

SUPPORTING THOSE WHO MAKE GOOD TROUBLE

There are lots of folks who work to fight injustice, making the kind of “Good Trouble” that John Lewis embraced, who need our support. Here are a few, and you can add your own in the comments.

LONG OVERDUE POLICIES THAT LOOK OBVIOUS IN THE AGE OF PANDEMIC

With the crisis of COVID, policies that long made sense but were considered too radical have become necessary.

WEDNESDAY: BIG WHEELS TURNING

Hard to believe this was made in 1982. Yeah, the production quality doesn’t match today’s digital capabilities, but the story itself seems really prescient. How can an ethically-compromised bloviating bigot manage to fumble his way into office?

Now you know. Bet you can even offer constructive feedback on how director Danny DeVito could update this script for today’s social media-enhanced election cycle.

Self-Driving Vehicles

- NHTSA issues guidelines for self-driving cars (Detroit Free Press) – FINALLY. But is it a bit too late now that Uber already has a fleet on the streets of Pittsburgh and Tesla has been running beta cars? Let's face it: the federal government has been very slow to acknowledge the rise of artificial intelligence in any field, let alone the risks inherent in computer programming used in vehicles. We're literally at the end of a two-term presidency, on the cusp of entirely new policies toward transportation, and NOW the NHTSA steps in? We need to demand better and faster rather than this future-shocked laggy response from government – and that goes for Congress as well as the White House. Congress fails to see the importance of early regulation in spite of adequate warning:

Legislators warned automakers at the 15 March Senate hearing that the governing body took a dim view of the industry's ability to self-regulate. "Someone is going to die in this technology," Duke

University roboticist Missy Cummings told the US Senate during a tense hearing where she testified alongside representatives from General Motors and Delphi Automotive, among others.

Senators Ed Markey and Richard Blumenthal, who questioned car executives at the hearing, had cosponsored a 2015 bill to regulate self-driving automobiles. The bill was referred to committee and never returned to the floor. [source: *Guardian*]

In the mean time, we have an initial 15-point guideline the NHTSA wants to address; are they enough? Is a *guideline* enough? Witness Volkswagen's years-long fraud, flouting *laws*; without more serious consequences, would a company with Volkswagen's ethics pay any heed at all to mere guidelines? Are you ready to drive on the road with nothing but non-binding guidelines to hold makers of autonomous cars accountable?

- Multiple Tesla car models hackable (Keen Security Lab) – Check this video on YouTube. At first this seems like an innocuous problem, just lights, mirrors, door locks...and then * boom * the brakes while driving. These same functions would also be controlled by AI in a self-driving car, by the way, and they're already on the road.

This is exactly what I mean by the feds being slow to acknowledge AI's rise.

- 'OMG COOL'-like impressions from early self-driving Uber passengers (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) – Criminy. The naïveté is astonishing. Of course this technology seems so safe and techno-cool when you have an Uber engineer and programmer along for the ride, offering the illusion of safety. Like having a seasoned, licensed taxi driver. Why not just pay for an actual human to drive?
- Tesla caught in back-and-forth with Mobileye (multiple sources) – After analyzing the May 2016 fatal accident in Florida involving Tesla's semi-autonomous driving system, Tesla tweaked the system. The gist of the fatal accident appears to have been a false-positive misinterpretation of the semi-trailer as an overhead road sign, for which a vehicle would not slow down. But this particular accident alone didn't set off a dispute between Tesla and the vendor for its Autopilot system, Mobileye. Another

fatal accident in China which occurred in January was blamed on Tesla's Autopilot – but that, too, was not the point of conflict between Tesla and its vendor. Mobileye apparently took issue with Tesla over “hands on” versus “hands-free” operation; the computer vision manufacturer's 16-SEP press release claims Tesla said the Autopilot system would be hands on but was rolled out in 2015 as hands-free. Mobileye may also have taken issue with how aggressively Tesla was pursuing its own computer vision technology even before the two companies agreed to end their relationship this past July. A volley of news stories over the last two weeks suggest there's more going on than the hands on versus hands-free issue. Interestingly enough, the burst of stories began just after a hacker discovered there's a previously undisclosed dash cam capturing shots of Tesla vehicle operations – and yet only a very small number of the flurry of stories

mentioned this development. Hmm. Unfortunately, the dash cam feature would not have captured snaps for the two known fatal accidents because the nature of the accidents prevented the camera from sending images to Tesla servers.

Artificial Intelligence

- The fall of humans is upon us with our help (Forbes) – this article asks what happens when white collar jobs are replaced by artificial intelligence. Oh, how nice, Forbes, that you worry about the white collar dudes like yourselves but not the blue collar workers already being replaced. How about discussing alternative employment for 3.5 million truck drivers?
Or the approximately 230,000 taxi drivers?
How about subway, streetcar, and tram operators (number of which I don't currently have a number)?
How about the administrative jobs supporting these workers? This is just a portion of transportation alone which will be affected by the introduction of AI in

self-driving/autonomous vehicles. What about other blue collar jobs at risk – like fast food workers, of which there are 3.5 million? And we wonder why Trump appeals to a certain portion of the working class. He won't be informed at all about this, will not have a solution except to remove persons of color as competition for employment. But the left must develop a cogent response to this risk immediately. It's already here, the rise of machines as AI and algorithmic replacements for humans. Let's not wait for the next Luddite rebellion V.2.0 – or is Trump's current support the rebellion's inception?

