



First Friday News & Views

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The Monthly Newsletter
of the First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.

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Guns, Butter, and Arithmetic Reality

By Jonathan Wilson

Some things just don't add up. President [sic] Trump is submitting a budget outline that proposes to increase military spending by 50-some billion dollars and to cut domestic spending by a like amount. So far, so good. I don't like it, but at least those numbers add up. That formula of polarity between domestic and military spending is classically consistent with the macroeconomic principles of Guns vs. Butter. Assuming no added productivity and no additional outside resources, what we choose to spend on the military must reduce correspondingly what we spend on domestic priorities, and vice versa.

But he doesn't stop there. He has also promised not to cut Social Security or Medicare, so the cuts in domestic spending would have to come from discretionary domestic spending. Not done yet. He's promised to increase spending for the Veterans Administration. There's more. He's promised to build a less-than-great-wall (assuming the Wall in China remains the gold standard for greatness when it comes to ineffective border walls). There's still more. He's promised a trillion-some dollar spending spree on infrastructure, and unprecedented spending in impoverished inner-cities.

There's more still when it comes to his much-heralded repeal of Obamacare. He claims his as-yet-unveiled replacement plan will give "everyone" access to insurance – not just the measly 20,000,000 additional insureds that Obama was able to cover without the help of Republicans in Congress. Plus, he says that his plan will not drop the pre-existing condition protections, will *raise* benefits, will *reduce* deductibles, will *lower* premiums, will let people stay on a parent's policy until age 26, and will eliminate the individual mandate that was designed to get more healthy people into the insurance pool so the actuarial tables continue to work. And the transition from the repealed plan to the replacement will supposedly be seamless – hopefully **not** in the model of his first month in office.

And he thinks he can lower taxes, and all this won't raise the national debt.

Democrats in Congress are shaking their heads in anger and frustration that there turned out to be more rubes in the right states for him to be elected President [sic]. The Republicans in Congress are shaking their heads in bewilderment and somewhat similar frustration. It's the Republican-controlled Congress, after all, that will be called upon to make a silk purse out of this sow's ear.

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The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am, Friday, April 7, 2017, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA

RSVP by April 5 to
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or phone 515-288-2500

Critically, I view President [sic] Trump as a shallow bully without the temperament to hold public office. Sympathetically, I view President [sic] Trump as a sad mental case flaunting his illness in the public square. And I thought George W. Bush was bad – you know, the less intelligent of the Bush brothers. But I think he at least knew he was out of his league and surrounded himself with smart people – bad people, but smart ones.

Don't get me wrong, President [sic] Trump knows he's out of his league, but he's surrounding himself with REALLY bad people who are about as lacking in government experience as he is. He's set out to "drain the swamp" and has proceeded to repopulate it with has-beens, wannabes, liars, and suck-ups. Some of his picks have been SO bad that he still couldn't get a Republican-controlled Congress to confirm them, or at least confirm them based on honest testimony in confirmation hearings. We actually have a chief law enforcement officer who committed perjury before our very eyes in order to get confirmed. We have an Energy Secretary that's proposed to eliminate the Department of Energy. We have an EPA head that opposes the work of the EPA. We have an education Secretary who favors taxpayer dollars going to private schools. We have a HUD Secretary who's never held public office, not even dog catcher and, when told of his Cabinet candidacy, acknowledged his incompetence for the job. And the first National Security Advisor didn't know that the US routinely monitors communications of the Russian Ambassador and thinks it's okay to lie to the Vice President.

President [sic] Trump said that he's inherited a mess. Steven Colbert said it best, "No, he inherited a fortune; he's making a mess."

Because someone says it, doesn't make it true. Because the President of the United States says it, doesn't make it true. Because the President of the United States says it repeatedly, still doesn't make it true. Alternative "facts" aren't true; they are not reality. Reality is in the arithmetic. Stay tuned as we go with a mentally unstable person into a fantasy world.

