

Vacillation, uncertainty and danger signs

This week, President Donald Trump announced that he was considering a 50% tariff on goods from the European Union; just days later, he reversed himself, announcing that any such tariffs would be delayed until July 9. Traders rejoiced, with the S&P 500 spiking dramatically. The market's leap at Trump's flip-flop was not unusual; in fact, it's become a common feature of the financial landscape. As one Financial Times columnist has flippantly suggested, traders are making bank by betting on the "TACO" trade — Trump Always Chickens Out. The notion is that, like Liberation Day tariffs and threatened tariffs on China and now threatened tariffs on the EU, Trump enjoys launching shots across the bow of his geopolitical opponents, but then quickly backs off once the prospective damage becomes clear.



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Now, the buried lede in this arrangement is obvious: The markets are ready and raring to rip, looking for any sign that Trump will revert to the economic policies of his first term — deregulation, tax cuts and low trade barriers. If he does that, investors are prepared to open the floodgates. In fact, the TACO bet is presumably the only reason the stock markets haven't totally tanked since Trump's Liberation Day gambit: Investors expect that Trump's largest mistakes will never practically materialize.

But uncertainty creates its own form of paralysis. The question for market-watchers isn't merely whether the markets are up or down overall under Trump (the S&P is down a little over 2%; the Dow Jones is down around 4%); the question is where the markets would have been had Trump never launched his barrage of inconsistent and vacillating policies. There, the answer is more troubling: If we calculate the rate of increase in the S&P 500 from Election Day 2024 to Inauguration Day 2025, and assume the same rate of growth until today, and then contrast that growth with the actual market numbers, the markets are underperforming around 10%.

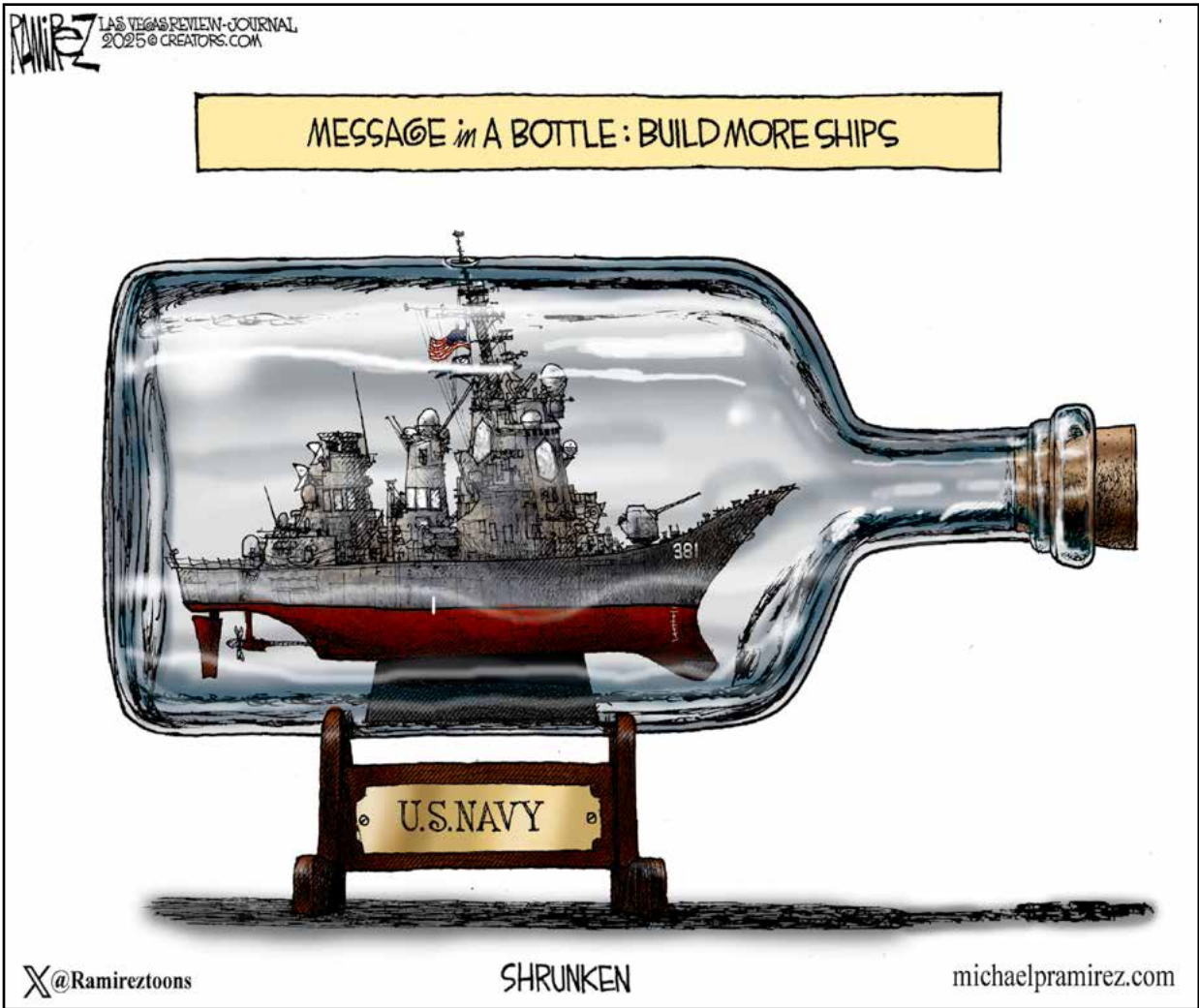
And the problems for Trump don't stop there. The benefit of a non-ideological president is that Trump can quickly jettison policy that doesn't work in favor of policy that does. But it also means that our geopolitical enemies don't actually believe that Trump is willing to maintain tough policy over the long term. Take, for example, Trump's vacillation on Russian aggression in Ukraine. Trump entered office pledging to end the Ukraine conflict, and launched his quest for peace by exerting extreme pressure on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who quickly caved to his every request. Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, has rejected every demand Trump has made. This week, after Trump posted that Putin was "playing with fire!" Russia Today responded, "Trump's message leaves little room for misinterpretation. Until he posts the opposite tomorrow morning."

