

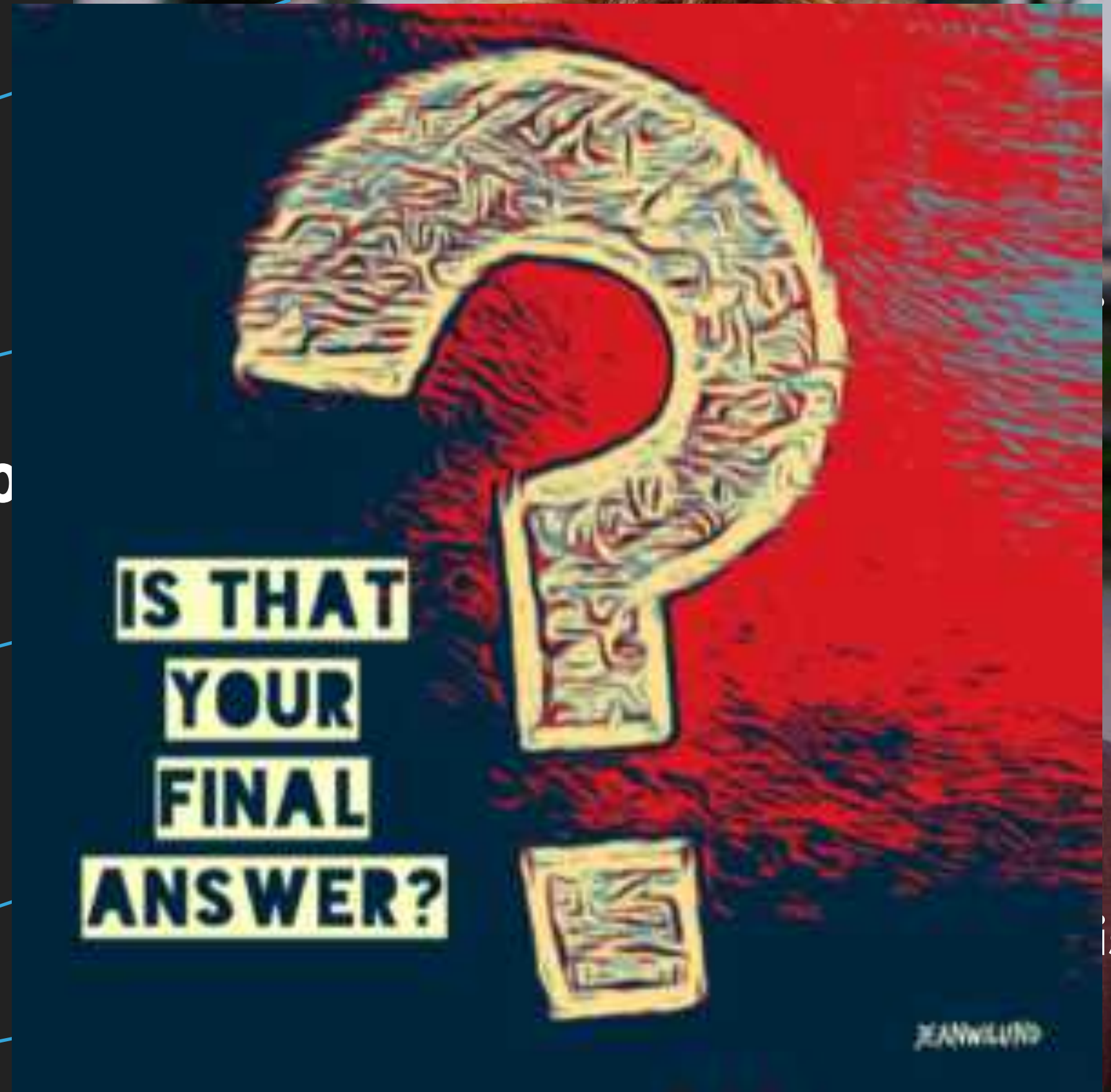


MR. POGREBA, PARKER SCHOOL

Unit 1: Foundations of American Democracy

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS TRUE?

