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DELAY NOTICE

Our target date for mailing this issue was originally Oct. 15 so that it would be delivered prior to election day. However, the disruptions of extended power outages and the time required to prepare for, and then clean up after, two major hurricanes affected every stage of our production process. We regret this delay.

INTRODUCTION

In view of the coming presidential and other elections we have adopted a more political, but not partisan, perspective for this issue. We will commence with some political snapshots which will lead into our main section – Government by Paradox and Paralysis. Here again we will identify ample evidence of the failure of our institutions to fulfill their purposes and to protect those whose interests they were designed to serve. In twenty-first century America with its two-party system both major parties can share responsibility and justifiable criticism for having brought our nation to the point where approximately only a half of those eligible to vote do so.¹

Our purpose continues to be to call attention to the widespread failure of institutional integrity in our society, but for this issue we will put aside the corporate sector and focus on our political system's anomalies and discrepancies as they are so clearly revealed every four years.

We had intended to do a brief follow-up on the Roman Catholic Church sexual abuse scandal, as recent developments have raised an interesting question about the way our legal system deals with this problem. We will postpone our coverage of this until our year-end issue.



SOME POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS

The political parties are not entirely to blame for our voter apathy. They spend hundreds of millions of dollars, mostly on TV ads, to promote their candidates. The latter also appear in person in debates, on talk shows and news report interviews, but all of these editorial formats fail to provide a thorough examination of the serious issues that face the nation and influence our lives in major ways.

One would think that the candidates' debates would provide a real opportunity for determining difference, but they have proved disappointing. Certain subjects, such as immigration, have been omitted by mutual agreement and preference, and others by the moderators' and the sponsoring organizations' control of the content. All too frequently direct questions are deflected by the candidates with rambling generalizations and references to previous positions. A

true, spontaneous debate in which questions are drawn at random from voter sources seems likely to remain a democratic dream for the public and a nightmare for candidates.

And, while the candidates may wish to blandize their campaigns to avoid giving offense to as many constituencies as possible, both the media and the public also bear responsibility for diluting the message we receive.

The format favored by TV broadcasters for news presentation is the short quote and photo-op with only a surface treatment of the subject. This has resulted, over time, in the American voting public becoming not only underinformed, but quite used to and satisfied by it. A strong majority of Americans obtain most of their news experience from TV and, accordingly, have arrived at a state of conditioned ignorance because of the meager menu offered by the media. Sadly, we have been existing on a political diet of soft food to which we are both accustomed and addicted. And, even if we

occasionally ask “Where’s the beef?”, we would find it difficult to digest.

This ignorance, and the lack of interest it fosters, is contrary to our origins and most of our history. It diminishes us as individuals and as a nation, but, even worse, it permits special interest groups and the lowest and most unscrupulous elements in our political structure to manipulate us to a degree that is shamefully efficient. We listen almost hypnotically to the demagoguery and the spin, and, more often than we like to admit, they are able to make their points.

“...an extensive ‘dumbing down’ process...”

Should we be surprised by this? Not really. It is part of an extensive “dumbing down” process that has come to dominate our educational, political and media systems. Just listen to the campaign rhetoric, read a high school history book or view what is offered on prime time TV by commercial television’s major networks. We believe that most people would agree that what they find can only be seen as a disappointing comment on America’s current standards and the threat they pose to our society and its future. How we arrived at our present position, which contradicts so many of our stated values and goals, is a complex tale which we will explore in a later issue.

* * *

We have been able to watch both parties’ conventions and feel justified in making these criticisms:

1. In Boston and New York generalities were the rule of the day, and specifics on many topics were in short supply. The candidates offered promises such as “I have a plan” or “We’ll change this” or “This will have the highest priority in my administration” to avoid specific commitment and the possibility of offending the constituencies of those who might disagree.
2. Similarly both parties attempted to define themselves for voters by general terms such as “values”, “patriotism”, the ubiquitous “diverse”, “caring”, etc. which usually promise more than they are able to deliver.
3. Too much emphasis was placed on the military service records of both candidates. This does not mean that in our present circumstances we do not need a president with an intelligent understanding of the use of American military force, but we question the relevance of relating this major demand of a vastly changed world to the time and circumstances of service, or lack thereof, in Vietnam. Some served; others didn’t. That’s a matter of record from which both parties may draw arguments and inferences and it will not be changed by campaign rhetoric. Investigative journalism may bring forth accusations of character failure, but the truth lies in the heart of each candidate and is certain

to stay there.

4. At both conventions there was endless talk, much of it senseless speculation, by the commentators trying to fill long hours of TV time. There was far too much orchestrated hoopla intended to create excitement and interviews with individual delegates who, no matter what the question, consistently reverted to responses centered on local issues.

We came away with the usual feeling that our political conventions are forums of excess in everything except articulation. They are showcases of crowd control, optimism, grandiosity and pretense. What they both lacked was suspense.

Our experience with political conventions goes back to the 1936 Roosevelt/Landon election. From that time until the adoption of multi-state early primaries the conventions were working sessions which often actually determined the selection of candidates. Bearing in mind that until 1948 all broadcast coverage was by radio, the process of polling each state delegation, while ponderous, was a suspenseful procedure, as states could, and often did, split their votes. The realignment caused by releasing votes from one candidate to another could instantly energize the whole convention as signs of a “swing” became apparent.

There was another form of suspense that pervaded the convention and that was the action, and again or lack thereof, taken by the platform committee. The platform was the banner behind which the party marched into battle and was drafted at the convention by the platform committee and then ratified by the full convention. There was intense internal struggle at the committee level to determine what would be included in the platform and precisely how each “plank” would be phrased because, once decided, it had to be embraced and defended throughout the campaign.

The idea of a written platform may seem quaint to us today when candidates can change their positions and we can argue, “what the definition of ‘is’ is”.

There was also something quaint about candidates such as Norman Thomas (Socialist) and Harold Stassen (Republican) garnering a handful of votes over a period of two or three decades long after their political stars first rose into brightness. For even after they were unable to realistically seek victory, they remained dignified and articulate defenders of their faith.

* * *

Politicians can be either blessed or cursed by the timing of events over which they do not have control. You may recall that just a few days before the start of the Democratic convention the 9/11 Commission issued its report and recommendations.

At first the response from Washington was what might charitably be described as muted. The early congressional comments indicated that hopefully some

action might be taken by year-end, as August vacation time and electoral campaigning would not provide time until after November 2. And, of course, after the election there might be a realignment of both congressional and committee memberships which would prevent meaningful legislation until the seating of a new congress in January.