Meanwhile, the Iranian regime is banking on the White House's rising isolationism to push its own agenda in nuclear talks. Trump repeatedly labeled Barack Obama's Iran deal the "worst deal in history" during his first term; Iran now seeks to remake that deal, under a different name. And the White House has signaled different positions to every side: that the United States seeks complete denuclearization, or a ban on Iranian nuclear weaponry, or a ban on Iranian nuclear weapons development ... Iran sees daylight, and they're acting.

For China, the calculus is similar. China has been ramping up its activities in the Taiwan Strait, preparing for the possibility of a blockade of the island nation. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has variously threatened massive tariffs, withdrawn those massive tariffs, threatened to ban TikTok, delayed that ban ... China sees vacillation, and they're acting.

Strategic ambiguity is sometimes useful. But uncertainty interpreted as weakness is wildly counterproductive. For the sake of Trump's presidency, a return to free markets and peace through strength would do far more to ensure success than the whipsawing policy prescriptions emerging from the White House on a near-daily basis. Trump knows the right thing to do; he did it the first time around. All he has to do is learn from his own history.

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Letter to the Editor

Passage of Senate Bill 287 is long overdue

To the Editor:

The Indiana General Assembly's passage of Senate Bill 287, which allows school board candidates to declare party affiliation, is a long-overdue step toward transparency and accountability in public education.

Contrary to the idealistic claim that school boards should be "nonpartisan," the truth is that education has already been deeply politicized — primarily by one side.

Teacher unions and professional education associations wield enormous influence over education policy, and their allegiance is unmistakably partisan.

The two largest teacher unions — the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) — consistently back Democratic candidates and policies.

In recent election cycles, over 94% of the NEA's political contributions went to Democrats and liberal causes. The AFT follows a similar trend. Surveys show more than 60% of public-school teachers identify with the Democratic Party, many embracing leftist, so-called progressive ideology on gender identity, race, and family structure.

These affiliations shape what is taught, what policies are enacted, and how opposing parents are treated. The Biden administration's push to reinterpret Title IX to affirm "gender identity" policies in schools — against the will of many parents — is a clear example of federal overreach. It treats children as extensions of the state rather than members of families with moral and religious convictions. This is not neutrality. It is imposition of a worldview.

Public education often reflects the agenda of these national organizations more than the local community. Parents who speak up are dismissed, while bureaucracies push controversial curricula under the guise of inclusion. We cannot afford to pretend this is a neutral system.

By contrast, many Indiana communities — particularly in rural areas — are conservative and Christian in their values. These voters want public schools that respect traditional moral standards, academic rigor, and parental rights. SB287 helps voters identify candidates who are more likely to uphold those priorities and resist ideological drift.

From a Christian perspective, the myth of neutrality is exposed by Scripture. Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters" (Luke 16:13). Everyone, including educators and school board members, brings a worldview to their decisions.