- A. Judge Judy is a member of the United States Supreme Court.
- B. Donald Trump won the popular vote for President in 2016.
- C. The federal budget deficit could be eliminated by cutting government waste and fraud.
- D. China owns over 50% of the US national debt.
- E. Violent crime is at an all-time high in the United States.



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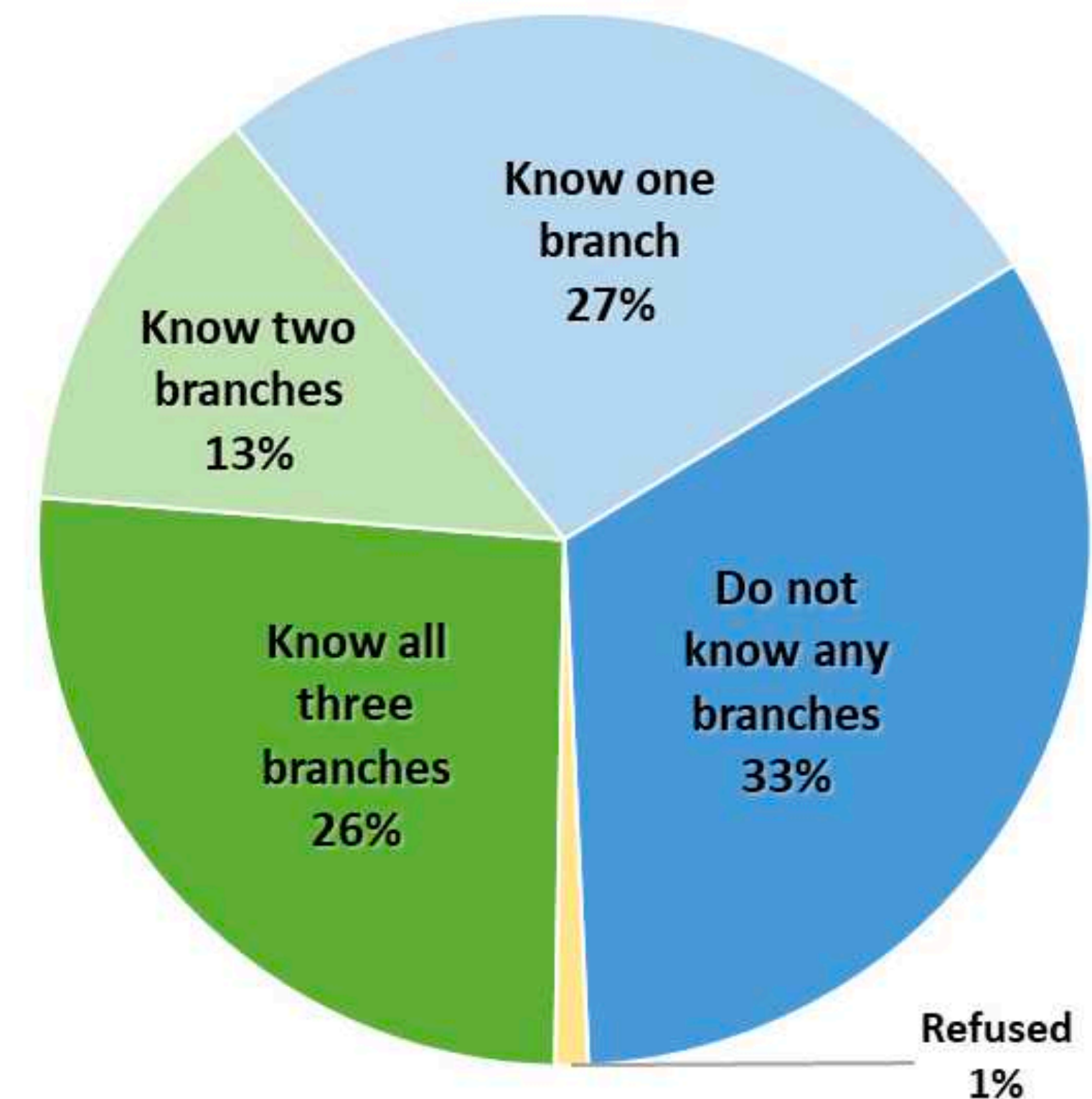
this.

is.

