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Nothing On TV But Reruns? Not Anymore

By DOUG FRENCH
Contributing Editor

TV is just amazing. Remember your frustration, especially during the summer, “there’s nothing on but re-runs.” Boy did that get fixed and then some. Imagine kids today if they were stuck with the three major networks? And now Netflix, Hulu and Amazon.

Besides some regulatory changes, Robert Prechter, of Elliott Wave fame, says social mood has much to do with the quality of entertainment in a piece entitled “On Breaking Bad: How Social Mood Helped it Become the ‘Best Ever’ Program.”

“Certain times of peak social mood support peak artistic achievements in many fields, including the field of popular entertainment,” wrote Prechter, who goes on to list a number of shows to illustrate his point such as Weeds, Downton Abbey, The Wire, Dexter, Game of Thrones and so on.

“This cornucopia is reminiscent of the late 1930s in film and the late 1960s in pop music,” he writes. “Lauds for ‘Breaking Bad’ are reminiscent of timeless praise for two artful films of 1939 (‘The Wizard of Oz’ and ‘Gone with the Wind’) and a comment about popular music from a major newspaper years ago: ‘Rock peaked in 1969.’”

Leaving out the Elliott Wave nomenclature, Prechter concluded, “Apparently the mix of a return to peak positive mood during the larger transition to more negative mood produces an ideal emotional state to motivate people toward peak artistic creativity.”

The Fed has done all it can to prop up our moods with cheap money while the world seems to border on chaos. The upside is, good programs, making for excellent leisure, continue to be produced.

For example, the third season of Orange is the New Black (OITNB) was released last month and ardent fans have no doubt gobbled up all 13 episodes. The series is based on Piper Kerman’s best selling book, but I have a hunch the Australian show Wentworth Prison also influenced the makers of OITNB.

Writing about season 2, Jeffrey Tucker makes the case that OITNB “is a microcosm of our whole society. The police state, the welfare state, the military state, and social management state — every bit of the oppressive order that manages us today outside the prison finds its analogy in the prison environment.”

With season 3, OITNB has stretched well beyond where Ms. Kerman’s story ended. The normalness of Litchfield is disrupted with the prison being taken over by private operators. Management cultures collide and incarceration is not so much about punishment and rehabilitation but cutting costs, increasing occupancy, and making a profit.

And while The Atlantic gushes over the season’s final scene: “The show’s finale gave its characters a

Continued on page4
What Will We Remember Fondly From Obama Years?

Continued from page 3
real miracle, and in some ways, it gave viewers one, too—one of the best TV scenes in recent memory, or maybe ever,” writes Spencer Kornhaber. Don’t be surprised if you’re underwhelmed.

The kind of scene that makes OITNB great occurs in the first episode. Because 80 percent of inmates are mothers, “Mother’s Day was off the chain at the Camp,” writes Kerman in her book. Season 3’s opener revolves around a Mother’s Day party at the prison. So there’s plenty of inmates enjoying their kids for an entire afternoon.

But then there’s Pennsatucky who is off by herself, sitting in the grass in front of six little wooden crosses designating the graves of the six fetuses she aborted. She’s named them all, staring with B. She pours out some Mountain Dew for them, feeling like a failure.

Big Boo, dressed as a clown of some sort, comes to sit with her: The born again hick and the aggressive dyke. A hysterical shouting match between these two would have ensued during the show’s first two season. Instead, Boo lends the ex-meth head a sympathetic ear.

Boo calmly tells Pennsatucky about Steven Levitt’s and Stephen Dunbar’s book Freakonomics. In their book Levitt hypothesizes that the lowering of the crime rate in the 1990s was due to the passage of Roe v. Wade in 1973,

Despite the numbers supporting his theory, and it making intuitive sense, the notion was controversial. Instead of thousands of unwanted children being brought into the world to commit crimes while in their twenties, those thousands weren’t born because Roe v. Wade made abortions legal throughout the land.

Steve Sailer, among others, took issue with Levitt, claiming it was the rise and fall of crack use that explained the fall. Levitt summaries Sailer’s argument.

“The arrival of crack led to large increases in crime rates between 1985 and the early ’90s, particularly for inner-city African-American youths. The fall of the crack epidemic left many of the bad apples of this cohort dead, imprisoned, or scared straight. Consequently, not only did crime fall back to its original pre-crack level, but actually dropped even further in a “overshoot” effect.”

