



Transcript of Thinking Outside The Boxe Q&A Session from 2015 Symposium

The following is the transcript of a question and answer session from Thinking Outside the Boxe's Annual Symposium held in Orlando from December 26-31, 2015. Participants in the annual symposium question and answer session included Thinking Outside the Boxe's correspondents from Raleigh, North Carolina, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, Sheffield, Jamaica, Owatanna, Minnesota, and Prescott Valley, Arizona. Digger Cartwright, mystery novelist and industrialist, also participated in the question and answer session.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

1. Should the federal government increase progressive taxation or the federal minimum wage as a way to address income inequality?

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-There's a reason why Robin Hood is one of the most enduring characters in literature and film. We all love the idea of an outlier, a third party who swoops in to balance the scales, right the wrongs and (of course) rob from the rich to give to the poor. When I was a high school student in Texas, Gov. Mark White introduced a school funding plan that would take some funding from wealthy districts and give it to disadvantaged ones in the hopes of leveling the playing field for all. It was, of course, dubbed the "Robin Hood Plan."

Now, thirty years down the road, Texas schools are as big a mess as they ever were. Local governments have found ways around the school funding plan, charter schools have muddied the waters even further and the education establishment is embroiled in fighting about whether dinosaurs should be allowed in science textbooks since they don't fit with Creationists' lunatic worldviews.

Great Britain instituted confiscatory estate taxes in an effort to break down the wealth of the old families and redistribute it to the masses. One look at the Council estates in Norwich will show you what a travesty that plan turned out to be.

Quite simply, as much as they appeal to our better natures and our wish to "make things right," these artificial efforts to



enforce equality usually don't work, or only work for a limited time.

That said, I WOULD support an increase in the minimum wage. As unions have faltered and died under the weight of their own bloated bureaucracies and self-serving, short-sighted policies, businesses have taken the opportunity to squeeze ever more work out of ever fewer employees, to the point that we now entrust large portions of our lives to people who are being paid wages that wouldn't allow them to live a middle-class life in Nicaragua, much less here. Every time this issue is raised, the specter of skyrocketing prices is thrown up as a roadblock, but when the cost of wages is factored into the overall business expense of a company like Burger King, Subway, McDonald's or the like, the math simply doesn't bear out the argument.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent—The idea of the poor being taxed progressively is absurd. Too many individuals earn pennies, only to have money withdrawn as taxes. In no way am I implying that these poor individuals should not pay taxes. In fact, I believe in rendering Caesars's things to Caesar. However, the government should consider a more lenient option, one that allows poor tax payers to retain more of what they earn, instead of less. Should the federal government increase progressive taxation? That is a yes and no situation. Why do I take such a stand? Progressive taxation should be implemented with regards to the rich. Since these individuals make a ton of money, they should be allowed to pay more in tax. However, with regards to the poor, these individuals should be taxed reasonably, as they don't have much to spare.

Additionally, the federal minimum wage should also be adjusted to address the problem of inequality. The minimum wage should be adjusted to ensure that these individuals are paid a livable wage so that they can equate to that of what a rich man is getting or a little below. Progressively taxing the rich is not a crime, but a fair way to have everyone on the same level. Increase the poor man's minimum wage and allow them the option to pay at a reasonable tax threshold.

Cartwright—Neither! Income inequality and the efforts to address this issue are typical socialist arguments and policy initiatives. It's not for the federal government to redistribute wealth though the Democrats would certainly like



nothing more than to legislate income equality via redistribution of wealth. What politicians and those who want income equality fail to understand is that you can't tax your way to prosperity. At some point, they rich are going to take their money and go somewhere else or worse. They aren't going to sit idly by while the federal government continues to take more and more from them and punishing them for being successful.

There's a fundamental problem with progressive taxation. It's punitive. The more successful you are, the more you're punished for that success by having to pay higher taxes. You end up paying for those who don't contribute anything at all to the system. But it's not just the rich who get screwed by the tax code. The middle class and small business owners get screwed the most. The tax code is messed up, and I don't think anyone will disagree with that. Everyone knows that the rich people have the best accountants and lawyers to ensure that they minimize their tax bill. Middle class Americans try to do the same thing but not quite as effectively. This is the very reason I have always supported a consumption tax of some sort. With a consumption tax, everyone pays a fair share. If you're a multi-billionaire and you purchase a \$500,000 car, you're going to pay more in tax than someone who purchases a \$10,000 car. If you buy a new iPhone every six months, you're going to pay your fair share over someone who buys the cheapest cell phone and uses it for three or four years.

The naysayers of a consumption tax say this hurts low income workers the most since they don't pay any taxes now. It's hardly fair that they pay no taxes but get all the benefits offered by the government at basically no charge. But let's address this. I would exempt grocery store purchases of unprepared food from the consumption tax since low income workers still have to eat. However, I'd slap the tax on prepared foods at restaurants. If you're a low income worker, you probably shouldn't be eating out or getting the latest technology every time something new comes out. It's a bit hypocritical that low income workers whine about not having any money but they have a cell phone with internet service, cable TV, Netflix, etc. Perhaps they should try being more frugal with their money. Alternatively, get a second job or get the skill sets you need to get a better paying job.



Politicians in America have had a war on poverty for decades. They've been taxing and spending non-stop for decades. Have they eliminated poverty in America? No. Have they closed the income gap in America? No. All the politicians are doing is taxing more and spending it on bloated federal programs or giving it to other countries.

How do we close the income gap in America? Let's make the American economy the strongest, most competitive, most dynamic economy in the world. Cut taxes and give businesses an incentive to create more and better jobs for Americans. Ensure that the economy is vibrant enough so that anyone who wants to work can work and advance. But we also need to change the culture of Americans and make sure they have the skill sets necessary to compete on the international business stage. We need to educate kids and give them K-12 educations that rival those of other industrialized countries. We need to help them make better choices when it comes to either going to college or going to a technical or vocational school. By doing this, we can help millions of working Americans lead better lives. Not everyone is going to have everything they always want. Not everyone is going to be a multi-millionaire. If you want everyone to have equal financial resources, you should move to a socialist or communist country. See how that works out for you.

With regards to the minimum wage, there is absolutely nothing wrong with the minimum wage as it is. I've talked about this at other events in the past. In fact, the minimum wage has done more to kill jobs than anything else. Ever wonder why we don't have full service gas stations anymore? Thank the minimum wage. The business economics don't support the payroll for service station attendants at the minimum wage. If they were like waiters and waitresses and relied on tips, perhaps it would be a different story.

Raising the minimum wage isn't going to lift anyone out of poverty. If you raise the minimum wage, do you think McDonald's is going to take a hit to their profits? No. They're going to pass along the cost to the consumers. So, the dollar menu becomes the two dollar menu. Oh, wait a minute, that's already happened, hasn't it? How did that work out for the minimum wage workers? You get a raise but now the food at McDonald's costs you twice as much. You go to buy groceries at the grocery store and your bill is higher...might be because the



minimum wage is higher and the store is passing along the costs to consumers. Let's look at Walmart and the layoffs they announced recently. Those people who got pink slips can probably thank the higher wages for their demise.

Abolish the minimum wage and let the free markets determine the right wage for a job. If someone is willing to work for \$5 per hour, so be it. If not, the business will have to raise the hourly rate until they find someone who will work for the advertised rate. The free markets work. Attempts to manipulate the markets through socialist policies rarely have the desired outcome in the long-term.

2. In light of recent terrorist attacks, should the federal government increase domestic surveillance? How far should a domestic surveillance program be allowed to go?

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-If the federal government expects domestic terrorist attacks in the future, then unfortunately, they should increase domestic surveillance. This is unfortunate because government is always too eager to place everyone in the "suspicious" category, presume guilt instead of innocence, and end up harassing or worse citizens whose behavior may not conform to arbitrary standards of proper conduct.

It's clear that any increase in surveillance must be cyberspace oriented since this seems to be the preferred mode of communication and instruction for terrorist groups. Along with that should be increased monitoring of cell phone calls and texts. This must be kept in perspective, since domestic terrorism accounts for very few deaths and injuries compared to everyday random gun violence related to gangs, drugs, and poverty. We need to ask ourselves if it's worth money, manpower, and time to ferret out one or two terror plots in a year in order to prevent a handful of innocent deaths. Or are those resources better spent on addressing our domestic violence problems?

Since it's in the federal government's best interest to keep the population afraid and therefore willing to pay taxes to fight terrorism, the feds will always overstate the problem. They'll use scare tactics and alarmist rhetoric to make us feel like we're in a war zone here at home, while at the same time promising to take the fight to the terrorist so they "won't



invade our shores." Perhaps the real solution is to put terrorism into perspective compared with all other perceived problems and dangers the country faces, and allocate resources where they will benefit the most people and prevent the greatest loss of life.

Myrtle Beach, SC Correspondent- If it makes me safer I'm alright with it. Kind of like TSA pat downs, I have no problem with them because ultimately they make me safer when I board a plane (arguably). I also have nothing to hide. I'm not saying that those who oppose it have something to hide, but me personally, I'm an open book. So on the surface I say yeah, go for it.

Now, that being said my problem with increased surveillance is that, contrary to what the Government wants us to believe, not EVERYONE employed by the United States is 100% honest. What would happen if surveillance data was to fall into the wrong hands? How could this be used against us personally or as a country?

Scary thought. So, until we can ensure that this surveillance won't fall into the wrong hands, which really can't happen, I say we hold off.

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-The increase in terrorist attacks around the world and in America have given intelligence and military officials the impetus to increase domestic surveillance, but the federal government has done its best to downplay, sideline and mask what terrorism has done to America, and how, in their view, it should be confronted.

The government's idea of domestic surveillance is taking behavioral information as outlined in a 2015 executive order (Social and Behavior Sciences Team) that gives government agencies the ability to use psychological science and data to connect Americans with government programs. A program like this one is just an example of the tactics used to garner private information from everyday citizens as well as examine how citizens make decisions about certain things and act on them. It's another way of getting people involved in more government sponsored programs while collecting information on them at the same time.



Another recent program, the "Strong Cities Network" announced in late September of 2015, which partners with foreign cities to fight violent extremism, (not Islamic terrorism) is structured to fight discrimination, racism and hate crimes against Muslims, which implicates everyday Americans. This program is connected to another more recent program through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ). It is the "Intelligence report on right wing extremism," which enables the government to protect others against "white nationalists" and extremists who believe they can ignore laws and demand their individual rights. The comparison can be made with this kind of domestic surveillance to the Kentucky county clerk, Kim Davis, who went to jail to protest the Supreme Court's gay marriage ruling. To the federal government she appeared to be a domestic threat while an Islamic terrorist living in the United States can be protected.

Other examples of the way domestic surveillance is built in to other agencies of the federal government or programs such as Obamacare's Federal Data Services Hub, which is a comprehensive database of personal information established by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). It was formed to facilitate the Affordable Care Act's health insurance exchanges. Other federal agencies in the domestic surveillance business include the IRS, which monitored Tea Party organizations and other conservative groups that had asked for tax-exempt status. Then there are the up scaled operations of the NSA that utilized surveillance in various capacities with eavesdropping on Americans through any number of means such as information about call logs, phone calls, phone call durations, emails, internet use and other personal information, and it could be the FBI gathering any information they want through a National Security Letter. There is no end to domestic surveillance operations.

With all the convoluted tactics, unfounded suspicions, and rushes to judgment by the federal government to categorize American citizens as domestic terrorists and right wing extremists, it is apparent that these actions have already led to an increase in domestic surveillance programs. Rather than increasing surveillance, the revamping of current programs should be the focus. The best solutions are to closely monitor those who pose a threat to the homeland whether a citizen, non-citizen or suspected terrorist from another country. These are the kinds of individuals that need to be profiled and tracked,



particularly those who have come into the country on special visas or as refugees and intend to incite a plot and carry out their plans within a city, town, or other area.

Domestic surveillance should only go as far as it is needed and should only profile known suspects whose actions have been thoroughly confirmed by trusted witnesses, intelligence operatives on the ground, as well as technical intelligence data and reports from verifying agencies. When bona fide potential informants or whistleblowers are stifled from revealing crimes and lies and are further intimidated, threatened, injured, or eliminated because of what they know or don't know about potential or real domestic terrorism, surveillance has gone too far. The same rings true for targeted, so-called domestic dissidents, particularly if they do not meet profile characteristics and have been unfairly hounded, indicted, imprisoned, or done away with because of suspicions by the government. If domestic surveillance programs continue with invasion of privacy and intimidation without the restructuring and restricting of their operations, the real purpose of surveillance will lose its effectiveness.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Over the years, countless individuals have been spied on. The privacy of these individuals was breached, because they were seen as noteworthy individuals who spoke out against issues affecting people and the nation on a whole. Individuals such as Martin Luther King, boxer Muhammad Ali, and even Art Buchwald, were spied on because of what they stood for. In fact, it was just recently it was unveiled that the Senate Intelligence Committee was spied on by the CIA. Really, even after recent terrorist attacks, should the federal government step up their game and increase domestic surveillance?

The domestic surveillance programme should not be led to go beyond where it is. In fact, if the country was to be given in the hands of a tyrant, we'll all be doomed, as the intelligence community will be tampered with and technological advancements would be implemented to infringe on our privacy. However, should domestic surveillances be used to scope out terrorists? That is a tricky question. We cannot assume that one is a terrorist if they speak against a movement that America has put in place, or against the U.S. foreign policy. People have their opinions and as a result of free will, they can voice those



opinions in a respectful and appropriate environment. However, things still stand, "If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to worry about."

Gastonia, NC Correspondent- This question has me wrestling with my liberal nature. As a lifelong free-thinking, granola crunching "all men are brothers" type of guy, I want to say that the government has no business running surveillance on American citizens. That's the sort of nightmare Orwell envisioned, and the idea that my government would have the ability to snoop on me and my fellow citizens should leave me consumed with righteous indignation and wrapping myself in a 'Don't Tread On Me' flag.

But it doesn't.

I am a father of two sons in elementary school. While both schools are fine places full of fantastic teachers, one is bordered by two neighborhoods that I wouldn't willingly venture into at night, and the other is in a business park area where there are innumerable offices filled with small business and other enterprises the intents of which are not clear to me.

Am I being paranoid? Maybe so. But when I hear over and over and over again on the news that the latest mass shooter had social media postings that indicated she had become a radicalized Muslim, or that he had recently been posting pictures of his gun collection and talking about "soft targets," it makes me want a Justice Department set of eyes on every post that hits Facebook.

Criminals, be they common thieves or mass murderers, have a long-documented tendency toward what cops call "verbal diarrhea." They talk about their acts, their plans, their victims and the modus operandi sometimes well in advance of their actions. While I'm not for a moment suggesting some sort of "Minority Report"-style pre-crime unit that would arrest people thought to be about to commit a crime, I'd fully support something akin to the friendly neighborhood beat cop stopping to talk to a kid he thinks is about to get in trouble.

Cartwright-If you use Facebook or Google or Apple or Amazon and you have a problem with domestic surveillance, you're out of touch with reality. Facebook, Google, and your cell phone



provider know about you and what you do than Uncle Sam does. Do you think the federal government is listening in to the phone calls of nearly 400 million people in America? That's not happening, but is Google tracking your every move on the internet? You bet your ass they are. Ever get pop-up ads for something you looked at on Amazon a week ago? Think that's a coincidence? Think again. They know what you're looking at online. They know what you like, what you want, what your habits and patterns are. They know all this about you. Your cell phone provider may even know where you are right at this moment. Does Uncle Sam know that you looked at a pair of shoes on Amazon last week? Probably not.

This is a serious issue for sure. The last thing I want is for the federal government to have more power over individuals and more information about individuals. We still have a reasonable expectation of privacy but we have to be willing to make some sacrifices in the name of making America a safer place. Logistically, the federal government doesn't have the resources to listen in on everyone's calls, for example. If they want to listen to what I'm talking about on the phone, have at it. It's probably pretty boring stuff most of the time. Do I want them listening to me? No. Do I want them listening to a suspected terrorist or someone with terrorist ties? Yes. The federal government does have limited resources when it comes to domestic surveillance. More often than not, they're going to focus those resources in the right places and they're going to be working within the parameters of the law which means they're going to need court orders to listen in on your calls.

If you go to some big cities, Big Brother is watching you walk down the street and get on the subway and so on. There are cameras everywhere we go. The reality is we're under surveillance just about all the time as it is—online, at the grocery store, in the restaurant, walking down the street, and so on—and most of this surveillance is done by private business owners who have no obligation to you. So, is it really that big of a deal?

Let's consider something else. The odds of anyone in this room or anyone that anyone in this room knows being killed by a terrorist here in America is remote. You probably have a better chance of winning the Powerball than you do of being killed or of knowing someone being killed by a terrorist here in the



United States. It's just that simple. Of course, this is the counter argument to more surveillance. Why focus our resources here when the odds of a terrorist attack are so low? Why not focus our efforts on spying on people with terrorist ties overseas?

On the other hand, our intelligence community has stopped a number of terrorist plots and may have stopped many more that we don't know about. I like most Americans want to be safe and want America to be safe. Can we accomplish this without giving up some of our privacy? No. Are ordinary Americans giving up any more of their privacy for domestic surveillance programs than they do for Google, Facebook, Amazon, etc? No, and in fact, we're probably giving up less.

Personally, I think surveillance of Facebook and other social media outlets is fair game, for example. I also think surveillance of foreigners living here in America and visiting America is fair game, especially those from countries with known terrorist ties. And, if you're an American and you decide to travel to a country with terrorist ties, stay for a while, then come back, maybe you should be under surveillance too. Who should be under surveillance: mom, dad, and the kids who go to the beach on vacation or someone who goes to Iraq for a vacation? Who should be under more surveillance: someone's grandmother from Kansas or a twenty year old male, Syrian "refugee?"

Let's use some common sense here people and recognize that we gave up our privacy long ago.

3. Is it time to end the current Social Security program for citizens under the age of 18?

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-According to the Social Security Administration website, "about 4.4 million children under 18 receive approximately \$2.5 billion each month because one or both of their parents are disabled, retired, or deceased. Those dollars help to provide the necessities of life for family members and help to make it possible for those children to complete high school."



Thirty billion dollars a year is certainly a lot of money except when put into context as part of the entire federal budget. There it is a relatively small part of the budget, less than one percent of the estimated \$4 trillion budget for fiscal 2016. Although Social Security was originally and primarily intended to aid retired workers, the logic of having survivor benefits available to children of surviving spouses makes sense, since providing Social Security benefits to a child may be more cost effective than having that child or family end up in another part of the social welfare system.

Unless a better alternative exists, I favor keeping children's Social Security benefits. It's a means-tested program, ends in most situations when the child turns 18, and Social Security is one of the best-run, best-managed government programs. To end the program arbitrarily and force families into a different government program that might not meet their needs and might be a wasteful use of taxpayer money is false economy. The only reason to eliminate this benefit would be if it were proven rife with fraud, waste, and mismanagement.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Social security has been a rock for ages for those living unemployed, as pensioners and even the disabled. This insurance scheme has provided many benefits and has in some way relieved less unfortunate individuals from the pangs and poverty of life. Social security does not only apply to the aforementioned, but it also involves those citizens who are under the age of 18. The big question circulating is, should the current social security programme be added for these ones?