AN UNINFORMED PUBLIC

- ▶ According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center,
 - ▶ 26% of Americans can name the three branches of government.
 - ▶ Only 14% know that the First Amendment protects freedom of the press.
 - ▶ 53% of Americans believe it is accurate to say "immigrants who are here illegally do not have any rights under the U.S. Constitution."

% of people who can name the three branches of government



Source: Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey, August 9-13, 2017.
Annenberg Public Policy Center

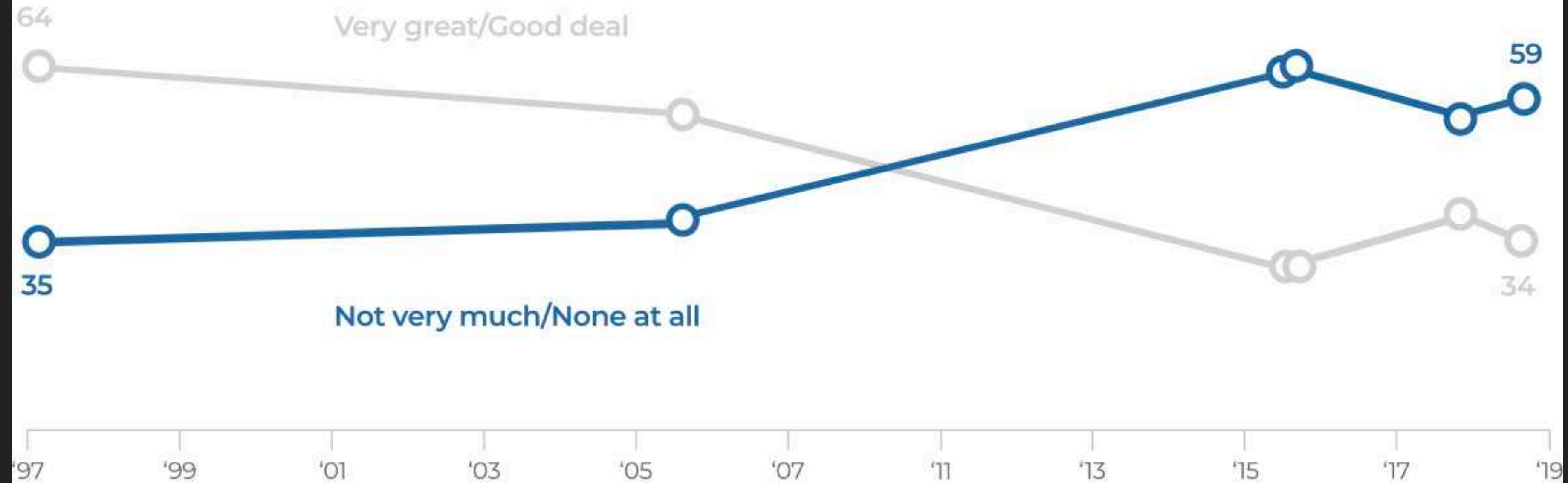
AND WE DON'T TRUST EACH OTHER

What has changed in the past 20 years?

Theories?