Levitt answers,

“Two of the key assumptions underlying your alternative hypothesis appear to be false: The retreat of crack has not led to an “overshoot” in crime, causing it to be lower than 1985, and even if it had, the states with high abortion rates in the ’70s do not appear to be affected particularly strongly by the crack epidemic. Moreover, when we re-run our analysis controlling for both changes in crime rates from 1985 to 1991 and the level of crime in 1991, the abortion variable comes in just as strongly as in our original analysis.”

Boo doesn’t trudge through all of that analysis, but simply tells the crestfallen Pennsatucky that since she was such a terrible meth head, her children would have likely ended up just like her. By aborting her fetuses, “You spared society the scourge of your offspring,” Boo tells Pennsatucky, which brings a smile to her face. She was a good mother for getting the abortions.

Don’t assume the great storytelling on TV will continue. Enjoy it while you can. As much as we want Better Call Saul to be as good as Breaking Bad, it’s not.

What will we fondly remember from the Obama years? ObamaCare, the Iran deal? It’ll be something he had nothing to do with—great TV.

www.pennypressnv.com
Commentary: Ron Knecht

Up from Special-interest Liberalism

In the 1970s, I was an environmental and consumer activist, all-purpose liberal Democrat, and a founding director of Illinois’ Naderite Alinskyite radic-lib umbrella organization that harbored some of Barack Obama’s fellow community organizers.

Fortunately for me, I continued to read, learn and grow; got over statist liberalism; and now oppose it due to the grim benighted future it holds for our children. Unfortunately for the world, many of my fellow Boomers and younger folks they’ve influenced still peddle it aggressively.

The opening of my eyes and my recovery from it began at our founding convention, for which I developed a proposal based on my expertise in energy economics and utility ratemaking to support “life-line” electric rates. Life-line means that monthly customer charges and modest usage levels are priced low to help poor people, with higher usage levels priced higher to encourage conservation.

I presented the logic and finely balanced details to the convention’s energy and utilities session: a $3.50 monthly customer charge and seasonal rates of a few cents per kilowatt-hour (kwhr) for the first 400 kwhr each month. Then lightning struck.

The founding director from the United Auto Workers, who didn’t know anything about energy economics or ratemaking but a lot about radic-lib street organizing, erupted: “I don’t know or care about any of that! Let’s just give everybody 1000 kwhr a month at two cents and zero customer charge! Screw the utilities!”

His demagoguery and the reaction to it made glaringly obvious the extent to which the consumer and environmental movements had degenerated and to which other such causes eventually fall, as I’ll explain. While such special-interest movements always couch their rhetoric and demands under fairness, justice, legitimate grievance and the public interest, eventually they become driven more by selfishness, ignorance, envy and greed to preying upon the public interest.

As a university energy research engineer, I encountered a full range of environmentalism and limits-to-growth theory, literature, research and dogma. I learned that commercial and industrial practices back then often produced unduly high “negative externalities” such as pollution -- the founding legitimate insight of environmentalism.

Thus, completely unfettered markets don’t always maximize aggregate human wellbeing and fairness (the primary public interests), and some legislation, regulation and other public intervention is justified. Similar observations originally motivated policy in education, civil rights, public health and safety, and even labor and other markets.

So, the early proposals of such groups are often reasonable and get adopted -- witness the regulation of air and water pollution in the 1970s. But as that convention showed, true believers cannot be satisfied by mere reasonable reforms, and all such movements invite hijacking by political hustlers seeking a cause to ride. For example, essential principles of equal rights before government yield to racial, ethnic and gender spoils systems. Child labor laws are necessary, but labor bosses really want union shops so they can wield great political power and get paid like corporate moguls.

Similarly, reasonable consumer and environmental demands have metastasized into the extreme, destructive policies proposed by Obama’s appointees. Those activists have achieved their real goal by co-opting government and large corporations to become institutionalized in jobs that pay them well for promoting their ideology and politicking.

America’s air, water and landfills are, overall, cleaner today than 40 years ago. However, enviros obscure those key facts by always making new policy demands for two reasons. For some zealots, environmentalism is a bizarre religion that sees mankind as a despoiler, and to varying degrees they want to roll back civilization to restore wilderness. For the larger fraction, most advocates and those with jobs in the enviro industries, admitting such facts would mean that most of them should get jobs that deliver enough real value to others to earn revenues in market competition, instead of getting paid for their politics.