The word from the White House was neutral with polite thanks to the Commission for its work, non-specific mention of helpful suggestions and a promise of further study.

But something happened that changed the Washington script. The families of the 9/11 victims decided they would “not go gentle into that good night”². They held multiple press conferences and opened an office for future activity. They would not let the story die and, because they had far greater credibility on the issue than the President, who initially opposed the creation of the Commission, and Congress, who favored a two step agenda of vacation first and then the back burner, they became the effective center of the story that would pick it up and keep it alive after the Commission disbanded.

The public interest soared and concerns of fairness and decency were joined with those of managerial efficiency cited by the Commission. In a matter of a very few days public opinion backed by media comment prevailed, as Congress indicated it would hold hearings in August, and the White House managed to find a bit more enthusiasm and a place on the fast-moving band wagon.

There was a moment immediately following the release of the Commission report and its finding of flawed intelligence that in capsule form speaks volumes about our two political parties’ capacity for institutional failure.

In response to the Commission’s citation of fault in our intelligence gathering and analysis functions, a nationally televised press conference was held by Senators Pat Roberts (R-KA) and Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), Co-Chairmen of the Senate Intelligence Committee, in which they both strongly criticized the content and value of the intelligence information received by their committee. And, in response to a question from the press, both stated that they had been misled to the degree that they would not have cast their votes in favor of our going to war in Iraq had they known the true circumstances which we faced.

This picture would be tinged with ironic humor were it not that the Senate Intelligence Committee, with its counterpart in the House, is charged with oversight responsibility for intelligence matters in the public interest. Sens. Roberts’ and Rockefeller’s *mea non culpas* have a hollow ring. Committee service can be tedious and only occasionally relieved by the more self-rewarding hearings, press conferences and photo-ops,

but, had the committee performed its oversight function better, the intelligence flaws would have been detected.

* * *

Now, to return to that brief period of a few days just prior to and during the Democratic Convention when the 9/11 Commission’s report and recommendations dominated the news. We think both parties missed a glorious opportunity to take an action that would have risen above party interests and would have been viewed as a benefit for the nation and its citizens.

At this moment either candidate could have publicly called upon the other to quickly meet to discuss the 9/11 Commission’s recommendations and to issue a public statement to the people, the Congress and relative government agencies as to which recommendations both candidates were able to endorse.

This would have made it clear to the public and to all levels of government that our national security comes ahead of the usual turf battles and power struggles and that, whoever wins the coming election, the errors of the past will be addressed and corrected.

Of course, agreement could not be expected on all recommendations. Some will require lengthy debate, intricate compromises or bold departures from our prior thinking, but surely both parties could agree on some proposals.

Had President Bush taken this step, he would have been exercising the power of his office, a power he already possessed. His action would have been seen as non-partisan, far-reaching, patriotic and concerned with the greater good. For an administration marked by as much controversy as his, he could have injected himself with a healthy dose of public approval and converted the impact of the 9/11 report from one of controversy to cooperation. Any invitation of this type could not have been refused or ignored by Senator Kerry.

“... a supreme but missed opportunity.”

The situation is somewhat different for the Democrats, as they cannot use the power of the government. Being on the outside, any offer from Kerry would be more in the nature of a challenge than an invitation and would have immediately placed the Republicans in a defensive position. Kerry could have been seen as making or taking power and, therefore, creating a leadership position. The moment for him to make such a transforming gesture in his speech at the convention seems to us to have been a supreme, but missed, opportunity. He could have seized initiative and placed himself and his party above their opponents and on the popular side of a major issue.

It is unlikely that either party could have refused such an invitation, but the offer could have been made more inclusive by suggesting that personal representatives could conduct the discussions if the candidates concurred.

Major issues and their opportunities to transcend party politics don't present themselves often enough that we should disregard them when they do. We believe that the 9/11 Report provided a win/win situation for everyone – Republicans, Democrats, the public, the Congress and the fifteen different intelligence entities that advise government.

* * *

The “dumbing down” of the American electoral process is not a theory. It is a fact. The confusion at the polls in Florida in 2000 may well occur again there or elsewhere and, when it does, we will hear the same complaint that the voting procedure is unfair for one reason or another. The truth is that our methods are far fairer than those found throughout most of the world, and they have generally served their purpose and the nation well over the years.

It is impossible to design a system that could prevent all error. The human factor is just too strong, as many people either can't or won't follow directions and others don't care sufficiently to make a real effort. But the real question which no one will ask, because it may be considered politically incorrect, is “If you can't figure out how to vote, then how will you decide what to vote for?”

PC (politically correct) has played a major role in “dumbing down” our political process by providing a shield behind which the two parties can hide. Its dictate that no one be offended requires in practice a vast uniformity that contradicts reality in that more often than not (and in greater numbers than practicable) we have invited others in to share our progress and principles. The rope that binds us together is one of many strands.

Another contradiction posed by PC is that, although it exalts diversity, its political reality is one of uniformity and, therefore, lack of diversity. PC could only have arrived at its present level of acceptance in an age and with the help of mass media, and in combination they have been able to bring about enormous change in our two political parties.

In watching the conventions and listening to their messages one cannot avoid but be struck by how similar, rather than different, they are with the exception, of course, of the candidates' military service.

You have to go beyond the actual words which often are chosen to indicate minor differences, but on major topics such as Iraq, health care, the economy, energy, security and taxes the goals and promises (not methods) are remarkably similar. Those topics that are too

important or too dissimilar to undergo homogenization (such as immigration, the environment, the national debt level, to name a few) will either be omitted from the national discussion or given only cursory attention.

It is no accident that the lines of distinction between Republicans and Democrats have become blurred and, in some areas, lost completely. With the PC monkey riding on their backs, their motivation turned from distinguishing themselves from each other towards “please all (or as many as possible) while offending none”. This led to both parties' attempting to move more to the center and establish their public persona there.

This changed the shape of the political spectrum so that it mostly consists of a large mass at the center with much smaller satellites at the far left and right. In doing so it greatly diminished those gradations of thought and belief that creatively and humanely served both parties for the century from the end of the Civil War to our engagement in Vietnam.

There is an interesting argument here that the domestic and political turmoil of the '60s could not have happened and produced the results in our society that they did without TV being on hand to provide a record. If this seems like an electronic version of the “tree that falls in the forest” conundrum, it's not far off.