Less than half of Americans express confidence in public's political wisdom

% saying they have ____ (of) trust and confidence in the wisdom of American people in making political decisions



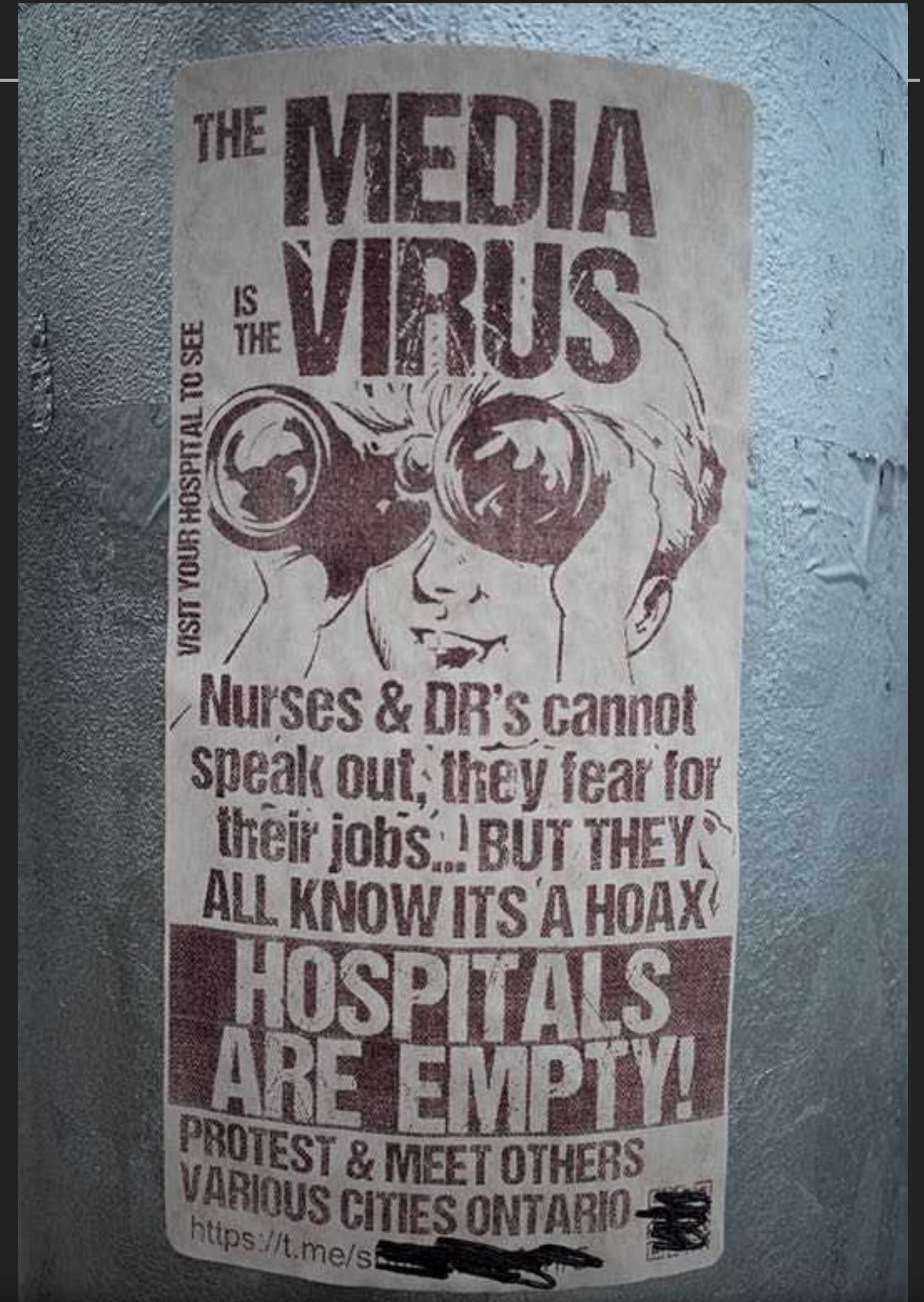
Note: "Don't know" responses not shown. Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 20–25, 2019.

“Many Americans appear to be extremely overconfident in their political knowledgeability, because they have no way of knowing how little they actually know about the world of politics (this is the so-called ‘double bind of incompetence’). But there’s a catch: when Republicans and Democrats engage in partisan thought processes, this effect becomes even stronger than before.”

