

Ethan Allen Institute

Newsletter - November 2013 (Print Edition)

Top Story: EAI Calls on Legislators to Delay Health Exchange Mandate/**Breaking: Shumlin Delays Mandate**

On October 22, 2013, the Ethan Allen Institute sent the following letter and response card to all Vermont state legislators:

Dear Legislator:

Due to the ongoing technical problems with Vermont Health Connect, a sizable number of your constituents may find themselves without health insurance coverage on January 1, 2014. Sec. 3 of Act 171 of 2012 provides that “no person may provide a health benefit plan to an individual or small employer [2-50 employees] unless the plan is offered through the Vermont health benefit exchange...” known as “Vermont Health Connect”.

Although Vermont Health Connect went live, as scheduled, on October 1, 2013, computer system glitches have prevented those individuals and small employer groups required to purchase insurance through the exchange from doing so. As a result, at this writing as many as 100,000 eligible Vermonters have not enrolled, selected a plan, and paid for a premium. If these problems can be worked out by DVHA and the contractors, it is possible that all hundred thousand might still be able to enroll, choose, and pay before their present insurance coverage ends on December 31, 2013.

If these problems are not worked out well before December 31, it seems unavoidable that thousands of Vermonters will wake up on New Year’s Day to find themselves and their families without health insurance coverage – unable to buy what they are required to buy, and with no legal alternative to turn to. But there is a solution. The 2012 legislature recognized the complications that might arise in the creation of Vermont Health Connect. They inserted Sec. 41a into Act 171. This section authorizes the Commissioner of Financial Regulation to “allow for the extension of a small group and association plan beyond their renewal date in order to ensure a smooth and orderly transition from health plans offered in the small group and association markets in 2013 to health plans offered in the small group market through the Vermont health benefit exchange in 2014.”

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to lend your support, as a legislator, for the Commissioner of Financial Regulation to invoke this “emergency clause” no later than November 18, if by that date Vermont Health Connect is not fully functional. This action by the Commissioner would allow individuals and small groups and their carriers to extend their present coverage until such time as Vermont Health Connect

becomes fully functional.

If you are willing to lend your support, please sign and return the enclosed postcard. We will collect your responses until November 8, and convey your support to the Commissioner, the Governor, the small business community, and the media.

Yours truly,
Robert Roper, President

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Breaking News

Governor Shumlin released the following statement on October 31, 2013:

Expressing continued frustration with on-going delays and technical problems with Vermont Health Connect's website enrollment process, Gov. Peter Shumlin today announced additional options that will provide peace of mind to Vermonters as the website continues to improve. Vermont small businesses will now have the additional option of enrolling in VHC plans directly through Blue Cross or MVP. Alternatively, individuals and small businesses will have the option to continue coverage through their existing plans until March 31st as necessary. Anyone may enroll in Vermont Health Connect at any point before that date.

Appearing with the Governor to announce the changes were legislative leaders, the heads of Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Vermont and MVP, as well as navigator organizations like the Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce and the Vermont and the Vermont Campaign for Health Care Security.

"The purpose of Vermont Health Connect is to simplify the process of buying insurance for Vermonters. I won't tolerate a situation where Vermonters go into the holiday season worried and confused by their health care options come January 1st. That is simply unacceptable," the Governor said. "Today I am taking steps to ensure that won't happen. While thousands of Vermonters have signed up for coverage through Vermont Health Connect, many others have been frustrated by technology glitches. It is possible those technology errors will be fixed in a matter of weeks, but multiple missed deadlines and failed technology fixes in my judgment require us to implement this plan."

Under the plan announced today:

For Small Businesses: Small businesses would continue to be able to enroll in VHC plans through the website, a navigator, paper application, or over the phone. Alternatively, businesses will have the option of enrolling in VHC plans directly through Blue Cross and MVP. Current plans for small businesses may extend through March 31st as necessary.

For Individuals and Families: They will be able to keep their existing coverage through March 31, or enroll in VHC at any point before that date.

