

Laws, Rules, Principles, & Axioms For You and Me, That Power Elites Always Ignore, and Get Away With

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Why is it that the more or less “obvious” truisms to rational beings become totally lost on, or are purposely ignored, by those we elect to govern us?

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Some years ago, I attended a briefing at which the President of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy at the time presented his

“Seven Principles of Sound Public Policy.”

I was greatly impressed. Here they are in basic form:

- One: Free people are not equal, and equal people are not free.**
- Two: What belongs to you, you tend to take care of; what belongs to no one or everyone tends to fall into disrepair.**
- Three: Sound policy requires that we consider long-run effects and all people, not simply short-run effects and a few people.**
- Four: If you encourage something, you get more of it; if you discourage something, you get less of it.**
- Five: Nobody spends somebody else's money as carefully as he spends his own.**
- Six: Government has nothing to give anybody except what it first takes from somebody, and a government that's big enough to give you everything you want is big enough to take away everything you've got.**
- Seven: Liberty makes all the difference in the world.**

The complete version, with supporting narrative for each principle, can be found here: <https://www.mackinac.org/>

If and when you read the details, you'll likely conclude these principles are obvious expressions of common sense. That's why we have expressions like “*duh*,” and end up slapping ourselves on the forehead so often. So much of what goes on can be reduced to common sense if we would only think critically. But we get distracted by the clutter of the everyday “*information*” barrage, and so it becomes vital to have someone bring us back to reality like Mackinac did here.

Sometimes following exposure to these “**Seven Principles**,” I began to think about **how our elected officials violate, ignore, or otherwise trample on common sense and rational thought once they strap on the armor of public office (if not before!)**

I ended up compiling the following, both for my own amusement and the edification of those who followed my blog.

Immutable Laws of Town and School Budgeting

- > **“You get what you pay for.”** You’re damn straight; if you increase teacher pay, you get higher-paid teachers. And the same is true of all public employees. Why is it we fall for the promise that higher teacher pay will bring better results? Are teachers holding back on their efforts, trying to blackmail us? Are they not giving us their best? Why would we hire and retain “educators” who act this way? Who aren’t committed to doing their very best **“for the children?”**
- > **Paying the best the same as the worst and vice versa**, which is how the teacher contracts in my town and state work, eliminates any incentives to excel or improve. As does annual step increases (per year of service) coupled with annual general increases. These are the demands of the Teachers' Unions, which don't give a hoot about *“the children.”* If they did, they would demand a pay system that incentivizes excellence and performance, and rewards it. Instead, like “participation trophies” in youth sports, they demand “participation, pre-programmed salary increases” simply for showing up.
- > Officials must believe **“accountability”** is what CPAs specialize in, or a measure of their skill level.
- > **Elected officials are always the last to accept that there is no tooth fairy** and no such thing as a free lunch. In fact, all but the rarest exceptions, who will be forced out, never do.
- > **There’s never enough money for officials to be good stewards of what they have**, keeping our physical plants in good repair. But there’s always enough money to tear one down and build something new in its place. *“It’s cheaper to build anew rather than renovate.”* Maintenance staff never get *“held to account.”*
 - Imagine if your private building was condemned....you’d be seen as irresponsible, a nitwit, and someone who didn’t care about their neighbors.
 - If private property was managed the way public property is, $\frac{3}{4}$ of my downtown would have had to be torn down decades ago; you know, in the historic district overseen by the Village Review Board. And half the houses in town would have to be torn down as well...those 40 years old or more.
 - Corollary: there’s never enough public interest, let alone a mandate, that officials maintain existing facilities as a first priority, but always great public clamor to support ripping down and replacing existing facilities **that were ALLOWED, consciously, to fall into disrepair.**
 - It’s like the government gets rewarded for letting things go**, not penalized or held accountable. And boy, do they know how to work the system.
- > They, and the vast majority of their constituents, act as if no state or federal revenue sharing or subsidy comes out of local pockets. Talk about sleight of hand, free money, and free lunches. **No wonder so many vote for whomever they think will give them the most free stuff.**
- > **School system professionals are masters learning from masters on how to manipulate the local leadership and the voters.**
- > **You can fool all of the people some of the time; you can fool some of the people all of the time;**
 - Sadly, you can **fool enough of the people most of the time to get them to support shooting themselves in the foot.**
- > **All congress critters and elected state officials are sons-a-bitches, except yours, who are your sons-a-bitches.** Funny how your pork is different from my pork, though it all comes from the same pigs.
- > **You can govern, or you can spend. The latter is a 10-1 favorite over the former.**
- > **Spending more almost always trumps courage, commitment, and stewardship.**
- > **“Tough choices” are only tough when you have no immutable, rock-solid principles on which to base decisions.**
- > **“For the children” has about as much relevance as “for the taxpayer.”** There are no advocate organizations for students, but tons of them for teachers, administrators, school board members, etc.

- It's *for* the children, but it's *from* the taxpayers. Actually, it's for the teachers and the administrators, not the children.
- > **"Costs beyond our control" are those approved in prior year actions.**
- > **The property tax is the most insidious, predatory form of taxation there is since it is an adjustable rate.**
 - It encourages ignoring the scarcity of resources that is the fundamental law of economics.
 - Bring six worried mommies and a real estate agent to a council meeting, and you can up the tax rate by 10% without even breathing heavy.**
 - If the feds and state did the same thing, we'd all be penniless in a few years.
- > **Government is the only form of human enterprise that has no competition, never goes out of business, or terminates employees for incompetence.**
 - And no human enterprise more needs these influences and consequences for ineptness.
- > **Government-operated public schools have been declining in performance in national and international rankings for years, regardless of spending more and having smaller class size.**
 - Thank goodness, your town and mine are the exceptions to the rule, at least to hear real estate agents talk about it. They love to brag about why people move to a town, but **somehow never mention why people leave the town** thereby providing a place for them to sell to those who seek our *"best schools."*
- > Henry Hazlitt's Economics In One Lesson reads as follows:
 - "The art of economics consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of any act or policy; it consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups."**
 - Elected officials ignore this lesson**, along with the law of scarcity, as they rush to spend for the short term and to quiet the squeakiest wheels.
 - The first law of politics is to ignore the first law of economics.**
- > The short term and the squeakiest wheels get the most attention.
- > **Mission creep is the order of the day; good intentions are the only justification required.**
 - Schools are now soup kitchens, health clinics, therapists, and babysitters.**
 - My town goes way beyond what the approved charter authorizes. Have you ever looked at the charter for your town? Does it authorize the council to approve resolutions for submitting to the Federal Government? Mine approved one proposing a new amendment to the US Constitution. **They can do this, but they can't keep the schools and the roads in good working order.**
- > Proactive leadership of budget preparation and guidelines are to be **eschewed** for theatrical wringing of hands and gnashing of teeth in reaction to budget submissions, especially when it comes to school budgets.
 - This is the **'leading from behind'** approach embraced elsewhere in our society. In this case, **'leading from behind'** is **'leading from a corner.'**
- > You don't really expect towns to adhere to the powers granted them in their Charters, do you? State and Federal Governments don't limit themselves to the powers in their Constitutions; why should towns limit themselves?

*After Trump

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