Analysis of 2020 survey of Americans knowledge and perception of their knowledge

A MISINFORMED PUBLIC

- ▶ But ignorance is just the beginning of our problem in the United States.
- ▶ Foreign governments, businesses, political leaders, and your uncle on Facebook who “does his own research” are contributing to a network of false and even dangerous **disinformation**.
- ▶ Disinformation threatens public health, faith in democratic institutions, shared action in the face of crises, and our sense of shared purpose.



POSTER IN TORONTO/FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS

“But it’s clear that online disinformation is dismantling our democracy. This year, replete with coronavirus conspiracies and misleading claims about mail-in ballots, has demonstrated that disinformation has downstream effects on ordinary people, and that our ailing information ecosystem will not be healed by a change in administration alone. It is affecting public safety, public health and the functioning of our democratic institutions themselves. And to make matters worse, disinformation is here to stay.”

Nina Jankowicz, disinformation fellow at the Wilson Center

TWO SIMPLE DEFINITIONS

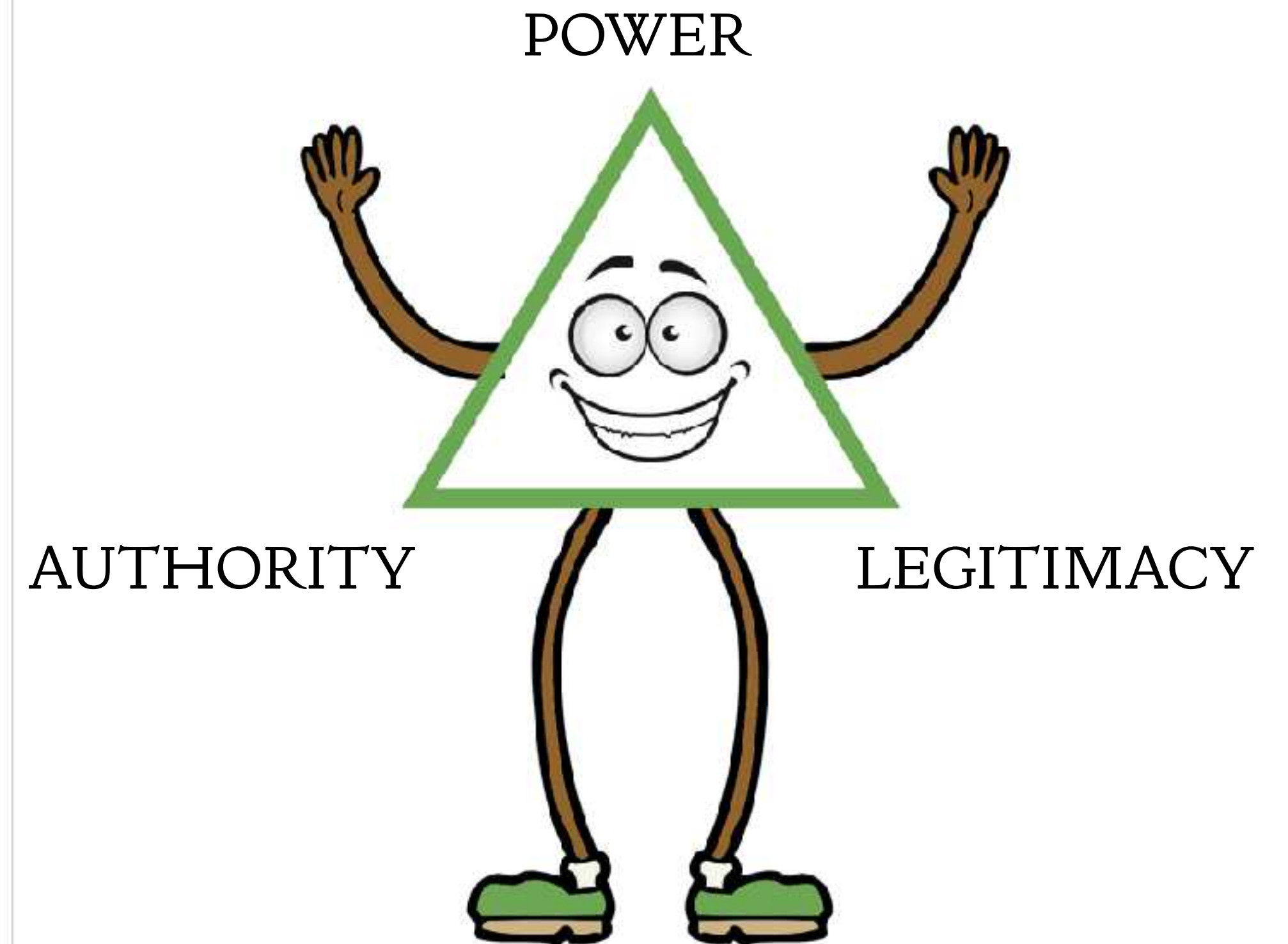
- ▶ **Politics** is “the activity—negotiation, argument, discussion, application of force, persuasion, etc.—by which an issue is agitated or settled.”
 - ▶ It comes from the Greek *politikos*, which means “citizen.”
- ▶ **Government** means “the system by which a nation, state, or community is governed.”
 - ▶ It comes from from the Greek verb κυβερνάω [*kubernáo*], which means “to steer.”



