



By Michael L. Sharb<sup>1</sup>

department: legal

# Quaestor Deus—A Brief History of the Future of the School Business Official<sup>2</sup>

“ You take the blue pill—the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill—you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember: All I’m offering is the truth. Nothing more.

—Morpheus, to Neo, in *The Matrix*<sup>3</sup>

“ ... we can rebuild him. We have the technology. We have the capability to make the world’s first bionic man.... Better ... stronger ... faster ....

—Opening Sequence, *The Six Million Dollar Man*<sup>4</sup>

“ What Comes Next? ”

—Song from the musical *Hamilton*<sup>5</sup>

The school district treasurer has evolved.<sup>6</sup> Yes, sure, in the Darwinian sense, we all have. But the school district treasurer has evolved.

Much ink has been spilled on the history of the statutory role of the school district treasurer.<sup>7</sup> This article is not going to trot that tired horse back out. That would be boring.<sup>8</sup>

Instead, this article will explore a much more interesting question: What Comes Next?

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## Homo Deus

In his book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, Yuval Noah Harari<sup>9</sup> explores how the principal force of evolution (natural selection) is being replaced by intelligent design.<sup>10</sup> He projects humans employing technologies such as artificial intelligence and genetic engineering to become, in essence, god-like—homo deus. But with this power, there will be a price to be paid:

- Based on today’s world, the power is likely to be unequally distributed, with haves and have-nots.
- With increasing machine- and data-provided efficiencies, a “useless” class, those lacking a societal purpose, will result.
- “Dataism,” a universal faith in the power of algorithms and the value of information, will become the prevalent worldview, rendering humanity as a giant data-processing system.

In short, humans will use science to become god-like, then pursue god-like aims such as immortality, endless happiness and divine power. But, the upgrading of humanity will be reserved for a small class of elites<sup>11</sup>, with the non-elites rendered useless. Continued scientific advancement will erode humanism,<sup>12</sup> and our artificial intelligence will become smarter than its human creators. Algorithms will know us better than we know ourselves, and humans will surrender to the algorithms, rendering humanity a giant data pool. That leads to the end of humanity as we currently conceive of it.<sup>13</sup>

Harari also notes that predictions of the future often assume that the future will look much as it does today, with new technologies welded onto contemporary values and points of view.<sup>14</sup> Where perhaps the future of 1919 was roughly discernable in 1819, it is almost unimaginable to project what the world of 2119 will look like or our role in it.

This paints a scary picture, perhaps interesting,<sup>15</sup> perhaps borderline nutty, but what does it have to do with school district treasurers?

*Continued on next page.*

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## Quaestor Deus

The Author submits that the forecasting of Homo Deus can be applied to forecasting the future of the school district treasurer as Quaestor Deus.

### The Bionic Treasurer.

This part is easy to forecast because it is already here.<sup>16</sup> In *The Six Million Dollar Man*, Steve Austin had a bionic left eye, two bionic legs and a bionic left arm.<sup>17</sup> In *The Bionic Woman*, Jaime Sommers had the same, with a bionic right inner ear instead of an eye.<sup>18</sup> Since the time of Steve and Jaime, bionics have become an actual thing and an entire movement, Transhumanism<sup>19</sup>, has more fully developed. The school district treasurer of the future will indeed be better, stronger, faster, but also will live and work longer. NB: We're going to need to re-think SERS.

### The Elite.

As noted, this stuff is expensive.<sup>20</sup> Very few are going to be able to afford it, leading to a small, elite class of Bionic Treasurers. NB: Perhaps SERS will be OK after all. Other aspirants aren't going to make it and will end up in the "useless class," along with bond lawyers and others.<sup>21</sup> The Bionic Treasurers, then, based on supply and demand dynamics, will end up each serving multiple school districts.<sup>22</sup>

### March of the Algorithms.

All of these Bionic Treasurers are going to look to put their advanced powers to use, and, together with increasingly sophisticated technology, will apply their skills across the spectrum of school districts they serve. Just as the introduction of the Five-Year Forecast in the late 1990s has led to much easier "apples to apples" comparison of revenue and spending across school districts, more advanced algorithms will mine data to forecast better than even the Bionic Treasurers. With so much data available, the algorithms will eventually be able to evaluate data statewide and provide answers to fiscal questions not yet thought of.

### Matrix State School District.

As the algorithms achieve greater and greater sophistication, there is no longer a need for fiscal administration at any local level. Eventually, all Ohio school districts merge into one for fiscal purposes, called, say, The Matrix State School District.<sup>23</sup>

**This is the evolutionary end of the school district treasurer, the ultimate Quaestor Deus.**

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## Conclusion(?)

