

COMPARING NOTES ... MY TAKE ON The World's Smallest Political Quiz.

by Vic Berecz

Last month I provided a link to "The World's Smallest Political Quiz" which is still in place. Many of you apparently gave it a try, since I received more feedback on *the quiz* than on any previous posting. This month my goal is to examine the questions of that quiz. I'll bore you with the rationale for each of my answers, and propose an alternative scoring mechanism that may allow each of you to rethink where you stand in the political spectrum.

First let me review how the *Advocates for Self Government* website scores the quiz. Since they are a Libertarian organization, the questions are written in such a way that an answer of *Agree* to all ten questions puts you in the *Libertarian* corner of the political spectrum. If you answer *Agree* to all the *Personal Issues* questions, and *Disagree* to all the *Economic Issues* questions, you end up in the *Left (Liberal)* corner; conversely *Disagree* to the *Personal Issues* and *Agree* to the *Economic Issues* places you at the *Right (Conservative)*. Finally, a *Disagree* to all ten questions puts you in the *Statist (Big Government)* corner. Each *Agree* is worth 20 points, each *Maybe* is 10 points, and a *Disagree* is 0 points. You then simply plot your *Personal Issues* score against your *Economic Issues* score on the chart.

My principal gripe with the quiz is the (almost) all-or-nothing approach of 20-10-0 scoring. As a believer in *Shades of Gray*, I'd like more flexibility with intermediate scores ... for instance, "almost completely agree" could produce a score of 19, etc. Below, I will discuss each of the ten questions and why I answered as I did. I will also suggest how I might have answered if flexible scoring was permitted. I'd be happy to receive your feedback on any of the ten questions, particularly if you feel I've missed a critical issue in my analysis.

Personal Issues:

1) Government should not censor speech, press, media, or internet. Here my answer was *Agree*, because I'm very close to agreement with the Libertarian position on this one. My principal qualms are that the long recognized prohibition stay in place for child pornography and for "speech" which threatens or otherwise imperils other people ... for instance, yelling "Fire" in a crowded theatre. I am also somewhat concerned about the broadening of the term "speech" to include disruption (such as those that occurred at recent military funerals) and the idea that corporations (which are artifacts created by the government) have the same free speech rights as human beings. Local *Disorderly Conduct* laws can perhaps address the former. But the latter, which was codified by the recent *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* decision of the Supreme Court, presents a different type of issue. As I said in a previous posting, "I truly doubt that most American corporations will be willing to take a direct part in electioneering" ... and I believe that's true of all real, responsible corporations. But, my concern is about corporations being formed for the specific purpose of using their "free speech" privilege to libel candidates or otherwise disrupt the political process, without exposing their principals to the sanctions the rest of us face when we lie or libel. Finally, there is the issue of advertising ... maybe there is some common sense limit that should be applied. Prescription drug advertising in magazines and on TV is an abomination. Billboards in some states ... Florida for one ... are horribly misused. Lawyers whose ads promote frivolous lawsuits ("if you've been injured, you have a right to compensation") are another of my pet advertising peeves. But, I know, you can't throw out the baby with the

bath water. Limiting advertising needs to be a very careful process, and is best self-imposed by professional organizations that are trying to be truly *professional*. Bottom line: if flexible scoring were permitted, I'd set my score at about 16.

