



Founder, Noel Smith (1933-2022)

HUSBAY NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2023

America is a liberal nation with a democracy problem

From Onlysky.Media

American politics is a machine that turns idealism into disappointment.

If you only look at opinion polls, the United States should have strongly liberal politics. For example, by a 63% to 37% majority, Americans believe the government should ensure that all people have health care. Majorities also support safe and legal abortion (62% majority), tuition-free public college (63% majority), raising taxes on millionaires (67% majority), embracing renewable energy and decarbonizing the economy (69% majority), and joining international efforts to combat climate change (75% majority).

All these progressive policies are backed by super-majorities of the voting public. In a democracy, it's reasonable to expect that they would swiftly pass into law. Yet these goals have been achieved only partially, if at all, and on some of them we're going backwards.

Why does the United States fare so badly at reflecting the will of the voters?

American democracy is broken as designed

Of course, voter suppression is a core part of this story. Black voters are the backbone of the progressive party. Since the Civil War, conservative states have engaged in a concerted effort to stop them from voting by all means possible. The tools of voter suppression range from pseudo legal means like poll taxes, to wholly subjective "literacy tests", to outright intimidation and terrorism like the Ku Klux Klan.

It was only with the passage of the Voting Rights Act that the most glaring of these injustices were reined in. Even then, voter suppression has never stopped. It just mutated into new forms: onerous ID requirements; gruelingly long lines which the media treats as a matter of course, rather than a sign of an underfunded system; felon disenfranchisement, combined with drug laws that were always intended to be enforced only against people of color. In recent years, Republicans have raged against mail-in voting, ballot drop boxes, and anything else that makes it easier or

more convenient to vote.

However, there are more fundamental problems, which would persist even if everyone who wanted to vote was able to. American democracy is broken by design. It's structured to privilege some voters at the expense of others, and it always has been.

Problem #1: The House of Representatives

There's no constitutional requirement for how many members the House of Representatives has. In the past, its size would increase with every census. But it's been stuck at 435 seats since 1929, before Alaska and Hawaii were states.

With the House capped at 435, every census is a game of musical chairs. Some states lose House seats at the expense of others. States can lose seats even with a growing population, if others grow more. Because of how seats are apportioned, smaller states have more House seats relative to their size, while larger states have fewer. This means smaller states have more political power in Congress than larger ones, relatively speaking.

Importantly, "smaller" in this context means smaller by *population*, not by land area. The states that benefit most from this unfair arrangement are geographically large but sparsely populated, or in other words, rural. And in America, most rural voters are white conservatives. In effect, you gain political power in America by living far away from everybody else. This is the origin of the reformers' slogan "land doesn't vote, people do".

This could be fixed by an ordinary act of Congress. A sensible way would be to take the population of the smallest state and set that as the number of voters per House seat. Larger states would gain seats in proportion to this number.

Currently the smallest state, Wyoming, has 600,000 people and one House seat. California, the largest, has 39 million people and 52 House seats. With this scheme, California would go up to 65 House seats. New York, which has 26 House seats, would go up to 33. This would restore the balance of power in favor of states where more people actually live.

Continued page 3

Haiku Quintets: dandana.us/fivepalms
Christian Cosmologists

that most odd creature,
 the "Christian Cosmologist,"
 should now be extinct

but specimens live,
 defying laws of physics,
 though sightings are rare

perhaps they possess
 supernatural power
 over reason's rules?

I'm a stern skeptic
 of my own cozy beliefs
 —self-deception's tricks

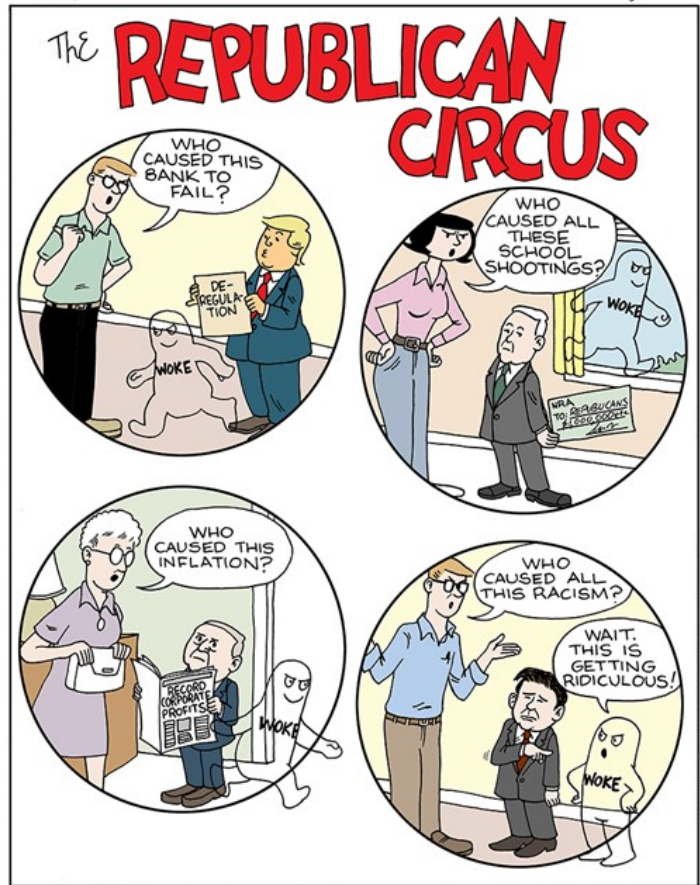
as a scientist*
 I ask, where's the evidence?
 show me the data



