



THE TAOS NEWS

‘Chasm between baby boomers and millennials’

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Glenn’s piece “Inequality. Really?” in the May 12-May 18 edition, personifies the chasm between the baby boomers and millennials. He said “the U.S. is still the best country to live in.”

What statistics is this opinion based on? It certainly couldn’t be the World Health Organization’s numerous reports showing the U.S. consistently having some of the worst health outcomes in the developed world, despite spending the highest amount of money per capita on health care. Nor could it be the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranking the U.S. with the 29th (best?) educational system (only five ahead of Russia). Land of the free and home of the brave? The Cato Institute ranks the U.S. 20th on their Human Freedom Index — the only English speaking nation outside of the top 10.

When Glenn compares the U.S. to Russia, China and Saudi Arabia, it seems like the U.S. is just fantastic. Compare us to democratic socialist nations such as Finland, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland or Poland, and we are far behind in nearly every social indicator. The socialism of the Cold War era is nothing like democratic socialism. As an economist, I have done extensive study of the two.

Socialism, as it existed in the Soviet Union, was the centralized decision making of resource allocation. This required the dictatorship to achieve and it was grossly inefficient. Democratic socialism is the use of efficient capitalist market principles to achieve desired social outcomes. It requires democracy to be efficient. Those capitalist market principles include a free and fair market to promote competition (the exact opposite of what exists in America today). Wealth inequality is the key to all of this. When the richest corporations and individuals can lobby Congress to enact legislation that gives tax breaks to multinational corporations and the wealthy, allows loopholes for tax havens, and promotes corporate mergers (like Facebook’s buyout of over 50 competitors), we have anything but a free, fair and competitive marketplace. “Innovation must be rewarded,” Glenn writes, and I agree, but innovation and competition are greatly feared by the establishment as challenges to their wealth and are stifled at any opportunity.

“Most of the 1 percent...did not inherit [their wealth]. They earned it,” Glenn states. What basis does he have for this conclusion? Certainly not the United for a Fair Economy report that indicated over 60 percent of individuals on the Forbes 400 list grew up in “substantial privilege.” Even if parents didn’t gift them large sums of money outright, their acceptance into the Ivy League schools their parents attended and donate to, private primary and secondary education,

and social connections give them an advantage simply because they were born to certain parents. If that is not “inherited,” I don’t know what is.

Yes, some of the richest people are self made. You cited Jeff Bezos’ estimated worth of \$43.5 billion (who even needs that much money?), but failed to mention the many Amazon employees that have to strike for living wages and better working conditions. “Steve Jobs’ estate is worth \$10.2 billion,” you say, but leave out the fact that the iPhones that made him were produced with shockingly cheap (less than \$2 per day) sweatshop labor in working conditions so horrendous that people have committed suicide in the Apple factory. Can you honestly tell me that you think someone that hoards billions of dollars instead of paying a living wage to the people that build their products is not greedy and is deserving of their wealth?

Do you know what it is like to try and survive in this economy with student debt? Debt resulting from a 400 percent increase in tuition costs and a 250 percent increase in room and board costs since 1975, according to College Board, in a job market that pays poverty wages. To put it in perspective, I earned two academic degrees in economics and international studies from the University of South Florida. Both degrees were paid for in part with the GI Bill, though I still have student debt.

I am currently a teacher (I’d argue the most important job out there) of calculus and algebra II at Taos High School. My take home pay: less than \$24,000 a year. Something is wrong with this country.