

Pray for Change - R'amen!

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 24 August 2016 01:49 - Last Updated Wednesday, 24 August 2016 17:10

This space is usually filled, I know, with a torrent of disgust and effluvia based on the disgusting torrent of effluvia erupting daily in the U.S. and in the world at large.

However, today we will focus on something less than our usual 12-million-calorie bounty of an engorged, buffet-table cornucopia with strap-on bib. We will instead take a light meal, and a little water. And an electric hot pot, or some Sterno. (*Think Ramen. □ More on that in a sec.*)

The U.S. has announced it will end our little experiment in finance, sociology, psychology, and basic competence, with federal private prison operations. The for-hire pens are not big money savers, they're more dangerous than those operated by the public sector, plus, the food stinks to the point of prisoners rebelling.

Cost-cutting, one presumes, is most easily accomplished by the reduction of guards (and their paychecks and benefits, if any), and by weaning prisoners off their high-end, *fancy-schmancy*, toast-and-hot-water meals.

It appears the ancient adage is true: *Things will change when it gets bad enough*. And so it now has, on the outside, as we close down private-enterprise prisons. It's changing on the inside, too, where prisoners have increasingly switched from tobacco products as a unit of prison currency, to packets of Ramen noodles instead -- because the food's better than they get, and it's needed to supplement both the small portions and lousy quality of the meals which do happen to come their way.

I am more tree-hugger (they produce oxygen, dummy!) than prisoner-coddler, but good grief. There is no reason to treat anyone caged like an animal. Ask any warden, and he'll tell you is that decent food is one of the most basic ways to help keep things on an even keel.

So, we'll no longer seek making a profit on jailing some people: May the gods and goddesses help us, this is what counts as "doable change" in the opening two scores of the 21st century.

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Well, if we can't go for depth in our changes, we should at least go for breadth:

I'm thinking here about voting now -- 'Tis the season, *fa la lah* and all that -- the actual process of casting and counting votes. (I'd
rather discuss a top-to-bottom rework of the entire political system -- from sending the electoral college back to school, to scrubbing the poison of money out of the entire process, of keeping Capitalism safe from democracy, but neither of us have that kind of time, nor that many doses of elephant tranquilizer that we can use on one another, we we both start foaming at the mouth and twitching.)

Consider, for example, those rickety voting machines, trotted out once every two years or so. The one-armed bandits have loose-twiddled gearing, worthy of woozy counts any way you want them -- pre-order your results early and avoid the tinkering rush. The electronic machines have their own challenges: hackable glitches aplenty, spotty or no patches, and ancient software owned not by the public (*what an insidious innovation, that one!*), but by many of the same types of for-profit corporations making-and-saving a quick buck in prison operations. The mechanical machines -- can you say Let's Hang Us Some Chads?! I thought so.

Disintegrating machines, Swiss-cheese software, a total lack of a paper trail, *riggable* counts, and a million ways to make people wait in line in the wind and rain, and another million ways to keep them away from voting booths in the first place -- you get the picture.

Voting was never supposed to be an elitist prospect, at least, not once we got past the notion that non-whites, and non-landowners, and women, should all get a chance to vote. One party is still having a real hard time with the laws on this subject. (*Three guesses as to which three letters of the alphabet represent that party. ☐ Officially, I mean -- as there are quite a few three-letter, and four-letter, words and acronyms coming to mind here...*)

Well, folks, there's is an answer. It's a thing called Vote by Mail. It cures a lot of this nonsense. It doesn't slice or dice. But, it's really, really complicated:

1. You register
2. You are sent a ballot
3. You mark the ballot clearly
4. You mail the ballot back or you can drop it off at a large number of drop-boxes

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5. There is a paper trail for recounts and clarifications
6. There is no need for mechanical or electronic machines at polling places
7. There's no need for 823 people to wait on the one working machine at a polling place
8. There's no need for *The Sons of Ironic Freedoms*, or whoever, to open-carry at polls, as protection
9. There's no need for voter harassment by frantic, scoop-crazed media for exit poll results
10. There's no need to call the election before people in the West have gone to the polls
11. There's no need for expensive mechanical and/or electronic updates for those machines

12. No one needs to go to 129 local, regional, and state offices to get a new ID to vote...

...and on and on and on.

Something to consider, I think -- a national Vote-by-Mail campaign, law, effort. Baby steps, I know, but we probably don't have to go slow in this country anymore. We've become so used to complaining about the *woeful unfairness* of *Gummint* instead of banding together to get things changed for the better...

Three states currently engage in this vastly complex and unfathomably nightmarish task of Vote-by-Mail: Colorado, Washington, and Oregon. (I wonder what else these seemingly logical, realistic states have in common... *lessee now*... Hell, they probably even *recycle*, too.)

Perhaps we should send Official Observers from various American region-states to these strange nation-states along the Far Rims of Our Collective Perception, Way Out There in Reasonableness Land, and see how they are able to tackle such overly awkward, unwieldy, and terrifyingly complicated forms of democracy in action without, like, bursting into Armageddon-Fear-Flames or fainting into a coma, or something.

Our voting system has long been set on self-destruct. Any day now, I'm expecting offers to come pouring in from poor and tiny emerging nations, offering to send peace-keepers and observer-referees to the 'States in time for the next round of our loop-the-loop free-for-all (but *very-expensive-for-all*, really) exercise in being the envy of the democratic world, which we call *voting*

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Time to fix the myths we choose to live. We're *better* than this -- or *we used to be*.

While we're at it? Let's fix another ass-backwards system stampeding around like free-range wildebeests, like a squall of wild-eyed gold-rush-hounds, all over this land -- a fevered plague called *charter schools, which many see as chartered \$chool\$*.

There are some things never meant to turn a profit. Prison is one. Voting's another. Education's a third. (*Health care's a fourth, but we can get back to that someday, when we have plenty of elephant tranquilizer.*)

If we fixed up Education, say, I can't help but think, any other problems we have would likely be a whole lot smaller. (*Another taxing thought, I know. ☐ Sorry 'bout that. ☐ No pun intended.*)

Fixing the Nation's Smarts, by providing top-notch education for all, would be a great investment in the future, like building new infrastructure, but for human beings -- for generations of individuals, families, and communities.

Plus, we wouldn't be placed in the position of having to trade Ramen packets for text books and next week's latest Voter ID scan-chip-card, so we can vote on new wars, while we drive across this bridge that still, *you know*, looks like it's pretty safe after all these years...

Wait -- *did you feel that?*

Today's Not-Safe-for-Work Bonuses:

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And now, more background on charter schools -- bring your rawhide chew toy along, though:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_htSPGAY7I

A classic from Roy, reprised -- just plug in new names as needed to update this beauty:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ege_RBhh37A