ARISTOTLE

POWER IN THE UNITED STATES

- ▶ **Power** refers to the ability of one person to get another person to act in accordance with their wishes.
- ▶ **Authority** refers to the right to exercise power.
- ▶ **Legitimacy** refers to a determination of whether someone has the authority to act. In the United States, this is typically governed by the law or constitution. Legitimacy is rooted **democratic** practices.



WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

- ▶ **Direct or Participatory Democracy** comes closest to the Ancient Greek definition: a government in which all or most citizens make decisions directly.
- ▶ Today, we more often mean **representative democracy** when we refer to democracy.
 - ▶ Economist Joseph Schumpeter defined it this way: "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals [i.e., leaders] acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote."
- ▶ What are the benefits and drawbacks of each?

OBAMA VOTING IN 2016



5 VIEWS OF POLITICAL POWER IN THE UNITED STATES

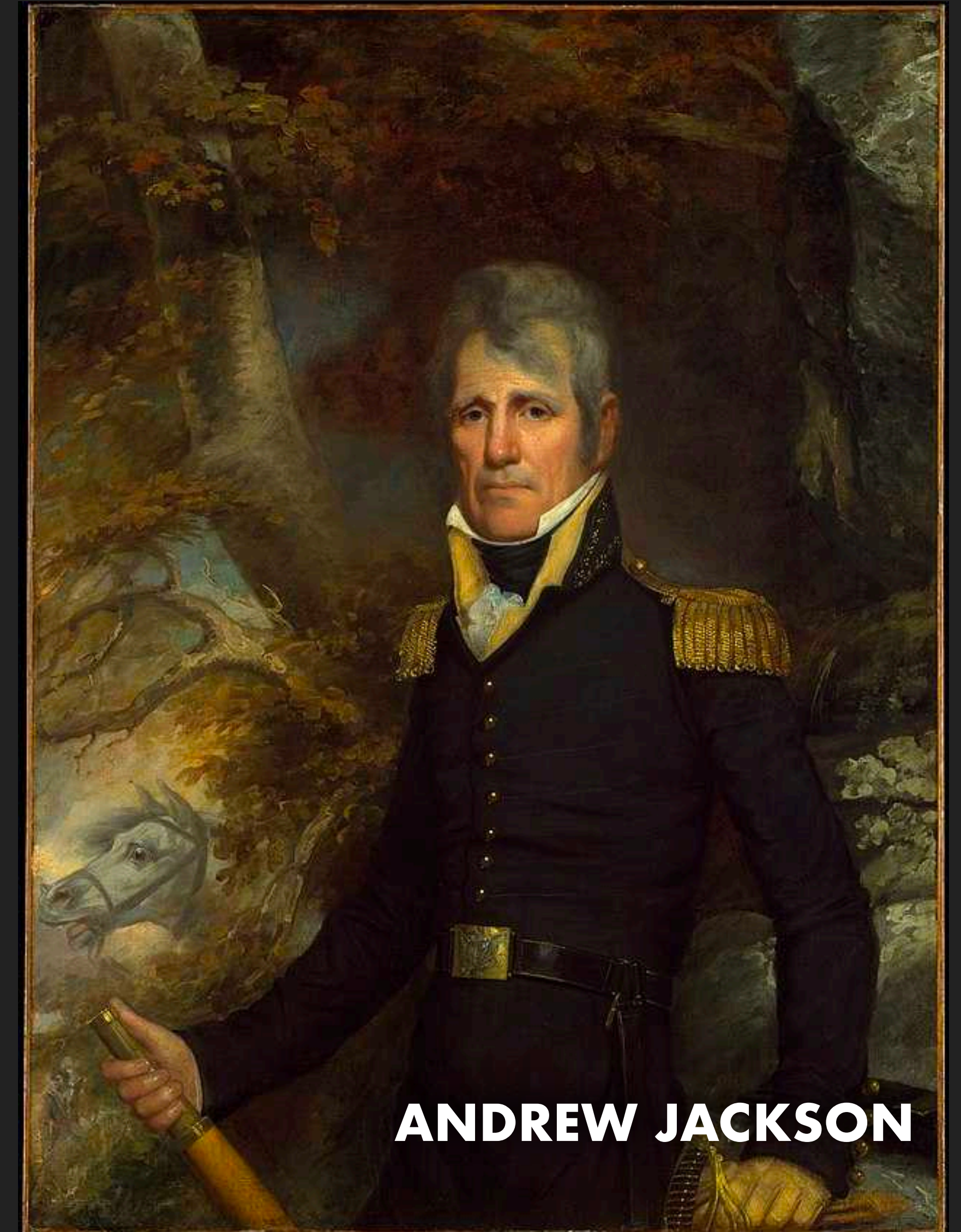
- ▶ The **class view**: American government is driven by the interests of the wealthy.
- ▶ The **power elite view**: The US system is dominated by powerful interest groups (business, labor, military, etc.)
- ▶ The **bureaucratic view**: government officials and workers themselves run the government, despite the intentions of elected officials/public.