As it stands, the current social security programme for children of disabled, deceased or retired states that these individuals should receive benefits as a dependent or survivor. However, there's a catch to it. It only applies once the child is below the age of 18 years, or still attending primary or secondary school. Social security is a pretty precarious situation. An example is that of a recent ruling in the Supreme Court. In the case *Astrue v. Capato*, the court unanimously held that children who were produced as a result of in vitro fertilization were in no way entitled to any Social Security survivor benefits. This was in cases where the laws in a particular state, in which the parent's will was signed, does not make provision for such.



If these Social Security programmes for those under 18 were to change, this would be dependent on the state of residency. Though it is high time to look into changing some of these policies, extra care should be placed in making decisions.

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-Ah, let me think back to when I was 18 years old. I was finish high school, had a job that paid me the princely sum of \$8/hour (this was 1986, so I was doing pretty well) and I'd been accepted to an excellent university. When I got my paycheck every two weeks, I didn't look at much beyond the final amount that was going into my bank account. However, when I filed my taxes for the first time and saw all that was taken out for Social Security, I was incensed. I was YEARS from retirement! How dare Uncle Sam hit me up to pay for a bunch of old geezers' comfort?

Now I imagine myself not having that Social Security deducted from my check, and being told that it was up to me to save money for my eventual retirement. 18-year-old me laughs, then walks away doing the mental math to squirrel the check away into car fund, college expense fund and money to be spent in pursuit of teenage females, who could be expensive to entertain.

While our current system may have its flaws, it certainly beats counting on baby adults to look after their own retirement. And while most of us have realized by age 30 or 35 that it would behoove us to start socking away a goodly chunk of money toward our dotage, there are still plenty who have never learned from the fable of the ant and the grasshopper. You know that one, right? The grasshopper spends the spring and summer frolicking and eating and amusing himself, and he mocks the ant, who almost never plays and spends tremendous amounts of time building a sturdy anthill and filling it with food against the coming winter. And as we've learned from "Game of Thrones," winter is coming, and when it arrives the grasshopper is left without resources and starves, while the ant is safe, warm and well-fed in his anthill.

The grasshoppers among us will become a drain on the system unless there is some sort of framework in place that makes retirement savings mandatory. It might not be our current system, but it's got to be SOMETHING.



Cartwright—I'm not suggesting we end benefits for children who are under eighteen and currently receiving survivor benefits until they are eighteen. I don't think that's the point of the question. However, I do favor telling people under eighteen that they will not have social security when they reach retirement age and encouraging them to start saving on their own at an early age. There's no doubt that the current Social Security system is broken and unsustainable. Let's remember that Social Security wasn't intended to be a long-term programme to supply for everyone when they reached retirement age. Somewhere along the way the idea of personal responsibility got put by the wayside in favor of another big government, socialist entitlement programme. I recognize that it's helped a lot of retirees over the years; it's helped relatives of mine who wouldn't have been able to survive in retirement without it.

At the same time, I think the Social Security programme has been a tremendous moral hazard. Working people have abandoned the idea of personal responsibility in saving for their retirement. If they had known that they were going to have to rely solely on their own savings for retirement, would they have made different choices in life? Would they have bought a new car every few years? Would they have taken all those vacations or but all those things they didn't really need? Would they have bought more house than what they needed simply so they could keep up with the Jones? I wholeheartedly believe that people would have made different choices in life if they had know that they were going to have to provide for their own retirement. If you happened to work for a company that provided you with a pension, good for you; you probably had the ability to spend more than you really needed to if that pension was going to take care of you in retirement. But those pensions went by the wayside a long time ago and successive generations have continued to exhibit little financial responsibility for planning for their retirement.

Now, I know what the first reaction of the naysayers is: It's hard to save money. Each and every one of us in this room and in America can find ways to save a little money. Maybe these people should have thought about that before they had one, two or three kids. Society has brainwashed a lot of people that you need to get married, have kids, and buy the house with the white picket fence. All well and good, but does anyone ever stop to ask if they can afford it or how that's going to impact their



finances now and in the future? No. But even with all this, there are still ways for people to save money. Maybe you go out to eat less or don't get a new car every five years or don't get the biggest house that will fit in your budget or cut back on other discretionary expenses. If anyone thinks they don't have discretionary expenses, they're living in a fantasy world. Cell phones with big data plans are discretionary. The internet is discretionary. Cable and satellite are discretionary. Everyone can save a little bit here and there, and it all adds up in the long run.

So how would this plan work? By ending Social Security as we know it for anyone under eighteen, we can estimate more accurately the funding needs for the Social Security Trust Fund for those who remain eligible to participate. Their participation isn't going to change and their benefits aren't going to change. We've simply put an end to the infinite funding needs going forward. Unfortunately, we've put twice the burden on people under eighteen—they are still going to be paying payroll taxes to sustain promises made to existing participants and those eligible for future participation and they will be required to fund their own retirement savings. Would suck to be them, but someone has to take one for the team. Better them than us, right?

But we can also minimize the burden on those young people and future generations. Much of the funding problems with Social Security can be resolved by getting more people working. The more people who work, the more taxes flow into the Social Security Trust Fund. When the trust fund has sufficient resources to fund current and future retirees, the payroll tax for future generations can be reduced or those funds could be diverted into personal retirement trust accounts. We can also help minimize the impact on future generations by ensuring that the Congress quits looting the Social Security Trust Fund by taking the cash to spend and replacing the cash with nearly worthless IOUs. Not only should the Congress be barred from taking any cash from the Social Security "lockbox"—isn't that a bit ironic?—but the Congress and the Treasury should be mandated to start returning cash that has been robbed from the Social Security "lockbox" until the trust has converted all the IOUs to cash. This is going to be a painful process that will require the federal government to cut back on its spending in other areas, which is what I prefer over the alternative tax hikes.



It's not going to be easy for young generations or the federal government, particularly the pork spending Congressmen and women, but it needs to be done. This in conjunction with promoting a strong, healthy, vibrant economy where we have maximum sustainable employment and a higher labor force participation rate can help to start solving the Social Security problem. We all have to recognize that the current system is not sustainable forever and that we need to shift the burden of retirement from the taxpayer to individuals for future generations.

4. Should federal anti-gaming legislation be scrapped?

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-If you've seen the "Godfather" films, you got a taste of what Vegas and Atlantic City life was like when the Mafia owned a large part of the casino and other gaming business. While the rubes through the door didn't get fleeced any more thoroughly than they do today, the behind-the-scenes goings-on were bloody, ruthless and heavy-handed.

They're less bloody today.

The early gaming prohibitions were enacted partly in a failed effort to break the Mob, and partly out of that same misguided sense of government-imposed morality that gives us silliness like Blue Laws and bringing entire freeways to a halt for funeral processions. As anyone who's been in the back room at their neighborhood bar or found that "secret" website where your Bitcoins will get you all the poker and blackjack you can play will tell you, the laws haven't worked. Just as with Prohibition, when the government tries to legislate morality, it fails.

What's the other big no-no that we've tried to legislate out of existence ... oh, right! Drugs! How's that whole "War on Drugs" thing working out? If you're in any major city, odds are you're within five miles of any illegal drug you could ever want. While I'm not for a moment suggesting we take all the brakes off and allow heroin to be sold next to the Sudafed at Walgreens, some of the early lessons from Colorado and Washington, where society has resolutely failed to collapse and crime rates have in fact gone DOWN since pot was legalized, bear noting.



Gambling is a drug. Those who get hooked on it while do anything to get their fix, and no amount of legislation is going to stop them. Far better to legalize it, bring it out in the open and at least let the government get its share of the available tax money. The back room at Uncle Funky's Hooch Palace is going to be a lot less appealing once Harrah's has a neon-drenched gambling palace set up a couple of miles away, generating tax dollars and employing the locals.

Cartwright—My right honorable friend here just said it. Legalize it and let government at the local, state, and federal levels tax it. We can't legislate morality, and I find it quite hypocritical that many states allow people to buy lottery tickets but they don't allow casinos. Isn't the lottery considered gambling? Isn't the lottery a game of chance? Let's legalize gambling and let the casino operators build casinos where they see fit and where it's economically feasible for them. This is good business, and it's good for communities. Each casino in Las Vegas averages over 2,000 employees each. I know there are plenty of communities throughout the United States that would love to have someone come in and create a couple thousand jobs.

Do you know what an economic boost a casino is for a community? It costs tens of millions of dollars to build a casino. When you build one, you give a boost to local construction companies. The casino creates thousands of jobs. Those employees pay taxes. The casino pays millions in taxes at all levels. The people working spend their money. You have a boost in people coming to the area. The economic benefits go on and on. All told, a casino has tens of millions of dollars in local economic impact.

Let's tell the religious zealots to get the hell out of the way of economic progress. If they don't like the casino, they don't have to go to it, and they can stay at home and pray for those sinners who are going to gamble and while they're at it they can pray for those sinners who drink and smoke and have sex and so on and so on. These same people say there's a high cost to society. Well, let them quantify that. We can put together an economic study that shows how much the area benefits from the construction of a casino. The naysayers can't quantify the "social cost" of gambling. This is just a smokescreen for their religious and moral objections to gaming.



Gambling is how we create tens of thousands of good jobs throughout the country and give a boost to some communities that could really use it. Let's get with the times and let the casino companies build where they want to build.

5. The majority of greenhouse gas emissions come from automobiles. Is it time to institute a carbon pricing system for individuals who drive automobiles?

Owatanna, MN, Correspondent-Factoring the cost of cleaning up pollution into the overall cost of owning and driving a car is long overdue. However, the way this carbon pricing is done is the key to successfully eliminating greenhouse gas emissions.

The first step is to remove all tax incentives, subsidies, and loopholes in state and federal tax laws for any company involved in the production of energy or the consumption of natural resources. The simplest way to achieve that is by completely eliminating corporate income taxes. It would be a reasonable trade. No army of accountants and lawyers need be paid to generate and subvert tax loopholes or restrictions, which will save companies billions of dollars. However, with no tax or pricing advantage over alternative energy sources, the oil industry in particular will receive no corporate welfare and must become more efficient if they wish to stay profitable.

Second, pass an overarching law that requires all businesses that produce or consume energy or natural resources in any way to take steps to insure that the net pollution effect of their activities is zero. The cost of cleanup of any pollution, including emissions from engines or power plants, shall be borne by the companies. They of course will pass those costs down to the end consumer, who will then be tasked with deciding with his dollars whether to drive or even buy an internal combustion engine car, or seek alternate means of power or transportation.

Leveling the playing field will instantly make wind, solar, electric, and nuclear energy companies and products more competitive, which will give them incentives to develop even better technologies than we have now, and bring them into use at a faster pace.



If the world is serious about reducing pollution to zero net effect on the planet, then everyone must be forced to play the game. However, the rules must state that no one, from the largest corporation down to the single person, shall be given a special advantage.

Gastonia, NC Correspondent—When I lived in Houston, there was a well-maintained set of train tracks that ran right alongside Interstate 10 out west of town. The west side of Houston is where most of the suburban sprawl has occurred, with the once-quaint city of Katy and the surrounding area now home to tens of thousands of commuters, most of whom hit the lanes of I-10 on their way to and from the city every day.

Union-Pacific announced that it was no longer going to use the rail line, and the city snapped up the land. Some civic- and green-minded folks suggested that using the existing tracks to put in a commuter rail line might possibly be a good idea, since a huge percentage of the commuters went into downtown Houston, not to other destinations. Instead, the city and state ripped up the rail line and added six more lanes to the interstate.

This is the sort of thing that would happen far less if it were more expensive to drive. A carbon tax on every gas-powered vehicle would go a long way toward making things like mass transit, high-speed rail lines and telecommuting more of a going concern. It's no coincidence that in Europe and Japan, where gas prices would make the average American explode with rage, there are thriving rail systems and the public transit systems are efficient and heavily used.

Unless it begins costing more to operate a vehicle, nothing is going to change. Right now, when you factor in the idea that my time is worth money, it's far more economical for me to use my minivan for trips into Charlotte, my nearest major city, even if I'm going into downtown. The public transit system is a joke, and there are no prospects on the horizon for it to improve. Instead, the local honchos are adding toll lanes to the existing interstates so the BMW set can get where they're going faster.

We respond to market pressures, and right now there's just no pressure pushing us out of our driver's seats.



Cartwright—The solutions are very simple. First, we need to impose a special gasoline tax on every gallon of gasoline and diesel sold in America. This tax should be punitive. In this instance, yes, you should be punished for your behavior. I've long promoted the benefits of higher gasoline prices at the pump. You have people driving less, capital gets invested in alternative energy and alternative transportation means, with fewer cars on the road there will likely be fewer accidents which should lower insurance premiums, and of course pollution is reduced. I'll gladly pay eight or nine dollars per gallon if it means there are fewer crazy drivers on the road every day and at the same time it helps clean up the air.

Normally, I oppose higher taxes but I think I can make an exception in this case. Here's what I would propose. Let's start with a \$3 dollar surcharge imposed on every gallon of gasoline sold in the United States. On whole, we consume about 140 billion gallons of gasoline per year. That would be about \$420 billion dollars raised annually. Of course, this kind of a surcharge is going to have an impact on the amount of gasoline consumed. Let's say that gasoline consumption is cut by one third which is about 47 billion gallons per year. This leaves about 93 billion gallons consumed at a \$3 surcharge which equals about \$279 billion annually. To be clear, this surcharge would have to be put into a trust fund. No government agency could raid the trust fund and spend the money for anything other than the intended purposes. The funds raised by the gasoline surcharge could only be used for road projects, traditional rail and high speed rail, other forms of public transportation, renewable energy projects, and most importantly planting trees.

Yes, you heard me correctly, planting trees. Greenhouse gas emissions come most in the form of carbon dioxide. As I recall from elementary school science, trees and plants take in carbon dioxide and release oxygen. So, if we plant more trees, won't we be taking greenhouse gases out of the air and replacing them with oxygen? Isn't this a simple approach to reducing climate change that should get all the tree huggers excited? It's a pretty simple concept, right? Two things are happening in the world today—we're creating more carbon dioxide because more people throughout the world are driving and we're cutting down trees and forests left and right for development, urban sprawl, or whatever you want to call it. We're putting more greenhouse gases into the air and we're taking out the natural air filters



in nature at a more rapid pace than we're replacing them. So, shouldn't we use some of the funds from my gasoline surcharge to designate tracts of land for reforestation?

Here's another interesting thing to consider. Burning a gallon of gasoline results in about twenty pounds of carbon dioxide being released into the air. The average tree can only absorb about forty-eight pounds of carbon dioxide per year. You can do the math—twenty pounds of carbon dioxide times 140 billion gallons of gasoline consumed per year in the United States equals a massive amount of carbon dioxide being emitted each year just here in our country or 2.8 billion pounds of carbon dioxide. It takes nearly sixty billion trees to process this carbon dioxide. We probably have that many trees in America; I don't really know, but adding a few million more every year wouldn't hurt one bit.

6. Should all states mandate water conservation at some level?

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent—Not all states have mandated water conservation, but there are those that should implement it at some level, as water tables and underground aquifers are in the process of depletion due to drought and unfavorable environmental conditions in many states across the nation.

In some states it will take many years to replace water due to higher demands and ever growing population centers, while other states have set in place water conservation projects and mandatory use restrictions. Good years of rainfall and snow accumulation restore water sources in places like the Rocky Mountains, but states in more arid environments depend on favorable weather to replenish vanishing sources. States like California have suffered the most because of over population and unfavorable weather, as well as resource management oversight and failure to accurately plan for inundated areas of population and agricultural areas where water is utilized at higher rates.

The Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) has used surveys for states and other data to compile a model for states to use as guidelines for water conservation. The AWE forwards compiled reports to each state's legislative bodies for further examination. They have also used a grading system to show what states have a conservation plan in place as well as those that do not. The AWE wants to bring attention to states that have no



plan and create an incentive for an exchange of ideas for water conservation solutions. Management of fresh water resources is crucial to supporting economic development and future population growth. The results of the AWE surveys indicate that water conservation laws and policies throughout the states greatly differ. There are states with no pertinent policies and regulations, while there are others that have well thought out and ample plans.

An extensive range of water conservation programs have been developed throughout the United States and most utility companies in states, cities and counties have adopted water policies that are managed through various agencies within the states. The states develop a platform based on the issues that face them concerning water use and conservation. Concentration is placed on the measures that affect the current water conditions in specific areas of a state along with water conservation measures. Most state water conservation measures include assignment of water matters to state agencies that are in charge of drinking water conservation and efficiency. Regulatory measures are an integral part of a state's platform and usually address water consumption policies that either meet federal standards or exceed them.

Conservation programs at the state level have water consumption regulations for toilets, showerheads, urinals, clothes washers, and spray valves. Concerning building and plumbing issues, states have mandatory rules that require efficient products and materials for water use. With actual water use, most water utilities have regulations and policies concerning actual water loss within a utility system, and they also require conservation in the water permitting process. In the case of emergency drought situations, cities with conservation plans also enact mandatory and prescribed emergency schedules and methods for water use, which include additional plans for the reserving of potable (drinkable) water.

States also offer technical assistance for water conservation programs as well as financial assistance for urban water conservation programs through loan funds, grants and bonds. Water consumer information and billing is also part of an overall conservation plan and includes matters concerning conservation programs that water customers can follow and utilize to save water and lower water bills.



The states that have mandated water conservation programs and have average to above average grades in water conservation programs include California and Texas with grades of A-, Arizona, B+; Georgia, Washington, and Rhode Island, B; Colorado, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia and Wisconsin B-. Eighteen other states fell in the C+ to C- range, and 19 in the D range. These figures are indicative of the importance of improvement across the board for almost every state, particularly for those states in the lower grade ranges. With cooperative efforts with other states and agencies like the AWE, programs can be implemented that meet the water needs of a state while conserving this valuable resource.

States should mandate water conservation at some level, and state laws that offer strong water conservation policies can shape the reduction of water consumption in all 50 states. The implementation of water conservation is critical as large portions of the Southwest and California are under severe drought conditions as is the Southeastern part of the country and the Midwest. Other states will face water shortages in the coming years as well. Even though there are states that have strong water conservation measures in effect, those states that are not part of intense programs will need them to support burgeoning communities and economic expansion. Without such programs, water needs will be in a critical, short, and limited supply.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Water is important. It's the essence of life and the center of so many activities we perform daily. Can we cook without water? What about our clothing? Cleaning? We absolutely use water for everything. Sadly, we chew more than we can handle. We waste water, at every cost that is. If we continue as prodigal sons, we'll one day run out of a substance so vital. However, if each state was to mandate water conservation at some level, wouldn't we preserve it?

That's an absolute YES! Governing bodies should impose these rules, especially on specific types of water usage that is increasing in numerous cities and regions. To conserve water, it's a continuous process. Facility bodies have a constant increasing fight, as they have to contend with heeding long term water conservation regulations. They are well aware of



restrictions such as lawn and landscape irrigation during periods of droughts and also limited hours.