After their early and just successes, such movements, seeking gravy trains to support their adherents, degenerate to being special interests with ever more extreme demands, as predatory upon the general public interest as politicians, judges and bureaucrats will let them be. Often, they quickly get big enough to offer sufficient job opportunities and campaign contributions to folks in government to co-opt it.

These special interests, plus others seeking to increase public spending and taxes, have continually increased the deadweight burden on our economy. So, our children face a future of very slow economic growth and reduced opportunity, social mobility and human flourishing. Our only hope is to greatly roll back the huge accumulated public-sector excesses.

Ron Knecht

Tips Of Our Cap and Bronx Cheers

The Penny Press Tips Its Cap To:

16-year old Houston resident McKinley Zoellner who walked up to Deputy Tommi Kelley while she was filling her squad car with gas and asked her if he could stand behind her so she would be safe in the wake of a recent shooting death of another Harris County while filling up. "To be nervous having to pump gas is sickening to me. So when you have someone that is so young and mature and thoughtful, and came up to help, I was very impressed with him," Kelley said. Us, too.

Backup BYU quarterback Tanner Mangum who threw a 42-yard Hail Mary touchdown pass to Mitch Mathews on the game’s final play as BYU stunned Nebraska 33-28 last week at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb. Just listening to the BYU radio announcer call the last play was the first highlight of the college football season.

The Penny Press Sends A Bronx Cheer And A Bouquet of Weeds To:

Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval who, having lost all credibility as a Republican, is now all of a sudden upset and shedding crocodile tears that the ACLU has filed suit to stop the Educational Savings Accounts which barely got out of the state legislature. He has asked Attorney General Adam Laxalt—who appears to be a real Republican—to put the defense of that lawsuit on a fast track. Where was Sandoval when the legislature was larding up the bill with gifts to the teachers unions? Oh yes, he was busy jamming the largest tax increase in history through the legislature.

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I always enjoy watching liberals—undereducated by their own pathetic public schools—twist in the wind when someone of true conscience takes an action with which they disagree. It’s as if the left has cornered the market on conscience.

Back when I was a boy in school, they were marching in Selma, Birmingham and Montgomery, trying to convince Congress that all men truly were created equal and Martin Luther King was quoting Henry David Thoreau’s Essay on Civil Disobedience. (Before the teachers union took over, they actually made us read it in public schools.) Ultimately, King’s methods worked and both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed.

They were not passed without people like Rosa Parks and King, himself, spending some time in jail. The concept is called civil disobedience.

So, today, the very same people who consider those achievements among the holy grail of American government are perfectly willing to denigrate a County Clerk in Rowan County, Kentucky who is willing to go to jail for refusing to sign her name to a marriage license for a same sex couple because of her own religious beliefs.

Now, I need to say right here that I am still very uncomfortable with the concept that a public official is refusing to do her job because of her religious convictions. It is a slippery slope.

But I am in awe of her courage. Just as I was in awe of those who braved Bull Connor’s dogs, water cannons and jails in Birmingham when I was just a boy.

Additionally, I—like Mike Huckabee—would like to know precisely what “law” she has violated. Where did Congress write a law that allows gay marriage and orders all 3,144 county clerks in America to issue marriage licenses? Where did the Kentucky legislature write such a law? I certainly can’t see one on the books. We know that equal rights in public accommodations is the law. It was signed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1964 after having passed both houses of Congress. We know that all citizens have the right to vote. That law was passed in 1965 by both houses of Congress and signed by President Johnson.

When did Congress pass a law which says that the nation’s 3,144 county clerks must issue marriage licenses to gay couples? In fact, when did Congress pass a law which orders county clerks to issue marriage licenses at all? Which President signed that law?

In point of fact, her “crime” was to defy a court order issued by a Federal Judge, which was that she must issue such licenses. She said she could not and, as of this writing, is in jail.

Federal Judges are the closest thing this nation has to feudal lords. They serve for life and cannot be defied except by a higher ranking judge. But, as Huckabee, among others, has pointed out many times, this is a system of checks and balances. If the judicial system is a check on the legislative branch and the executive branch, those branches must serve as a check on the judicial branch of government.

To quote Thoreau, “The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free.”

I would like to think that if I felt that strongly about something I would have that kind of courage. I hope I would.

Her husband, speaking to USA Today, said "She won’t bow, I promise you. I’m just an old, dumb, country hillbilly, but I know God.”

Keep in mind that she is the duly elected Clerk of Rowan County which means that she really can only be removed by the people who elected her. And she’s perfectly willing to go to jail for what she believes. Whether or not you agree with her, that is impressive.