- But every business needs AI! (Forbes) – Uh...no conflict here at all with the previous article. Nope. Just playing the refs. Save America, people, just keep buying!(By the way, note how this contributor touts Hello Barbie chatbot as a positive sign, though Mattel's internet-enabled Barbie products have had some serious problems with security.)

- The meta-threat of artificial intelligence (MIT Technology Review) – Doubt my opinion? Don't take it from me, then, take it from experts including one who plans to make a fortune from AI – like Elon Musk.

Longread: Academia becomes the new white collar underclass

You may have noted Long Island University-Brooklyn's 12-day lockout which was not really resolved last week but deferred by a contract extension. The dispute originated over a pay gap between Brooklyn and two other better paid LIU campuses. Ridiculous sticking point, given the small distance between these campuses LIU barred instructors from campus and halted their benefits during the lockout. Students walked out, infuriated by the temps who subbed in for the locked-out instructors – a cafeteria worker in one case filled in for an English instructor. LIU's walkout won't be the only such conflict over academic wages. To understand the scale of the problem, you'll want to read this piece at Guernica, which explains how academia is being shaken down across the U.S., not just in Brooklyn. I remember asking an academic administrator back in 2006 what would happen when secondary education was commodified; they couldn't imagine it ever happening. And now the future has arrived. What are we going to do about this while retaining U.S. standard in education?

Hope you're liking the site revamp! Do leave a comment if you find anything isn't working up to snuff.

PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS ENTERPRISES PART 8: CONCLUSION

The general plan of *The Principles of Business Enterprises* by Thorstein Veblen is to state several ideas about the way business operated in the Gilded Age, with explanation and examples, and then to examine the logical outcomes of the operation of these principles. There is no grand theory, just observation, description and discussion. Two of the principles are that businessmen operate solely to generate a profit, and that to achieve efficiency, the entire social life of working people had to be remade in the image of the ideal production worker.

Veblen identified the basis for the operation of business as the concept of property as applied to industrial production. The idea is that just as the products of the blacksmith and the cooper belonged to them to do with as they saw fit, factory owners were entitled to all of the production of the factory to do with as they saw fit. The entire system of the US is devoted to the protection of property, so naturally businessmen dictate government policies in all areas that affect their profits.

These ideas manifest themselves in our society. Businesses cooperate to insure efficient operation, and in the process help make sure they all profit. Education is focused on preparing the human capital to find a job, because the alternative is to starve. The press devotes itself to the maintenance of the illusion of democracy, while the actual practice is that federal and state legislatures and courts protect the property claims of capitalists and pave the way for increased profits from operations both in the US and around the world. Businesses charge whatever they can get away with, free from interference by government or enforcement of antitrust laws. If it creates more profit, businesses stop

producing, and stop hiring, regardless of the impact on the community.

What Veblen saw in 1904, we see today. The debts of corporate persons are easily discharged in bankruptcy, but the debts of human beings are pursued by armies of lawyers and government officials. Banks are bailed out, but homeowners are ruined. Private schools cheat people, but those people have to pay student debt till they die. No one goes to jail for wrecking the economy or any other elite crime, but heaven help the guy caught with a bit of pot.

This is all the logical outcome of an understanding of the idea of property. Locke said that when artisans mixed their labor with physical things, they were entitled to own the finished product. In exactly the same way, Veblen says, the factory owner is said to be entitled to own the goods produced by the factory. But Veblen is quite clear that Locke's theory doesn't explain why this should be, because the industrial age requires most people to work in a coordinated system and a supporting social structure; and the amount produced in this system is orders of magnitude larger than any individual artisan could produce.

His line of thinking leads naturally to questions about distribution of the profits of production. Why exactly is the owner of a factory entitled to all the profits? Why exactly is the owner entitled to pay the workers as little as possible? After all, the owner of a steel mill can't produce anything without coordinating with many other manufacturers, miners, farmers, transportation companies, and an army of workers all of whom show up and work cooperatively in each of these enterprises, and a social structure that supports all of this action. The owner cannot produce anything unless society is organized for industrial production. In today's terms, app developers have nothing to do if there is no electricity or no city wired for cable. This is what Elizabeth Warren was talking about when she said

There is nobody in this country who got rich on their own. Nobody. You built a factory out there – good for you. But I want to be clear. You moved your goods to market on roads the rest of us paid for. You hired workers the rest of us paid to educate. You were safe in your factory because of police forces and fire forces that the rest of us paid for. You didn't have to worry that marauding bands would come and seize everything at your factory... Now look. You built a factory and it turned into something terrific or a great idea – God bless! Keep a hunk of it. But part of the underlying social contract is you take a hunk of that and pay forward for the next kid who comes along.