Why is there a strong need for this mandate to conserve water? Simply put, increasing growth. In some communities, especially large ones, water demands far outweigh supplies. An increasing population means pressure on drinking supplies. Additionally, in some cases of pollution, some ground water supplies have been contaminated and are forced to close. In cases where they do remain open, they usually undergo extensive and expensive treatment to ensure it's potable.

There are alternative sources to fixing this problem. However, reclaimed wastewater and desalinated seawater might require very pricy new infrastructure and are flooded with issues. Therefore, to ensure that water remains available and affordable to everyone, it's important that we get the hang of using less water to effectively do what we want.

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-No, all states should not mandate water conservation at some level. All mandates do is give bureaucrats power and authority over citizens and their money. Time and time again, government bureaucracy has proven to be wasteful, ineffective, and only good at making products and resources more expensive. The better option is to let free markets force individual consumers to make their own decisions regarding water conservation.

Many states have no water shortages at all. Mandating conservation when there is no crisis is comparable to performing surgery to heal a paper cut. Why should artificial restrictions be put in place to solve a problem that doesn't exist?

For states in the desert southwest, water shortages are a real and growing problem. Here, the laws of supply and demand must be allowed to operate. If a free market price is determined by how many buyers want to buy the product (demand) in proportion to the readily available amount of that product (supply), either the cost of water will go up due to higher demand, or new supplies will be brought online by water producers.

If supply fails to increase sufficiently to meet demand, prices will go up. Consumers will make personal decisions on how much water to use based on their individual needs. To illustrate, if



the cost of water doubles because of a supply shortage, I may decide to not water my lawn or wash my car and save that water for more important needs such as washing dishes or taking showers.

Higher prices will do a better job of promoting conservation than mandates. Allowing the free market forces to determine accurate water prices will result in voluntary reductions of consumption along with increased supplies in the long run as new and innovative ways to produce or obtain fresh water are developed.

Cartwright—I agree that mandates are problematic from a bureaucratic perspective, and I agree that the free markets should determine this. I guess you could make an argument for a surcharge on excess water usage similar to the surcharge on gasoline that I proposed a few minutes ago. This is a good way to influence consumption of water and the behavior of consumers when it comes to water usage.

But you can also influence consumers with incentives related to conservation in this case. Let's consider this. I recently saw a toilet that had a sink atop the tank so that when you washed your hands the water drained into the tank which would then be used the next time you flushed the toilet. I thought it was a pretty slick idea. We do waste a lot of water when we wash our hands and take showers. What if we could reclaim and reuse this water in the toilets in our own homes? It would probably take some re-plumbing and some modifications but it could probably be done. Would people be willing to invest in this effort if they received a tax break or a rebate from their water company based on the amount of water they save in a year's time? I imagine a lot of people might take advantage of this if you could make it worth their while. Just something to think about.

How can we encourage people to conserve water? Most people take water for granted. They turn on the sink and the water is there. They don't really worry about it until the well goes dry, so to speak. We need to work on educating the population on how to conserve water and the importance of doing so. As a lot of places in the west have seen, you're in a lot of trouble when your water resources become scarce. Here again this is about influencing consumer behaviors. We waste a lot of water to water the lawns so that we have pretty green grass. This



really isn't an efficient or prudent use of water, particularly when it's in short supply. Perhaps homebuilders should consider alternative landscaping options that consume less water when building a development and homeowners consider alternatives to their lawns. Personally, I favor putting down the artificial turf they use on some football fields. I think it's made of recycled tires. It's looks very real and requires no watering. It's pretty expensive, but if it saves on the water bill and you're given some type of credit or incentive, it might become more prevalent.

7. Do schools need more authority to discipline students? If so, how do we accomplish this?

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Through a video watched on Facebook, I was quite appalled by the level of indiscipline in the classroom. Teachers have no authority whatsoever with regards to disciplining children. Students do absolutely whatever they want, even in the presence of their teacher. Also, think about the level of violence meted out to teachers daily. These include verbal and at times, physical abuse. Should we allow the morals of students to collapse in the classroom or do schools need more authority to discipline students?

Yes, schools need more authority to discipline students. This will teach them respect for their fellow classmates, teachers and those of the auxiliary staff. Additionally, the majority of students respond to discipline. However, as important as it is for schools to improve in disciplining children, how can this be accomplished?

To accomplish this, schools need to implement a punishment system. If there is a detention system in your school, ensure that the environment is unbearable. Detention should not be an area where students can sit and have the time of their lives. When the conditions during a detention session are made unbearable, students will learn not to behave unruly, as they'd dread going to detention.

Furthermore, students love the comfort of their smart phones. Take those away for the entire day and they'll be like walking zombies. Schools should be given that authority to seize items, especially smart devices from students who misbehave. Though



other measures can be implemented, that is dependent on the level of authority given to schools.

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-A recent incident in St. Paul, Minnesota, where a 16-yr-old student attacked and severely injured a teacher inside the school, illustrates the dilemma school personnel face of balancing their personal safety with maintaining control of unruly students. If not enough discipline is allowed, students start to believe they are immune from any serious consequences and will behave accordingly. If too much disciplining is allowed to the point of corporal punishment, the schools open themselves up to lawsuits from upset parents. Worse yet, unscrupulous or sadistic teachers or principals may physically abuse children if left unchecked.

Schools need more authority to discipline students. However, the discipline should not be corporal punishment of any sort. On the other hand, school personnel should be allowed to protect themselves from unruly or violent students.

Perhaps the immediate answer is to increase the number of school security personnel in each building. If a student is disrupting class, perhaps lashing out at other students or teachers, send in a security squad of several strong adults who will gently but physically remove the student from the situation and place him or her in an isolated room for a cooling off period. This isn't good for the student, because he is removed from the learning environment, but it benefits the rest of the class, who are allowed to resume learning instead of witnessing a confrontation or fight.

The long term solution is to restore in parents the mindset that education is one of the most important things they can give their child and they need to become actively involved in preparing their children for learning, and stressing proper behavior in class. It seems that many parents see schools as merely a long-term daycare solution and don't much care what their child does in school. Reversing that trend may take several generations, but until parents teach and instill respect for learning and respect for teachers, school discipline will continue to be a major problem.



Gastonia, NC Correspondent—As the brother of a woman who has taught middle school classes in both private and public schools, and spent two years as the principal of an elementary school in the poorest part of Baton Rouge, I can say without equivocation that schools must be afforded more options when it comes to disciplining children.

In all social strata, it seems that parenting of the sort that teaches respect for authority and obedience to rules is becoming a vanishing thing. Millennials are too busy teaching their little Jordyns and Braydens that they're special little snowflakes to give them any sort of moral or civil instruction. Gods forbid we bruise their little self-images, right?

The lot of them would be better off if their self-images and their hind ends got bruised a little more often.

This leaves teachers and school administrators in the untenable (and unenviable) position of having to try to discipline children whose parents will defend their spawn's misdeeds as the justifiable questioning of an active mind and demand that the entire school staff undergo sensitivity training before so much as speaking to little Kathlynn or J'von again.

Corporal punishment is by and large a thing of the past in schools. Having been on the receiving end of a wooden paddle wielded by a burly assistant principal more than once in my school career, I can testify to its power to right wrongs and set me on the straight and narrow. Even if the blows themselves didn't do the job, the smirks I got from my friends when I emerged from the office wincing did.

Suspension is a useless tool, as most parents allow their kids to treat it like a vacation, and since teachers are under such pressure to keep the average test scores up that they'll bend over backward to make sure that the offenders get all the extra instruction time they need to keep from falling behind.

Perhaps some sort of in-school community service might be the answer. I doubt that the class bully will strut quite so proudly when he's spent three days wearing a hair net and serving lunch to his former victims in the school cafeteria. The foul-mouthed malcontent who disrupts class will have plenty of time to scream obscenities into the ether while he's mowing



the athletic fields with a reel mower. And the “Mean Girl” who delights in tormenting those who don’t fit in might find herself a bit more sympathetic after a week scrubbing floors and toilets.

Demeaning? Yes, absolutely. Punitive? You bet.

Effective? Could be ...

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-Schools do need more authority to discipline students. Discipline and behavior problems are prevalent in American public schools today and are significant enough that they disrupt and jeopardize student learning. Teachers are leaving the profession altogether because of discipline problems and they, along with concerned parents, have noted in national studies that just a few trouble makers cause the behavioral problems that affect a whole classroom. The result is a tension filled environment of confusion, interruption, distraction and disrespect for the normal operation of a classroom and the learning process. There is also awareness, from the teacher standpoint, that students and parents feel empowered to question and confront the decisions of teachers and threaten them with lawsuits and other actions.

A nonprofit research organization, Public Agenda, has found that many times teachers are operating in an atmosphere of constant challenge and anticipation, which affects their capacity to teach and keep order in the classroom. Surveys through Public Agenda indicate that teachers have said that students readily remind them that they have their rights and that their parents can sue them. Others indicated that they had been accused of disciplining a student unjustly, and more than half of teachers surveyed reported that their districts conceded to demanding parents, which caused even more discipline problems.

In order to accomplish discipline issues in schools, school districts must form their own coalitions comprised of teachers, parents, administrators and school board members who are ready to tackle the issues of discipline problems and resolve them in a firm and common sense manner. The solutions needed to meet discipline problems head on should include strict enforcement of disciplinary measures already in existence in individual schools, and those discipline or behavioral measures should be consistent throughout a school district. Also, alternative



schools and discipline rooms within a school should be made available for habitually disruptive students.

Those disruptive students who refuse to leave a classroom on the spot, through a teacher request, must be taken to a discipline room by a school administrator, or accompanied by a school security official, where they receive school work to complete and other assigned tasks within the school itself, which makes them not only responsible for the consequences of their behavior but also makes them accountable to the school as well. If those measures are ineffective and students refuse to do schoolwork or other assigned tasks, referral to an alternative school is made, with a suspension from the home school, until placement is made in the alternative school.

Another important issue linked with discipline involves aggressive parents who must be limited in their ability to sue schools over disciplinary actions, particularly when money settlements are involved. Though most parents today take the side of their children in disciplinary proceedings, parents have to be involved in the disciplinary process in a more proactive way and own up to their children's disruptive and damaging behaviors. Parents must be part of any behavioral plan when their child has continuously created havoc in a classroom. Follow up in the home environment with a behavioral plan is critical as well.

It is very apparent that school discipline has been a prevalent problem for some time. Schools are up against the wall with a minority of students who do their best to consistently challenge rules and teachers, while preventing others from learning and teachers from teaching. With the present sue happy climate in America, schools are at the mercy of parents, their lawyers and the courts, which weakens a school's ability to maintain disciplinary measures in the classroom. Without bold and tough rules and their strict enforcement, school systems will only continue to battle what seems to be an ever growing problem that needs to be ended before schools become behavioral treatment centers rather than centers of learning.

Cartwright—All of my colleagues here have hit on one important point, and that's the lack of respect that kids today have for authority figures. The school system suffers from the inmates running the prison. That has to stop. I've long advocated



turning over the entire school system in the America to the military. Let me be clear that I'm not saying we turn public schools into military schools. I'm simply saying that the administration of the schools be run by the military. Kids will be taught respect and manners, and if the parents need to be taught some respect and manners, they can be taught respect as well courtesy of America's finest military personnel. I think the military is pretty good at the whole discipline thing, don't you? Unruly kids in school would learn that their actions have consequences, and I don't think they would want more than one dose of military discipline. I think it would improve moral in the schools and make our schools safer for students, teachers, and administrators alike. I think you would see an improvement in test scores because there wouldn't be learning disruptions in the classrooms and habitually truant students would be getting paid a visit by a couple of MPs.

The fact is the public education system has no effective means of disciplining students anymore. The only way to restore that is to have the system run by the military. Good luck suing Uncle Sam if you feel your precious little child who has no respect for teachers or others has been mistreated if they have to peel potatoes or do pushups or if they get their ass whipped. Many kids these days are being taught morals or values or respect in their homes so they need to get it somewhere else. The schools have been emasculated when it comes to this, so let's give a new approach a try.

8. Has social media's impact on society and the world done more good or more harm?

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Social media is the ultimate news platform. Whatever information you can think about collecting, social media is the aggregator. Exerting such power, it's not surprising people of various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds flock to social media, to find what they want. The innovation of the #hashtag has made it even more seamless for people to discover what they want. With a simple search, they have information right at their fingertips.

Though social media has seemingly drawn people closer together and has lessened costs of communication, has it done more harm than good? Absolutely! Though social media has made it easier for people to keep in touch, it has driven people apart. People



are more inclined to communicate behind a computer. They're actually strangers in real-time. Additionally, it tears the family apart. As a consequence of social media, teenagers no longer find it necessary to open up to their parents. Instead, they take solace in opening up to complete strangers.

Social media is also an avenue through which people are cyber-bullied, stalked and even raped. Anyone can put up a fake profile, pretending to be someone their not, just to lure people into a trap. Social media is also time-consuming. People spend countless hours online that they neglect important things. Instead of building the society and extensively the family, social media tears it down. It does more harm than good. People need to revert to the former standards of society.

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-If you're a Facebook junkie like me (yes, at age 47 I'm a social media maven), you can't scroll through your newsfeed without seeing GoFundMe accounts for friends, friends of friends and vaguely recognized third parties asking to raise money for everything from medical bills to tuition to housing expenses. This is just one facet of the way that social media has allowed those with compassionate hearts to extend a hand to those in need whose challenges they might otherwise have never known about.

However, because humans are a deceitful bunch, it's also become a way for scam artists to spin sob stories to get well-meaning rubes to give money to fake causes. The stories cross my desk every day of hucksters setting up fake online donation buckets when tragedy strikes a community. When a school bus full of kids goes off a cliff, who would dare be perfidious enough to seek to profit from the horror and heartbreak the families and friends experience? Lots of people, I'm sad (but not surprised) to say.

And therein lies what is to me the single biggest issue at the heart of social media: vetting. In order to become a tax-exempt charity, there are strict rules that organizations must follow, and while there have been issues in the last few years concerning the obscene salaries of some of the top bosses at the United Way and others, at least a good portion of the money they take in makes it to the intended recipients.



But to cast the net more broadly, vetting is an issue that's even more critical when it comes to online journalism. Sites like Breitbart and other agenda-driven "news" sites are the Weekly World News of the Internet Age. They take single-sourced reports as gospel fact, and will accept even the flimsiest suggestion of a story as fact if it's juicy enough and fits their worldview. If they are criticized, they indignantly protest that they're being targeted by the "mainstream media" and make it a First Amendment issue.

Facebook and Twitter allow these internet equivalents of the shouting wino on the corner a gigantic soapbox on which to stand. With thousands or even millions of followers, their screeds and faux news shout down the more professional, thoroughly vetted, double- and triple-sourced news outlets. What was rumor becomes fact, and actual facts become objects of dispute.

I'm not going to rule either way on this question, but I'm also not canceling my subscription to my local newspaper.

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-In the 21st century, technology has advanced at a rapid pace and many people have found a positive way to harness the use of these advancements for business and communication. There are other less productive forms of communication that have taken root, especially in the last ten years. Social networking has rapidly become an everyday form of conversing with long lost friends and family and has turned into a substitute for the spoken word and physical interaction, without a lot of real thought provoking and productive conversation. Social media has made a strong impact on society and the world and has done more harm than good, as it has become an oftentimes superficial and convenient substitute for dealing with the many societal, relational, and behavioral problems that exist in today's world.

Countless social media followers have become quickly addicted to sites like Facebook and Twitter, which are among the most popular of social media. Many are involved in this type of networking, which includes not only regular citizens, with their everyday comments, responses and picture postings that broadcast their everyday actions to the world, but even political candidates, news organizations, businesses, charitable causes, and others have tapped into the Facebook and Twitter



scene for various promotional reasons. Businesses and outlets have obviously found a new way to capitalize on and attract the masses that are using social networking. When there is a constant flow of information that is instantaneously accessed, the frenzy for more and more good and bad information is at a fever pitch.

The more negative aspect of an addiction to Facebook and Twitter is the loss of productivity in the workplace, and society as a whole. Workers are either distracted at their jobs, or they are in their cars with smart phones that enable them to access Facebook and other sites, or they are texting and following an adored celebrity on Twitter. Taking a peek at their favorite social media website on their workstation computers has also become a distraction as well as shopping websites. Social media has also become a dangerous place for children and older kids because of sick minded perverts and stalkers posing as teenagers, as well as real time terrorists recruiting for volunteers for their dangerous and evil causes. Unsuspecting kids have been coerced into meeting these twisted individuals thinking they are making a new friend or signing up for an exotic adventure in the Middle East. In addition to interacting with someone never seen other than a posted picture, those with personal Facebook pages have to be aware that monitoring by different organizations is occurring as to what is being posted in words and pictures, what they are interested in, and what they are doing from dawn to dusk. Spilling your guts, promoting your life story on a Facebook page, or twittering your every thought on controversial topics could be a dangerous routine, and there are law enforcement agencies that can scan social media information for threatening information, so posting private or questionable information has its risks.

Facebook, Twitter, My Space, and other "social websites," along with computer games and smart phones, have created a generation of antisocial, self-centered and unaware younger people. When younger adults are not on their computers, they are walking around with their heads bent down staring at a phone, or taking selfies with friends and finding their 15 minutes of fame through a posted video on You Tube, or somewhere else. They are so glued to a device that nothing distracts them or interests them other than a mesmerizing phone and intermittent texting. It is almost impossible for them to carry on normal conversations or interact in a socially engaging manner. This



kind of behavior has set a dangerous precedent, as our current world is slowly ebbing away from one of interaction and dealing with others in a civil, intelligent, and meaningful manner. These individuals texting and following Facebook can barely mutter the words, "Hi, how are you?"

Normal ways of communicating with others appear to be dwindling, and social media has become a replacement for dealing with various issues. There are some advantages to social media in its immediacy, and access to others as well as business promotion, but the disadvantages are more far reaching. Social media promotes a different set of standards and stimulates addiction to a running source of all types of consumerism without having to lift a finger. The whole idea of social media just doesn't jive with what is considered normal fare. If Facebook, Twitter or My Space devotees want to avoid trouble, they should not take social media sites so seriously, but they do, and that's to the detriment of themselves and society at large.

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-Free and open communication between everyone is the hallmark of peaceful, enlightened, democratic societies. On balance, social media has advanced that cause and has done more good than harm.

The civil uprising known as the Arab Spring is one of the best illustrations of how social media brought people together instantly to protest tyrannical governments across the northern Africa. Despite shutting off TV, newspapers, and radio to citizens, these governments couldn't prevent social media like Twitter, Facebook, and email from keeping masses of people informed as to what was happening during protests and riots and government attempts to stifle these protests. It can be claimed that if not for social media, the Arab Spring might not have happened.

In the USA, groups like Black Lives Matter have used social media to organize protests across the country to advocate for changes in how law enforcement personnel deal with minority citizens. BLM has succeeded in putting racial profiling and the problem of white police officers dealing with black suspects into the forefront of the national news and debate over racism.



These are two of the best examples of the good social media has brought to the world lately. But the downsides of social media must be compared to see just how much net positive has come from these new forms of communication.

One particularly disturbing trend is injuries and death caused by distracted drivers who text or talk on cell phones. Even pedestrians are affected. The incidence of injury and death is rising to pedestrians who are electronically distracted in some way and don't notice passing cars or obstacles in front of them.

