



# Independent

NEWSLETTER OF THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE

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## The “Green New Deal”: Not Dead Yet

By Robert P. Murphy



Earlier this year, the U.S. Senate blocked a non-binding resolution to adopt the so-called “Green New Deal.” Although the measure was killed by a vote of 0-57, the ideas and fervor it embodied did not die with it. Indeed, the toxic mix of hardcore environmentalism and social justice radicalism will continue pouring from left-wing pundits (and from politicized school children) even if congressional gatekeepers view a formal endorsement as too politically hazardous in the current political climate.

Championed in the House of Representatives by “progressive” darling Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), the original Green New Deal resolution called for a 15-member committee to draft a comprehensive national plan to make the U.S. economy “greenhouse gas emissions neutral” and to “promote economic and environmental justice and equality.”

For an initial price tag of \$1 trillion over ten years (not counting the additional harm caused by the associated taxes and regulations), the committee would have enjoyed “a mandate that connects the dots between energy, transportation, housing and construction, as well as health care, living wages, a jobs guarantee, and the urgent imperative to battle racial and gender injustice,” wrote progressive journalist Naomi Klein.

This raises many questions, among them: Isn’t it odd that Ocasio-Cortez and Klein say we have 12 years to save humanity from climate catastrophe, yet now’s apparently the time to talk about fixing gender imbalances? And if greenhouse gases are really an existential threat, shouldn’t New Green Dealers embrace nuclear power as a pragmatic way to reach their emission goals, rather than explicitly rejecting this politically unpopular power source? The apparent paradoxes vanish once we realize that in the modern political climate, “global warming” is a pretext.

Aside from its hodge-podge of competing priorities, the Green New Deal would commit enormous sums of money to pursuing impossible goals, ultimately raising energy prices and hurting consumers, especially the poor. Even if one believes that current levels of carbon dioxide emissions are harming the environment, it takes a leap of faith to believe that policymakers have the full knowledge and purest incentives to pick the “right” amount of carbon tax so as to optimize atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Look closely, however, and you’ll find that Green New Dealers freely admit that a carbon tax will neither slash fossil fuel emissions nor

*(continued on page 7)*

**Robert P. Murphy** is a research fellow at the Independent Institute, research assistant professor with the Free Market Institute at Texas Tech University, and author of the Independent Institute book, *Choice: Cooperation, Enterprise, and Human Action*.



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## Executive Director's Letter

## Why Is Liberty Good?



*Graham Walker*  
GRAHAM H. WALKER  
Executive Director

Carved into his memorial in Washington D.C., are these words of Thomas Jefferson: “God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?” Turning then to slavery, he said, “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just.” Obviously, his trembling was justified. He should have taken his own anxiety more seriously.

Jefferson’s statement located the value of liberty within a larger context of meaning to which humans are morally accountable. In historical context, Jefferson’s view implied the then widely accepted idea that man is *imago dei*, that is, made in the image of God; hence

the ultimate value of persons and the significance of human liberty as a reflection of divine liberty.

Jefferson’s own views on God were, to be sure, a bit ambiguous. And, many people in our era would not follow him even as far as he went in the direction of theism. But we need not follow him there to learn something from the way he framed the issue.

Jefferson’s formulation reminds us that liberty is not self-justifying and, moreover, that just because something is done “freely,” i.e., without coercion, does not mean it is *ipso facto* good. He reminds us that liberty can be defended only if its value is derived from a greater good, and that liberty cannot be an end in itself. It needs a basis, and its use needs moral limits.

If we cannot follow Jefferson all the way to his sources, we can and indeed must recognize that human liberty is good because humans are valuable. Human beings are the pivotal dimension of a complex natural reality whose interdependent threads comprise a physical and moral ecology that is not man-made. The natural moral order is, rather, an independent fact to which humans are accountable. Among other things, this is why the Founding generation affirmed that there is something like a natural moral

law, and natural rights deriving from it. Humans are significant in a way that deserves respect. If they are nothing more than material accidents in a morally indifferent universe, then neither their dignity nor their liberty matters much.

Everyone can now agree that slavery was an immoral institution that belied the Founders’ commitment to liberty—as Jefferson candidly acknowledged. But there are plenty of new threats to human liberty and human dignity, many of them undreamed-of in earlier eras. As in earlier eras, most threats stem from government: either a failure to enforce the rule of law that protects people’s lives, liberty, and property, or an unhealthy growth in government power over society and the economy. To combat these threats, we must have a place to stand. That’s why our policy work at Independent often indirectly reflects a natural law tradition of human liberty and worth. This tradition combines the insights of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian wisdom, leading to the work of Augustine, Cicero, Seneca, Aquinas, Montesquieu, Locke, Bastiat, Madison, Smith, Tocqueville, Acton, C.S. Lewis, and many others.