- 2) **Military service should be voluntary. There should be no draft.** On this one, while I sympathize with the concept, I feel that in special emergencies (such as the German-Japanese threat posed by World War II or any direct invasion of the U.S. by a foreign power) a draft would be absolutely necessary. I believe this is too important an exception that I could not answer *Agree*, and so I used the *Maybe* alternative. If flexible scoring were permitted, I'd probably score myself as a 15.
- 3) **There should be no laws regarding sex for consenting adults.** Again, I'm very close to the Libertarian position. Laws that are unenforceable make no sense. Therefore laws that regulate sexual conduct in the privacy of your own home make no sense. I'll go further and say that laws against prostitution not only are generally unenforceable, but also make it a lot more difficult to protect both purveyors and consumers of these services, and to collect appropriate income taxes. There's a reason that prostitution is known as the "oldest profession." Again, I feel the local *Disorderly Conduct* or *Disturbing the Peace* laws can handle the problem of public sex acts. The biggest issue I have may be mixing *no laws regarding sex* with *free speech*. Today we ... at least those of us who live in Florida ... are subjected to sometimes graphic billboards up-and-down our highways touting nude bars, anti-abortion diatribes, sex toys, offers of vasectomies and reverse-vasectomies, and on-and-on. I'm kind of afraid of what would happen if all sex laws were abolished. These concerns would move my flexible scoring approach down to 18.
- 4) **Repeal laws prohibiting adult possession and use of drugs.** I do favor legalization of most so-called "recreational drugs." This is because I think they should be treated like my "drug" of choice ... alcohol. People have been drinking stuff, chewing stuff, smoking stuff that makes them feel good from time immemorial. The era of *Prohibition* taught us a lesson regarding alcohol; I'm not sure why it wasn't fully learned regarding similar substances. Regulate and tax ... that's the answer. Then why was it that I answered this one *Maybe* rather than *Agree*? That's because the term "drug" is not defined in the question and the definition changes over time. The statement can be construed as saying that there should be no controls on the development, advertising, or use of medicinal drugs. That would take us back to the era of *Snake-Oil Salesmen*. Likewise, new concoctions are constantly being developed, and I'd hate to say prior to knowing the facts about them that there should be no controls on their possession and use. Bottom line, I'd favor repealing these laws on a substance-by-substance basis, and then taxing their use sufficiently to offset any potential problems their use generates, very much as we do with alcohol and tobacco. I guess that means I'm a real maybe ... even with flexible scoring, I'd put it at 10.
- 5) **There should be no national ID card.** This was my only *Disagree* on the *Personal Issues* questions. I've made my position known in previous postings. I believe a biometric ID card for all non-citizens (with their status and a photo, fingerprint, and retinal scan) is one of the key ingredients to a successful immigration policy. I also feel that the extension of this concept to citizens, to conveniently prove their citizenship, would be a useful and unobtrusive program, which would not in any way limit our 4th Amendments protections against unreasonable search and seizure. I do not, however, feel the federal government must issue this card. It could readily be tied into state driver's license programs, so long as there

was enough consistency that a standard device could match the person and the cards issued by all 50 states. I'll put my flexible score at a 5.

Economic Issues.