Of course, as the actual and claimed differences between the parties grew less, the effort to promote them had to increase. Enter now the media with TV – a new, one-size-fits-all method of reaching everyone, anywhere at any time. Here was a marriage truly made in political heaven. The political parties had to have 24/7 pictorial access to the public. The media sold it and created a seemingly endless revenue stream that could only increase as population and political awareness from its increased coverage expanded.

In this process a new participant appeared in the form of national and local polling organizations. Originally developed in the 30's by George Gallup and Elmo Roper to obtain consumer reaction to product values such as price, taste, color, shape, fragrance, etc., these took the form of written reports of extensive questioning of consumers mostly in public and commercial spaces such as train stations, parks, stores, theatres, etc.

Again, electronics changed all that in a flash. The computer could provide instant answers to almost any question and tailor the questions to the pollster's need of the moment. As electronic gathering and reporting capabilities became more sophisticated, the polling industry expanded power and attracted the entry of large cross-media entities such as The Wall Street Journal/NBC and CBS/NY Times. This coziness suggests that the media wanted to not only present the political news but also to conduct the research on which the parties had become so heavily dependent.

* * *

We have cited above a number of forces that have changed the political equation in our country—the “dumbing down” of our voting process, both political parties’ movement towards the center with a consequent loss of distinction, PC, the emergence of a greatly expanded polling industry with sophisticated equipment and methods — all of which have taken place over the last half-century. These forces have impacted both our lives and the political duopoly through which we are represented. In combination, all of these elements have acted upon and changed our government—something that we cannot do directly, but only indirectly by voting for representatives, which leads us to where America is today, and our main topic.

* * *

GOVERNMENT BY PARADOX AND PARALYSIS

America and the world today are poised at entry to the twenty-first century and already taking their first and, perhaps, faltering and fateful steps. As a nation we continue to view the future with our innate optimism which so far has been only slightly diminished by the reality of our role as sole superpower.

It is unlikely, as we learn the limits and demands of this new role, that we will be able to bear its responsibilities satisfactorily for ourselves and others by reliance upon armaments and rhetoric, but rather we would be better served by the spirit and values of our origins.

Unfortunately, the clarity and integrity of many of our past principles and future prospects are presently obscured by the failure throughout our society of a broad range of private and public institutions.

“....an age of political incumbency”

Today, America inhabits an age of political incumbency. This is a plain and brief statement, but its ramifications are many and complex. This age is one that we have built ourselves, and yet we suspect that very few Americans are aware of its nature and its effect on their lives. It is a truth that we must recognize and embrace for the common good before it passes entirely into wrong hands. The lines of cause and effect that we will try to draw are neither clear nor straight, but we hope to be able to tie them together in a way that makes sense.

* * *

First, what do we mean by “an age of political incumbency?” Quite simply we are stating that in our present society any incumbent in political office has a distinct advantage over any challenger and that this

advantage enjoys a powerful influence over how we form and experience our contemporary government. Moreover, this influence is not generally publicized to the electorate, nor understood by it.

In the 2002 congressional elections only 4 incumbent members of the House of Representatives lost their seats.³ As there are 435 members of the House, this indicates a retention rate of over 90%. In the Senate, where only a third of the members face election every two years, the retention rate was somewhat less at 85%.⁴ These figures might lead us to believe that they emanate from totalitarian countries such as China or Russia, but that is not the case. They are our own home-grown, made-in-the-USA variety. Nor are they a statistical spike or anomaly, as in the last three congressional elections (’02, ’00 and ’98) the figures have shown little deviation.⁵ We expect the elections in November will continue to show high incumbency reelection rates.

Why is this pattern, which flies in the face of statistical expectation, important? Because it limits the expression of democracy in a system that is based on that expression. Consider all the rhetoric and the hundreds of millions of dollars expended in this year’s elections which are intended to persuade the voters that their choice of candidates will determine the country’s future direction.

It may sound correct if constantly repeated, but there is a flaw in that argument. Yes, it is entirely possible for the voter to change the political party that occupies the White House, but if approximately 90% of all congressional incumbents are reelected, it’s almost impossible to change government! The great mass of the legislative branch will remain as it is.

Many of our political observers have commented on how polarized our government is today. It is true that we face major issues over which there exist sharp differences of opinion, but how polarized can a society be when close to 90% of its government is reelected every two years? It would seem that, whatever the issues that divide them, our elected representatives find common ground in getting reelected. In such an environment the heat of polarization is turned down to bickering and/or an occasional intemperate accusation.

Before tracing the roots of this congressional transformation which is responsible for the greater part of our governmental paralysis, it is only fair to say that our elected representatives couldn’t have pulled it off by themselves. They had the assistance of the public whose apathy and ignorance of political matters have shown consistent growth in recent years, in spite of the massive amounts of money spent to attract votes and voters.

Apathy is easily detected in the results of the last presidential election when 105.6 million voters went to the polls.⁶ This number translates into about 67% of those registered to vote and 51.3% of the country’s voting age population.⁷ This last number has shown a

steady decrease over the last half century.

Ignorance is something else – somewhat harder to prove, although, like smut, we may recognize it when we see it. Similarly, statistics relating to things that do not occur are somewhat more difficult to obtain and evaluate than for those that do. In general, it is our opinion that, although large amounts of money and emotion are injected into our elections, they do not attract a high level of critical and objective reasoning. Last year it was reported that “one in four Americans don’t know who their governor is, and one in two don’t know who their congressman or woman is.”⁸

And yet, it’s entirely likely that many of those who disconnect from our political elections cast ballots for sports all-star team selections; and those who dismiss our voting procedure with “It’s too much trouble” or “I’m too busy” can spend far more time, effort and money attending a sports event.

Apathy and ignorance are controllable by the individual and all that is required to replace them is a change of attitude or interest. This is not true for the third cause of low voter turnout, which is disillusion. Largely created by unfulfilled promises, exaggerated rhetoric and habitual voting results, it establishes an atmosphere of disappointment and reinforces both apathy and ignorance.

At approximately a 50% voter turnout level in the world’s leading democracy, there should be warning signals flashing throughout our political structure, but we have no evidence of any real concern. Rather, what response there is, if any, seems to be “more of the same”. It was not always thus.

* * *

“IN THE BEGINNING”

In the beginning there were thirteen British colonies that came together at three different times at the end of the eighteenth century to establish and declare their independence, to write a constitution that would create both powers and limitations under which their new, federal government would operate and then to form and operate that government. Looking back, we tend to view these events in a compressed time frame, in almost capsule form, with many of their difficulties obscured by the mists of time, and the fragility of memory. We fail to sufficiently distinguish between the comfort and technology of our world and the lack thereof of our colonial ancestors.