Gov. Shumlin spoke to the head of CGI, the lead contractor charged with creating and maintaining the VHC website. The Governor has outlined his concerns with the system, informed the company of the plan being implemented, insisting that pressure on CGI to solve the problems becomes more urgent with each passing day, and reiterated that the state expects to pursue its remedies regarding the financial penalties outlined in the contract.

“No one has been more frustrated and angry than me about the pace of progress in enabling Vermonters to choose and sign up for affordable, quality health coverage. The most important step we can take immediately is to ensure the system is fully operable as quickly as possible,” the Governor said. “While I am confident that Vermont Health Connect will be a success and we will get past this temporary transition, I will not let uncertainty on this front drag on.”

Commentary: The Vermont Exchange Train Wreck

By John McClaughry

On September 12 the nationally-known consulting group Gartner, Inc. delivered a report to the federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The report assessed the operational readiness of the various state health insurance exchanges as the ObamaCare mandated launch date – October 1 – approached.

Vermont Health Connect, the state’s \$170 million exchange, is “one of the most functional in the country”, according to Gov. Shumlin. That’s conceivably true, since most if not all of the other exchanges are in serious trouble, but the Gartner report concluded that Vermont Health Connect “should be considered in RED status due to significant risks to meeting the October 1st deadline for Go-Live.”

The statutory deadline of October 1 has long since gone by, but Vermont Health Connect remains essentially inoperative. You can review the ObamaCare-approved insurance plans offered for 2014, but you can’t buy one. Kyle Midura of WCAX-TV observed on the October 18 Vermont This Week program that site visitors “almost inevitably get an error message”.

Gov. Shumlin first dismissed Vermont Health Connect’s missed opening date as a “nothing burger”. He then said the exchange would be operative by November 1, and that unspecified people were “working 24/7” to get it going. Most recently, he waffled on the November 1 deadline as well, saying it might be ready by November 3. Midura noted that administration officials view this as a “soft deadline” – more a suggestion than a requirement that triggers real-world consequences.

But for many tens of thousands of Vermonters there are real-world consequences to not being able to buy health insurance on Vermont Health Connect. Thanks to a unique monopoly feature of Vermont’s Act 171 (2012), Vermonters who are thwarted by an inoperative exchange site cannot choose to continue their present coverage with their present insurer. This monopoly feature, in force in no other state, applies to currently insured individual purchasers and small business groups of up to 50 employees.

The reason for the monopoly is that Gov. Shumlin and his single payer allies are trying everything possible to lure or force people into the exchange before 2017. On that date state-run, taxpayer-financed Green Mountain Care is supposed to replace all health insurance.

This \$3+ billion single payer plan will be financed in large measure with a Federal block grant equal to the sum of all the ObamaCare tax credits paid on behalf of the people buying through Vermont Health Connect. (GMC will also require an

enormous payroll tax increase, as the Governor has recently admitted.) Forcing the insured into the exchange will maximize that hoped-for (but by no means assured) Federal payment.

Fortunately the 2012 law contains an emergency clause.

On October 22 the Ethan Allen Institute sent a letter to all legislators. It described the situation and concluded: “If these problems are not worked out well before December 31, it seems unavoidable that thousands of Vermonters will wake up on New Year’s Day to find themselves and their families without health insurance coverage – unable to buy what they are required to buy, and with no legal alternative to turn to. But there is a solution.”

“The 2012 legislature... inserted Sec. 41a into Act 171. This section authorizes the Commissioner of Financial Regulation to ‘allow for the extension of a small group and association plan beyond their renewal date in order to ensure a smooth and orderly transition from health plans offered in the small group and association markets in 2013 to health plans offered in the small group market through the Vermont health benefit exchange in 2014.’”

The EAI letter asked legislators to use an enclosed post card to show their support for the Commissioner of Financial Regulation to invoke this emergency clause “no later than November 18, if by that date Vermont Health Connect is not fully functional.” So far the Commissioner has made no public comment on the issue.

