

LITTLE JOHN THE PIZZA MON

Small-businessfolks keeping our ball in play

"You'll do something Mr. Rearden" [to make it possible for everyone who depends on the wealth you generate to survive]—a character in Ayn Rand's Atlas Shrugged

Does anyone remember this scene in the classic movie Ghostbusters? Dan Akroyd as Dr. Raymond Stantz insists to Bill Murray, Dr. Peter Venkman, that this new ghostbusting business they're forming is much different from university life:

"This is the private sector, they expect results!"

Well in the real world not only are customers demanding, so are those entities of legitimized coercion we know as governments (state, local, federal). And unlike customers, who just go away if you piss 'em off, if you upset the G-men they kill your women and rape your buffalo.

Little John is actually John Worster, a former bartender for the E.G. Nicks' establishments. John was my primary mixologist toward the end of my alcohol-laden primetime, roughly the 1980s thru the 1990s. We've stayed in touch occasionally via email over the years as I sobered up and he launched himself into SE Michigan entrepreneurship.

I recalled that he had bought a pizza franchise up in Waterford, the Cottage Inn on M-59 near the airport. When casually I asked how it was going over there, he replied with his customary George-Carlinsque political bite:

"I wish I had a moneymaker here but the economy is tough which is why I am always here. Plus it would be nice to get a little break on my taxes. I figure, make me pay half now and if I become very profitable, then let put a little more in until I am even instead of kicking me in the balls every 20th of the month. You'd think they [the state] would want me to stay open because we are all cash cows for them. I wonder if I tell them Pizza Hut has declared war on me, they will start sending me money."

His response gave me the idea for this column:

Consider the thousands of Atlases—small businesses who don't get any big corporate tax abatements or special deals— carrying a dying world (esp. in Michigan) on their shoulders. These are the men and women who pay the freight, who make it possible for university professors, school teachers, cops, and multifarious other government-stipend recipients to pose and deliver.

This discussion is taking me back to my iconic Ayn Rand days. The following exchange is between one of the men of the mind who goes on strike (I believe Francisco D'Anconia) trying to convince another industrialist (Hank Rearden?) to join him:

"If you saw Atlas, the giant who holds the world on his shoulders, if you saw that he stood, blood running down his chest, his knees buckling, his arms trembling but still trying to hold the world aloft with the last of his strength, and the greater the effort the heavier the world bore down upon his shoulders—what would you tell him to do?

"I...don't know. What...could he do? What would you tell him?"

"To shrug."

Hence the title, Atlas Shrugged, of arguably the most important book in history. God, I miss the clarity of that Randian vision, I do miss it so. But until we gain that high, clean ground, we need to look around at the real world and make some headsup decisions.

My friend, John the Pizza Man, is one of a vanishing breed who provide the foundation of all the finer things of civilization. When journalists discuss the budget and all those sacred cows we need to fund, say, teachers and police, how about putting the entrepreneurial class on the sacred cow list, too? Why kill the golden egg-laying goose by shooting it with yet another tax or multiple, assorted "cider house" rules?

We need to go the other way.

One of these days, coercive taxation will expire on the dustbin of history, along with human slavery. That will be a wonderful time. Imagine a world where when you say "**we** need to have thus and so" **you** get to pay for it... or otherwise arrange for voluntary funding. Libertarian Nirvana.

There's so much loot and waste in the sacred-cow business, I get all verklempt thinking about it. But one solution is straightforward and easy: end the drug wars. Everyone will benefit immediately, substantially, and I mean everyone. (I've argued this elsewhere in a letter to the editor on jail overcrowding.) The simple fact is if you legalize weed and regulate/tax it, you add \$1 billion to the plus side of the ledger in Michigan and balance the budget overnight.

Drug decrim: another position where my buddy John is totally on the same wavelength. When I ask about details of the government systems he has to battle in order to let him to save their royal asses, I discover I don't really want to know. Scary. I ask if there are any Mafiosa shaking him down, too, for protection or whatnot. He replies:

"No Mafia stories. I don't think there are enough intelligent people in Waterford to set up a Mafia. Kind of tough to run the numbers game when you only use 1 through 10. If this makes for good material then be sure I appear in the article as John "the meat" Worster." [1]

That last comment addresses an earlier request if I could refer to him as Little John so long as I made it obvious no diminishment of stature in the principal appendage area was intended.

So there you have it, another Michigan entrepreneur for world peace, radical liberty, and hopefully enough standup-comedy material to get him through the long, dark night of our "cult of the omnipotent state."

Pistons' fans, Lions' fans, Waterford lakes' trailer-home haute couture, Boob-Tube Nation, cycle bums, friends of freedom everywhere, check out the Cottage Inn that John runs. Buy two. You'll be glad you done good.

[1] Here's the full array of John's stream of consciousness emails that formed the research for this column. He's not a fan of paragraphs but the message is clear.