

MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE®

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PART I

AS WE WRITE THIS, THE REPUBLICAN NOMINATING CAMPAIGN PROCESS THAT OFTEN SEEMED INTERMINABLE HAS CONCLUDED WITH A PREDICTABLE RESULT. IT WAS EXTREMELY REPETITIVE, FREQUENTLY BANAL AND FAVORED SELF-SERVING “STUMP” SPEECHES OVER REAL OPINION POSITIONS.

WHATEVER ELSE OUR NOMINATING CAMPAIGNS LACK OR DISPLAY, THEY ARE ONLY PRELIMINARY BOUTS AND ARE SUPPOSED TO PREPARE THE COUNTRY FOR THE MAIN EVENT TO FOLLOW — OUR NATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS. THE TRUTH IS THAT WE NOW FACE ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL ELECTIONS IN OUR NATION’S HISTORY WITH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES HERE AND ABROAD, AND IT IS HIGHLY DOUBTFUL WHETHER THE CAMPAIGN NOW UNDERWAY WILL PROVIDE ANY MEANINGFUL GUIDANCE TO DEALING WITH THE WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES THAT CALL FOR ACTION BY OUR GOVERNMENT.

THESE CONSEQUENCES CANNOT HELP BUT ALTER THE WAY MOST AMERICANS THINK AND LIVE. THEY WILL ALSO TRANSFORM OUR CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL HERITAGE AND THE WAYS IN WHICH WE AND OTHERS VIEW THE FUTURE TRAJECTORY OF OUR NOBLE EXPERIMENT IN GOVERNMENT. IN SHORT, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO OVERESTIMATE HOW CRUCIAL THIS YEAR’S ELECTIONS ARE.

TO EMPHASIZE THEIR IMPORTANCE WE OFFER THREE STATEMENTS TO SERVE AS GUIDELINES IN READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH OUR

ELECTIONS MUST TAKE PLACE. THE FIRST IS ALBERT EINSTEIN’S EVER MORE PRESCIENT VIEW OF BOTH TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR:

“THE PROBLEMS FACING THE WORLD ARE SO COMPLEX THAT THEY CANNOT BE SOLVED BY THE SAME LEVEL OF THINKING THAT CREATED THEM.”

THIS EXTRAORDINARY COMMENT OVER FIFTY YEARS AGO SPEAKS TRUTH TO SCIENCE, ECONOMICS, RELIGION (IF WE ALLOW IT) AND, PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, TO OUR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY POLITICS HERE AND ELSEWHERE.

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THE SECOND STATEMENT THAT DOMINATES OUR POLITICAL ACTION AND RESULTS, BUT THAT IS NOT READILY OR PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED, IS THAT BOTH MAJOR PARTIES ARE LARGELY CONTROLLED BY NUMEROUS SPECIAL INTERESTS. EACH PARTY HAS ITS OWN LIST OR “TEAM” — WALL STREET FOR GOP, PRO-IMMIGRANT GROUPS SUCH AS LARAZA, LULAC, MALDEF, ETC. FOR DEMOCRATS; FARMING INTERESTS FOR GOP, INDUSTRIAL WORKERS FOR DEMOCRATS; OIL AND GAS RESOURCE DEVELOPERS FOR GOP, TEACHERS UNIONS FOR DEMOCRATS, ETC.

IN THIS ISSUE: WE EXPLORE A RANGE OF TOPICS THAT WILL MOST LIKELY NOT BE MADE PART OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, AS WELL AS REASONS FOR OUR CURRENT DYSFUNCTIONAL POLITICAL STATE.

OUR NEXT ISSUE WILL CONTINUE OUR POLITICAL DISCUSSION WITH EMPHASIS ON THE CRITICALITY OF THIS YEAR’S ELECTION TO OUR FUTURE.

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THERE WERE ALWAYS LINES OF IDEOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC DIVISION WITHIN OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM, BUT THEY WERE NOT AS CLEARLY AND FREQUENTLY IDENTIFIED AS THEY HAVE COME TO BE UNDER THE BRIGHT LIGHT OF OUR MASS MEDIA. THE LATTER IS HERE TO STAY, AND BETWEEN IT AND THE VASTLY INCREASED BEHIND-THE-SCENES PRESENCE OF LEGISLATIVE LOBBYISTS (AT EVERY POLITICAL LEVEL, BUT MOST POWERFULLY IN WASHINGTON) "SPECIAL" INTERESTS ARE MOVING OUR POLITICAL CHOICE AWAY FROM THE CENTER. THESE GROUPS ARE "SPECIAL" IN THE SENSE THAT THEIR FOCUS, OR INTEREST, IS MORE NARROW OR SPECIFIC THAN WHAT WOULD MEET THE DEFINITION OF A NATIONAL INTEREST.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE BY MONEY HAS BEEN PART OF GOVERNMENT, WHETHER MONARCHICAL, DEMOCRATIC OR DICTATORIAL, SINCE ITS EARLIEST FORM, AND WE ARE NO EXCEPTION, BUT IT HAS BEEN MOSTLY KEPT IN THE BACKGROUND — ADMITTED BUT NOT ADVERTISED.

STARTING WITH THE UPHEAVAL OF THE POSTWAR '60S AND THE CONCURRENT ENORMOUS INCREASE OF AMERICAN WEALTH AND POWER, OUR PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT CHANGED IN WAYS THAT ALIGNED IT TO EMBRACE RATHER THAN RESIST THESE TWO FORCES.

THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED MEASURE OF CURRENCY IN CONGRESS SHIFTED IN THE POSTWAR PERIOD FROM MILLIONS TO BILLIONS AS EVIDENCED BY SEN. EVERETT DIRKSEN'S (R-IL) FAMOUS COMMENT: ". . . A BILLION DOLLARS HERE AND A BILLION THERE, AND PRETTY SOON WE'RE TALKING REAL MONEY".

WITH THE FIRST TWO PRESIDENCIES OF THE '60S, AMERICA'S GROWING ATTACHMENT TO POLITICAL CHANGE REACHED INTO THE OVAL OFFICE FOR PRESIDENTIAL PROOF AND AFFIRMATION. THE KENNEDY YEARS OFFERED WHITE HOUSE TESTIMONY TO THE POWER OF MASS MEDIA, NOW EXPANDED IN FORM, REACH AND IMPACT BY THE EMERGING TELEVISION INDUSTRY, AND THEY DISPENSED WITH THE IDEA THAT AN OCCUPANT OF THE WHITE HOUSE MIGHT WANT OR BE ENTITLED TO PRIVACY. IMAGE WAS EVERYTHING AND MORE WAS THE GOAL.

CAN WE FORGET THE ENDLESS STREAM OF PHOTOS OF KENNEDYS SAILING, PICNICKING OR PLAYING TOUCH FOOTBALL THAT INFUSED OUR PRINT MEDIA? CLOTHED IN SYMBOLICALLY PURE WHITE, THEY MARKETED TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, BY SKILLFUL USE OF THE MEDIA, A VIEW OF A JOYFUL, HEALTHY FAMILY AT PLAY WHEREAS IN REALITY IT WAS EXTREMELY DYSFUNCTIONAL. IN THE AGE OF MEDIA EXCESS/SATURATION

PERSONAL PRIVACY BECAME A PRIME TARGET.

AFTER KENNEDY, LYNDON JOHNSON FOLLOWED ANOTHER POLITICAL POWER PATH. WHILE HE ACCEPTED THE MEDIA ATTENTION HE INHERITED FROM THE KENNEDY YEARS, HIS REAL INTEREST LAY IN THE MANIPULATION OF THE WEALTH AND POWER THAT SURROUNDED THE PRESIDENCY. HE USED THESE WITH EQUAL SKILL AND ENJOYMENT TO INCREASE HIS OWN WEALTH AND TO DESTROY OR REMOVE THOSE WHOSE PRESENCE THREATENED HIM WITH COMPETITION OR DIRECT OPPOSITION. HE PLAYED NO FAVORITES; FRIENDS OR ENEMIES, OLD OR NEW.

LOOKING BACK ACROSS A HALF CENTURY OF POLITICAL CHANGE AND CONTROVERSY, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE FOR THESE MAJOR FORCES OF MASS MEDIA AND NATIONAL WEALTH AND POWER NOT TO ALTER OUR ELECTORAL PROCESS. AND SO THEY HAVE.

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THE THIRD CIRCUMSTANCE FOR WHICH WE MUST BE PREPARED IS THAT WHATEVER TOPICS ARE GIVEN ATTENTION, THEIR COVERAGE WILL BE ONLY STRONG OR DEEP ENOUGH TO PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR AN ATTACK UPON THE OPPONENT OR A GENERAL DEFENSE OF ONE'S OWN RECORD.

BARRING THE EMERGENCE OF AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT SUCH AS PEARL HARBOR, THE STOCK MARKET CRASH OF 1929, AN ASSASSINATION OR SOMETHING SIMILAR IN ITS CONSEQUENCES, IT IS LIKELY BOTH PARTIES WILL ENGAGE IN CAMPAIGNS WHICH WILL NOT DELVE VERY FAR BELOW THE SURFACE OF ANY ISSUE AND WILL ONLY QUALIFY FOR DEBATE A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE SERIOUS ISSUES FACING OUR COUNTRY.

CONTROL IS THE KEY — WHAT IS ALLOWED TO BE DISCUSSED AND WHAT IS NOT; AND, IF ENGAGED, WHETHER TO DEFLECT OR TO COUNTER. WHAT WE ARE UNLIKELY TO SEE IS EITHER CANDIDATE OFFERING A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF A MAJOR ISSUE WITH SPECIFIC LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF TOPICS INVOLVING ARGUMENT ON CONSTITUTIONAL GROUNDS. IMPORTANT AS THESE USUALLY ARE, WE SHOULD NOT EXPECT THEM TO BECOME THE SUBJECT OF REASONED DEBATE.

THERE IS NO DENYING THAT THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY IS THE SUBJECT THAT RESONATES MOST CLEARLY AND FORCEFULLY WITH THE AMERICAN VOTING PUBLIC TODAY, AND

BOTH OBAMA AND ROMNEY HAVE GIVEN IT THE GREATER PART OF THEIR TIME AND ATTENTION. THIS IS A SAFE, RELATIVELY RISK-FREE PATTERN — EMPHASIZE THE ECONOMY, ADD REFERENCE TO A LOCAL ISSUE OR TWO, ENGAGE IN SOME IRRESISTIBLE DEMAGOGUERY AND THEN BACK TO THE PLANE AND ON TO THE NEXT STOP.

THIS IS THE 10% SOLUTION, THE ICEBERG CAMPAIGN IN WHICH 90% OF THE PROBLEMS WE FACE REMAIN OUT OF SIGHT AND REACH, BENEATH THE CAMPAIGN'S SURFACE. IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH IN THE WAY OF AN UNPLANNED EVENT TO UPSET THIS MODEL, BUT FOR THE PRESENT IT APPEARS THAT WE WILL BE TREATED TO AN AUTO-PILOT CAMPAIGN PROCESS UNTIL THE TWO PARTIES' CONVENTIONS OR THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF VICE-PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATES, WHICHEVER COMES FIRST.

IN THE TWO MONTHS AFTER LABOR DAY CAMPAIGNS USUALLY INTENSIFY AND, WITH THE PRESENT HIGH LEVELS OF EMOTIONAL, POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL INVESTMENT, WE CAN ANTICIPATE ALL-OUT EFFORTS AND PERHAPS SOME STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS.

WHAT WE WILL GET WILL NOT BE WHAT WE NEED, AND, AS OUR CONCERN IS WITH THE LATTER, WE ARE WRITING ABOUT A CAMPAIGN THAT WILL PROBABLY NEVER OCCUR — THE ONE THAT CONCERNED AMERICANS LOOK AND HOPE FOR BUT WHICH SO FAR HAS BEEN DECLARED OFF-LIMITS BY BOTH PARTIES.

THIS CHAPTER IS OUR CAMPAIGN, THE ONE WE THINK AMERICANS DESERVE, THAT RAISES ISSUES OF NATIONAL INTEREST, BOTH LARGE AND SMALL, WHICH MUST BE ADDRESSED IF WE ARE TO HAVE ANY HOPE OF RECLAIMING OUR FOUNDERS' GIFT OF GOVERNMENT.

GOVERNMENT SIZE AND FUNCTION

THESE TWO ASPECTS OF GOVERNMENT ARE SO TIED TOGETHER IN THE PUBLIC ARGUMENT THAT THEY CAN BE USED AS CO-ORDINATES TO DESCRIBE ITS OPERATION. THE GOP HAMMERS AWAY WITHOUT LET-UP AT GOVERNMENT'S OVERSIZE. IT IS AN ARTICLE OF REPUBLICAN FAITH THAT OUR GOVERNMENT IS BLOATED, INEFFICIENT AND HAS EXTENDED ITSELF INTO PREVIOUSLY PRIVATE AREAS WHERE IT LACKS CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY. ANY REDUCTION IN GOVERNMENT'S SIZE WOULD IMPROVE ITS EFFICIENCY, REORDER ITS PRIORITIES AND SAVE MANY BILLIONS OF DOLLARS.

