

Sixth Institute for Objective Policy Assessment (IOPA) Newsletter, V 3:2

John Merrifield, IOPA (<https://policytalk.org>) President, August 2024

Even with VP Harris replacing President Biden as the 2024 Democrat Presidential Candidate, the key US and world circumstances still contain the huge policy challenges described in February's Fifth IOPA *Newsletter* (copy below for easy reference).

*Hoping to hold your attention for the good of all, I'm putting this **objective truth** right up front: ED and Fiscal conditions - formally declared crises that are IOPA's current priorities – already impose high costs on you. The costs include: i) much slower economic growth; and ii) dangerous nonsense being taught to our kids. It'll get worse without still unknown, to be IOPA-vetted, appropriate course corrections. Some of the corrections are politically feasible only with much more severe crisis symptoms. **Please read on and help any way you can.***

All 51 low-performing US K-12 school systems continue to foster widespread illiteracy, innumeracy, and dangerous nonsense that is *Dismantling America* (title of Thomas Sowell book). Key symptoms of our “[Nation at Risk](#)” low-performing school systems include these existential threats: a) Further deterioration of our unsustainable federal fiscal practices (see the still highly salient hyperlinks in *Newsletter #5* – see also the [Fiscal Main Menu page](#)); b) At least premature attempts at a climate change-driven transition to a vastly different energy mix, which among other negatives accelerates the federal fiscal rush to apocalypse. Further advances in the [still very unsettled climate science](#) may show that the measures taken and proposed have much lower benefits than costs; and c) Related to ‘b’ – demand for electricity seems likely to far outstrip supply growth, portending blackouts, chaos, and or the *much* higher prices that are becoming commonplace in Europe.

Existential threat defined: something imminent, without a major course correction, that will significantly adversely affect the liberty (see James Bovard's *Freedom in Chains*) or prosperity of the vast majority. The online definition: “a threat to the existence or survival of a person, thing, or future.”

Most of the tasks described in the February *Newsletter #5* are still ongoing. **The main new IOPA event has been the overhaul of our website, <https://policytalk.org>.** Your thick-headed CEO finally accepted what several IOPA partners and outsiders have been asserting for a while. *It is simply not credible for a new think tank to productively address 20 major policy issues.* So, we've eliminated some that had been posted to the Tier One and Tier Two policy issue menus and **prioritized two**. On the [policytalk.org](#) Homepage main menu, **CURRENT PRIORITIES** and Future Endeavors replaced Tier One and Two.

There are only 2 current priorities: Education and Fiscal. Given ‘b’ and ‘c’ above, we may add an *audit-level assessment of the climate change debate* to **CURRENT PRIORITIES**. The audit level is a step up from the existing [Assessment of the Climate Change Debate](#). That's in line with IOPA's commitment to greater scholar and journalist accountability, which we need to improve the conversations about any policy issue.

We've also added ‘**Hot Topics**’ to the [policytalk.org](#) Main Menu. Each topic is an in-the-news topic forum through which IOPA can collect and disseminate ideas for preliminary vetting, and as a way to get people used to visiting [policytalk.org](#).

A major IOPA addition in terms of content and volume is the [Education Blog Essay Directory](#), which has links to nearly *200, 1–2-page original essays*. Here is the Table of Contents:

ED Blog Essay Contents:

Accountability – p 1

Chartered Public Schools – p 2

Differentiated Instruction Challenges – p 2

Evidence, Real and Imagined – p 2

Governance – p 4

Heroic Assumptions Underlying our 51 School Systems – p 4

Instruction Challenges and Strategies – p 5

Intellectual Prisoners of the Status Quo and Separate Realities – p 6

International Comparisons – p 7

One-Dimension Fallacies – p 7

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Price-lessness Forces Central Planning vs. Decentralized Planning – p 10

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The Current 51 US School Systems Make it Unnecessarily Difficult – p 12

Transformational Reform Arguments – p 13

Valued School System Outcomes – p 14

IOPA needs every kind of help (networking, critiquing, reading our publications, getting IOPA-author books into bookstores and libraries, money) to get our significant insights and assessments in front of policymakers early in the new federal administration, and state administrations.

