



Try Madison — James, not Wisconsin — to get your head straight

By Jim Waters

Remarks made in the “comment” sections at the end of online newspaper articles usually come from anonymous sources and offer little value to reporters, who must confirm sources and corroborate facts.

But they sometimes offer an unfiltered perspective about what Kentuckians think about their commonwealth and its government.

One such comment came in response to a column by the Lexington Herald-Leader’s Tom Eblen about a recent trip sponsored by Lexington Commerce that he and several other civic leaders took to Madison, Wisc.

Eblen’s column depicted the expedition as the equivalent of a struggling patient spending serious evaluation time at the psychiatrist’s office. Only this excursion ended up representing a collective three-day session on the couch for about 260 central Kentuckians, who sought ways to improve Lexington’s “quality of life and economic vitality,” Eblen wrote.

Online comments about the column indicate some readers might need serious time on the couch, too.

Eblen’s rambling missive did the usual finger-pointing at hard-working Kentuckians for lacking tolerance and diversity. We need a “better attitude,” an anonymous headline writer appended to the column.

Equally anonymous was this comment at the end of the column: “Cities, states, and the federal government — and the ways they raise and spend money — are the foundations of our communities, without them we would live in a chaotic state of all versus all.”

If Eblen really wants more economic vitality, I suggest he use the paper’s space to address the public-policy bipolarization he inspires that leads to comments such as this.

For example, he could write about the problem this reader faces for wrongly thinking that government, rather than individuals, serve as the glue that holds our communities together. He could write that the comment-poster needs counseling to get his thinking straight: Government plays a supporting, not a leading, role as the reader’s comment — and many of Eblen’s columns — implies.

Should Eblen ask: “If government is to play a supporting role, then who or what is it to serve?” To which our nation’s founders and I would eagerly answer: the individual.

Those wise sages put liberty and protection of the individual above any government program or nonsense about the collective good. They didn’t have to try to impart the “collective good” through some law or government agency — or even a trip to Madison, Wisc.

The comment-poster should visit Madison — James Madison, that is — who advised: “The people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter, under which the several branches of government hold their power, is derived.”

Madison and the framers of the Constitution recognized that individuals hold the freedom to create, innovate and adapt in order for our nation to benefit collectively. And who could argue that this has not happened — in terms of prosperity and freedom — beyond anything our founders could possibly have envisioned?

I admit that my “attitude” stinks right now, and you know why.

Government confiscates a big chunk of each loaf of my labor’s bread and then won’t tell me how my money gets spent. It gives me no say in how my tax “contributions” get spent for educating my own children. It tries to coerce me into changing my thermostat setting and strong-arm me into driving an unsafe, ugly car. It tries to limit my speech and force me to accept values to which I don’t subscribe.

Just the thought of changing those things and allowing me my “pursuit of happiness” puts me in a great frame of mind and results in a big, stupid grin on my face.

And the only place I went to find those was my well-worn copy of the “Declaration of Independence.”

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