

## Freedoms *from page 6*

heirs nevertheless felt they had an obligation to use their immense wealth and power to improve society in some way. Their old concept was called “noblesse oblige”. The Mellons, Rockefellers, and Carnegies endowed universities, libraries, and the arts. Two wealthy scions of only slightly less prominent families, Hamilton Fish and Gifford Pinchot, took it beyond sharing just their monetary wealth, by also sharing the wealth of their time and energy. They demonstrated their commitment to repaying society for their great good fortune by entering public service as young men. In their lives, they became modestly famous doing such beneficial things as serving their country in the military, serving as United States Secretary of State, cabinet members, and as popular state Governors, negotiating important treaties with foreign powers, embarking on major domestic projects such as paving public roads for the first time, and creating the United States Forestry Service. They believed that workers needed to earn a living wage, because helping workers would help all of society. Where are such public-spirited wealthy people today?

Since the Cold War, we have seen a different kind of monopolistic behavior unfold. Rather than eliminating all competitors “horizontally” to control the tabletop as the old-time railroad barons did, we have seen the recent emergence of “vertical” monopolies like today’s large petroleum and lumber corporations, who own every part of their retail chain, from mining or harvesting a raw resource, to supplying all the retailers within their territories with refined finished products, such as unleaded gas to competing gas stations, and plywood sheathing to all the building supply outlets. Once again, the vertical monopolist gains sole control of an entire market, but has done it in a way unrecognized by current antitrust laws.

Two modern developments make this especially problematic:

First, vertically integrated corporations contain their own internal trading departments that write contracts for future purchases and sales, which is a bit like betting in a card game where you always get to shuffle and stack the deck. This means a big vertically integrated company can predict or even create shortages and surpluses, thus influencing the price of their commodities, even if they are not the only supplier on the tabletop. (Remember OPEC? Saudi Arabia still controls the world’s crude oil prices, even though there are lots of other oil producing nations. This is a key part of the creepy United States-Saudi alliance.)

Second, since the year 2003, many publicly traded stockholder corpora-

tions have been “taken private”. Controlling stock is now owned by an individual and his immediate family through “stock buybacks”. Some of these super-wealthy folks have demonstrated they feel no responsibility to the public good, nor to the remaining minor shareholders (to whom they pay little or no dividends), nor to any disempowered board of directors, nor even to their employees. Some deem their employees “subcontractors”, who then work for them without insurance or benefits. The private owners of these vertical monopolies do have a strong ability to influence government through hiring lawyers and lobbyists. If those efforts don’t succeed to shape government policy or avoid legal reprisals, they move themselves or their wealth to a different jurisdiction and declare bankruptcy (Have you been following the story of the Sackler family, who owns opioid manufacturer Purdue Pharma? Or heard of the book “Kochland” by Christopher Leonard?). This behavior is not an example of what we used to hail as “American free enterprise.”

So, in today’s world, that’s what economic corruption looks like. What does political corruption of our democracy look like? As far as I’ve seen, there are no thick envelopes of cash being passed to legislators in State House hallways before votes. There are however too-cozy relations between lobbying organizations and office holders’ campaigns, which you can investigate yourself on the New Hampshire Secretary of State’s “Campaign Finance System” and “lobbyist’s income reports” websites. Corruption of our democracy can even look like legislators who take a hiatus from office to lobby for a commercial interest (in exchange for a huge salary), only to return to office just six months later - this is the proverbial “revolving door” cycle. For this scam to succeed, voters have to be duped into voting for these “double agents.”

This is where “dis-information” enters the picture. Corruption also takes the form of privately-financed “educational” institutes, out-of-state-financed bulk mail political ads, and broadcast or internet news feeds that decry all other channels as “fake news”. You should be skeptical of information provided to you “for free”, and find out who advertises or sponsors the political and news reporting you see. It costs money to produce all this stuff (This is a perfect place for a plug: Be sure to support the independence of your community newspaper by making your contribution to support your Andover Beacon today!).

Who pays money to make sure you see a story from their angle, and why? For example, did anyone else notice the announcement at the top of the program that big pharma sponsored the Demo-

cratic candidate debates, and that the first question from the moderator every time was always about health care issues, not the environment, not foreign policy, nor any other front-burner issue? The harder it is for you to find out who is actually paying to produce published information, the more suspicious you should be of that information. That’s why I cite verifiable sources in my columns, so you can check up on it yourself if you wish. In upcoming Report from Concord columns, I will describe the bills I’ve proposed that aim to reduce the types of corruption I’ve described here.

Through years of exposure to clever advertising, we consumers know how to be skeptical of repeated saturation ads that make “New! and Improved!” claims advertising the same old products. We should be equally wary of political and prejudicial opinions being pre-packaged and drummed into us through print, broadcast, and internet media. No matter how often they say it, we know a lie will never really become the truth, but they can get some folks to think it, the same way we catch ourselves humming an advertising jingle.

How do we get out of our current political logjam and restore an economy

that works as well for regular folks like us, as well as it does the super-wealthy? Let’s start by listening to information carefully and considering its source. If I feel that I’m getting mad or emotional, I realize that somebody is probably trying to manipulate me. As a teacher, coach, dorm parent, and “professional adult”, I navigated a turbulent world full of teenage people (and their parents) for nearly four decades. I think I’ve experienced nearly every nuance of manipulation from every angle in human imagination! My advice is to just stop, cool down, and think about our common goals rationally and fairly. Will it still look fair if I put myself in the other guy’s shoes? When I apply this way of thinking to our local communities, I always vote to preserve local small-business capitalism, our supportive community, our most personal freedoms, and our democracy. I hope you think local small-business capitalism, our supportive community, our most personal freedoms, and our democracy are worth your best effort, too.

Pay attention to who is feeding you (dis)information in this upcoming election year, and discuss “who said what” with other citizens. Then be sure to vote!



## Letters *from page 5*

is more expensive to create than other sources. Without a governmental mandate, our electrical utilities would try to keep their costs down by buying the least expensive power they could find. If biomass were economically competitive with other sources, no legislation would be needed.

Our legislators like to promise during their campaigns that they will work to lower our utility bills, but when they get in office, they do the exact opposite by rewarding favored industries with government-mandated subsidies that cost every ratepayer more.

New Hampshire has the seventh highest electrical rates in the country, at 19.47 cents per kilowatt hour, just less than California’s at 19.86, and Massachusetts at 21.54. Contrast that to the national average of 13.30 cents per kilowatt hour. Our power is more expensive than either

Maine or Vermont, though they too pay well over the national average.

There are two obvious routes for our utilities to deal with this increased cost: 1) raise their rates, or 2) cut costs in other areas of operation, such as maintaining the infrastructure of power lines and transformers. I suspect that they will do both. How much it will add to our monthly bill will soon become apparent. We may soon have the third or fourth highest rate in the nation (We are unlikely to ever be as high as Hawaii at over 31 cents per kilowatt hour.)

This is a subsidy that the government is now requiring every electrical ratepayer in the state to pay to keep these non-competitive businesses in operation. While the loss of jobs in this industry is unfortunate, requiring all of us to subsidize them when they can’t successfully compete in the market burdens us all.

*Faith Clendenan*

The mission of *The Andover Beacon* is to serve and strengthen the Andover community. To that end, we welcome (by the 15th!) civil, reasoned letters addressing specifically local issues, events, and developments. Submissions must not be critical of another’s religion; blasphemous; obscene; hateful; legally objectionable; or commercial in nature. The *Beacon* reserves the right to edit or not publish submissions it deems inappropriate for any reason.

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