

*From the desk of Brad Lips
Chief Executive Officer, Atlas Network*

Freedom at 36,000 Feet

Intended for perusal by friends of Atlas Network, this personal newsletter has been compiled during long flights with the goal of entertaining and informing you, whether you're in the air or on the ground. It's an assortment of observations about the freedom movement and world events with firsthand accounts from my most recent travels.

Here's an experiment you can try. The next time you're in a room with several other people ask (1) how many of them are better-than-average artists, and (2) how many of them are better-than-average drivers. I'm certain that you'll get more hands in the air for (2) than for (1).

Why is this?

Well, you and I know how imperfect our own doodles are, especially relative to the sketches we've seen produced by others. Of course, the art we've seen was made mostly by people who are proud of their artistic abilities—hardly a representative sample of the population at large! It's easy to imagine that we're in the bottom half of artists, but that's really because we don't have a clue what drawings would come from that 50th percentile of the population.

Conversely, in my years on the road, I have noticed *a lot* of boneheaded moves by other drivers. Okay, I've made a few mistakes myself, but those were due to distractions from the backseat, and they hardly reflect my larger body of work behind the wheel! So, of course, my intuition is that I'm a better-than-average driver. But perhaps my verdict would change if I put more focus on counting the many, many competent people sharing the road with me, who aren't making boneheaded moves!

This experiment—and the predictable results that come from it—helps us remember that cognitive biases distort our view of the world. The social media algorithms have discovered that many of us are addicted to news that causes alarm and outrage. Certainly, there's plenty to be alarmed and outraged about. But that's not *all* that's out there, and I'm hoping that Atlas Network helps in keeping you balanced!

We recently sent you our [Summer 2024 Freedom's Champion](#) magazine, which celebrated how Pelican Institute has created new economic opportunities in Louisiana; how Liberty Sparks in Tanzania advanced a pro-freedom reform agenda in Tanzania; and how Parth Shah has built a lasting freedom movement in India.

Use the QR code below to explore
online materials mentioned in this
doc via blue text!



Not only that, we published a feature story, “Who Moved the Overton Window in Argentina?” about many friends of Atlas Network who worked patiently, against great odds it seemed, to improve the odds that Argentina—long headed down the road to serfdom—could do a dramatic U-turn. The cover image of President Milei, by my colleague Steven Greene, got some viral attention in Argentina in the days ahead of my visit.

Details on that trip below ...

What I Saw in Argentina

In June, I attended “The Rebirth of Liberty in Argentina and Beyond” in Buenos Aires, hosted by our Argentine partner Libertad y Progreso (LyP) and the Cato Institute.



The conference happened amid violent protests as the legislature debated (and then passed) Milei’s “Bases Law” to extend his administration’s reforms. The event grew out of a grant Atlas Network made to LyP in January, believing it would be valuable to convene an international summit on the six-month anniversary of Javier Milei taking office to (1) to celebrate progress made; (2) to put attention on the challenges ahead; and (3) to build public appreciation that this moment is about more than economic adjustments; it’s about creating a culture of liberty.

Count me cautiously optimistic about what’s taking place. Milei’s government avoided hyperinflation. Markets have begun to function again after the elimination of various price controls. Some 70,000 public sector employees have been dismissed, marking progress toward Milei’s announced goal of cutting the size of government by half.

Milei closed the event I attended with a dense economics lecture, explaining how he sees the need to sequence the fiscal reforms, monetary reforms, and exchange rate reforms that could transform Argentina into the freest country in the world. (Milei’s level of energy and fluency with policy details is quite different from what we all saw in the U.S. presidential debate last month!)

Of course, the political road ahead for Milei is treacherous and difficult. Our friend Mary O’Grady also worried in the *Wall Street Journal* after the event that Milei may not be moving fast enough to implement dollarization (closing the central bank), the one reform that could tie the hands of future Peronist governments. But the mood in Argentina is strikingly optimistic among the free-market faithful.