This 2014 e-book asks professional clergy, of any doctrine, to explain how their particular faith reconciles settled (i.e., noncontroversial) science with the basic tenets of religion (i.e., supernatural deities and afterlife). So far, none have responded. I tentatively conclude that one can either hold religious faith or accept the confirmed findings of science, but not both. * I'm a curious hobbyist, not a practicing researcher.

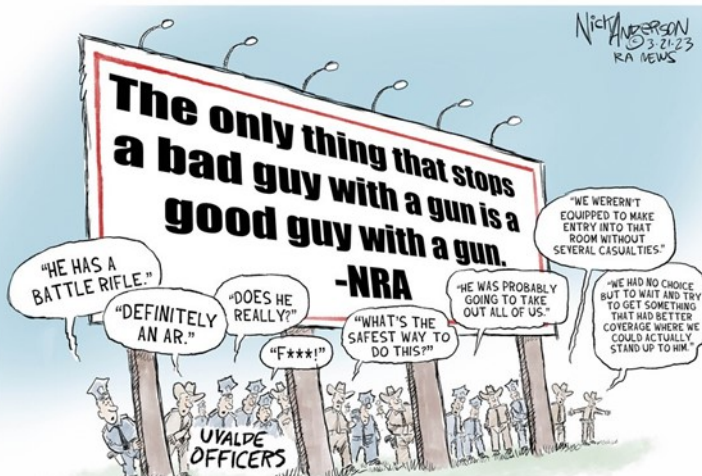
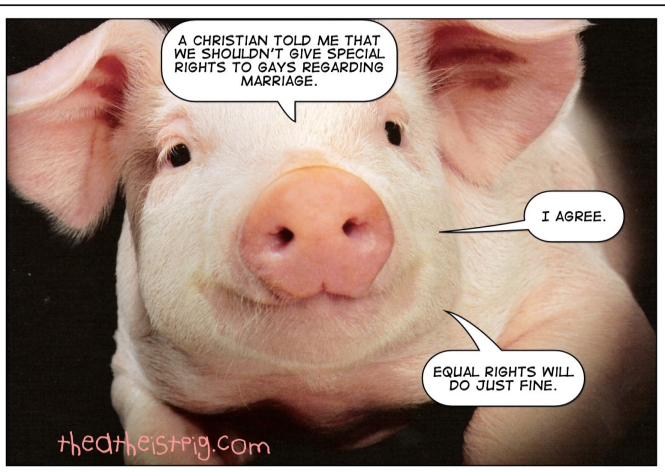
TOM the
 DANCING
 BUG

BY RUBEN
 BOLLING



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If you pray for rain long enough, it eventually does fall. If you pray for floodwaters to abate, they eventually do. The same happens in the absence of prayers. *Steve Allen*



Source: The Texas Tribune

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, *without theism or other supernatural beliefs*, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good. To learn more go [here](#).

From page 1 Problem #2: The Senate

The Senate is even worse than the House. By the terms of the Great Compromise, every state is guaranteed two votes regardless of population. This means people living in smaller states are vastly overrepresented.

California's 39 million citizens have just two senators. That's roughly the same population as the 22 smallest states *combined*, but those states collectively have *forty-four* senators. Brooklyn has more people than 15 states, but each of those fifteen gets two senators of its own, while Brooklyn has to share its two with the rest of New York.

The 25 smallest states have about 53 million people, only about 15% of the U.S. population. But that small minority controls half of the Senate chamber. How can any country call itself a democracy when 15% of the population has the same voting power as the other 85%?

On top of *that*, the Senate's anti-democratic rules make an already bad situation even worse. Top of the list is the filibuster, which lets 40 senators block most legislation. This grants even more disproportionate power to an even tinier minority.

