

IDEAS MATTER

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The Freethinking Heart of a Liberal

If we are to be unprejudiced judges, then we must be open to every idea freely given. In tandem, we must be weary of those who shun the thoughts of others without active ideas and consideration. This is should be at the philosophical center of any who consider themselves liberal.

The Greek “Liber”, or “free” is at the root of the word liberal, as it is in liberty and library. A liberal is a freethinker open to new ideas.

The opposition of liberal thought, commonly relayed as conservative, is actually the term orthodoxy. Liberal ideas can and should be fiscally conservative. Expanding the American Experiment is liberal at its core and both socially and ethically conservative. The liberal challenge comes in the initiative of active listening. Orthodox thinking and its cousin, group-think, is lazy and stands in the way.

A Fiscally Conservative Liberal Idea

What if we conceive a system that added monetary resources to our city government and grew in size and monetary support as well? That would require liberal freethinking. What if the initial investment was minimal, and the growth of that system came tax free. That would be fiscally conservative at its core. What if the system lowered our carbon footprint. That would be simply conservative, but far from any modern orthodoxy. Experiments, though, must start small.

The Investment: As We Live in a Desert...

There is no question, in the middle of summer, that we live in a hot and dry part of our nation. Sunlight is the one renewable resource we can count on. In our modern times, we can capture it.

This experiment would begin on the Ward 6 office roof. This building was built as a fire station, which makes it large with a large flat roof. Solar panels on the roof would shade that roof and replace dollars spent on air conditioning by producing electricity for the building and Tucson’s electric grid.

This requires an investment, but instead of buying the whole system or using the failed idea of leasing a system, we can seek a full investment in Tucson’s future. Just one. The investment could come from the city budget, but as this is a diminishing resource, it would be better to look outside of government. A grant or a donation. For the sake of argument, let’s define the investment at a level as high as we can get it, but somewhere above \$100,000. All this will take some work, but we have or can build the staff to succeed. That is what your elected government is for.

With this initial investment, the Ward 6 office would be fitted for solar power which is no small task and then solar panels will be placed on the roof with what is left of the investment. This initial effort will not finish the project and that’s where it experiment kicks in. The investment is just a small start.

As an example, here are some conservative numbers received from a local solar contractor.

Given a 20.67 kW system (39 panels), 36,000kWh/year will be produced.

At approximately \$0.05 (5 cents) per kWh, that’s an \$1800 revenue source.

Not huge in terms of governmental spending, but still a savings. Here’s where the experiment begins.

- A grassroots campaign, This offering is on the Cheap, Laser Print Homespun

GOOD, FAST, CHEAP -- WE ONLY GET TWO

This experiment is one about finances a small start in proportion to the overall effect. That's where scientific decision making helps by minimizing the cost. Here's the experiment.

The Experiment: A Tax-free Perpetual Solar Funding Engine

With a relatively small investment, much can be gained. The experiment relies on exponential growth to fuel the future of the system. A common puzzle states that if I give you 1 penny on day one and double it every day, how much would you have in 30 days? The answer is \$5,368,709.12.

This experiment requires something oddly difficult in government. The Solar Resource that comes from saving on energy costs would need to go into a fiscal lock box. The funds would need to be dedicated solely to the experiment. Cutting the resource in half, two funds would exist. Half would go toward a defined project, say, improvement of the recycling program. The other half would go to growth and maintenance of the system. As solar power systems take little maintenance, this resource would largely go toward growing the system. It should be noted that maintenance would include the roof below the panels, another savings to the Ward 6 office.

With the expenditure from half our Solar Resource for the year the system would be larger in the next year and the resource would be larger as well. Thus, a larger system and a larger resource over time. The system would grow tax free.

Anyone who knows something about physics will tell you that there are no perpetual motion machines. This proposal converts the ward office's electric bill into that Solar Resource. In time, the best way to maximize impact is to set a goal of a zero dollar electric bill. Eventually, the system will outstrip the needed power generation at the Ward 6 office. At that time we can expand to other venues or convert the whole resource into the ward's projects.

Though this time will come, the conclusions from the experiment will tell us if it is worth expanding citywide long before. Here we could set a goal of converting our city's entire electric bill into a Solar Resource for the people through their government.

Here's Another One: Trees and the Heat Island Effect

Citing the source, I should note that this idea was sparked by a conversation I had with Chris Donat, a candidate for the 2026 AZ CD-6 Congressional seat. He's the spark in this idea.

Many of the older midtown neighborhoods have streets that are nearly three lanes wide. Additionally, as the sun bakes these black asphalt streets Tucson gets hotter (the Heat Island Effect).

What if we took one of those lanes, the southern edge of an east/west street and extended into the street with an area for trees? In governmental terms, this would be affordable. The hypothesis of this experiment is that shading the street we will lower the overall temperature in the neighborhood. This experiment could be a good target for the Solar Resource as well and as the resource matures.

Understanding that a volunteer neighborhood would need to be found and data would need to be collected, this is another example of experimental liberal governance. This initial experiment is no small task. More expensive older trees would be needed to gather data swiftly. Also, there's a small problem of designing for street parking and underground utilities would need to be considered. Here is another example of liberal free thinking, which is really is the best way forward. **IDEAS MATTER**