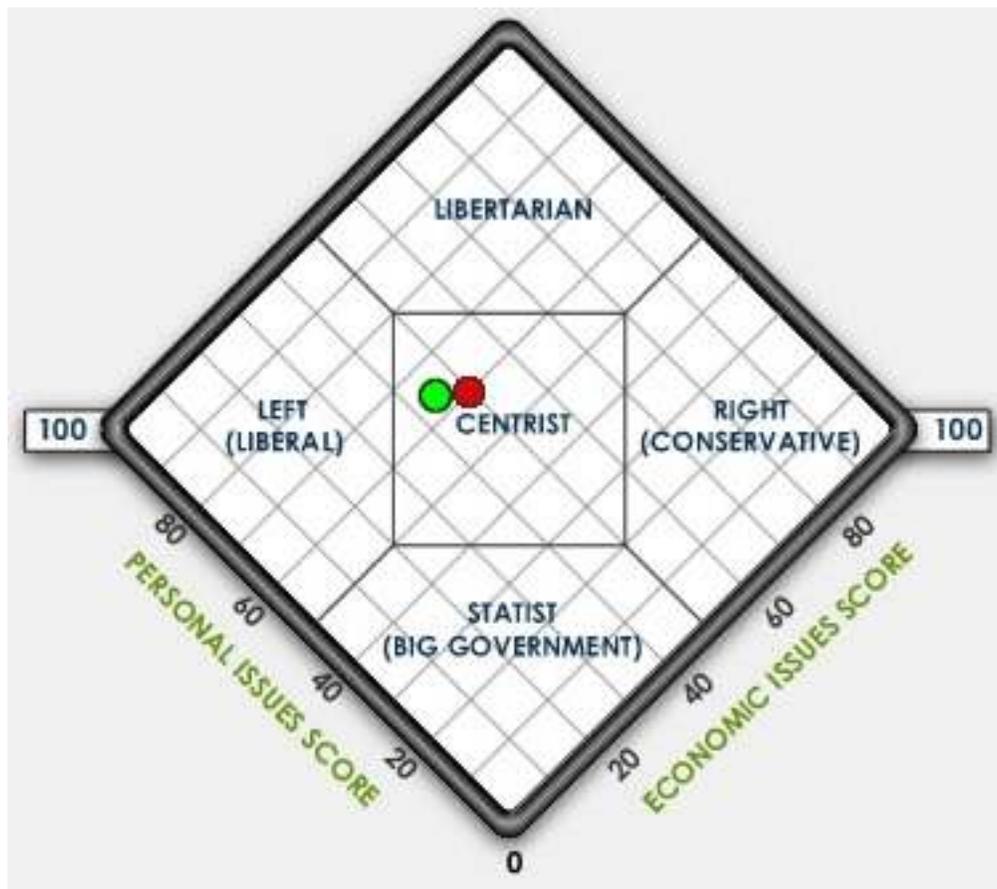
- 6) **End "Corporate Welfare." No government handouts to business.** This one is a pretty strong *Agree*. The basic concept of a corporation is to establish a vehicle for generating profit, while limiting liability. Our laws permit this, and the degree of security and stability provided by our federal and state governments provides the best environment in the world for corporate success. That should generally be sufficient "corporate welfare" ... and I include agricultural subsidies in that category. On the other hand, I have two concerns about a totally hands-off approach. First and foremost, our government itself needs to buy supplies and services from private corporations. This should not be construed as *corporate welfare*. Some of these are critical items, for instance much of our military equipment. I think it is ludicrous to turn our entire aerial refueling capability over to a foreign company because, as a result of subsidies from their governments, they underbid the only viable American supplier, Boeing. Likewise, it is equally stupid to drive a company like GM out of business, when a manageable recovery plan using government loans is feasible. Do you think Toyota or Mitsubishi would have turned their facilities over to U.S. wartime production needs as GM and Ford did during World War II? So to me the bottom line on this issue is the government must have the flexibility to act in our nation's own best interests. I worked for years for defense contractors, and heard all the noise about "cost-plus" contracts and \$600 toilet seats. I can tell you a lot of stories (which I won't do here publicly) about the greed of contractors and the stupidity of the government ... and vice-versa. But, I have not yet been able to think of an alternative better than *cost-plus* to facilitate military systems development. Do you have any ideas? I guess I'd have to put my flexible score on this one at 15.
- 7) **End government barriers to international free trade.** Again a pretty strong *Agree* ... unfortunately, this one has many of the same problems as *corporate welfare* above. But the big problem is that *It Takes Two to Tango* and "trade" requires two parties to every exchange. How do American companies remain viable without American trade barriers or corporate welfare? That's especially the case if our trading partners subsidize their businesses ... or as in the case of China, effectively control all businesses. Yes, free trade is desirable, but it cannot be undertaken unilaterally, so on a flexible scale I'd give it a 15 also.
- 8) **Let people control their own retirement; privatize Social Security.** This is the one question in the quiz where I feel the question itself is somewhat biased. For that reason I had to answer *Disagree*. Here's my problem: the question implies that "Social Security" is and should be the only basis for retirement planning. But, we all know that for most people retirement income needs to be a three-legged stool ... employment-related retirement income, personal savings retirement income, and the government-sponsored safety-net retirement income that we call *Social Security*. This sounds like a very reasonable approach to me ... kind of like diversification in investing. Two of the three legs are largely under our own control, since most employment-related retirement savings today comes from IRA's or 401-K type plans. Social Security, the third and smallest leg is not under our control, but is fully invested in what the whole world considers to be the best investment for capital preservation ... U.S. Treasury bonds. So what do I believe? People should control most of their retirement savings and Social Security should continue in something very much like its current form. That would be a 5 in a flexible scoring system.