Many other lives have been ruined or severely disrupted by improper sending of sexually explicit texts or pictures, a.k.a. sexting. Headlines are regularly seen about teens who end up as convicted sex offenders because they foolishly sexted to the wrong person at the wrong time.

Social media is a tool and as such is neutral. The ways humans employ social media can be good or harmful. Social media technology and use is still in its infancy. I hope we learn to use it wisely and mostly for good.

Cartwright—I think that social media has, in fact, made us less social. Kids and many adults are glued to their cell phones and are unable to carry on conversations or interact in social settings. Look at how many people these days, particularly the youth of America, are socially awkward and socially inept.

Social media has certainly given relevance to people and events that have no relevance. Do we really need to know that some unemployed bum living in his parents' basement and playing video games had a sandwich at lunch, watched TV, smoked some dope, played more video games, and went to the bathroom? Do we really care what some snot-nosed, self-centered, shithead kid who has done nothing in life, who knows nothing about life, and who knows nothing of the world thinks about anything? Do we really care when some pathetic, bitter, critical liberal or right wing nut spews their hateful rhetoric? Why give relevance to any of this?

People waste so much time on social media in the pursuit of nothing that I think it has really hurt American productivity. I don't think it's going to get any better. People seem obsessed with wasting time on trivial pursuits when it comes to



social media. In these regards, I think it has been bad for society.

I think the only positive I see is as a means to connect with people who you may have lost touch with over the years. It's a convenient way to reconnect with these people, if you want to connect with them. But I don't think this really benefits society as a whole. Has social media cured cancer or anything like that? Nope. Has it ended poverty in America? Nope. Has it increased the safety and security of America? Nope.

On net, social media in my opinion is quite a waste. No one seems to really be benefiting from it in any meaningful way. It's giving kids and some adults a false sense of security and a false sense of importance in the world. I know people who have tens of thousands of followers on social media outlets but these followers don't know the person in real life in most cases. These followers aren't there when the person they're following needs a shoulder to cry on or needs a loan to buy gas money. Let's get real. Social media just tries to "fluff" people and get them feeling good about themselves or feeling like their lives don't suck so much.

9. Are the Democrats and Republicans both becoming more extremist and does this give rise to a viable third party?

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-Both the Democrats and Republicans have become more extremist, though in differing ways with varying yet similar characteristics. Democrats have gone from a party of state's rights to one of progressive and socialist thought and policy, while Republicans have gone from a party of decentralized government philosophy to one that has compromised its conservative values and further weakened itself through alignment with and capitulation to Democrat ideas, along with limited opposition to Democrat sponsored programs, legislation, executive overreach, and Supreme Court and lower court rulings.

Today both parties disagree on just about everything. Both parties agree on tax cuts, the Democrats favoring cuts for middle class and low income families while raising taxes on businesses and higher income earners. The Republicans favor tax cuts for all income levels. On social issues, Republicans favor traditional marriage between one man and one woman while



democrats favor gay marriage. When it comes to abortion and gun ownership, Democrats favor gun control and support abortion, while Republicans oppose abortion and believe in the Second Amendment. Democrats are more for a progressive view while Republicans tend to be more conservative.

As far as extremes are concerned Democrats have demonstrated their views with their lack of responsibility and inability to part from faulty ideological beliefs concerning regulatory matters, foreign policy, economic and social issues, legislative reform, and matters related to corruption, courts and the president's executive powers. Their support of dangerous domestic and foreign policies and their refusal to align with what is best for the country, along with their unending spending directed towards flawed legislation and deceptive social programs, has pushed them to a party of advancing socialism rather than one of concern for the little guy.

Extremes with Republicans are revealed through their refusal to strongly oppose progressive Democrat ideas and support and defend true conservative values. Their fears over current administration policies and executive actions have allowed them to misrepresent their constituents with bold talking points that fall flat when confronted with final votes on controversial issues, decisions on critical legislation and executive actions. Their failures to represent their constituents in a fair and truthful manner and to oppose that which Americans have continually contested has caused divisions within the Republican party itself, and a complete lack of trust with its constituents. Their weakened defense mechanisms, their distancing themselves from party ideals and what properly serves the country has driven their constituents to seek outsiders who will stand for limited government, strong national defense, free markets, the rule of law and strict adherence to the Constitution.

Though politics in America are controlled by the two parties, the current administration and federal government's domination over almost every aspect of a citizen's life has led to the possibility of a third party. With the extreme actions and inactions of both parties, the idea of a viable third party has been contemplated, but many in and out of political office are wary of a third party because of the confusion and splits that already exist in both the Democrat and Republican parties. The



fear is that a third party would not be able to stand on its own without a tradition of history. In addition, there would not be the necessary support and loyalty that established political parties have attracted over the years. Only if a strong and staunch party leader were to come out of an independent or third party would there be enough of a following to justify the formation of a third party. At the present time, there are few people that stand for the Constitution, traditional principles and ideals who could lead such an effort. The answer lies in a complete overhaul within each party where ethical and principled political candidates with common sense ideas and commitment to what is feasible and right for the country are elected to political office. Change within the parties may be a temporary fix, but it could provide the impetus to set America back on track and put the extremists in both parties out of office.

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-For the last several decades, it seems as if the Democratic and Republican parties have become more alike. For that reason, and not because both parties are becoming more extremist, I believe a viable third party will rise up from the political mess we're in, gaining dissatisfied members of both major parties.

In the 1960s, Democrats were the anti-war party. Viet Nam was so divisive that one party or the other had to come down on the side of peace just to maintain political balance, and it turned out to be the Democrats. Over the coming decades, as the U.S. became the sole superpower after "winning" the Cold War, an endless stream of police actions, pre-emptive invasions, and knee-jerk reactions to terrorism began. This peaked with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. By then, the Democrats were as fully supportive of global policing and an absurdly huge defense budget as were Republicans.

On the other hand, Republicans long held the mantle of the fiscally responsible party, the party of small government, the party of balanced budgets. They should have advocated for spending the post-Cold War peace dividend on peaceful pursuits, or downsizing the budget and government since a massive military-industrial complex was no longer needed to fight communism. Instead, the Republicans abdicated fiscal responsibility by caving in to warmongering special interests



and financing the Iraq and Afghanistan wars with credit instead of taxes.

Then came the Great Recession of 2008-09. Congress made a bipartisan decision to inflate the federal debt as the fix to the problem while still fighting wars in the Middle East. Both parties have shown they are in virtually complete agreement as to how to govern the country. We have become essentially a one-party government.

The extremism cited by so-called experts arises from parties taking polar opposite sides on a host of issues that have little to do with governing but a lot to do with politics: abortion/right to life, racism, immigration, and religion. Bold, radical positions on these issues are attempts to give voters clear choices at election time. But once the elections are over, incumbents and newly elected representatives alike return to business as usual. This is why Democrats became disillusioned with the Obama administration, why Republicans became disillusioned with the Bush administration, and why most people end up voting for who they perceive to be the lesser of two evils. So much was promised; so little was delivered.

A viable third party will only come to prominence when those lesser-of-two-evils voters defect to a party that takes common sense positions on the real issues of governing and is committed to repairing the real problems our nation faces.

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-Politics today have become the equivalent of a clique-ridden high school, where you have to pick which group you'll ally with and once you're locked in, changing groups can be the social equivalent of committing seppuku in the lunchroom.

Our elected officials are behaving like spoiled, pouty children who demand things their way, and if they don't get everything they want, they'll take their toys and go home. Remember the days of Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill? These were men whose ideologies diverged greatly, but who could sit down together and work out compromises when it was in the country's best interest. This was seen as a GOOD quality. They were praised for their ability to put aside their differences and work together.



In today's political world, compromise has become concomitant with weakness, and offering to compromise with the other side is showing your exposed belly to those on your own side who would seek to knock you down the ladder of professional achievement. The only way to the top in either party is to wrap yourself firmly in your base's agenda and, if you do have any urges to offer compromises, vent them through third parties or couch them in weasel-worded language that makes it sound as if you're doing your opponent a favor by letting them have some scraps from the big table.

Sadly, the game is rigged. It's damned near impossible for a third party to gain a foothold because of the way primary registration and the Electoral College are constructed. For a third party to succeed, it's going to require time, at least two or three presidential election cycles, money and patience. That last is actually one of the hardest to put together, as modern society has been conditioned by YouTube and Vine to pay attention to things in short bursts. If a new party doesn't have dramatic success in its first election cycle, the masses move on to the next shiny object on the political landscape.

I do think that eventually the American peoples' dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs will give rise to a viable third party, but I don't think it will be anytime soon.

Cartwright—I'd like to point out to my friends here that we do have a third party in America. It's the Libertarian party, but unfortunately, it doesn't get much attention though it does have a following. However, the Republicans and the Democrats are never going to let third party candidates be successful. This would upset their balance of power and they're going to do whatever it takes to maintain their power and their control.

Someone made a comment a minute ago that the two parties are one and the same and that the system is rigged. That's exactly right. We are ruled in America by a political elite establishment. They think they're better than the ordinary American. They think they know better than the America people. If you're not one of them, you have about zero chance of any success in politics. They look out for their own and make sure they get their own into the "club" in Washington. They pick the candidates that they want and even before they get elected the upper echelon from the party takes them to lunch or takes them



out to golf and tells them what they're going to do when they get to Washington, tells them what committee they'll be on once they're elected, and how they're going to vote. If you buck the trend, if you're not a good little soldier who falls in line with the establishment, you're done. They all play their little game of back and forth. They trash talk each other on TV, and when it's all over they go have drinks together and yuck it up at how stupid the American people are. Does this make us any different from Russia or China?

Why do you think the establishment hates Donald Trump so much? They know he's not going to play their little game, and they feel he's a threat to their power and balance. Trump is the Luke Skywalker to the establishment Evil Galactic Empire. They're seeking to destroy him. Ross Perot was the same. Look what they did to him. Let's go further back to George Wallace, the last their party candidate to win any Electoral College electors. Everyone who is a threat to them gets attacked either physically or with smear campaigns.

Do we need a viable third party in the United States? Absolutely. It would be great if we could get some third party candidates, particularly Libertarians, elected to the Congress. Perhaps it would force some compromise between the parties and get the system working a little bit better. Is that ever going to happen? I doubt it unless we can get a candidate like Trump to back quality third party candidates in Congressional elections. I don't think it's highly likely, but it's nice to dream about. I want what's best for America and I want America to be the great place that our Founding Fathers envisioned. Unfortunately, our constitutional republic has been hijacked by the political elite who are more interested in self preservation and personal gain than doing what's best for the country.

10. Is it time for a new round of campaign finance reform?

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-Every time you hear the words "campaign finance reform" in the press, they're inevitably accompanied by "hot-button issue" or some similar harbinger of doom. We're warned repeatedly that there will be donnybrooks the likes of which man has never seen if we try to modify the current dog's breakfast of methods by which our elected officials belly up to the public trough.



Hogwash.

Campaign finance reform needs to be one of the primary issues as we move along in the presidential election cycle. As it stands now, a politician who tries to run for office and eschew any sort of support from big business or lobbying concerns will soon find himself outspent by his competitor who chooses to open his wallet and funnel in contributions.

The game is rigged, boys and girls, and the only way to un-rig it is to make the big money contributors back off and shut off the gravy pipeline that ensures those who are most beholden to the special interests are the ones who get elected. One look at the gun control debate is all that's required to see how soul-rotted our current system is. Right after a cataclysm like Sandy Hook or San Bernardino, the "thoughts and prayers" crowd makes its voices heard, the usual suspects on the left trumpet for everyone to renounce their firearms, and then everything goes quiet. If anyone dares propose actual reform, no matter how rational or limited it might be, the NRA and its stool pigeons wrap themselves in their misinterpretation of the Second Amendment and paint anyone supporting the measure as five steps to the left of Stalin.

And it works. Almost every time, it works. Because of the money. Well-meaning folks with honest causes don't have pockets nearly as deep as corporate entities that stand to profit from the status quo.

Corporations aren't people, no matter what the Supremes say. They shouldn't be allowed to act like them.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Politics can be a pain in the derriere. That is the reason why I stay as far away from it as the East is from the West. It's simply bad business and the sooner citizens realize that, the better it is. I just believe too much cash is invested in politics when it could be used elsewhere, for further development. As with their campaign finance, funds that are raised for promoting candidates, policies in elections and various other political ventures, this seriously needs to be reformed.

The reformation to such finance campaigns in the United States is to ensure a change within the political environment, with



regards to the involvement of money in politics. This reformation is necessary as political campaigns induce too much expenditure and have proven to be an utter waste. The expenses incurred include those of travel. The cost associated with travel expenses for staff and candidates are exceedingly great. Think about the costs of communication. It's very costly for candidates to communicate with voters. The purposes and types of these finance campaigns differ, and cost might vary depending on which country or state is in question. For example, in some states, television advertising might be made to candidates avail for free, however limited by law. As for the United States, they are big on incurring heavy expenses in campaign budgets. As such, officials should take great pleasure in reforming the campaign finance.

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-Campaign finance reform has been an ongoing problem since modern campaigns have turned into mega-money raising marathons coupled with various campaign finance laws that have given rise to corruption and control by special interests, super PACs (political action committees) and other money raising conglomerates. Current financing structure makes it complicated and difficult for the average individual to run for office without owing their lives to big-money donors.

The controversial Supreme Court decision of 2010, concerning Citizens United v. the Federal Elections Commission, basically said that political spending is protected under the First Amendment. The ruling freed corporations and unions to limitless spending on political activities as long as the spending was done independently of a party or candidate. The decision did not influence contribution limits to individual candidates, political parties and PACs (political action committees). Another Supreme Court ruling in 2014, McCutcheon v. Federal Elections Commission, ruled that individuals are able to give the legal maximum to candidates for Congress and president, as well as to political parties and PAC's without the worry of violating the law when they come against a limit on all contributions, which were set at \$123,000 for both 2013-14 and a limit of \$48,600 on contributions to candidates. This decision did not challenge the limits on individual contributions to candidates for president or Congress which are now \$2,600.

With limitless contributions, it is easy to see how quickly millions of dollars could be accumulated through wealthy



individuals, special interest groups, and others, which enables them to control the course of campaigns. The super PACs, which supposedly operate independently of candidates, have both the endless funds and influence over campaigns and even the candidates themselves. With these current laws in mind, a new round of campaign finance reform is one solution to cleansing the latest reforms while instituting new ideas and strategies that would allow for the operation of a less expensive and influenced political campaign process.

Campaign finance reform requires a broad number of reforms and reformers to change the way politicians raise money. It needs to become a non-partisan, all parties issue in which everyone, in spite of income level, is able to participate in the process and run for office without continually asking for contributions from the wealthy and influential. Funding needs to be available through the public as well as self-financing, and when wealthy individuals and corporations make contributions, they must report where their money is spent. More importantly, small donors have to be made part of the fundraising system as well. Americans want to see an end to the takeover of the political system by major contributors who want and rely on favors and other perks for themselves once an election is over. Political bribery at all levels must end from the presidency down to other elective offices.

With the pressure of reelection constantly looming in the minds of almost anyone running for office or reelection to office, campaigning for money has become a routine way of life for candidates. One aspect of the process of campaign reform is the building of grassroots donor programs, which is one way that political reformers change the process of campaign funding while empowering small contributors. The regulations may still exist, but the push continues for a ground swell of enthusiasm and direct involvement by ordinary, everyday voters, with five dollar donations, to take on the big money that rules politics.

Other campaign reform ideas include revising or overturning current campaign laws to stop the exchange of huge amounts of donated money in return for special treatment, giving the Congress and states the authority to regulate money in elections, supporting public campaign financing that strengthens small donations, demanding openness with campaign funding and disclosure and release of contribution information, insisting on



doing away with super PACs and other groups that abuse spending, and working to strongly enforce campaign finance rules.

Only through revised campaign finance reform will those outside of the political process be able to participate in and have the opportunity to become supporters and possible candidates themselves. Their ideas must be considered in order to improve the political process and lives in general. All citizens deserve the chance to run for office and income should not be an issue, and campaign finance reform can be part of the answer to citizens leading the way to changing politics and removing big money out of the process.

Cartwright—Good luck with this one. Again, the political establishment is not going to let this happen. They're in too deep. They're selling their votes and peddling their influence left and right to special interest groups for huge sums of money. It takes lots of money to run a campaign for federal office, whether it's the House of Representatives, the Senate, or the President. The money has to come from somewhere for these massive and expensive campaigns. This is partly the reason why it is so difficult to unseat an incumbent. They usually have a massive war chest of campaign funds to use for advertising to crush most of the opposition. This also leads to career politicians. Why get out when you can live the high life in Washington on the taxpayer's dime?

Do we need campaign finance reform? Absolutely. We need to ban PACs and Super PACs and special interest groups from manipulating the election process. As the system is today, Chinese communists can funnel massive amounts of money into the election process through various means, predominantly Super PACs. Do we really want foreign companies, countries, or politicians involved in our election process? I don't think so. It's not what America and our election system is about.

Another option is to institute term limits for congressmen and senators. Perhaps by doing this they wouldn't constantly be on the campaign trail trying to raise money for re-election, particularly during their final term in office. Use the debate system to let candidates get out their messages or give each candidate the opportunity to buy allocated hours of prime time television on the networks so they can stand and talk about



themselves, their campaign platform, what they're going to do for America, and why they deserve your vote.

The system wasn't designed for the political elite and their establishment or the enormously wealthy who can fund their own campaigns. The Founding Fathers envisioned every day Americans in public service in the Congress and as President. I think the system has become vastly corrupted from their original intent.

Along those lines, I've also long believed that service in the Congress should be like jury duty. You would have to meet certain qualifications in terms of education, not have a criminal background, and so on. If you're number is randomly drawn at the election time, you get to go to Washington as a congressman or senator and serve your country and your state or district. Then, you have a whole new House of Representatives every two years, and one third of the Senate is new every couple years. That would eliminate career politicians and the need for campaigning for election and reelection. Perhaps then the Congress would do the work of the people and not focus on self preservation via reelection. It's a fanciful idea but not going to happen.

11. Torture or enhanced interrogation? How far is too far in dealing with terrorism?

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-In a perfect world, we (the "good guys") would never have to resort to the tactics and methods used by our adversaries to combat them. We'd be able to wrap ourselves in our cloaks of righteousness and overcome our enemies by sheer civic virtue, right-mindedness and devotion to the American Way.

We, however, are cursed with the necessity of living in the real world, where nice guys frequently do finish last, and where turning the other cheek will more often than not result in twice the bruising. The Geneva Conventions were drawn up to shake a finger at the horrors of war, and to set a framework for the conduct between nations in times of armed conflict. What we face in the War on Terror, however, is not a conflict with another nation (well, not officially ... but that's another matter, Yemen) but a conflict with groups of heavily armed, social media-savvy fanatical thugs who will stop at nothing to



propitiate their worldview and suck in new followers and malcontents.

However, the benefits of the medieval-style torture techniques used in Guantanamo and elsewhere are not the most effective ways to get information out of those elected for Uncle Sam's Fun Camp. Numerous studies have shown that what the waterboarders get is frequently manufactured, either made up from whole cloth or pieced together from fact and fiction in an effort to get off the torture table.

