are some of you who are regularly considering whether or not college attendance is a good idea, and a number of you who are set in the mindset that without it you have no options. This article then is more of an attempt to expose you to recent trends regarding college attendance and how interesting the conversation will be in future years. I, for one, am grateful for my college degree, particularly as a first-generation college student. Be that as it may, I look forward to seeing how the value of my degree holds up in the future.

“DEMYSTIFYING GAS PRICES” 6

BY CALEB JOHNSTON

With ongoing conflict in Russia and increased turmoil in the Middle East, I'd expect gas prices to be higher than normal. On top of that, Joe Biden's presidency has been characterized by inflation. Given those facts, I was surprised by the precipitous gas price drop in Utah late last year. When I was in Seattle recently and saw prices over \$4.00, I was even more confused. Prices in Utah had fallen to under \$3, and currently average \$2.72; what made Seattle so different [1]? Responding to my shock, my dad explained the recent enactment of a new gasoline tax in the state. Knowing my hometown, the lack of recoil shouldn't be surprising; Seattle-ites, being more environmentally-conscious, didn't really care.

The Seattle attitude does not reflect America's greater concern with gas prices. Seven out of ten Americans say that gas prices affect their feelings about the economy. Presidential Biden's approval ratings were well-correlated with gas prices. It's no wonder that Americans take gas prices as a sign of economic well-being; in the first quarter of 2022, spending on fuel made up 2.6% of disposable spending [2]. On top of that, gas prices are fairly easy to track. It's hard to miss a price that's plastered on signs lining major roads, and the price variations are not too complex [3]. The Seattle tax made sense to me, but I still didn't understand why prices had dropped so heavily in Utah. As a confused economics major, I took it upon myself to better understand the recent drop.

My mind was drawn to supply and demand, the core of price changes. Perhaps the most obvious case of supply disruptions comes from overseas conflict. Gas prices generally track crude oil prices [4]. The US gets 61.5% of its crude oil from North America; even though most of its oil comes from North America, supply shocks in other areas have the potential to affect prices at home [5]. A conflict like the invasion of Ukraine has the potential to stifle the crude oil trade. Right after the invasion, US gas prices spiked, then fell for 98 days straight, making the conflict seem like a nonfactor with the recent drop in prices [8]. Another key determinant of worldwide oil prices is OPEC, a cartel that controls the supply of oil sold by member countries and

produces about 40% of the world's crude oil [7]. In my research, no source claimed that loose OPEC policy caused the drop in US gas prices, though OPEC has announced supply cuts to combat low prices [9]. If anything, high US oil production has depressed prices [9].

Gas prices also follow a seasonal cycle that has nothing to do with geopolitical circumstances. Gas prices generally drop starting in September. At this time, pumps start using a cheaper winter blend of gasoline, leading to a price drop of anywhere from \$0.10 to \$0.30 [10]. On top of this, the winter is a low period for demand; Americans like to do their driving in the summer [1]. Weather patterns can also curtail demand. Experts predict that El Niño will cut demand by 7% this winter [11].

Clearly, gas prices can result from factors that have little to do with the overall economic state. Low prices can even be an indicator of a recession, unlike what we'd expect. At the beginning of the Great Recession, the average gas price fell \$2.49 in six months [8]. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, gas prices dropped abruptly, then rose afterwards [13].

Admittedly, research does show a tie between gas prices and unemployment. The stagflation of the 1970s is often blamed on the increase in price of crude oil [14]. Understandably, Americans look for shortcuts when assessing the economy and the performance of their president. In some cases, their assessment is correct, as gasoline serves as an input for other industries and cuts into discretionary spending. However, we should hesitate to judge our economic condition on gas prices. Don't get me wrong, as a driver of a GMC Sierra and a co-owner of a moving company, I am grateful for low gas prices. But when prices lift, maybe we can learn a lesson from Seattle-ites and not let that influence our mood about the economy or the current administration. So many factors can influence prices, factors beyond our president's control, and gas prices are not a true indicator of economic well-being, as they could be signaling different conditions. Though fast and easy, we ought to remember that gas prices are only a crude measure.