DEMOCRATIC VOICES DO NOT SPEAK TO MATTERS OF SIZE, COST OR REACH AS THEY ARE SEEN AS SIDE ISSUES. GOVERNMENT FOR THE LEFT FUNCTIONS AS AN ENGINE WHICH CREATES PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT AND SPENDS FUNDS TO STAFF AND IMPLEMENT THEM. THE SIZE AND SHAPE DERIVE FROM THE PURPOSES STATED IN THE ENABLING LEGISLATION, AND ARE OF A SECONDARY NATURE.

WITH SUCH BASICALLY DIFFERENT VIEWS HARD WIRED INTO THEIR POLITICAL BEING IT IS NO WONDER THAT OUR TWO MAJOR PARTIES REGULARLY SPEAK PAST EACH OTHER. THEY HAVE DONE IT FOR YEARS AND BOTH ARE CONVINCED THAT THIS TACTIC IS A SUCCESSFUL ONE. THE WORDS THEY SPEAK AND THE ARGUMENTS THEY HURL AT EACH OTHER WILL NOT FIND

THEIR TARGETS. THEY WILL PASS BY ON EITHER SIDE ON THEIR WAY TO THE VAST OUTER SPACE OF THE POLITICAL PAST.

THESE POSITIONS ARE SO FIXED IN EGO AND IDEOLOGY THAT WE HAVE CONVINCED OURSELVES THAT THERE IS NO WAY THROUGH OUR AROUND THEM. OR IS THERE?

MEANWHILE IN ENGLAND

ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO AN ENGLISH COMEDY ENTITLED YES, MINISTER APPEARED ON OUR PUBLIC TV CHANNELS AND TODAY IS STILL RERUN FOR ANOTHER GENERATION OF VIEWERS. IT CONCERNED THE DAILY MACHINATIONS, PLOTS, SUBTERFUGES AND COMPETITIONS BETWEEN THE PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND A MINISTER IN CHARGE OF ONE OF THE CABINET LEVEL DEPARTMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT. IT WAS FIRST CLASS SATIRE THAT LOCATED AND THEN TARGETED BUREAUCRACY'S MOST VULNERABLE PARTS OF ANY SITUATION, AND YET MANAGED TO LEAVE THE VIEWER WITH THE BELIEF THAT BUREAUCRACY IS THE TRUE SURVIVOR OF GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUING POWER, POLICY AND PARTY STRUGGLES.

IN MAY, ENGLAND'S COALITION GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT "UNDERPERFORMING CIVIL SERVANTS WILL BE IDENTIFIED AND FIRED UNDER PLANS TO RANK ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS BY ABILITY"¹ AND "MINISTERS ARE DETERMINED TO CHANGE THE CULTURE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE IN WHICH, THEY SAY, LAZY STAFF GET AWAY WITH POOR PERFORMANCE BECAUSE MANAGERS ARE UNWILLING TO HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS".²

THIS IS STRONG LANGUAGE ANYWHERE, BUT ESPECIALLY FOR ENGLAND WHICH HAS SHARED, ALTHOUGH TO A LESSER DEGREE THAN ITS NEIGHBORS ON THE CONTINENT, THE ATMOSPHERE OF POSTWAR SOCIALISM MOST RECENTLY EVIDENCED BY THE EXTENDED LABOR PARTY ADMINISTRATIONS OF TONY BLAIR AND GORDON BROWN.

THE LATTER CAME TO THEIR END IN 2010 WITH THE ELECTION OF THE CAMERON/MILIBAND COALITION GOVERNMENT AT WHICH TIME CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEES NUMBERED OVER 500,000.³ FOLLOWING UP ON ITS CAMPAIGN PROMISES, THIS NUMBER WAS REDUCED TO THE 434,000⁴ CITED IN THE MAY ANNOUNCEMENT. A REDUCTION OF THIS SIZE (13%) WOULD SEEM POLITICALLY MANAGEABLE, BUT THERE IS MORE TO COME. STEVE HILTON, CAMERON'S DIRECTOR OF IMPLEMENTATION, WHO HAS SINCE LEFT TO TAKE A JOB IN THIS COUNTRY, ADVISED CAMERON "THAT THE CIVIL SERVICE COULD FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY WITH A 90 PERCENT CUT IN STAFF".⁵ AND HE SUGGESTED THAT ONE DEPARTMENT UNDERTAKE A TRIAL PROGRAM WITH THE EMPLOYEE LEVEL REDUCED BY 70 PERCENT.⁶

THESE NUMBERS ARE EXTRAORDINARY AND UNHEARD OF IN PRACTICAL POLITICS, AS THEY WOULD EMBRACE SUCH OPERATING CONSTITUENCIES AS JOB CENTERS, PENSIONS, VEHICULAR LICENSING, SECURITY FORCES AT PORTS AND AIRPORTS AND CRIMINAL COURTS OFFICERS.

ONE OF THE MOST SURPRISING ASPECTS OF THIS PROPOSED ACTION IS THAT CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT FOR IT CAME FROM WORKERS, THEMSELVES, WHO FELT THWARTED IN THEIR POSITIONS BY AN ATMOSPHERE THAT TOLERATED AS LITTLE WORK AS POSSIBLE. THIS WIDE ACCEPTANCE OF LOW INDIVIDUAL STANDARDS EARNED THE GROUP A MEDIOCRE RATING SUCH AS “ABOVE AVERAGE” AND STIFLED ANY REAL ACCOMPLISHMENT BY THE SMALLER, MORE INDUSTRIOUS AND MORE GIFTED ELEMENT WITHIN THE WORK FORCE.

OUR GEOGRAPHIC AND NUMERICAL SCALE IS MUCH LARGER THAN ENGLAND’S WHICH WOULD IMMEDIATELY BRING FORTH THE RESPONSE THAT WE COULD NOT DO THE SAME HERE. BUT JUST CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITIES. YES, OUR NUMBERS ARE LARGER, BUT WHAT IF ONE, OR BOTH, OF OUR POLITICAL PARTIES PROPOSED A GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY LABOR FORCE REDUCTION AS ONE OF SEVERAL ELEMENTS IN AN EFFORT TO REDUCE OUR NATIONAL DEBT WITH ALL SAVINGS BEING APPLIED IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY TO THAT PURPOSE?

THE PERCENTAGE OF REDUCTION NEED NOT BE ANYWHERE NEAR AS HIGH AS THE ENGLISH EFFORT, AND, OF COURSE, AN IMMEDIATE UPROAR WOULD FOLLOW, BUT, BECAUSE OF OUR LARGER NUMBERS, A CUT IN THE 15% TO 25% RANGE COULD GENERATE SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS WITHOUT FORCING A SERIOUS LOSS OF OUTPUT. THERE IS ANOTHER POSSIBLE BENEFIT IN THAT THE FIRST USE OF A BROAD PROGRAM SUCH AS THIS COULD SERVE NOTICE ON THE REMAINING STAFF TO UPGRADE ITS PERFORMANCE AND ATTITUDES.

OUR BUREAUCRACY IS PROBABLY NO MORE WEIGHTED WITH SOCIO-ECONOMIC , EDUCATIONAL, ETHNIC AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS THAN BRITAIN’S, BUT, AS OUR CONTINUING ECONOMIC ARGUMENT INDICATES, WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF ACTIONS THAT COULD RESULT IN REAL SAVINGS.

WE WILL FOLLOW THESE DEVELOPMENTS IN ENGLAND, BUT MEANWHILE THIS IS JUST ONE OF MANY IMPORTANT MATTERS WHICH WILL NOT BE MENTIONED IN OUR CURRENT CAMPAIGN.

A NATION OF LAWS?

THIS IS A PHRASE THAT OVER TIME HAS COME TO BE IMBEDDED IN OUR POLITICAL BEING. WE USE IT TO DESCRIBE AND TO VALIDATE OURSELVES. AND YET BENEATH THE SURFACE THERE IS GROWING EVIDENCE THAT THE FORCE OF OUR LAWS AND THE INTENT OF THEIR MAKERS ARE WEAKENING. THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SHIFT FOR OUR GOVERNMENT AND ITS CONTRACT WITH ITS CITIZENS ARE OF THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE AND SHOULD BE ADDRESSED — I.E., ARE WE WHAT WE SAY WE ARE, OR ARE WE SOMETHING ELSE? IN MORE WAYS AND MORE CIRCUMSTANCES OVER THE PAST HALF CENTURY WE HAVE SUBSTITUTED POLITICAL PREFERENCE FOR OUR LEGISLATIVE AND ENFORCEMENT FUNCTIONS.

THE MOST HEINOUS EXAMPLE OF THIS HAS BEEN THE DETERMINED RESISTANCE ON THE PART OF ALL OUR PRESIDENTS AND CONGRESSES FOLLOWING PRES. REAGAN TO IGNORE EXISTING IMMIGRATION LAW AND CONDUCT OUR GOVERNMENT’S

POLICY AND FUNCTIONS AS IF IT DIDN’T EXIST. THE MAIN REASON FOR THIS IS THAT BOTH PARTIES ARE UNWILLING TO TAKE THE POLITICAL HEAT THAT WILL BE GENERATED WITHIN THE PRO-IMMIGRATION VOTING BLOC AND ITS FINANCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKERS.

IN 1986, PRES. REAGAN, ALARMED BY INCREASING IMMIGRANT ARRIVALS, SUPPORTED A “ONE TIME” AMNESTY TO THREE MILLION ILLEGALS IN RETURN FOR WHICH OUR SOUTHERN BORDER WOULD BE CLOSED TO ALL BUT LEGAL ENTRANTS. FAST FORWARD TO TODAY AND THE BORDER CONTROLS WE HAVE ARE BASICALLY THE SAME AS THOSE WHEN REAGAN WAS IN OFFICE — BASICALLY, NONE — COURTESY OF FOUR PRESIDENTS AND TWELVE CONGRESSES.

A CLEARLY PERNICIOUS EFFECT OF THIS FAILURE TO ENFORCE DULY PASSED LEGISLATION IS FOR IT TO DILUTE CONGRESS’ SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND TO ENCOURAGE CONGRESS TO VIEW ALL ASPECTS OF GOVERNMENT AS A MASS OF EVER SHIFTING PURPOSE AND IDENTITY. THAT IS NOT WHAT AMERICA HAS BEEN FOR MOST OF ITS HISTORY, BUT IT IS WITH US NOW.

WARS IN PIECES

OUR FOREIGN ENGAGEMENTS HAVE NOT ESCAPED THE APPLICATION OF CONGRESS’ NEW ROLE AS ARBITER OF WHICH LAWS TO HONOR. ITS WORLD IS GROWING MORE AND MORE TO RESEMBLE THAT OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND WHERE WHAT IS IS DETERMINED BY WHAT IT IS DECLARED TO BE.

ARTICLE I, SECTION 8 OF THE CONSTITUTION STATES THAT ONLY CONGRESS CAN DECLARE WAR AND YET SINCE THE END OF WWII WE HAVE PARTICIPATED IN MANY MILITARY ACTIONS (LARGE AND SMALL, AND SHORT AND LONG, BUT ALL EXPENSIVE) WITHOUT BEING AT WAR. THERE WERE ALWAYS EXCUSES AT HAND — THE KOREAN WAR WAS DEFINED AS A “U.N. POLICE ACTION”, AND THEREFORE, DID NOT REQUIRE A CONGRESSIONAL DECLARATION.

SIMILARLY, WE HAVE FOUGHT IN VIETNAM, IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN FOR OVER THE LAST HALF A CENTURY AT A COST OF MANY THOUSANDS OF LIVES AND WELL OVER A TRILLION DOLLARS. CONGRESS TRIED TO CLARIFY THE SITUATION IN 1973 WITH THE PASSAGE OF THE WAR POWERS ACT REQUIRING THE PRESIDENT TO OBTAIN CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL FOR ANY ACTION LASTING MORE THAN 60 DAYS, BUT PRESIDENTS NIXON, REAGAN, CLINTON, BOTH BUSHES AND OBAMA WERE ABLE TO CIRCUMVENT IT. TODAY, AT LESS THAN 40 YEARS OLD, IT IS A RELIC OF ANOTHER TIME, ENFORCED BY NEITHER CONGRESS NOR THE WHITE HOUSE.