NOT ONE OF THE FIVE VIEWS

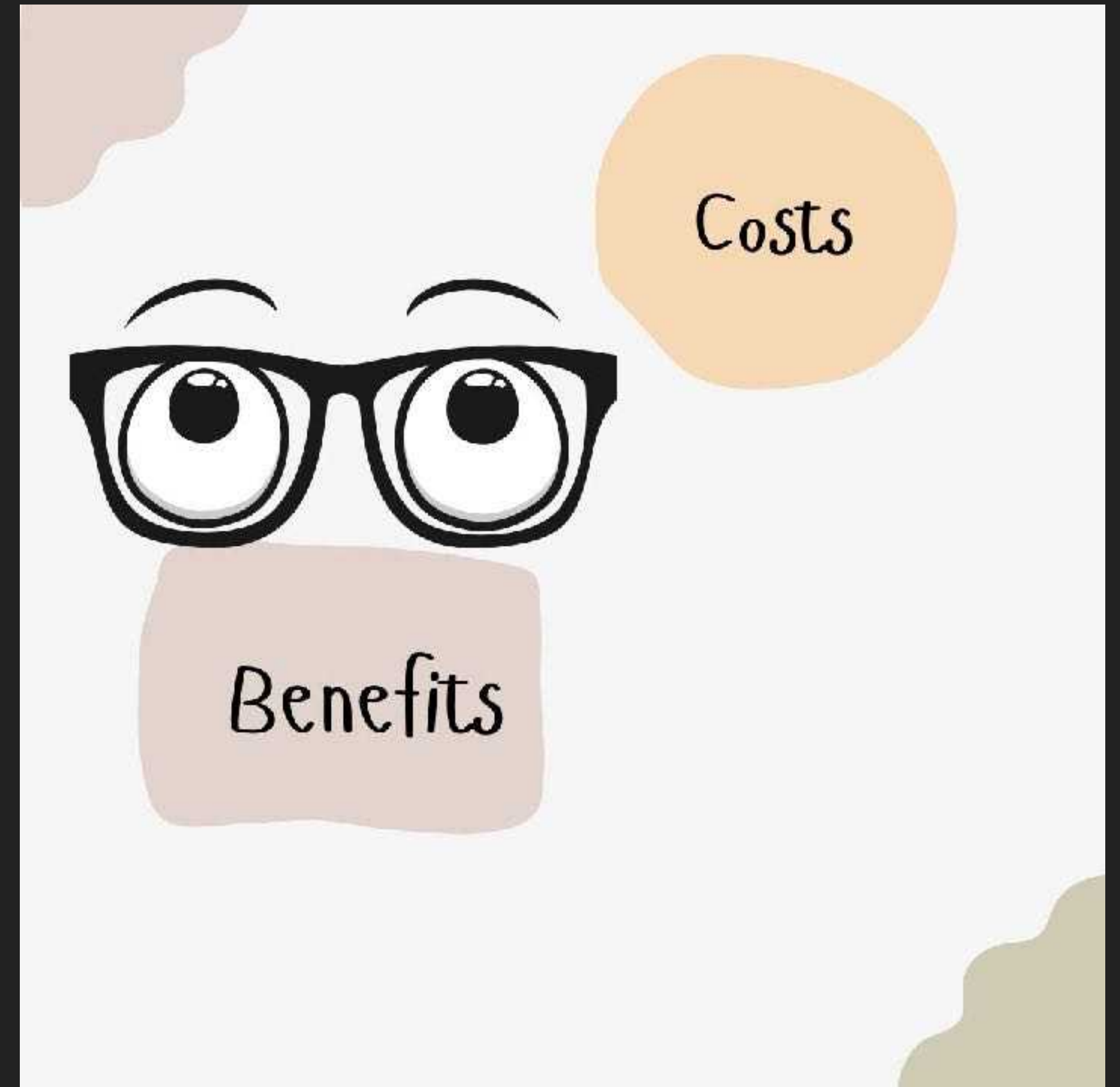
5 VIEWS OF POLITICAL POWER IN THE UNITED STATES

- ▶ The **pluralist view** holds that a multitude of groups, not individuals, hold power in the US. It is the evolving contest and changing resources among these groups that determines the course of American government.
- ▶ The **creedal passion view** accepts that many of the preceding four theories are correct, but maintains that the most important changes come from morally impassioned elites who put aside economic interest.
 - ▶ Jacksonian Democracy
- ▶ Which view(s) make the most sense today and in history?



THE POLICY AGENDA

- ▶ Broadly, the **political agenda** refers to the issues that we believe are appropriate for governmental action.
- ▶ This idea has evolved greatly over American history, shifts from individual to government, and state to federal action.
- ▶ Primary drivers of the policy agenda today are **interest groups, government institutions, the media, and the states.**
- ▶ Political debates are often settled by the **perception of costs** versus the **perception of benefits.**



PERCEPTION OF COST AND BENEFITS DRIVE AMERICAN POLITICS

4 TYPES OF POLITICS

- ▶ **Majoritarian Politics** involve making appeals to a broad group.
- ▶ **Interest Group Politics** tend to be fought out by small groups, some of which will benefit, some of which will bear costs from the change.
- ▶ **Client Politics** are policy changes in which one group will benefit and the costs are widely distributed to others. This can lead to **pork barrel projects** and **logrolling** to get passage.
- ▶ **Entrepreneurial Politics** occur when a large number of people benefit and a small group bears a substantial cost.



"THE BRIDGE TO NOWHERE"