In other words, there are good reasons to defend liberty, and when you do it you’re in good company!

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NEW BOOK

# Restoring the Promise: Higher Education in America



Higher education, according to Independent Institute Senior Fellow **Richard K. Vedder**, suffers from a triple crisis: it's too costly, too little learning occurs, and the return on investment is falling both for students and society.

To fulfill its traditional mission, Vedder argues in his new book, *Restoring the Promise: Higher Education in America*, colleges and universities must collect better information, implement what experts know about learning, become more innovative, and have "skin in the game" so their incentives are aligned with good outcomes for their graduates. Collectively, these reforms would spark a true educational renaissance, with benefits accruing to students, their families, and society at large.

A product of Vedder's more than fifty years of toiling in the academic vineyards (including as founding director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity in Washington, D.C.), *Restoring the Promise* equips the reader to understand and champion the necessary changes and to spark the renaissance all the sooner.

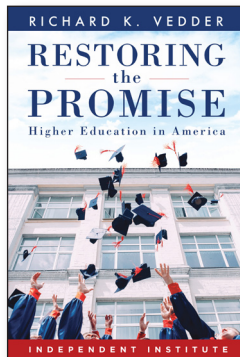
Here are some highlights from this tremendously insightful and deeply researched book:

- *America's colleges and universities are increasingly expensive—far more costly than 25 or 50 years ago—causing graduates to defer buying a home, starting a family, saving for retirement, and pursuing the American Dream.* The main fault lies with misguided government policies, especially federal student financial assistance programs that artificially boost demand and enable schools to exploit students through price discrimination. It's estimated that every dollar per student in federal financial aid leads to about a 60 cent increase in tuition fees.

- *Evidence from surveys of more than 2,300 students on diverse campuses suggests that students gain little important knowledge during their college years.* Exceptions include vocationally useful disciplines such as engineering, nursing, architecture, or accounting. On average, students are in classrooms or studying for less than 30 hours weekly for about 32 weeks a year.
- *Higher education often confers surprisingly little advantage in the job market, making college a risky investment for many.* An estimated 40 percent of recent college graduates are "underemployed," working in jobs that don't require a degree: Uber drivers, baristas, big box store cashiers, and the like. Some 40 percent or more of students fail to graduate from college in even six years.
- *Colleges are notoriously inefficient, with few incentives to lower costs or improve quality.* Colleges are swarming with administrators, far outnumbering faculty. Buildings lie empty much of the year. Professors at even teaching-oriented schools rarely teach even 400 hours a year, down at least one-third over the past half century.
- *Academic debate on campus has increasingly yielded to intellectual conformity.* Reasoned debate among alternative viewpoints is too often limited. Many prominent campuses have become bastions of a "progressive" leftist monoculture.

To spark a renaissance in higher education, three concepts are critical: information, incentives, and innovation.

Vedder's recommendations—and market-based principles—should be implemented quickly. Nothing less than the fate of American higher education is at stake.



For more information, see [www.independent.org/books](http://www.independent.org/books)

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## Independent Institute in the News

### Center on Law and Justice

“The bill that just passed in the House is the first step to gun registration. It’s so-called universal background checks, and that’s totally ineffective unless you have registration of the guns. So, who’s going to register their guns? Law-abiding people. Criminals don’t register guns. What a useless farce it is, and they’re parading themselves as the protectors of our children.”

—**Stephen P. Halbrook** on *The Rob Schilling Radio Show*, 3/6/19



SR. FELLOW IVAN ELAND ON C-SPAN'S  
*WASHINGTON JOURNAL* 2/18/19

### Center on Peace and Liberty

“Executive power is the government these days because 99 percent of the employees of the federal government work for the executive branch. You can’t be for a small government if you’re for executive power. You just can’t do it. It’s a contradiction.”

—**Ivan Eland** on C-SPAN’s *Washington Journal*, 2/18/19

### Center on Culture and Civil Society

“Freeing housing markets is thus the master key to solving San Francisco’s inequality, homelessness and housing crises.”

—**Mary L. G. Theroux** in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 2/19/19

### Center on Entrepreneurial Innovation

“[California’s] DMV has threatened a ‘return of unacceptable field office wait times’ if it does not get millions more of taxpayer dollars—its current budget is \$1.2 billion. Budgetary blackmail by a national poster child for bureaucratic incompetence is unacceptable. Instead, major reform is needed.”