In an incisive and scathing article on The Daily Beast (10/22), former Vermont resident Stuart Stevens foresees a “unique train wreck” developing in Vermont, due to a failed exchange designed as an essential gateway to the single payer system.

Stevens concludes: “As this great health insurance experiment proceeds, Vermont bears watching. If this small, healthy state can’t make Obamacare work to a high degree of satisfaction, it doesn’t bode well for more difficult challenges.”

He might have added, “it certainly won’t bode well for Vermonters.”

- John McClaughry, formerly a nuclear reactor physicist, is vice president of the Ethan Allen Institute.

Commentary: Tax Reform 1, Bigger Government 0

By Rob Roper

Vermont Business Magazine recently reported that Huber & Suhner, a high-tech manufacturing company employing 63 people in Essex, decided to close its Vermont facility after nearly a quarter century. The company will be relocating those jobs to North Carolina and New Jersey. If Justice Louis Brandise was correct that states are “laboratories of democracy” where various policies can be explored to see what works and what doesn’t, this provides us with some interesting experimental outcomes to ponder.

Vermont’s strategy for attracting good paying jobs and spurring economic growth, particularly since the election of Peter Shumlin (D-VT) to the governorship, has been built around subsidizing “green” energy, moving toward a government monopoly,

single payer healthcare system, and expanding publicly funded early education. All of these initiatives rely on expanding the size and influence of government over the economy – higher taxes, more mandates, forced redistribution of resources, and the centralized picking of winners and losers.

This year, North Carolina under Governor Pat McCrory (R-NC) embarked on a different strategy -- a complete overhaul of the North Carolina tax code. The reforms include, among other things, flattening and lowering the individual income tax to 5.75%, reducing the corporate income tax rate to 5% by 2015, 4% by 2016, and 3% by 2017, capping the gasoline tax, capping individuals' mortgage interest plus property taxes at \$20k, and fully repealing the estate tax.

According to the 2012 Tax Foundation's ranking of most business friendly (or unfriendly as the case may be) states, Vermont and North Carolina were not all that far apart at the bad end of the spectrum. Vermont was ranked 47th, North Carolina 44th. However, after North Carolina's new policies are fully in place, that state's ranking will rise significantly to around 17th. Now, it's fair to say these kinds of rankings paint a limited view of a much larger picture. But, the big picture here is this: North Carolina now has a bunch formerly Vermont jobs, and we don't.

Huber & Suhner spokespeople listed a number of reasons for leaving Vermont. Quoted in a recent news article, the company's president stated bluntly, "Obviously, the cost of doing business here and the tax perspective is a significant reason why we're moving." The other big reason cited for the move was a more diverse and better qualified labor market in North Carolina.

The lesson to be learned from this Brandisian democratic laboratory experiment is this: the prospect of single payer healthcare getting the burden of insurance off its back was not enough of an incentive to keep this company in Vermont. Nor was the promise that universal preschool might eventually develop a more qualified workforce. Nor was the prospect of leading the Green revolution from the Green Mountain State. But, the reality of more tax-friendly environment for employers in their business lives and employees in their personal lives succeeded in convincing a company to tear out 24 years of community roots and relocate 800 miles away.

I know many people will say that Vermonters expect more from their government that it seems North Carolinians do. That may or may not be the case. But the fact is that without the tax revenue from Huber & Suhner – and nearly 500 ex-IBM employees, and over 600 Entergy employees, and 165 ex-Energizer employees, and 35 ex-General Dynamics employees, all gone or going so far in 2013 – Vermont is creating a situation in which we will have less capacity to help those in need while we are also creating more unemployed families who need help. This is a death spiral.

You don't help the hungry by salting the fields where you grow the food. All Vermonters want to help our neighbors in times of trouble, but before you can spread the wealth you have to earn it. If we don't focus seriously on implementing policies that are proven to drive economic growth, to attract good paying jobs, and to generate stable and sustainable tax revenue, Vermont's private sector economy will continue to deteriorate, and our social safety net will go right along with it. Nobody wins that game. Except, perhaps, states like North Carolina.