THE PROBLEM DOES NOT LIE IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE ACT WHICH, ALTHOUGH IT ATTEMPTS TO QUALIFY THE FORCE AND CLARITY OF THE CONSTITUTION, STILL EMPLOYS SPECIFIC TERMS SUCH AS “60 DAYS” TO LIMIT HOSTILITIES. RATHER, THE DIFFICULTY IN THE WAR POWERS ACT BECOMING A GENERALLY RECOGNIZED MEASURE OF AUTHORIZED MILITARY ENGAGEMENT IS DUE TO HOW AND WHY CONGRESS CHOOSES TO DEFINE ITS OWN ROLE.

QUITE SIMPLY IT IS RIVEN BY THE CONFLICT BETWEEN WANTING TO BE ON THE “RIGHT” SIDE OF A MILITARY/HUMAN ISSUE WITHOUT HAVING TO PAY THE POLITICAL PRICE WITH CONSTITUENTS FOR SUPPORTING WAR IN GENERAL AND ITS MORE SPECIFIC AND PAINFUL DEMANDS UPON OUR SOCIETY.

ADDITIONALLY, IF THE PRESIDENT HAS PUSHED A POLICY FOR WAR, FEW MEMBERS WILL NOWADAYS MAKE THE POLITICAL CALCULATION IN FAVOR OF OPPOSING HIM. IF MEMORY SERVES, THERE WERE ONLY A HANDFUL OF MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO OPPOSED THE BUSH INVASION OF IRAQ BASED ON SADDAM HUSSEIN’S POSSESSION OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

EVEN WHEN THE LATTER WAS PROVED TO BE THE HOAX THAT IT WAS, CONGRESS FAILED TO ABIDE BY THE ACT. FOR THOSE WHO WANTED WAR AND THOSE WHO WANTED NO WAR, IT OFFERED AN UNDECLARED WAR. FAR FROM BEING A TRULY DELIBERATIVE BODY, CONGRESS DEVOTES ITSELF MOSTLY TO THE ELEMENT OF POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION PRESENT IN THE ISSUES THAT COME BEFORE IT.

LIKE IMMIGRATION LAW ENFORCEMENT, ADHERENCE TO THE WAR POWERS ACT, WHETHER IN LIBYA, IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN, WILL NOT BE A TOPIC OF DISCUSSION IN THIS YEAR’S ELECTION.

MONEY MATTERS

ONE OF THE BYPRODUCTS OF THE NEAR COLLAPSE OF OUR FINANCIAL SYSTEM IN LATE 2008 WAS THE PASSAGE OF THE DODD-FRANK ACT. IT WAS REPRESENTED AS NECESSARY TO CURE THE FINANCIAL EXCESSES OF THE PAST AND TO PROVIDE DETAILED REGULATORY AUTHORITY FOR THE FUTURE.

IT WAS COMPARED IN PURPOSE AND EFFECT TO THE GLASS-STEAGALL ACT OF 1933 WHICH WAS GOVERNMENT’S ATTEMPT TO CLEAN UP AFTER THE 1929 WALL STREET MESS. IT DID SO BY REQUIRING FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS TO SEPARATE THEIR COMMERCIAL AND INVESTMENT BANKING FUNCTIONS. THEY COULD OPERATE ONE OR THE OTHER SEPARATELY, BUT NOT BOTH. THE END RESULT WAS THAT LARGE BANKS THAT ENGAGED IN BOTH ACTIVITIES HAD TO CHANGE THEIR STATUS AND TO DIVEST THEMSELVES OF THEIR INVESTMENT BANKING SERVICES.

GLASS-STEAGALL PROVED TO BE AN EFFECTIVE RESTRAINT ON WALL STREET’S EXPANSIONIST MARKETING PRACTICES AND REMAINED THE LAW OF THE LAND UNTIL PRES. CLINTON ALLOWED THE BANKS BACK INTO BOTH RINGS OF THE FINANCIAL CIRCUS. IN FORM IT WAS A RELATIVELY SHORT AND SIMPLE PIECE OF LEGISLATION.

NOT SO, DODD-FRANK WHICH IS THOUSANDS OF PAGES IN LENGTH. IN ITS FAVOR, IT ATTEMPTS TO DETAIL BEHAVIOR AND ACTIVITIES IN A FAR LARGER AND MORE COMPLEX MARKET THAN GLASS-STEAGALL’S. BUT IT IS AS MUCH THE PRODUCT OF THE DESIRES OF THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY AND ITS AGENTS AS IT IS OF THE NEED TO REGULATE THEM. WITH ITS MANY OPERATIONAL CAVEATS AND CONTROLS WE OFTEN FIND A CONTRADICTING ARRAY OF LOOPHOLES, EXCLUSIONS, BACK DOORS, SIDE DOORS AND OTHER CREATIVE ESCAPE MECHANISMS.

IT IS A REAL QUESTION WHETHER CONGRESS OR OUR REGULATORY BODIES WILL BE ABLE TO FULLY GRASP AND ENFORCE THE PROVISIONS OF THIS LAW.

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AND THERE IS STILL WITH US THE MATTER OF OUR STEADILY GROWING NATIONAL DEBT. IT IS SECOND TO NONE IN IMPORTANCE FOR OUR COUNTRY, BUT HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY SHELVED UNTIL EARLY 2013. NOW AUTHORIZED TO REACH JUST OVER \$16 TRILLION, IT IS A FINANCIAL TSUNAMI APPROACHING OUR SHORE.

IN SPITE OF ITS “CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER” ANY MENTION OF IT IN THE CAMPAIGN WILL PROBABLY BE BRIEF AND GENERAL, AND WE SHOULD NOT EXPECT ANY EXCHANGE OF POSITION PAPERS OR PROPOSALS FOR REMEDIAL ACTION.

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THERE WAS A TIME WHEN BOTH PARTIES PREPARED BUDGETS FOR THE COMING YEAR WHICH THEY THEN DISCUSSED AND RECONCILED WITH THE WHITE HOUSE’S PRIORITIES. FROM THIS PROCESS EMERGED A WORKABLE PLAN TO MEASURE AND MANAGE INCOME FOR THE FISCAL YEAR AHEAD.

FOR YEARS THE CONGRESS HAS EVADED THIS RESPONSIBILITY, CHOOSING INSTEAD TO LUMP ALL INCOME AND EXPENSE ITEMS INTO ONE FIGURE UNDER A PROCESS KNOWN AS A CONTINUING RESOLUTION. IF MEMORY SERVES, THIS PRACTICE EXTENDS AS FAR BACK AS THE REAGAN YEARS.

NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO RESTORE OUR FORMER BUDGETING PROCEDURE, AS IT WOULD SERVE THE NATIONAL INTEREST OF TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT. IT IS NOT LIKELY TO EVEN BE MENTIONED IN PASSING.

NOTHING’S TOO GOOD FOR OUR VETERANS

OVER THE YEARS, FUNDING FOR VETERANS’ BENEFITS HAS EXPANDED DURING WARTIME AND ITS AFTERMATH, WHEN PUBLIC ATTENTION IS AT ITS PEAK, AND THEN RECEDED AS TIMES REVERT TO “NORMAL” AND THE DISTANCE GROWS BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE. VETERANS ADMINISTRATION (VA) FUNDING HAS BEEN A MODEL ELEMENT IN THE NATIONAL GAME OF “BUDGETBALL” THAT CAPTIVATES OUR CONGRESS AND WHITE HOUSE.

AS WE REMOVED OURSELVES IN TIME AND THOUGHT FROM THE HORRORS OF THE FIGHTING IN VIETNAM, AND ITS WOUNDED EITHER DIED OR WERE RETURNED TO FUNCTIONAL CIVILIAN LIFE, VA FUNDING COULD BE EXPECTED TO DECREASE. THE PROBLEM FOR GOVERNMENT BECAME THE AMOUNT OF THIS DECREASE AND HOW IT WOULD BE DETERMINED.

UNFORTUNATELY, OUR ANSWERS FAILED ON BOTH COUNTS. IN TIMES OF PEACE WHEN OTHER MATTERS CRY OUT FOR MONEY AND ATTENTION OUR RESPONSE HAS TOO OFTEN

BEEN TO TAKE SOME OF THAT MONEY FROM THE VA'S BUDGET. WE HAVE HAD A REGRETTABLE RECORD OF UNDERFUNDING THE VA AT VARIOUS TIMES IN OUR HISTORY, THE MOST RECENT EXAMPLE OF WHICH WAS ENDED BY TWO UNRELATED EVENTS THAT HAD "GAME CHANGING" CONSEQUENCES.

THE FIRST OCCURRED IN THE BUSH II PRESIDENCY. IT WAS THE DISCOVERY AND REPORTING OF TERRIBLE LIVING CONDITIONS IN SOME VA HOSPITALS WITH EQUALLY DISASTROUS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES. IT OFFENDED OUR NATIONAL SENSE OF OBLIGATION TO OUR VETERANS, GAINED IMMEDIATE MASS MEDIA TRACTION, CREATED PUBLIC OUTRAGE AND BROUGHT ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS WHICH RESULTED IN THE REPLACEMENT OF AT LEAST TWO HIGH LEVEL VA OFFICIALS AND THE RESTORATION OF REALISTIC VA FUNDING LEVELS.

THE SECOND WAS OUR EMBARKING UPON THE TEN YEAR WAR IN IRAQ. THIS WAS A DIFFERENT WAR FOUGHT IN DIFFERENT WAYS WITH A DIFFERENT ENEMY THAT LED US TO DRASTICALLY IMPROVE OUR MEANS OF TREATING THE WOUNDED, RETRIEVING THEM FROM THE BATTLE ZONE AND THEN REMOVING THEM IN MEDICALLY EQUIPPED HELICOPTERS AND PLANES TO DISTANT, FULLY EQUIPPED HOSPITALS FOR BODY REPAIR, RECONSTRUCTION AND/OR REHABILITATION.

THESE NEW TECHNIQUES SAVED MANY LIVES THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN LOST IN PREVIOUS WARS AND THEY HAVE GREATLY SKEWED THE RATIO BETWEEN NUMBERS FOR THE WOUNDED AND THE DEAD. MANY OF THE FORMER WILL NOW BE ABLE TO LIVE UNDER DIFFICULT TERMS AND CONDITIONS IMPOSED BY THE NATURE OF THEIR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL INJURIES, AND WILL REQUIRE SPECIFIC EQUIPMENT, TREATMENT AND LOCAL SERVICES. THESE TREATMENTS WILL EXPAND OUR COST AND CONCEPT OF VETERANS' CARE AND, AS OUR VOLUNTEER MILITARY FORCE IS NOW YOUNGER THAN ITS DRAFT PREDECESSORS, WE WILL ALSO FACE THE ADDED COST OF LONGER PERIODS OF TREATMENT.

WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THESE FACTORS WILL CALL FOR INCREASED VA FUNDING FOR MANY YEARS. REPAIRING THE PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL DAMAGE OF BATTLE WILL TAKE TIME AND MONEY IN AMOUNTS THAT WE ARE NOT ACCUSTOMED TO. THE ELECTRONIC DEVICES USED TO RESTORE LIMB/NERVE FUNCTIONS ARE NEW AND EXPENSIVE, AS ARE THE PEOPLE WHO OPERATE THEM AND TEACH THEIR USE.

AND THEY WILL PUSH US, HOPEFULLY, TO A NEW AND MORE COMPLETE WAY OF COMPUTING THE COSTS OF WAR. OUR PRESENT AND PREVIOUS WAY HAS BEEN TO LIMIT OUR COST ACCOUNTING TO THE PERIOD FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END OF HOSTILITIES. THE NEW WARS AND WOUNDS AND THE NEW WAYS OF TREATING THEM HAVE RENDERED THAT MEASUREMENT OBSOLETE.

THE VA IS JUST ANOTHER PART OF OUR BUREAUCRACY IN ONE WAY, AND YET IT IS VERY DIFFERENT IN OTHERS. IT CLOSES OUTDATED OR UNDERUSED HOSPITALS IN SOME AREAS AND OPENS NEW, LARGER ONES WHERE THEY ARE DEEMED NECESSARY. IT IS FACED WITH TREATING ALMOST 10 AILMENT/INJURY CLAIMS PER VETERAN FROM THOSE WHO SEEK COMPENSATION COMPARED TO LESS THAN 4 IN THE VIETNAM WAR AND ONE OR TWO IN WWII AND KOREA.⁷ AND AN EVEN MORE TELLING CHANGE IS THAT 45% OF THE 1.6 MILLION AFGHAN AND IRAQ WAR VETERANS ARE FILING COMPENSATION

CLAIMS FOR SERVICE-RELATED INJURIES.⁸

PAYMENTS, THEMSELVES, SEEM MODEST COMPARED TO THE CURRENT COST OF LIVING. THEY RANGE FROM \$127 A WEEK FOR A 10% DISABILITY TO \$2,769 FOR A FULL DISABILITY.⁹ BEARING IN MIND SOME OF THE COSTS FOR SPECIAL CARE, FACILITIES OR EQUIPMENT REQUIRED BY A DISABLED LIFE AND THE ADDED CHALLENGES THAT DISABILITIES POSE TO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAVEL, THE VA'S SCALE OF COMPENSATION IS BY NO MEANS A RICH ONE.