Be sure to RSVP by April 5 for the April 7, 2017 meeting by calling 515-288-2500 or on line at: JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. Our speaker in April will be Daniel Hoffman-Zinnel, the new Executive Director of One Iowa. You won't want to miss. You are encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend!!

Thanks to Byron Huff for serving as emcee at the March meeting, and to Tim Schreck for introducing our March speaker, Bob Warren, the Executive Director of Hoyt Sherman Place.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. **Book donations are always welcome.**



Thanks to Scott Kuknyo for helping coordinate the book exchange. Thanks to Steve Person for going out of his way to help get out the last issue of our newsletter.

Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. We're all going to die, and we can't take it with us. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.

Thanks to those who gave to the scholarship program, and a special thanks to those who helped with our celebration party.

Ponderables

Some days the supply of curse words is insufficient to meet my demands.

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I'm here to kick ass and drink whiskey. And Pilgrim, I'm out of whiskey. John Wayne

I believe in free speech – but not free

If we never did anything we shouldn't, we wouldn't be able to feel good about doing the things that we should. House of Cards

The gift of a good liar is one who convinces you he is not a good liar. House of Cards

March Speaker Robert Warren — Executive Director of Hoyt Sherman Place
By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, March 3, 2017, was Robert Warren, executive director of Hoyt Sherman

Place (where the First Friday Breakfast Club has held its monthly meetings for most of its 20-plus-year history). Warren, who has been on the job here for a year and a half, regaled us with an enthusiastic and most impressive account of the mansion/gallery/auditorium/lawn that he oversees and of his plans for its future. What follows can be only the merest outline of Warren's efficient and amusing presentation, but you can listen again – or for the first time – to all of it by going to our Web site, <ffbciowa.org>, and clicking on the "Speakers" tab.

Warren began with fulsome praise for the members of the Des Moines Women's Club, who preserved and developed the Sherman Mansion for the better part of a century, adding the gallery and its collection and the 1250-seat auditorium, who set up its endowment, and who still meet weekly at Hoyt Sherman Place. He outlined some of the famous speakers who had lectured in the auditorium and gave some details of the art collection – over 50 paintings and other works now valued at some \$2.7 million, almost all of which have been restored. He unveiled for us a 17th-century painting titled *Apollo Teaching Venus to Paint* which he found tucked into a crawl space in the mansion.

As for the theater, "for quite a few years, it had been treated strictly as a rental house," Warren noted. "It was at the whim of outside promoters if they wanted to stop in Des Moines for a show." Once Warren arrived, he began booking shows directly, filling the calendar with acts such as Peter Frampton, Kacey Musgraves, and Tears for Fears. He drew on contacts he had developed through his decades of being in the industry. He figures that about half of the events and concerts will still come through outside promoters and half will be shows Hoyt Sherman books directly. No matter how the event is booked, though, Hoyt Sherman is taking a more active and aggressive role in marketing it, and that marketing role, which may include advertising, social media, and other promotional efforts, extends to local arts and community organizations that rent the facility, such as Ballet Des Moines and Civic Music.

Among other projects planned or in the works: building an addition to the backstage area; increasing the endowment fund; increasing collaboration with other local arts organizations as well as arts education groups and the Sherman Hill neighborhood; using Hoyt Sherman's expansive lawn for events and activities; and increasing the visibility of the historic mansion. "My goal is to have the entire building open and accessible as many hours of the day and week as we can, re-engaging with the community in the process," he said. "I want to put Hoyt Sherman back on the relevance radar."