We should, for instance, ponder the process by which representatives were sent to Philadelphia. Because of the importance of founding a nation (you pretty much have to get it right the first time, there being no qualifying rounds or practice sessions) those chosen were established leaders in their communities, successful and

educated. They may have been large landowners, lawyers, bankers, merchants, editors/publishers.

They were chosen to speak for their home area, not to lobby for benefits, and in doing so to exercise their best judgment in first founding a nation and then running its government. They all had family and/or commercial/professional obligations which had to be suspended for the extended periods of their attendance in Philadelphia unless they could be dealt with via a slow and irregular mail service.

Moreover, and this is absolutely critical to understanding the political role of our early elected representatives, their contact with their home state voters was limited to a small geographical area. A senator from New York City or, even, Albany would not make campaign trips to such distant points as Buffalo or Rochester to give a speech and seek opinions.

There were no polls and news was delivered slowly by word of mouth or by local newspapers. Town meetings and taverns were the principal forums for discussion, but again primitive travel and sparse population discouraged frequent visits to outlying areas. These circumstances continued during the course of our westward expansion long after they had improved in the eastern states.

“There was no divided loyalty.”

A second critical element in understanding our political past and our present paradox is that these early congressmen, who were largely elected because of their intelligence and local popularity/leadership, were paid by the federal government. There was no divided loyalty. They were called to Washington for a few months each year to discuss the issues that faced the nation and to pass legislation to deal with them.

Circumstances change, as, of course, did these. America prospered and expanded and then was completely changed by the telegraph, the gold rush, railroads, the telephone, WWI, radio, etc. Over time we became a less parochial people with both diplomatic and commercial interests around the world. While we sought to distance ourselves from “entangling foreign alliances”, fate decreed otherwise and, with our global involvement in fighting two world wars and the politics of peace that followed, many of the old ways in America were left behind and could not be recalled—and are now only faint and receding sounds in our rush to progress.

Here we make passing note of one piece of FDR legislation in the ‘30s—the passage of the Rural Electrification Act which brought electric power to rural America. It’s primary purpose was to provide electric power to the hard working small farmers and other mostly poor inhabitants of rural America to improve their lives. It was extremely successful because power opened the way for the purchase of labor saving

household appliances, one of the key segments of our economy.

There was, however, an added and politically very powerful side effect. The time saved by household appliances could be used at home to be entertained and informed by the medium of radio. FDR, in his “fireside chats”, could talk to everyone in the country at the same time about any topic of his choice. The first political step of the mass media age was one of cohesion – of tying the nation more closely together and more closely to its government. This, of course, would change, as technology and communication altered the political uses to which money and power are applied in our society.

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OUR POLITICAL DNA

It was inevitable that the spirit and circumstances of our national birth would not last, as innocence is a moment found and lost almost simultaneously. As our country grew and became richer, so also did the government, and it became a target for demands upon its resources by both the public and its elected representatives in the congress.

For the first century and a quarter of our existence, with the exception of our Civil War, we were an outwardly focused nation bent on expanding the settlement of our territory and closing the frontier. This was finally accomplished by the admission of Arizona, the last of the 48 contiguous states, to the Union in 1912.

In our creation of states from our western expansion the benefits of federal support and funding opportunities were not lost upon the territorial governments seeking admission, and, as with the closing of the frontier we were no longer adding to the “pie”, competition to consume it grew more intense.

By mid-point in the twentieth century we had experienced two world wars, a stock market crash and a major global economic depression which encouraged citizens to see and experience their government as a provider and to be supported in this view by their elected representatives and by the new mass media, both broadcast and print.

In a way, the flow of energy, thought and direction from the combining colonies of the late eighteenth century had been gradually reversed. In the process members of congress had been transformed from spokesmen expressing their opinions to representatives attempting to persuade in favor of a variety of constituencies, often lacking any common interest other than their shared political sponsorship.

“...the vast, multi-product, multi-market, single source supplier, media conglomerates...”

We emerged from WWII as the only major economy in the world undamaged by war. Wartime restrictions disappeared. Service personnel returned to marry, have children and go to college via the GI Bill. Combat technology was transformed for the civilian market and a process of private ownership consolidation mixed with technology advances and corporate mergers was begun that would lead to the formation of the vast, multi-product, multi-market, single source supplier, media conglomerates that have the power to determine what the public reads, listens to, watches and purchases.

The wealth we have created is almost unimaginable in size. It is not easy to come to terms with the reality of dollar figures such as a billion (being 1,000 times a million) or a trillion (1,000 times a billion). Yet these are amounts that our elected representatives, without any experience prior to their entering politics, are entrusted to administer on a daily basis.

The result has been that, for the most part, the Congress views this cornucopia as a personal fiefdom which it can direct to any purpose(s) it may choose, including highly specific local projects that benefit only small areas or, even worse, individuals or small groups of investors/owners. Naturally, in order to facilitate the members of Congress in this difficult process, another level of persuasion and compensation, the professional lobbyist, has been inserted into our government procedure. Lobbyists, of course, are paid by a variety of constituencies (local, national and international) to see that their interests and congressional voting records are in proper alignment.

We have arrived at what is seemingly the most impenetrable, resistant and serious paradox of American democracy as it has developed over the past two centuries and exists today:

Congress is a federal body whose members are paid by the federal government. They come to Washington, the seat of the federal government, to conduct their business and to discharge their responsibilities by passing legislation necessary or desirable to defend and protect the general public. That is a pretty uncomplicated loyalty flow chart. But in reality? It would be impossible to argue that our system works that way. While it's bad enough that wealth from one source or another has become the prime determinant of much of our legislation, the more damaging effect is that it has turned around the thinking and the loyalty of our elected representatives so that they follow rather than lead.

It is a rare piece of legislation today that is crafted purely in terms of the national interest and an even rarer one that would gain broad congressional approval. And in the end, the new parochialism of wealth in the Congress is more limiting and dangerous than the old parochialism of geography.

DNA determines what we are, who we are and how we will function in our environment. All this is accomplished by the DNA in every cell in our bodies which, as a double helix composed of 2 entwined strands of encoded tissue, carries instructions from age to age.

In twenty-first century America the two entwined strands of our political DNA are wealth and power. They not only form the system, but they decree how it will work. Considering the amount of money involved, that's "awesome".