Other highlights of the event included seeing younger Argentine entrepreneurs talk with confidence about the potential of the country. Asked about what governments should do to encourage entrepreneurship, Eduardo Bastitta (CEO, Plaza Logistica) explained: “I call it the Popcorn Plan. The government ministers should go make some popcorn, sit down on the couch, and watch what Argentine entrepreneurs can do once you take the boot off their throats.”

The CEO of Libertad y Progreso (the local think tank hosting the event with Cato) sounded a similarly optimistic note: if Argentina can endure this period of transition and establish investor confidence, the economy could take off. The country has substantial fossil fuels and rare earth mineral resources that have yet to be exploited given the unfriendly climate for business in the past.

[Elon Musk joined the event via Zoom for a half-hour interview by Johan Norberg.](#) (Remember, use the QR code on the front to access online materials relating to text I put in blue; in this case, the YouTube recording of the Musk/Norberg interview.) It was a fascinating discussion. Musk framed his business pursuits as a larger project to improve the odds of human civilization’s longevity and its progress toward more happiness. He spoke of how innovation requires fast feedback loops, and that effective design comes from deleting code and processes. He presented a guiding rule to delete and delete and delete, and then put back what you need. But if you’re only putting back in 10% of what you deleted, you obviously are being too conservative in what you delete. Governments, he said, need to adopt habits of deleting, just like he advises for tech startups. Credit Milei for boldly moving in this direction.

Expressing Our Enthusiasm for Liberty—Buckley, Milei, or Moicano?

A quick digression here.

I came of age in Bill Buckley’s Connecticut and admired the *National Review* founder’s sometimes sesquipedalian efforts to find the perfect way to express a complex idea.

As I’ve said, Milei’s speeches are full of erudition, but they finish with a coarse appeal to the gut. I wonder what Buckley would have thought of Milei’s habit of closing with an emphatic “¡Viva la Libertad, carajo!” A PG translation here is “Long live liberty, damn it!” but most Spanish speakers hear it quite a bit stronger—not far from the [amazing rant in a boxing ring, given this spring by Brazilian UFC fighter Renato Moicano.](#)

You’ll definitely want to follow the QR code to see a link of a pumped-up Moicano after winning a fight against Jalin Turner. In front of a cheering Las Vegas crowd, he proclaimed his love for America. He proclaimed his love for our Constitution. Then, he concluded with sage advice: “If you care about your f---ing country, read Ludwig von Mises and the six lessons of the Austrian school of economics, motherf---ers!”

I’m quite certain that’s *not* the way Buckley would have put it! But ... that endorsement will move more books than the rather dry recommendation blurbs on the back of my copy of Mises’s classic *Human Action*.

More Good News

It was almost lost in the campaign-focused news coverage of late June, but the Supreme Court's *Loper* decision has answered an item at the top of classical liberals' wish lists: the overturn of 1984's *Chevron* decision, which permitted the growth of the administrative state at the expense of normal Americans' liberties.

This is a monumental event in American jurisprudence, but not a radical one. Our friends at Pacific Legal Foundation—who filed an amicus brief in the case, having litigated scores of cases confronting the *Chevron* Deference doctrine in the past—remind us that it is simply restoring the Constitution's intended separation of powers. Senior attorney Anastatia Boden remarked:

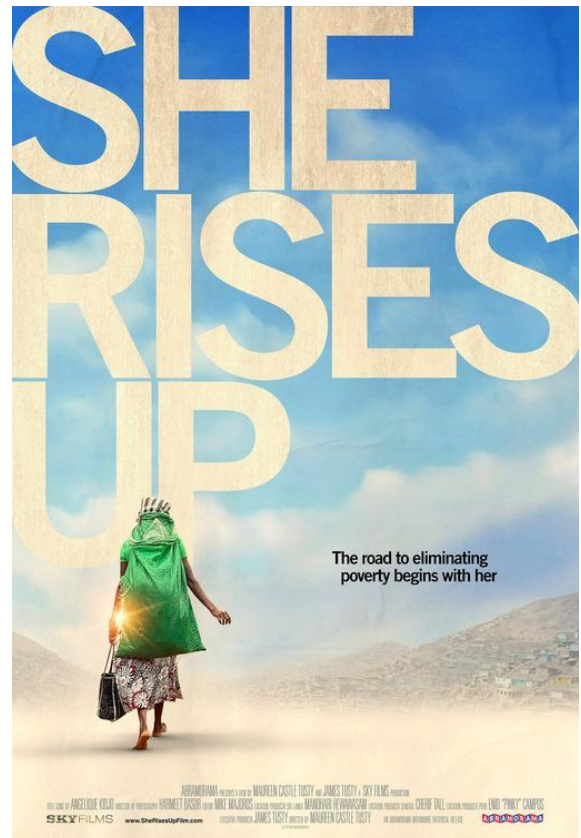
Loper is being heralded as a landmark decision, and it is, yet it represents the common-sense proposition that Congress should pass laws, the Executive should enforce them, and the Judiciary should interpret them. This scheme of checks and balances is our best shot at a free and just society.

She Rises Up

Atlas Network senior fellow Magatte Wade is one of the women who appears in a [new documentary called *She Rises Up*](#), by Jim Tusty and Maureen Castle. We've been cheering on this film because (1) we're proud that our partners helped the film-makers in the research phase, and (2) it's so rare to have a documentary about global poverty that isn't trying to appeal to one's sense of pity. This is all about the *resilience* of female entrepreneurs.

Visit SheRisesUpFilm.com to learn when *She Rises Up* is coming to your community or write me if you want to organize a local screening, and I'll connect you with Jim.

I'll attach to this newsletter a piece mentioning the film that I published in RealClearPolicy last month, "[Will Women Transform the Tepid Twenties?](#)" I make the case that economic growth in the decade ahead could be boosted by removing barriers to enterprise for women around the world.



The Worry Remains the Same

I've kept this edition of my newsletter pretty upbeat through its first pages, but I need to acknowledge that the problem that inspired me to make a career in public policy has only grown more problematic.

We're now a quarter-century removed from the federal government's last budget surplus and the last serious bipartisan effort to put Social Security on sound actuarial footing. The debt carried by our federal government is now larger than our GDP, and the interest on that debt is greater than GDP growth.

As my friend Jon Caldara of Independent Institute says, "All the cockpit dashboard warning lights are flashing," as though we're on a plane approaching a mountain that's growing faster than the plane can gain altitude. And, oh yeah, I can extend the metaphor by pointing out we have loud, senile men arguing in the cockpit with a cabin full of passengers asleep or scrolling on Tik Tok.

Not a pleasant metaphor to type out at 36,000 feet, but it's critical that we all appreciate Herb Stein's old warning: "If something cannot go on forever, it will stop." Preventing our looming debt crisis and mitigating the pain of adjustment needs to return as a top priority for our liberty movement.

What I Saw in Spain

Atlas Network was recently in Madrid for our Europe Liberty Forum, which brought together representatives of 119 partners of Atlas Network from 43 countries. As you may know, Atlas Network conferences have evolved to be very unique: our attendees are active "participants, not a passive audience; so several sessions are organized as workshops or competitions." Still, a real highlight of the event was the keynote address of Javier Fernández-Lasquetty given in the form of a "Toast to Freedom" (another Atlas Network tradition).

Javier has been an ally of Atlas Network for decades, and he recently concluded his tenure as minister of economy, finance, and employment of the Madrid Regional Government. During his tenure (and despite a socialist government at the federal level), Madrid has become a model of free-market reform. Tax cut after tax cut, deregulation after deregulation, Madrid is showing that economic growth can be reborn in what we too often mourn as "Old Europe."

I'll attach [Javier's prepared text for his Toast to Freedom](#) so you can be as inspired as I was.

Following the main conference in Madrid, we hosted a donor retreat/tour that we call "The Atlas Network Experience." It's a great way to travel to new places with likeminded friends of liberty. We are now planning our next Atlas Network Experience to take place during May 23-28 in Belgium, immediately following the 2025 Europe Liberty Forum.