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Robert Warren grew up in the tiny town of Friendship, Wisconsin, but went to Manhattan after high school, attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, then earning a BFA from Marymount Manhattan College, specializing in musical theater. For much of the next decade he performed in touring shows, including "The Pirates of Penzance" and "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas." The, done with touring, he joined an Army program that provided an education and a job in the White House communications department. After earning a BFA in radio, TV, and film from the University of Maryland, he says, it was time to leave the east coast. By then he was a single father with full custody of his two young sons, and they came back this direction, to Cedar Falls, Iowa, where Warren oversaw the renovation and revival of the Oster Regent Theatre. This project led to a similar one in Blowing Rock, N.C., and his success there led him back to Washington, D.C., for a nine-year stint at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, a leap from a "very small fish pond to a shark tank" where – as was recently noted in an article in *dsm magazine* – Warren managed to thrive by taking his sense of humor and his wildness and blending them with his administrative abilities." In Washington, Warren was the associate producer of "Shear Madness", and also executive director of the Kennedy Center's Any Given Child initiative for Sarasota, Florida, which assists communities in developing arts-infused educational programs. In 2013, he left the Kennedy Center for a successful stint leading Hartford Performs in Hartford, Conn., a public-private partnership that uses an arts-integrated curriculum to boost academic progress. A nationwide executive search in 2015 on behalf of the Hoyt Sherman Foundation led Warren once again back to the Midwest – where he can be reached via the Hoyt Sherman Web page, <hoytsherman.org>, or at 1501 Woodland Avenue in Des Moines, telephone 515/244-0507 x206.

Be Nice by Brian Taylor Carlson

My mother used to tell me, “Always be nice to people.” And I am. I would never be rude to someone and I am always mindful of other people’s feelings. I feel empathy for people who are going through experiences, both good and bad. This sometimes leaves me with making excuses for other people’s behavior, especially in my previous restaurant career. I can tell if someone is having a bad day or if someone has a larger problem happening in their lives just by the way our interaction goes. But I am always nice, even if I am directly insulted.

Recently, while out to lunch with coworkers, I witnessed a cringe-worthy customer-waiter exchange at another table, and it brought back a few instances when I questioned my life choices. Of course, I have always loved the restaurant business and the lifestyle that goes along with it. I never would have spent 25 years in the industry. But people can be truly surprising sometimes. And I’m being nice.

One night, I was working an alfresco fountain-side section at Michaels Restaurant in Key West. It was hot and humid, and I had every seat filled. An older gentleman with his date sat at table 22. Upon approaching the table, he began to assert his dominance over me, and at first, I thought he was joking. But it quickly became apparent that there was a certain rank into which he was socially established that made it acceptable for him to exert power over my lowly servant status.

After a few times of passing by his table to assist and provide table maintenance to other guests, he snapped his fingers to get my attention for minor things such as more butter, checking on the time for the next course, decanting the wine, a replacement napkin for one that he dropped on the deck, and more attention. And to massage his ego. It was clear that he was trying to impress his date, who had the personality of a burlap sack. No matter how rude or mean he was to me, her expression never changed, and she acted like it was “business as usual.” I found her to be the enabler.

Near the end of the dinner, I had just cleared their entrée dishes and was approaching the table with dessert and cordial menus. Once again, he snapped his

fingers at me to nab my already wearily enrapt attention. He waved the menus away with a sneer, and hastily snapped, “We’ll have two double espressos and a crème de-lay.”

“Would you like those now or later?” I asked.

“Now!” he snapped again with an incredulous expression.

“Well, sir, I only wanted to know how much of a ‘delay’ you wanted on your ‘crème brûlée,” I answered, unwavering in my direct challenge to his dining prowess. “I’ll be back momentarily.”

The shocked look on his face was all I needed to satisfy my revenge. I don’t tend to harbor resentment over these trivialities, but this diamond in the rough clearly needed to be adjusted. I will never understand why people feel it necessary to assert a social hierarchy in the relationship between server and customer. It’s always bugged me.

Speaking of bugs, I had another delightful couple seated fountain-side one evening at table 23. They came in at opening time to ensure that they would have ample time to make the Mallory Square sunset celebration. Contrary to some tourists’ beliefs, there is typically only one sunset celebration per evening, but that’s a topic for another story.