- 9) **Replace government welfare with private charity.** Great in theory but unlikely to work well in practice! That's why I equivocated with a *Maybe*. Yes, private charity would be preferable to government welfare. But, those who shout the loudest about eliminating welfare also call welfare recipients "loafers" (and much worse). So, it's unlikely that they can be counted on to be a part of the private charity they espouse. Now a personal story: almost two centuries ago, one of my ancestors was the contractor who built the first "hospital" in Szeged, then Hungary's second city. Another ancestor was it's first administrator. These were two wealthy men who believed in a safety net for their city's poor. While the early 19th century concept of a hospital was more akin to what we'd call a "poor house" ... they both were particularly proud that this city-funded endeavor made Szeged the only major European city without beggars on the streets. I, like them, consider myself a Christian. I too believe in private charity ... the kind of *love thy neighbor* charity espoused by Jesus of Nazareth. But, I also believe as my ancestors did, that there is a need for a safety net. Let's downplay government welfare, encourage private charity, but not abandon the safety net concept of welfare. We don't need or want children starving in our country. As I've said before, most libertarian positions sound good in theory, but are very difficult (if not impossible) to implement in practice. On my flexible scoring system, I'll give this one a 7.
- 10) **Cut taxes and government spending by 50% or more.** This is my most emphatic *Disagree*. Cutting taxes and cutting spending ... these are as American as apple pie. But, where in the world did they come up with *50% or more*? Government taxation and spending takes place at three levels: local, state, and federal. In most localities 50-70% of expenditures are for education. Unless they want to eliminate public education ... which I believe is one of America's greatest assets ... every other local government activity, including fire and police protection, would have to be eliminated. At the state level, similar arguments can be made with the bulk of expenditures focused on education and highways. Trimming federal expenditures is another story. Here, because balanced budgets are not mandated, a string of large deficits during the last 50 years (except for a few years in the Clinton administration) have left us with a huge debt and the carrying costs associated with it. I hope no one is advocating that the United States renege on its debt, as many third-world nations have done. So, in the federal budget, the great bulk of expenditures are in debt service, defense, and the thing we call homeland security. These latter are the principal reasons for having any government at all, so nobody can realistically propose their elimination. Bottom line ... *50% or more* is impossible. Now I'll ask, is there waste and fraud? Yes. Should we try to eliminate it? Absolutely. But, remember there always have been crooks, and they will continue to find ways around the law. Is the government doing more than it should? That's probably the case, especially for the federal government. As an advocate of states' rights, I believe governmental services should be provided at the lowest practical level. That way they can be adapted to local needs and conditions. Should taxes be cut? Maybe, after our budget deficits are under control and we're making headway in eliminating debt. More importantly, we need to re-evaluate the taxation system to make it fairer and less burdensome on those who pay taxes, and bring the tax cheats who thrive in the "underground economy" into the system to pay their fair share. I don't mind paying taxes as long as the system is fair and the services I expect and need from the government are provided. In fact, I've stated publicly that I pay taxes willingly. Don't forget, nothing is free! Keeping all this in mind, my flexible score here is very low ... a mere 3.

Summary: So that's the rationale for my answers to the *World's Smallest Political Quiz*. I hope my qualms and issues have been *good food for thought* for each of you. I'd love to hear your take on these same questions.

My total *Personal Issues* flexible score is 64 versus 60 using the Quiz website. My total *Economic Issues* flexible score is 45 versus 50 on the website. You'll note that as a true believer in *Shades of Gray*, there are no 20s or 0s in my flexible scores. The green mark on the diagram below represents my flexible score. Note that my experience indicates little difference between the flexible and website scores. That says the authors of the quiz did a good job by making the process as simple as possible.

I'd like to hear feedback on your experience using flexible scoring. Did you also produce similar scores both ways? But, most importantly, I hope you thought seriously about the issues presented. If so, do something to build the world you want ... start by talking about your positions on these subjects with friends and family, and in November take your concerns directly to the voting booth. We each can change the world we live in ... even if just a little bit.



Red is my Quiz Website Score and Green is my Flexible Score.

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