Worst of all, the prospects for reforming the Senate are dim. Article V of the Constitution says that no state can be deprived of its equal vote in the Senate, not even by a constitutional amendment. If we passed an amendment to override this, there's no telling what would happen. With conservative courts, it could spiral into a constitutional crisis.

Another option would be to take away the Senate's veto power, making it like the U.K. House of Lords, which can delay legislation but not stop it. Of course, the problem is that this would still take a constitutional amendment, and those require ratification by three-fourths of the states. Why would small states vote to give up the disproportionate power they have?

A more subversive solution would be for liberal voters to move en masse to red states, outvoting their existing residents. With work-from-home policies becoming common, this is more feasible than it once was, but it'd still be a massive coordination problem to persuade hundreds of thousands or millions of people to move at once.

Problem #3: The Electoral College and the presidency

The electoral college might be the ultimate example of the founders' distrust of democracy. The House and the Senate, distorted as they are, at least promise that whichever candidate gets the most votes in a race will win. The presidency has no such guarantee. A presidential candidate can lose the popular vote by millions and still be elected.

In the electoral college, each state has votes equal

to the total number of senators and representatives it has. This further boosts the already disproportionate power of rural white states at everyone else's expense. And because the president chooses judges for lifetime appointments, it gives them outside influence on the makeup of the judiciary as well.

Because most states have a winner-take-all scheme for awarding electoral votes, voters living in a state dominated by the other party effectively have no voice. Meanwhile, voters in the handful of swing states are hugely overvalued. A presidential candidate can win while espousing views that are drastically out of step with the country, so long as they appeal to that swing-state minority.

This is fixable without amending the Constitution. States could simply agree to award their electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote. However, this runs into the same problem as Senate reform: why would small states vote to relinquish the unfair advantage they currently have?

Not a case for pessimism

These structural roadblocks have thwarted necessary change for decades of American history. Even when we have a Democratic president and majorities in Congress, those majorities tend to rest on Democrats from red states, who water down or block progressive legislation because they're afraid of losing their seats. We saw this dynamic with Obamacare and the public option, as well as with Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema bottlenecking the previous Congress. It's led to one generation after another of progressive idealists growing disillusioned, cynical and burned out when they see how hard it is to get anything done.

If America were more democratic, we'd still have Christian theocrats and white nationalists, but they wouldn't have nearly as much influence or power. Small rural states would be inconsequential, compared to the coastal metropolises where most Americans actually live. We might already have had universal health care, gun control and real rights for workers. We'd basically be a bigger, richer version of Canada.

All else being equal, if the president were chosen by national popular vote, Al Gore would have beaten George W. Bush in 2000, and Hillary Clinton would have won in 2016. There'd have been no Iraq war, no Abu Ghraib. We might have prevented 9/11. We'd undoubtedly have had a more science-guided response to COVID. We'd be a world leader at fighting climate change. We'd have a Supreme Court that protects rights rather than one that takes them away.

Best of all, the sting of repeated loss might have pushed the Republican party to cast off its extremists or face extinction. It would be forced to become more

Continued on page 4

Special Interest Groups

Here is a list of Special Interest Groups (If you have an idea for one, please let us know).

SIG Names

Focus of the Group

Thoughts of the Day (1st Wed)	Attendees discuss non-political topics that effect most of us.
Current Affairs (CAF): (3rd Wed)	Events discussed during the current news cycle—3rd Monday
Life's Experiences (LEX):	Your memorable experiences to share with the group
Non-Fiction Review (NFR):	Reviews of non-fiction books, magazine articles, films and TV
Creativity (CRE):	Includes short stories, poetry, blogs; in other words fiction writing (including reviews) as opposed to non-fiction review.
Roundtable (RT):	A discussion of a topic selected by the SIG hosts
Science Technology & Medicine (STM):	What have you learned, and would like to share
Open Forum (OF):	This SIG will happen on dates when no one has stepped up to do a presentation on any of our previously existing categories.

Check our website for specific information by clicking [HERE](#).

Monthly Meetings

All lectures begin at 6:30pm with a social gathering and lecture at 7:00. Time for non-lecture events are noted. Lectures are held at the Center for Arts and Humanity, 1226 N. Tamiami Trail, 34236.

April 9	Annual Carl Sagan Picnic (4pm), Turtle Beach Pavilion (See below)
May 1	TBA

Chat & Chew

Meets every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month at Perkins restaurant at Fruitville and Cattlemen at 12noon. All are welcome at Chat & Chew regardless of membership status. Enjoy the company of like minded folk and have a leisurely lunch and some stimulating conversation.

