

| OPINIONS |

Dirty toilets signal mismanagement

Nothing clears my mind like a brief visit to my professional pill-pusher. Dr. Kenneth Kopay charges only \$3.50 per minute for his couch sessions, which means he makes \$210 per hour. At 30 billable hours per week, his gross earnings for a 40-week year are \$252,000.



EYE ON THE PIE

Morton Marcus

Out of this, he has to pay rent for the office, wages and benefits for his staff, and subscriptions to numerous high-end magazines.

"Doc," I say, "seems to me you are netting less than a quarter-million bucks a year, which definitely makes you un-rich. Don't you think you are doing a disservice to your med-school colleagues by pulling down their average return on education?"

The good doctor says, "Listen, I get a haircut every week. My barber gets \$15 from me each visit. That's his fee plus tip. If he cuts four heads an hour, for 46 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, he'll gross \$138,000. He's got rent and reading expenses just as I do, so he's also un-rich."

"What's the point?" I ask.

"What do you think is the point?" he replies with that practiced professional cadence.

"I think you don't want to talk about your income," I say. "However, I want to discuss it because I'm concerned about you, barbers and other service-providers who cannot readily increase the productivity of

their jobs. All they can do is increase their prices to keep up with inflation.

"Yes," I continue, "you could work more hours or give fewer minutes to each client, as could the barber. But that might reduce the

quality of your work and the demand for your services. There's not much you can do by incorporating more technology into your practice. Sure, a massaging couch might help you just as computer-guided scissors could aid the barber."

Suddenly, Dr. Kopay turns on the 54-inch TV screen and asks me to identify an "ink blot" that looks like a foggy photo of Saturn.

"That's a business going out of business," I reply promptly.

"Interesting," he says. "Tell me more about why this business is going out of business."

"Dirty toilets," I answer.

"Truly?" he says.

"Dirty toilets," I repeat. "They signal to customers and employees that management does not care about them as people. Most people take toilets seriously. A dirty toilet is an affront to people who care about themselves, their families and their fellow citizens. Management can always blame the users of the toilets for persistent filth and disarray, but ultimately it's management's responsibility."

"At what age did you become a discerning toilet critic?" Dr. Kopay asks.

"Just after I figured out how the unem-

Technology can raise the productivity and wages of toilet cleaners.

ployment rate is calculated," I respond.

He laughs. I laugh. We have good laughs at these sessions.

"Do you have special affinity for toilet attendants?" he inquires.

"Not more than I do for anyone who performs an im-

portant social function for which s/he is poorly paid and given little respect," I reply. "Yet technology can raise the productivity and wages of toilet cleaners."

"However, facility managers don't have the money to reward productive waste workers. Higher management often does not see the value of clean toilets beyond the executive suite."

"Is this fixation," he asks delicately, "on toilet matters something that troubles you? Do you hear commodes running through the night?"

"No," I say. "It's just that the important things are ignored, taken for granted, assigned low priority because we believe that, in our times, the basic problems have been solved. It's not true. Dirty toilets are no different from the disasters waiting to happen to pipelines, computers, sewers, streets, bridges. They are the clear signs of a society that, through ignorance, has stopped caring about itself."

"Our time is up," Kenny says.

"It may very well be," I respond. •

Marcus taught economics for more than 30 years at Indiana University and is the former director of IU's Business Research Center. His column appears weekly. He can be reached at mmarcus@ibj.com.

Rebuilding a sustainable Indianapolis

While the transfer of the Indianapolis Water Co. to Citizens Energy Group significantly increases the debt burden for ratepayers, the debt issued to fund the transfer does provide the city of Indianapolis with an opportunity to address decades of infrastructure neglect.

Rather than simply building and repairing streets, sidewalks, bridges and parks, ratepayers and taxpayers should demand that these projects set standards for construction in Indianapolis by reusing or recycling materials, using environmentally friendly products, and designing public spaces to encourage physical activity.

Deconstruction is a method of taking what is commonly considered waste and reclaiming it into useful building material. Industry estimates are that 10 jobs are created for every ton of recycled material. Indianapolis-based Workforce Inc. is successfully recycling e-waste and cardboard, plastics, paper and glass for merchants in Broad Ripple, Fountain Square and Mass Ave. Engaging Workforce Inc. to lead deconstruction efforts for "Rebuild Indy" would minimize materials sent to landfills, provide opportunity for at-risk workers, and help develop commercial demand for these services.