“COUNTRIES DON’T HAVE BLOOD” 7

BY CALEB RINGGER

At a campaign rally on December 16, 2023, Donald Trump made the following statement about the current wave of undocumented immigration at the southern border:

“When they let fifteen, sixteen million people into our country, we’ve got a lot of work to do. They’re poisoning the blood of our country, that’s what they’ve done. They’ve poisoned mental institutions and prisons all over the world—not just in South America, not just the three or four countries we think about—but all over the world.”

At first glance, this might sound like just another example of Trump’s generally anti-immigration rhetoric he has repeated for nearly a decade now. But on closer inspection, this statement is much more insidious than his past rhetoric, and taps into a set of uniquely dangerous ideas.

I want to focus on the phrase “they’re poisoning the blood of our country.” Let’s treat it like more than just rhetorical fluff—what do these words mean? Trump’s statement implies that countries have blood—something that is not, of course, literally true. So what does he mean?

“Blood” is frequently used as a synonym for genetic makeup (“blood is thicker than water,” “runs in my blood,” “bloodline”). This suggests that Trump could be referring to America’s genetic makeup in this statement. The idea of contrasting “dirty blood” with “pure blood” is an old racist concept that has been used to elevate people of noble birth above commoners, and White people above people of mixed ancestry. The “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory claims leftist elites are trying to eliminate white racial purity by encouraging immigration and interracial marriage. This exact idea, as well as the term “blood poisoning,” was famously used by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, where he claims that Jews were engaged in a plot to poison the blood of the Aryan race by encouraging immigration and interracial marriage.[1]

Trump is not Hitler, and direct comparisons are less constructive than some liberals think. However, these ideas undoubtedly capture a similar sentiment—countries have blood, that blood can be poisoned, and immigrants do the poisoning. And while Trump may not explicitly advocate for white nationalism, many people certainly do (David Duke, Nick Fuentes, Richard Spen-

cer)—and nearly all of these people support Trump.

It is possible that Trump did not intend for “blood” to mean “race” (although in political rhetoric, effect is definitely more important than intent). Maybe he meant “culture,” “law and order,” or something like “American-ness,” some abstract nature that unites the country.

Even if this is the case, however, his statement is still dangerous, and just plain wrong. Immigrants—including undocumented immigrants—have an objectively positive impact on the United States economy, leading to higher productivity and growth.[2] Additionally, undocumented immigrants commit significantly less crime on average than both legal immigrants and native-born Americans.[3] And of course, thanks to centuries of genocide and cultural erasure against this country’s indigenous people, nearly all Americans are either immigrants or descended from immigrants. By ignoring this reality and spreading the lie that immigrants “poison” American institutions, Trump is stoking the kind of anti-immigrant sentiment that has led to a recent increase in anti-Latino hate crimes.[4]

To be clear, it’s not fascist to take issue with the current administration’s immigration policies. The United States is certainly facing a crisis as we struggle to house and process the millions of asylum seekers and refugees that cross the southern border every year, and harmful drugs like methamphetamine and fentanyl are smuggled across the border at an alarming rate.[5] My point in this article has not been to dismiss or demonize anyone who has concerns about the current state of immigration in this country.

However, it is both possible and essential to have an open, nuanced conversation about American immigration policy without resorting to racist tropes that dehumanize the millions of human beings who come to the United States each year looking for economic opportunity and safety. In order to have this conversation, we must both avoid and denounce rhetoric that echoes fascist concepts of national blood and blood poisoning. This rhetoric, and politicians who use it, only serve to further divide our already polarized country and stoke racial hatred.