—**Lawrence J. McQuillan** in *The Orange County Register*, 3/1/19

### Center on Global Prosperity

“Today the [Cuban] Revolution continues to be a police state that brutally represses any form of dissidence, and its reforms have yielded nothing but failure...Sixty years on, Cuba has nothing but misery to show for itself—and an extraordinary ability to delude itself and many others.”

—**Alvaro Vargas Llosa** in *Investor’s Business Daily*, 1/18/19

### Center on Health and the Environment

“What the U.S. healthcare system needs more than mere transparency is increased competition. Unfortunately, the healthcare sector’s overly burdensome regulatory system often limits competition through ‘Certificate of Need’ laws and other restrictions on innovation and patient choice.”

—**Raymond J. March** in *The Washington Examiner*, 3/20/19

### Center on Educational Excellence

“The Alexis de Tocqueville who so admired an America full of opportunity for all would not admire a nation where the path to success is advanced by bribing rowing coaches and entrance-examination proctors. Colleges argue they need public subsidies because they advance the American Dream featuring high inter-generational income mobility; this scandal certainly is another blot on that argument.”

—**Richard K. Vedder** in *Forbes*, 3/13/19



SR. FELLOW RICHARD VEDDER ON FOX NEWS  
CHANNEL’S *JOURNAL EDITORIAL REPORT* 1/26/19

“It shouldn’t be this hard to figure out whether specific education department programs are working. What we do know from publicly available spending and achievement data is that, since 1970, education spending has roughly tripled in real, inflation-adjusted terms, but student achievement has remained largely flat.”

—**Vicki E. Alger** in *The Federalist*, 2/19/19

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW

# Philanthropy and a Free Society

Private charity offers tremendous but overlooked potential for advancing the general welfare in a free society. This crucial subject is the focus of *The Independent Review's* Spring 2019 symposium, "Exploring the Philanthropic Landscape."

"Generosity, philanthropy, and charity are part of the warp and woof of a free society and as complements to the market process are critically important social processes," writes **Lenore T. Ealey**, president of The Philanthropic Enterprise, in her introduction to the symposium.

For better or worse, governments shape the context in which private charities operate: they can constrain it, protect it, or promote it. **Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill**, director of the Campus Free Expression Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center, traces the philosophical roots of each approach in "From Hobbes to Hayek: Perspectives on Civil Society and Philanthropy."

How well do advocates of a free society grasp the importance and potential of private philanthropy? Not well enough, according to Duke University economics and political science professor (and co-editor of *The Independent Review*) **Michael C. Munger**. In "Making the Voluntaryist Venn Work for Us, Not against Us," Munger argues that freedom's advocates blunder when they champion the price mechanism as the only means for organizing diverse, decentralized groups in society. Non-market private cooperation plays an even greater role than market exchange, Munger explains.

Taking a different tack, poverty and welfare policy scholar **Samuel P. Hammond** (Niskanen Center) suggests that freedom's advocates generally overestimate



THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW  
SPRING 2019

the ability of private philanthropy to deal with complex social problems. In "It (Still) Takes a Nation: Why Private Charity Will Never Replace the Welfare State," he argues that some combination of market growth and state-provided welfare programs would likely best promote economic security and individual flourishing. Hammond's and Munger's thought-provoking articles should prompt much discussion within the freedom movement.

Regardless of their political ideology or religious creed, champions of philanthropy should recognize that charitable groups of all stripes can learn much from faith-based organizations that effectively serve the needs of local communities. Political scientist **Anthony J. Gill** (Univ. of Washington) shows why in his article, "Of Credence and Collective Action: Religion's Comparative Advantages in Social Charity." Faith-based institutions, Gill explains, are generally less likely to foster long-term dependence on charity, and they also provide useful training for volunteers whose outreach efforts benefit the community at large.

To further advance their mis-

sions, philanthropic leaders should also pay close attention to the rise of the millennial generation. Millennials are poised to possess more spending power than GenXers, Baby Boomers, or their predecessors. One powerful tip for attracting and retaining Millennial donors is to offer them programs that tie contributions to high-quality, personalized experiences, according to North Dakota State University professors **Elizabeth Crisp Crawford** (Dept. of Communications) and **Jeremy Jackson** (Dept. of Agribusiness and Applied Economics), authors of the symposium's closing article, "Philanthropy in the Millennial Age: Trends toward Polycentric Personalized Philanthropy."

"Organizations that fail to adapt to the needs and demands of the rising millennial generation will see their resources and their effectiveness dwindle as they are replaced by coproduced polycentric philanthropic organizations that have adapted to the fast-paced, decentralized, personalized approach," Crawford and Jackson write.