There is also the argument that the LGBT community is trying to make an example of her.

I’ve quoted Henry David Thoreau. Let me also quote those two modern philosophers, Ron White and Arlo Guthrie. (I doubt that has ever been done in the same column before.)

On the issue of selective enforcement, allow me to point out once again that there are 3,143 county clerks in the United States who presumably ARE issuing marriage licenses. And Davis wasn’t issuing ANY marriage licenses—not just licenses to same sex couples. Yet, the Federal government has descended on this county in Kentucky to take this woman to jail.

Ron White: (from his album Behavioral Problems) “They found 7/8 of a gram of marijuana in my bag. Now, when I have 7/8 of a gram of marijuana, I consider myself to be...out of marijuana. That is no weed. They handcuffed me and put me in the squad car, and took me to jail. Now, I’m not being an ass about it. I broke the law, that’s fine, but...this is Florida! These cops drove by three meth labs and a dead hooker just to get here!”

This is a local issue in Kentuck with an elected county clerk. If Davis’ actions were to inspire some more of the other 3,143 county clerks, then what?

Arlo Guthrie: (from Alice’s Restaurant) You know, if one person, just one person, does it, they may think he’s really sick and they won’t take him. And if two people do it, in harmony, they may think they’re both queer and They won’t take either of them. And if three people do it! Can you imagine three people walkin’ in, singin’ A bar of “Alice’s Restaurant” and walkin’ out? They may think it’s an Organization! And can you imagine fifty people a day? I said FIFTY people a day . . . Walkin’ in, singin’ a bar of “Alice’s Restaurant” and walkin’ out? Friends, They may think it’s a MOVEMENT, and that’s what it is: THE ALICE’S RESTAURANT ANTI-MASSACREE MOVEMENT! . . . and all you gotta do to join is to Sing it the next time it comes around on the guitar. With feelin’.

What happens if this becomes a movement?

How many county clerks will how many Federal Judges put in jail then?

Indeed.

FRED WEINBERG
Commentary: Robert Ringer

Does Mindfulness Work?

In this day and age of ISIS, police assassinations, criminals in public office, riots on demand, and the moral equalization of every conceivable kind of “lifestyle,” it’s no wonder that mindfulness has become an increasingly popular technique.

The practice of mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism, which is always a good sign. Moreover, Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman all subscribed to mindfulness, and when it comes to endorsements, you can’t do much better than that.

Oversimplified, mindfulness is a state of active, open, intentional attention on the present. Mindfulness is the only intentional activity where you aren’t trying to improve yourself or get anywhere. The only intent is to be aware of where you already are.

That’s why you should never look at mindfulness as a goal or destination. Goals are about the future. A destination is a place you want to reach. But when you’re mindful of the present, you’re already where you want to be, both mentally and physically.

There are two kinds of mindfulness. One is formal mindfulness, the practice of sustained attention on the body, breath, or other sensations. In other words, you consciously concentrate on, say, your breathing. You purposely try to stay focused on every inhalation and every exhalation.

Informal mindfulness, on the other hand, is the moment-by-moment attention to your life, which involves two components. The first is regulating your attention so it’s focused on an immediate experience. The second component is developing an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance.

To accomplish this, you have to consciously work to stabilize your mind, because the mind is inherently distractible. Without consciously controlling it, your mind will run wild with petty thoughts, worries, social pressures, anxiety, depression, and fears of rejection, disappointment, and financial failure. But perhaps worst of all is the horrid habit of overthinking. Overthinking creates stress, stifles action, and probably kills.

The key to mindfulness is to focus less on what’s going on in your mind rather than what’s going on around you. Mindfulness advocates like to refer to this as “be here, now.” It would be impossible to sum it up better than with these three words.

Thus, the essence of mindfulness is to think in terms of this moment and this day. After all, there’s no guarantee that there will be another moment or another day. Everything about the future is hypothetical, at best. That’s why “What if?” is the enemy of mindfulness. When you practice mindfulness, you put aside all “What ifs?” and focus on what is — right now, this second.

Like everything of value, mindfulness is not easy — especially at first. It’s an enormous challenge to suspend all thoughts of past, future, and present concerns. Also, part and parcel to this practice is not being nonjudgmental about such concerns. Easy to say, but very tough to do.

I find that the best way to accomplish this is to not categorize things in terms of good or bad. I try (but do not always succeed) to think of most things in terms of “they just are,” and leave it at that. When we judge something as “bad,” it’s presumptuous, because we usually have no idea what the final outcome will be. We’re simply assigning a negative label to it, a label which may prove to be incorrect down the road.