We have nothing against wealth and power per se. Their true values seem to us to be defined by how they are obtained and used, whether for public or private purpose. Twenty billion dollars entrusted to Enron, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation or a congressional committee would, we suspect, produce somewhat different spending results even if they were all given the same general instructions, as corporate, private and government interest seem to follow lines of magnetic resistance.

Today anyone considering running for a seat in the US Senate is advised by party officials to have a campaign fund of at least \$5 million. This applies to a state of average size. For the more populous states, where media buys are more expensive, this amount would have to be increased. No seat has ever gone begging for the lack of a candidate.

Members of the Congress are well compensated. They receive a six-figure salary which automatically increases every year, numerous perks, free office space, generous staff allowances and medical/dental/retirement plans that the private sector cannot match. All of this is provided by the federal government.

And yet the Congress has developed a mind-set and an appetite that consistently calls for more — more from large corporations, more from local interests at home, more from lobbyists and more from voters in their own districts and elsewhere who are inundated with messages from a variety of sources delivered through the miracle of our mass media — broadcast, print, direct mail and telephone marketing.

At some point it might be expected that our elected representatives might pause in their pursuits and say, "Wait a minute; this is all very pleasant, but whom do I work for?" A moment of such personal and political introspection is not apt to occur and, if it did, the most likely response would be to wait until it passed, or to say "the people".

But "the people" have been transformed into a small number who provide the most significant financial support. As the flow of money through government increases and becomes more expensive, its circle and cycle shrink, with more wealth and power being concentrated in fewer hands. This is a trend that has been observed both within government and in the corporate world during the last few decades of large and frequent mergers/consolidations.

We have arrived at one of the key points where paradox and paralysis are joined. We have two factors that should point to record breaking voter turn-out. There are increasingly large sums of money being spent on political persuasion, and communications technology has advanced so that there are techniques, facilities and opportunities available that were unknown as recently as five or ten years ago. And these new capabilities are not expensive. In fact, in our mass marketing age the marketing of politics, by extending its reach and lowering costs, has achieved an increase in per capita cost efficiency that might be equal, if not superior to, any other market sector.

Rather sadly, the immense power of the money, technology and effort applied to political marketing has not increased voter turn-out which has shown a steady decline in recent decades. This can only reflect a growing disillusion among voters which, if it is not remedied, will inject a highly negative, and possibly permanent, cynicism into our political system. We are very much on the edge in this, and may even have crossed the line. We can only contemplate it with sorrow and a sense of real loss when we think back to the unified idealism and purpose of our country's founders.

There is more than enough paradox in the system to call attention to its need of repair. What we have wrought seems to be a recycling system in which money buys votes and diminishes access to government for those without it. It concentrates wealth and power in fewer places and creates disillusion. The latter reduces voter turn-out which further reduces public interest and access and, most importantly, creates a government of incumbency. And, as this is where we started, we have come full circle.

None of these elements by themselves and in appropriate measure are a threat to our form of government or way of life, but in combination and without any corrective force at the center of government they can become political poison.

"... the chances for internal reform appear to be slim and none."

Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to expect any effective reform effort to come from either of the three branches, especially the legislative. That leaves only the individual consciences of our elected representatives to publicly identify the problem and issue a call to action against it. Considering that the House Ethics Committee has never censured any member, in spite of exposure of outrageous conflicts of interest, rules violations and financial irregularities, the chances for internal reform appear to be slim and none.

Here is another absolutely delicious paradox that now seems firmly entrenched in our age of incumbency. The media prattles on about how polarized voters are

at all positions along the political spectrum from far left to far right and that both parties are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to woo these voters. The truth, however, is that most of these voters will not change their vote and cross party lines. In the Congress we know that only 10% of those elected will not be incumbents. In a presidential election, no matter how close, the effect of the electoral college system permits a somewhat broader range, say from 10% to 20%, of voters to constitute the “swing vote” the results of which will probably be determined in about a quarter of our fifty states.

And here’s the zinger! As we noted previously, improvements in mass marketing technology and methods have enabled marketers to reach more people per dollar spent (a bigger bang for their buck), thereby lowering their per capita cost. But as the population of swing voters may be only 15% of the total, the hundreds of millions of dollars is being effectively directed towards a much smaller number which drastically increases the real per capita cost.

Both parties and their candidates must pretend that every vote in every state is equal. It’s a nice thought, but it’s not true. If it were, we wouldn’t have an incumbent reelection rate near 90%.

We have allowed our system to become infected with greed for money and power and sluggish from excess. While we proclaim ourselves as the world’s greatest democracy, the truth is that we carry within our system a self-inflicted vascular illness which could have debilitating future effects at home and abroad. If biology is destiny, we need to change our DNA, and for this we will need an informed and aroused *vox populi*.

In our present state we feel that the Liberty Bell has another crack, a page has been torn from the Constitution, there’s a stain on the Declaration of Independence, and a questioning gaze in the eyes of the Statue of Liberty. As more wealth is directed to the political process and structure, the cycle in which it moves grows smaller and stronger and the twin strands in our political DNA entwine themselves every more tightly.

We probably need a combination of Paul Revere and Diogenes, but, lacking that, a growing number of concerned citizens asking tough questions and demanding right answers is the next best thing.

In our two century passage from resistant colony to sole superpower America and Americans have met internal and external challenges in a variety of ways, but usually with a strong measure of fairness. We have witnessed the transformation of both major parties to an excessive dependence on hype and hoopla, and they are poor substitutes. We need to reclaim our ideals, as well as our government. In all honesty, this will not be easy. The *vox populi* must be aroused, gathered and concentrated by a quality of leadership that has appeared at only a few times in our history.

Congress has found ways to exempt itself from its

own laws and is skilled at legislating through and around challenges to its power. Much of this power, both personal and political, is lodged in the committees and their chairmanships and fosters the “go along to get along” process of incumbent government.

The voice of the people, while it may be heard throughout the land, can undergo serious muting on Capitol Hill. It may well be too much for us to expect that our national voice can reclaim our lost integrity, but it could open eyes, stir hearts and stimulate minds. And that would be a good beginning.

* * *

OUR CONTRACT WITH GOVERNMENT

It used to be said that a “social contract” existed between government and citizens under which, in return for the payment of taxes, government would provide for the common defense and other basic services and support when necessary.

Over time, our government’s role, wealth and power have been so greatly expanded that its contract should be considered a “public contract” to reflect its broad range of social, economic and political obligations.

