

## IPA-columnist needs reader help-9-25-19

Columnist needs reader help

By Jim Nowlan

I muse widely, yet my knowledge base is quite narrow. So, I could sure use help from thoughtful readers who know more than I about the topics below, which I am beginning to explore for possible essays. If you have informed thoughts and links to good sources, please email at [jnowlan3@gmail.com](mailto:jnowlan3@gmail.com).

First: There will be war-like conflicts in the future, and the U.S. won't be spared, as we have been in the past. As drones and cyber-conflict replace much of the boots-on-the-ground-warfare, the first thing to go down in any major future dust-up would likely be our electric power grid.

Would apocalyptic chaos ensue on the streets? Would a nation like ours be brought to its knees, just like big corporations that make huge ransomware payoffs to hackers, to get their systems back up and running?

Could Americans benefit from "civil defense" training, or would it be useless? How would you and your family fare if you were without electricity for several weeks? Should every family buy a small gas-powered generator to keep the lights on, and a supply of food and water?

Second: The evil of anonymity. In my early days as a weekly newspaper publisher, we required that letters to the editor be signed. After all, the writer should be willing to stand behind his thoughts.

In today's world of instantaneous, off-the-cuff, often profane, vicious comment via digital platforms, anonymity seems to be the order of the day. On the blogs I see, commenters use fictitious "handles." Why?

Anonymity allows us to brush aside the mediating forces of our personality (the ego and superego, as Freud would have it) and unleash the id, our primitive, animal drives (the beast within us, as Hobbes would say). This builds anger and polarization.

If self-identification became the norm again, we would tend to be much more respectful, but could still make our arguments. And, in contrast, anonymous comment would therefore be discounted. Right?

Third: What are the consequences of our society having been transformed, in about one short century, from a nation of producers to that of consumers? In the early 1900s and before, most job holders made things, whether on the farm or in the factory. Today, few of us make things. Many of us do provide services, often critical ones like health care, but many services are nice but not necessary.

Our primary job as humans has been transformed from producing to consuming. That is why Wall Street pores over the data from the many surveys of consumer sentiment. If we stop gorging ourselves with food, doo-dads and services, beyond our needs, our economy collapses.

Doesn't it worry you that if consumers suddenly decided to stop shopping, for reasons of anxiety about our economic future or whatever, we would be in deep economic doo-doo?

And shouldn't our government be saving for a rainy day, rather than piling on trillions in long-term debt simply to stimulate more current consumption?

Fourth: Are humans becoming helpless in the age of digital helpmates? Have you ever asked a teen behind the counter at a gas station for directions? He or she looks at you as if you're from another planet. I'm sure he wonders why I haven't already looked the directions up on your smart phone (which I can do).

Computers find everything for us. Farmers around me aren't even allowed to fix their own equipment.

It's as if digital technology is somehow, surreptitiously, relegating humans to total dependency, helplessness. If so, what are the consequences?

Five: Why don't officials act to ban assault-style weapons of war like AR 15s and AK 47s, each able to spew out scores of bullets per minute? I live in rural gun country. Many of my friends have several guns, for hunting, target practice as well as personal and home defense, which I think is fine.

None of my friends, however, so far as I know, has the need for his own weapon of war. Yet these rat-a-tat guns have to be absolute magnets for pathologically insecure men whose battered self-esteem is bolstered by ownership of big weapons.

If the world of responsible gun owners, as most are, came out against weapons of war, their standing in the larger society would be enhanced, especially by parents who are now fearful of letting their kids go to the malls. What am I missing here, as there isn't even much talk of banning such weapons?

Any thoughtful observations to guide me, or straighten me out, much appreciated.