

Summer Discussion – Memorial Union Terrace or Cafeteria (rain)

Bernard Friedlander – Discussion Leader – July 2, 2019

Can Rich, Intelligent Donors Finance America Out of Our Current Socio-Political Doldrums?

My question for today's discussion is simple.

*Imagine one of us had millions or billions of dollars to devote to our image of the public good in times of stress like these. How should we spend large amounts of money for the purpose of seeking realistic ways to re-direct the current drift of American political decision-making? Remember: **human behavior is the most complex system On Planet Earth.***

I am currently writing a memoir of my very long friendship with an extremely wealthy and successfully anonymous American. He made it a major focus of his adult life to use the mechanisms of finance and philanthropy to try to redeem his sense of family guilt for the serious misbehavior of his ancestors who gained their great wealth on the dark side of American behavior. In addition to being extremely successful in business, they were also criminals.

During the course of his mature years, my friend mobilized tens and hundreds of millions of dollars from his own family fortune, and by other means of fund raising, to devote to reparative and constructive philanthropies.

Just before he died, in his old age, Burton Fine realized that whatever social benefits might have sprung from his philanthropic efforts, they did not have any effect on raising the social values of our American public morals that might constrict the kinds of institutionalized stupidity, venality, corruption, crime, and short-sightedness cited below by Thomas Friedman. As the Presidential campaign for Election 2020 opens, it is evident that our best American social and political values are about to be put to a test they may not successfully survive.

In a nutshell, if Burton Fine were starting out all over again on his life of philanthropy, how should he better spend his money for the public good—now, and in the years ahead?

Connect The Dots To See Where Trump is Taking Us

Thomas Friedman, New York Times Opinion Columnist, June 11, 2019

Just when you think you've seen and heard it all from Donald Trump, he sinks to a new low that leaves you speechless and wondering: Is he crazy, is he evil, is he maniacally committed to unwinding every good thing Barack Obama did, or is he just plain stupid?

I mean, what president would try to weaken emission standards so American-made cars could pollute more, so our kids could breathe dirtier air in the age of climate change, when clean energy systems are becoming the next great global industry and China is focused on dominating it?

Seriously, *who does that?*

But that's the initiative Trump has embarked upon of late — an industrial policy to revive all the dirty industries of the past and to undermine the clean industries of the future.

It is a policy initiative that is not only perverse on its face, but that utterly fails to connect so many dots that are right now harming our national security, economy, weather and competition with China.

Think of the dots Trump refuses to connect:

Dot No. 1: Get the term “global warming” out of your head. What's actually happening is better described as “global weirding.” The warming of the atmosphere makes the weather weird. First, the hots get hotter. This then leads to greater evaporation, which means there's more water vapor in clouds for precipitation. So the wets get wetter and the floods get wider. But the droughts in dry areas also get drier.

Some of the colds can even get colder, as when a weakened polar vortex, which normally keeps cold air trapped in the Arctic, allows more frigid polar air to push southward into the U.S. At the same time, the hurricanes that are fueled by warmer ocean temperatures get more violent.

That's why you're seeing weird weather extremes in all directions. So, [The Washington Post reported](#) that in Montana: "On March 3, the low temperature tanked to a bone-chilling minus-32 in Great Falls. Combined with a high of minus-8, the day finished a whopping 50 degrees below normal." At the time, the city was in its longest stretch below freezing on record.

But then [The Post reported](#) that on May 11 in a town "near the entrance to the Arctic Ocean in northwest Russia, the temperature surged to 84 degrees Fahrenheit" — in May! Near the Arctic! And this happened at the same time that "the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere eclipsed 415 parts per million for the first time in human history."

Now let's go to Dot No. 2: On May 30, the National Weather Service declared that in the continental U.S. "there's never been a wetter 12 months than the period that recently ended" — since it began keeping records 124 years ago, [CNN reported](#). But this global weirding not only devastated Midwestern farmers, requiring huge insurance payouts, it also hammered the U.S. military.

The Air Force had to request \$4.9 billion to repair just two weather-ravaged bases. [As NPR reported](#), "about one-third of Offutt Air Force Base, in eastern Nebraska, was underwater earlier this month as flooding hit large swaths of the Midwest. And Tyndall Air Force Base in the Florida Panhandle was hit hard by Hurricane Michael in October."

The then-Air Force secretary, Heather Wilson, declared "that 61 projects — consisting largely of operations and maintenance — at air bases in 18 states would not happen if the supplemental disaster funding does not come through."