Unless government recognizes that it must meet this broader responsibility ethically, fairly and efficiently its powers will not live up to its principles, it will fail in its responsibilities and will invite resistance and divisiveness. Such a process would only increase its paralysis.

In our government system there is a greater probability that individual or local interests will be served than national ones. This is because politicians find it more difficult to coalesce around national issues and be heard. They lack unity and efficiency.

Local interests approach and petition our national government because they seek results that will help them—not everyone else. Congress hears the louder voice of the smaller number and accedes, usually with a quid pro quo. This process is purified by labeling it “representation”.

Due to the current prevalence of paid access and legislation, the Congress should establish a filtering capability that could rank issues before it in terms of their national importance and set its agenda accordingly. Such a ranking process could be used to eliminate the persistent parade of pork projects which clutter up much of our legislation and add billions of dollars for local expense to our national budget. It may even be that the committee system was put in place with this at least partially intended. If so, it has failed. This would require integrity, objectivity and a view of the common good not associated with the Congress at this time in our history.

* * *

CONCLUSIONS

America's rise from colony to colossus in a little over two hundred years is an historic event without precedent in that it now occupies a position of military and economic power unchallenged throughout the world. In the course of this transition it amassed tremendous wealth and created an exceptionally high standard of living.

We believe, however, that our principles and process of government suffered during this journey and were overwhelmed by the prizes of power and wealth.

With regard to process, government has extended itself into areas never contemplated by our founders. This is often necessary to maintain historical progress, but we have often done so for the wrong reasons (i.e. to cater to certain interests and/or voter blocs). The result is faulty legislation that is unfair, difficult, if not impossible, to enforce and subject to massive evasion and/or fraud in its implementation (i.e. current US immigration, tax and Medicare law).

Legislation produces programs, programs produce bureaucracies and bureaucracies produce power bases and interests which can differ substantially from, and even oppose, the original legislative intent. They become a relatively inflexible part of government and tend to extend the paralysis in the legislative branch to the actual administration of programs. In effect these government departments and programs have become institutions provided with the enormous power of translating and applying congressional purpose to the public.

“... both major parties pursue the ‘please all, and offend none’ line.”

The erosion of principle in government is somewhat different, as any consideration of principle requires a personal introspection as to what is right and how its pursuit should be achieved. Such moments, and the values they produce, were not uncommon to our founders as a result of their colonial experience. They are in short supply in twenty-first century American politics where both major parties try to follow, as best they can, the “please all and offend none” line.

For example, as we write, it has been announced that the Bush and Kerry campaigns through the Commission on Presidential Debates have requested the moderators to sign a 32-page agreement as to their content and conduct.⁹ We have come a long and sorry way from Lincoln/Douglass. Any real debate only requires agreement on 3 things – time, place and that the participants will answer any question from any source. But spin is in and, with 32 pages of restrictions, there should be plenty of “soft lob” questions and answers.

And again we are faced with paradox and paralysis.

The paradox is that, as technology enables us to broadcast our electoral campaign and democratic process instantly to all parts of the world, our two parties are intensely engaged in a joint effort to limit the message. And this type of control prevents the voter from being as fully informed as he/she might be. The lesson could not be more clear – restrict the message to banal and general topics, reduce voter choice and, although one presidential candidate must fail, achieve reelection for the great majority of the Congress.

It is difficult to even suggest how our country might go about ridding itself of these twin evils – paralysis and paradox, as there are always arguments for both sides. Take, for instance, the paradox of our being the world's wealthiest economy and at the same time the world's largest debtor. It would seem to be an impossible position to argue and, yet, it finds ready support in our executive and legislative branches.

It would require a truly mammoth effort, like turning a supertanker, to move our government's power structure and practice away from its reliance on incumbency, but this appears most unlikely. We do not see a leader with the necessary energy, integrity, intelligence, charisma and purpose emerging from our present system. Nor do we think that the public or the Congress would be able to change the lenses through which they view our government and come to a new (but really a former) ethical perspective.

We know there will be change. We cannot know how or in what form it will occur, but can only hope that our system will find the heart and the way to correct itself before decadence sets in and history applies its own unarguable remedy.

POSTSCRIPTS:

IRAQ

Our situation in Iraq seems to continue to deteriorate with persistent violence and loss of life for our troops and Iraqi citizens.

To come to any degree of clarity in this matter we must recognize that by removing Saddam Hussein we created a power vacuum — and not just for political power, but also for religious and economic forces. There could be no genuine surprise that various constituencies would rush in to occupy the vacated space and would fight fiercely for the right to exercise their power and faith in a way that would both dominate the period of interim government and then assure their survival after elections as key, if not the key, players in the drama of Iraq's future.

This struggle is and will continue to be a hard-ball

game with national and regional results and, beyond them, international implications. Nothing will be held back by the local elements who are involved. Death, torture and maiming of citizens and soldiers alike have become commonplace, and are justified by anger at our presence and by claimed religious authority.

The question that begs a legitimate American answer is, “Having removed Saddam Hussein, with what did we propose to fill the vacuum created by his departure? Was it that we were American, democratic and good guys?” The probability of our being perceived that way during an invasion/occupation was very low and could only go lower as we entered into combat with local forces to fill the vacuum and exercise control.

Our first effort, then, at creating the kind of occupational role we wanted has failed, and we are not likely to have a second chance. This suggests that fighting between all parties will continue as long as we are there. Lulls or truces may occur from time to time, but are unlikely to bring about a permanent peace and power structure.

In contemplating our position in Iraq it appears that while we were able to choose the time to commence hostilities, we will almost certainly not have the same opportunity to terminate them. In effect, we opened Pandora’s Box.

For even when we withdraw our troops, the vacuum will be reformed with one less strong force and thereby provide the perfect scene for renewed local struggle. Consider a tank containing four fish — one large and three smaller. In the presence of the large fish the other three are almost entirely occupied by defensive measure to avoid being consumed by their larger and stronger neighbor, but, when you remove the threat of the dominant one, the remaining three, now seeing themselves on equal terms, engage in determined survival competition which will continue until only one remains.

In Iraq our departure would be likely to bring about increased local conflict—which could, and probably would, expand in time and place to civil war. We doubt that Iraq could summon the internal strength to survive such a development.

And yet an even worse fate may lie ahead. After the years of violence brought about by, first, Saddam Hussein and then our military presence, the Iraqi nation, upon our departure, might expect relief and welcome a new and eerie stillness. But, if it listens carefully, it might soon pick up the sounds of its neighbors knives being loosened in their scabbards.