Fifth Newsletter:

As the insidious poison of all 51 dangerously dysfunctional US education systems (see below: K-12 *and* post-secondary) spreads, we see an immediate threat in the denial of the [growing signs of a looming federal fiscal cliff](#). With a [persistent inflation rate of ~3 %](#), we're looking at a 5 % floor on debt service expense; close to one-third (!!!) of annual federal revenue of about \$5 trillion; way more than we spend on defense!!!

That and election pressure to further increase spending makes lending to the federal government increasingly risky, which will further raise what our federal government must pay bond buyers. We see that in higher expected interest rates and [growing difficulty selling the government's bonds](#):

“The U.S. Treasury prefers its debt sales to be humdrum affairs. Lately, they are sparking fireworks in markets.

For years, many in Washington and on Wall Street assumed that investors would buy any number of [bonds the government issued](#), no matter the fiscal outlook. Testing that assumption: the sale of \$20.8 trillion of new Treasuries in the first 11 months of the year—set to surpass 2020's record of just under \$21 trillion.

[The last 30-year auction](#) was so poorly received that it [rattled other parts of the markets](#). Investors fear that signs of weak demand might spread similar tumult, raise the [cost of government borrowing](#) and hurt the economy.”

That leaves us facing see some combination of: 1) higher tax rates, which may not yield much additional revenue at an acceptable economic cost; 2) large spending cuts, perhaps with little deliberation = **national security risk**; 3) inflationary levels of Federal Reserve buying of bonds; 4) insufficient fiscal space to address emergencies; 5) default risk and government shutdowns because of the political cost of #1-#3 - several urgent IOPA research issues there; and 6) the mother of all financial crises.

Please help IOPA address those soon. That can include in-kind help such as networking, or direct help with a **donation**. Maybe do both, but please don't be in denial of the storm clouds on the horizon. **Please don't stand on the sidelines**. All formerly great nations declined because of apathy and complacency. A key benefit of your involvement and a **steady investment** is a feeling that you're giving back to this great country; that you're not on the sidelines; not watching the dismantling/implosion of what your personal vision of the future depends upon.

Yes, I want to repeat what many of you will regard as an outrageous [but TRUE] assertion:

Your vision (your personal dream – your bucket list) for the future depends upon the IOPA vision, from that it follows that you need to assert it to your contacts. It also affects their vision. PLEASE join the 20-24 Club. Many small donors is every non-profit's dream.

The IOPA team cannot achieve the IOPA vision of stability, and increased freedom and prosperity, without a lot of assistance. Please help!!! Before I further discuss the debt threat, and another declared existential threat, plus the heart-wrenching **failure to match the supply and demand for mental health services for children**, I want to emphasize: **1)** the importance of funding the IOPA Business Plan (a basis for internal funding of research). a) a key reason that we need IOPA is that the IOPA team recognizes some critical issues before funders recognize them (see the policytalk.org homepage for an example); and b) funding all research on a project-by-project basis is too uncertain to provide a steady flow of work. Internally funded projects must fill the time gaps between the externally funded vast majority.

And **2)** and define important in-kind ways to support IOPA. a) spread the word via personal and electronic networks: i) visit <https://policytalk.org> – note recent improvements; and ii) read and tout key IOPA-authored books and monographs (**K-12 reform**, **fiscal cliff**, and **climate change debate**) – get libraries and bookstores to carry them; b) form key issue discussion groups – use IOPA resources to drive discussion; and c) *find people to serve as IOPA Board members – people able to make a significant intellectual and financial contribution – maybe you.*

Persistent “**Nation at Risk**”-low K-12 school system performance, and the unsustainability of federal fiscal practices are formally declared crises. Reform failure on those will undermine your vision; your hopes; your dreams. IOPA has world-class scholars in both policy areas. Your support accelerates progress on developing **well-vetted** policy reform ideas that will receive serious consideration, especially as crisis symptoms worsen. K-12: the 2022 and 2023 elections offered more proof that miseducated youth are key supporters of government expansion, and costly green policies that are at best premature, and at worst, expensive acts of futility (research needed to separate the two). In the federal fiscal area, high and rising interest payments on the growing debt threaten to **undermine our own defense** alongside pushing us into dangerous isolationism; that alongside a major financial crisis. **This is not about the immorality of placing painful burdens on unborn grandchildren.** **The federal fiscal cliff–induced dangers are a here-now desperate call for well-vetted policy reform assessments.**