The specter of mind-control research is one no one wants to discuss, but with more being learned every year about the workings of the human brain, I think it's an area worthy of exploration. With tight controls, and with full bipartisan congressional oversight of the proceedings, I would fully support exploration of ways to extract the truth from known terrorists and other national security threats. Either by pharmaceutical means or by some as-yet-uncreated technology, there has to be a better way than barbarism to get what we need.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Terrorism, an act of terror on civilians, has had ravaging effects for years. Terrorism have torn families to pieces, inflict much pain and suffering and has affected the economic standing of the country in question. These individuals who are infamous for their acts of terror, should efforts be made to apprehend them? Better yet, should torture or enhanced interrogation be used to get answers?

While strong measures need to be taken to apprehend and extract information from these individuals, it's important that this matter of terrorism is handled fragile and with care. These individuals are dangerous. If they're willing to strap themselves to a bomb in the name of religion or politics, torturing them for information will only make matters worse. Really, no good would come of it.

There are so many enhanced interrogations used throughout the years by the CIA. These should be continued, as they are euphemism for torture and provide much better results. In fact, some people say enhanced interrogation is "justified". This particular technique does not create monsters, but retains humanity in those tasked with enforcing law against terrorism. How far is too far in dealing with terrorism? Torture is taking



things too far in dealing with acts of terrorism. In fact, those who deal out these tortures for answers are just as guilty as those men who terrorize civilians.

Myrtle Beach, SC Correspondent-On the face of this one I say "Go for it, torture the crap out of those terrorist bad guys!" But it's just not that simple. Sadly we DO need to maintain a "working" relationship with other countries. If we go around torturing people and using extreme interrogation methods we may raise some eyebrows and make more enemies than friends.

All you have to do is put the shoe on the other foot. Americans have been kidnapped and tortured for information, and how did we feel? We were MAD! Other countries are mad too. While their methods may be effective in obtaining information we are all human beings, civilized mostly, and as humans we shouldn't be torturing other humans.

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-In dealing with terrorism and the interrogation of terrorists, there are fine lines that may or may not be crossed. Enhanced interrogation is not torture unless it crosses those lines. There is a purpose for enhanced interrogation and it involves extracting information from difficult and determined individuals. Those that question interrogation and its use are unaware of the seriousness of the tactic and how intelligence agencies have to bear the obligations of eliciting information from very bad people. While demanding protection from terrorists and their plots, these same detractors fail to realize that niceties are not part of enhanced interrogation procedures. When they discover that they don't like the dirty details involved with interrogation, they automatically close their eyes and cover their ears and refuse to acknowledge the effectiveness of any action that indirectly serves to protect them. If enhanced interrogation doesn't fit their mental picture of what they believe the process should or should not be, or how it should be conducted, they automatically accuse the interrogator of wrongdoing or crossing the line. Interrogation is not supposed to be a pleasant experience for suspected terrorists, and if the individual has critical information, it is only reasonable to attempt to extract information in the most expedient way, which involves manipulation and intimidation in various forms. Preventing a terrorist attack is enough of a reason to go beyond certain limits of restraint.



There is no reason to be congenial with terrorists or treat them with kid gloves, but there are the factors of basic respect for maintaining the psychological and bodily integrity of other human beings. Though terrorists are most certainly not upright individuals, with many fitting the definition of pure evil, they are still human beings and are afforded the dignity and worth that befits all human life. This is the basic distinction that separates thinking and moral societies from terrorist organizations and dictatorial societies.

With enhanced interrogation, it is usually necessary to bring about discomfort or pain to an individual to achieve critical ends, and respect for the individual cannot be achieved by purposely mutilating, crippling or injuring an individual to the point of incapacitation or death. Even enhanced interrogation methods can go over the edge towards torture. Sleep deprivation to extremes can cause psychological damage or even death, and water boarding if done enough can cause permanent damage and death. It's all in the hands of the interrogator's ability to avoid extremes and still get the sought after information without causing irreparable damage.

The same is true of breaking an individual psychologically. If a person's humanity is shattered through psychological means, there is little left of his dignity and his interrogator's. This is where how far is too far comes into the picture. The lines are crossed and enhanced interrogation transitions to torture. Enhanced interrogation may be quite uncomfortable, but it strives to leave the interrogated person physically and psychologically whole without far reaching and permanent effects.

Both enhanced interrogation and torture are not making suspected terrorists sit in uncomfortable chairs, or increasing or decreasing the temperature in an interrogation room, or keeping prisoners up all night for questioning, or depriving them of special diets, or using loud, rude and abusive language during an interrogation. Torture does not take any concessions into consideration and only sees the individual as a source of information and forgoes any sense of human dignity in the process. In the eyes of torture tactics, the person becomes expendable.



No play by the rules dictates exist for enhanced interrogation, other than that interrogation happens under secret conditions, and there is no way of knowing whether true torture is happening to even the worst of the worst. It is almost next to impossible for interrogators to do their jobs without making critical mistakes, but an intuitive and humane interrogator can recognize the state of a prisoner's psychological, physical and moral state and formulate a line of questioning that produces results, but sometimes even wise decisions take a turn for the worse. There is simply no foolproof way of interrogating without possible difficulties arising.

There must be a clear understanding of what enhanced interrogation is and its differentiation from torture, and there also must be an awareness that trained interrogators are doing a job that requires analyzing suspects and dealing with them in specific ways in order to extract pertinent information, which is information that protects the public from future terrorist plots and actions. Dealing with terrorist subjects in the interrogation room is a process that ordinary citizens have difficulty dealing with and comprehending and until the public realizes that gaining information can be a dirty business, there will continue to be questions about enhanced interrogation versus torture and the limits on both.

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-Modern-day terrorism against the United States is primarily a self-inflicted problem caused by our addiction to foreign oil and our belief in nation building. It's a logical assumption that the government anticipated having to set up an interrogation policy for captured or arrested terror suspects. It also follows that an appropriate response to terrorist attacks would be terroristic interrogation techniques, namely torture. What the government didn't figure on was having their tactics exposed by investigative journalists, eyewitnesses to interrogations, or surviving victims. So the great debate began about what is proper when interrogating terror suspects.

If the United States sincerely claims to be a Christian, democratic, peace-loving nation, then laws would have been passed outlawing any physical or mental torture. Also, breakers of those interrogation laws who were convicted would receive severe prison sentences. Interrogation laws appear to be weak. Convicted offenders seem to be few. The few who have been caught and convicted don't appear to have been severely penalized. One



must assume that torture is at least tacitly permissible in the United States.

Many studies have shown that torture is not a reliably effective method of gaining information from prisoners. This is perhaps the strongest reason that torture should not be used during interrogation. But even if torture worked, the moral outrage of treating prisoners inhumanely should give our leaders pause. Most of the world's governments condemn torture publicly, although we must assume some other governments privately use torture. Using torture on suspected terrorists will only encourage terrorists to use torture on any U.S. soldiers or citizens they capture. Let's take the high road and outlaw torture in this country, then uphold and enforce those laws.

Cartwright—I don't think the terrorists are interested in torturing anyone. They're simply looking to cut off our heads, burn us alive, or cause as much death and destruction at one time as possible. If you have a high ranking terrorist in custody and you know that he has information on a planned terrorist attack on a major city in America, how far would you be willing to go to get the information to stop the attack and save the lives of tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of innocent people? Personally, I say do whatever it takes. I'm not worried about the "rights" of terrorists or their mental state or their dignity or what other countries think.

12. How do we more effectively promote the use of alternative energy?

Owatanna, MN Correspondent—The best way to promote the use of alternative energy is for the government to eliminate all forms of corporate welfare that benefit energy companies. This is needed to level the playing field for alternative energy producers who are at a disadvantage because their products—wind power, solar power, nuclear power—are not economically competitive with subsidized fossil fuels.

Even though some alternative energy companies receive subsidies or tax benefits, they pale in comparison to the benefits the large oil companies have virtually institutionalized into the tax code. If fossil fuels maintain a distinct price advantage over alternate sources, consumers will be reluctant to pay more for a product that doesn't appear to have added value.



The next step will be to require all producers of any energy to ensure they have added no net pollution to the environment. This means fossil fuel makers will have to develop engines that produce no pollution, and then to offset the energy used to obtain the oil from the earth, they must spend money on either environment-enhancing strategies such as planting trees, or other pollution-elimination activities such as water filtration or recycling innovations.

Once alternative energy costs come down to be even reasonably close to fossil fuel costs, then grass roots efforts must be started by more affluent citizens to lead the changeover to non-polluting energy. Social media campaigns promoting the "coolness" of switching to alternative energy sources can work. The emphasis on one person at a time taking the pledge to fight the harmful effects of pollution is what is needed. What won't work is a government-imposed carbon tax that will merely be a tool for large corporations who pollute to avoid responsibility by hiding behind another massive volume of vague and unenforced rules and regulations.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-One day, we'll exhaust the resources we have in our care. As true as that statement is, it doesn't hurt to consider other options. Any form of alternative energy mentioned, usually sheds light on the implications of using energy that is alternate to fossil fuels, and does not cause harm to the environment. These alternatives are introduced with the intent to correct issues associated with fossil fuels. However, throughout the years, what constitutes alternative energy has been controversial. This is as a consequence of the effects these so called alternative energies have on the environment, including global warming (This is due to high emissions of carbon).

Though today's idea of alternative energy is controversial, it should nonetheless be promoted. The best way to get people involved in endorsing alternative energy is by example. We cannot be pushing an alternative energy source but have never used it before. A few years ago, a friend of mine started promoting solar energy. She had panels hooked up to her home and she also held events to educate and get people involved, even if it meant allowing them to purchase small solar equipment, such as mobile solar chargers. All in all, promoting alternative



energy means that we too need to get involved in using any alternative energy source.

Gastonia, NC Correspondent—With gas prices below \$2/gallon, it's a little hard to get folks' attention when you start to preach the gospel of alternative energy and begin warning them that the fossil fuel clock is ticking and that someday (although so far every prediction of when has been wrong) the wells will run dry and "The Road Warrior" will take on the status of prescient documentary.

However, anyone with a rational mind knows that the processes which created our oil are no longer cooking, and that future generations will spit on our oil-soaked graves when they learn of our profligate use of petroleum and our failure to adequately conserve.

So how do we convince Joe Motorhead to give solar a chance? As loath as I am to recommend the writing of more checks out of our already overburdened government checkbook, I do think that a certain amount of subsidy is well warranted. In fact, if I could personally designate the use of my own tax dollars, that would be one of my pet projects. The recently expired solar tax credits were tremendously effective, increasing the number of small-scale solar installations dramatically.

The spirit of competition is another way to not just increase public interest in alternative energy, but to advance the current technologies. Look at what the X-Prize did for privately funded spaceflight. With a sufficient potential reward comprised not just of direct cash but of patents, market exclusivity and good old-fashioned fame and name recognition, it should be possible to goad the Tesla of alternative energy into emerging from the shadows and opening his garage.

We're naturally resistant to change, and unless there is a promised benefit that outweighs the comfort of remaining in our fossil-fuel recliners, we won't move. A mixture of government investment, private funding and effective public relations (remember the '70s water- and electricity-conservation movement that raised a generation of green-leaning kids?), we'll shift the paradigm and make solar panels as integral a part of backyard landscaping as gazebos and in-ground pools.



Cartwright—I'm all for the promotion of alternative energies, but this boils down to two things—economics and changing consumer behaviors in the form of incentives or disincentives. I go back to my fuel surcharge and using part of the funds raised by that to invest in and promote alternative energies. I think we should go off of the coast of just about every state and construct windmill. Anyone who lives on the coast knows that those windmills would be turning all the time. The government never does anything cheap or efficiently, so perhaps they offer up the opportunity to private industry with some sort of subsidy or tax credit funded by the fuel surcharge to build offshore windmills for energy purposes. Do the same thing for businesses who are willing to build solar fields.

Wind is a no brainer. We should be doing anything and everything to harness the power of wind. I think buildings along the coast or in areas prone to high wind should install smaller windmills on their roofs or on their properties; use the energy to power your exterior lights or heat your pools or something. Solar is intriguing to me as well. I think most buildings could put solar panels on their roofs. I'd even like to see window tint film developed with solar panel capabilities incorporated so that high rises and commercial buildings can tint windows with solar power generating capabilities. Things like this will only help in the long run.

As I said earlier, reducing the use of fossil fuels for transportation is going to take a disincentive for drivers to continue filling up with cars. A fuel surcharge or significant increase in the price of gasoline is the only way to change this. Some consumers will go buy a more fuel efficient car or an electric hybrid or a fully electric car. That's great. The electric it takes to run that car has to come from someplace. Perhaps it's coming from coal fired power plants or nuclear plants. I don't know, but the transition to electric cars en masse would require additional power consumption and put additional strain on power grids. We need to be ready for that so perhaps this is where additional wind and solar power come into play.

At the individual level, we need to disincentivize consumption of fossil fuels, predominantly gasoline for transportation purposes, and incentivize investment in alternative energies via tax credits and bigger tax breaks for buying electric cars or



putting wind or solar power generating capabilities on your home or property.

13. Should the United States return to the gold standard or a similar standard?

Owatanna, MN Correspondent—The United States should return to the gold standard. Going off the gold standard, along with several other changes in banking and monetary policy in the past 100 years, has led us to the financial precipice we stand upon today. Without returning to some sort of fiscal sanity embodied by a gold standard, we will likely see an unprecedented financial catastrophe in this century.

Since the creation of the Federal Reserve in 1913, the U.S. dollar has declined approximately 96% in value. There are two main causes of the dollar becoming nearly worthless in a century: fractional reserve banking and debt-based monetary policy. Each of these strategies led to the eventual abandonment of the gold standard.

Fractional reserve banking allows banks to lend out more money to the community than the actual value of their assets. This money is created electronically by the Federal Reserve and given to banks at low interest rates. The banks then lend this new money to individuals and businesses at higher rates. The banks earn a riskless profit by passing printed dollars from one party to another. Inflation results when the rate of increase in this amount of currency, or money supply, is greater than the supply of goods and services produced by the economy.

Inflation has averaged about 3.25% since 1913. This is the most insidious and detrimental tax on the average American because it reduces purchasing power to all workers. To me, inflation is one of the leading causes of modern families needing two earners just to stay financially afloat. Before we permanently abandoned the gold standard in 1971, supporting even a large family was relatively easy with one primary wage earner. Returning to a gold standard would severely reduce the use of fractional reserve banking and stabilize or eliminate inflation.

Debt-based monetary policy is only possible when government can print as much money as it wishes. This takes the place of government spending based on tax revenues, which used to be the



normal way governments raised money. The greatest example of debt creation was the Great Recession of 2008-2009, when the Federal Reserve attempted to stabilize a critically overheated world economy by dumping trillions of debt-based dollars, not backed up by taxes or assets, into the economy. Because interest on this new debt must be paid, it's in the government's best interest to maintain inflation so the debt can be paid off with cheaper inflated dollars in the future. Returning to a gold standard would prohibit debt-based monetary policy because the government could only spend money it received from taxes or asset sales.

The primary reason to return to a gold standard is to reduce the length and breadth of financial recessions. Boom and bust cycles are innate to business. When the country was on an absolute gold standard (up until 1933), those cycles were short, and sharp, but healthy for the overall economy. Government intervention allowed by bailouts, printed money, and inflated dollars extends what would normally be healthy economic corrections into long, drawn out Great Recessions and Great Recessions that end up hurting the bottom 99% much more than the top 1%.

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-Many believe a return to the gold standard would create more problems due to the complications involved with the current economy, but others consider a return to the gold standard to be a viable alternative to worthless paper money with nothing backing its value. A return to the gold standard or something similar would certainly give politicians motivation for reforming the welfare state, but between pressure from lobbyists, special interest groups as well as voters, the political class would continue to stonewall the inevitable. If these obstacles could be overcome, a return to gold money could be a reality.

In order to go back to a gold standard, there would have to be reforms at many levels. The federal government would have to cease inflating, balance its budget, and discontinue welfare programs. Most people would not be prepared for such reforms, and, again, politicians would be on the chopping block for even thinking about passing and implementing such measures. The hindrance to any monetary reform is the very idea or thought of it. The mere contemplation of drastic change is overwhelming to many, particularly when it comes to money.



Gold standard advocates agree that the methodology utilized to return to the gold standard must be part of a course of action of reestablishing gold as usable money within the current monetary system, while continuing to phase out the utilization of paper money, but still honoring existing money transactions in the system. Gold pricing and value would be an issue, as would any stated worth of paper currency.

There is also the matter of continuing inflation, which is of concern with the reintroduction of gold as a form of money, as everything in the marketplace today has risen in price, which includes gold. People's usable income and savings have been worn down and are of less value. Gold standard advocates want to look at the money value of gold in different ways. Some want before inflation thoughts concerning gold to money ratios, while others want to raise the price of gold to an approximate figure, and others want to calm the waters with setting the current market for gold versus money ratio and reformulate the dollar value on that basis.

Reevaluating gold for money use is a complicated process because the buying power of gold has to be adjusted to equal out its worth as a currency in the present economy. In order to buy something of lesser value, gold coins of certain denominations and smaller increments would have to be minted and circulated for consumer use. Gold would be more stable money than most paper money, as government paper currency fluctuates whether its quantity is increased or decreased, as it attempts to meet the requirements of business and other pressures that make it rise or fall.

With a gold standard, there might be a minimal rise in cash prices particularly when the amount of gold used as real money increased, or if it were mined and processed, and there might be declines if gold used for money declined and amounts of gold were taken from the market to devote to industry, medicine, dentistry or jewelry.

Returning to the gold standard must be based on reintroducing gold and gold coins as money. This process would be handled in such a way as to not cause deflation and economic shock as well as allow for the completion of open government contracts and obligations to government bond holders. The transfer of gold would go from government holdings to private hands and would be



turned into gold coins for public circulation. In order to accomplish this, the public, again, has to understand the process and what changes they as citizens would have to make in order for the standard to be effectively implemented. It would mean self-reliance and responsibility on their parts and the end of endless welfare state spending by politicians.

The gold standard could be realized with the removal of fear of the idea itself. If enough support and willingness were garnered to sacrifice for reform, there could be a swing from a paper and credit monetary system to one of gold without interfering with the normal flow of the market and production processes.

Myrtle Beach, SC Correspondent-We should have never left the gold standard! Does anyone know off the top of their head what a dollar is worth? A candy bar? A soda? A bag of chips? It's so hard to value things when your money really has no value. But going back isn't as easy as it sounds.

Going back to the gold standard would require EVERY store, EVERY business, ALL Government state and federal to re-structure pricing. This is not a simple endeavor. Also, I don't see anyone wanting to give up their \$35 dollars for \$1, or somewhere around that. I just see it being a problem.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-The gold standard has been long abandoned since 1933. In this system, the value of a currency was determined in portions of gold. This currency could be exchanged. In cases where gold was needed, a trade could be made and paper money would be redeemed for gold. I was not around during the gold standard so I have no experience whatsoever, but basic research has it that this subject is debatable as it's one that provides permanent or long-term stability in terms of economy and growth. In addition, this particular form of gold standard was said to have the capacity to put a halt to inflation and would decrease the size of Government.