Can this happen? Sure. Will it happen? The Author has no idea.<sup>24</sup> Predicting the future can be a tricky business.<sup>25</sup> The Author will close by noting, whatever you may be doing and wherever it may lead: If nobody comes from the future to stop you, how bad can the decision really be?<sup>26</sup>

Michael L. Sharb is a partner at Squire Patton Boggs.  
216.479.8389 | [mike.sharb@squirepb.com](mailto:mike.sharb@squirepb.com)



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- 1 The Author is a partner at Squire Patton Boggs (US) LLP. When not writing for the *SBO Quarterly*, the Author supports OASBO by co-hosting the hit game show, "Game of [Th]Rowans" and presenting from time to time on a variety of topics, legal and otherwise. He also leads Squire Public Finance, the firm's nationally-recognized public finance practice group.
- 2 Very roughly, "Treasurer God." For the uninitiated, the title is a riff on the title of the bestseller *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, by Yuval Noah Harari. The Author's extensive research (meaning whatever Google came up with during my maximum searching attention span of approximately 10 seconds) revealed "quaestor" to be the Latin approximation of "treasurer."
- 3 In mythology, Morpheus is a god associated with sleep and dreams. Clever, those Wachowskis.
- 4 Steve Austin, of course, played by Lee Majors, once married to Farrah Fawcett Majors. More will be said of bionics, *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman* anon.
- 5 Memorably performed by Jonathan Groff as King George III. Da da da da da...
- 6 So sayeth none other than "the Dean" of Ohio school district treasurers, Dan Wilson, in an OASBO news item dated June 28, 2019, which inspired this Article. With so unimpeachable a source, the Author takes the matter as a given.
- 7 Including an article co-authored by some guy named Rick Manoloff in the *SBO Quarterly*, January 2011.
- 8 Never forget that boring can be beautiful. See Mick Sharboloff, "How to Win the Bored Meeting," *SBO Quarterly*, September 2018.
- 9 OT: If you haven't read Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, what are you waiting for?
- 10 No, not that intelligent design. Rather, intelligent design in the sense that humans obtain the capacity to create themselves according to their own wishes, given the state of science. As Alanis Morissette might say: Isn't it ironic?
- 11 Some view being an elite as an American dream; see, e.g., the song *Know Your Enemy* by Rage Against the Machine (1992). Trivia: The Rage song *Wake Up* plays over the closing credits of the movie *The Matrix*.
- 12 Meaning, a philosophy or ethical stance emphasizing the value of human beings.
- 13 If it were to happen, a hard pill to swallow, but you made it this far and the Author assumed you took the red pill and stayed in Wonderland.
- 14 Think here of *The Jetsons*, which first aired in 1962; a nuclear, all-Caucasian family living in a completely non-diverse world, but with incredible, then only imagined technology, much of which has since come to be. More on the latter point anon.
- 15 Bill Gates and Barack Obama, among other luminaries, are fans, for what that is worth.
- 16 "Cyborgs are Here and You'd Better Get Used to It", Charles Towers-Clark, *Forbes*, October 1, 2018.
- 17 *The Six Million Dollar Man* series was based on the novel *Cyborg* by Martin Caidin.
- 18 The Author is sparing you discussion of the Bionic Dog, "Maximillion" (seriously) or "Max," the bionic equivalent of Fonzie jumping the shark in *Happy Days*.
- 19 Transhumanism is a way of thinking about the future that is based on the premise that the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development but rather a comparatively early phase. See [whatistranshumanism.com](http://whatistranshumanism.com).
- 20 The \$6 million spent to upgrade Steve Austin in 1973 would cost \$34.6 million in 2019, applying historical inflation rates. Data for Jaime Sommers is unavailable, but in Germany *The Bionic Woman* was called *Die Sieben Millionen Dollar Frau*, translated as *The Seven Million Dollar Woman*. Using the \$7 million figure, and again applying historical inflation rates since 1975, Jaime's upgrade would cost a cool \$33.3 million in 2019.
- 21 The Author appreciates that some may already consider bond lawyers included within, if not defining, that class.
- 22 If this part sounds far-fetched, know that the Author has the privilege of working with a school district treasurer that currently serves three school districts and, until recently, served four.
- 23 Remember: All I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more.
- 24 Hopefully not, as the legal market would be super-competitive with only one potential client.
- 25 *The Jetsons* did a remarkably good job (flat screens, smart watches, robotic assistance), though we are still waiting on flying cars. The show was set in the year 2062, however, so be patient.
- 26 Bill Murray tweeted this on October 21, 2014.