THE SUBJECT OF HOW WE TREAT OUR VETERANS IS IMPORTANT TO THE NATION, AND COULD EVEN PROVIDE AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN TOPIC THAT BOTH CANDIDATES COULD ADDRESS WITHOUT HAVING TO BE SEEN AS IN TOTAL OPPOSITION TO EACH OTHER.

WITHOUT RANCOR AND THE IDEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE (II) THEY COULD SET THE TONE AND COURSE FOR TREATING OUR VETERANS BETTER IN THE YEARS AHEAD THAN WE HAVE DONE AFTER PAST WARS. THEY DESERVE THE BEST POLICY AND MANAGEMENT WE CAN OFFER WITHOUT BEING SUBJECT TO POLITICAL WHIM OR FUTURE GAMES OF "BUDGETBALL".

BUT REMEMBER, THIS IS ELECTION YEAR, AND THE CARE AND COSTS OF VETERANS' SERVICES IS JUST ANOTHER ISSUE THAT WILL NOT BE DISCUSSED. TOO BAD; IT'S IMPORTANT FOR OUR MILITARY AND IT TELLS US A LOT ABOUT OURSELVES.

CAN FAITH MOVE MOUNTAINS (OF DEBT) ?

WE HAVE WRITTEN FREQUENTLY ABOUT OUR COUNTRY'S MASSIVE DEBT LOAD AND ABOUT HOW ITS CURRENT NUMBERS ARE SO LARGE THAT THEY TRANSCEND THE NORMAL SCALES AND MEASUREMENTS OF OUR LIVES. FOR INSTANCE, TRILLIONS OF ANYTHING ARE DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE, BUT WE HAD BETTER GET USED TO THEM IN OUR FINANCIAL DIALOGUE. IT SEEMS THEY ARE HERE TO STAY; AND THEY NOW ARE NEEDED TO DESCRIBE THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT NUMBERS OF OUR PRESENT, AND APPARENTLY FUTURE, GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS.

"THEY ARE FORCES OF ACCUMULATED MOMENTUM AND ARE NOT SWAYED BY POLITICAL ORATORY."

THE FIRST IS OUR NATIONAL DEBT WHICH HAS REACHED A LEVEL THAT IS FISCALLY DANGEROUS AND YET CONTINUES TO SEDUCE OUR ELECTED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS. MANY OF THE LATTER HAVE CRITICIZED AND CONDEMNED OUR DEBT POLICY IN SPEECHES ARTICLES, PHOTO-OPS, ETC., BUT NEITHER CHAMBER COULD MUSTER THE POLITICAL WILL TO GRASP THE NETTLE OF PASSING BINDING LEGISLATION. THE RESULT IS VERY CLEAR. IT IS NOT DEBATABLE. THE LONGER WE POSTPONE CHANGING OUR PRESENT PRACTICES, THE SOONER WE WILL REACH A TIPPING POINT WITH CONSEQUENCES CAPABLE OF DISRUPTING THE OPERATION OF OUR ECONOMIC/POLITICAL STRUCTURE. WE ARE ALREADY AT THE POINT WHERE OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON SHOULD TAKE DR. EINSTEIN'S QUOTE TO

HEART. TIPPING POINTS CAN BE SILENT AND INVISIBLE, AND OFTEN IRREPARABLE. THEY ARE FORCES OF ACCUMULATED MOMENTUM AND ARE NOT SWAYED BY POLITICAL ORATORY.

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THE SECOND NUMBER WE ARE CALLED TO DEAL WITH DIFFERENTLY IS THAT OF OUR NATIONAL BUDGET. THE BUDGET SERVES TO IDENTIFY ITEMS OF INCOME AND EXPENSE NECESSARY FOR THE COMING PERIOD OF TIME AND TO ESTABLISH A BALANCE BETWEEN THEM THAT WILL MEET THE AGREED UPON GOALS OF THE BUDGET ENTITY — NATION, STATE, CORPORATION, FAMILY, ETC.

THE BUDGETARY PROCESS USED TO INVOLVE AND SPEAK FOR THE CONGRESS, THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY. ITS RESULT WAS A DOCUMENT WHICH PROVIDED AN OPERATIONAL GUIDELINE AND WAS EXPECTED TO BE HONORED UNLESS INTERRUPTED BY UNAVOIDABLE ACTS OF WAR, NATURE, GOD, ETC. IT HAS FUNCTIONED AS INTENDED FOR MOST OF OUR HISTORY, BUT COMMENCING IN THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION, CONGRESS DECIDED THAT AGREEMENT WAS TOO HARD TO REACH AND TOO POLITICALLY RISKY.

IT THEN DID AWAY WITH THE PRACTICE OF SUBMITTING A NATIONAL ITEMIZED BUDGET. INSTEAD IT GATHERED ALL FUNDING REQUESTS TOGETHER IN ONE PACKAGE LABELED A CONTINUING RESOLUTION, THIS VEHICLE HAD BEEN USED BEFORE, BUT ONLY FOR EMERGENCIES. IT IS NOW OUR MAINSTREAM CHOICE OF FUNDING.

THIS IS A CLEAR USE OF GIVING PREFERENCE TO POLITICS OVER GOVERNMENT. IT BELONGS TO THE SAME ERA AND WAY OF THINKING AS THE EARMARK. CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS SHOULD ONLY BE USED IN TRUE NATIONAL EMERGENCIES. THE PREPARATION AND PASSAGE OF OUR COUNTRY'S BUDGET SHOULD BE RESTORED TO ITS FORMER, RIGHTFUL AND PUBLIC PLACE.

THE IDEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

THE IDEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE IS A ROOT CAUSE OF OUR PRESENT STATE OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION, AND HAS BEEN A KEY AND CONSTANT ELEMENT IN THE ECONOMIC STRUGGLE BETWEEN RIGHT AND LEFT OVER THE LAST CENTURY. IT STATES THE ABSOLUTE SUPREMACY OF IDEOLOGY IN OUR DISCOURSE OVER POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MATTERS AND ENCOURAGES THE WINNER-TAKE-ALL, NO-HOLDS-BARRER CONFRONTATIONS AT ALL LEVELS.

IN OUR COUNTRY, WHERE THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES CONTROL ACCESS TO THE BALLOT AND THE LARGEST SOURCES OF FUNDING, COMPETITION IS INTENSE TO ASSURE THAT THE VOTER RECEIVES A MESSAGE THAT IS ON POINT, ON SCHEDULE AND ON TOP.

THIS BATTLE IS WAGED 24/7 THROUGH OUR MAINSTREAM MEDIA (MSM), OUR POLLS, OUR POLITICAL

ORGANIZATIONS FROM THEIR LOCAL TO NATIONAL LEVELS, LOBBYISTS OF ALL KINDS AND THE "PRIVATE SECTOR" WHICH IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE PUBLIC IN ITS POLITICAL ACTIVISM.

IT IS THE TOTALITY OF THIS EFFORT AND WHAT IT DEMANDS OF OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES THAT EXPLAINS WHY VOTES IN CONGRESS ARE REGULARLY ALONG PARTY LINES, EVEN THOUGH MEMBERS OF BOTH PARTIES INDIVIDUALLY CALL FOR BIPARTISANSHIP, A MORE MODERATE OR CENTRIST POSITION OR A JOINT MOVE TOWARDS A NATIONAL INTEREST.

WHAT USED TO BE AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF CENTRIST VOTER OPINION HAS BEEN NEARLY ELIMINATED, AS REPRESENTATION IN CONGRESS HAS BEEN PUSHED TO THE MORE EXTREME IDEOLOGICAL EDGES OF THE OPINION SPECTRUM WHERE THE FLOW OF SPECIAL INTEREST MONEY AND PRESSURE IS FOCUSED.

LOBBYISTS ARE EVERYWHERE, SHAPING THE DISCUSSIONS AND OFFERING LEGISLATIVE LANGUAGE FOR THEIR TOPICS OF INTEREST, AND IT IS THE EXCEPTIONAL NEWLY ELECTED MEMBER OF CONGRESS WHO CAN DISMISS THEIR PRESENCE AND METHODS. THEY MAKE A LIVELY MARKET IN CONGRESSIONAL VOTES — YES OR NO, DEPENDING UPON THE ISSUE AND THEIR CLIENTS' INTERESTS. THEY DO NOT PAY FOR "MAYBE" VOTES. AND SO, AS POSTWAR AMERICA EXPERIENCED AN ENORMOUS INCREASE IN ITS WEALTH AND POWER IN BOTH GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WE MADE THE MISTAKE OF INVITING THEM INTO OUR LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

LACKING AN EFFECTIVE MODERATE CENTER, THE MORE IDEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS ON THE EDGES ENGAGE IN A FORM OF ALL-OUT WARFARE TO PROVE THEY ARE BOTH RIGHT (I.E. VICTORIOUS) AND, THEREFORE, WORTHY OF CONTINUING SUPPORT.

UNFORTUNATELY, THIS KIND OF ARGUMENT OFFERS TWO WAYS TO WIN — BEING RIGHT (YOURSELF) OR PROVING YOUR OPPONENT WRONG; AND THESE TACTICS CAN READILY BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE PERSONAL HISTORY OR CHARACTER. WHAT RESULTS IS A PARTICULARLY DETERMINED (SOMETIMES VICIOUS) AND PROLONGED STATE OF CONFRONTATION.

IN OUR CONGRESS TODAY THERE IS THE NEED TO BE RIGHT, THE WILLINGNESS TO ATTACK PERSONS AS WELL AS POLICIES AND HAVING TO MAINTAIN ACCESS TO FUNDS FROM EXTERNAL SOURCES/INTERESTS. OCCASIONALLY QUESTIONS OF STRONG CONSCIENCE WILL BE RAISED AND HONORED, BUT FOR THE MOST PART THEY ARE RESOLVED IN THE INDIVIDUAL'S, NOT THE NATION'S, INTEREST. ERGO, WHAT WE SEE AS WE OBSERVE OUR ELECTED GOVERNMENT IS THE IDEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE AT WORK.

THERE IS ANOTHER FACTOR THAT HAS BEEN MADE A PART OF OUR GOVERNMENT'S WORKING EQUATION. IT EXISTS MOST NOTABLY IN ELECTIVE OFFICES BUT ALSO EXTENDS THROUGHOUT OUR BUREAUCRACIES. IT IS THE ACT WHEREBY OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF BOTH PARTIES VALIDATE THEMSELVES BY THEIR PARTY ASSOCIATION, MEMBERSHIP, PHILOSOPHY, ETC.

THIS BOND CAN STEM FROM DEEP AND DISTANT SOURCES, EITHER EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL IN NATURE, AND, ONCE MADE, IS NOT EASILY BROKEN. IT TENDS TO BE REINFORCED BY THE WAYS AND NATURE OF OUR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND OVER TIME INCREASINGLY RESTRICTS THE

POLITICIAN'S ABILITY TO SEE OR VENTURE BEYOND "THE PARTY LINE".

POLITICIANS ARE A DIFFERENT BREED. WHETHER CAUGHT IN A LIE OR STUCK WITH THE TRUTH, THEY CONVEY A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS BRAVADO TO ASSURE THE PUBLIC OF THEIR WORTH. THIS BRAVADO MUST SURVIVE THE POLITICAL REQUIREMENTS OF THEIR CAREERS WHEREBY THEY ARE SUBJECT TO MULTIPLE APPROVAL OR REJECTION VOTES BY THE PUBLIC, THEIR OWN PARTIES AND THE LEGISLATIVE BODIES OF WHICH THEY ARE MEMBERS.

THESE VOTES ARE PUBLIC, USUALLY FINAL, AND WITH THE AID OF THE MEDIA CAN MAGNIFY THEIR VERDICTS, WHETHER POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE. IDEOLOGICAL VALIDATION IS A KIND OF ARMOR WORN BY POLITICIANS TO PROTECT THEM FROM THE FULL FORCE OF REJECTION AND ANY PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEFEAT. IN OUR "BIG MONEY", MEDIA DRIVEN AGE ITS USE AND EFFECTIVENESS HAVE GREATLY INCREASED.

"... THEY ARE NOT ONLY UNSTABLE,
THEY ARE IN COMPETITION WITH EACH OTHER."