Furthermore, the gold standard in some cases, to a minute degree, puts the Government out of business, as they'd not be able to print money due to a run of emotions or at their will. However, the debate to retract to the gold standard or similar does not only shadow the above merits but sheds light on the fact that this standard prevents or restricts the government



from increasing the national debt . All in all, during the gold standard era, it is implied that the country ran smoothly in comparison to what we see happening today. Historically, the gold standard was measured to have performed best.

Should we revert to the gold standard? That depends strictly on where the country wants to be. I've personally never lived under such system, but people seem to want to live there. If it's backed by popular demand, so be it.

Cartwright—Great concept, but this is not going to happen. It would be nearly impossible to return to the gold standard at this point without severely disrupting financial markets. The dollar is strong right now against other currencies and inflation is relatively low. Go back to World War I. The US had double digit inflation for a couple years. Same thing during World War II. It's nice to say that the gold standard would eliminate inflation but that's not the case. Economic history over the last hundred years or so doesn't bear that out here.

I like the idea of having gold in Fort Knox and knowing that the dollar is backed by something other than the full faith and credit of the federal government but it's not practical and never has been practical. The gold standard didn't stop us from getting in two world wars, a war in Korea, and a war in Vietnam. It didn't stop the federal government spending more and more. It didn't stop entitlement programs and the expanding welfare or entitlement state.

What we need to focus on is the full faith and credit of the federal government. We need to start balancing the federal budget, paying off the national debt, and reforming entitlement programmes so that the unfunded liabilities don't bankrupt us in the next couple decades. Some of these reforms take massive political action, which isn't going to be easy. We need to ensure we have a vibrant, competitive economy that's producing jobs so that anyone who wants to work can work. Having people working solves a lot of problems in America.

When it comes to the Federal Reserve, we need to let the FOMC continue to do its job in seeking maximum sustainable employment and price stability. I think they've done a good job for the most part if you look at their history. It's a tough balancing



act that they have. Where I think they could make some changes is to increase the reserve requirements of banks. This requires banks to retain more of their deposits and reduces their lending capabilities which force them to make more judicious decisions in the lending process. The financial crisis of 2008 could have been avoided had the reserve requirements been higher. Higher reserves are not a bad thing financially for the banks but it is very unpopular as it limits their lending ability. The higher reserve requirements take money out of circulation and curbs inflation. On net, I think higher reserve requirements contribute to a more financially sound banking system which is crucial to having a sound economy.

14. The last two presidential elections were rife with known voter fraud. How do we ensure that our elections remain open, free, and fair?

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-I would agree with this question's positing of voter fraud if the definition of the term were expanded to include criminal and intentional disenfranchisement of large swaths of voters. By tinkering with early voting rules, scrambling the ways in which college students are allowed to vote and where they have to be to do so and through other Machiavellian schemes, Republicans have mounted a concerted campaign to close the voting booths to constituencies that traditionally don't skew their way.

It's somewhat equivalent to the way both parties have gerrymandered districts for many years, although this is being done via legislative fiat rather than through creative mapmaking.

To the larger issue of supposed voter fraud, though, I think there is a simple solution: A national ID system, providing a photo ID to every legal resident of the United States which would guarantee their franchise and be tied to other government programs, would be a simple solution. Despite some of my liberal leanings, I in no way support allowing those who are not legal residents of our country being allowed to vote, and a national ID would get around the maze of different state and local regulations and give everyone the same framework within which to work.



The ID itself should be a masterwork of miniaturization, with holographic imprinting on the laminate, a complex barcode and any other jiggery-pokery that the tech wizards responsible for things like the current state of US currency can come up with.

At the poll level, technology also needs a major upgrade. At my local precinct, the thin gray line between me and the exercise of my franchise is a kindly old woman with a massive book of names which she thumbs through to make a checkmark next to my name indicating that I've done my civic duty. With national IDs, each of which has a unique identifier (maybe the new chip technology that's made our credit cards more annoying to use?), the process would be infinitely streamlined and the human error factor removed.

Yes, any system can be hacked or fooled, but if we make it hard enough, the likelihood of mass fraud drops. Why not put the same technological prowess that goes into our credit cards into our right to vote?

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-In order to ensure that our elections remain open, free and fair, a number of changes in the election process need to be instituted at local, state, and national levels. Those changes should involve the creation of an election commission that is made up of those not affiliated with a political party, the federal government or any state or local entity that is heavily involved in partisan politics. The commission would be assigned to oversee the voting process and would be responsible for guaranteeing honest and fair elections. This commission would pass down election directives to local and state administrators for enforcement at those levels.

Once an election commission is established, standards must be implemented with the voter registration process. A potential voter must speak English; personally register with an official birth certificate and bona fide proof of citizenship. No one should be allowed to register by mail or through another individual, unless they are disabled or unable to physically get to a registration location, and even then a notarized form must be provided for proof of inability to personally register. A registrant should also be required to have a photograph and fingerprint image taken for a voter identification card that has to be personally retrieved from the registration location before



release of the card or sent by registered mail. The card should be made tamper proof and officially stamped with the district of registration. In addition, no registered voter should be allowed to vote outside of their district or submit an absentee ballot, unless he or she has moved, has been deployed in the military, has been officially assigned to work out of the country, or is unable to physically vote at a polling location. Also, all members of the military should be allowed to vote in sufficient time for their ballots to be counted in an election, with their ballots transferred by bonded military couriers to their appropriate home districts for release and counting.

Other factors involved with establishing open, free and fair elections include a number of critical issues that should include voting regulations that specify the following: no early voting, no voting without a photo identification card, no internet voting, no multiple voting, no utilization of or direct involvement with voting machines from outside the United States, no tampering with voting machines, no voting outside of an established district, no last minute registrations or registrations of questionable or deceased individuals, and no party affiliates, vote swaying, or threatening individuals allowed within a polling area.

With elections that are rife with fraud, potential voters have to consider the tremendous amounts of illegal campaign contributions that have driven questionable campaigns over the top. Contributions must be critically analyzed and even with current laws that govern maximum contributions to candidates, improprieties still occur. The contribution process must be thoroughly examined and stiffer regulations implemented. Absolutely no donations should be accepted from foreign sources (particularly through internet donations) or criminally implicated individuals, mega-million companies, organizations, or financial institutions that expect something in return.

With an honest and free-of-fraud election system, citizens will be willing to cast their vote because they know that their vote will mean something and cheating will not be part of the equation. Voters can feel a sense of relief that their vote will be cast in a fair and equitable manner, and new generations of voters will have confidence in a system that works for everyone involved, and new found confidence will bring an increase in voter participation. Without necessary repairs to a



broken system, voter fraud will continue to be an issue with every election cycle.

Cartwright—The instances of voter fraud in the last couple of elections is indisputable. We had the whole Dallas Cowboys football vote in Ohio, even though I don't think any of them were residents of Ohio. Half of the Walt Disney character roster voted. We have precincts where more votes were cast than there were registered voters. And I was here in central Florida for the 2012 election. We had a judge keep the polls open past established hours so that people could vote. They were still voting the next day and the election was over. All of this was fraud, but no one has seemed to have an interest in investigating it and prosecuting the perpetrators.

The solutions to stopping voter fraud are very simple and my colleagues here have hit on some of them.

First, you should have to show a valid government issued photo ID to be able to vote AND you should have to be able to prove your residency in the precinct. There should be no registering by mail or on the internet. The whole argument against showing photo identification is an implicit endorsement of voter fraud. Anyone who is eligible to vote in America can get photo identification. You can't open a bank account or a utility account without a photo ID. In fact, you can't do much of anything without photo ID anymore, so this is just a copout for those who want to be able to rig elections by stuffing the ballot boxes. If you're not able to register in person, perhaps we can even send the sheriff, a couple deputies, and a representative from the election commission to your house to verify your identity, fill out the paperwork, and get you registered to vote.

Second, the absentee ballots should either be eliminated or issued only under the most extenuating of circumstances and with ample proof of the reason for needing the absentee ballot. We all know when Election Day is. Be prepared to go vote on Election Day unless you're serving our country overseas or in the hospital. There's no excuse for not being able to vote on Election Day. The polls are open enough hours that anyone can vote. When I was a kid, everything was pretty much closed on Election Day. Maybe we need to go back to that.



Third, let's talk about the process of voting on Election Day. We need police presence at every polling station so there is no voter intimidation. Once you get inside, you must show a government issued photo ID AND your voter registration card. Once your name is matched to the log of eligible voters and they have ensured you didn't vote by absentee ballot, you get to dip your finger in the ink and put your fingerprint next to your same and signature in the register. The ink will wear off in a couple of days and should prohibit anyone from coming back to vote again. Once you've done all this, you get to vote.

These simple procedures should curtail voter fraud immensely. No system is foolproof, but these measures should help keep our elections fair. Any objections to these simple measures can only be deemed subversive. If you are an honest person and you're eligible to vote, you should have no problems with this.

15. Do drones present a threat to individuals' privacy and security?

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-Though drones have been used in a number of federal and state government surveillance programs to combat local crime, they have also been used to scrutinize southern border intrusions, terrorist activity, weapons running, and seek and destroy efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and other Middle Eastern war zones. In spite of the sometimes questionable use of drones for protective and combative efforts, their domestic use has been challenged concerning the threats that drones pose to an individual's privacy and security.

The FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) is responsible for the licensing of drones within the United States, and the agency has instituted minimum standards of safety concerning the operation of drones. The government is allowed to more freely activate drones, but they are required to obtain a Certificate of Waiver or Authorization (COA) to complete operation of drone aircraft. Licensing applications focus on routine types of guidelines that have to do with the safe operation of the drone itself, whether it is airworthy, hazard and risk-free, and injury-limited towards property and individuals. Commercial drones have operational limitations and can only be used under experimental conditions; however, a large number of licenses have been issued and discrepancies in their use at both the commercial and



government level have occurred. Individuals that utilize drones for leisure activities do not have to submit to FAA certification as long as drone use stays below a 400 foot level and are used with good judgment.

In spite of the FAA's restrictions, though limited concerning privacy issues, individual rights still remain at the forefront of the problem. A drone's design and range capability enable it to continually observe, undetected, in any environment whether in the countryside or a major city. An enhanced drone is able to access detailed pictures and videos, look closely through high-level windows, as well as peer through walls, fences, foliage and other barriers. They are also capable of utilizing infrared cameras, heat sensors, global positioning (GPS) and motion detection that allows recognition and identification of individuals in recreational areas, schools, and other gatherings. The FBI has opted in to increased government surveillance, as it is able to utilize and link its huge identification databases (DHS' IDENT) to government drones, which aid in the facial identification of individuals that they believe to be political agitators. This type of drone invasiveness indicates First and Fourth Amendment violations as well as privacy violations that are embedded in common law.

With the surge of drone use, an individual's privacy, safety, and security continue to be threatened in America. Celebrities are being stalked with drone photographic technology, private detectives and police departments use drones to follow and track suspects, and the criminally minded use drones to stalk, harass and get even with their adversaries. Even Google, Inc. has gotten in the game in other countries where their drones are positioned at street level to show more movement of individuals in Google's Street View feature.

Drones do pose a threat to the privacy and security of individuals. Without strict limitations concerning drone licensure and government and commercial distribution, surveillance activities on unsuspecting individuals will continue. In addition, for safety's sake, when drones operate in airspace used by commercial and private aircraft, federal agencies need to be regulated concerning the use of drones in such airspace. Citizen groups, state legislatures and the Congress must override what the federal government has allowed to happen with drone intrusiveness on the lives of innocent



individuals. Though Congress has approved amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act of 2013 that prohibits information collected by government (Department of Defense) drones from being used as evidence in court cases, Congress, the FAA and other governing bodies have not gone far enough to protect individual citizens from the invasiveness of drones. As private, recreational drones are used for different purposes, they should not be subject to the kind of stringent limitations that are placed on government and commercially designed drones. Government and commercial drones may have their place with border intrusions, war skirmishes, terrorist camps, prisoner rescues, hostage situations and crime scenes, but they do not need to be hovering over the back yard of a citizen who just attended a July 4th celebration.

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-Let me count the ways! Off the top of my head, being hit by an errant drone operated by an inexperienced pilot leaps to mind as the biggest threat to my individual security. Perverts flying drones around my house at night trying to use onboard cameras to get a cheap thrill view of my wife or me is my biggest privacy concern.

Secondary issues might be drones being flown along busy streets that distract drivers into causing accidents, or distract pedestrians crossing streets and leaving them open to being hit by cars. Drones could infringe on privacy if they have cameras and hover close enough to spy on people in public places who might be in compromising positions (think a young couple who chooses to engage in sex in a secluded outdoor location).

Those are a few issues with private drone operators. While serious, they pale in comparison to what government agencies might start doing with drones. We already have Constitutional issues with traffic cameras photographing cars that run red lights so the local cops can mail the owners a traffic ticket. The next logical step up from that is deploying drones equipped with radar guns above streets and highways to monitor and catch speeders. A dozen drones in a small city might do the work of a hundred police officers and save the government a great deal of money, while at the same time enhancing the city coffers with speeding ticket fines.

I'm not advocating we let anyone drive as fast as they want to with no enforcement of traffic laws, but I'm concerned that "Big



Brother is watching" has the potential to become a horrific reality. What if our every move in public was subject to remote monitoring? What sort of quality of life would we have if we had to worry about every little innocent but stupid thing most of us do in public that might get us into some sort of trouble because a drone was watching? I don't get comfort from assurances I'm safer because drones are everywhere looking for bad guys.

While drones have been valuable in certain areas such as combat and weather monitoring, drone technology is so new and we've had so little experience with the practical side, that society is bound to overreach or overreact with employing drones for various purposes. However this new capability plays out, I hope the people in charge of rules and regulations proceed cautiously.

Myrtle Beach, SC Correspondent-I think most of us have seen the commercial for credit monitoring where they are singing "getting to know you, getting to know all about you". But if not, one of the scenes shows a man in the park flying a drone overhead someone on their phone doing personal banking or something of the sort. As dramatized as that commercial is, it's the sad truth! It's not uncommon for things to start out innocently enough, and then someone will undoubtedly find a way to turn it into something terrible. It's just the nature of the beast. So, yes, they are dangerous in the wrong hands. What do we do? I'm not sure. I don't want to remove them from the hands of little Timmy who has dreams of becoming a film director; but I don't want Steve peeping in my window while I'm on my computer or changing clothes.

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-This past Christmas, the hottest toy around for those of shaving age was the drone. Big ones, small ones, gas-powered or rechargeable, it seemed like every grownup (yes, mostly male ones) wanted a drone of some sort.

And they got them. By the millions. One of the hottest commodities on YouTube right now is the "drone fail" video, showing expensive pieces of equipment being wrapped up into balls courtesy of impact with trees, power poles, cars, houses and innocent bystanders. However, as the skill level of the average operator increases, these sorts of things will become less common and we'll move on into the more menacing aspect of widespread drone ownership.



Already there's been a much-publicized incident in which an outraged father used his trusty shotgun to disable a drone that he claimed was being used to snoop on his teenage daughter, who was sunbathing in the back yard. Quite tellingly, the judge who presided over the case dismissed the charges against the father, saying that the Castle Doctrine applied, in this case, to the airspace over his daughter's body.

Not everyone carries a firearm, though, nor do we want random people firing into the air trying to bring down offending drones. With the proliferation of drones, the operators will undoubtedly begin to feel safety in numbers. When we become more inured to the presence of UAVs overhead, will we pay as much attention to that one particular drone with the camera trained on us?

Far be it from me to venture into hysteria, but can it be too long before garage tinkerers start coming up with ways to effectively arm drones? We've already seen a crude attempt, with one drone fitted out to carry and fire a revolver. It was hideously inaccurate, and the drone didn't long survive the punishment of the recoil, but it was a first step. Can we really be dense enough to imagine that the culture that turned BattleBots into a TV phenomenon won't come up with a way for drones to get in on the fun?

My only question is whether I need to invest in body armor or start working on my own chain saw-equipped drone.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Do you love your privacy and security? Would you relish the idea of knowing that your family is being stalked by the unknown? Many individuals feel that way, as over the years, the government has invaded their personal space, leaving them uneasy and insecure. Drones, have been dispensed to monitor the activities of individuals. They are military surveillances manufactured as unmanned aircrafts. These aerial vehicles have no human navigator on-board and are usually remotely controlled from the ground or automatically.

Though these unmanned aerial vehicles have proven beneficial as they can be used in battle without putting lives at risk, they can have a devastating effect on the privacy and security of the common citizen. The nature of these drones makes them quite



inconspicuous, as they are light and can fly overhead without knowledge. These drones were used by the United States government to perform thorough surveillance on countries, including Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. In fact, in 2007, approximately 700 drones were dispatched and used in Iraq.

It is for this reason individuals should worry about their privacy and safety. It's appalling to know that one can be followed the entire day, having their encounters and every doing mapped out by these drones without their knowledge. Yes, these vehicles were more than capable of gathering Intel on their subjects. Yes, drones do present a threat to individual's privacy and security.

Cartwright—The answer to the question is an unequivocal, "Yes." I love the idea of having drones used for police surveillance on criminals. Hell, I even like having them armed to catch people who speed or run red lights and give them a ticket. I certainly don't favor drones in the hands of private citizens who want to invade their neighbors' privacy. This is one thing that needs to be stopped quickly and resolutely. Local governments need to ban these just like they banned laser pointers. No good will come from people having drones. Ban them now.

16. Should members of the Congress be allowed to gain financially from their positions? What should we do about this, if anything?

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent—No member of Congress should be allowed to gain financially from their positions. The problem with federal legislators is that many come to their elected positions already wealthy from previous jobs either as attorneys, doctors, dentists, former state legislators, political appointees, business owners, or other high ranking positions and professions, which have afforded them, not only substantial salaries, but opportunities for outside investment and other political advantages before they even enter office at the federal level. Many are able to finance their own campaigns to run for the federal House and Senate, and gain more in campaign funds within their campaigns, as contributors are oftentimes friends and political allies who are willing to give more to an already financed campaign. Many in Congress are millionaires when they take office and remain so in and after their term(s) in office.



Under the Constitution, Article I, Section 6, Congress has been able to establish its own pay. Much has changed since the founding of the nation and the ratification of the Constitution, and the original founders of the nation would be flabbergasted at the salary amounts and perks provided to past and current Congresses. From 1789, when Congressional salaries were only \$1500, the Congress has raised its pay levels over 20 times in the period from 1789 to 1968. In 2009, the current salary level was set at \$174,000. A steady and large government salary, considerably above the average American's salary, has allowed Congress to work outside of their federal positions, maintain businesses, investments, and other funds while serving in Congress.

Once Congressmen and women are elected and attain status at the federal level, they gain all the perks that a federal office holder enjoys for their tenure in office, which includes a salary of \$174,000 a year along with over \$900,000 a year for office expenses and employees that work for them. In addition, they receive allowances of over \$200,000 for travel, business expenses related to congressional duties, and other expenses that include free postage privileges (franking) and other perks. They also receive large and substantial federal employee health insurance policies and federal pension programs. Retirement can be taken at the age of 62 for five or more years of service. The amount received depends on years of service and the highest three years of salary received. While in office, members of Congress have access to the right connections and information that enables them to increase their holdings and wealth, and later these same connections and information allow Congressmen and women to profit once they leave office.