For example, why does death have to be a bad thing? Maybe it’s a good thing? Who really knows? The only thing we know for certain is that death has visited every person who has ever lived on this earth. No matter how much we belabor death, it just is.

It’s important to understand that mindfulness is not about repressing stressful thoughts. Repression doesn’t work, because repressed thoughts build even more stress under the surface. The best approach to stressful thoughts is to neither embrace them nor push them away. Just let them alone and focus on your life … in this moment … in this place … on this day.

At its worst, the mind is on autopilot, a condition with which I’ve had more than my share of my bouts. By autopilot, I mean that you’re “zoned out.” As an example, have you ever done something like finished your shower, then not being able to remember if you washed your hair? What happened was that you zoned out while washing your hair (assuming that you did, indeed, wash it), because you were absorbed with other thoughts.

This can happen with brushing your teeth, taking your vitamins, and any one of an infinite number of other things that are part of your normal routine. When you zone out, you aren’t present, which is why you aren’t able to recall if you’ve done any these things.

Perhaps an even bigger challenge is keeping stress-producing external forces at bay. In this regard, I am reminded of a late friend of mine, Vern, who was a mentor to me when I was in my early twenties. Vern owned a successful life-insurance agency and, though he was a very low-key guy, he was a master at finding unconventional ways to motivate his agents.

One of the many unique things I remember about Vern was how he handled his mail. I happened to be in his office one day when his secretary put a stack of new mail on his desk. He quickly scanned the pile, then picked it up and put it in the middle drawer on the left side of his desk.

It was a deep drawer, and it was filled with unopened mail. I asked him why he kept all his mail unopened and in a desk drawer, and his answer was classic Vern: “If you open even a few pieces of mail a day and read it, you’re not only wasting valuable time, but a lot of the mail you read will stress you. What I find is that if I just throw it all in a drawer, over time 99.99 percent of it will take care of itself.”

Vern was the calmest, most peaceful guy I’ve ever known. Whatever it was he was doing, it clearly worked for him. His handling of his mail was a metaphor for his whole life. He believed that if you just give everything to the universe, the universe will take care of it. Putting his mail in his desk drawer was his way of giving it to the universe.

I didn’t give mindfulness much thought until a couple of years ago, because it sounded a bit hokey to me. But as I read up on it, I became more and more interested in it, and I concluded that it’s not so much that “the universe” solves your problems; it’s that you surrender your problems to the universe. Huge difference.

Why does this work? Because most problems aren’t really problems at all. We just make them so in our minds. As Mark Twain put once it, “I have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.” So when you give problems to the universe, you’re simply getting rid of the seeds that have the potential to sprout into problems. The universe is a big place, so it can deal with all the seeds you can send its way.

With all this in mind, the big question is: Are mindfulness adherents correct when they claim that it can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, strengthen your immune system, and add years to your life? And the not-so-big answer is: I don’t know. I’m not an expert at this. But common sense tells me that it sounds logical. So I’m in. Maybe not yet all in just yet, but in.

I’ll let you know in a few years how well it’s working out for me. In the meantime, you might want to read up on it. The Internet is saturated with material about mindfulness.

In the meantime, you’ll have to excuse me. I have some thought-trash I have throw out to the universe. It’s pretty nice to have a 24-hour trash collection service at your disposal. Best of all, you have nothing to lose, because it’s free!

ROBERT RINGER

Robert Ringer (© 2015) is a New York Times #1 bestselling author who has appeared on numerous national radio and television shows, including The Tonight Show, Today, The Dennis Miller Show; Good Morning America, ABC Nightline, The Charlie Rose Show, as well as Fox News and Fox Business. To sign up for a free subscription to his mind-expanding daily insights, visit www.robertringer.com.
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The American Dream

Earlier this week, another Presidential candidate made his way to Nevada, and, during a speech in Reno, warned about the American Dream slipping away.

“People are starting to believe that the American Dream is starting to slip from their reach,” Sen. Marco Rubio reportedly told a crowd of 500. “And you know what? If we keep doing what we are doing, that is exactly what will happen.”

As I read his warnings, I couldn’t help but think of Victor Fuentes, a man who is already seeing his American Dream slip away, unfortunately at the hands of the federal government. Just a day before Rubio spoke in Reno, the Las Vegas Sun featured Victor and his case, which is being fought by NPRI’s Center for Justice and Constitutional Litigation.