“A RENOVATION TO EDUCATION” 8

BY ISABEL HALLOWS

On the first day of my Constitutional Law class, someone asked the professor if she thought there were too many lawyers and if the field was oversaturated. One of her remarks in response to the question struck me. She said that as a rule of thumb, she would just never recommend obtaining a graduate degree where the costs incurred were greater than the earnings would be in the first year in the workforce post graduation. Advice like this seems like solid, standard practice financial advice, but the idea that there are circumstances in which formal education might not be worth the cost turned my mind to higher education broadly, and the debts we incur in its pursuit.

I don't think the high school to college pipeline is always a positive norm. I was fortunate enough to have a sense of direction of my long term goals as early as middle school, thus when I got to high school I enrolled in as many concurrent enrollment classes as I could as soon as I could. My long term goal of becoming an attorney fueled my motivation and forged my path in high school. Nevertheless, not everyone has that clarity, and contrary to popular tradition, university years may not be the best—and certainly not the cheapest—time to go searching for it. Too many young adults go to college and spend four years “finding themselves”, partying, and digging themselves further into debt with degrees that won't pay the bills (and this is coming from a PoliSci major).

This is certainly not to suggest that I am against education. The current prophet, President Nelson, is quoted saying, “Education is the difference between wanting to help someone, and knowing how to help”. I sustain this principle wholeheartedly and value my education for the way that it enables me to help others, and for the way educated persons help me. But education needn't always exist strictly as academic institutions of higher learning. The kind of lifelong education that is pursued in all stages of life and from every available source is separate from—but not mutually exclusive with—formal university degrees. Some of the most educated individuals I know lack expensive degrees. They have devoted their lives to learning about the world from books, from stories, and from natural curiosity.

So how do we utilize both formal and informal sources of learning to eliminate the waste of time and

resources? What can public education do to improve the lives and wellbeing of students post high school graduation? When higher education is the chosen path, how do we increase the efficacy of time at a university? Schools offer aptitude tests, but kids don't take them seriously. How useful and relevant are the results? Perhaps we should look at the collegiate and professional sports model, where youth are scouted for sports as young as middle school, and their talent is followed, encouraged and nurtured for years. What if schools implemented a similar system for standardized tests? What if parents could opt in to sharing their children's test scores with a database that connects students with potential employers? What if students who excel in math and science were “scouted” by computer software companies that then “sponsored” their education? Clearly this idea is still in its early phases with countless logistical issues, but implementing programs that help kids identify their passions and strengths early on in order to help them in their transition into the workforce could be extremely beneficial to the individuals—and to society as a whole. This way, kids attend college to specialize and learn about their desired fields, streamlining their development and preventing years, money, and spirits from being wasted.

In addition to inventive programs like this, we ought to require entrepreneurship classes to show children that they have the opportunity to become innovators. Not everyone needs to be a lawyer, doctor, engineer, or classically trained administrative businessman to be successful. Further, the future workforce should understand that giving birth to a new business doesn't require novel goods or services; society flourishes because of plumbers, diesel mechanics, welders, ranchers—people who start the businesses that aren't flashy to keep the national economy in motion. In my mind, contribution to mankind constitutes success. The beautiful thing is that different individuals have individual talents to contribute!

The best way to identify and harness a person's capacity to contribute to society is not always through university classes. When it is, years and borrowed money are too frivolously spent. If we want to maximize the efficiency of schooling and open students' eyes to all the options of post high school life, the traditional pathway of education in America may need a renovation.

“LEGISLATION IMMITATION”

9

BY JANE DRINKWATER

Though federalism hopes to let local governments find individualized solutions to their unique problems, Americans often assume it works like this: Washington D.C. deals with the most prominent political issues, and then the state governments sort out less relevant matters. Yet a look at Utah’s 2024 congressional docket proves that caricature inaccurate. Since the legislative session opened on January 16, a whirlwind of nationally contested issues has played out at the state capitol.

Many of these issues are highly divisive and related to the broader “culture war”. LGBTQ+ rights, racial diversity in hiring, gun control, religious freedom, socialism, gender equality, public school curriculum—take your pick. Whatever hot-button topic you care most about, Utah’s probably got a bill about it this year.