The gentleman at this table of young 20-somethings also felt it was necessary to display his obvious male dominance over the gay waiter by ordering for his date in such a way as to make demands of me—and insinuate that there would be certain repercussions if these demands were not met in a timely and efficient fashion. Fine. No sweat off my back, of course, but my feelings were still hurt under my thick skin of years of dealing with this type of behavior. I dealt with situations like these with strength. I did not allow myself to divert energy in paying too much attention to people like this and letting them affect my personal well-being. And telling someone that you can have them fired is probably not the best way to get someone in the service industry to respect you more. If you suddenly feel many sets of eyes on you while you are dining out, chances are your server has alerted the entire staff of your behavior.

After I left the table to enter their menu-rearranging “gluten-free, carb-conscious, no butter, no extra oil, lower calorie, vegan, lightly-spiced low-sodium” and

eventually food-free order into the computer, I heard a loud gasp and the sound of chairs scraping across the deck with a clamor. This could only mean a few things. Either there was a spill, and customers were making an attempt to save their outfits from the spilled beverage—especially red wine—or they were rushing to get to the next venue. And if there is one thing you do in Key West to shine a spotlight on you, announcing across the hills that you're a tourist, that's rush.

I approached table 23 and couldn't help but notice the gentleman's startlingly large bug-eyes and trembling nervousness. Beads of sweat had erupted across his forehead. His girlfriend was standing up, patiently waiting by the side of her distressed boyfriend, and her gaze had turned toward the floor. Was she blushing? I couldn't tell.

"Is everything in order here?" I asked.

The handsome, muscular gentleman pointed with bulging biceps toward the fountain. "BUG!" he whimpered. His girlfriend *was* blushing. I knew it. She blushed even more.

Palmetto bugs are relatively common in Florida. They live in the root systems of palm trees and feed on detritus. Like most bugs, they like moist, low-light environments—especially under decks and near fountains that are located between live palm trees that grow from the ground. This palmetto bug had emerged from below the deck, climbed up the edge of the fountain, and decided to get a tan in the late afternoon sun while enjoying the lovely waterfall.

Without a word, I spun around, walked the few steps to the bar, grabbed a beverage napkin from the bar caddy, unfolded the napkin, approached the fountain, and

netted the palmetto bug with the napkin. I strolled calmly out the front of the restaurant and let the little guy go in a section of grassy area by the sidewalk. It ran and hid beneath a dead croton leaf.

I walked back into the restaurant and wadded up the napkin. I had the intention of washing my hands to rid myself of palmetto bug germs. But as I passed by table 23, the muscular, masculine dominant bodybuilder asked in his best little boy voice, "Did you kill it?"

"No, I let it go," I replied. This guy would be so cute if he wasn't such a dick, I thought.

"You let it GO?!" he resounded. I felt sorry for his girlfriend, who wanted to be anywhere but there at that moment. She looked like she was trying to sink herself lower into her chair to make herself invisible.

The rest of the dinner was amusing to say the least. I had more "Thank you, sirs" from this guy than I had in months. I'm not sure if the couple's relationship lasted through the night, but you can rest assured the gay, queeny, "to-be-dominated" waiter saved the day, and that nasty, menacing palmetto bug never saw it coming.

The point is, always be nice. That's all you can do. No matter what festering situation you find yourself immersed in, it's always best to take the high road and show dignity and respect to those around you. Even if the person is treating you like you are gum beneath their shoe, snapping their fingers and flexing their massive biceps, just be nice. It always pays off.

But if you decide to be mean to your server, do yourself a favor by learning how to pronounce crème brûlée. It will leave your server devoid of ammunition.

President [sic] Trump says premiums for the GOP health insurance will be "a fraction of those under Obamacare." That's saying nothing; 99/100 is a "fraction," but not a meaningful one.

Our President [sic] demonstrates that money and class are separable.

