

Some Views (2023)

David M Gay

In the following, I comment briefly on various issues of these fraught times. You may disagree with some of my views, and that is OK. When I met my late wife Tanner in Boston in the late 1970's, people had many different views on various topics, and it was fine to express those views. I think this is healthy. Often there are arguments for and against a position, and the weights you assign to these arguments will decide your position, pro or con. Different people often assign different weights. It is helpful if you explain why you favor or oppose an issue; perhaps you will convince others to modify their weights and thus their position; or, after hearing some arguments and seeing new evidence, you might sometimes change your own mind.

One of the things I find objectionable are politicians who lie. I urge you not to vote for such politicians. At the moment, that means not voting for Donald Trump or his supporters, as they continue to lie that he won the 2020 presidential election.

In high school, civics was a required course. We learned about various systems of government, particularly our own. None is perfect. For the short term, a benign dictatorship is best, as reasonable decisions can be made and enforced. The trouble is that dictatorships do not remain benign for long. Democracies are slow and klunky, but in the long run they are far better than dictatorships. Thus I favor democracy. While our system can certainly be improved, I urge you to oppose politicians who would destroy rather than improve our democratic system. Sadly, this means opposing many of the current Republican leaders. (In high school, I was a Young Republican. Back then, the Republicans had what I considered to be desirable principles. Now the only principle for many of them seems to be to support Donald Trump.)

Though I attend church and sing in the choir, I also believe in science: gather data, try to explain it, and base decisions on the currently known best explanations. Our modern life has benefited greatly from science. Please oppose politicians who make assertions contradicted by science or who are unwilling to look honestly at evidence.

One of my views is that for every dollar you earn, you should keep part of that dollar. That means there should be no means testing in government programs. Everyone should get the benefits. There should always be an incentive to earn more money. I also believe in graduated income taxes, so you will keep less and less of each additional dollar, but you will always keep some of that dollar.

Maybe I'm a socialist, as I believe in medicare for all, free lunches for all students, and tuition-free college and graduate school for academically qualified students. I would

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get rid of homelessness by having a government program to make very simple housing available to everyone. If you want something fancier, you must earn money and pay for it.

Hereditary wealth is bad for the country. I believe in high estate taxes on large inherited wealth, with no tax on the first portion of an estate, and no tax on contributions to 501(c)(3) entities. Details would be worked out by suitable legislation.

I want to put drug pushers out of business. To that end, I would make addictive drugs cheaply, easily, and legally available at drugstores, so there would be no financial incentive to getting people hooked on drugs. I do not want to encourage addiction and would include warnings on packaging and offer suitable drug treatments in medicare for all. Perhaps fentanyl should remain illegal.

Speaking of drugs, I want to encourage development of new treatments while keeping costs reasonable. Once a drug company has profits of, say, twice what it has invested in research to develop a particular drug, it would need to limit the drug's cost to a reasonable fraction more than the cost of manufacturing the drug. Thus there would be incentives to develop new drugs and to manufacture drugs in general, but costs would, I hope, be contained.

While I do not like deficit spending, I think the current federal deficit is due largely to tax cuts during the terms of Presidents Bush and Trump. The solution is to undo those mistaken tax cuts. The trickle-down benefits they were supposed to engender have not materialized. This is one area where politicians need to honestly look at data.

I think the second amendment to the U.S. constitution should be read as allowing everyone to have a single-shot, unrifled, muzzle-loading gun, i.e., the technology current when the amendment was written, with anything more modern subject to regulation. If only we had sensible judges who could actually judge, that would be a reasonable interpretation.

Concerning freedom of speech, I think it should apply to direct speech by actual people, with anyone transmitting that speech, e.g., over the air or on the internet, subject to identification. We should be able to find out who is paying to have speech broadcast. Organizations that transmit speech should be required to identify all their sources of income and the amounts of that income. In particular, it should be possible to determine who is contributing to an organization and how much they are contributing.

Concerning global warming, I favor a carbon tax and an end to subsidies for fossil-fuel production. With a suitable tax on carbon, I imagine we would switch fairly quickly to renewable sources of energy, of which plenty is available. The sun showers us with energy.

If you find some of my views wrong, please feel free to tell me why. My E-mail address is dmg@acm.org.