Neither Warren nor Veblen pushes forward into talking about ownership of property. But that isn't true of everyone. One of the things that confounds the defenders of the neoliberal consensus of pundits and mainstream economists is the apparent willingness of younger voters to consider socialism as a logical alternative to unregulated capitalism. Most explanations are based on the experience of the young with neoliberal capitalism. Here is Anis Shivani via Salon:

But millennials, in the most positive turn of events since the economic collapse, intuitively understand better. Circumstances not of their choosing have forced them to think outside the capitalist paradigm, which reduces human beings to figures of sales and productivity, and to consider if in their immediate lives, and in the organization of larger collectivities, there might not be more cooperative, nonviolent, mutually beneficial arrangements with better measures of human happiness than GDP growth or other statistics that benefit the financial

class...

...

The idea is to move beyond money, interpreted in particular ways by capitalism, as the sole means of determining what is valued in human activity. Just because the means of production can be owned collectively does not mean—and indeed should not mean—that the state should be the owner.

Well, maybe. Cities own water systems and the pipes and sewage systems that provide us with water and sewage disposal. No one really believes it would be good to let the private sector suck profits out of us for something as important to staying alive as water. Why shouldn't cities own other necessary and useful things, like electrical and cable lines? When you think about the willingness of private businesses to squeeze more money out of us in their relentless pursuit of profits at any cost, it's easy to see why public ownership of specific companies might be a good idea.

Locke and his adherents, including the Founding Fathers, claimed that Locke's idea of property rights was a Natural Law, a Natural Right. It was designed by the Almighty to direct humans along the path of righteousness. Today we don't think like that. Veblen called Locke's theory metaphysical, by which I think he meant philosophical as opposed to practical. Many of us demand certainty about such things and find it in bibles of one kind or another, including Locke, but many of us are more open to other ways of thinking. Veblen has a much more worldly manner, and I think he had a strong touch of the American philosophy of pragmatism, the school exemplified by John Dewey.

I don't think I fully understand this book, not just because the language is sometimes difficult, but because I don't think I understand the tone correctly. For example, he seems dismissive of socialism, but accepting of

the trade union movement, and of the attitude of the workers whose acceptance of unbridled property rights was weakening. He notes several times that businessmen with their archaic natural law ideas control the nature of social life for workers, and exercise outsize influence on government, and their utter amorality. He mentions the bad effects each of these has on the community. Some books are like that; you have to read several works by the author and scholarly commentary to understand them fully.

Nevertheless, I plan to soldier on to the next book, *Security, Territory and Population*, a group of lectures by Michel Foucault. I've already read some of his works, including *Discipline and Punish* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, so I at least have a running start.

WEDNESDAY MORNING: WOE, NELLY, WOE

I meant woe, not whoa. I do know the difference.

It's woe I was thinking of when I wrote this next bit.

What would you do if you were told you wouldn't be paid for last 2 months of a 9-month job?

Let's say you have kids to feed, a mortgage/car payment/college loan payments to make, childcare to pay, out-of-pocket healthcare costs – you know, all the expenses the average working person has.

In spite of one or more obligatory college degrees, continuing education requirements and mandatory background checks, your job requires you to work in facilities where 'mushrooms, black mold, fecal matter, dead rodents, no heat' are common. It's a workplace functioning like Flint's water crisis, and it's been this way for more than a decade. Fellow employees have had to

bring in paper towels and light bulbs from home or solicit them as donations to the workplace.

Because of your employer's money woes, you may even have made a concession agreeing to collect your pay over 3-4 months instead of the next six to eight weeks you are actually scheduled to work.

And then your employer's employer says they aren't going to pay, and you might have to work without pay for the next six weeks. Unpaid, as in violation of labor laws unpaid.

And your employer's employer has a history of acting both in bad faith and with prejudice. Your workplace hasn't improved for years; children were permanently poisoned and adults died as a result of their awful handiwork on this and other projects.

What would you do? Quietly stay at your desk working and hope for the best, or walk out in protest to demand action?

The employer's employer accuses you of all manner of bad things, and is actively undermining your rights to organize, by the way.

Welcome to Detroit Public School system, and welcome to more of Michigan's obnoxious and toxic GOP-led legislating. Pretty sure the jerks who are causing this latest crisis by grandstanding on teachers' backs don't care if the president arrives here in Michigan today.

Dude caught on video sprinkling substance on food arrested by FBI

As if we didn't have enough to worry about in Michigan, some whackjob has been sprinkling a mixture of hand sanitizer and rodent poison on food in stores, including salad buffets. He was caught on security camera in Ann Arbor, but he is alleged to have sprinkled this mix in multiple stores in Ypsilanti, Saline, Birch Run, and Midland. The mixture is not supposed to be toxic, but who wants to eat remnants of isopropyl alcohol and an anticoagulant? What the hell was this all about anyhow?