WE HAVE DESCRIBED THE FUNCTIONAL TRIPOD UPON WHICH RESTS THE STATE OF OUR POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT. IT IS COMPOSED OF EGO, MONEY AND THE POLITICAL AMBITIONS OF THOSE WE HAVE ELECTED. IN ANY ENVIRONMENT THESE ARE VOLATILE ELEMENTS, AND IN POLITICS EVEN MORE SO. IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN POLITICS THEY ARE NOT ONLY UNSTABLE, THEY ARE IN COMPETITION WITH EACH OTHER.

ONE VERY TROUBLING PROBLEM IS THAT OUR NATION IS FAR LARGER, MORE COMPLEX AND DIVIDED THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN BEFORE AND, CONSEQUENTLY, THAT ITS TRUE INTERESTS OFTEN DO NOT LIE WITHIN THE "LINES" OR POSITIONS OF EITHER PARTY.

THESE INTERESTS HAVE BEEN SO OBSCURED BY THOSE OF OTHERS THAT WE WILL BE REQUIRED IN MANY INSTANCES TO REVIVE, REINTERPRET, RESTATE AND RESTORE THEM TO AN ACTIVE ROLE IN OUR NATIONAL LIFE. THIS IS NO SMALL TASK, ESPECIALLY FOR OUR DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, BUT IT IS AN URGENT ONE.

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IN LARGER OR LESSER MEASURE THIS IS THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE DONE TO OUR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND ITS PRESENT CONDITION. IT IS NEITHER EASY READING NOR GOOD NEWS AND YET, IT IS THERE FOR ALL TO SEE. IT WOULD BENEFIT EVERY GROUP AND EVERY CITIZEN WERE WE TO HAVE AN OPEN DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW WE HAVE FAILED THE GOVERNMENT WE WERE GIVEN AND HOW, IN TURN, IT NOW FAILS US. AND THIS ELECTION YEAR, 2012, WOULD BE AN IDEAL TIME TO START, BUT IT WON'T HAPPEN. THE STATE OF OUR GOVERNMENT IS JUST ANOTHER OF THOSE ISSUES THAT WILL NOT BE MENTIONED BY ROMNEY OR OBAMA. IT IS PART OF THE SILENT CAMPAIGN, THE ONE WE WILL NEVER HEAR.

BELTWAY VENTURE CAPITALISM

STEVEN CHU IS OUR SECRETARY OF ENERGY, A NOBEL PRIZE WINNER IN PHYSICS AND A STAUNCH BELIEVER IN FUNDING EARLY STAGE VENTURE CAPITAL OPPORTUNITIES USING TAXPAYER DOLLARS.

HIS MOST PUBLICIZED, TRADE-MARK VENTURE WAS THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S (DOE) 2009 USE OF ITS LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAM (LGP) TO PROVIDE SOLYNDRA, A WEST COAST SOLAR PANEL MANUFACTURER, WITH \$525 MILLION. AT THE TIME OF ITS ANNOUNCEMENT, THE PUBLIC WAS SUBJECTED TO A WAVE OF PUBLICITY INCLUDING EXECUTIVE SHOVEL TURNING, PHOTO OPS, SPEECHES BY COMPANY OFFICERS, LOCAL POLITICIANS AND LABOR UNION REPRESENTATIVES. NOT TO BE LEFT OUT, PRESIDENT OBAMA CHIMED IN WITH A REFERENCE FROM WASHINGTON.

BUT ALL DID NOT GO SMOOTHLY AT SOLYNDRA. IT BURNED THROUGH HALF A BILLION DOLLARS PLUS OF LOANS IN RATHER SHORT ORDER AND DECLARED BANKRUPTCY IN SEPTEMBER OF LAST YEAR. BUT, OF COURSE, THERE IS MORE; THERE USUALLY IS IF YOU LOOK CLOSELY. THE SOLYNDRA LOAN PROGRAM WAS NOT TREATED LIKE OTHERS, AS SOME OF ITS LARGEST INVESTORS WERE ALSO IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTORS TO OBAMA'S CAMPAIGN; AND AT THE END THEIR INVESTMENTS WERE GIVEN PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT TO THOSE OF OTHERS.

ALSO AT THE END SOLYNDRA CLAIMED TO THE DEPT. OF LABOR (DOL) THAT ITS DEMISE RESULTED FROM UNFAIR COMPETITION BY CHINESE SOLAR PANEL MANUFACTURERS SO THAT ITS EMPLOYEES COULD QUALIFY FOR FEDERAL AID PACKAGES UNDER THE DOL TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OF RETRAINING AND FINANCIAL AID. THIS WEAK CLAIM WAS MET BY A STRONG RESPONSE THAT PROVIDED EACH WORKER WITH A PACKAGE WORTH ABOUT \$13,000¹⁰.

THE SOLYNDRA FIASCO FOCUSED ATTENTION ON OTHER PARTICIPANTS IN THE DOE'S LGP. CHU HAD ALSO GRANTED A LOAN GUARANTEE OF \$520 MILLION TO FISHER AUTOMOTIVE AND HAD TO CEASE PAYMENTS WHEN FISHER SUFFERED PRODUCTION PROBLEMS AND HAD TO LAY OFF WORKERS.¹¹ AND BANKRUPTCIES WERE FILED BY TWO MASSACHUSETTS COMPANIES, BEACON POWER AND EVERGREEN INC., ALONG WITH SPECTRAWATT IN OREGON¹²

AND FINALLY, THE TALE OF ABOUND SOLAR, A HIGH TECH SOLAR MODULE MAKER IN LOVELAND, CO THAT IN 2010 IN HIS WEEKLY RADIO ADDRESS PRES. OBAMA STATED "WOULD MANUFACTURE ADVANCED SOLAR PANELS AT TWO NEW PLANTS, CREATING MORE THAN 2,000 CONSTRUCTION JOBS AND 1,500 PERMANENT JOBS."¹³ SECRETARY CHU ADDED HIS OWN BRAND OF HYPE AND ABOUND WAS AWARDED A \$400 MILLION LOAN GUARANTEE DESPITE A BROAD CONDEMNATION BY THE FITCH RATING SERVICE OF ABOUND'S TECHNOLOGY AND PROGRESS WHICH CONCLUDED THAT "DOE'S WILLINGNESS TO FUND ABOUND . . . CALLS INTO QUESTION THE MERITS OF THIS LOAN GUARANTEE."¹⁴

IF WE LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN WE CAN DISCERN ELEMENTS THAT MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO DOE'S IGNORING THE CLEAR AND SPECIFIC FITCH WARNINGS. BOHEMIAN COMPANIES, AN INVESTMENT FIRM CONTROLLED BY BILLIONAIRE

PAT STRYKER, MADE DONATIONS OF CLOSE TO \$500 MILLION TO VARIOUS DEMOCRATIC PARTY CAUSES BETWEEN 2008 AND 2012, AND ALSO HAD A LARGE INTEREST IN ABOUND.¹⁵

REP. BETSEY MARKEY (D-CO), WHOSE CAMPAIGN HAD RECEIVED PERSONAL FUNDS FROM Ms. STRYKER, BACKED THE AWARD OF THE DOE LOAN TO ABOUND TO COMPLETE THIS CLASSIC CYCLE.¹⁶

IN APRIL, ABOUND LAID OFF 70% OF ITS LABOR FORCE (ALMOST 300 EMPLOYEES) AND CEASED CONSTRUCTION ON A NEW PLANT IN INDIANA. IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT NO EXECUTIVES WERE AMONG THOSE WHOSE SERVICES WERE TERMINATED.¹⁷

SUCCESSFUL VENTURE CAPITAL RESULTS REQUIRE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF AND COMMITMENT TO GOALS AND METHODS, AND TO THE DISCIPLINES NECESSARY TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT. THE WASHINGTON BUREAUCRACY'S WAY OF THROWING LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY AROUND BY MOSTLY INEXPERIENCED EMPLOYEES AND HOPING TO EMERGE A HERO IS A FLAWED AND MOSTLY FAILED MODEL.

CHU WAS CALLED TO TESTIFY ABOUT SOLYNDRA, ABOUND AND OTHER SOLAR LGP INVESTMENTS BUT DECLINED TO ANSWER WHEN ASKED HOW MANY MORE RECIPIENTS ARE IN THE FAILURE PIPELINE.¹⁸

AS INTERESTING, WASTEFUL AND INDICATIVE OF BUREAUCRATIC BUNGLING AS THESE BRIEF HISTORIES ARE, WE SUSPECT THEY WILL NOT MAKE THE GRADE FOR CAMPAIGN DISCUSSION.

DEATH AND TAXES

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FAMOUSLY ASSERTED THAT "IN THIS WORLD NOTHING IS CERTAIN BUT DEATH AND TAXES"¹⁹, BUT HE WAS UNPREPARED FOR THE CONTRADICTIONS OF OUR 21ST CENTURY GOVERNMENT.

A RECENT IRS REPORT REVEALS THAT THE CURRENT WHITE HOUSE STAFF NUMBERS 457 AND EARNED MORE THAN \$37 MILLION LAST YEAR; AND THAT 36 OF THESE EMPLOYEES OWE \$833,970 IN BACK TAXES.²⁰

THIS ATTITUDE OF TAX EXCLUSION IS BY NO MEANS LIMITED TO THE WHITE HOUSE, BUT, EXTENDS TO A BROAD RANGE OF OTHER AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS, AND CREATES AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FORM OF EVASION.

THE US POSTAL SERVICE TOPS THE LIST WITH 25,640 EMPLOYEES WHO OWE CLOSE TO \$270 MILLION. STAFFERS IN CONGRESS OWE MORE THAN \$10 MILLION; 4,697 EMPLOYEES AT THE DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY OVER \$37 MILLION. AT TREASURY 1,181 WORKERS ARE LIGHT \$9.3 MILLION AND AT JUSTICE WITH ITS PREPONDERANCE OF LAWYERS ON PAYROLL 2,069 EMPLOYEES OWE CLOSE TO \$17 MILLION.²¹

ALL TOLD, FEDERAL EMPLOYEES OWE A TOTAL OF \$3.4 BILLION, BUT ONLY IRS WORKERS CAN BE FIRED FOR NON-PAYMENT OF TAXES.²²

THIS IS A RATHER EXTRAORDINARY SITUATION, ALL THE MORE SO BECAUSE GOVERNMENT COMPENSATION NOW EXCEEDS ITS CORPORATE COUNTERPARTS FOR MOST GRADES OF EMPLOYMENT EXCEPTING, OF COURSE, THE TOP EXECUTIVE LEVELS. SOME PUBLICITY HAS TARGETED THIS CIRCUMSTANCE

WITH RESULTING DISCUSSION IN CONGRESS ABOUT CREATING A GARNISHEE PROGRAM TO REDUCE AND ULTIMATELY ELIMINATE THESE TAX DEBTS.

IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THIS MATTER WILL MOVE FROM DISCUSSION TO FIRM ACTION. REMEMBER, IT IS CONGRESS THAT MUST ACT. BUT WE ARE IN AN ELECTION YEAR AND MEMBERS OF BOTH CHAMBERS WILL BENEFIT FROM BEING ON THE "RIGHT" SIDE OF AN ISSUE SUCH AS THIS.

THIS HAS THE MAKINGS OF A GREAT CAMPAIGN ISSUE — EXPLOSIVE INFORMATION, PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT, EASY TO CORRECT, AND A SMALL AND CLEARLY IDENTIFIED GROUP OF ABUSERS, BUT EVEN SO, WE THINK IT'S PART OF THE QUIET CAMPAIGN.

UPWARD MOBILITY — WASHINGTON, D.C.

HAVING SEEN HOW GENEROUS CONGRESS CAN BE WITH TAXPAYER FUNDS FOR A VARIETY OF PURPOSES, WE MIGHT WELL INQUIRE AS TO WHETHER ITS LARGESSE MIGHT BE EXTENDED TO ITS OWN COMPENSATION. AFTER ALL, THERE'S NOTHING LIKE OPM (OTHER PEOPLES' MONEY) TO FACILITATE GIVING AND, AS THE BIBLE SAYS, "GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER"²³.

THAT'S GOOD, BECAUSE THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF CHEERFUL GIVING (TO THEMSELVES) IN CONGRESS OVER THE PAST QUARTER CENTURY. A STUDY BY THE WASHINGTON POST REVEALS THAT IN THIS PERIOD THE MEDIAN NET WORTH OF A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, EXCLUDING HOME EQUITY, ALMOST TRIPLED FROM \$280,000 TO \$725,000 WHILE THAT OF THE AVERAGE AMERICAN FAMILY DECREASED SLIGHTLY FROM \$20,648 TO \$20,500²⁴.

THIS SHIFT IN PERSONAL WEALTH WAS CONFIRMED BY A NEW YORK TIMES ANALYSIS THAT INDICATED THE MEDIAN NET WORTH OF CONGRESS ROSE 15% BETWEEN 2004 AND 2010 COMPARED TO A DECREASE OF 8% FOR THE AMERICAN PUBLIC.²⁵

"... GROUNDS FOR PROSECUTION UNDER OUR SECURITIES LAWS."

