

BULLETIN -- JULY 2

Where are we, this July 4? At about the time our original 13 states adopted their new Constitution, Alexander Tyler, a history professor at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, had this to say in *The Fall of the Athenian Republic*, an event which had taken place 2,000 years earlier:

“A democracy is always temporary in nature; it simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy, which is always followed by a dictatorship.

“The average age of the world’s greatest civilizations, from the beginning of history, has been about 200 years. During those 200 years, these nations always progressed through the following sequence:

From bondage to spiritual faith;
From spiritual faith to great courage;
From courage to liberty;
From liberty to abundance;
From abundance to complacency;
From complacency to apathy;
From apathy to dependence;
From dependence back into bondage.”

This July 4, where are we on the sequence laid out by Alexander Tyler? The signs of this logical progression are all around us, and quite evident in our country’s history. Most of us are somewhere between abundance and dependence, sinking from complacency to apathy. Look at Colorado, where the smoke swirling around the recreational marijuana industry occupies so much of people’s budgets, time, energy, and legal processes, to say nothing of their lungs and minds! Why worry about anything else, man? I mean, like, I’m just lookin’ for another hit off a joint. Got one on ya?

And, judging from the vote potential for pot legalization in numerous states, that’s just a harbinger of the direction many people seem to want the country to take. Quickly disappearing is the pride that many people used to take in becoming self-sufficient, getting out on their own, developing a business, pursuing a career. This is all good news for those elites who want to provide womb-to-tomb government-sponsored security for everyone -- or at least for everyone who makes it past the womb, which the elites appear to look upon with very mixed feelings.

It is now settled in the minds of many that health care is a right of all people. On the face of it, the doctrine of the Church, as interpreted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, seems to be in full agreement. Our bishops have been pressing for universal health care for decades before the topic became a political football. The benefits of healthy living certainly are desirable for all. People need to be in the best

possible health in order to enjoy the fundamental rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It should be obvious.

What is also obvious is that health is a very difficult thing to measure. While providing health care for all seems fair and just, is it equally fair and just to provide *the same measure of care* for those whose health is poor *because THEY have failed* to properly care for themselves? Let's be blunt: do we spend the same amount of time, energy, and money on a 35-year-old street bum who's dying of cirrhosis and COPD that we do on a 45-year-old mother of four who has a malignant but operable brain tumor? Common sense will likely tell us no, but who decides? That's what confounds so many people about the "right" to universal health care. No one should be advocating throwing the street bum out into the street. That's cruel and certainly contrary to the moral law. But when one has chronically refused to take any responsibility for his own health and well-being, why should all the resources of his fellow citizens be used to allow him to continue his self-harming behavior?

Just watch the people wandering into a buffet restaurant. You will see many energetic and even athletic people who are clearly there to enjoy a powerhouse meal of the proper balance of proteins, carbs, and fats which would cost much more for them to provide for themselves at home. You will also see many lethargic and morbidly obese people who seem to have made one of many trips to an all-you-can-eat facility to consume foods which are destined only to further drain them of energy and ambition. Many of these might openly tell you that they are on "disability" due to back or knee trouble. (No wonder there!) Why should the people who have made a habit of taking proper care of themselves be paying high premiums to support the gluttonous habits of others who have a record of paying no attention whatever to their own health? Or of people who are wheeling around on a government-supplied Amigo, periodically shutting off their oxygen supply line so they can "safely" light up another smoke?

Some might say these are cruel and judgmental questions. I'm saying that, out of charity, we should be using the same principle that we do when we refuse to hand out money to people who are likely to use it only for drugs, booze, or other harmful and addictive behaviors. Throw them out in the street? Absolutely not! In their illnesses, chronic conditions, and dying states, provide them compassion, comfort, cleanliness, and companionship? Absolutely! Is the government best suited to make such choices? All you have to do to answer that question is behold the gridlock typical of both Washington and Lansing, and the waste of money on foolish fads in local government.

Hospitals are usually pretty well trained to do triage. Faith communities are usually pretty well attuned to moral issues surrounding life and death. It seems to me that both could be enlisted, among other impartial citizens, to help health care providers and insurance companies make decisions that are fair, just, and equitable. And that much of the business of government should be to regulate the price-gouging and out-of-control costs which seem so prevalent in the burgeoning and bloated health care "industry." Government should keep *its* nose out of individual health and let those who are best suited for genuine care and compassion do their work. Now, that's just opinion; but it might be a step toward something to get us past the partisan constipation which is helping no one. God bless you!

Thought for the week (on the shrinking middle class and consequent danger for the country): “As power flows out from the middle in both directions, the basic features of a free and virtuous society are lost. The foundations of civil society wither. The sustaining virtues of a flourishing society become scarce. In a hyperstylized celebrity culture and hyperpartisan political community, the quiet practices of fidelity, prudence and thrift are drowned out by bling and #winning” (Jordan J. Ballor, executive editor of the *Journal of Markets & Morality*).