The feature — which I encourage you to take a few minutes to read — tells the story of a man who swam seven miles to escape the tyranny of Cuba, sought asylum in the United States and eventually purchased a camp for his church in the Nevada desert. He had achieved what immigrants and natural-born citizens all hope for.

Now, that American Dream he’s worked for over 20 years to achieve has all but been destroyed by the Fish & Wildlife Service.

In 2010, acting contrary to the First and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution, the federal government rerouted a spring-fed stream that ran through the church’s private property since at least 1881, moving it just outside the property line. On Christmas Eve and after the first significant rainfall, the stream returned to its historical path and the ensuing flooding damaged the church camp to the tune of $86,000. And, since the stream was moved off the property, Victor and his church, Ministerio Roca Solida (Solid Rock), are unable to baptize people in the stream’s waters at their Patch of Heaven camp.

The case, which is being fought in courts here in Nevada and a portion of which could be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court, raises several important questions: Is it OK for the federal government to take a person’s property (in this case, water) without due process? In violating a person’s Constitutional rights, may the federal government also cause tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage without compensation? May the federal government prevent its people from carrying out their religion?

The case is important for all Americans and it’s precisely why the CJCL took on this case years ago. If the federal government is allowed to prevail in this case, not only will one man’s American Dream be forever destroyed, but a dangerous precedent will be set that chips away at others’ hopes of achieving the American Dream as well.

The American Dream is something worth fighting for and with the support of people like you who are willing to stand up to unconstitutional acts by the government, it will continue to be something Americans work to achieve for generations to come.

SHARON ROSSIE
Sharon Rossie is the President of the Nevada Policy Research Institute.
Politicians Are Failing Us on the Economy

A couple of months ago, the Congressional Budget Office issued a sobering report on the U.S. economy’s long-term prospects. Not to put too fine a point on it, we’re headed for the fiscal rocks.

Federal spending accounts for about 20 percent of the nation’s GDP, the budget analysts note; if current trends continue, that will rise to fully 25 percent by 2040. Revenues will not keep up — they’ll amount to only 19 percent of GDP.

Here’s what the non-partisan CBO has to say: “Mainly because of the aging of the population and rising health care costs, the extended baseline projections show revenues that fall well short of spending over the long term, producing a substantial imbalance in the federal budget. As a result, budget deficits are projected to rise steadily and, by 2040, to raise federal debt held by the public to a percentage of GDP seen at only one previous time in U.S. history — the final year of World War II and the following year.” We face a fiscal crisis of historic proportions.

Our presidential candidates can talk all they want about American prosperity and world leadership, but without a firm fiscal base it’s just hot air. Unless we can stabilize the debt and put the country on a path of sustainable economic growth with prosperity evenly shared, we’ll have no firm economic base for all those lofty goals to rest upon.

This means tackling a host of complex problems. We have to get long-term debt under control. We have to preserve Social Security yet find a solution to rising entitlement spending, which will be a key driver of federal spending for decades to come. We have to deal with healthcare costs, which pose the same challenge. We have to invest in skills, education, and infrastructure without breaking the bank. We have to craft a simpler, fairer, less intrusive tax policy that promotes economic efficiency and is conducive to long-term growth.

The people who have to do all these things are politicians who, thus far, have been unwilling and unable to take these obvious challenges head on. The problem is not with the system itself. Similar barriers have been overcome repeatedly in the past, with reforms in Social Security in 1983, taxes in 1986, and repeatedly in budget agreements.

Rather, the problem is that our leaders are divided between those who want to cut spending and those who want to boost taxes in order to expand government’s role. Yet it’s impossible to solve our problems by finding new revenues or cutting spending alone. Without doing both, we face a weakened future. It is unreasonable and unacceptable to try to continue our present course of trying to muddle through.

There’s a reason that you don’t hear much talk about this in Washington. Americans themselves want it all — lower taxes without significant cuts in federal spending. But here’s the problem: Almost 60 percent of federal spending is accounted for by Social Security, Medicare and defense and national security. Add the 7 percent of the budget that goes to interest on the national debt, and there’s little room for significant progress without painful and difficult legislative action.

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Commentary: Matt Barber

Needed: A Million More Like Kim Davis

For the first time in American history a woman has been imprisoned by the government for merely exercising her Christian faith. War has been declared on Christ and His followers.

And there’s no turning back.