Serving as one of the most dramatic examples, HB269 would require every school to display a framed poster of the 10 commandments in a prominent location [1]. HB112 would remove “human sexuality” from the sex education curriculum [2]. HB119 provides financial incentives for K-12 teachers to bring firearms to school [3]. Utah’s congress is even engaged in the cultural battles of 70 years ago: House Resolution 16 would ratify the Equal Rights Amendment [4], and Senate Resolution 5 condemns communism in language that might seem heavy-handed even to McCarthy [5].

The majority of the controversial bills are education-related and copied from other Republican states. HB 374, which would remove books deemed inappropriate from school libraries, follows a national boom in censorship laws from dozens of states in the last 3 years [6]. HB 303 would demand a harsher standard of neutrality from school officials, who may not endorse, promote, or disparage a religious belief, political viewpoint, or “viewpoint regarding sexual orientation or gender identity” [7]. While HB 303 does not go as far as Florida’s infamous 2022 “Don’t Say Gay” law, that legislation seems to be its inspiration [8]. HB 261, which Governor Cox signed into law on January 30th, is nearly identical to a 2023 Texas law. It eliminates diversity, equity, and inclusion offices from public universities, K-12 schools, and government offices. These public entities would be mandated to give annual trainings on freedom of speech, but would be banned from requiring employees to attend trainings on diversity and inclusion [9].

Perhaps most controversial is HB 257, also signed into law on January 30th. With its passage, Utah becomes one of 10 Republican state legislatures imitating North Carolina’s 2016 “bathroom ban”. The new law restricts

access to public bathrooms and changing rooms to only those whose gender on their birth certificate matches the sex-designation assigned to the room (although, after revisions, individuals can only be charged with trespassing if they “enter or remain in the changing room under circumstances which a reasonable person would expect to likely cause affront or alarm”). This law introduces significant complications for Utah’s transgender community [10].

It also positions Utah’s representatives as players in national cultural debates, signalling their loyalty and acceptability to their out-of-state colleagues in the Republican party. Clearly, I am personally opposed to plenty of the ballot measures. My political opinions tend to put me in the minority in Utah, so it’s possible that these legislative actions are exactly what most of Utah wants. But I’m concerned that in their efforts to keep up with the Republican party’s race to the right, legislators may be leaving Utah behind. It’s hard to know whether legislators’ behavior is matching what Utahns want from them, because state politics garner such minimal attention. In the last election cycle, only 3 of 68 incumbents lost their re-election campaigns—some years, it’s even less than that [11]. Legislators’ votes and decisions can fly under the radar, leaving constituents unlikely to hold them accountable, even if they (unknowingly) disagree with their representative’s actions.

But of course, whether or not they know the origins of a law, Utahns feel its impact. A transgender student who might have worried about bathroom bills in the abstract before January 30th must now sit in a school administrator’s office and work out a plan for gender-affirming privacy. Utah teachers probably hold opinions about how our country should protect students from gun violence, but that used to be theoretical. Now, if HB119 passes, they will have to decide whether to carry a weapon in their classroom. The practical impact of these policies happens when a state’s elected officials take a vote—a vote that probably goes largely unnoticed, because people were distracted talking in hypotheticals about the White House.

And of course, the policies themselves are hardly “by Utah, for Utah”. Instead, they are by Florida (or Indiana, or Georgia, or Texas, or anywhere but here), for an increasingly partisan national movement. Is that how federalism was intended to work? As much as I wish it weren’t the case, the national culture war is being fought in Utah’s capitol, and until we turn our attention to what’s happening in our state, the people who have to live under these laws will have little say in how they are made.

“SPOIL OR SPUNK? THIRD PARTIES CANDIDATES IN 2024”

10

BY NATHAN CHASE

The 2024 United States presidential election is looking to be a rematch of the 2020 election. As of now, Donald Trump not only won the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primary by historic margins, but it seems inevitable that he'll win more states and become the Republican nominee [1]. Although Joe Biden is one of the most unpopular presidents in modern U.S. history, there are no signs of his party looking to replace him at this time [2]. Though 2024 may see like a sequel to 2020, there is one key difference: third party candidates. The increased presence of these candidates gives Americans more options as a majority of voters do not want to see a Trump-Biden rematch, but these third parties are a long shot [3]. However, the circumstances of this election will give these third party candidates influence in American politics that has not been seen in decades.