As a non-profit organization working to advance free societies, the Independent Institute hopes like-minded groups will gain ideas and inspiration from this symposium. Together we can advance freedom, prosperity, and individual flourishing for people around the globe.

See [www.independentreview.org](http://www.independentreview.org)

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## CALIFORNIA GOLDEN FLEECE® AWARDS

## California Wildfires Burning from Bad Incentives

California's wildfires of 2017 and 2018 were the worst in the state's history, claiming 3 million acres and at least 130 lives.

The failure of the state's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) to heed earlier warnings has led the Independent Institute to designate the agency, for the second time in two years, as the "winner" of the *California Golden Fleece® Award*, a dishonor given to California state or local agencies or government projects that swindle taxpayers or break the public trust.

The case against Cal Fire and other blameworthy public agencies—and the remedy—are detailed in the latest California Golden Fleece® Award Report, *California Wildfires: Key Recommendations to Prevent Future Disasters*, by **Lawrence J. McQuillan, Hayeon Carol Park, Adam B. Summers, and Katherine Dwyer**.

The report finds that Cal Fire and other parties focus far too little on fire prevention, at least partly because they succumb to the faulty incentives they face. To remedy these and related problems, the authors make numerous recommendations on fire prevention, fire-detection technologies, and institutional reform. Here are a few:

- *Prompt the stewards of California's forests—federal, state, local, and private—to emphasize proactive forest management*, including the removal of fuels. This is critical. One federal official estimates that in 2017 California treated only half of the 500,000 acres of forestland that should be treated annually. Easing the permitting requirements that discourage private landowners from removing trees and creating fire breaks is also essential.
- *Undertake controlled burns more extensively*. Prescribed burns—and carefully monitored low-level wildfires—can help prevent future megafires by depriving them of accumulated fuel. Funding for controlled burns should be guaranteed beyond the five years provided by recent legislation. Air-quality regulators must ease restrictions that make it difficult for forest managers to conduct prescribed burns.
- *End policies that push development into fire-prone areas*. Numerous state and local measures—zoning restrictions, affordability mandates, height restrictions, and more—drive up the price of housing in cities and suburbs and artificially push development into more fire-prone rural areas. These measures should be eased or eliminated. Granting property-insurance firms the freedom to set premiums high enough to cover expected losses in high-risk areas would also help.



- *Adopting new early-warning systems—utilizing camera networks, CO2 sensors, drones, satellites, and artificial intelligence—would enable households to assess emerging risks in real time*. U.C. Berkeley's Fire Urgency Estimator in Geosynchronous Orbit project uses both satellites and drones to monitor wildfires at an early stage and dispatch firefighting resources. Implementing this system could be a game-changer. Also, the state could work with the federal Wireless Emergency Alert system to improve outreach to specific neighborhoods or counties.
- *If California adopted these innovations, along with Thermite firefighting robots, gel retardants, and virtual-reality training systems, it could become a world leader in fire-management innovation*.
- *Hire more private firefighters*. In November 2018, Kim Kardashian and Kanye West hired private firefighters to save their Hidden Hills mansion from the Woolsey Fire (Los Angeles and Ventura Counties). Nearby residents thanked the couple for saving the neighborhood. In addition to the cost savings, using private firefighters frees up public agencies to focus on other fire-related efforts.
- *Make public utilities more focused on customer safety by enabling market discipline*. California's major electric utilities are government monopolies that face little competition and face costly energy mandates and regulations. Lifting their protected status (and the regulatory strings that come with it) would both encourage and enable utilities to focus more on meeting consumers' demand for lower prices and community safety.
- *Encourage more private stewardship of California land*. California wildfires would be reduced over the long-term if more land were in private hands and if private landowners were allowed to exert more stewardship of their land.

The California Golden Fleece® Award report is available at [www.independent.org/cagoldenfleece/](http://www.independent.org/cagoldenfleece/).



## REACHING MILLENNIALS

**Catalyst: Sparking Change with Vision and Passion**

As young people leave the nest and find their way in the world, new challenges arise. From student debt burdens, to housing, to the need for personal privacy, the obstacles can be overwhelming.

While many react with despair and cynicism, the Independent Institute offers a constructive alternative.

We hold that every individual can become an agent of positive change in the world, whether alone or with like-minded people. That's where *Catalyst* comes in.

To make the world a better place, our *Catalyst* website offers uplifting, solutions-oriented commentary on the issues that directly touch people's lives.