Details available soon—I hope you'll consider joining us!

In the photo at right, some of our group are pictured next to the tomb of Diego de Covarrubias y Leyva, who contributed greatly to understanding that “just prices” are derived from subjective values of buyers and sellers in a free market, and that government debasement of the currency is immoral.

Other fun memories from our Atlas Network Experience included:



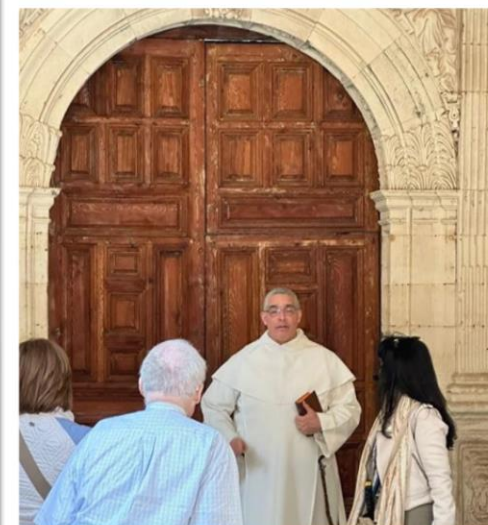
Visiting with Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez while in Madrid



A memorable night dancing to—and with—a local “tuna band” in Salamanca



Marveling at a 1900-year-old Roman aqueduct in Segovia



Visiting the private Columbus Cloister at Convento de San Esteban in Salamanca

Additional Travels—Calgary, Philly, Naples

In early June, I went to Calgary to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Fraser Institute, the second think tank that (Atlas Network founder) Sir Antony Fisher helped found. The program featured former prime minister Stephen Harper and Alberta's premiere (and former Fraser intern) Danielle Smith, both of whom were quite upbeat about political winds blowing again in the direction of free enterprise in Canada. It was particularly heartening to see the 800+ attendees give a rousing standing ovation to Mike Walker, who ran Fraser Institute for its first three decades.

Another big standing ovation took place in Philadelphia this May, when Commonwealth Foundation held its 30th anniversary celebration while giving their inaugural "Champion of the Commonwealth" award to Tom Beach, a board member at both Commonwealth and Atlas Network. Cheers to Tom, and how great is it for Commonwealth making the case for school choice and free enterprise in a state as important as Pennsylvania?

Berta Valle has emerged as a wonderful champion of human rights. She graced our Liberty Forum stage during the period when her husband, Felix Maradiaga, was a political prisoner in Nicaragua after daring to run for president against the dictator Daniel Ortega. Berta spoke at a meeting of our Atlas Club Naples in Florida in May. If you're looking for a tear-jerker of a video, check this newsletters' landing page for [homemade video of Berta and her daughter's reunion with Felix](#) after his nearly two years in prison.

Berta is pictured here beside (left to right) our evening's hostess, Marlene Mieske, Atlas Network board member Laura Ann Spencer, and my wife, Stephanie. We're looking to expand the number of "city clubs" Atlas Network visits regularly with speakers, so don't be shy about inquiring about how to pull together a gathering in your community!

David Boaz RIP

Many words have been written about the death in early June of our friend David Boaz of Cato Institute, including a [beautiful memorial our team published](#) with the help of our colleague Tom Palmer, who collaborated with David during six decades. I won't attempt any exhaustive review of David's contributions of my own, but I will add one anecdote.

I met David on my very first day of informational interviews in Washington, D.C., when I contemplated, at age 26, making the leap into the think-tank world.

I'll never forget the start of our conversation. I asked something along the lines of "What's the purpose of the Cato Institute?" After beginning his reply with a Reagan-y "Well ...," David was unapologetically bold, saying (as I remember it), "We in the liberty movement are saving the world from bad ideas."

Saving the world! I loved that then, and I love that now.

Hayek famously wrote that “we must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage.” Few people in the world can compete with David in terms of recruiting people to join our intellectual adventure for liberty.