- Rob Roper is President of the Ethan Allen Institute

Commentary: The Latest Climate Change Embarrassment

By John McLaughry

The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has released its long awaited "Summary for Policymakers". This 36-page document boldly reaffirms, with no trace of embarrassment, that "it is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century."

The casual reader may wonder what to make of the phrase "extremely likely". Notwithstanding the array of weasel word qualifications used throughout the summary, the IPCC wants us to believe that "most" of the rise of global average temperature since the mid-20th century was "very likely" caused by human-generated greenhouse gas emissions.

In the last report (AR-4, 2007) the IPCC experts were "90% confident" – whatever that meant – of this statement. Now they are reported as being "95% confident". One critical review (SEPP) notes that "The IPCC presents no physical evidence substantiating that it is 'extremely likely' that more than half of the [global temperature] increase during the past 60 years stems from rising greenhouse gas emissions or a rigorous method of calculating the 95 to 100% probability that the term 'extremely likely' embodies."

The most crucial linchpin in the IPCC's argument is its assumed sensitivity of climate to increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide. The new Summary report defends its previously assumed sensitivity. As climatologist Dr. Roy Spencer points out, "this is the entire political issue. Is the climate sensitive to human emissions of CO₂ or not? Does an increase in the molecules of CO₂ from 3 to 4 per 10,000 parts of air make a difference in climate?"

Spencer continues "A best estimate for climate sensitivity — unarguably THE most important climate change variable — is no longer provided, due to mounting contradictory evidence on whether the climate system really cares very much about whether there are 2, or 3, or 4, parts of CO₂ per 10,000 parts atmosphere. Yet the IPCC claims their confidence has DOUBLED (uncertainty reduced from 10% to 5%) regarding their claim that humans are most of the cause behind the warming trend in the last 50 years or so."

The Summary also runs away from the fact that that there has been no statistically significant rise in surface temperatures for over 15 years. The Wall Street Journal offered this translation: "Temperatures have been flat for 15 years, nobody can properly explain it... and the IPCC doesn't want to spend much time doing so because it is politically inconvenient and shows that the computer models on which all climate-change predictions depend remain unreliable."

Dr. Richard Lindzen, the dean of American climatologists recently retired from MIT, observes "The latest IPCC report has truly sunk to level of hilarious incoherence. It is quite amazing to see the contortions the IPCC has to go through in order to keep the international climate agenda going."

It should also be explained that contrary to the practice in almost every scholarly profession, the IPCC releases its always-alarming Summary months before the release of the scientific working group reports on which the Summary is supposedly based. During the intervening months the IPCC's political commissars are tasked with making very sure that the working group findings corroborate the Summary.

Critics have recently graphed the 73 different computer projections of global temperature since 1990, and added in the actual observed temperatures over the same period. The result is an eye-opener. Beginning in 1998 the actual temperatures on the graph lie below every one of the 73 projections on which the IPCC has based its scary predictions.

Furthermore, the computer projections utterly fail to reproduce global temperatures beginning in 1950 (or 1900), the actual trends in which are already known. At least the IPCC deserves some credit for abandoning Michael Mann's notorious "hockey stick" graph contrived 15 years ago to terrify policy makers and the media about Planet Earth progressively boiling in its own juices.

The earth has been warming since the end of the Little Ice Age around 1850. There is no evidence that human release of greenhouse gases has any detectable effect on global temperatures. Those who want to put governments in charge of all fossil fuel combustion (and shower subsidies on "renewable energy") need to find a scientifically respectable case for their claims. So far they have embarrassingly failed, and the forthcoming IPCC report won't do them much good.

Events

December 13. The Ethan Allen Institute will debate the Public Assets Institute on the subject of "The Proper Roll of Government in Education." Lyndon State College, Burke Mountain Room, 5:30-7:00 pm. (Dates for January and February debates TBD.)