A person can be crazy; not crazy enough to be put in an institution, but if already in one, be too crazy to be let out



Des Moines Metro Opera

By Michael Egel

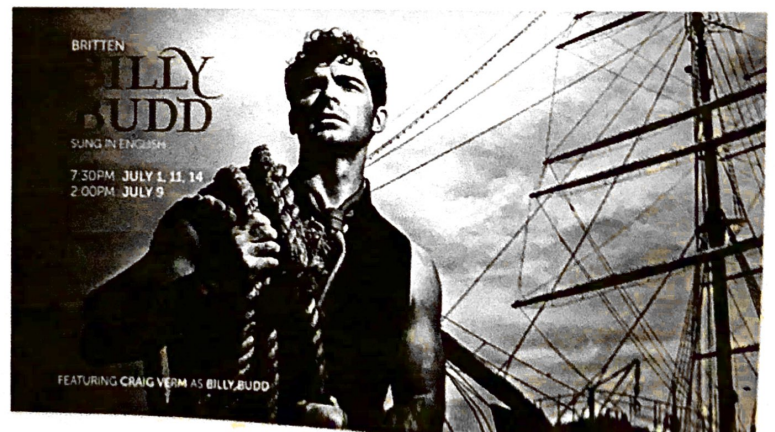
This month, extracts from letters between composer Benjamin Britten and tenor Peters Pears have gone on display at their Suffolk home which they shared for decades following World War II until Britten's death in the 1970's. For 39 years, Pears was Britten's muse, collaborator and lover, but during most of that time, this was a dangerous life to live. Despite the fact that they shared a home, the true nature of their relationship was unclear to even some of their closest friends. Though in public they were very restrained, their letters reveal a sweet picture of a very loving couple. Their partnership was one of the 20th century's most important artistic collaborations.

Across England during 2017, a number of exhibitions are planned marking the 50th Anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, when homosexual acts between men over 21 in England and Wales were decriminalized. Included as part of the exhibit, for example, are a letter written by codebreaker Alan Turing and love letters between Noël Coward and his partner, Graham Payn – which contrast those of Britten and Pears by their more restrained and cautious nature. Also on exhibit are the manuscripts for the novel *Maurice* by EM Forster, who, along with Eric Crozier, created the text for Benjamin Britten's all-male opera *Billy Budd* in 1951 based on Melville's novella of the same name. So it is with extra pride that Des Moines Metro Opera turns to that particular opera for its Summer Festival Season of 2017.

Billy Budd was commissioned by the Arts Council for the 1951 Festival of Britten, but the idea to turn the novella into an opera had been in Britten's mind for many years. Throughout his career, Britten empathized with stories of an outsider who is positioned apart from a tightly-knit community, either through their actions or by nature of who they are. In the case of *Billy Budd*, the drama is delivered with remarkable directness. Here the master-at-arms, John Claggart, represents evil while Budd himself represents good. Positioned between them is the pivotal character of Captain Edward Fairfax Vere, under whose jurisdiction and authority these two forces of good and evil will powerfully and tragically collide.

“This is our moment, the moment we've been waiting for!” So exclaims the entire cast of sailors and naval officers near the beginning of Act II of Benjamin Britten's epic opera *Billy Budd*. It's a refrain that has often played through my mind numerous times since we first began planning to produce this incredible work several years ago. And as we get closer to our opening night on July 1, it seems to increase in frequency and eager anticipation. Though the title of this opera may have some familiarity to opera goers and bibliophiles alike, performances of this 20th century masterpiece are actually very rare. In the United States, only a handful of our largest opera companies possess the necessary resources to successfully meet the enormous demands of this score. Demands that include enormous orchestral forces, numerous principal artists, a 40 plus voiced all-male chorus and a stage configuration that translates naturally into the shape of British Naval ship of the 18th century.

Given our long history with the works of Benjamin Britten, we are proud to present this new edition as a part of the 45th Anniversary celebration. Baritone Craig Verm (pictured) returns to sing the title role, a role he seems vocally and physically designed to perform! I've waited a long time to present this work to you and I hope you won't miss it. This is indeed our moment, and it has certainly been worth waiting for!



