



Parting Thoughts

By David M. Rich and Thomas L. Krannawitter, Ph.D.

As we have announced on our [website](#), The Vino & Veritas Society will be closing its doors as of December 31, 2022.

We think the reasons for our business decision will be of interest to some of you. More, those reasons form a kind of case study about where our nation is today and the challenges facing those trying to protect and preserve the American experiment in constitutional self-government. This case study features some highlights from our past content that we hope you will keep in mind as you continue your pursuit of civic virtue.

THE CHALLENGES

As we explained in the October 2022 [Case Study](#) and discussed in several podcasts, it is now a question whether the United States can be described, accurately, as a *constitutional republic*. Large parts of our government bear no resemblance at all to the kind of government the American Founders thought they were creating. If someone working in the federal government today picked up *The Federalist Papers* and read it, they'd likely laugh and say: "That's not how our government works!"

The greatest commentary on the United States Constitution ever written—*The Federalist Papers*—is now largely irrelevant because the Constitution itself is now largely irrelevant.

To boot, the character of the American people today is strikingly different than the character of those who launched a successful revolution in 1775/76 and ratified the Constitution just over a decade later. Self-reliance, self-restraint, and self-assertion have been eclipsed, to an alarming extent, by envy, a desire to command and control fellow citizens, and a sense of entitlement.

Before asking whether Americans are still free, we first should ask whether Americans *want* to be free. It appears many do not.

Still, for the optimists among us who insist that the United States is still an operating, functioning republic worthy of preserving, the challenges are daunting.

ELECTIONS DON'T MATTER

FIRST, as was highlighted in our November 2020 [case study](#) elections no longer matter in a decisive respect.



This is true, in part, because it is now a question whether citizens can trust that elections are legitimate and results are valid and accurate. In 2020, we watched as election officials in multiple states changed voting rules, arbitrarily, often without any legal authority to do so.

The well-known problems associated with mail-in ballots have been amplified as many states now mail out millions of ballots every election cycle. What began as a means of accommodating certain individuals who could not vote in person has become another entitlement program. Sometimes, multiple ballots with the same name are mailed to multiple addresses, creating the perfect setting for ballot-harvesting and fraud.

Even when and if elections are legitimate, transparent, and accurate, however, they still don't matter. The bottom line is that the American people no longer control their own government by voting.

An enormous part of our government now consists of unelected, unionized bureaucrats whose jobs are rarely ever affected by election results. They don't care who wins or loses in the next election, or the one after that, or the one after that.

Of the few politicians who are actually elected to office, they have little reason to listen to, care about, or fear the citizens who vote for them. Campaign finance laws and regulations ensure that the vast majority of Congress, for example, will stay in office until they retire or die from old age.

Thus we see voting Americans, over decades, demanding that their elected representatives fix the ridiculous and broken processes of U.S. immigration—to name just one example—and, for decades, elected representatives simply ignoring them.

SEPARATION OF POWERS: RIP

SECOND, the separation of powers woven into the design of the Constitution — thought by the Founders to be the key to limiting government power and channeling it toward government's proper purpose — has been replaced with an **administrative state** that operates outside the bounds of the Constitution and vests and combines all political powers into independent, bureaucratic regulatory agencies.

Those independent, bureaucratic regulatory agencies issue regulations that have the power of law over citizens. Those same agencies enforce the regulations they issue. And when there is a question about whether a citizen or an organization has



failed to comply with one or more regulations, the agency will typically hold an administrative hearing to settle the dispute.

In this way, independent, bureaucratic regulatory agencies combine and exercise all three political powers, legislative, executive, and judicial.

Even within the elected branches of government, separation of powers is dead in practice. Ties of partisan loyalty among the branches have become far more important than differences of interests between the branches. Democrats in Congress, for example, have much more in common with Democrats on the Supreme Court and a Democrat in the White House than they do with Republicans in Congress.

Separation of powers has been relegated mainly to old books of political theory.

MUTUAL CIVIC TRUST IS NOW CIVIC SUSPICION

THIRD, millions of citizens now view each other with great **distrust and suspicion**, while viewing those in government as the only ones who can protect citizens from each other.

The American revolutionaries famously pledged to each other, in the closing line of the Declaration of Independence, their “lives, fortunes, and sacred honor.” They thought it was both wise and good to trust ordinary fellow citizens, to a large extent, while distrusting those in government who will always be tempted to misuse and abuse government power for their own advantages.

Today, the situation has been turned onto its head. Millions of our fellow citizens place great, almost unlimited faith in political “leaders” and unelected bureaucrats. They cannot imagine limiting the powers of those in government because that would mean limiting the protections government can offer and the entitlements government can dispense.

Those same Americans are convinced their fellow citizens are out to hurt them, steal from them, or somehow cheat them. They do not trust fellow citizens, which is why they prefer that those in government regulate, command, and control fellow citizens.

CITIZENSHIP

If these problems are to be solved — and it is a big question whether solutions are possible even in the best of circumstances — they can only be solved by virtuous individuals who are good citizens.



The question is: Are there Americans who want to learn how to be **virtuous and good**, and then put into practice the important lessons they learn?

Some do. Among them are the good Americans who have become part of The VINO & Veritas Society. But many do not. They value cheerleading for political celebrities more than learning.

This is something partisans on both sides of the political aisle have in common: For many Democrats and for many Republicans, *nothing* is more important than the next election. The problem is that after the next election is another election, and then another, and another. The United States is now in election mode all the time, 12 months each year, year after year. There is no pause, no break.

And if we have learned anything over the past century, it is that elected politicians will not solve the problem of an America sliding down the slippery slope of progressivism and collectivism.

As Americans continue to **politicize everything**, government gets involved in everything. There are hardly any areas of life left in America that are not regulated by government, subsidized by government, or both. As government gets involved in everything, citizens devote increasing time, attention, and money to elections — even though elections never change the modern administrative state in any significant way.

The modern obsession with elections has proven to be a great challenge for The VINO & Veritas, one we cannot overcome. We attempted to offer a unique kind of education about the principles of constitutional self-government coupled with opportunities to socialize and deepen one's own civic understanding in local chapters. We misunderstood what the American people value. It is a great question whether any kind of serious civic education can now compete with the urgency of electing the next governor, the next member of Congress, or the next President.

As aspiring virtuous citizens, we'd pose the following questions to you:

1. Does the constitution matter today and how might you convince your fellow citizens to embrace it, and understand it better, as you do?
2. Would it be helpful to focus on one attainable social and political goal, such as abolishing one form of professional **licensure** at the state level? The early innovators of progressivism did not limit their attention to the next election cycle.



Their strategy, which included the transformation of the entire realm of higher education, stretched over multiple generations. Can freedom-loving patriots today overcome the immediacy of the next election cycle and build long term plans to restore virtue among our fellow citizens?

3. Has the American experiment in self-government been successful? If yes, is it sustainable? If no, what can be done to turn the ship back toward the ideas of the declaration and achieve desirable outcomes?

These are among the challenges that we have been unable to overcome, which is why we have chosen to close the doors on The Vino & Veritas Society come the end of 2022.

We will continue to look for ways to share the virtues and precepts of The Vino & Veritas Society because we remain persuaded those beautiful ideas are indispensable if there is any hope for a future free United States of America. And, to be clear, the ordinary business of The Vino & Veritas Society will be coming to an end.

We thank each and every one of our members for the support, interest, and cheer you have shown to us. We thank you for the opportunity to serve you. And we look forward to finding new ways of joining together and advancing the good cause of liberty and sharing the American idea with all who want to know what it means.