Annual Carl Sagan Picnic is April 9 at the Turtle Beach Pavilion from 4-7pm. Bring a dish to share along with your own drink and ice. Chicken will be furnished by HUSBAY. Darwin Soder and Sue Tschesnok will host. The Pavilion is south on Midnight Pass road going south from Stickney Pt. The Pavilion is just pass the entrance to the beach.

From page 3

moderate, more like opposition parties elsewhere in the world.

I'm not arguing for pessimism. It would be overstating the case to say that America is hopeless or that change is impossible. On the contrary, we've made significant change for the better over the course of our history. The New Deal, the Great Society, the Voting Rights Act, Obamacare, the Inflation Reduc-

tion Act, and more have made the country fairer and better than it was. Step by painful step, we've drawn closer to the high aspirations contained in the best parts of our founding documents.

It's genuinely impressive that American progressives have achieved as much as we have despite all the hurdles put in the way. It's testament to the reformers' ingenuity, tenacity and fighting spirit. But it should never have had to be this hard.

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

**President's Message
The Resurrection**

As we approach the Easter season in this country, it brings to mind the crazy beliefs the Christians possess, and also the fun of Easter bunnies and Easter baskets. I grew up enjoying those side perks as a kid.

Scientists today often raise someone from near death, however not in the case of a friend who died recently. No amount of thoughts and prayers would have the slightest chance of reviving him. I hoped science could do it, but his brain was too damaged.

As I think of these events, I am prompted to recall my parents' deaths which were both very traumatic for me. Though they were very old, I still suffered shock and regret. However, nothing could raise them from the dead either.

On Easter Sunday, I will join other HUSBAY members for our annual Carl Sagan Picnic and chuckle over the irony of it all.

Dave Helgager

We're the only developed country in the world that unconditionally allows civilians to own military-style assault weapons, that allows "open carry," and that lets gun manufacturers openly buy politicians (thanks, Republicans on the Supreme Court). As a consequence, we're also the only country in the world where the leading cause of death for children is being blown apart by bullets.

Thom Hartmann

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Donations made during the month

Contributor: \$25 to \$49

Supporter: \$50 to \$99

Leader: \$100 to \$199

Allstar: \$200 to \$500

**Want to have your name appear here?
Just make a donation of \$25 or more
during the month.**

"The cure for poverty has a name: it's called
THE
EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN

Now, name me a religion that stands, or has ever stood, for that..."

-Christopher Hitchens



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FFRF ads tell DeSantis: You're right — Our schools aren't for indoctrination

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is running a full-page ad in both the Tallahassee Democrat and the Miami Herald with a surprising headline: "Yes, Governor DeSantis — You're Right." Concur the national state/church watchdog: "Our schools are for education, *not* indoctrination."

But there the agreement ends.

It is DeSantis, FFRF charges, who wants to use public schools to indoctrinate Florida students. He is censoring books, free inquiry and classroom debate over gender, sexual orientation, race and Black American history. He's allowing a minority of extremists to impose their views on other parents with his so-called "Parents Bill of Rights." For good measure, FFRF mentions proposals to hobble freedom of speech and the press.

DeSantis notably has decreed several times that "our rights come from God, not government." Au contraire, FFRF says. "Gov. DeSantis, our rights come from 'We the People,' not your god." While FFRF concurs with DeSantis that "The Founders rejected the divine rights of kings," FFRF's ad reminds him that "they threw out divine rights altogether" by adopting an entirely godless Constitution.

While Desantis has oft-repeated that "Florida is the place where woke goes to die," FFRF urges Floridians to "wake up." Exhorts FFRF: "Don't let Florida become the state where the First Amendment goes to die." As DeSantis promotes his book, "The Courage to Be Free," FFRF urges Florida citizens to "Embrace *the courage to be free* . . . from inquisitional intrusion into free inquiry and debate, what students may read, learn and how they grow into themselves in our public schools and universities."

DeSantis won't "say gay," the ad charges, but he does say "God" altogether too much in his official capacity, thereby entangling religion with government and public schools, says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

FFRF urges Floridians to "Help FFRF keep our government and public schools free from religious control, indoctrination and censorship."

FFRF's educational advertising is made possible thanks to generous members who make a tax-deductible donation to [FFRF's Advertising Fund](#).

[The Freedom From Religion Foundation](#) is the nation's largest association of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics) working to keep religion out of government. FFRF has almost 40,000 members and more than 1,900 in Florida.



"THERE IS SOMETHING FEEBLE & a little contemptible about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of ... COMFORTABLE MYTHS.

Moreover, since he is aware, however dimly, that his opinions are not rational, *he becomes furious when they are disputed.*"

-BERTRAND RUSSELL
Philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, pacifist, and social critic.

Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Quotes

FACEBOOK.COM/GODLESSQUOTES