Third Party Background

There are some notable third party candidates throughout U.S. history that heavily influenced the presidency. Theodore Roosevelt split the Republicans in 1912 and launched his own third-party candidacy, which resulted in Democrat Woodrow Wilson's presidential victory. Ross Perot in 1992 brought a populist message that many experts speculate cost George H.W. Bush a significant number of Republican votes and led Bill Clinton to win the presidency [4]. The controversial 2000 election may have had a different outcome, had third-party candidate Ralph Nader's supporters voted for Al Gore in Florida.

In 2024, the number of third-party candidates is already large. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the nephew of President John F. Kennedy and son of Bobby Kennedy, seems to be the most prominent candidate. He started running in the Democratic primary, but later switched to running as an independent. RFK Jr. currently polls at 20% as he appears to take votes from both Trump and Biden (although it is still very early in the election for polls to have any real implications) [5]. Other candidates include Colonel West and Jill Stein. Joe Machin, the senator from West Virginia, is also considering a run under No Labels Party [6].

Spoil or Spunk?

Although many have seen third parties as spoil

ers or wasted votes, they have a unique importance in the upcoming election. In a year where both the Republican and Democrat frontrunner candidates are unpopular to voters, these candidates give an outlet for people to express their vote against the broken two party system. It's better to have multiple options even if those options may not lead to success. For those that feel that Donald Trump and Joe Biden clash with their morals, having these third parties give them an opportunity to be a responsible citizen and not feeling guilty about their voting decision.

For example, Biden's support of Black voters in Georgia has dropped significantly recently. In 2020, 88% of Black voters supported Joe Biden, but current opinion polls suggest a catastrophic drop to 58% [7]. To pick-up dissatisfied black voters, RFK is holding events in Georgia, and he promises he will continue the work of his uncle in the progress of civil rights. What message does this send to Joe Biden? Will he now campaign differently if RFK Jr. becomes a significant threat to his reelection?

We are all better off with competition. In the spirit of America, there are a plethora of options which compete with each other to create higher quality products. When you get ice cream, there is more than just chocolate and vanilla. The idea of third party candidates taking votes from Donald Trump and Joe Biden will force both of them to not only compete with each other, but raise the bar in how they present their policies with voters. Even if Biden and Trump are both nominated by their respective parties, they will be held more accountable and to a higher standard since voters will now have more options.

Third parties undoubtedly act as spoilers for Republicans and Democrats, snatching valuable votes, particularly in swing states where the election is decided by the smallest of margins. However, these third party candidates also bring spunk and shake up the election by putting the GOP and Democrat candidates on their toes. In a year where a majority of Americans are not enthusiastic about a rematch of 2020, this provides voters a way to voice their discontent. There are still nine months until the general election, and anything can change. However, pay close attention to how Trump and Biden act in response to these candidates. These third parties may be the most influential in deciding where the country goes next.

“THE COST OF SPACE” 11

BY SCOTT SAWAYA

When Woody, the cowboy from Toy Story 2, is shocked to discover that a television show featuring himself was canceled following a cliffhanger (an all too familiar sensation nowadays), he is met with a curt response. Prospector Pete tells him, “Two words, Sput-nik. Once the astronauts went up, children only wanted to play with space toys”.

This movie premiered 25 years ago in 1999 and today it seems like space toys are still popular, but for a very different demographic. Where the turn of the century was characterized by boyish optimism racing around the bedroom with Buzz Lightyear in hand, a quieter trend was also emerging within a smaller demographic with a lot more money. Billionaires began to realize that they didn't need to wait for a state-sponsored shuttle to the stars, they could just build their own. The “billionaire space race” was born, with three key players leading the pack - Jeff Bezos and his company Blue Origin, Richard Branson of Virgin Group, and Elon Musk with SpaceX. That's right, not only do these three men have an aversion to remaining faithful to their first wives, they also really want to explore and capitalize on the cosmos.