Canadian city of 80,000 forced to evacuate overnight due to massive wildfire

Mind-boggling to think of an urban center this size forced to flee on such short notice, but Fort McMurray did just that beginning late afternoon yesterday. Even the local hospital was emptied as fire leaped from undeveloped to developed areas, consuming neighborhoods. 80% of homes in the Beacon Hill neighborhood are ash. Conditions have been unusually warm and dry in the region; the local temperature was 83F degrees before the evacuation notice was issued. Weather conditions today are expected to be hotter (32C/90F) and WSW winds stronger ahead of a cold front, likely spreading the fire even farther to the northeast.

The area around Fort McMurray has only been in moderate drought conditions, yet the fire was explosive, doubling in size in a matter of hours. Can't begin to imagine what might happen in areas where conditions are drier while this climate-enhanced super El Nino continues.

Volkswagen's former head of engine and transmission development exits company

Wolfgang Hatz, suspended by VW for his role in Dieselgate, chose voluntarily to leave the company. This bit in NYT's article is choice:

In 2007, shortly after being named head of engine and transmission development at Volkswagen, Mr. Hatz complained at an event in San Francisco that new rules on tailpipe emissions in California were unrealistic.

"I see it as nearly impossible for us," Mr. Hatz said of a proposed regulation during the event, which was filmed by an auto website.

In other words, Hatz didn't see the purpose of the regulation, didn't perceive a challenge to design truly clean diesel – he saw an obstruction he needed to bypass. *Auf wiedersehen, Herr Hatz.*

Odds and sods

- Middle Eastern drought worst in 900 years (NASA) – Drought map of Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey looks awful, but Egypt – wow.
- Wars might be caused by lack of water (Scientific American) – I sense a theme developing...hey, guess when the Crusades were? 900 years ago.
- Study shows stocks overvalued often, too long (Phys.org) – Huh. Interleaves with economic social theory of reflexivity, that.
- Third leading cause of death in U.S.: medical errors (Science Daily) – Grok this: 250,000 deaths a year. You'd think insurance companies and policy makers would look into this, considering annual death toll is like ten times that on 9/11. Imagine if we spend tax dollars on fixing this and improving health care instead of militarizing against the rare-to-non-existent domestic terror attack.

- Tesla's residential battery, Powerwall, now for sale (Bloomberg) – Residential solar may now explode with growth. We can only hope.

It's supposedly downhill from the top of this hump. Race you to the bottom!

FIFTY SHADES OF FAKE UNIVERSITY DEGREES

On Sunday, Declan Walsh delivered a blockbuster report on the vast network of fake universities, diplomas for purchase and high-pressure upsales of "validation" credentials for fraudulently purchased diplomas. Remarkably, the company in which these activities were housed, Axact, with headquarters in Karachi and offices throughout Pakistan, had enjoyed a role as a prominent software company billing itself as Pakistan's biggest software success story. Despite the massive amount of evidence compiled by Walsh and the Times, Axact initially pushed back hard, trying to threaten the Times with legal action and even going after a local Pakistani blog that merely accumulated amusing Tweets relating to the story.

Today, authorities in Pakistan took decisive action, with as many as 45 Axact employees arrested and the seizure of computer equipment and files:

According to Express News, employees were evacuated from the software company's head office in Islamabad. Further, around 45 employees were rounded up, including HR and PR managers, to be taken to FIA headquarters.

The arrested Axact employees were shifted to FIA's cyber-crime wing office.

The seven-member FIA team also seized hard disks, computers, other electronic equipment and documents belonging to the IT firm. The bags and mobile phones of department heads in Islamabad have also been seized.

/snip/

The FIA also raided Axact's call center in Rawalpindi and seized voice call and other devices. Axact's regional director Colonel (retd) Jamil has been taken into custody.

With "university" names like Columbiana and Barkley, the cynicism of Axact's scam is breathtaking. But once I started thinking about it, I realized that the new world of online degrees is a very cutthroat place with questionable marketing practices everywhere. Just right here in Gainesville, the University of Florida has raised many eyebrows with its decision this year to admit an extra 3000 students who would not otherwise be admitted and then inform them that they have to complete the first year of studies toward their degree online. But don't worry, poor little online second class students, because at UF, even if you complete your entire degree online, your diploma won't reflect that fact. Here's the very first entry on the FAQ's for UF online:



Frequently Asked Questions



Degrees

Admissions

Tuition & Financial Aid

Services

Will my diploma and transcript say UF Online or the University of Florida?

From day one, you are a University of Florida Gator. Your diploma and transcript will be indistinguishable from the diploma and transcript that students who complete all courses residually receive.

It's a highly competitive world for those online degrees, whether they come from fake diploma mills, for-profit "universities" or traditional universities being forced by backwards legislators to come up with online competition.

Call me old-fashioned, but my concept of a university education involves an actual university with libraries housing real books, laboratories where real experiments can take place, lecture halls where students and professors actually interact face to face and a shared site where a community moves about freely. Sure, fake diplomas from legitimate universities do get penned now and then, but the market for fakery has been enabled greatly by the rapid expansion of online "learning".