VIEWPOINT

Brian Williams

Every street or sidewalk project should require the use of permeable or pervious paving. These paving solutions allow rainwater to seep into the ground, recharging ground water and reducing storm runoff. Indianapolis must protect its aquifers. With a greater volume of water in our aquifers, Indianapolis can begin to improve the quality of its water by diluting contaminants. As part of its settlement with the federal government, Indianapolis must reduce the number of storm runoff events and reduce the volume of water involved in those events. Permeable and pervious paving are established solutions that grant obvious benefits.

When and where possible, Indianapolis should use Indiana-based manufacturers that are making products that make a difference. For example, Green Tree Plastics in Evansville makes construction materials as well as park benches from recycled plastics. Terra Green Ceramics in Richmond recycles glass and ceramics for tiles. Shouldn't we engage Hoosier companies that employ our neighbors to make products with a positive environmental impact while we rebuild our capital city?

Finally, given the scope of the Rebuild Indy effort, Indianapolis should require every project to follow the "Complete

Every street or sidewalk project should require the use of permeable or pervious paving.

Streets" guidelines, which are gaining traction around the country. Complete Streets policies encourage municipal planners and engineers to design thoroughfares with all users in mind, including drivers, public-transportation vehicles and riders, pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as older people, children and people with disabilities.

Streets designed with sidewalks, raised medians, better bus stop placement, traffic calming measures and treatments for the disabled improve pedestrian, bicycle and motor-vehicle safety and encourage physical activity.

When the majority of all trips are three miles or less, we should encourage more walking, biking or mass-transit solutions. If done successfully, Complete Streets designs help reduce oil consumption, thereby reducing pollution and improving individual health by encouraging walking or biking.

If well-thought-out and implemented, Rebuild Indy can not only improve our infrastructure, but also improve our economy, our environment and our health. That is a return on our tax dollars and rate dollars that is acceptable, given the amount of debt for which my children and I are now responsible. •

Williams is regional venture partner of Hopewell Ventures, a Midwest-focused private-equity firm. He can be reached at bwilliams@ibj.com.

LETTERS

Some examples of gutlessness

Morton Marcus is right when he says [in the Sept. 13 issue], "Gutless government avoids political risk."

I just differ with him on which items on the list of government activities, or lack thereof, constitute such "gutlessness."

Marcus cites "privatizing" certain activities as evidence. Actually, I think privatizing certain governmental activities makes sense when doing so allows for better service at a better price for the citizen/consumer. Frankly, a lot more could be done in this area to reduce the tax burden yet provide better services.

My examples are as follows:

■ Wanting to tax the "rich" because they can afford it. After all, the rich are few and we can vote to take all of their money if we want, right?

■ Encouraging people with no income to take home loans they don't have a prayer of paying back and then blaming "Republicans" for the meltdown.

■ Building huge fiefdoms in Washington, D.C. at enormous cost with little benefit and then castigating the people for not paying enough in taxes—see Departments of Education and Energy;

■ Blaming doctors and insurance companies for the outlandish rise in health care costs when the trial lawyers and government are main culprits.

■ Standing up for those who put a crucifix in urine on the basis of "freedom of expression" yet condemning those who oppose the "Ground Zero Mosque" as haters.

Government is gutless and we who keep electing these bozos are the real culprits!

John Sorg

Online shopping isn't the problem

IBJ reported (in a Sept. 23 online story, "Indiana lawmakers push for Internet taxes") that an online sales tax measure being pushed into the budget talks was spurred by the inflammatory words of David Simon. Simon [heads] one of the country's largest group of brick-and-mortar shopping mall [developers]. His bias on this issue is clear: His business model depends largely on the failure of online retailers.

The Internet, however, is one of the few reasons our economy looks salvageable. It is disingenuous of Indiana lawmakers to claim low Internet taxation puts some firms at a competitive disadvantage when their goal is likely just to bring in more tax revenue, not level the playing field.

First, if they want to fix an unbalanced budget, they should look for ways to cut wasteful spending. Second, if they want to address a tax inequity, they should cut the current sales tax, not institute a new one.

Marc Oestreich

Telecommunications legislative specialist
The Heartland Institute, Chicago

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