For more information, please visit <http://desmoinesmetroopera.org/productions/britten-billy-budd>, or call 961-6221

Reorganization of Waterworks Bill Bad for Taxpayers & Des Moines

By Matt McCoy

This bill is a power grab by the Farm Bureau to punish Des Moines Waterworks for demanding accountability for nitrates entering into the Raccoon River Watershed, which has some of the highest nitrate levels in the nation. It robs taxpayers in the city of Des Moines by taking a city owned asset and replacing it with a regional authority without capital investment to pay for the asset that's already been established and paid for by the taxpayers of Des Moines. Des Moines taxpayers borrowed money and built Des Moines Waterworks, and they own the asset. While it's true that Des Moines Waterworks serves the entire metro, the city of Des Moines owns it and the suburbs are merely customers or consumers of the Des Moines Waterworks. If this bill passes as drafted, Des Moines taxpayers will be stuck with larger water bills, less control of the assets they own, and potentially be forced into special assessments for new water plants expansions to serve outlying communities who's demand for water continues to escalate. This is bad for Des Moines taxpayers, and it's a bad way for the legislature to engage in an issue that should be handled through local control.

Background:

Des Moines Waterworks was established in 1919, nearly 100 years ago. The city of Des Moines purchased the water company and has been running it ever since. A board of trustees, who are appointed by the mayor of Des Moines and approved by city council, operates the water utility. The board of trustees has the powers, much like a city council, to operate the utility, except levying taxes. Water rate payers own the utility. The board of trustees hires a general manager to operate the utility. The general manager produces an annual budget for operations of the utility using revenue of the sale of water as a primary income source. The budget is reviewed, modified, and approved by the board of trustees. The board of trustees is the only body of the utility that can enter into contracts and the utility must comply with state of Iowa public improvement bidding laws.



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"You can't con people, at least not for long. If you don't deliver the goods, people will eventually catch on." **The Art of the Deal**, supposedly by Donald J. Trump.

Young Elizabeth: The Making of the Queen by Kate Williams
A Book Review by Steve Person

There are queens and then there is The Queen. Soon to turn 91 years old, Elizabeth II is one of the most recognized people in the world. For over sixty-five years, she has been doing her job as Head of State to one of the oldest monarchies. Other royal houses have come and gone, but the British monarchy survives because of its adaptability to change with the times. Perhaps the best example of this is the current name of the Royal House of Windsor. Prior to 1917, the reigning family name was Saxe Coburg Gotha. With the virulent anti-German feeling during World War I, King George V decreed that the name of the dynasty be changed to Windsor, a much more English-sounding alternative. This year marks the 100th anniversary of that name change.

Over a thousand years of history preceded Elizabeth when she became Queen at the young age of 25 in 1952 upon the death of her father, King George VI. While the reigns of British kings and queens have sometimes been violent, frequently short-lived, and not very often celebrated for their longevity, the current occupant of the Throne enjoys a popularity rating that any American or English politician would envy—around eighty percent.

Kate Williams's book is a somewhat simplistic retelling of the young life of Elizabeth and her sister, Margaret Rose. Their father, King George VI, never expected to be king, but when his elder brother, Edward VIII (later Duke of Windsor) abdicated the throne to marry the American divorcee, Wallis Simpson, kingship changed the family dynamic forever. Prior to becoming George VI, the man known to his family as "Bertie," retained the title of Duke of York. When six-year-old Princess Margaret learned that their father was to be the new king, she reportedly said to ten-year-old Elizabeth, "Poor you!" for in 1936, Elizabeth became the Heir Presumptive. Normally, the next in line is called the Heir Apparent, but since George VI's wife, Queen Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother) was still young enough to bear children, the possibility existed that a male heir might still come along. That, of course, never happened.

Williams gives a mostly sympathetic view of the young Princess Elizabeth before she became Queen, and she takes every opportunity possible to bad mouth the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Surprisingly, she is one of the few authors who does not idolize George VI, but rather is quite pointed in mentioning his bouts of depression, quick temper, and heavy drinking and smoking. Still, George VI and his consort acquitted themselves well during the harrowing years of World War II, and the man who never intended to be king, died at the young age of fifty-six.

I found the book at Barnes and Noble, but it is also available on line. It is a quick read.