Psychologists have actually studied this phenomenon of billionaires and their shared desire to explore space, and many believe it is a result of a certain degree of separation from reality that comes with extreme wealth. Their research demonstrates that wealth and power are ultimately an unsatisfying end goal, and those that have maxed out their pursuit of what money can buy are left still unfulfilled, choosing to fill that empty space inside them...with outer space [1]. The final frontier becomes the ideal physical and metaphorical vacuum for those who have run out of corporate ladders to climb, offering the prospect of other-worldly glamour and fame all in the name of “scientific progress”.

In order to better understand what is going on in the heads of our off-brand Tony Starks, it is helpful to turn to what neuroscience says about power. Recent research indicates that key neural processes responsible for experiencing empathy actually physically deactivate when we see ourselves as being superior to the people

around us [2]. Professor of Psychology Dacher Keltner has coined this reality the “power paradox”, stating that after we gain the positions of power that we seek, we can actually start to lose the very traits that got us there in the first place [3]. It is a disturbing thought that the people we revere for their innovation and ingenuity can actually lose their capacity to empathize and relate to others as a result of our own adoration. Far be it from me to diagnose anyone from a distance, but it seems very possible that the draw of space to America's most wealthy citizens is that it can continue to enable the addictive and destructive drug of power without the pesky requirement of directly engaging with too many people or a need to connect with them and practice empathy.

I want to be abundantly clear that I am not opposed to space exploration, quite the opposite. In 2022 I had the incredible opportunity to work at the World's Fair in Dubai where I often spent time promoting America's contributions to understanding outer space. NASA had even loaned the U.S. pavilion where I worked a piece of the moon collected during the last Apollo mission in 1972, which became a highlight for the guests that visited us [4]. I loved watching people from all over the world light up as they were able to touch something from outer space for the first time, and were united in a childlike sense of wonder about the worlds beyond ours. What I am ultimately opposed to is making the idea of space inaccessible and limiting innovations in space travel to be just another milestone for the wealthy rather than an accomplishment that can be shared collectively.

Perhaps Neil Armstrong was prophetic in his declaration that the moon landing was “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,” exemplifying space exploration as a means of collective progress over individualistic pride. Even though America's billionaire club has the power to explore space as they please, we cannot let them control the narrative of space travel and make dreaming of the stars a status symbol. It should instead be a means of profound connection that can serve as a tool of unity rather than division. After all, the most fortunate part of space exploration is not to reach the stars, but to have someone to celebrate with when we get there.

“台灣真的是中國的台灣嗎？ A CONVERSATION 12 WITH BRENT CHRISTENSEN”

BY KATELYN GALE

On January 13th, 2024, Taiwan elected Lai Ching-te, the former Vice President of Taiwan, as President of Taiwan. This election was historic, as it solidified the dominance the DPP, the Democratic Progressive Party, has had over the KMT, the Kuomintang, since 2016 [1]. Even so, Lai Ching-te only won roughly 40% of the vote, with the KMT candidate, Hou Yu-ih, winning 33.5% of the vote and the TPP (Taiwan People's Party) candidate, Ko Wen-je, winning a surprising 26.5% of the vote [2].

While this election in part represents the positive power of Taiwan's hard-fought democracy, on a broader scale, it is more so indicative of Taiwan's ongoing struggle for sovereignty. Chinese officials have released many statements leading up to and following Taiwan's election, emphasizing President Xi Jinping's ultimate goal of reunifying China and Taiwan and how unfit for the Taiwanese presidency China deems Lai Ching-te to be [3][4]. Furthermore, following the election, Oceanic country Nauru, one of Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies, announced plans to cut ties with Taiwan, and instead establish diplomatic ties with China [5]. Despite the strides Taiwan has taken in the last 30 years to build up its government and identity as separate from China, China's influence nevertheless remains a shadow on Taiwan's accomplishments.

