

# Opinion

## Supply and demand: Our wants and needs facing off with a pandemic

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

In 1982, I saved money out of several consecutive paychecks to buy myself a video cassette recorder. I found what



**Grubaugh**

and I bore that honor proudly.

I could rent movies, and I could record things on TV for later viewing. It was empowering. In those days, I was newly married and raising children, so I needed a late-night distraction and a dependable replacement to fill the time I no longer had for literally going to the movies. For the next several years, I rented tape upon tape to the point where my trusty VCR finally went “pfft,” rejecting every cassette I put into it.

I found solace in a repairman up the street who specialized in fixing old VCRs. He put in a few spare parts and had me up and renting again. That lasted a few more years until, alas, time caught up with me and the old JVC.

I wanted at a Tipton store in Alton.

The brand was a JVC, and as I recall, I coughed up \$449 for a top-of-the-line unit. I was the first in the family to get one,

Today, I look back at that memory with a smile, even though VCRs are no longer part of daily life. Also, long since departed is the Tipton chain that sold the unit, the Blockbuster business that rented most of the movies and most of the studios that made those films.

For that matter, my repair guy died last year, ending with some completeness an otherwise wonderful era.

By now, I’ve lost virtually every reader 30 and younger. What was a VCR, they wonder? Google the topic, I say. Anybody older already knows. We baby boomers had our kicks with the world’s inventiveness during the second half of the last century. Color TV, microwave ovens, remote controls — they were “automated everything” born or popularized while I was coming of age.

All these gadgets made life more convenient, but they pale in comparison to today’s options where almost anything we need is available at the touch of a button. After all, when even my 12-year-old granddaughter can punch up a cell phone app and order a complete set of snacks from Schnucks and have it delivered to her house the same day, we are most certainly living in a gilded age. Correct?

Perhaps not. I still yearn a bit for simpler times when I had to scratch and save to get what I wanted. Consumers today have more complex challenges. Not only do they need money, but they must

worry about somebody hacking their bank account. They have to figure out things like Uber service, computer operations, streaming television, and electronics that require an MIT degree to operate. (That is, of course, unless you have my aforementioned granddaughter, 12, handy).

And now, we also have COVID in the picture. Strange as it may seem, the pandemic has put everyone, old and young, in the same box, learning together how to adapt in a new age.

And one of the strangest and most unexpected results of the virus is our ability to get the things we want, when we want them.

Last month, I wrote extensively about pandemic-driven supply chain problems and the difficulty in getting so many products and services because of labor shortages hampering production. Suddenly, material goods are harder to come by.

One example, and one to which most people can relate, occurred for me this past month. I went shopping for a new toilet, and I had but a single showroom choice in the brand I wanted. I asked the saleswoman what would happen if I ordered something else and her response was less than encouraging: She didn’t know when it would be available.

I bought the lone toilet there and then because some things are not meant to be put on hold.

Commodities and services at all levels have been affected during the crisis — lumber, plastics, foods of every sort, computer chips, cars, home furnishings, toilet paper and, yes, even toilets. And what I learned in seventh grade still applies: Supply drives demand, and demand drives prices. And we’ve all seen how prices have been going lately.

Everyone I know has a similar story from 2020-21. As substantial as health concerns have been, these two years will be etched in our consumer brains for a long time to come as well. Perhaps now is the time to really appreciate the things we’ve got because things are increasingly difficult to come by. And with COVID, if we’re not around to appreciate them, what good are they in the first place?

I can only imagine what it would have been like, back in 1982, if my video cassette recorder would have been on unceremonious back order. I would have been heartbroken, and I wouldn’t have all those fond memories I have now.

I’m not alone in all this. Our desire to return to normal life has us all thinking about the good old days, no matter how long ago those days might have been.

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## George Washington’s legacy under assault by insurrectionists, apologists

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

Each time a president leaves office, C-SPAN conducts a poll of historians asking them to rank all the presidents of



**Ortbals**

the United States from best to worst. They are asked to base their review on 10 criteria, some of which are rather nebulous like Public Persuasion and Moral Authority. I find it more useful to evaluate presidents based on actions

they took or did not take and the consequences that ensued from those decisions. C-SPAN has conducted four of these polls — 2001, 2009, 2017 and the one recently released. Throughout, the top five has mostly remained the same: Abraham Lincoln at No. 1, followed by George Washington, Franklin Roosevelt and Teddy Roosevelt with either Dwight Eisenhower or Harry Truman running fifth.

Many Americans can probably offer some reasoning for most of them. Lincoln,

of course, led the nation through the Civil War, saved the union and ended slavery. FDR shepherded the country through the Great Depression and WWII. Teddy Roosevelt, the great trust buster, was the first to position the United States on the national stage and initiated our national parks. Eisenhower ended the Korean War and gave us the interstate highway system. And Truman saved Europe through the Marshall Plan and NATO and helped create the United Nations.

But, what about George Washington? Does he rank a perennial second just because he was the first, the Father of our Country?

Washington actually did two vitally important things for the fledgling nation to put us on the right path and guide us through the ensuing centuries. One you’ve probably never heard of; the other you probably take for granted.

When the new federal government began operating in 1789, it carried forward about \$54 million in debt acquired in fighting the Revolutionary War. Individual states had taken on an additional \$25 million for the same purpose. Congress consolidated these debts in the summer of 1790 and later that year initiated a tax on domestically produced distilled spirits to repay them.

Individual distillation of whiskey was common at that time, particularly on the frontier, and the new law quickly became known as the “Whiskey Tax.”

Anyone who distilled whiskey whether for wholesale, retail or private consumption was required by the law to register and pay the tax on each gallon produced. When government agents were sent out to enforce the law, they met a rude welcome. One was tarred and feathered by a mob in Washington County, Pa., for example, and the insurrection continued and grew and became more violent until Washington, himself, assembled and led an army to put down the revolt.

This was imperative because if federal laws, passed by Congress and signed by the president, could be ignored, the infant country would eventually devolve into chaos. Washington had to show that the government had both the will and the capacity to enforce the law. His action in quelling the Whiskey Rebellion served us well for the next 227 years.

His second accomplishment was perhaps more important. He voluntarily stepped down from the presidency to provide for the peaceful transfer of power. This is no small thing. Having defeated the world’s greatest power

and presided over the Continental Congress, Washington could have been king or, as some like Alexander Hamilton advocated, president for life.

But Washington realized that the young republic needed a peaceful transfer of power to set the example for all who would come after him. And so, he stepped down after two terms and let the people decide who would succeed him.

As you look through history you see how extraordinary this was. The French overthrew King Louis XVI and ended up with Napoleon. The Russians overthrew the Czar, but Lenin took his place. The Cuban revolution dispatched one military dictator only to suffer under another. America did not go down that road because George Washington put country above self.

Respect for the rule of law, peaceful transfer of power, country above self — this was George Washington’s legacy. It was nearly destroyed on Jan. 6 and the assault on our democracy is not over yet. It remains to be seen if “government of the people by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

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