Ongoing progress via IOPA: 1) Private School Access Index; 2) Data set for Chartered Public Schools (CPS); 3) School Choice Expansion 2.0 proposals – 1.0 is ongoing as more states enact ESAs (universal education savings accounts) or tuition tax credits. 2.0 a) is a school choice expansion plan for states that are unlikely to adopt universal programs as a starting point for school choice expansion. 2.0 b) is a plan for states that have already taken a giant step forward, but need to do more for themselves and to show the way on further progress to end the public funding discrimination against the children for whom the assigned school is a poor fit; 4) IOPA will have an online School System Reform course; 5) a proposed project list for potential funders; 6) Educating movers and shakers in Louisiana on the key elements of school system reform – school choice expansion

legislation; 7) Setting up monitoring of further progress in a major curriculum change in Louisiana – an example of a central plan optimization effort; 8) Developing the Ascension Society – modeled after the Mont Pelerin Society – for place-specific high-level policy development and advocacy; 9) Resubmitting a research proposal to foster recognition of school choice expansion as the best way to quickly erode persistent deep pockets of urban poverty. That, and #10, are top reasons why we need to fund the IOPA business plan. IOPA is often ahead of funder recognition of key issues; 10) Seeking funding of a proposal to address the 2 key aspects of the federal fiscal cliff issue – a) maybe still avoiding going over the edge; and b) minimize the damage from going over and maximize the benefits; and 11) Developing a potential funders data base and messages to connect with them.

Key IOPA Op-Eds: 1) Forthcoming: addressing the fiscal issue highlighted in the opening paragraph of this *Newsletter*; 2) How to “[Right the Federal Fiscal Ship](#),” 3) [Fiscal Cliff Math](#), [Potential to Increase Economic Growth](#), the [Immigration-Fiscal connection](#) and a [Support Ukraine Assessment](#) – (help with Op-Ed placement, please); 4) IOPA is an active Article 5 (path to amend the US Constitution) Fiscal Restraint Movement partner. IOPA simulates the fiscal and economic effects of federal spending rule proposals; and 5) [State Fiscal Policy Recommendations and Tools](#).

Urgency also exists because of the political calendar. A year from now, we’ll be in the hugely important first 100 days of the next federal administration. Outside a symptom-intensive crisis, that’s when major policy reforms have the best chance of adoption. So, the next 10 months are a critical time to develop well-vetted (thoroughly assessed) policy reform proposals.

What IOPA will use initial dollars for:

- 1) **Website improvement**, including especially the addition of conversation forums for IOPA’s Assessments; also search engine optimization.
- 2) **A reviewer database and stipends for reviewers** – the basis for the civil informed disagreement that converts an Analysis into an Objective Policy Assessment.
- 3) **A mental health services to children study - a \$10,000** scoping out study to set up a large-scale, grant-funded study on how to reform the state fiscal policies that determine the availability of mental health services to children.
- 4) See the IOPA [Launch Priorities](#) page.
- 5) **Administrative Assistant** – for example, CEO Merrifield should not have to assemble and mail [20-24 club](#) benefits. BTW, PLEASE JOIN, you won’t miss the cost of a meal each month, and there are great tangible benefits such as a great T-shirt and an IOPA e-mail address (yourname@policytalk.org – forwards to your regular e-mail address). Of course, accelerated progress on key policy issues is the main reason to join and encourage membership.
- 6) **Define Building fund**: many people prefer ‘concrete investments’ (serious scholarship with a sense of humor – note the ‘Seal of Approval’ in the IOPA logo). Two IOPA Associates reacted to a discussion of the child mental health services shortages by wishing to oversee a respite facility for children. We determined that we could/should combine such a facility with IOPA offices and a meeting center on the top floor. Please consider donating to the building fund, and as you network on behalf of IOPA, you may find a donor able to write a check big enough to initiate design and construction. All building fund donors will be tangibly acknowledged at the building site (and elsewhere); with the building likely named after the biggest building fund donor. Perhaps you’d like to trigger a gift match process.

To deliver painless, steady support to IOPA, see the ‘[20-24 Club](#)’ button on the policytalk.org main menu (homepage header).