In looking ahead in Iraq we may actually set back the political clock by a century. There is now and has been for the past year much campaign rhetoric about how and when we leave Iraq, and the thrust of this discussion has been that the circumstance and timing of our departure will be a major determinant of the success or failure of our effort there. As both candidates

avoid an outright and prompt removal of our forces, the effect of such an act can be assumed to take place at some point in the further, rather than nearer, future.

Another perspective, which we favor, is that the harshest reality and greatest effect of our incursion has been the political destabilization which has already occurred and looks capable of continuing, in greater or lesser degree, for an extended time over which we will have no control once we depart.

There are undoubtedly many patient and peaceful Iraqis who support their country’s transformation to a representative democratic form of government, but peace and patience have not been the hallmarks of Middle Eastern transfers of power. Indeed, what may appear to be patience from our perspective may actually be resignation to the recurring cycle of violence, corruption and injustice.

“...the more we inject ourselves in order to accomplish our goal, the more we imperil that same goal.”

Currently, the interim government is attempting to hold elections in January ’05. This, in itself, were they to be conducted peacefully and fairly, would be an enormous achievement. We suspect that the interim government will not survive this process into the next government due to the difficulty of the role it was assigned and its necessary ties to the US. Our role, both now and after any elections, is complicated by the fact that the more we inject ourselves in order to accomplish our goal, the more we imperil that same goal.

It has been apparent in our own and others’ development of democratic government that its time of genesis is a precarious one marked by intensely emotional opposition among a variety of interests during which the political structure is weak and not yet clearly formed. Our own success at this delicate stage of our existence was due in no small measure to our physical isolation and protection from further European interference by two oceans and an unexplored continent.

Our advocacy in Iraq has opened the way for widespread civil conflict there that has challenged the old lines of political and religious authority and will make government by competing factions, even if they can embrace compromise, a very tenuous task. So much for the internals; destabilization has already occurred.

For the external threat and how it might play out we have only to look at the map. On Iraq’s eastern border is its long time enemy, Iran, with wealth, a growing young and restless population, access to the sea, advanced technology and old scores to settle—strong motivation to attempt a territorial expansion into a weakened neighbor.

On Iraq’s western border lie Jordan and Syria. The former, because of its ties (to US) and size would attempt

to stay clear of any conflict, but there can be no such illusion about Syria. Given a move by Iran that would redraw any of the region's borders, Syria would almost surely see an opportunity to also lay and pursue a territorial claim against its eastern neighbor.

To the north, Iraq's border is shared by Turkey and Iran. Northern Iraq is home to the Kurds who have been able to maintain their identity as a semi-autonomous regional entity in spite of attacks on them by Saddam Hussein and Turkey. They are hardy people, but, if a weakened Iraq came up for grabs and they were caught between Turkey's hammer and Iran's anvil, they might not be able to survive.

Bear in mind that that part of Iraq's border above the 35th parallel is pretty much equally divided between Syria, Turkey and Iran, and that it contains the oil centers of Mosul, Erbil and Kirkuk. Any quick, or even unplanned, movement could initiate hostilities after which neither neighbor would want to be left behind.

Also to be considered is that the Tigris River runs from Turkey south through Northern Iraq and that the Euphrates also rises in Turkey, crosses Syria and then enters Iraq slightly below the 35th parallel. The importance of these two great river systems in the Iraqi political/economic equation is no less than that of oil.

Iraq is almost totally bordered by Saudi Arabia to its south except for Kuwait at the eastern end. In the event of an outbreak of hostilities by the northern neighbors, Saudi Arabia might opt for non-involvement, but, looking to the future, might conclude that its interests would best be served by some additional territory, especially of the oil bearing type. In such a circumstance, it might, alone or in combination with Kuwait, establish a "protectorate zone" in Southern Iraq to prevent the destruction or disruption of oil production there.

So there it is — the possibility of a destabilized Iraq being too tempting to its neighbors and, by accident or incident, providing the excuse for hostilities which, once commenced, turn the clock back to post-WWI, the break-up of the Ottoman empire and the great powers of Europe creating Iraq by drawing lines on a map. It's hard to see how the UN could do any better, or any worse, than the League of Nations in such a position and the situation is further clouded by loss of moral leadership by both the UN (Oil for Food scandal) and the US (invasion, Abu Ghraib abuse).

But perhaps this is even too mild a scenario. There is a much darker and more dangerous possibility that must be considered. The political and economic chaos and disruption caused by military incursions from one or more of its neighbors would create a new power vacuum in Iraq. Such a circumstance could provide the background from which a charismatic, and perhaps young and extreme, Islamic leader might emerge with a message that would move Muslims throughout the region towards a moment of historical unity. This unity

could easily find support from militant Muslims within the moderate governments and bring about their collapse or transformation.