February 3: Rob Roper presents Triumph of Liberty to the Montpelier Rotary Club. If you'd like to schedule a presentation for your organization contact rob@ethanallen.org.

News & Views

EAI Notes

EAI's Turning Blue Gets over 830 views in October. If you haven't seen it yet, check it out. If you have seen it, please share it! We're looking forward to the next 800 views. Thanks to all. <http://ethanallen.org/eai-launches-documentary-film-turning-blue/>

Common Sense Radio archived shows now available on line. Thanks to Shayne

Spence for his work in getting October's shows up and taking on this project. And thanks to all our members who helped raise the money allowing us to hire Shayne. It's already paying dividends! Check the radio archives out here. <http://ethanallen.org/common-sense-radio/>

Regular News & Views

Vermont 47th: The Tax Foundation released its 2014 business climate rankings and Vermont once again landed in the bottom 10, at 45th worst in the nation behind such colossal disasters as New York and California. On the bright side this is a one slot improvement from last year's ranking, and a two-slot improvement over 2012 when Vermont ranked 47th. According to the Tax Foundation's report, "The states in the bottom 10 suffer from the same afflictions: complex, non-neutral taxes with comparatively high rates." The scores are based on evaluations of five categories: corporate tax, individual income tax, sales tax, unemployment insurance tax, and property tax. Vermont scored 42nd, 45th, 13th, 22nd, and 48th in each category respectively.

(Rob Roper and Shayne Spence interviewed Joseph Henchmen of the Tax Foundation on October 14 about Vermont's ranking. You can hear the show [HERE](#).
https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B9wd_10wch5uX2JZLWxsbGdsczg/edit?usp=sharing)

Huber & Suhner to leave Vermont for North Carolina/New Jersey. Vermont Business Magazine reports that the Essex based manufacturer, currently employing 63 people, will complete the relocation by 2014 stating, "Obviously, the cost of doing business here and the tax perspective is a significant reason why we're moving."

VY Budget Impact: "The state will take a budget hit of \$11.5 to \$12.5 million a year when Vermont Yankee closes at the end of 2014. That's because if Yankee isn't producing power, it pays no taxes on the plant." (VBM 10/13)

Consumer Reports Warns Stay Away From HealthCare.gov' "Stay away from Healthcare.gov for at least another month if you can. Hopefully that will be long enough for its software vendors to clean up the mess they've made." 'Nuff said.

Vermonters' Costs Going Up. According to a state by state report by the Heritage Foundation, Vermonters who are 27 years old will receive a 144% premium increase under Vermont Health Connect. For those who are a bit older at age 50, their increase is only 60%, and a family of four will see an 18% increase. What a great deal! Chart here: <http://www.heritage.org/multimedia/infographic/2013/10/how-will-you-fare-in-the-obamacare-exchanges>

The VHC Launch: "The State of Vermont was so unprepared to launch VHC that their training was incomplete. During a training session held August 6th and 7th for navigators, counselors and brokers 50 questions were asked that could not be answered by the VHC managers. We were all promised that by the following Wednesday, August

14th, we would have the answers given to us via e-mail. As of 28 days into the open enrollment period, Oct 28th, after 74 days, there still is no reply to many critical questions. Any health insurance company could have answered these questions the moment they were asked.” - Southern Vermont insurance agent, 10/28/12.

ObamaCare Exchange Grief: “The administration claims the Obamacare online exchanges crashed because the Web site got more than 8 million hits in the first week. Please. You know how many people visit Amazon.com every week? More than 70 million. The difference is: 1.) Amazon seldom crashes, and 2.) on Amazon, people actually buy something.” - Marc Thiessen, (Washington Post 10/15/13)

Reassured? “Visitors to the state’s new online health insurance marketplace were greeted Tuesday morning with a notice warning that users “have no explicit or implicit expectation of privacy” and that their files may be “intercepted,” “monitored” or “recorded” by police, federal agencies and even foreign governments.”

