The Quicksand of Optimism

from the WSJ and William Galston, What Would Madison Do About the Budget?

> *When it comes to government, I am a die-hard Madisonian. The chief intellectual architect of our constitutional order knew that public officials would always be torn between self-interest and concern for the common good. And he knew that in times of conflict, reason would often give way to passion. Political institutions, he concluded, should not be built on the quicksand of optimism about human nature. Instead, they should accept human beings as they are and channel the mixed motives of public officials toward promoting the public good.*
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> *James Madison also understood that nothing wrought by human beings can be perfect, let alone timeless. When circumstances change in unexpected ways, our institutions must change as well—or risk conducting the people's business far less effectively. So it was that the man who originally opposed adding a Bill of Rights to the Constitution ended up as its author. So it is that we the people have amended our Constitution 27 times.*