Led by Editor-in-Chief **Ben Wilterdink**, the website features writing by Catalyst Policy Fellows such as **Scott Beyer**, **Kristiana Bolzman**, **Jonathon Hauenschild**, **Alexandra Hudson**, **Ryan Khurana**, **Luka Ladan**, **Ross Marchand**, **Conor Norris**, **Elliot Young**, and **Nick Zaiac**. In addition to articles, Catalyst engages readers with captivating graphics, videos, memes, and quizzes—all supported by social media.

Here's a small sampling from recent trending pieces.

In "San Francisco's Housing Crisis Is a Product

of the Regulatory State," Scott Beyer writes: "A vast majority of the city is zoned for low-rise residential, such as single-family and duplex housing. If this zoning code were thrown out, and land developers throughout San Francisco could build to meet consumer demand, much of the central area would likely get 'Manhattanized' with towers; and much of the outlying areas would morph from sprawl into mid-rise multifamily buildings."

In "Automation in the Short and Long-Term," Ryan Khurana argues that social entrepreneurs should respond to automation in the workplace, not by discouraging its adoption, but by smoothing the transition for workers: "This could involve encouraging firms to make investments in retraining their own workers should they foresee automation investments being made, removing barriers to labor mobility such as through untying benefits from specific employers, and removing the disincentives to hire labor that occur through a distortionary taxation system."

Ross Marchand touts the benefits of biomedical innovation in "Gene Replacement Can Be the Cure that Patients—and Taxpayers—Have Been Looking For." He writes, "Existing gene therapies show that victims of terrible diseases can be quickly cured through one shot, instead of 100 shots, 20 medications, and 10 high-risk surgeries . . . Medical innovation that can save lives and taxpayers money is on the not-so-distant horizon, but only if government regulators recognize the breakthroughs and allow these new medical procedures to flourish, not flounder."

Visit the website at [catalyst.independent.org](http://catalyst.independent.org)

**THE "GREEN NEW DEAL": NOT DEAD YET**

*(continued from page 1)*

attract sufficient bipartisan support. That's why they also call for an array of regulatory mandates and green energy subsidies.

As for their proposed energy-efficiency mandates, try to imagine a rapid retrofitting of every building across America. Anyone who thinks such a massive endeavor wouldn't become a blank check for politically powerful groups in the construction industry should watch a few episodes of *House of Cards*.

As for renewable energy, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman epitomized the Green New Dealers' wishful thinking when he wrote: "We could cut generation-related emissions by two-thirds or more simply by ending the use of coal and making more use of renewables." Note

his use of the word "simply"—as if eliminating coal, which generates about 30 percent of U.S. electricity, is no big deal.

Regarding fuel economy mandates, the simple fact is that the easiest and cheapest way for automakers to meet stricter mileage standards is to make cars lighter and smaller, which causes more collision fatalities. Reputable studies estimate that fuel-economy regulations have killed anywhere from 40,000 to 125,000 people. Yet somehow neither Ocasio-Cortez nor Krugman even admit to this deadly tradeoff.

The Green New Deal is a massive boondoggle that would restrict individual liberty and cripple economic growth. If and when its animating ideas go to the grave, we can all breathe a sigh of relief.

## Host a Speaker, and Lead for Liberty



If you're like most advocates of liberty, you embrace opportunities to learn more about timely public-policy issues as well as timeless principles of history, economics, and philosophy. That's one reason why so many freedom lovers become members of the Independent Institute—to enjoy discounts on our award-winning books and invigorating public events. In addition, members of our Lighthouse Society may participate in our *Quarterly Briefing* conference calls, featuring discussions with the Independent Institute fellows and leaders.

Now we invite you to delve deeper—and join with others in your social, civic, or professional networks—by partnering with the Independent Institute to provide a speaker or discussion facilitator for your club, association, or in-home salon.

Concerned about housing costs, ocean pollution, the public-pension crisis, or California's water wars? **Lawrence J. McQuillan**, Director of Independent's

Center on Entrepreneurial Innovation, is the author of numerous publications on these and other topics. His forthcoming book on water policy will whet your appetite for more.

Is education your passion? **Vicki E. Alger**, author of Independent's book, *Failure: The Miseducation of America's Children*, believes the solution to underperforming schools is simpler than you might think. Her latest publication is *Customized Learning for California: Helping K–12 Students Thrive with Education Savings Accounts*.

Worried about the next generation's much publicized attraction to socialism? **Ben Wilterdink**, Editor-in-Chief of Independent's *Catalyst* website (see page 7), can share perspectives on what's really behind it, and how to reach Millennials and Gen-Z'ers with the appeal of free markets, individual liberty, and personal responsibility.

Let Independent find a speaker for your group and help you become a more effective pro-freedom leader in your civic, social, or professional network.

We are here to serve. Help us to help you advance a free society.

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