

The Missing Planks

Prominent presidential candidates are advancing proposals that frankly horrify me. Should we dismember big tech firms? Or just give every American adult \$1000 a month? Rather than critique these awful ideas, I'd rather ponder the Dog that Did Not Bark – moderate, common-sense proposals that no major candidate is likely to advocate. Just a few that have been on my mind lately...

1. Stop REAL ID before it inconveniences tens of millions of American travelers. Also, order the TSA to stop asking to see your boarding pass *twice* just to board a plane.
2. Let students fulfill their foreign language requirement with a computer language. For both high school graduation and public college admission.
3. Charge higher interest rates on student loans for borrowers who are unlikely to successfully finish their degree. And tell the borrowers why you're doing this!
4. When someone applies for a building permit, don't say Yes or No. Name a price – and make it public.
5. The same goes for health and safety regulation. Don't tell firms how to avoid harm. Charge them for the harms they cause. If the downside risk is catastrophic, make them buy insurance or post a bond.
6. While we're at it, why not sell foreigners portable work visas, with an upcharge for dependents?
7. Electronic road pricing!
8. Means-test Social Security and Medicare.
9. Identify the clearest annual waste of \$100B in the federal budget. Advocate the immediate abolition of this waste, with all savings going toward deficit reduction, not new programs.
10. Loudly and graciously thank taxpayers for their service.

Yes, I know that some of these proposals aren't even in the hands of the federal government, but the same applies to a great deal of what presidential candidates say. And on reflection, it's hardly crazy for candidates to make such proposals. The bully pulpit aside, they can use federal funding to reward state and local governments that move in welcome directions.

So why are all of these planks likely to remain political orphans? Half are doomed by demagoguery, and the rest by apathy. Most people hate ideas like #5, #7, and #8; and if they don't feel the hate spontaneously, any halfway skilled politician can readily kindle it. In stark contrast, #1 and #2 are probably already popular. But they fail to inspire passion, so they're stillborn.