

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: Richard Collier collier.rt@undisclosed.com

To: Nick Gardiner enpg@thepassyress.com

Date: Jan 24, 2016, at 9:54 PM EST

Subject: Essay Novitski December 2015

Dear Sir

First, some background is appropriate. I spent much of my early and formative years in Hawaii, my mother's home. I am a proud fourth generation kamaaina. During those years up until Statehood in 1957, Hawaii was a benevolent oligarchy. There was an elected legislature that was to reflect the will of the people. However, there also was a Governor General, appointed from Washington, who had the power to overrule the legislature if he felt what they were doing was not in the best interests of the Territory, its people and commerce. Over the years, this power was exercised gently, largely because the legislature knew that going to any extreme more likely than not would be overruled. Thus, the legislators learned to compromise, make deals and, most important, get along. Thus grew the idea of Hawaii as the great melting pot, where all races and nationalities (and there were many), business and workers got along and the place worked extremely well.

With Statehood, that all changed, and being there I can say not for the better. With no longer the check and balance of the Governor General, politics quickly became polarized, initially driven by Harry Bridges, and avowed Communist, taking over the longshoremen who, of course as Bridges and everyone else knew, could bring the Islands to their knees. Which, of course, he promptly did, with a devastating strike. It took the Federal government intervening to bring things back, but sadly, not to the normal of pre-Statehood. It took many years and more strikes to purge Bridges, his ideology and social divisiveness and allow government to function more or less normally again.

The point is: I am not against oligarchy per se, as long as it is benevolent. So, you may ask, who were the oligarchs: A combination of business leaders, descendants of missionary families, the clergy and professional people numbering, perhaps, 2-300. All were, in one form or another, active civically and many served in the legislature. They were, you would say, the power elite of the day, antecedents of those Novitski excoriates today. But it worked well there for several generations. Which is why, all of 18 but very aware in 1957, I was one of the few who openly said that Statehood was wrong for Hawaii. Certainly the first ten years or so proved me right. Once things got sorted out, helped by a booming economy, the dysfunction did work out thereafter. But it was quite ugly and uncertain for a quite a while, as racial and class issues stoked by Bridges' movement rose in the political arena. Divisiveness such as we see today in a community unprepared for it.

Now to Joe's Novitski's essay.

First, yes, there is too much money in politics. This is one area where we should level the playing field. Those now (ostensibly) in charge, who all bemoan the time they must spend fund raising, can fix this quickly by agreeing that every House, Senate or Presidential candidate should have a fixed amount to spend, first in primary and then in general election. This will only work if,

like pre-'57 Hawaii, all come together. Candidates would be freed from spending up to 2/3 of their time grimacing and dialing. And, forced to ration spending, the candidates will have to spend where it matters: for effect instead of carpet bombing the media and electorate with meaningless stuff and attack ads. Since we don't have a governor general, this has to be done collectively in the spirit of solving a problem no one can do alone and in a way that no one is disadvantaged. Some advocate a Constitutional Convention. I advocate a Legislative Convention focused only on this issue, with full transparency, that ends only when a deal is struck. Lock them in the room, so to speak.

Second, I think Joe Novitski gives far too much credit to the easy-to-target Koch brothers and their like. And he lets the militant public employee unions off free. The phenomenon of Donald Trump (yes, hold your nose) shows that all across the land, ordinary folk with ordinary lives have had it with the Washington (sub)-elites. Economically and socially, these and the Koch/Adelson/Hollywood liberals could not be more different. But they share more in common than was previously apparent: disgust with the way the "system" is not working.

Third, the great tragedy of the past few years is that the Fed and Washington - and particularly Obama and the Democrats when they controlled both houses - wasted treasure when, if they were going to run the money printing presses, at least do it for something productive: fix our dilapidated and decaying infrastructure. Think of the millions who could have gone to work under a modern-day WPA. The labor participation rate, instead of being at a record low would likely be at a record high. And our economy would be booming; the envy of the world. Talk about a wasted opportunity. If the Republicans want something to run on besides failed foreign policy (which rarely motivates voters) it should be to bang on this colossal failure of leadership by both the President and his party. [By the way, I think the Republicans are bankrupt morally and policy-wise, and the current list of strivers an embarrassment.]

Finally, yes, a form of national service should be mandatory. But how many generations will it take before the results of Joe Novitski's thesis shows in the make-up of our legislatures? We don't have that kind of time. Rather we should (1) impose term limits on all public elective office; (2) equalize the money playing field as above; (3) require a minimum level of practical management experience for any Presidential candidate, as it is primarily a management job. And when one gets in office with none, as we have in Obama, it shows. He doesn't know how to work with his customers (Senate and House), hire good and competent people, bring disparate element together, set strategy and manage through it. This is one of the main reasons that Senators (Usually lawyers who, by definition, are not managers) usually make lousy presidents while ex-governors do better.)

So I find Joe Novitski's advocacy of national service to be noble and, long-term, to the betterment of our nation, but it's also a bit naive and pollyanish for today. We are facing tough questions that require more immediate and practical solutions.

Sincerely,

Dick Collier

Dick Collier Retired from, first, 32 years in virtually every aspect of the real estate industry, and then 15 years as a founding principal of an alternative investment management firm. Currently he is active in homebuilding, citrus farming, property investment and historic motorsports.