**AFTER TAKING BOLD
STAND AGAINST
TESTING
KINDERGARTNERS,**

SUSAN BOWLES IS TEACHER OF YEAR

In the political landscape that is Florida, Gainesville is a lonely, tiny blue dot in a vast sea of red. Last night, that blue dot celebrated a symbolic act that could have major repercussions in the national elections coming up next year. Kindergarten teacher Susan Bowles was named Teacher of the Year in Alachua County, adding further validation to the bold stand she took last September in refusing to administer a test she found to be flawed and an egregious waste of classroom time. In her bold act of refusing to administer the test, Bowles fully expected to lose the job she loves so much. Instead, her action prompted the state to drop the test and she has been given a high honor for her work.

Naming Bowles as Teacher of the Year takes on a special symbolism to me because it comes precisely when JEB! Bush is making his push to enter the 2016 presidential election. To JEB! fans, his educational "reforms" in Florida are one of his chief accomplishments. To those of us in the blue dot, we know that JEB!'s "reforms" had nothing to do with school performance and had everything to do with enriching the private firms run by his cronies to administer the tests. That enrichment of his cronies resulted in trickle down, but only to JEB! [And Rick Scott's "reforms" of JEB!'s testing program were merely a function of switching out JEB!'s cronies for Scott's, but I digress.] Adding even more to the symbolism here, Bowles teaches at Lawton Chiles Elementary.

The test to which Bowles objected was only one in a wide array of tests mandated by the test-crazed Florida Legislature. This test, the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (inappropriately marketed by Scott's cronies as FAIR), was legislated to be administered three times a year. But as the Gainesville Sun reported in September, Bowles found that changes

made for this year made the test meaningless and a huge waste of time:

In past years, both tests existed in paper format for kindergartners, but this year the FAIR became a computer-based test for the state's youngest students, which has made it necessary for teachers to administer the test one-on-one.

/snip/

Some kindergartners are coming to the test without ever having touched a computer mouse before, which Bowles said causes the testing time to stretch from the prescribed 35 minutes to 50 minutes or an hour.

There is also no way to go back and correct answers on the test, she said, so a student who accidentally double-clicks to enter an answer could end up skipping multiple screens on the test, rendering their results inaccurate.

But the main issue for Bowles, and others, is the loss of instructional time after administering these tests – a total of six weeks, in fact.

Bowles initially took to Facebook to announce her decision not to administer the test. Again, from the Sun:

Bowles said she was so frustrated after trying to test two students last week that on Sunday she took to Facebook to publicly air her act of civil disobedience, in a post titled, "Why I am refusing to give the FAIR test to my kindergarteners."

"I know I may be in breach of my contract by not administering this test," she wrote in the post. "I cannot in good conscience submit to administering this test three times a

year, losing six weeks of instruction. There is a good possibility I will be fired."

Attention to Bowles' move snowballed, and her actions garnered huge amounts of support from parents. A blog at the Washington Post noted the attention. The blog post reproduced what Bowles posted on Facebook about the test. Bowle's preface to her letter to parents is especially courageous:

To the parents of the boys and girls in my class,

I wrote you a letter over the weekend to let you know that I am refusing to administer the FAIR test [Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading] to your precious little ones. I had hoped to send you an email or letter, but it would not be professional of me or allowed by the district for a letter to go out letting you know that I am doing something that is a breach of contract and therefore against the law. I want you to know that for the 26 years I have been a classroom teacher, I have been a good employee, and have always complied with my superiors. I also want you to know that this is not in any way being done because our principal or superintendent are mandating these tests. This is a government issue. So this decision does not involve anyone I work for. It is an act of civil disobedience.

I am hoping for government change in policy regarding testing.

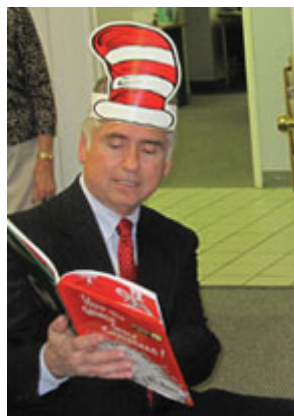
That last bit turned out to be prescient, as well. Bowle's letter to parents was dated September 7, 2014. The Gainesville Sun article came out on September 9 and the blog post at the Washington Post was September 11. On September

15, Florida's Commissioner of Education caved in to public pressure about the test and cancelled it. As the Post stated in a blog post that day:

It turns out she wasn't fired. On Monday, Owen Roberts, the superintendent of schools in Alachua County where Bowles teaches, sent a letter to parents saying that Florida Commissioner of Education Pam Stewart has decided not to require FAIR testing for any students in grades K-2. The e-mail doesn't directly name Bowles but does refer to "all the attention focused on this issue over the past few days."

Congratulations to Susan Bowles for her brave act of civil disobedience and the benefit to the youngest Florida students that it produced. Congratulations also to Alachua County Public Schools for rewarding Bowles' principled stand.

THE UGLY POLITICAL SOCK PUPPETRY OF ARIZONA'S TOP EDUCATOR



Despite the obvious heat surplus and water shortage issues, Arizona continues to be one of the most growth intensive states, and has pegged much of its future on what can be loosely called "smart sectors" such as information technology, solar, chip making and, indeed, higher education itself as evidenced by

the recent Starbucks/Arizona State University partnership.