HERE, SOME BACKGROUND SHOULD BE NOTED. ALL MEMBERS OF CONGRESS EARN THE SAME SALARY, ABOUT \$175,000, WHICH IS INCREASED BY AUTOMATIC ANNUAL INCREASES, BUT OF COURSE THEIR INDIVIDUAL ASSETS CAN VARY SUBSTANTIALLY, AND THEY HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO ENGAGE IN FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS WITH EVIDENT CONFLICTS OF INTEREST THAT ARE NOT ONLY FORBIDDEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, BUT WOULD PRESENT GROUNDS FOR PROSECUTION UNDER OUR SECURITIES LAWS.

WITHIN THE LAST FEW MONTHS, AS THE GLARE OF PUBLIC OPINION REACHED INTO SOME OF OUR CONGRESSIONAL HIDING PLACES, THERE WAS DISCUSSION ABOUT LEVELING THE INVESTMENT PLAYING FIELD AND SUBJECTING CONGRESS TO THE SAME RESTRICTIONS ON FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS THAT APPLY TO THE GENERAL POPULATION.

WE HAVE NOT SEEN ANY MENTION OF THE FINAL TEXT OR PASSAGE OF THIS LEGISLATION. SUCH MATTERS AS PENALTIES, JURISDICTION, REGULATORY AND PROSECUTORIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALL HAVE TO BE SPECIFIED IN ORDER TO CHANGE THE PRESENT CULTURE AND REMOVE LOOPHOLES. WE MAY HOPE FOR GAME CHANGERS BUT SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR SOMETHING LESS, AS THESE ARE ELEMENTS THAT HAVE A WAY OF TAKING ONE SHAPE IN PHOTO-OPS AND PRESS RELEASES AND CONSIDERABLY DIFFERENT ONES WHEN TRANSLATED INTO THE LAWYERS' AND LOBBYISTS' LEGISLATIVE LANGUAGE.

WASHINGTON IS THE LOOPHOLE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD AND CONGRESS DOES NOT EASILY CREATE LAWS THAT LIMIT ITS OWN ADVANTAGES.

THIS SUBJECT BEARS CLOSE ATTENTION. IT COULD PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SOME VIGOROUS BIPARTISAN CAMPAIGN BASHING, AND HAS PROBABLY ALREADY PLAYED A CONTRIBUTORY ROLE IN THE UNUSUALLY LARGE NUMBER OF INCUMBENTS NOT SEEKING REELECTION THIS FALL. AFTER ALL, IF YOU HAVE TO PLAY BY THE RULES, WHAT'S THE USE?

OUR INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT ARE IN DEEP TROUBLE AND NEED OUR HELP, BUT AGAIN DO NOT EXPECT OUR GROWING DOUBLE STANDARD BETWEEN CONGRESS AND CITIZENS TO SURFACE AS A CAMPAIGN ISSUE.

AFTER NOVEMBER

EVER SINCE THE BEGINNINGS OF REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT THERE HAS BEEN A REAL DIVISION AS TO HOW REPRESENTATION SHOULD FUNCTION. IS THE REPRESENTATIVE AN INSTRUMENT TO DO THE BIDDING OF HIS/HER CONSTITUENTS OR TO PROVIDE OPINION, OR JUDGMENT, THAT WILL BEST SERVE THE CITIZENS OF HIS CONSTITUENCY? BACK IN 18TH CENTURY ENGLAND, WHEN THE POLITICS OF THE DAY PUT THIS QUESTION TO NOTED PARLIAMENTARIAN AND STATESMAN EDMUND BURKE, HE RESPONDED:

“PARLIAMENT IS NOT A CONGRESS OF AMBASSADORS FROM DIFFERENT AND HOSTILE INTERESTS.” IT IS A “DELIBERATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONE NATION, WITH ONE INTEREST, THAT OF THE WHOLE.”²⁶ (EMPHASIS BY EDITOR)

THERE, IN THE LAST THREE LINES IS THE OVERRIDING QUESTION THAT FACES OUR GOVERNMENT, OUR POLITICS AND OUR CULTURE. WHAT IS IN OUR NATIONAL INTEREST? AND HOW CAN WE SET OURSELVES TO DELIBERATE ABOUT IT IN A RATIONAL AND PRODUCTIVE WAY?

POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE THEIR PLACE, BUT IT MUST BE ABLE TO ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENCE OF OPINION. WE USED TO HAVE A GOVERNMENT THAT UNDERSTOOD HOW TO ARTICULATE AND SERVE A NATIONAL INTEREST, BUT IT IS LONG GONE. IT WORKED WELL UNTIL THE SLAVERY ISSUE TURNED THE COUNTRY INTO A PATCHWORK OF SLAVE/NON-SLAVE STATES AND A POLITICAL IMPOSSIBILITY FROM WHICH THE CIVIL WAR RESULTED.

FROM OUR FOUNDING UNTIL WWI THE POLITICAL TONE IN AMERICA UNDERWENT ENORMOUS CHANGE AS, FOLLOWING THE CIVIL WAR, WE EMBARKED UPON AN UNEQUALLED PERIOD OF ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE MARKED BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH BASIC INDUSTRIES AS STEEL, OIL, MEAT PACKING, TELEPHONE, ELECTRICITY, AUTOMOBILE, RAILROADS, STEAMSHIPS, MECHANIZED AGRICULTURE, AIRCRAFT, URBAN RAPID TRANSIT AND OTHERS.

THESE INDUSTRIES AND THEIR PRODUCTS OFFERED THE AMERICAN CONSUMER PREVIOUSLY UNIMAGINED BENEFITS AND RAISED OUR NATIONAL STANDARD OF LIVING TO THE ENVY LEVEL. AND WITH THEIR GROWTH AND THE WEALTH THEY PRODUCED WE BEGAN THE ALMOST CONTINUAL INJECTION OF MONEY AND POWER INTO OUR POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT STILL BEDEVILS US.

MONEY AND POWER LIKE TO HAVE THEIR WAY AND THEY COME DOWN PRETTY REGULARLY ON THE SIDE OF HAVING ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES DO THEIR BIDDING RATHER THAN COMMIT THEMSELVES TO A NATIONAL INTEREST. IDEOLOGY IS PROPOSED AS A WAY OF BRIDGING THE GAP, BUT THEN IT DEVELOPS A LIFE AND STYLE AND CHARACTER OF ITS OWN.

THE EXCESS OF MONEY AND POWER IN OUR POLITICS/GOVERNMENT HAS PUT OUR COUNTRY IN A VERY TIGHT SPOT. IF IT CONTINUES IN ITS PRESENT WAYS, IT WILL DETERIORATE FURTHER BECAUSE IT WILL BE UNABLE TO RESPOND TO ISSUES THAT LIE BEYOND THE MONEY/POWER ARGUMENT.

“IT IS THEIR CHOICE, AND THEIRS ALONE;
NO ONE ELSE HAS THE RIGHT OR THE POWER.”

IF WE ARE TO ATTEMPT TO REALIZE OUR POLITICAL WAYS AND GOALS WITH A NATIONAL INTEREST, AS CITED BY EDMUND BURKE, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO MAKE THAT DECISION. IT IS THEIR CHOICE, AND THEIRS ALONE; NO ONE ELSE HAS THE RIGHT OR THE POWER.

IT WILL NOT COME EASILY, BUT WILL TAKE TIME, INVOLVEMENT, COMMITMENT, MONEY, PATIENCE, AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES AND THE STAKES.

* * *

WE ARE NOW AT A TIME WHEN OUR TRADITIONAL POLITICAL CENTRISM HAS ALL BUT DISAPPEARED AND MOVED TO THE EDGES OF BOTH PARTIES. THERE, POWERS GATHER NOT TO BE GUIDED BY THE CONSTITUTION, BUT TO INTERPRET IT FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT. NEITHER PARTY SEES ITSELF AS AN EXPRESSION OF EXCESS THAT DEPARTS FROM OUR PAST DEMOCRACY; NOR DO THEY SEE THEMSELVES AS BENT ON EITHER EXPANDING OR EVADING CONSTITUTIONAL INTENT ON A REGULAR BASIS. BUT THEY, MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, DETERMINE THE NATION'S POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT.

OCCASIONALLY, THEIR RHETORIC HARKENS BACK TO MENTION OF OUR FOUNDERS BUT THE LATTER CANNOT HEAR. NOR WOULD THEY RECOGNIZE THEIR CREATION IN ITS PRESENT FORM, AND WE HAVE ALREADY TRAVELED TOO FAR TO RETURN TO WHAT WAS THEN.

THE QUESTION IS WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT OF THE LAST HALF CENTURY THAT WE HAVE CREATED CAN SURVIVE ITS OWN DETERIORATION AND DYSFUNCTION. AT THE EDGES, BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT SEE THEMSELVES AS UNEQUIVOCALLY RIGHT — MORALLY, POLITICALLY AND CONSTITUTIONALLY — BUT VISION THERE IS NO CLEARER THAN AT THE CENTER. MOSTLY IT IS LESS ACCURATE, AS IT IS BENT BY THE POLITICAL EQUIVALENT OF THE CURVATURE OF THE EARTH.

THE INTENSITY OF THE IDEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE THAT FUELS OUR POLITICAL ARGUMENTS CALLS FOR EACH PARTY TO BE “RIGHT”. THIS NEED TO BE CERTIFIED AT AN ABSOLUTE LEVEL RECALLS THE BITTERNESS OF THE AUTHORITARIAN RELIGIOUS BATTLES IN 17TH CENTURY EUROPE AND AMERICA WHEN THE ULTIMATE “RIGHT”, GOD, WAS INVOKED BY BOTH PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS, WHEREAS TODAY WE APPEAL TO MORE SECULAR SOURCES — MONEY AND POWER, ALSO KNOWN AS SPECIAL INTERESTS.

* * *

ONE TROUBLE WITH SPECIAL INTERESTS IN AMERICA TODAY IS THAT THERE ARE SO MANY OF THEM. THEY HAVE GROWN GREATLY IN NUMBER, FUNDING AND POLITICAL SUPPORT AND CAN SUCK THE POLITICAL AIR OUT OF MOST ISSUES, LEAVING LESSER INTERESTS, INCLUDING UNFORTUNATELY THE NATIONAL INTEREST, GASPING FOR BREATH.

THAT’S NOT THE WAY WE WANT IT, NOR THE WAY IT SHOULD BE, BUT THAT’S THE WAY IT IS. WE WILL NOT HAVE GOOD GOVERNMENT OR GREAT LEADERSHIP AGAIN UNTIL WE CAN RESTORE THE BALANCE BETWEEN SPECIAL AND NATIONAL INTERESTS. FOR THAT, WE WILL HAVE TO CHANGE OUR THINKING.

* * *

LOOKING BACK, IT MAY SEEM THAT OUR GREAT PRESIDENTS HAVE FORTUNATELY COME ALONG IN TIME TO DEAL WITH GREAT ISSUES, BUT THE REVERSE MAY BE TRUER — THAT GREAT ISSUES CREATE GREAT PRESIDENTS.

ON THE PRACTICAL LEVEL, A GREAT CAUSE CAN CAPTIVATE LARGE NUMBERS OF VOTERS AND CAN CREATE A MASSIVE AND POWERFUL SUPPORT GROUP CAPABLE OF DOMINATING BOTH PUBLIC OPINION AND A PRESIDENT’S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM. FDR HAD THE PAIN AND ANGER OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN HIS FAVOR AND COUSIN TR BENEFITED FROM THE PUBLIC’S REACTION TO 19TH CENTURY CAPITALISM’S EXCESSES.

THE PEOPLE AS A FORCE THAT CROSSES PARTY LINES (I.E., POPULISM) HAS DIMINISHED AND ALMOST DISAPPEARED IN THE LAST HALF CENTURY BECAUSE THE POPULIST VOICE, WHICH HAS BEEN SEEN AS FREE, EMOTIONAL AND NAIVE AT ITS MOST POPULAR MOMENTS IN THE PAST, IS NOW DROWNED OUT BY THE MONEY AND POWER OF OUR MEDIA AGE AND INDUSTRY. IT IS POLITICS AND BIG BUSINESS JOINED AT THE HIP (AND WALLET) AND IT RUNS OVER EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH.

THIS IS NOT “NEW” CAPITALISM. IT IS THE OLD WITH THE ADDED POWER OF 24/7 COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AND “BUY CONTRACTS” ON MOST MEMBERS OF CONGRESS.