Parting Thoughts

We best honor friends like David Boaz by continuing to build a strong and principled liberty movement. I’m certainly grateful that you, and so many others, fill our ranks of donors and allies whom we can count on to promote free society values in the U.S. and worldwide.

I really hope that you’re enjoying what you get from Atlas Network—this newsletter included!

Check out the QR code on the front to get more information on the items highlighted in blue, and—of course—I’m hoping that you’re already registered for our most inspirational event of the year, [Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner](#) in New York City, on November 20–21, 2024.

Reading about the freedom movement can be illuminating, but—if you’ve never immersed yourself in it in person—I highly recommend attending our Liberty Forum! For many attendees, it proves to be a life-changing experience.

Hope to see you in New York!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad Lips". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brad Lips
Chief Executive Officer

Toast to Freedom - Atlas Network Europe Liberty Forum, Madrid, 05/24/24

By Javier Fernández-Lasquetty

First of all, a confession: I have spent more than 20 years in politics. That's to say, I come from the dark side. And regardless of that past, you are offering me the incredible honor of speaking here tonight ...

Spain plays an important role in the liberal movement. Since Juan de Mariana and the School of Salamanca, back in the seventeenth century, Spain has been at the forefront of the classical liberal movement. This Forum is an example. A Spaniard now presides over the Mont Pelerin Society, Gabriel Calzada, president of the University of the Hespérides. Six years ago Universidad Francisco Marroquín opened a campus here. Spain is home to some of the most important and active think tanks and foundations in Europe. They generate ideas, reports, and arguments that help expose people to the principles of a society of free and responsible people.

All of this is important! What you do in your own country is important. It inspires and gives ideas. I have personally experienced it myself. In the Region of Madrid, freedom has advanced because there were people and think tanks that generated ideas and alternative proposals to the socialism of the mainstream.

That is why Madrid resisted the pandemic without lockdown.

That is why, in Madrid, we made 20 tax cuts in just four years!

That is why, in Madrid, we declared war on over-regulation: more than 200 regulations repealed or eased in just four years!

And this is working! Madrid is growing twice as fast as the national average. Ideas matter!

This has been done in the Region of Madrid by the government of Isabel Díaz Ayuso, of which I was a member. This was possible because there were people, organizations, and think tanks like yours that had been working every day in favor of the free market, in favor of respect for private property, in favor of the elimination of state barriers and privileges.

Hayek wrote that “without principles we drift.” That's why we have to be optimistic! Here in this room, we have principles, and we know they are better! And not only do they produce results. They are morally superior. Socialism is always coming up with new ways to present itself, and it's always the same: it's full of resentment, confrontation, and distrust in the ability of individuals to make their own decisions.

We see it in Spain, and we see it in Europe: those who want more state and less freedom. Whatever party they belong to, what they really want is for people to follow their commands. In exchange for a subsidy. Or to avoid being fined.

We want something better. We want people who are responsible, who go as far as they can with their ingenuity and creativity, taking risks. We don't want people who obey.

The mainstream says that Europe has to be the world champion of regulation. We know that we will do better if we are the world champion of freedom.

The mainstream says that the real European model is to have hardly any economic growth. That is not true.

Let's be clear: a fearful, protectionist Europe, behind a wall of tariffs and regulation, is not in anyone's interest. What is in our interest is a free Europe, open to trade and innovation!

Let's be clear: it's not the culture of cancellation and political correctness that is European. What is truly European is free thinking and a critical spirit.

What is truly European is not educational egalitarianism, but having very clear concepts such as freedom, effort, merit, and reward.

I believe that the European identity is based on individual freedom, personal responsibility, the rule of law, tolerance, an entrepreneurial spirit, and the ambition to make the world a better place.

We know that there are threats to Europe, but we also know that we can overcome them. Russia has invaded a European country, Ukraine, and we all stand with Ukraine! We know that Hamas cruelly murders Jews, and that is a threat to any European. But we also know that we can overcome this threat!