Upon leaving office, whether through retirement or election turnover, Congressmen and women have made their time in Congress worth their while as they leave with the connections they came with and their newly acquired contacts from Washington, D.C. Many have previously had, or have acquired, holdings in real estate, spousal assets, portfolios that include retirement accounts, stocks, bonds, and bank accounts, plus many own businesses and law practices with substantial assets. A number of former officeholders go on to highly lucrative careers as lobbyists, financial and investment advisors, banking executives, law firm administrators, and real estate developers



where they are able to utilize their former congressional connections to further their financial holdings and millionaire status.

As far as everyday citizens doing anything about Congress gaining financially from their positions, there have been a number of calls for term limits and recall elections, but those moves are not totally consistent across the board with state and local laws and have yet to be enacted nationwide. Citizens should also demand complete revamping of the election process concerning campaign financing for representatives and senators. Ordinary citizens should be able to participate in the elective process without raising millions of dollars to take part in the process. Campaigns should not only be community based and financed, but those running should be evaluated by the requirements of character, service and ability, not the amount of money raised or how wealthy an individual candidate is. If a Congressional retiree is drawing a federal pension and other benefits, and is gaining millions as well from an outside position or newly acquired appointment, he or she should have to relinquish a portion (or all) of the pension or benefits attached to those former positions. In addition, no political liaisons should be allowed to influence hiring of former Congressional members to high level positions in the private sector.

With government being an out-of-control big business and less concerned and involved in serving its citizens, those seeking office must be committed to service rather than money making ventures. Those involved in it must be committed to reversing that process. Public outcry will have to be strong enough for any restrictions on Congress to hold water, and the public must educate itself on what can be done to oppose unnecessary spending and financial gain for those in service to the government. Nothing will be done without strong opposition to stop the perks, political connections, and huge amounts of money changing hands with those in and outside of Congress. A restoration of common sense, coupled with the founding principles, along with emphasis on character rather than money-hungry unaffordable, high salaried politicians with huge investment portfolios will have to be part of any plan for overhauling and limiting members of Congress.



Owatanna, MN Correspondent—Over the past century, it seems that money has replaced common sense as the primary driver of legislation and policy in Congress. Because of that, we've seen wealthy individuals, large corporations, and well-funded special interest groups dictate the majority of laws that have been passed. Whether those laws are beneficial to all Americans is debatable, but members of Congress invariably say that whatever bill for which they voted in favor is ultimately "what's good for the American people."

Judging by the social ailments that still plague us such as drug abuse, crime, gang violence, poverty, a declining education system, and crumbling infrastructure, there seems to be a disconnect between perception and reality by Congress. Add in the fact that in the past thirty or so years, wealth disparity between the richest one percent and the rest of us has soared to unprecedented levels, and it seems clear that feeding at the public trough by politicians must end.

The quick and dirty solution is to abolish lobbying of members of Congress by special interest groups. Let lobbyists remain free to call or send letters or emails stating their case, but in no way allow them to give gifts, donate to election campaigns, or provide any financial incentives to either the politician or his or her constituents.

The next best solution is to institute term limits for Congress so members don't become ensconced in Washington. This would prevent long-term relationships developing between lobbyists and politicians and would hinder the good old boy network to a degree.

A more radical and perhaps unconventional response would be to prohibit former members of Congress from going to work for any lobbying firms or for any corporation that has received significant government funds in the recent past. More and more it seems politicians view serving their country in office as a mere stepping-stone to a high-paying job in a corporation they personally helped via beneficial legislation while in Congress.

Taking away all financial incentives is the only way to return to having statesmen for lawmakers, rather than greedy, self-serving politicians.



Myrtle Beach, SC Correspondent- Let's play this one out here. You get a job with a pretty sweet paycheck and you get paid regardless of whether you accomplish anything or not. Do you have any incentive to try and work together with your co-workers, to compromise, to make things better? Heck no you don't! You're getting paid regardless! If you didn't catch the reference I'm speaking about Congress. I do not think you will find any red-blooded American who believes Congress should be paid the way they are, unless they are in Congress.

Here is what we need; people who WANT to change things, people who want to effect this country and not just draw a paycheck. How do we get that? Let's say Kevin works at your local car parts store. He's fed up with the way things are and decides to run for office and wins. Kevin goes to Washington and gets paid the same salary he was paid at his job at the car parts store and a small sign-on bonus so his standard of living doesn't change. Meanwhile the car parts store gets a small tax break for having an employee in Washington; and they agree to have the same (or similar) job, pending the fact Kevin can still perform the same job duties, at the same pay waiting for Kevin once his term is up. So Kevin doesn't have to worry about finding another job when he's done in Washington. Guess what, Kevin isn't there for the money, he's making the same money he was; Kevin is there because he wants to influence change! The flip side is the salary Kevin makes is a FRACTION of what we currently pay people regardless of whether they accomplish anything or not. So even if we pay Kevin's travel expenses, we are still coming out paying less...for someone who actually WANTS to be there. Problem solved.

Cartwright-No, politicians should not be allowed to profit from public service, but the reality is that they do. The statistics on the wealth in the Congress is staggering. The median net worth is over \$1 million. You have people in the Congress worth \$400-\$500 million dollars, and you have only a handful who are of very modest net worth. The reality is that the Congress is full of a bunch of high net worth individuals making decisions that benefit themselves more than anyone. They're out of touch with every day Americans, and they can't relate to every day Americans from their ivory towers in the insulated world of Washington, D.C.



I'm sure the people in the Congress are all a bunch of honest, hardworking, compassionate, decent people who have the best interests of their constituents and the country at heart. And did I mention they're probably as honest as the day is long? They just happen to be wealthy from their previous careers as lawyers for the most part. And their increase in net worth while they are in the Congress is just coincidence; it's just dumb luck because their holdings are all in blind trusts and being managed by professional money managers. They just happen to be rich already, and their money is really working for them. Their increase in net worth has nothing to do with their public service.

Qu'ils mangent de la brioche!

17. Do video games contribute to youth violence?

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-The first time I became aware of the issue of kids being influenced by violent video games was back in the dark ages, when Punch-Out was one of the hot arcade commodities.

First, a quick refresher for our younger audience: Arcades were places where you would go to play video games back in the time when home video games either weren't available or had graphics quality so bad that they were headache-inducing.

The chatter back then was that somehow playing Punch-Out would make kids more likely to start punching each other in real life, which in fact they'd been doing for millennia without the benefit of electronic encouragement. I was frequently the subject of real-life games of Punch-Out when I was in school, since we moved a lot and I was always the new kid in class, usually with a funny accent.

I could stop here and let my argument stand, but I have sons who are rapidly approaching their teens, and what I see in some video games today absolutely horrifies me. The Grand Theft Auto series is the one most often held up as an example of what's wrong with video game culture, and it's done a tremendous amount to earn that censure. In the course of a game, players are paid to kill, deliver drugs, take drugs, brutalize prostitutes and a host of other "real-life" interactions. The makers of these games rake in money by the truckload, and occasionally release a



pet survey or two showing that their games have nothing to do with real-world violence.

I simply can't believe that. Kids are influenced by the media they ingest. Look at how many kids turned out in Harry Potter robes once the books and movies hit it big. Look at how many would-be Captain Americas and Black Widows took to the streets last Halloween. Or how about how many teens started drinking blood after watching the "Twilight" movies? (OK, maybe that last one isn't quite right.)

Whether or not they re-enact the specific behaviors in the games, the over-the-top violence of games like Grand Theft Auto desensitize kids and teens to violence. The games may not even make them more likely to commit violent acts, but they certainly make them less likely to react with the expected horror and disgust when seeing violence. There is nothing good that will come from this, and the leash needs to be yanked back hard on the designers of the games.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Youths find solace in video games. When engaged in these activities, they venture in a world where they're in control. Youths love video games and once they've ventured on that road, it'll take sticks and stones to go back. There are many forms of entertainment. Some are proper while others are improper. Violent video games are as such, improper entertainment. This form of entertainment does not have a positive effect, but negative one on youths. Why? These violent games teach youths how to be violent and aggressive.

Youths have fragile and impressionable minds. They're highly capable of soaking up whatever they say and hear. The same applies. When these young minds consume violence at an early age, they tend to display aggressive and socially reclusive tendencies. They tend to be edgy, rebellious and negative.

In many cases, youths who play video games are daring. They believe they can do anything. Especially if they've been playing video games strong in adult content, they use the same sort of speech with their friends and even those they're not acquainted with. Many try to downplay the negative effects of video games but they are real and parents should make every effort to protect their children from these negative effects.



Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-Whether video games contribute to youth violence is a question that has been debated for some time. Doctors and other experts who analyze video game content for violence and its effects on children are divided as to the harm video games may or may not cause. With most video games today containing certain degrees of violent content, there are concerns as to whether video games trigger violence in youth who participate in video games as a regular ongoing activity.

With the prevalence of video games and their use as a form of entertainment and recreation since the 1970's and 1980's, parents and professionals have been eager to know what can be done to avert any possible acting out or violent reactions that might occur from active participation with video games. According to NPD Market Research, the number of children and young adults from 2-17, who regularly participate in video games for recreational purposes is currently at a 97 percent level. With that many active gaming participants, it would be assumed that violent actions would be occurring, but according to a 2001 report from the Surgeon General, risk factors for violent actions such as school shootings are aligned more with a child's mental stability, quality of home life and other factors, not exposure to media, whether through television, movies or video games. The fervor over violent video games adds to the cynicism and suspicions about video game use, and authoritative adults tend to equate video games with the problems of wayward youth.

Further research indicates that video games that contain violence may be one possible risk factor of many that produce aggressive behaviors in youth. Other factors affecting violent actions include the realities of the real world and its influence on youth and how interaction in the world can produce unnatural or anti-social behaviors. The tendencies that parents and experts need to watch for in youth, who are consumed with violent thoughts in general and are heavily involved in video games and other types of media include: agitation, anger, depression, heightened emotions, coldness, indifference, disagreeability, rule breaking and other neurotic tendencies.

Though the video gaming market is composed of mostly younger players, the gaming market itself has older generations of players that have become more of the center of attention for the industry, which accommodates adult tastes. With video ratings being in the mature range, younger players are selecting games



aimed at more adult content, and this content should be monitored by parents. Parents should be made aware of content and educated on what games contain and take the necessary precautions with video game selection. Video game use requires practical precautions such as limiting playing time with video games, restricting ultra-violent video games, finding family-friendly video games, reading reviews on video games and their violent content, and discussing with children why interactive violence is not a solution to the everyday problems of the real world. Parents are, according to the Federal Trade Commission, stepping up to the plate and have made video game purchases for their minor children or have made purchases with their children, so parents are becoming more aware of the game choices available and what is necessary to prevent overindulging in video game play.

As research continues to indicate, video game participation and play are not major factors in destructive actions and participation does not turn a video game player into a violent criminal. Psychological experts will continue to be divided, and agree to disagree concerning the harm of video gaming, but they will continue to issue warnings and strategies to parents concerning violent content and what to do to curtail the possible negative effects of video games on youth.

Cartwright—I'm not sure that video games directly cause youth violence, but I think it may bring out aggression and exacerbate mental disorders in some people. Youth that go and do something violent already have something wrong with them. They don't sit and play a video game and then decide to have a sandwich before carjacking someone. Those who do something violent are either influenced by their environments or they have a screw loose somewhere along the line.

I think this does bring up a bigger point that is often overlooked. How do we get help for the youth who are prone to violence due to the environments in which they are raised or due to some mental disorders. Reducing violence in America is a tall task. Kids these days may have to contend with gangs in some cities or broken homes and neighborhoods which can lead to violence. Some kids just need mental counseling or meds to keep them in order. Sadly, in the cases of mental disorder, what recourse do we as citizens have for getting someone help. Teachers or co-workers of troubled youth may observe behaviors



or sense something wrong, but they have little recourse to deal with this. They have little options for getting someone help.

I go back to my earlier comments about letting the military run the school system. I think we'd see a precipitous drop in youth violence if the military is running the school system and bringing respect, manners, and structure in the lives of kids and teens.

18. Federal and state governments are rife with fraud and waste. How do we combat this? Is there any way to stop this?

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-The only way to reduce, if not eliminate, fraud and waste from governments is to reduce the size and scope of government. With the federal government in particular, its size has increased enormously in the last 100 years. State governments are less of a problem since most have some sort of regulations requiring a balanced budget. Nevertheless, state governments are just as liable to waste money or commit fraud with taxpayer dollars.

Watchdog efforts and oversight requirements sound like good solutions, but they don't seem to be effective because accountability is often lacking due to there not being a sense of ownership. There isn't as much motivation for an individual to monitor the spending of someone else's money as there exists for that person to monitor his or her own money. Moreover, individual taxpayers rarely have the time or inclination to investigate where every single dollar of their taxes is deployed, and then determine if each of those dollars is being spent prudently and legally.

Some people say eliminate lobbying from government and all will be well because outsiders will no longer be able to buy access, influence, and inside favors. However, as the string of campaign finance reforms and Supreme Court cases such as Citizens United illustrate, those with enough money will always find a way to influence government.

Unfortunately, reducing the size of government will be nearly impossible. It will only happen when a fully educated electorate that understands government, civics, and basic economics gets tired of paying for an endless stream of \$700 toilet seats, billion-dollar weapons that don't work and are never deployed,



and an endless supply of security and safety agencies such as the Transportation Safety Agency and the Department of Homeland Security that don't keep us safer and erode our civil liberties. Then we can elect a quorum of politicians who will pass laws to restrict spending and dismantle government back to its constitutionally delineated size.

Cartwright—My friend here is exactly right that we need to shrink the size and scope of the federal government, and for that matter, all levels of government. There was a bit of an uproar a couple years back when you had the picture of the guy from the GSA sitting in a bathtub at some Las Vegas Hotel; there were some resignation and righteous indignation from the left and the right, but at the end of the day, a few top people were sacrificed and nothing more happened. The federal government is rife with wasteful and fraudulent spending just like this and everyone knows it but no one has the willpower to tackle the issue. Billions of dollars are wasted with Social Security and Medicare fraud each year, but we let it happen and we will continue to let it happen.

I think the solution lies in part with tax reform. I've been an advocate of ditching the current tax code for a long time and replacing it with something like the fair tax or a flat tax. Make it so that everyone can fill out their taxes on a postcard and mail it to the IRS each year with their check. Then, you take the IRS agents and have them start auditing each and every department of the federal government for fraud and waste. In addition, every member of the federal government would get audited each year, just to keep them all honest and to make sure there's no graft or profiting from public service. The auditors at the IRS are great people; they're good at their jobs. I don't want to get rid of them; I want to keep them working for the people. I want them to ensure that the people's taxes are being put to good use and not squandered.

The politicians seem to forget that the federal government has no money of its own; all the revenue that the federal government has is derived from the people. The politicians don't care if the money is squandered; it's not their money. I bet the Congress would have a different opinion about their spending bills if the money was coming out of their pockets. I wonder if some of the members of the Congress who are worth two, three, four hundred million dollars would approve of spending their



personal resources in such a wasteful manner. I bet they don't run their businesses like that; I'm sure they keep a pretty tight rein on the purse strings of the companies.

19. Is year round education good for student learning?

Gastonia, NC Correspondent—As the brother of a career middle school teacher and the son of a college professor, I am deeply suspicious of “fads” in education. From New Math to Common Core, periodically some well-meaning idiot comes up with a fantastic new idea that's going to make our kids smarter, our country stronger, our whites whiter and our colors brighter...or something like that.

Usually, they're variations on a theme or hackneyed old concepts presented with a fresh coat of paint, a thick frosting of PR and a creamy filling of squeeze paid out to “noted educators” to endorse the new plan and/or condemn the old one.

And, just as usually, the test scores and grade point averages stay the same, about the same percentage of kids graduate and time marches on.

However, year-round schooling makes sense on a simple level. Kids forget stuff over the long summer break. Teachers spend the first two or three weeks of school bringing their charges back up to speed and figuring out who has perfect recall from the previous year and who seems to have suffered a grievous head injury and forgotten all but the most basic words and numbers. By cutting out the long chasm of summer vacation, the little sprouts are watered more regularly and thus grow more abundantly.

Yes, I understand that much of American family life is centered around that long summer break, at least for those in the upper middle class and above. For the working poor and struggling middle class, that long summer break means finding caretakers for kids too young to be left alone, and making sure they budget enough to cover those expenses. Parents who can't afford to send their kids off to camp or hire a summer nanny have to come up with the scratch to cover a long period.

With year-round schooling, the breaks are shorter, benefiting all concerned. The kids receive more constant instruction, the



parents have less long-term planning to handle and the teachers don't have to spend so much time re-teaching material.

The model falls apart at the high school level, though. Kids in high school have summer jobs, internships and other activities that do require a summer break, and they can also be held more personally accountable for keeping their skills sharp and their minds tuned. So year-round until eighth grade, then resume the standard calendar for the final four years of school.

Owatanna, MN Correspondent-To say the nation's public schools face some serious issues when it comes to educating our children is an understatement. Many solutions to the assorted problems have been tried. Some have succeeded. Others have not. Year round school schedules have been proposed but not extensively implemented, mainly because of all the conflicts that arise when the change is proposed.

Since our nation has seen our educational competitive edge narrow in recent decades, we should start a national movement toward year round schooling. It's not a perfect solution, but it's worth a try.

The main argument for year round education is better learning and retention by students when they aren't given summers off to forget what they learned the previous year. Getting up to speed in the first month of the new school year won't be an issue either, if students only have a week or two off on any scheduled break. Those breaks will become routine, just as a five-day school week has become routine in this country.

Various groups will need to make adjustments if year round school becomes reality. Teachers will have shorter turnaround time to prepare for each new class. Businesses that rely on summer tourism will need to find another source of seasonal labor if teens won't be able to work fulltime. Teens who want or need to work fulltime in summers for spending money or to save for college will need to change to year round part-time hours to compensate.

If we as a nation truly place a quality education at the top of the list of requirements to achieve the American Dream, we owe it to our children to try new methods and concepts of teaching



until we can honestly say we provide our children with the finest education in the world.

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-Year round education is good for student learning when it is applied to specific student groups. Inclusive studies have shown that there are no real variations in learning with students who attend school year round and those who are on traditional school schedules, which include holiday breaks, other out-of-school time periods and a full three months off during the summer. There are indications that extra days in a school year can be of benefit to students overall and there have been improvements in test scores, but there are still questions as to whether year round education is effective for all students in the learning process.

One group that has benefited more from year-round schooling in relationship to achievement levels are at-risk/ disadvantaged students. They tend to do better in year-round arrangements because of the consistency of time in a learning environment, the variety of learning experiences and the added attention provided by instructors. A traditional school calendar is not as effective with these students, as time away from school and the classroom causes distraction and a loss of what has already been acquired learning wise. Other studies have revealed that at-risk/disadvantaged students lose up to 27 percent of what they have previously learned during the summer months as opposed to other students. With year-round schooling, these students are better able to keep their minds occupied with learning and are not sidetracked by a non-school home setting that may or may not promote learning during the summer months.