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HAS ACQUIESCED IN THIS

TAKEOVER, HAVING SETTLED FOR A FAILED EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND SURRENDERED ITS POLITICAL AUTHORITY TO ONE OR THE OTHER OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES IN RETURN FOR ENTERTAINMENT. TO CHANGE THIS WE MUST EDUCATE AND ENERGIZE THE AMERICAN VOTING PUBLIC SO THAT IT HAS THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL TOOLS NECESSARY TO OVERCOME THE DUMBING DOWN EFFECT OF THE MSM AND TO ACCOMPLISH REFORM.

THE II AND ITS OFFSPRING WILL NOT BE EASY TO REMOVE FROM OUR POLITICAL THOUGHT. THEY HAVE BEEN IN PLACE TOO LONG AND THEIR GRIP ON OUR NATIONAL ELECTORAL PROCESS IS NOW VERY STRONG. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT THE PENDULUM EFFECT WORKS IN POLITICS AS IT DOES ELSEWHERE — THAT THINGS REACH A CERTAIN LEVEL OR STAGE AS THE RESULT OF ONE ACTION AND THEN ARE DRAWN BACK BY ANOTHER. AS THIS IS REPEATED OVER AND OVER, IT CREATES A ZONE OF MODERATE BALANCE WHICH WE COME TO VIEW AS NATURAL IN PHYSICS, HUMAN BEHAVIOR, POLITICS AND MORE.

BUT WE DO NOT LIVE IN MODERATE TIMES. THE SAME PLAYGROUND SWING THAT IS USED SAFELY AND RHYTHMICALLY BY A YOUNG CHILD, IN THE HANDS OF A LARGER, OLDER AND MORE RISK-PRONE USER CAN BE PUSHED BEYOND ITS ARC OF SAFETY TO THE POINT OF SELF-DESTRUCTION FOR BOTH THE SWING AND ITS RIDER. THE WORKING PENDULUM IS A THING OF BEAUTY AND SHOULD NOT BE PUSHED BEYOND ITS LIMITS. WITHOUT THE INPUT OF SOME EXTERNAL FORCE, HOWEVER, ITS ARC WILL GRADUALLY SHRINK AND IT WILL COME TO REST.

THERE IS A SCHOOL OF POLITICAL THOUGHT THAT APPLIES THE PENDULUM PRINCIPLE TO POLITICS AND CLAIMS THAT THE EXTERNAL FORCE OF TENSION BETWEEN THE RIGHT AND THE LEFT WILL GUIDE THE POLITICAL PENDULUM SO THAT IT OPERATES WITHIN ITS ARC OF SAFETY. THIS SUGGESTS THAT POLITICS CAN SUCCEED WHERE PHYSICS HAS FAILED — A MOST UNLIKELY OUTCOME. POLITICS IS A HIGH RISK GAME WITH INCREASINGLY LOOSE RULES THAT CAN BE EASILY TERMINATED BY WARS, REVOLUTIONS, ELECTIONS, ASSASSINATIONS, ILLNESS AND OTHER EVENTS.

“JUST ONE BULLET; JUST ONE MAN.”

FOR EXAMPLE, WE NEED ONLY TO CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF ONE BULLET, FIRED BY ONE MAN IN 1913, THAT KILLED AUSTRIAN ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND. IT SET IN MOTION A SERIES OF EVENTS THAT INCLUDED THE INITIATION OF WWI, THE FALL OF THE EUROPEAN MONARCHIES AND THE END OF A CENTURIES OLD SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL ERA. JUST ONE BULLET; JUST ONE MAN.

OUR AMERICAN POLITICS HAVE DEGRADED CONSIDERABLY SINCE THE INTENSITY OF OUR “MOMENT AT THE BARRICADES” OF OUR REVOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE. THAT IS NOT TO SAY WE HAVE NOT HAD OUR FINE MOMENTS. WE HAVE, BUT OUR LANGUAGE AND OUR VIEWS OF EACH OTHER HAVE GROWN HARsher, ANGRIER AND MORE VICIOUS.

IT’S NOT THAT WE DON’T HAVE SKINS TOUGH ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND WHATEVER THE POLITICAL GAME MAY THROW AT US. IT’S THAT OUR LANGUAGE OF ATTACK, AND THE MONEY AND

POWER THAT FUELS IT, NOW OBSCURES THE GOAL, THE NATIONAL INTERESTS.

OUR GOVERNMENT IS NOW IN THE HANDS OF A CLASS OF “PROFESSIONAL”, FULL TIME POLITICIANS — A STATUS THAT WE WERE WARNED AGAINST BY OUR FOUNDERS. THEIR MAIN INTEREST IS TO CONTINUE IN OFFICE AND TO BE COMPENSATED IN CASH AND OTHER WAYS THAT WILL ALLOW THEM TO LEAD VERY COMFORTABLE LIVES, BOTH WHILE IN OFFICE AND AFTERWARDS. THESE ARE NOT ELEMENTS OF OUR NATIONAL INTEREST.

* * *

THERE IS AN ENORMOUS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS. UNFORTUNATELY, MOST AMERICANS CANNOT CONNECT AT THE GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL EITHER THROUGH THEIR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OR THROUGH THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF OUR GOVERNMENT’S HISTORY, PROCESSES OR STRUCTURE. THEY ARE LEFT HAVING TO SETTLE FOR THE LIGHT LIFTING OF IMAGE POLITICS — HOOPLA, ADVERTISING, CAMPAIGNS, IDENTITY PROMOTIONS AND ALL THE QUICK, FLASHY MOVES OF THE MIDWAY. THESE ARE FORCE FED IN LARGE DOSES BY THE MSM’S TECHNOLOGY AND MONEY. IT IS A SORRY SPECTACLE OF EXCESS IN EVERY SHAPE, SIZE AND COLOR IMAGINABLE. BUT IT IS OURS, ALL OURS, AND IT IS BOUGHT AND PAID FOR.

NOMINATIONS TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT USED TO BE A FUNCTION OF THE TWO PARTIES’ CONVENTIONS, WHERE THERE WAS A LOT OF “BACK ROOM” MANIPULATION, BUT ALSO THE SOMEWHAT DECEPTIVE, BUT PUBLICLY POPULAR, PROCEDURE OF ROLL CALL WHEREBY EACH STATE ANNOUNCED WHOM IT WAS BACKING FOLLOWED BY DISPLAY OF THE NEW VOTE TOTALS. DEMONSTRATIONS WERE FREQUENT AND NOISY AND EACH “GREAT STATE OF” HAD ITS FEW MINUTES OF AIRTIME AND COMMENT, AT FIRST BY RADIO AND THEN BY TV.

TODAY WE HAVE A SYSTEM OF ABOUT A DOZEN “DEBATES” SPREAD OVER A SIX MONTH PERIOD FOLLOWED BY A SERIES OF STATE PRIMARIES THAT DETERMINE THE RECIPIENTS OF ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES.

THE “DEBATES” HAVE A SORT OF “LOOK, DON’T TOUCH” FEEL TO THEM, AS QUESTIONS ASKED BY MODERATORS USUALLY BRING FORTH “CANNED” RESPONSES. THERE CAN BE OCCASIONAL SPIRITED CONFRONTATION DIRECTLY BETWEEN THE CANDIDATES, BUT MOSTLY THEY ARE ABLE TO ESCAPE BY EVASIVE ANSWERS OR ARE RESCUED BY THE NEXT QUESTION.

THE MSM IS SEEN TO PLAY A DIGNIFIED, IMPARTIAL ROLE VIA THE MODERATORS. THIS DEBATE FORMAT CREATES A TRAVELING CIRCUS, BUT YOU DON’T HAVE TO WAIT FOR IT TO COME TO YOUR TOWN. IT’S IN YOUR LIVING ROOM.

AS THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN THE US DOES NOT PREPARE STUDENTS TO BE AWARE BEYOND THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL IMAGE ADVERTISING, ELECTIONS BECOME A TIME WHEN THE ACT OF ARGUMENT DRAWS MORE ATTENTION THAN THE STATE OF GOVERNMENT. IT IS A VERY MESSY SITUATION.

CHINESE TRAINS - AMERICAN CARS

CHINA PLANS TO INCREASE ITS INVESTMENT IN TRAIN TRAVEL SO THAT BY 2020 IT WILL HAVE 120,000 KM OF

TRACKAGE²⁷. FOR COMPARISON, OUR INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM MEASURES ABOUT 80,000 KM. THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECT OF CHINA’S RAIL PLAN IS ITS COMMITMENT TO 13,000 KM OF HIGH SPEED RAIL²⁸, A TECHNOLOGY WITH DECIDED ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER BENEFITS, WHICH WE HAVE REPEATEDLY REJECTED.

BUT CHINA IS NOT THE ONLY COUNTRY TO VIEW HIGH SPEED RAIL (HSR) TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT AS A VALID INVESTMENT FOR PASSENGER TRAVEL AND FREIGHT HAULING. FRANCE, ITALY AND JAPAN HAVE ENJOYED HIGH SPEED TRAINS FOR A GENERATION OR MORE WITH FAVORABLE PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY RECORDS.

OUR 19TH CENTURY WESTWARD SETTLEMENT AND SUBSEQUENT RAPID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATION WAS ENABLED BY OUR BEING ABLE TO PUT AN EAST/WEST AND NORTH/SOUTH TRACK SYSTEM IN PLACE IN A SPAN OF ABOUT FIFTY YEARS. IT WAS A MARVEL OF ITS TIME AND SERVED AS THE MAINSTAY OF OUR NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY UNTIL WWII AFTER WHICH OUR INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM AND IMPROVED AIRCRAFT OFFERED SAVINGS IN TIME, MONEY AND CONVENIENCE WHICH FOUND FAVOR WITH INDIVIDUAL AND COMMERCIAL USERS.

THE QUESTION THAT IMMEDIATELY ARISES IS “WHY DO OTHER COUNTRIES ACCEPT HSR AS A WORKING ELEMENT OF THEIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, AND WE DON’T?” NOT ALL ROUTES ARE SUITABLE FOR HSR, BUT THERE ARE PARTS OF OUR COUNTRY WHERE CLIMATE, TERRAIN AND DISTANCE READILY LEND THEMSELVES TO HSR DEVELOPMENT.

THE AUTO, TRUCKING AND AIRLINE INDUSTRIES ARE NOT EAGER TO REOPEN OLD AREAS OF COMPETITION, BUT AS AIR AND ROAD TRAVEL COSTS INCREASE, THERE MAY BE ROOM AND REASON TO RECONSIDER RAIL. CHINA, AFTER ALL, IS ABOUT THE SAME SIZE AS THE U.S.

THERE ARE OLD SCARS, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC, IN WASHINGTON LEFT OVER FROM THE DEMISES OF THE NY CENTRAL AND PENNSYLVANIA RR SYSTEMS, BUT TECHNOLOGY AND ITS APPLICATIONS IN OUR AGE ARE AS IMPORTANT AND TIMELY AS IN OTHERS.

THE MATTER OF WHETHER AND HOW MUCH WE SHOULD INVEST IN A HSR PROGRAM WOULD MAKE FOR A LIVELY AND INTERESTING CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE. IT WOULD BE INFORMATIVE AS TO THE FACTS AND, EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW GOVERNMENT CONDUCTS AN OPEN DELIBERATION OF CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC INTEREST.

THIS IS A DISCUSSION NOT LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE IN CONGRESS, NOR IN OUR PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. TOO BAD.

GOVERNMENT INACTION OR GOVERNMENT IN ACTION?

OUR NATION’S FOUNDERS DEALT WITH PROBLEMS OF MAN’S RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT, TO HIS FELLOW MAN AND TO GOD, OR THE CHURCH. SOME OF THESE CONCERNS ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

OR THE CONSTITUTION. OTHERS FAILED THAT BAR, BUT WERE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN OUR ALMOST 150 YEAR COLONIAL EXPERIENCE FROM 1620 TO THE ISSUANCE OF THE D OF I IN 1776. FOR MOST OF THIS TIME WE ACCEPTED OUR STATUS AS AN ENGLISH COLONY, BUT EVEN THOUGH WE WERE POLITICALLY AT REST (EXCEPT FOR ONGOING SKIRMISHES WITH THE FRENCH AND THE INDIAN NATIVES), THE RELIGIOUS TEMPER OF THE TIME WAS IN A STATE OF FLUX WITH THE ORIGINAL SETTLERS FINDING THEIR WAYS INCREASINGLY BEING CHALLENGED BY NEWER AND DIFFERENT ARRIVALS.

THIS CREATED A FUNDAMENTAL FAULT LINE WHICH PERSISTS IN OUR CULTURE TODAY. THE EARLY SETTLERS WERE CHRISTIANS, NOT BUDDHISTS OR MUSLIMS, AND THEIR IMPRINT EXTENDED FAR BEYOND THE PULPIT INTO OTHER INSTITUTIONS, BOTH POLITICAL AND JUDICIAL. IT WAS THIS STRONG CHRISTIAN HERITAGE THAT ENABLED THE "GREAT AWAKENING" IN THE 17TH CENTURY AND ITS REAPPEARANCE IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY.

