

SNG-How to really love our grandkids-6-18-18

Ask me how much I love my grandkids

By Jim Nowlan

I saw a bumper sticker the other day: Ask me how much I love my grandkids.

But do we really love them so much?

In our selfishness, speaking generally, we of the Baby Boom and earlier generations seem to be somewhat complicit in the following problems:

- U.S. debt is greater now than at the height of World War II, which had to be financed primarily with debt. The recent tax “reform” bill has some good points, yet it is to be paid for with \$1.5 trillion in additional debt, which the retiree generation won’t pay for—their grandkids will.
- Most of us retirees still receive more from Social Security than we paid into it. That is changing, and for our grandkids it will be the opposite.
- We old farts receive much, much more in health care via Medicare than we pay into it, and the program will place financial heavy burdens on our grandkids.
- Dysfunction in Illinois state government over the decades will burden our grandkids with solving the wreckage.
- Education is critical to our grandkids’ future. And the competitive challenges they will face are enormous. [Because of population differences, China has more honor students in its classrooms than we have students.] Yet, cheering under the Friday night lights seems more important to many grandparents than encouraging the grandkids to excel in the classroom and set their sights high.

- And the US is dis-investing in higher education at a time China is pouring more and more into their system, which is now challenging the U.S. in critical scientific fields.
- [Our once vaunted interstate system and airports crumble while, based on my extensive travels as a visiting professor in China, ever more bullet trains and interstate-quality highways are surpassing our logistical support system.]

All of these realities push daunting burdens onto those grandkids we love so much. What to do? Here is a modest suggestion.

On my travels around the state and beyond, I often make pit stops at a McDonald's to recharge my caffeine. I almost always notice (especially mid-mornings) one or more coffee klatches of 4 to 10 locals of the retiree age class (which doesn't have to be very old today). I'll bet the folks gather almost daily for an hour or more.

I know many seniors volunteer and do good works, yet I think many of us could do more to prepare a better future for our grandkids, rather than just throw up our hands in despair.

According to a 2015 report from the Illinois Department of Revenue, retirees represent fully 25 per cent of all Illinois tax filers.

This huge slice of society has rich experience, knowledge, even wisdom, and many are found at the coffeeklatches.

I suggest the coffee groups devote half—just half—of their time over caffeine to addressing our problems at the local, state, even national levels. I am confident at least one at each coffee klatch has declared, along these lines: “A blockhead could do a better job than our elected officials!”

Since these coffee drinkers appear to be anything but blockheads, I further propose creation of a “Your Town Coffeeklatch Civics Club (come up with a better name, please).” Devote the first half of a morning gathering to selecting an informal chair and then a topic of interest, maybe a local one initially, such as: How are our schools doing?

The chair might ask one or two of the group to do some internet research. In this case, check out how the local schools compare with those throughout the state, remembering that average isn’t good enough.

Once information is compiled, discuss the situation. Are the schools performing at high levels, and if not, what thoughts might there be around the table as to how local public education might be improved? This might require some more research, maybe even talking with a local superintendent or principal.

Continue the discussion for several sessions, then focus on some proposals the group thinks might be forwarded to the local school board for consideration.

I think coffeeklatchers would be amazed by how sensitive local officials, state legislators, even congressmen are to proposals that show obvious thought and some research.

Then on to the next topic, maybe a tough one like the state public employee pension mess.

Even if your first efforts don’t change the world, the work should develop constructive discussion and will be good for the brain.

I worry that many readers might think the above is cockamamie (what’s new? readers chortle).

But somehow retirees have to look to the future of their grandkids, whom they love so much.