

T. Kayes Open Forum BOJ 11/5/2019

Provided by Terry Kayes (Placerville, California)

November 5, 2019

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors Meeting
Open Forum Commentary by Terry Kayes, District 3

Madam Chairman,

For over 20 years now, I've been dealing with a serious neurological disorder that has recently been causing me increasing problems with balance and my voice. (I can also sometimes cause me to be impatient and cranky.)

Accordingly, I am requesting 4 minutes to have my say. It shouldn't take me quite that long.

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors Meeting
Open Forum Commentary by Terry Kayes, District 3

**(No Ethics + Self-Absorbed + Dumbed-Down + Consumption-Fixated) +
(Trained Incapacity + Narcotizing Dysfunction) → Catastrophic Failure
of Citizenship, Effective Government, Civil Order, and Civilization**

Near the close of my comments in Open Forum on October 22nd, I included the above formula, which is meant to say that when a society exists from which ethics is rapidly disappearing and most of whose people are almost entirely self-absorbed, dumbed-down and consumption-fixated — coupled with "trained incapacity" and "narcotizing dysfunction" (two terms which I will briefly explain in a moment) — than what typically follows is a catastrophic failure of citizenship, effective government, civil order, and ultimately (if not reversed) civilization in general. That is what history shows.

To anyone who was alive and paying attention in the 1950s, the process of cognitive "dumbing down" began in America with the rapid growth of advertising and commercial television in the few years immediately following the end of the Second World War in September 1945. Add to this the widespread, systematic deconstruction between the early 1950s and the mid 1960s of a once effective primary and secondary system of education, based on sound pedagogy aimed at teaching young people essential skills (like reading with comprehension, sensible writing and speaking, and how to pay attention), and how to employ such skills to think critically and on one's own. Slightly later came the "self-esteem movement" with its grade inflation — which became increasingly blatant starting in the later 1960s and continuing apace into the early 21st century, not only in the lower and secondary schools, but also into the (pre-baccalaureate) colleges, and postgraduate and professional schools, so that nowadays it's not uncommon to

find graduates of such highly-focused training who, for all practical purposes are alliterate or are functional illiterates, who call scanning "reading" without (fully) understanding what they see on a screen or a printed page. Yet they claim they can read.

Then there's the matter of "trained incapacity," first referred to in the early 20th century by the brilliant sociologist (and social critic) and one of the early founders of "behavioral economics," Thorstein Veblen, who correctly observed that college students who were being intensively trained in specific professional occupations, too often later, revealed a "trained incapacity" to see, or to learn, the value of other areas of knowledge, thus making them deficient in ever knowing how to think across boundaries, with a pragmatist's appreciation of the practical world.

It was the pioneering work in the late 1940s by the sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton that lead to their theory of "narcotizing dysfunction," which says "as mass media inundates people on a particular issue, they become apathetic to it, substituting knowledge for action." This is a fact now "in play."

I'll have more to say about the above and other factors, as they pertain to ethics and trust in government, in future Open-Forum commentaries, focusing increasingly on the dubious practices of Caltrans, the California Air Resources Board, and other entities.

Thank you for your attention.