“But Robin Lunge, director of health care reform for the Shumlin administration, said the language has since been axed from the site and that prospective customers of Vermont Health Connect can rest assured that, barring a court order, their data won’t be vulnerable to inspection by outside eyes.” (P. Hirschfeld VPB 10/3/13)

Coming Soon to a Waiting Room Near You: “Despite the torrents of cash pumped into the health-care system over the years, the Canadian population is not getting its money’s worth when compared with the vast majority of OECD countries. Worse still, in many respects the situation does not show any signs of improvement.”

“In Quebec for instance, nearly 1.7 million people, or 25% of the population, still have no family doctor. Patients wait an average of 17.6 hours in the emergency room, nearly two hours more than a decade ago. Throughout Canada, the median wait time between seeing a general practitioner and treatment by a specialist has almost doubled from 1993 to 2010, going from 9.3 to 18.2 weeks.” - Yannick Labrie, IEDM, National Post 11/24/11)

No Extreme Weather, Just Extreme Rhetoric. ‘2013 ranks as one of the least extreme U.S. weather years ever’ – Many bad weather events at ‘historically low levels’ ‘Whether you’re talking about tornadoes, wildfires, extreme heat or hurricanes, the good news is that weather-related disasters in the US are all way down this year compared to recent years and, in some cases, down to historically low levels.’ Tornadoes: ‘lowest total in several decades’ Number of wildfires: ‘On pace to be the lowest it has been in the past ten years’ Extreme Heat: The number of 100 degree days may ‘turn out to be the lowest in about 100 years of records’ Hurricanes: ‘We are currently in the longest period (8 years) since the Civil War Era without a major hurricane strike in the US (i.e., category 3, 4 or 5)’ (last major hurricane to strike the US was Hurricane Wilma in 2005) – Climate Depot

Antarctic Polar Ice Growing. Whenever the ice at the North and South Pole is mentioned, it is mostly in the context of melting triggered by global warming. However, the sea ice in Antarctica - in contrast to that in the Arctic - has proved to be remarkably robust. New measurements have now confirmed that. As the U.S. space agency NASA

announced, the sea ice in the Antarctic has extended over an area of 19.47 million square meters at the end of September. That is the highest since measurements began in 1979. Why the white splendour is extending there while it is rapidly disappearing in the Arctic is a mystery. --Spiegel Online 21 October 2013

IPCC Integrity: “There is no evidence that human-emitted greenhouse gases have a harmful influence on the climate. So it becomes necessary [for the IPCC] to use spin, distortion, deception and even fabrication to cover up this absence of evidence with a collective assertion of belief in their cause to an increased level of certainty. In the end they must rely merely upon collective opinions within their selected ranks, of which they once again claim high levels of certainty. “ – Geochemist Vincent Gray PhD, a reviewer of all five IPCC reports since 1990. (Forbes 10/13/13)

Caught Holding the (Plastic) Bag! Vermont global warming scare-monger Bill McKibben got caught on camera filling up his grocery cart with eco-unfriendly plastic bags. No reusable canvas totes for Bill! The article by Twitchy spotlighting McKibben reminds us that the global warming cult figure is a prominent member of the Plastic Pollution Coalition, who’s website blares on its front page, “Disposable plastics are the greatest source of plastic pollution. Plastic bags, straws, bottles, utensils, lids, cups and so many others offer a small convenience but remain forever. REFUSE disposable plastics! Follow the “4 Rs” of sustainable living: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.” McKibben himself is quoted as saying, “Some fights, like global warming, are necessarily hard. And some fights are no-brainers: let’s stop using plastic stuff we don’t need.” Uh huh.

Newly Independent Village School of North Bennington Bucks State Testing Decline. When the Vermont Agency of Education released the results of the spring 2013 NECAP science assessment, Vermont 4th graders suffered a 6 point decline in proficiency – the only statistically significant drop in New England. One notable exception was the Village School of North Bennington, which abandoned the government school system and “went independent” this fall. Their 4th graders increased their science proficiency by 20 points and landed in the 80th percentile overall. Congratulations.