You would think, given the above factors, and many more, Arizonans would be meticulous and scrupulous about the leaders they elect to shepherd the state's educational system. But you would be wrong.

The power and control of Arizona's education system rests in the hands of an elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Sadly, it has been a position occupied by common, and morally bankrupt, conservative political hacks of late. From 2003 through 2011, the office, the fifth highest elected office in Arizona, was held by Tom Horne, the current embattled Attorney General of Arizona. Horne was a line construction lawyer who up and got elected Superintendent of Public Instruction. But, hey, how much worse is that than when a podunk lawn mower repairman got elected Maricopa County Sheriff (which was before the office went totally into the sewer with former travel agent Joe Arpaio).

Okay, Horne was awful as Superintendent of Public Instruction (and has disgraced the office of AG even worse since), but once he left, one John Huppenthal was elected to cover the educational interests of Arizona's children. And since January 2011, Huppenthal has been the one in charge of Arizona's education.

Who is John Huppenthal? Pretty much an up through the ranks of the bat shit crazy Arizona state legislature right wing political climber. People who lived in Huppenthal's district in the late 90's, when he was an Arizona State Senator, can attest that the man compulsively and inexplicably robo-called with all kinds of dogmatic messages, at all hours of the day and night. To the point to where some literally were forced to contact his office and threaten suit if it did not stop on their phone. Huppenthal and his office were stunningly cavalier and arrogant about Huppenthal's compulsive robo-calling. Yet he took to it again as

Superintendent of Public Instruction in an effort to undermine the public schools he was entrusted with protecting and, instead, cravenly support private vouchers taking money away from public schools.

Such is great flavor as to the “measure of the man” that is John Huppenthal, but still mostly ancient history. How has the aggressively dogmatic Huppenthal done as Superintendent of Public Instruction, i.e. Arizona’s top educator? Same old story; same old song and dogmatic nutjob dance. You may remember the controversy over “banned textbooks” by the Tucson Unified School District a little over two years ago from the somewhat hyperbolic and inaccurate “Jeff Biggers Salon expose”. Well, that whole ordeal, contrary to Biggers’ Salon framing, was never the fault of the Tucson Unified School District, but, was nearly completely the doing of the compulsively dogmatic conservative John Huppenthal. That is who John Huppenthal is.

To sum up, Arizona is a growing state, aggressively seeking the educated, who in turn want quality education for their young. Instead we give them the likes of Tom Horne and John Huppenthal. As a result, Arizona, for all the luster, is lagging pathetically in education because of dogmatically blinded and visionless leaders.

So, who is this “education leader” John Huppenthal that has led Arizona to barely be above Mississippi and Arkansas in the bottom ten of American education? Well, as hinted above, he is an obsessive/compulsive right wing political animal. And, it turns out, his compulsive behavior is so obsessive that it carries well over into his duties as Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction. In the form of Huppenthal being an obsessive political sock puppet blog troll.

Okay, granted, political blog sock puppets are a dime a dozen, or, you know, less. But it is a far different story when multiple anonymous sock puppets are being run by a major state’s

Superintendent of Public Instruction. In this case Arizona's one and only John Huppenthal. From Bob Lord, who has done yeoman's work on this at Blog For Arizona:

Okay, for the few of you who have not figured this out yet, by all indication our friend Thucky is John Huppenthal, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, which is the fifth highest elected office in the state.

This may be a first. I don't know of any other elected official who has led a double life as a serial blog troll besides John Huppenthal. Chalk that up to Arizona having the market cornered on political craziness, I guess.

The story here is that Blog For Arizona is a small, but quite important and statewide, progressive political blog in Arizona. For years it has taken on the assortment of right wing "conservative" nut jobs that have been dragging Arizona's present, and future, down. Including, of course, John Huppenthal. For quite some time, a couple of aggressively defiant and apologetic "commenters" have appeared at Blog for Arizona to defend Huppenthal under, at a minimum, the screen names "Thucydides" and "Falcon9".

Turns out both sock puppet screen names are almost surely none other than Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal. In the Phoenix New Times, Stephen Lemons (aka the "Feathered Bastard") relates many of Huppenthal's erstwhile greatest sock puppet hits.

Here is a great video report by Brahm Resnik, and featuring excerpts from an interview he did with Bob Lord as well as comments by media expert Dan Gillmor of the ASU Cronkite School of Journalism. [I would embed it but for the fact there are no available reasonable embed controls and the thing auto plays, which just is not permissible on this site. Extremely poor form by

So, not only is Huppenthal a book banning right wing nut job, he is an anonymous political blog troll – with multiple identities – obsessively, albeit covertly, policing reporting on his own true life self. Not only does Huppenthal, through his sock puppets, aggressively defend himself at all cost, he also attacks other politicians he dislikes, like the outstanding current Democratic candidate for Arizona Attorney General, Felecia Rotellini.