To learn more about the implications of Taiwan's election, I sat down with Dr. Brent Christensen, former US Foreign Service Officer and former director of the American Institute in Taiwan.

Q: Why does China care so much about Taiwan? How might an invasion of Taiwan help mitigate the lingering effects of China's "Century of humiliation?"

A: "It's a good question. I think that Taiwan is sort of the last piece of the puzzle, as it were, [for the PRC] to regain territory lost during what it regards as the "Century of humiliation." It has become an article of faith in the PRC that Taiwan must be regained for the PRC to finish addressing the territorial losses that occurred during that century, when the PRC was weak and had

to cede all these territories and [make] all these concessions to foreign powers. And although this has been a long-standing demand, [...] Xi Jinping has almost personalized it as something that is essential for his [...] dream for the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." There are a lot of people who are suggesting that now that China has become so powerful, they will take action sooner rather than later to force the issue. But in my view, that is not the PRC's inclination; peaceful reunification remains their priority. But Taiwan also remains a critical issue in the U.S.-China relationship. It is worth noting that the one most important issue when Kissinger was negotiating the terms for normalizing relations with the PRC [in 1972] was the status of Taiwan. I thought the way the [1972 Shanghai] communique was drafted and interpreted was a very elegant way of finessing that issue on which there was obviously no good way to completely resolve that issue. They just sort of agreed to disagree."

Q: Moving to the US side of this conflict, what are the US's primary interests in Taiwan?

A: "There are several factors that make Taiwan important to the United States. One of course is Taiwan's success as a democracy; it scores number 1 in Asia on the Global Democracy Index, and number 10 worldwide. So that's a pretty impressive achievement, considering they didn't have their first direct election for president until 1996. Secondly, I think that policymakers recognize that Taiwan is an important security partner in the region. We have an explicit commitment in the Taiwan Relations Act [of 1979] that we will support Taiwan's self defense. It is a legal requirement spelled out in the Taiwan Relations Act that the U.S. will provide necessary support for Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. And I think there is a realization that if the US did not support Taiwan's self-defense, it would call into question our [support for our] other allies in the region. There is also an important economic factor—Taiwan's economic value to the U.S. and to the global economy was clearly underscored by the computer chip shortage that occurred a couple of years ago.

Indeed, there is now a broad awareness that Taiwan is an indispensable source of the most sophisticated semiconductors in the world. And it is the TSMC [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company] that makes 90% of the chips that the world needs for everything from cars to computers to cell phones. I would point out that NVIDIA, which designs the majority of the chips that fuel the AI industry, has them all made by TSMC.”

Q: It is well-established that Taiwan is an essential factor in the global economy, despite it being such a small, young island. How did this happen?

A: “To some degree, this is due to the impressive success of Taiwan’s industrial policy. Economic Strategist Kwoh-Ting Li is the one who first conceived of the idea of setting up Taiwan’s science parks. And he was the one who invited Morris Chang, the founder of TSMC, to come to Taiwan and set up this company. But this could only have been done in the right sort of environment where there was already a lot of technical talent in Taiwan. The New York Times’ Tom Friedman wrote a column a few years ago where he said that Taiwan was fortunate not to have any natural resources except its people. [...] So Taiwan had to focus all of its attention on honing the skills of its people. There is a broad recognition that Taiwan has a lot of really impressively capable engineers and technical experts who were able to support these industrial goals. [...] After all, it is the semiconductors and all [the other tech products] that Taiwan produces that really makes the world’s high-tech industry work.”

Q: Shifting back to China, I want to talk about China’s current economy. In the last few years, we have seen numerous reports on China’s declining birth rates, aging population, and difficulties with its housing market. How might these difficulties change China’s strategy with an invasion of Taiwan?