Dependent Nation: Means-Tested Gov’t Benefit Recipients Outnumber Full-Time Year-Round Workers. Census Bureau: according to the Census Bureau, there were 101,716,000 people who worked full-time year round in 2011, including both private-sector and government workers. Among the 108,592,000 people who fit the Census Bureau’s description of a means-tested benefit recipient in the fourth quarter of 2011 were 82,457,000 people in households receiving Medicaid, 49,073,000 beneficiaries of food stamps, 20,223,000 on Supplemental Security Income, 23,228,000 in the Women, Infants and Children program, 13,433,000 in public or subsidized rental housing, and 5,854,000 in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. Also among the 108,592,000 means-tested benefit recipients counted by the Census Bureau were people getting free or reduced-price lunch or breakfast, state-administered supplemental security income and means-tested veterans pensions.

Liberalism’s Future: “Liberalism’s agenda has been constant since long before liberals, having given their name a bad name, stopped calling themselves liberals and resumed

calling themselves progressives, which they will call themselves until they finish giving that name a bad name.” – George Will (Washington Post, 5/16/13)

Jefferson on Obamacare (presciently). "A government big enough to give you everything you want, is a government big enough to take away everything that you have."

Book of the Month

The Liberty Amendments: Restoring the American Republic

By Mark Levin

Threshold Editions, 2013

272 pages

Mark Levin is president of the Landmark Legal Foundation, served in the Reagan administration and as chief of staff to Attorney General Edwin Meese. He is best known as the host of his nationally syndicated radio show, The Mark Levin Show, where he is a fierce, no-holds-barred advocate for and defender of liberty and the U.S. Constitution.

In the Liberty Amendments, Levin makes the case that the United States has entered a period of what he calls “an age of post-constitutional soft tyranny.” The government is no longer constrained by the boundaries of the Constitution. As a result, “What was to be a relatively innocuous federal government, operating from a defined enumeration of specific powers, has become an ever-present and unaccountable force.”

In order to restore the federal government to its proper role, Levin proposes ten constitutional amendments through a process outlined in Article V of the Constitution, bypassing Congress and calling on two thirds of the state legislatures to convene a “Convention for Proposing Amendments.”

What should those amendments be? Levin has ten suggestions, including term limits for Congress and the Supreme Court, repealing the 17th Amendment and returning the responsibility of appointing of U.S. senators to the state legislatures, constitutional limits on spending and taxing and protecting private property, limits on the federal bureaucracy, and protections against voter fraud.

Beyond providing an intriguing vision for our future, Levin also gives an insightful look back into our nation’s history and the creation of our constitutional republic. He tells the stories and outlines the debates behind our founding principles. He explains why our Constitution is structured the way it is, and how our founding fathers had the insight to foresee the problems we have today, and to give us a remedy.

- Recommendation by Rob Roper, president of the Ethan Allen Institute

Final Thought

Happy (Day After) Halloween!

Generation Opportunity (<http://generationopportunity.org>) describes itself as “a free-thinking, liberty-loving, national organization of young people promoting the best of Being American: opportunity, creativity and freedom.”

What they're doing, and so far brilliantly, is demonstrating to an up and coming generation of Americans that government is not necessarily something to be blindly embraced like some sort of security blanket. Government can be downright abusive, intrusive, and, well, downright creepy. (Don't miss their “Creepy Uncle Sam” ads!)

These folks make a compelling case that young Americans in particular, who understand and benefit most from the implications of free choice, imagination and industry – ie capitalism – as it intersects with the information technology age. Why, for example, should a twenty-something who can find, evaluate and buy practically anything almost instantly from her smart phone ever consent to be governed by a detached bunch of politicians determined to cram one-size-fits all “systems” down her throat?

Generation Opportunity is waking up to the fact that this government is mostly in the business of robbing them to pay off a wealthier, older generation. They're not going to stand for it, and that scares the heck out of a lot of people. So, Happy Halloween!