Think Huppenthal is a disgrace to his public office, and position as the leader of Arizona public education? Sure. But, wait, there is more! Much more. Huppenthal has done this on, arguably, taxpayer time on the job, and unquestionably via the misuse of state equipment and resources.

Arizona Administrative Code Title Two, Chapter Five provides, *inter alia*:

R2-5A-501. Standards of Conduct

A. Required conduct. A state employee shall at all times:

1. Comply with federal and state laws and rules, and agency policies and directives;
2. Maintain high standards of honesty, integrity, and impartiality, free from personal considerations, or favoritism;
- ...
4. Conduct himself or herself in a manner that will not bring discredit or embarrassment to the state.

B. Prohibited conduct. A state employee shall not:

1. Use his or her official position for personal gain, or attempt to use, or use, confidential information for personal advantage;
- ...
5. Directly or indirectly use or allow the use of state equipment or property of any kind, including equipment and property leased to the state, for other

than official activities unless
authorized by written agency policy or
as otherwise allowed by these rules;

The Arizona Republic and local Channel 12 NBC News, through the excellent Brahm Resnik, has reported Huppenthal used his office at the Department of Education in his anonymous sock puppet political blog trolling and commenting (see the video linked above). I have independently confirmed, via Bob Lord at Blog For Arizona – where many (but far from all) of the comments were made – that dedicated Arizona Department of Education IP addresses were used.

Pretty hard to look at Huppenthal's putative conduct here and not see how, at a minimum, it is in direct violation of R2-5A-501(A)(2 and 4), maintaining honesty and integrity and conducting oneself so as to not discredit and/or embarrass the state, not to mention R2-5A-501(B)(5) misuse of state property and equipment for other than official activities. The putative technical violations are patently obvious.

Most damningly, there is precedent for investigation, sanction and termination of governmental officials in Arizona for violative conduct such as misuse of governmental computer networks and political hatcheting. In 2008, high ranking Maricopa County official Al Macias was terminated for conduct directly analogous to that which Huppenthal stands accused of, and under directly similar ethical guidelines.

While the firing of a county official is a far different thing than removal of a top elected state official, the previous standard should serve as a wake up call to both the press and state ethics officials in Arizona on the purported conduct of State Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal.

Should the students, teachers and citizens of Arizona expect any substantive investigation into Huppenthal's ethical lapses in conduct? Of course not, because that would almost certainly

have to come from the Arizona Attorney General's Office run by fellow embattled conservative Republican, and Huppenthal's direct predecessor, Tom Horne. Hard to envision the scenario where Horne is not so busy fighting off his own charges of impropriety that he would be willing to take on a fellow kindred wing nut.

It is a story worth telling and investigating, and one the citizens of Arizona should hear; let's hope more of the press, both state and national, follow up on where Brahm Resnik, Stephen Lemons and Bob Lord have had the courage to lead.

DID NORTHWESTERN UNIONIZING JUST CAUSE REAL NCAA REFORM? NO, NOT AT ALL

Well, the likely answer is no, but the ground is certainly finally shifting underneath the NCAA to such an extent that they are worried. The step of trotting authoritarian boob Mark Emmert out on for a series of television appearances sure didn't work.

But, yesterday, somewhat quietly, the NCAA announced a proposed restructuring of its root governance model:

The board endorsed the restructuring process, which is aimed at allowing the division to be more nimble, streamlined and responsive to needs – particularly the needs of student-athletes – during its meeting Thursday in Indianapolis. The Steering Committee on Governance, made up of university presidents, drafted the restructuring plan.

...

Under the proposal, the division would still be led by a Board of Directors composed primarily of university presidents. However, new voices would be added: the chair of the Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee; the chair of a new group tentatively called the Council; and the most senior Division I member of the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association's executive committee. The council chair would always be an athletics director, giving that constituency an automatic spot on the board.

The Board would focus chiefly on oversight and strategic issues, while leaving much of the day-to-day policy and legislative responsibility to the council.

The council, composed of at least 60 percent athletics directors, would have 38 members: one from each conference plus two voting student-athletes and four commissioners (one from the five highest profile Football Bowl Subdivision conferences, one from the remaining FBS conferences, one from the Football Championship Subdivision conferences and one from the remaining conferences). The council would be the final voice on shared-governance rule-making decisions.

The steering committee suggests creating three bodies that would assist the council in its work and comprise the "working level" of Division I: an academics-focused group, a championships-focused group and a legislative group. Council members would determine implementation details, including what other groups are needed, how the groups will be populated and reporting lines. The steering committee also emphasized the need for a

nomination process that is competency-based and diverse.

In order to allow the five highest-resource conferences (the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big 12 Conference, Big Ten Conference, Pac-12 Conference and Southeastern Conference) to address their unique challenges, the model would grant them autonomy to make rules on specific matters affecting the interests of student-athletes.

Sounds all nice and glossy, no? Not so much though upon closer inspection.

First off, it appears timed to be a direct attempt to deflate the unionizing vote at Northwestern today. Emmert and the NCAA just can't help but be oppressive jerks can they?