"... GOVERNMENT WAS OFF LIMITS FOR RELIGION, AND VICE-VERSA."

IN BETWEEN, WHEN THE D OF I AND CONSTITUTION WERE WRITTEN, OUR FOUNDERS, WHO COULD LOOK BACK OVER A CENTURY AND A HALF OF ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES WITHIN OUR COLONIAL EXPERIENCE, DECLARED THAT GOVERNMENT WAS OFF LIMITS FOR RELIGION, AND VICE-VERSA.

NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT SEGMENT OF OUR POPULATION THAT, IN FAILING TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN OUR HERITAGE AND OUR POLITICAL STRUCTURE, DEFINES AMERICA AS A "CHRISTIAN NATION" WITH BOTH RESTRICTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES THAT ARE NOT FOUND IN THE CONSTITUTION. THIS IS A DOUBLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM BECAUSE OF ITS SPIRITUAL NATURE AND BECAUSE OUR GOVERNMENT, WHEN IT HAS FOUND IT USEFUL, HAS OFTEN FOOLISHLY PLAYED THE RELIGIOUS CARD AND FALSELY PROMOTED A RELIGIOUS IDENTITY.

* * *

WHO WERE THESE FOUNDERS TO WHOM WE OWE SO MUCH AND WHOSE WARNINGS AND WISDOM SEEM TO HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN AS WE HAVE MOVED THROUGH ALMOST TWO AND A HALF CENTURIES OF HISTORY ON THE TWIN TRACKS OF MONEY AND POWER?

PRIMARILY, THERE WERE SEVEN OF THEM — WASHINGTON, PAINE, JEFFERSON, ADAMS, FRANKLIN, MADISON AND HAMILTON — AND THEY REPRESENTED THE FOUR MOST POPULOUS AND WEALTHY COLONIES OF VA, MA, PA AND NY. THEY WERE EDUCATED AND SUCCESSFUL IN AN AGE WHICH RESPECTED THOSE ACHIEVEMENTS AND IN A PLACE THAT HAD NEED OF THEIR SKILLS. THE AVAILABILITY OF THEIR MINDS, IMAGINATIONS AND LIVES AT THE TIME WE WERE BREAKING AWAY FROM ENGLAND WAS A STROKE OF INCALCULABLE GOOD FORTUNE FOR THE NEWLY EMERGING AMERICA.

THEIR MOMENT WAS ALSO AIDED BY ITS SLOW COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, BY BEING

SEVERAL THOUSAND MILES REMOVED FROM ENGLISH CENTRAL AUTHORITY AND BY A MONARCH WHOSE ATTENTION AND EMOTIONS WERE MORE FOCUSED ON HIS TRADITIONAL RIVAL, FRANCE, THAN A FEW COLONISTS IN THE NEW WORLD.

OVER THE YEARS OF OUR FOUNDERS' LIVES THEY WERE ABLE TO ABSORB THE INJUSTICES OF OUR COLONIAL STATUS AND TO THINK AND PLAN HOW THEY MIGHT BE REMEDIED IN A NEW FORM AND WAY OF GOVERNMENT.

THEY HAD THE BENEFIT OF BEING ABLE TO DRAW UPON ENGLAND'S LAW, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE WHERE AND WHEN THEY WISHED, AS WELL AS GREEK AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN SOURCES. IT WAS IN THE CRITICAL TIME FOLLOWING THE D OF I AND THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR THAT THESE MEN EXCHANGED THEIR VIEWS ON HOW THEY COULD TRANSFORM OUR COLONIAL EXPERIENCE INTO A WORKING MODEL OF REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT.

WITH SEPARATION FROM ENGLAND ACCOMPLISHED, THEY TURNED TO WRITING THE CONSTITUTION AND THEN, AFTER ITS RATIFICATION, CREATING THE INSTITUTIONS AND LAWS THAT THEY HOPED WOULD ENSURE ITS CONTINUING STRENGTH AND SUCCESS.

OUR CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS WAS COMPLEX AND OFTEN BITTERLY ARGUMENTATIVE, AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED IN TRYING TO MOLD THIRTEEN GOVERNMENTS INTO ONE. WHAT ENABLED ITS SUCCESS AS MUCH, OR MORE, THAN ANYTHING ELSE WAS A CONVERSION OF THINKING BY OUR FOUNDERS, A VISION OF A NATIONAL INTEREST WHICH GREW INTO A STANDARD WHICH ALL COULD BE COUNTED ON TO APPLY AND HONOR.

THIS IMAGE OF A NATIONAL INTEREST OVERRIDING OTHERS WAS KEY TO OUR SURVIVING THE MANY CHALLENGES OF OUR FIRST HALF CENTURY OF EXISTENCE. THERE WERE NO LOBBYISTS PLYING CONGRESS WITH MONEY, NO POLLS, NO MASS MEDIA/CAMPAIGNS AND NO FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY SPENDING PROGRAMS TO CREATE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.

OVER TIME THE INTRICACIES OF TECHNOLOGY, POPULATION, MONEY AND POWER HAVE BOTH DIMINISHED AND BLURRED WHATEVER VISION OF OUR NATIONAL INTEREST REMAINS. IN FACT, WE NO LONGER HAVE ONE; RATHER, WE HAVE MANY TO SERVE THE MULTIPLE INTERESTS AND CONSTITUENCIES CREATED BY OUR LAW MAKERS.

THIS IS A FAILING SYSTEM. IT FAILS THE PUBLIC AND IT FAILS ITSELF. ARE WE A NATION OF LAWS, AS WE SO LOUDLY AND REGULARLY PROCLAIM? NO. A NATION OF LOOPHOLES, MORE LIKELY. IT DOESN'T SOUND AS LOFTY, BUT IT'S ONLY NECESSARY TO READ OUR TAX CODE OR THE LEGISLATION CONGRESS PASSES TO SEE THE EXTENT BY WHICH EXCEPTIONS DOMINATE MOST LAWS.

THE GREAT DANGER

THE WEAKNESSES, CORRUPTION, GREED, INDOLENCE AND SELF INTEREST THAT RULE CONGRESS ERODE ITS STATURE AND STRUCTURE. WITHOUT A CENTER IT WILL CONTINUE TO WEAKEN, PERHAPS TO IRRELEVANCE, AND FALL PREY TO THE GREAT DANGER FROM EITHER THE FAR LEFT OR FAR RIGHT. CENTRALITY IS A KEY ELEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE

GOVERNMENT. IT IS MODERATE BY NATURE AND OPPOSES THE II WHICH NOW GRIPS BOTH PARTIES. THIS IS A BAD SITUATION THAT CAN ONLY GET WORSE UNLESS OUR TWO MAJOR PARTIES CAN MOVE TO RESCUE THEMSELVES AND TRY TO RESTORE A SENSE OF BALANCE TO OUR GOVERNMENT.

THE MONEY IS BIG AND THE POWER IS STRONG, AND THERE ARE ONLY THREE FORCES THAT CAN TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS — CONGRESS, THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. PREFERABLY, THEY SHOULD WORK TOGETHER IN A MORE CENTRAL DIRECTION THAN EXISTS NOW. IF YOU PUSH EVERYBODY TO THE EDGES, MANY WILL LOSE THEIR GRIP AND DISAPPEAR. WE HAVE TRIED THAT AND IT HAS PRODUCED OUR PRESENT POLARIZATION. IT HAS FAILED. IT HAS PRODUCED A DYSFUNCTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND ALTERED OUR EXPERIENCE OF A DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC.

WE HAVE DEALT WITH A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE — ECONOMIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, ETHICAL, POLITICAL, ETC., AND THEY ALWAYS PRESENT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ARGUMENT, FOR DIFFERENCE OF OPINION. BUT IN MANY OF THEM ONE CAN EASILY DISCERN THAT THERE IS A NATIONAL INTEREST THAT CAN BETTER BE SERVED BY ONE DIRECTION OR COURSE OF ACTION RATHER THAN ANOTHER.

THOSE ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES WE SHOULD BE SEEKING. CAN WE NOT RESIST VIEWING ALL ISSUES AS POLITICAL LEVERS MARKED “PULL TO WIN”? WITNESS THE PRESENT SNIPING BACK AND FORTH BY BOTH CANDIDATES OVER ROMNEY’S BAIN CAPITAL RECORD WHICH BRINGS TO MIND THE TWO CIRCUS CLOWNS WHO REPEATEDLY SWAT EACH OTHER WITH VARIOUS PROPS WHILE ENGAGED IN SOME CASUAL TASK.

IN OUR POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS, CAN’T WE IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS AND RESULTS THAT WOULD CREATE A MORE INFORMED ATMOSPHERE FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WHICH, IN TIME, WOULD TRANSLATE INTO BETTER GOVERNMENT.

WE NEED TO PERSUADE BOTH PARTIES THAT SUCH A CHANGE IS IN THEIR INTEREST AND THAT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, FOR IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL TAKE SUCH A STEP ON THEIR OWN.

THE KEY ELEMENT IS, OF COURSE, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, AS THEY HAVE THE ULTIMATE POWER TO FORM, CHANGE OR DISMISS OUR GOVERNMENT. THEY ARE NOT STUPID, BUT TEND TO BE LISTLESS AND LESS THAN INFORMED UNTIL AROUSED BY CRISIS, A CHARACTERISTIC OF OUR NATIONAL DNA THAT PROBABLY DATES BACK TO THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF PAUL REVERE.

NOW, HOWEVER THEY ARE CHALLENGED BY THE CRITICALITY OF THIS ELECTION TO PLAY A LARGER PART. THEY MUST NOW WANT TO, DECIDE TO AND PREPARE TO EXERCISE THE POWER GIVEN THEM BY THE CONSTITUTION.

THIS ELECTION IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP. NO MATTER WHO WINS, OUR GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO CHANGE ITSELF IN ORDER TO SURVIVE THE DANGERS IT HAS ALLOWED TO ACCUMULATE. TIME PASSES AND THERE IS WORK TO DO WHICH ONLY IT CAN DO. IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICA THAT’S A SOURCE OF CONCERN.



END NOTES

- ¹ THE TELEGRAPH, LONDON 51 16-5/22/12
- ² IBID
- ³ IBID
- ⁴ IBID
- ⁵ IBID
- ⁶ IBID
- ⁷ PALM BEACH POST 5/28/12 ‘ IBID
- ⁸ IBID
- ⁹ IBID
- ¹⁰ PORKER OF THE MOUTH. CITIZENS AGAINST GOVERNMENT WASTE. 11/20/11
- ¹¹ MIDDLE AMERICAN NEWS. 4/12
- ¹² L2 CF. NOTE 10
- ¹³ COLORADO’S OWN GREEN LOAN SINKHOLE BY MICHELLE MALKIN. CF. NOTE 11
- ¹⁴ IBID
- ¹⁵ IBID
- ¹⁶ IBID
- ¹⁷ IBID
- ¹⁸ IBID
- ¹⁹ LETTER TO M. LEROY (1789)
- ²⁰ YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK. MIDDLE AMERICAN NEWS, 3/12
- ²¹ IBID
- ²² IBID
- ²³ HOLY BIBLE, 2 CORINTHIANS 1,7
- ²⁴ MEMBERS OF CONGRESS GETTING RICHER MIDDLE AMERICAN NEWS 2/12
- ²⁵ IBID
- ²⁶ SPEECH TO THE ELECTORS OF BRISTOL. EDMUND BURKE 11/3/1774
- ²⁷ RAILWAY AGE AND TRANSPORT POLITIC. INTERNET 8/17/09
- ²⁸ IBID

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MR. AULT IS RETIRED FROM BUSINESS, A GRADUATE OF YALE UNIVERSITY, AND THE AUTHOR OF A RETAIL FOOD STUDY (LA ROCHE & Co. NYC, NY 1957) WHICH DESCRIBED THE EMERGENCE AND GROWING DOMINANCE OF THE SUPERMARKET IN AMERICAN FOOD RETAILING; AND EMINENT DISDAIN: THE TRIUMPH OF CYNICISM OVER INTEGRITY IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICA. (AUTHORHOUSE, BLOOMINGTON, IN 2009)

THE AUTHOR’S MOST RECENT BOOK, WHO LOST AMERICA?, DEALS WITH THE TOPICS COVERED IN MOC ISSUES 19 THROUGH 27. IT IS NOW AVAILABLE ON-LINE AT AMAZON.COM OR FROM THE PUBLISHER AUTHORHOUSE, AT 888-280-7715 OR AT AUTHORHOUSE.COM.

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