



Needed: A capitalism vaccine to stave off the disease of socialism

By Jim Waters

The story of Jonas Salk bears repeating to — and re-living over and over by — Kentuckians who believe the current crippling economic malady aggravated by “government bailouts” needs a healthy dose of capitalism.

Born in New York City in 1914, Salk became the first member of his family to get an education. He entered the field of medical research with great ambition to do something that really mattered to lots of people. So he tackled the most destructive disease of his time — polio.

Polio crippled a president, Franklin Roosevelt, and killed more Americans in the years following World War II than any other communicable disease. Health-care providers reported 57,000 cases in 1952 alone. The disease struck children most often.

Since the first recorded case in the 1830s, the disease baffled researchers.

Enter Jonas Salk. The son of a Russian-Jewish immigrant committed himself to keeping a health crisis from becoming a national disaster.

After developing the vaccine in 1952, Salk and his fellow researchers did some preliminary testing on polio survivors. However, researchers still didn’t know how the vaccine would work in individuals who could yet contract polio. Only by testing the vaccine in a trial in 1954 did its protective power emerge.

Among those who participated in the trial: Salk and his family. That’s commitment.

Now we face a different kind of disease.

A socialist approach to economic problem-solving leads us to a point where the federal government — already in the banking business, the insurance business and the mortgage-loan business — wants to get into the auto manufacturing business. Just like polio lodged in the gastrointestinal tract and spread into the bloodstream and then to the body’s nervous system, this disease of socialism spreads throughout the citizenry, which begins to look to Frankfort or Washington, D.C., to solve all its problems.

The trillions of tax dollars spent to reward failure and irresponsibility threatens to make this “crisis” a national disaster.

Enter freedom-loving Kentuckians not content to resign themselves to “cures” that only make the patient worse. These patriots no longer lazily accept the use of their hard-earned money to reward failure and irresponsibility, whether it occurs in Washington, Frankfort or at city hall.

They reject the garbage fed them from inside the Beltway these days — that individuals must surrender their dreams of prosperity and success “for the collective good.”

These patriots show up at tea parties, sign petitions, write letters, send e-mails and tell Gov. Steve Beshear: “Tell Washington ‘thanks, but no thanks’ to its socialistic approach toward stimulating our economy. We’re Kentuckians. We live in the land of Daniel Boone and Henry Clay. We can solve our problems through ingenuity, hard work, innovation and a commitment beyond just finding the right basketball coach.”

They also believe in the words of Marx — Groucho not Karl — who said: “Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies.”

The disease of socialism continues to spread, threatening to rob us of our prosperity and diminish our country’s greatness.

History shows that the “collective good” improves fortunes only when government leaves individuals free to pursue their own interests.

Polio became little more than a blip in the vast expanse of history. Yet, Salk saved thousands of lives not because of an edict from Washington, D.C., but because of his personal talent and ambition.

Let’s relegate this economic plague we face to just another blip in history by keeping the crisis in which we find ourselves from becoming a full-blown disaster with a strong dose of capitalism and individualism.

— *Jim Waters is director of policy and communications for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky’s free-market think tank. Reach him at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com. Read previously published columns at www.bipps.org.*