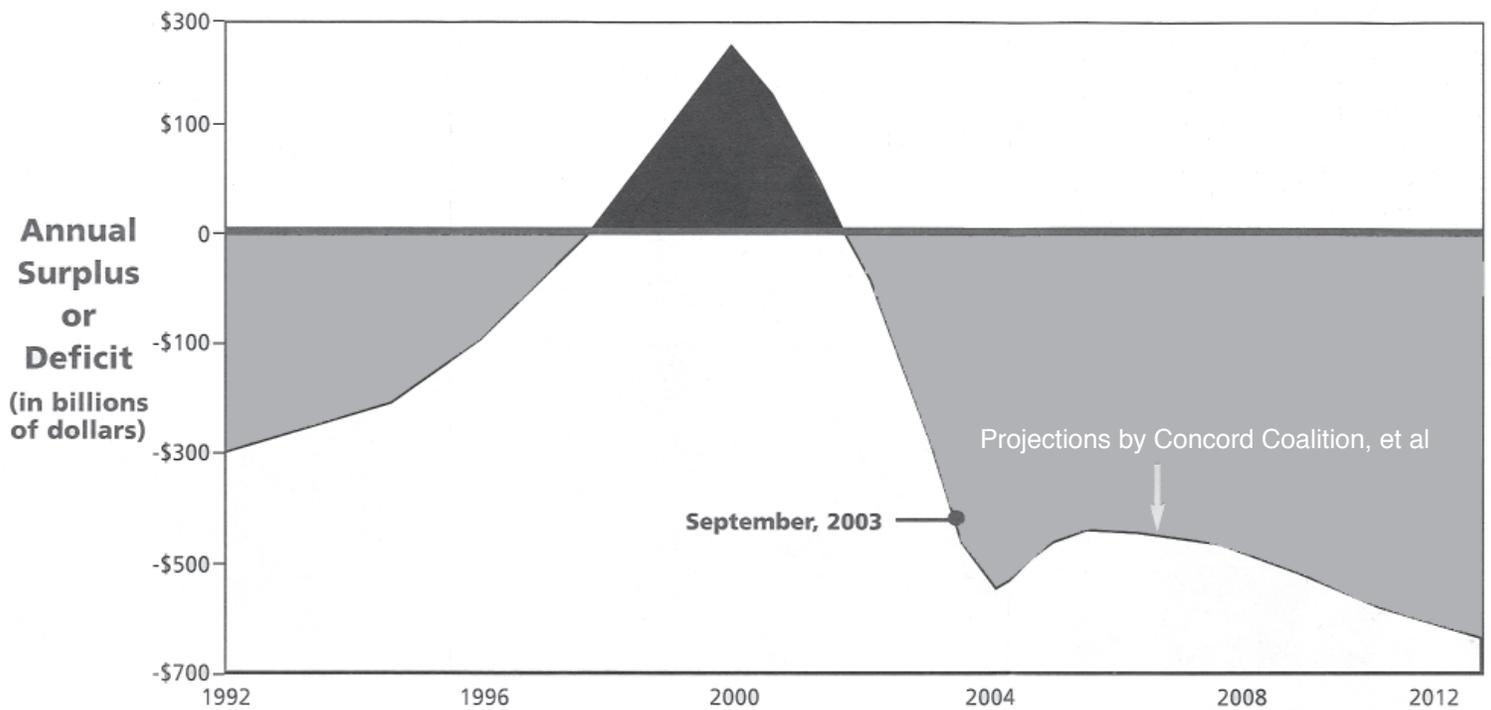
Should such a coalescence occur, it is difficult to see how any restrictive force could be applied to it. Certainly, the UN could not muster what would be viewed as an anti-muslim response; and no leader in the US or Europe would find it politically viable to call for a second intervention in Iraq. In the event that a second call to arms in Iraq were issued, it is unlikely there would be any takers.

Any movement towards aroused Muslim unity would have repercussions from Gibraltar to Indonesia. Most importantly, the majority of the world's oil supply would be in Muslim hands, thereby enabling the Muslim world to engage in economic and political, as well as spiritual, jihad. Any consolidation of the control of mid-eastern oil production by Muslim extremists would push the US into new relationships with those countries where we might find replacement sources— most notably Russia, Mexico and Venezuela. Our urgent need for oil would drastically alter the balance of power in these relationships in ways that would have far reaching political, economic and social consequences.

***"... democracy imposed is
democracy betrayed"***

Always to be remembered is the element of chance. A planned aggression is not necessary to start hostilities in the mid-east tinder box. The gunfire of a nervous soldier at an unfamiliar sound in the night, a patrol unknowingly violating contested space, even an unfounded rumor of military action—all can cause the spark and perhaps the start of an expanding regional conflict with serious international consequences. We do not believe that our status as sole superpower calls for our imposing our flag, faith and form of government on others. We do not have to exercise all the powers that we possess, and we believe that democracy imposed is democracy betrayed.

Our actions in Iraq have gone beyond its borders and have resulted in increased violence from Muslims throughout the world, but we should recognize strategically that all Muslims are not the same. If, indeed, we wish to convey our political truth and proof to Islam, we would be well served to do so in countries such as Turkey, Indonesia and, perhaps, even Iran where a fast-growing, young and educated population is pushing for political and cultural change. These societies have found ways to include more liberal western elements in their development and might find our model for new Muslim democracies to offer some benefits. Even the hint of such accommodation is unlikely in countries such as



Source: *The Concord Coalition, 1011 Arlington Blvd., Suite 300. Arlington, VA 22209*

Here's another perspective. In just the few years since 2000, the following increases in debtor events have taken place:¹⁵

- a) Credit card failures (being unable to make the minimum required payment) are up 55%;
- b) Mortgage foreclosures are up 45%;
- c) Bankruptcies are up 33%.

There can be no doubt that the US has become the world's most powerful and magnificent economic machine. In the two generations since WWII it has consistently improved old technologies and brought forth new ones, and in doing so has created enormous wealth. But machines are made of many parts that must function smoothly and in unison. The larger and more complex the machine, the more important it becomes that its individual parts do not malfunction.

Our planet operates under the laws of the natural sciences such as physics, astronomy and chemistry. The equations that express these laws are very precise. Economics, on the other hand, is largely a man-made science. You could say it is an unnatural science. It attempts to measure, align and interpret myriad human actions and desires and to create from them a predictable whole.

The computer has perhaps proved to be the greatest aid to economics since the development of currency replaced the barter system, providing improved statistical reach and reliability. And yet, its forecasts can turn out to be woefully off the mark. Example: in only a few years the government's prediction of US budgetary results has changed from extended surpluses to the prolonged deficits in the above chart.

Deficits are IOUs without a due date, and they have negative consequences if they are incurred in excessive amounts or in a disorderly way that lacks reference to any time, ability or method of repayment. A considerable amount of our national debt falls in this category of concern.

In Washington it may seem feasible to continue to add large deficits to our debt. But, is it realistic? We live with a law of

limits and even our elected representatives must face them. We have transformed ourselves from a creditor to a debtor nation and the global perception of this shift and how we conduct ourselves can change quickly and quietly. Any such change would, of course, be reflected in financial markets and in future dealings with government and financial institutions around the world.

Perception is important in economics. We do not have to actually play the fool, but, if others see us that way, the result can, unfortunately, be the same.

END NOTES

¹ Common Cause – Election Reform: Rebuilding Trust in Government. “In the year 2000, just 51% of eligible Americans cast votes for President and even fewer ... for the House and Senate.”

² Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems*. 1953

³ Now With Bill Moyers – PBS – 8/27/04; Chuck Lewis, Exec. Dir.; Center for Public Integrity

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Election Assistance Commission, 1225 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 2005

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Jonah Goldberg, Editor-at-large, *National Review*. 12/03

⁹ *New York Times* – 9/22/04

¹⁰ Concord Coalition – 11/03

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ *Palm Beach Post* - 5/19/04

¹⁴ Concord Coalition - 11/03

¹⁵ NOW with Bill Moyers - PBS - 6/25/04; Elizabeth Warren

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