The hope for Europe is to hold on tight to Western values. Neither Europe nor America should deny the Atlantic alliance that preserved freedom in the 20th century and helped bring down the Berlin Wall and defeat communist tyranny. The future of freedom depends on our ability to renew this vital bond.

The threats are clear and present. Meanwhile, Europe has never experienced such incredible prosperity. This human flourishing is precisely because of Liberty.

That is why the work that the Liberty movement is doing all over Europe is so important. Keep up the great work! Everywhere, on any issue, whenever we place the ideas of liberty in front of people, we are winning minds.

That is why we are going to toast together.

Let's toast with optimism!

Let's toast with courage!

There's nothing more important than freedom. Let's toast to freedom!

Will Women Transform the Tepid Twenties?



By **Brad Lips**
June 05, 2024

Kristalina Georgieva, the International Monetary Fund's managing director, **recently described** our global economy as being stuck in "the Tepid Twenties — a sluggish and disappointing decade."

In prior periods, expanded trade could boost emerging economies, but many of those gains have been realized and are at risk of setback given increasing protectionist sentiment across the globe. One important reason for the relative strength of the American economy is the incredible contribution of American women, and this points to a lesson – and an opportunity – for other countries.

In the U.S. the female unemployment rate is down to 3.5%, and **entrepreneurship among women is increasing** as they dive into start-ups and small businesses. For more than a decade, women have **outpaced** men in acquiring undergraduate and graduate degrees.

As the knowledge economy evolves, American women are positioned to play an ever-greater leadership role. This is not true about women globally, and it was not true in America's past.

The United States inherited a British common law tradition that forbid women from entering into contracts without their husband's permission. They had limited ability to conduct business and hold property. Professor Jayme Lemke has studied **how the legal status of American women was transformed** for the better during the 19th century via a series of state-level legal reforms.

Today, we see the huge benefits – not just in economic terms, but in terms of freedom and choice – that come from welcoming women as full participants in the global economy.

Women in other countries deserve the same rights as men, and countries stand to benefit when women bring their talents to the marketplace. Local think tanks and civil society organizations are proving to be cost-effective catalysts to change in this direction.

The Centre for Public Policy Research in Kerala, India, **rolled back restrictions on female employment** that had been imposed by the province's governing Communist Party. Women previously could not work in the evening; today, they can, and the CPPR is advocating now to lift other antiquated restrictions that prevent women from working in hospitality industries.

The Students' Organization for Liberty and Entrepreneurship in South Sudan has run workshops training thousands of women about their legal rights **to inherit and own property**, despite persistent cultural norms that keep women in an inferior role.

Many women in the central African nation of Burundi **make their living through cross-border trade**, but until recently they were required to interact with officials at 19 different checkpoints. Each checkpoint could bring fees, demands for brides, even sexual assault by border agents acting with impunity. The Center for Development and Enterprise Great Lakes campaigned to overhaul the administrative processes that created this hostile environment – making trade more efficient and saving lives from avoidable trauma.

We need more hearts and minds appreciating the importance of this important frontier: protecting the rights of women and removing barriers that make it difficult to earn a living.

A remarkable new documentary, *She Rises Up*, helps make this case. It follows female entrepreneurs building businesses in Peru, Senegal, and Sri Lanka. One can't help but be inspired by the resilience, wisdom, and compassion displayed by gritty women who are determined to overcome obstacles to achieve their dreams. The benefits are not just measured in money, but rather in dignity and social uplift. Senegalese entrepreneur Magatte Wade comments in the film, "When a woman is making money, she doesn't have to put up with situations that are not right. That's the power of a job."

She Rises Up opens a window on what entrepreneurial capitalism actually looks like in the Global South.

It is time for broader audiences to recognize that this is the road out of extreme poverty. After so many billions of dollars in foreign aid that mostly fed corruption, it is time to recognize that countries must improve their environments for

business. This is the only scalable strategy for achieving economic lift-off – and it's a strategy that works best when it is designed to be inclusive of the talents of women.

Brad Lips is the CEO of Atlas Network, which supports a global community of more 500 independent think tanks that are committed to identifying and removing barriers to human flourishing.