The Bible establishes the family as the primary institution for raising and educating children (Deuteronomy 6:6–7), with government existing to serve, not supplant, their role. School board members who honor this order deserve support.

From a philosophic perspective, thinkers like Thomas Sowell and Victor Davis Hanson emphasize that ideas have consequences. Progressive educational policy is not just different; it erodes the civic and moral foundations of our republic. When local school boards act as mouthpieces for elite ideology rather than stewards of community values, they weaken democracy. SB287 helps return authority to the local level, where it belongs.

Opponents claim SB287 introduces politics into education. But that is like blaming a mirror for our unpleasant reflection. Politics is already deeply entrenched in public schools; this law simply reveals where candidates stand, enabling informed decisions.

The legislation doesn't mandate a candidate to declare party affiliation. It simply offers voters more information. In an era where progressive activists increasingly seek to sideline parents and push radical ideologies in classrooms, this tool is not only practical; it is essential.

I urge Indiana school board candidates to embrace this new transparency.

With party affiliations listed, voters can identify candidates likely to share their values — even though it is not a guarantee.

Vote for those who reflect community convictions. The future of children — and culture — depends on returning education to its rightful place: serving families, not indoctrinating them into so-called progressive beliefs.

I look forward to voting for Republican candidates with conservative values in future elections.

For a detailed version of this letter, visit my blog at christiannews-junkie.com.

Robert Sparkman
Rome City

The state flower brings such beauty

"This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready to break my heart as the sun rises, as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers." — Mary Oliver.

I wait, oh so patiently each year for the peonies in my garden to bloom. I always say it was the peonies that sold this house to me several years ago. They were in full bloom when I came to see this house, my house. I turned around to Randy and Shannon and said, "I'm buying your house." It had only been on the market a few days when I saw the homemade for sale sign. As soon as I walked through the front door, I knew it would be mine and I said so. Randy asked if I would like to see the rest of the house.

"Sure," I said laughingly! I had friends with me who were all shaking their heads at my rash decision. The peonies clinched the deal.

It wasn't a rash decision. I had been looking for three years for the perfect house, the perfect neighborhood, the perfect garden. And there it was.

I have since, of course, added more peonies and plants and trees so that sometimes I feel as if I built a forest around me as in every fairy tale!

On the morning of the first bloom, I go out to the garden and recite the Mary Oliver poem. She is a favorite of mine, and I have her poems pasted all over my kitchen cupboards. Sitting in the midst of a peony patch gives one a different perspective on gardening, on life. Sometimes I ponder the age-old question, how many more springs will I see these bloom? Therefore, I cannot waste a moment of anticipation or pure joy from the gardens.

My grandmother had peonies. I wonder if I paid much attention to them as a kid. Maybe yes, Maybe no. But I do remember the fragrant smell that filled her house. Mine is the same as bouquets fill the nooks and crannies of my old house. The only problem with the peonies is they are fleeting, as are all flowers.

Let's look at the history of peonies starting with Indiana. In 1931, the General Assembly designated the zinnia to be the state flower. I am definitely a big fan of zinnias! But the peony growers lobbied to have that changed, and in 1957, once again the General Assembly gathered to change the state flower to the peonies.

This decision was based on the fact that peonies bloom around Memorial Day which makes them the perfect compliment for gravesites, planting or just setting out the blooms. Peonies have become so popular that this past May was the fifth annual Indiana Peony Festival in Noblesville. I need to remind myself of that so I can attend next year.

Let's go back two thousand years ago. The first known peonies were in China and were used for medicinal purposes. In the 11th century, the growers in China finally realized the pure beauty of the peonies and aptly called them, "King of Flowers." (I think I agree on that one!) It wasn't until the early 1800s that peonies became popular in Europe and came into North

America by 1850s.

In 1957, it became our state flower, and in 1986, Ronald Reagan declared the rose to be our national flower.

Growing peonies in your own garden is very easy actually. Choose a sunny location (6-8 hours of sunlight every day), well-drained soil and lots of room to grow and expand. Peonies love long cold winters, which help to provide gorgeous blooms in the spring. Once they are established in your garden, they really are no care at all! I love taking rides out into the country and always, always seeing peony bushes in bloom next to old houses abandoned or otherwise. I often wonder who planted those beauties?

In my own yard, my peonies are the crowning jewel of the garden. I go outside each morning to see the progress of the buds and then of the blooms. I am sure I loved them as a child and now I love my own. Mary Oliver captured the joy of peonies in her poem,

"Do you also hurry, half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden, and softly And exclaiming of their dearness Fill your arms with the white and pink flowers ...

To be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are nothing, forever."

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