Anti-Christian persecution is the civil rights cause of our time. The cultural Marxists in power have seceded from our constitutional republican form of government, with its Judeo-Christian moorings, and have supplanted, in its place, a secular-socialist oligarchy. Like Union troops hunkered at Fort Sumter, faithful Christians are now exiles in our own land. Anti-Christian “progressives” have demanded unconditional surrender, and federal Judge David Bunning has fired the first mortar.

Even as I write, a kind, soft-spoken and well respected civil servant of 27 years sits languishing, like some violent criminal, in a Kentucky prison. She is confined, indefinitely and without benefit of a trial, to a tiny cell. She is a political prisoner in a spiritual war. Like so many accidental civil-rights heroes that came before her, Davis, a Democrat who was overwhelmingly elected as Rowan County clerk, has peacefully and graciously refused to violate her Christian conscience. She has declined to sign her name to marriage certificates that defy God’s natural design for the timeless institution and has requested, as a simple accommodation, that either her name be removed from the marriage licenses, thus eliminating her personalized acquiescence to the Supreme Court’s new attempt to usurp God’s authority and redefine this cornerstone institution, or, alternatively, “to allow licenses to be issued by the chief executive of Rowan County or [by] developing a statewide, online marriage license process.”

That’s it. Simple, reasonable and fair. Our nation has a rich history of respecting the rights of conscientious objectors, and Kim Davis, like tens-of-millions of her brothers and sisters in Christ, is exactly that.

“There is absolutely no reason that this case has gone so far without reasonable people respecting and accommodating Kim Davis’ First Amendment rights,” said Mat Staver, Davis’ attorney and head of Liberty Counsel, a Christian civil rights organization.

“This is a heaven or hell issue for me and for every other Christian that believes,” Davis said on Thursday. “This is a fight worth fighting. … I’ve weighed the cost and I’m prepared to go to jail.”

And so she has.

Reasonable people can disagree on the propriety of Kim’s actions. Some say that she was right in refusing to violate her conscience by signing her name to a legal document that presumes to solemnize that which God condemns. Still others say that she needs to either “do her job” or resign – that she took an oath and is violating that oath.

Nevertheless, all reasonable people must agree that imprisoning this innocent woman for her conscience is both an absolute outrage and gross violation of her constitutional liberties. Even the ACLU thought it was a bridge too far. The fact remains that people don’t shed their First Amendment rights when they become government employees. Kim Davis swore to uphold the U.S. Constitution, the Kentucky Constitution and the laws of the Bluegrass state. When she took her oath, United States law, the Kentucky Constitution and the Kentucky Revised Statutes all reflected the millennia-old definition of natural marriage: “Only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in Kentucky.”

The Kentucky Legislature has yet to change this law one jot or tittle. Instead, five left-wing extremist lawyers in Washington, D.C., issued an opinion presuming to move the goalposts mid-game. Court opinions are not “the law of the land.” Judges don’t make laws – only the legislature can do that. Kim Davis is not defying the law; she is upholding it as codified.

Accordingly, she has repeatedly asked, “Under what law am I authorized to issue homosexual couples a marriage license?”

Neither Judge Bunning nor anyone else can answer.

Because no such law exists.

In a statement on Friday, Mat Staver made the same point: “Not long ago 75 percent of Kentuckians passed the state’s marriage amendment. Today a Christian is imprisoned for believing what the voters affirmed: marriage is between a man and a woman. Five people on the Supreme Court imposed their will on 320 million Americans and unleashed a torrent of assaults against people of faith.

Kim Davis is the first victim of this tragedy.”

Indeed, many scoffed at our warnings that Christians will someday be forced to either endorse “gay marriage” or go to jail. Well, scoff no more. That day has arrived. In just two months since the high court’s disgraceful Obergefell v. Hodges opinion, the full-on criminalization of Christianity has begun. You must either bow a knee before the false gods of same-sex “marriage” and “gay rights,” or face the fiery “contempt of court” furnace. We have moved from anecdotal instances of anti-Christian discrimination to systemic religious persecution.

Here’s the formula: 1) Force affirmation of homosexual behavior, abortion or some other institutionalized sin via judicial fiat; 2) Christian objects, refuses to disobey God and requests a reasonable religious accommodation; 3) Accommodation is denied and Christian is jailed for “contempt of court.”

You’re going to hear that term a lot in coming days, weeks, months and years – “contempt of court.” It’s the straw man charge that will be utilized to imprison not just Christian public officials, but others as well. Christian business owners, lawyers, private sector employees, parents of school-age children who don’t want their children indoctrinated by sexual anarchist propaganda and many others will be held in contempt of court, denied due process and incarcerated indefinitely.