A: “Actually, China’s economy needs Taiwan’s high-tech inputs. This has been described as a “silicon shield,” in that this critical need would perhaps prevent

or delay a Chinese attack. Taiwan produces all of these high-end components that China’s high-tech industry needs. So, China may impose export controls or bans on certain kinds of Taiwan exports, such as pineapples or wax apples. But they will never do that for the things they really need from Taiwan. They can make some of these components themselves, but they don’t make them as well. [...] For example, all of the important parts of an iPhone—the lenses, the chips, the speakers, and the other things that make an iPhone work—all come from Taiwan. So [...] any actual military conflict would interrupt those supply chains or those exports in a way that would make a lot of these industries just collapse.”

I look forward to the next few months and the next few years, where the China-Taiwan conflict will undoubtedly step further onto the global stage, drawing support, censure, and action from all sides. In the end, however, I can only hope that we can all live to say “No, Taiwan is really not China’s Taiwan”.

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“WHAT’S THE FAIR SHARE” 14

BY LEVI HILTON

In each State of the Union address that President Biden has given, he has called upon Americans to pay more in taxes. No thanks.

Well, more accurately, he wants wealthy Americans to pay more in taxes. It almost seems that the wealthy are always villains in the eyes of President Biden. Speaking of this group he said, “it’s about time they started paying their fair share.” He said, “I think it’s about time we started giving tax breaks and tax benefits to working-class families and middle-class families, instead of just the very wealthy.”

In the most recent State of the Union address, he once again emphasized the need for wealthy Americans to pay their “fair share,” promising Americans that he would support the legislature to enforce higher taxes on the higher brackets.

When the phrase ‘fair share’ is thrown around so much, it makes me wonder what that really means. Let’s examine a breakdown of the tax percentiles and portion of taxes paid. All of this data is published by the IRS. These numbers are taken from 2020.

Percentile of Earner / Income Bracket	Portion of Federal Income Taxes
Top 1% (Income above \$548K)	42.21%
Top 5% (Income above \$221K)	62.74%
Top 10% (Income above \$152K)	73.67%
Top 25% (Income above \$86K)	88.51%
Top 50% (Income above \$42K)	97.68%
Bottom 50% (Income below \$42K)	2.32%

Looking at this data, it is bizarre to me that anyone would claim that wealthy Americans do not pay their fair share. The top 1% of taxpayers pay 42% of the total federal tax income! The top 10% make up almost three-fourths of total income tax earnings!

If we really want to talk about fairness, should we look at the fact that 50% of taxpayers only contribute to 2% of the nation’s tax earnings. That doesn’t seem quite fair to me.

Now, I’m not at all asking that everyone pay the same monetary value of taxes. That wouldn’t be fair either, and it wouldn’t make sense. But when the most important figure in the world calls for people to pay their “fair share,” I think it is important to understand what that means. If we measure fairness by cash contributed, it is laughably unfair (as seen above). If we measure fairness by rate paid, under our current system, it continues to be unfair.

If President Biden wants to make the American tax system more fair, he should support a flat tax system, and remove the thousands of pages of tax codes that give loopholes and exceptions. In a flat tax system, everyone pays the same tax rate. Currently the income tax rates are 0%-37%. Instead of one person paying 10% and another person paying 30%, wouldn’t it be more fair if everyone paid the same rate?

This is why Malcom Forbes, president and CEO of Forbes, INC has called repeatedly for a flat tax. In an op ed he wrote demanding a flat tax he said:

“If we want to do something to help families in this country, I can’t think of a better option than the flat tax. True, the across-the-board tax cuts proposed by Republican and even some Democratic leaders are an important step in the right direction and will do enormous good, but we should not stop there. We should scrap the existing tax code. Just think about what a monstrosity this code is. The Gettysburg Address runs about 200 words. The Declaration of Independence runs about 1,300 words. The Holy Bible runs about 773,000 words. But our federal income tax code runs about seven million words and is growing longer every year.”

I agree with President Biden that the American tax system is unfair. I don’t think anything he continues to do is helping with that. Let’s try something new. Something simple. Something flat. Something fair.



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