

## The Puzzle of American Government

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Sometimes life is like a jigsaw puzzle. We're happily going about our business, and then something happens that seems odd. Like that odd piece of the puzzle, we can't make heads or tails of it, so we throw it aside and go on to the next piece. Once in a while, though, a few pieces later, we pick up a piece of the puzzle and, just like the next apparently insignificant event in our lives, it triggers a memory of that first piece. We go back and find it to see if the two odd-looking pieces fit together. When they do, we find that an image emerges.

With politics, or how much attention we pay to politics, the dynamics are similar. Some politician does something, and we look at it somewhat askance because it may not make sense on its own. We throw it away and don't pay it any more attention. Later on, Congress passes something else that may not make sense, but seems okay because it appears to solve a problem. But the real problem might be the pieces that come next.

We are at a point in our political jigsaw puzzle that we can begin to see the larger picture, but we need to go back and find those odd pieces that seemingly made no difference, or maybe they did, but we liked the difference they made.

Looking back, we can see that one of these events was the elevation of the Department of Education to Cabinet status. Some people were opposed. Others supported it. Reagan made it happen with an executive order. Prior presidents and legislators had nationalized the police (F.B.I.), retirement, (Social Security), Medical Insurance for the elderly (Medicare) and each of those were viewed by the majority of the American people as something that might, or might not, be necessary, but the puzzle piece was too hard to figure out, so we tossed it aside and didn't worry about it. "Nothing I can do," became the self-forgiving catch-phrase.

There is one common factor in the changes noted above, and that is that the puzzle pieces were put in place by proper authority of executive order or federal legislation.

Even the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (by Bush) followed proper procedure despite the fact that its existence is contrary to the basic philosophy of the Constitution.

Recently, however, the selection of the pieces of the puzzle that is our American future has shifted. Everyone complains about the cancellation of the XL pipeline. It was authorized by Congress, and was well into construction when it was frozen. That piece of the puzzle remains hotly argued, but only because of the differences of opinion regarding the secondary effects.

Some very subtle and unnoticed pieces have been put into our puzzle, however, that are beginning to really expose the picture that is our future. First, came the declaration that climate change was a threat to national security. Nobody paid much attention, and those who did either agreed with it or thought it was radical loony-toon talk. That piece was tossed aside.

Public health was considered to go beyond the health insurance for the elderly and the Affordable Care Act was passed. There was a lot of gnashing of teeth on one side and praise on the other, but once it was law, most people ignored it.

At about the same time, out-and-out gun control was shoved to the side. Unknown to many citizens, at the same time as that piece was tossed, the EPA proposed a rule to tax all ammunition at an absurd rate of around \$1.00 per round. The effect would have been to eliminate the ability of most Americans to purchase it. Only the wealthy would be able to buy ammunition. But it was probably the secondary effect that really killed the initiative. Specifically, it was argued that, if ammunition went from 50 cents a round to \$1.50 a round, a black market would erupt, completely undermining the effort, and creating a criminal population from former law-abiding citizens. That piece, the ammunition control piece, was set aside, and the gun control piece was retrieved, but there was still no place in the puzzle to put it.

In every jigsaw puzzle there is a lynch-pin piece that suddenly makes the picture much more easily seen. In our puzzle, that was the arrival of a virus. The virus proved that the people putting together the puzzle didn't necessarily need to follow all the rules. Alternatives were available.

And, as in putting together a jigsaw puzzle, once the picture emerges, there are changes made to the strategy of putting it together. The change we are seeing now has to do with a little-used law that was passed during the last century with all the best of intentions. Congress needed to find ways to win World War II. Our tanks were one of our best assets, but we couldn't get enough engines for them. So, Congress passed a law that said that, in times of war or in the national defense, the government could take over an industry and have it produce what was needed to win the war. Once the war was won, control would be passed back to the original owners. This law is titled the

Defense Production Act. Chrysler was forced to make engines for tanks instead of cars, and we won the war.

If we put some recent puzzle pieces together, we can see what might come of this. The two most recent ones are the Executive Orders that Baby Formula be manufactured under the Defense Production Act. So few people knew about that order, and so many were thankful for it, that the absurdity of baby formula being needed for the national defense went largely unnoticed. The next puzzle piece was the order, also under the Defense Production Act, that green energy production, in the form of increased manufacturing of solar panels, be stepped up. That made perfect sense, because the declaration had already been made that climate change was a national defense priority.

Even in the late stages of putting puzzles together, there is always that one odd piece, and the news of that one was leaked, perhaps too early, by someone in the administration. The report begins with the statement that Winchester Arms produces the vast bulk of the ammunition purchased by the military. In fact, 70% of Winchester's product is sold to the government. What was leaked was a request from the Administration that Winchester stop making its product available to the general public if it wanted to keep its contract with the military. Gun control was shifting once again towards ammunition control.

As the picture takes shape, it is easy to re-examine other statements made by the administration and wonder what is next. There has been talk that we must have gasoline to power our military vehicles. Is the petroleum industry the next to be nationalized under the Defense Production Act?

We were told, years ago, that a healthy population was important to our national defense, and New York attempted to outlaw large sizes of soft drinks. What's next? The nationalization of potato farms? The trucking industry? The beef and poultry industry?

Each of these can be arguably linked to the state of our preparedness for national defense. A healthy economy is necessary to the national defense too. Are rent and price controls in the pile of remaining puzzle pieces?

The movement to nationalize the elections process didn't make a ripple in the fabric of the existing constitutional language, but nationalizing elections was considered by many to be a matter of national defense. After all, without proper elections, the nation is at risk. Nationalizing elections, however, can't be done administratively, and the initiative languishes in Congress.

Of all of these puzzling pieces, the most disconcerting is the use, or misuse, of the Defense Preparedness Act.

Throughout all of this puzzling, it is important to remember that all of these people who were finding these pieces and putting them into place truly believe that what they are doing is what is best for the country. All of them, with the exception of the most recent puzzle pieces, were put into place using the procedures outlined in our legislative structure. We can't all agree on what is best for the nation, but we should all be able to agree that ends do NOT justify the means. If the United States is to become a nation of central powers, or if the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Amendments are to be honored and upheld, is to be a matter of choice, then it should be the people's choice. Completing the puzzle without respecting that, by circumventing the legislative process, runs the very high risk of composing a governmental picture of oppression. We all should remember that, those in power find it necessary to use a workaround to achieve their ends only when the majority of the people don't like the choice offered.

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