Dot No. 3: So on June 6, Trump signed a \$19.1 billion disaster relief bill, boasting: "Just signed Disaster Aid Bill to help Americans who have been hit by recent catastrophic storms. So important for our GREAT American farmers and ranchers."

Dot No. 4: THE VERY SAME DAY, this newspaper reported, "The world's largest automakers warned President Trump on Thursday that one of his most sweeping deregulatory efforts — his plan to weaken tailpipe pollution standards — threatens to cut their profits and produce 'untenable' instability in a crucial manufacturing sector.

"In a letter signed by 17 companies including Ford, General Motors, Toyota and Volvo, the automakers asked Mr. Trump to go back to the negotiating table on the planned rollback of one of President Barack Obama's signature policies to fight climate change."

The story explained that Trump's new rule "would all but eliminate the Obama-era auto pollution regulations, essentially freezing mileage standards at about 37 miles per gallon for cars, down from a target of 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025." And because California and 13 other states are committed to fulfilling Obama's or other higher standards, and will go to court to make sure they can, it will split the U.S. auto market into two — a huge problem for the car companies.

Personally, I have no sympathy for the automakers. They brought this on themselves. They, and those in Congress who coddle them, have a long history of assisted suicide.

They got the G.O.P. to more or less freeze the 1980s mileage improvement standards that grew out of the 1970s oil crisis, claiming it would be too expensive for them to keep improving. And what did we get? More pollution in America and therefore more childhood asthma and other health costs, and a bankrupt auto industry that had to be bailed out in 2008 in part because the Japanese out-innovated it in the 1980s and 1990s by holding to higher mileage standards and creating more fuel-efficient fleets.

And now these same foolish and selfish Detroit auto executives, in combination with Trump's coal-lobby-led Environmental Protection Agency, want to rerun the same play. The companies just wanted Trump to not get as crazy in rolling back standards as he did.

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As any industrial designer will tell you, smart, steadily rising environmental standards spur innovation and inspire companies to race to the top and become global market leaders. Obama's emission standards spurred the U.S. auto industry to catch up, and now Trump wants the companies to slow down their innovation and pollute more, in order to drive up their short-term profits. It's like burning your furniture to heat your house.

As University of Oregon Law Professor Greg Dotson, a former senior energy congressional staffer, pointed out in an essay on theconversation.com titled "Why E.P.A.'s U-turn on Auto Efficiency Rules Gives China the Upper Hand": "Reversing course on the E.P.A.'s tailpipe standards threatens to yield this competitive advantage to other nations ... China's recently adopted goals for plug-in vehicle overtake California's program by requiring an aggressive deployment of plug-in vehicles beginning in 2019 with a target of seven million new plug-in cars sold per year by 2025. The Chinese government is even openly discussing the appropriate date to discontinue sales of internal combustion engine vehicles within China."

Yup, let's make China great again!

If you want to know what a real president would be doing, just look at [Michael Bloomberg's "Beyond Carbon" initiative](#), which has committed \$500 million for the biggest coordinated campaign ever to promote clean energy.

Nine new governors were elected in 2018 on platforms to power their states by 100 percent clean energy, as California has already committed itself to. Some are small, like New Mexico, and may need technical assistance for their plans. "Beyond Carbon" is designed to support such states. It also offers aid to utilities, cities and businesses that need help or staffing to adopt innovative programs to clean their air and water and to lower carbon emissions, particularly by shutting down coal power plants and replacing them with clean energy.

Alas, when you actually connect all of the dots they draw a line pointing straight backward:

Trump is trying to lower auto emission/mileage standards that were making our car companies more competitive against efficient Chinese and Japanese automakers — and making our air cleaner — while Trump is signing multibillion-dollar bailouts for farmers and Air Force bases ravaged by extreme weather that has been amplified by climate change that is amplified by carbon pollution, while Trump is having his bureaucrats hide evidence of climate change and while Trump is forcing Americans to pay billions in tariffs on Chinese imports to protect against, among other things, future competition from Chinese electric vehicles that have zero emissions and zero oil consumption.

This is not strategic. This is not winning. This is not patriotic. It's just foolish, destructive and cynical.

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Thomas L. Friedman is the foreign affairs Op-Ed columnist. He joined the paper in 1981, and has won three Pulitzer Prizes. He is the author of seven books, including "From Beirut to Jerusalem," which won the National Book Award. [@tomfriedman](#)