The persecution isn’t coming.

The persecution has arrived.

And that’s what it means to be a Christian follower.

So pray for a million more like Kim Davis.

Become like Kim Davis.

Is she perfect? Certainly not. None of us is. Indeed, before Kim’s transformational Christian re-birth four years ago, she was thrice divorced and “played in the devil’s playground” for much of her life.

She was lost.

But now she’s found.

God has an amazing way of taking empty, broken vessels, rebuilding their lives and then using them mightily for His glory and honor.

Stand, like Kim, fearlessly, lovingly and boldly for Christ, declaring, as did the apostles when faced with a similar decision, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (see Acts 5:29).

Indeed, as the Bible’s Daniel, a “public official,” boldly refused to disobey God and commit sin by worshiping a pagan king, so too has Kim Davis honored our Lord by refusing to bow before a pagan court – by refusing to call evil good and good evil.

They wanted to make an example of her.

Instead, they made a martyr of her.

And awakened a sleeping giant in the process.

MATT BARBER

Matt Barber is founder and editor-in-chief of BarbWire.com. He is an author, columnist, cultural analyst and an attorney concentrating in constitutional law. Having retired as an undefeated heavyweight professional boxer, Matt has taken his fight from the ring to the culture war. (Follow Matt on Twitter: @mattbarber).
MEET THE NEW NEIGHBORS

THE GOVERNMENT FOUND THEM A NICE HOUSE ON YOUR STREET

Convicted sex offenders could be moved into a halfway house in your neighborhood, without your knowledge. And this government program is going on across the country right now. At the same time, our right to keep and bear arms is under constant attack. The ultimate insult of gun control is that it leaves honest Americans at the mercy of those with no mercy.

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GOP Excuses for Sentencing Kids to 100 Days in Public School are Total B.S.

It is impossible to overstate just how badly the Republican-controlled Nevada Legislature and our Republican governor screwed up the most exciting and promising school choice program in the galaxy.

The fly-the-size-of-a-cow in the ointment continues to be the absurd and discriminatory requirement for parents of private school and home school students to force their children into a government-owned/union-managed/bureaucrat-run public school for 100 days to qualify for an Education Savings Account (ESA).

My wife and I are among the home school parents in Nevada who bit the bullet and very reluctantly enrolled our kids in the public school system for this semester. What a nightmare. My kids hate it. My wife hates it.

And they’re not too fond of me right now either!
So the big question about the 100-day penalty is: Why?
One of the lame excuses being bandied about by some GOP legislators is that it was necessary to get Democrat votes to pass the bill. But that’s total B.S.

Republicans had control of both the Senate and the Assembly and didn’t need, or get, a single Democrat vote to pass SB 302. So why penalize children to appease Democrats who weren’t going to vote for the bill anyway? Duh.

The second excuse is that without the 100-day requirement the new ESA program would have “blown a hole” in the budget. But if so, legislators must have been using public school math!

The fact is private schoolers and home schoolers have been costing the government NOTHING in the education budget. Parents have been picking up the tab. But by forcing those kids into a public school this semester to qualify for an ESA, now they ARE costing the government money it otherwise wouldn’t have been spending. Duh.

And does anyone really believe that providing ESAs for four semesters instead of three during the two-year budget cycle would have “blown a hole” in the budget that couldn’t have been covered by either reprioritizing other education spending or funding them with money from the obscene $1.4 billion tax hike that Gov. Sandoval shoved down our throats?

That said, let’s accept the false argument that the only way to afford the new ESA program was to allow it for the last three semesters instead of all four. OK, fine.

In that case, then why, oh why, incur the additional per-pupil costs by forcing private and home school kids into a public school for the first semester of the budget cycle instead of simply saying you can’t open and start an ESA until the second semester of the budget cycle? Duh.

The public excuses being put forward by GOP legislators who blew this golden opportunity (as usual) by needlessly forcing private school and home school kids into a public school for 100 days are total B.S. If Gov. Sandoval really cared about children and education, like he claims, he’d call a special session tomorrow to repeal this discriminatory and outrageous 100-day penalty.

Alas, our governor’s initials aren’t B.S. for nothing.

CHUCK MUTH

(Mr. Muth is president of CitizenOutreach.com and the publisher of www.NevadaNewsandViews.com. You can reach him at ChuckMuth.com)
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