With year-round schedules there are usually two models of structure that are comprised of single track and multi-track. In multi-track students are grouped on different schedules and different time off periods. This type of schedule, again, accommodates at-risk and disadvantaged students as they are able to get extra or remedial help during the days off phase of the track as teachers are still on campus. The process is comparable to a summer school platform, but it occurs during the school year and may only be a week or two spaced out during the year, rather than a whole summer. With this kind of shortened arrangement, students in need of additional help don't feel as though they are being forced into a summer school situation to



play catch-up or finish an entire school session over the summer.

Another group of students that benefit from year round schooling are more advanced students who are able to readily adapt to additional time in school and are concerned about increasing their learning and skills on a daily basis. Their abilities allow them to move along at a stronger pace and give them the opportunity to profit from a multi-track system as much as a lower level student. They are able to take on additional learning tasks that interest them and participate in more advanced subject matter within the track with the additional off-days provided. A year round schedule with inter-sessions can supplement advanced students educational experiences with creative courses that pique the interest of this student group and keep them a step ahead of the learning process.

Parents are not completely convinced that year round schooling advances their children's learning as they have complaints concerning scheduling conflicts, their children's lack of time to experience other things outside of the classroom, and the limited socialization that their children experience with so much time spent in the classroom. Other parents do see the advantage of year-round learning with the enrichment that their children receive through additional creative courses that are provided with multi-track programs, and parents are grateful for the additional time and attention their children receive through year-round education. There will always be differing opinions on year-round schooling, but the increased learning factor is the most important element in the debate.

Currently, year-round schooling appears to give students an academic edge over more traditional school learning, but researchers conclude that the numbers are not substantial enough to get a clear and concise picture of the overall effects of year-round schooling on learning. What does appear to be a positive for year-round learning is the boost in achievement levels with at-risk students and the fact that other students enrolled in a year-round schedule are not negatively affected by the year-round learning schedule.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Obtaining an education is very important. That cannot be expressed enough. Since education is 'crucial', it's then expected that children go through an all



year round educational calendar. However, should that be the case?

Where I come from, we usually express that, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." As outdated as that phrase may seem, there is some value to it. Too much educating or time cracking books, though good for student learning, might prove negative to their overall mental, physical and psychological health. While academia is important, so is the mental stability of our students.

Though an entire school day is not for 24 hours, it's highly anticipated that a break is allotted to students. This is to ensure that they engage in meaningful association, socialize with friends and spend adequate time with family. An all year round education also leaves students feeling drained. I can vividly recall my years in school. They were difficult! I often looked intently toward the holidays, because they gave me time to rejuvenate and reset my brain for learning. If we take that away from students, we'd be living among zombies and people who don't know how to catch a break. Although educated, they'd be incapable of holding a decent conversation.

An all year round education is also costly for parents. When we give children a break from school, we also give their parents a break. We give them sufficient time to plan ahead and save enough to cover their children's current and impending expenditures.

Cartwright—The more we can keep the kids in school, the better off we all are. If they're in school, they're not out roaming the streets getting into trouble or mischief. I would think most parents would like this. Who takes care of the kids in the summer while the parents are working?

Just keeping kids in school isn't enough. We need to make sure they're getting a first rate education while they're in school. We need to go back to grouping kids in classes based on aptitudes so they can learn at their own level and pace instead of teaching to the lowest aptitude in the room. We need to have great educators in the classrooms; get the best and the brightest to teach the kids. Let's give college kids an incentive to become teachers, and make sure we give the best of the best teachers already in classrooms an incentive to stay.



Let's get the federal government out of the way of teachers and administrators and let education be run at the local level...of course, notwithstanding my earlier comments to put the military in charge of school administration. We need to be doing whatever it takes to prepare future generations for the competitive global economy.

20. Should unemployment and welfare benefits be tied to community service?

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-More and more Americans unable to find work are drawing unemployment and welfare. The negative side of this pervasive problem is that getting paid for too much free time becomes an open invitation to an irresistible lifestyle for some. Who wouldn't like to get paid for doing nothing? This way of life has developed a group of complacent individuals otherwise known as freeloaders or leeches. Though some are genuinely concerned about finding work and the satisfaction of providing for themselves and their families, the lackadaisical types are more comfortable maintaining a moocher lifestyle.

The non-working lifestyle has become an insurmountable problem in modern society due to the sheer numbers of people on welfare and unemployment. With unemployment at record high levels since the recession, with more than 94 million Americans out of work, more and more individuals are receiving extended periods of unemployment benefits and welfare. The longer both groups are out of the work force, the harder it is to return to work and the more individuals have to rely on unemployment and welfare. Added to that number are those who are about to receive or do receive unemployment and welfare, and are not that interested in working, so the combined numbers are too high to count.

Many legislators at the state and federal level have tried to find a solution to the growing lack of funds to finance entitlements and have come up short with ways to solve the dilemma. Some states, such as Maine, have implemented programs to cut dependency by enacting mandatory community service. The program has proven to be a very productive way to send the unproductive on their way since many on unemployment and welfare lack the desire to seek work at any cost.



Community service programs are an effective way to wean people off unemployment and welfare. Programs that require direct input from those on unemployment and welfare provide an avenue for such recipients to gain either part-time employment, job training if they can't find work, or continue with volunteer and community service activities.

Enrollment in community service programs should be a requirement for anyone that has applied for unemployment or welfare, particularly if they have been out of work or drawing welfare for any length of time. Retaining any benefits should be dependent upon finding a part-time job, entering a vocational training program or performing community service.

Those on unemployment and welfare should be required to give back to the community that has helped them gain benefits. If they are not enrolled in any kind of community service program that hinges on part-time employment, job training or other volunteer work, volunteering in some other way should be a requirement. Local volunteer centers can coordinate various activities for out of work individuals from helping in homeless shelters and hot food lines, to roadside and neighborhood cleanups, as well as collecting canned goods for food pantries, mowing people's lawns, shoveling snow or raking leaves, starting a cooperative garden, shopping for the elderly, visiting hospital patients, mentoring high school students, reading with children in the local library, and volunteering with local churches or specific organizations like the YMCA, Boy and Girl Scouts, Boy's Club, and others.

Programs that involve pre-requisite conditions of part-time work, job training, and community service work associated with the program provide the right kind of stimulus for those on unemployment and welfare to break the bonds with their lifestyle and end the cycle of handouts. State and local governments need to think really hard about the program in Maine and put those ideas into practice across the country. Maybe with a boost in the economy and an expansion of community service based programs, unemployment and welfare will someday be thought of as past history.

Myrtle Beach, SC Correspondent-I say why not? I'm not PICKING on the poor, or anything like that. Trust me I've collected unemployment before. I did everything I could to find a job and



did all that was required of me, I even went back to school. I wouldn't have had a problem volunteering a couple days a week if that was required for me to keep getting my unemployment until I found a job.

This entitled nature needs to stop. I was raised being told that nothing in life is free. There are no free meals, no free money, nothing is truly free; whether it's time or money someone pays.

I always hear "I can't find a job, and I have 2-3 kids". Well, guess what. What did you think was going to happen? You want kids, you "pay the price." That's why I haven't had them. I'm not financially prepared to support another human being; I can barely afford my dog! So, these people on welfare that have kids and can't work, 90% of them have a vehicle. So volunteer! "I can't volunteer with kids; I can't afford a sitter". Yes, you can. Volunteer at an old folks home, or go play checkers with Granny; so many of them have no family and would love to play with kids! Put your name in at that home and your local church offering to drive the elderly to the store; you can take your kids! Take your kids to the local Humane Society and take the doggies for walks or pet the cats. My point here is that kids and childcare can't be a crutch forever. There are things you can do to volunteer with your children.

Gastonia, NC Correspondent-Ah, isn't this one of the hottest of hot-button topics? How dare we force those who are down on their luck trade labor for the support of the state? Does that not put us in league with Ebenezer Scrooge, snarling, "Are there no workhouses?"

Let's first look at the unemployed. In every state with which I'm familiar, there are requirements that those receiving benefits apply for a certain number of jobs each week. Failure to apply or provide other proof that one is either trying to find work or trying to improve one's skills to become more employable is cause for suspension or termination of benefits.

As long as that requirement is strictly enforced, I see no problem with the current arrangement. However, if the job search goes on for more than three months without bearing fruit, I think some sort of vocational re-training should be mandatory. Quite simply, if no one's hiring in your chosen field, you need



a new field. These Millennials who are holding out for the “perfect” job in their area of expertise need a reality check.

Welfare is an easier issue, for me. If you are in such straits that you must be on the government dole, the government has the right to expect some measure of recompense either through direct service or through efforts to lessen the burden others bear. Perhaps parents who have too many children to allow them to work could take on providing day care for the children of wage-earners. Perhaps the physically disadvantaged whose mental faculties are still intact could serve on such things as IRS help lines.

I’m not suggesting some sort of indentured servitude to the government, and certainly there are some who through no fault of their own will require help and be unable to contribute in any way. But if sufficiently ascertaining but compassionate arbiters are set to work to determine who can fill what positions, I have no doubt that the greater portion of those receiving public assistance can be offered some way to contribute.

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent—Welfare benefits have long been the thread by which the unemployed are sustained. We’re living in tough economic times. It’s difficult for so many households to make ends meet, and so welfare benefits are able to fill that gap. However, too many individuals depend on unemployment benefits without a thought of giving anything in return. We need to teach people to earn their catch. Instead of giving a man a fish for a day, teach him how to fish. That includes getting unemployed people to give back to society. Unemployment and welfare benefits should be tied to community service.

In a recent article released by *The Guardian*, it was clearly stated that individuals 18 to 21 years of age, who’ve not been secularly employed for the past 6 months, would no longer be entitled to unemployment benefits, unless of course, they enroll in an apprenticeship or community service program. When tied to community service, unemployed individuals are trained, especially when young, and learn how to be responsible adults when they grow up.

Additionally, community service will give adults the opportunity to appreciate the benefits they receive from the State. They will understand what it really means to work for what they have,



instead of staying home all day, on the couch and have money thrown all over them. Working for the community in an attempt to obtain welfare benefits is not below anyone, but is a kind gesture to help the unemployed to appreciate what they have.

Cartwright—Absolutely! Why should we let people on welfare or unemployment sit around all day watching Netflix, playing video games, going to the gym, having sex, smoking dope, and doing nothing to contribute to society in a meaningful way? These people are fully able to work, but many of them are just flat out lazy. It's become a lifestyle for them. Why work when someone is willing to pay you to sit around and do nothing?

Obviously, we need to address the bigger issue of welfare reform in this country. It's nothing more than a modern day plantation system where welfare recipients are slaves to the plantation overseer, Uncle Sam. They rely on Uncle Sam for every aspect of their existence. Sadly, it's become generational, much like on the plantation. Successive generations are born into it and never escape. This needs to stop. There clearly needs to be limits on the amount of time you can receive welfare benefits, that is unless you're providing forty hour or more per week in community service. Let's set up a system that tells the welfare or unemployment recipient where to go to do the community service each week. If they don't turn in their timecard with forty hours of work verified, they don't get the benefits. They can work the food kitchen or the homeless shelters. They can pick up trash along the roads. There are plenty of community improvement projects that need done in communities throughout America. They can help public works fill potholes in the roads if they need to.

And how about this? If we're going to build a wall across our southern border, let's round up all the illegals and the people on welfare and unemployment and ship them down there to build it in exchange for their benefits while they're working on the border wall. If they refuse, their benefits are cut off immediately.

These people are just sitting around and doing nothing. Let's put them to work. If they don't like the work, they can find another job. These people have been sucking off the teat of the taxpayers for far too long. I don't mind helping people get back on their feet or helping those who are incapacitated and



can't work, but it makes me sick to think that my hard-earned tax dollars are going to fund habitually lazy leeches of society.

21. Now that same sex marriage has been legalized, is it time to legalize polygamy?

Sheffield, Jamaica Correspondent-Whether you'd like it or not, let me first add that our country, the world on a whole, is suffering from moral laxity. What was seen as abnormal by societal and Biblical standards years ago, are now frowned upon. Then, it's no surprise same sex marriage has been legalized. Could it be that we're running in the lowest sink of debauchery? ABSOLUTELY! As if legalizing same sex marriage was not abhorrent enough, there's talk to legalize polygamy.

Not only is it not time for polygamy to be legalized, it should never be legalized. Why? Let's look at the impending plausible catastrophe within the family. If polygamy was ever introduced into society, there would be nothing but envy, strife and jealousy. The second wife or those following will always feel the need to prove themselves or measure up to the standard of the first wife. In fact, each wife or husband will do everything in their might to outdo the other.

Worst case scenario: If children are involved, all hell will break loose.

The children will join in on the fun and the entire family will turn into a pack of goons. There's also the "who's entitled to this" aspect of a polygamous family. Each member will want their produce. We can't even keep a monogamous family together, why would we want to add to that nonsense? Unless each individual within a polygamous family didn't marry for love, that family might succeed, but a polygamous family is one headed toward disaster. A polygamous marriage should NEVER be legalized.

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent-In spite of the questions and concerns as to the Supreme Court's declaration that same sex marriage is a constitutional right and is legally permissible, the question of legalization of polygamy appears to have become an outgrowth of that decision. It has been brought to the public's attention that polygamy must now be considered as



another form of marriage, and there are a few in the polygamous debate that are already suing for the right to marry.

Even same-sex marriage advocates are questioning whether or not it is time to legalize polygamy. With the pressure that occurred through various groups and organizations that advanced legalization of gay marriage, the same effect has been promoted through moving polygamous marriage to a new level of acceptance, in spite of bans on polygamy that still exist today. Many fear that in spite of the taboos and existing laws against polygamy, the legalization of polygamous marriage will set another precedent for marriage to sink to lower depths in the unraveling of traditional marriage.

There are reasons why the efforts to advance polygamy may not be readily accepted or legalization embraced, as polygamy carries long-standing taboos and laws that are different from those attached to gay and traditional monogamous relationships. Polygamy has been associated with specific harmful aspects that begin with the repression of women and the negative effects of repression, which cause depression and low self-esteem, as well as subservience to husbands and inability to control the addition of more wives to the relationship. Additional problems include the inclusion of underage girls who are too young for marriage but are forced into polygamous marriages. Also, young men attached to polygamous communities find themselves displaced and grounded in specific geographical areas with little standing in the community.

Other issues concerning polygamy relate to child rearing, as it becomes a complicated process in polygamous relationships. The women in such relationships most always have full responsibility in caring for and raising a number of different children. Women in polygamous relationships also lack control over their ability to work outside the home and are vulnerable to abuse, isolation within the group, household conflicts, and other difficulties.

Legalizing polygamy would be a difficult undertaking, particularly in communities that are structured on polygamous relationships and have their own set of family laws and procedures within their relationships and communities. Legalization itself would create a myriad of legal problems within such arrangements such as first marriage determination, divorce actions, asset distribution, child custody disputes,



insurance benefits, medical decisions, retirement accounts, estate planning, and a myriad of other issues.

Since most polygamous relationships are in effect based on inequality, and inequality is the structure of such relationships, marriage partners lack recourse to normal family law and more traditional lifestyle choices. With most polygamous marriages being polygynous (women sharing one husband), women in such marriages or arrangements are much less likely to have equality with any pursuit, plus they are subject to the long-term, harmful effects that are a result of such marriage arrangements.

Whether the Supreme Court or lower courts move to legalize polygamy is a question that many are not ready to answer or accept, as polygamy involves unresolved issues from past laws and taboos that both remain stumbling blocks for any kind of legalization, plus a number of Americans are not in support of such marriages. Decriminalization of polygamy appears to be the first step in defueling the fires of legalization and with all the extraneous issues involved with polygamy, who is to say whether or not legalization will occur?

Cartwright—Since we've legalized gay marriage, it's only fitting that we legalize polygamy which is another form of marriage. At this point, only a hypocrite or a bigot would oppose legalizing polygamy.

22. Should open carry with appropriate background checks and licensing be permitted in all 50 states as a federal regulation?

Prescott Valley, AZ Correspondent—Open carry should be permitted in all 50 states, not as a federal regulation, but as a state-by-state regulation as a number of states already have open carry with background checks and appropriate license and permit procedures in place.

The federal government does not currently restrict open carry, but it does have specific rules concerning the open carrying of firearms on property owned and operated by the federal government. Those rules and regulations, in and of themselves, limit open carry in vulnerable facilities that could, and have been, subject to the use of firearms for criminal purposes.



These facilities are basically gun free zones and the regulations in place serve to endanger those operating and working in buildings, military installations, and other property owned by the federal government. The government regulations have served as examples as to what can happen when open carry is disallowed in specific places. The Ft. Hood massacre should serve as an example of what can happen with these kinds of restrictions.

Nearly every state has varying open carry laws, with the exceptions of California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and South Carolina, and the District of Columbia, which prohibit open carry. Thirty-one states allow open carry without a license and permit, with some restraints on carrying the weapon unloaded. Fifteen states require some form of license or permit to open carry.

State laws are also established for the carrying of long guns (rifles and shotguns). In a majority of the states, 44 of them, open carrying a loaded long gun is legal. The states of California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota and New Jersey, as well as the District of Columbia forbid the carrying of rifles and shotguns. The remaining states allow the open carrying of long guns, though in Michigan restrictions apply as to where the long gun can be taken or located, while in Iowa, Tennessee and Utah a long gun has be unloaded, and in Virginia and Pennsylvania there are limitations on the cities where a long gun can be openly displayed.

With open carry laws existing in nearly every state, federal government intervention and regulation is not needed. Americans who abide by the law are afforded the right to carry guns in more places than thought possible without legal complications. Perhaps state open carry laws should be more uniform in nature without so many limitations that serve to confuse gun owners in and outside of respective home states, but federal regulation would only assist in confusing state open carry issues even more. The only reason for federal regulation concerning open carry is to transfer the same type of restrictions it does on government property and other facilities to the states, as well as disallowing citizen access to open carry as a means of protection. In spite of the government's efforts to continually regulate and micro-manage gun use in general, open carry is a state issue that needs to remain as such.



Cartwright—I do believe that we should have open carry in each and every state for those individuals who have obtained an open carry permit. This would be like a concealed weapon permit which requires classes and target practice in addition to substantial background checks. If you can pass all of this, I'm all for it. I think this would seriously reduce a lot of crimes in America. Who's going to walk into the liquor store and rob it if there's ten people walking around with firearms on their hips? Who's going to walk into a restaurant or theater and start shooting if other people have guns? Hell, I think this is a great solution to airline security as well. Give every passenger who gets on the plane a pistol and have them turn it back in when they get off the plane. How many hijackings do you think there would be if all the passengers were equally armed?

I'm all for open carry all across America so long as there is a rigorous permitting process to make sure that felons, criminals, or individuals with mental disorders don't get permits. Ever notice how much crime and gun violence is committed in places with tough gun control laws? How did gun control work out for Paris? Bet things would have ended differently had some of the people had guns. How about crime in places like Boston, Buffalo, and Los Angeles which all have tough gun control laws? Not places that I would want to live or visit for that matter given their crime rates.

END TRANSCRIPT. NO TRANSCRIPT OF ADDITIONAL DEBATE AMONG PANELISTS IS AVAILABLE.