Secondly, it enshrines into the root NCAA governance that the major football and basketball conferences are all that really matters and the rest of the universities and colleges in the NCAA are second tier and unimportant. As the AP stated in their report:

If approved later this year, schools in the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and SEC could implement some rules on their own and would get more voting power over legislation that would affect every NCAA member school.

Sadly, that looks exactly right under the restructuring plan. Now, there is some value in giving a bit of autonomy to the super conferences, but not to where they can exercise their greed to the detriment of all the rest of the smaller conferences and member institutions.

Notably, while the NCAA proposal has taken care of the NCAA's own institutional power, and cravenly concentrated more of it in the big money conferences, notably absent are attendant concrete proposals that actually aid the student

athletes, provide for their well being and insure their existence in the face of injury.

As further evidence of the NCAA's continuing malevolence, at the same meeting in which the restructuring proposal was approved, the NCAA also voted to screw the athletes just a little more by restricting their ability to transfer. The exact provision is to eliminate hardship waivers that permit athletes having a just cause for needing to transfer to another school the ability to be immediately eligible and, instead, just gives them an extra year of eligibility. In short, the NCAA just decided that instead of helping such athletes, they would screw them by stringing them out.

In other related news, the National Labor Relations Board announced also announced Thursday that they would grant the request/appeal lodged by Northwestern University challenging the previous regional decision to permit the players' attempt to unionize. From the NLRB official announcement:

The National Labor Relations Board has granted Northwestern University's Request for Review of the Regional Director's March 26, 2014 decision in 13-RC-121359. The Regional Director found the University's grant-in-aid scholarship football players are employees under the National Labor Relations Act. The election will take place on April 25, 2014 but the ballots will be impounded until the Board issues a decision affirming, modifying or reversing the Regional Director's decision.

The Board intends to issue a subsequent notice establishing a schedule for the filing of briefs on review and inviting amicus briefs, to afford the parties and interested amici the opportunity to address issues raised in this case.

It is not totally clear, but it strikes me that should the Northwestern players vote to not unionize, the NLRB matter may be technically moot and die of its own weight.

However, what is clear is that should the players vote to form a union, their secret vote won't be known and/or certified anytime soon, and will play out over months, if not years.

So, in short, status quo for the corrupt NCAA.

THE DAY GUN RAMPAGE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MI PASSES BILL ALLOWING GUNS IN SCHOOLS

There is absolutely horrifying news coming out of Newtown, CT, where 27 people—18 of them young children—are reported dead in a gun rampage.

The President's spokesperson, Jay Carney has already said today is not the day to talk about gun control laws. (Update: Obama did speak briefly. It was a very touching statement that promised action.)

Can we talk about this, then? A bill passed in the MI legislature's last day frenzy last night will expand concealed carry to include schools, day care centers, churches, and stadia.

Changes to the concealed weapons law passed the state House and Senate late Thursday, allowing trained gun owners to carry their weapons in formerly forbidden places, such as schools, day care centers, stadiums and churches.

Schools, however, and privately owned

facilities could opt out of the new law if they don't want people carrying guns in their buildings.

The bill also would transfer the power of granting concealed-weapons permits from county gun licensing boards to the county sheriff.

State Rep. Joel Johnson, R-Clare, called the bill a "pro-public safety bill" because it allowed gun owners to be an asset to public safety in volatile situations.

Again, this bill is not yet—at least according to reports—law. Governor Snyder has not yet signed it.

If we take one immediate lesson from Newtown, shouldn't that be schools and day cares are no place for guns?

Update: The MI House GOP just issued a statement in response to the CT massacre. They start by saying the culprit was intent on spreading evil—not death. (h/t Josh Pugh)

Regarding the school shooting in Connecticut, our first concern is thinking about the families and the tragedy they have suffered at the hands of a criminal bent on spreading evil.

After that show of concern is done, they spend four paragraphs defending their bill in the name of public safety.

Therefore, having well-trained individuals with the freedom to carry a concealed pistol may be considered a public safety asset that could act as a deterrent against such shootings or, if an evil criminal does strike, may prove to serve as protection for innocent bystanders.

It is the belief of many representatives

in our caucus that it is criminals who have no intention of following any law that are the perpetrators of such heinous crimes as school shootings. Strict gun-control laws do not stop criminals from committing evil acts, they merely infringe on the rights of law-abiding citizens who might be able to take action against evil if given the chance.

The only way this statement makes sense in the context of the CT shooting is if they imagine kindergartners as the “law-abiding citizens who might be able to take action.”

Finally, in a press release lobbying for their bill in spite of the massacre that four guns in a school just caused, they beg people not to politicize CT.

Regardless of where anyone stands on the gun-rights debate, however, we will encourage everyone to try to refrain from politicizing the tragedy in Connecticut.

As you read this, remember that these are the “pro-life” people who also just rammed through a bill requiring that women be counseled on burial options if they want an abortion.

Incidentally, the gun bill is still on Governor Snyder’s desk. But don’t worry. He issued a tweet offering thoughts and prayers, but not veto.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and the families in Connecticut.