

The Proxy Solution

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A Quick Note

As I have tried to share the ideas in this book with others, there have been some who have told me that one of my initial assumptions is flawed – the United States is not a democracy, it is a republic. I believe they are half right.

I think the following definition from Merriam-Webster.com fits our government quite well.

Republic - a government in which supreme power resides in a body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives responsible to them and governing according to law.

But I also believe the definition below fits too.

Democracy - a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.

Could it be that our republic is also a democracy in the same way a Volkswagen Beetle is also a car? Perhaps muscle car enthusiasts are laughing to themselves, but you get the point. I am not saying that all republics must be democracies, but I am saying that ours is. In other words, when I go to the polls each November, my vote should mean something. It should mean that I have made a decision about how my town, my state, or my country should operate, and somehow that decision should be considered as these governments move forward.

So, as I write about fixing our democracy, I could just as easily write about fixing our republic. In either case, the words are designed to find a way in which the people of this nation can be adequately represented in Congress. This is where the brokenness of government seems most obvious, and most sinister. Are there really those who

would argue that the people of this nation should not be represented in government?

And speaking of representatives, this book uses the word representative in a few different ways so it seems important to clarify its use.

When using representative in the generic sense, as in one who stands for others, the word will be written in lowercase(representative).

When using representative in a slightly less generic sense, in reference to Senators and Members of the House of Representatives together, otherwise known as Congressmen, the word will also be written in lowercase(representative).

When using representative in a specific sense, to describe Members of the House of Representatives, the first letter will be capitalized(Representative).

When representative is used at the beginning of a sentence, hopefully the meaning will be clear.

Preface

October 5, 2006. That's the day I had my Doc Brown moment. It's true that my moment might not be as significant as inventing the flux capacitor, but perhaps it might be enough to strengthen the diluted version of democracy found here in these United States.

For those not well versed in '80s movie trivia, November 5, 1955 was when Doctor Emmett Brown slipped and hit his head on the bathroom sink. It was at that moment the good doctor came up with the idea for the flux capacitor which would make time travel possible, and *Back to the Future* a box office sensation. Sure, it's all fiction, but sometimes life imitates fiction.

In October 2006 I had already spent close to a year thinking and writing about American democracy. It's true nobody was listening, but I continued to set my mind's spare cycles to the task of finding a cure for an ailing system. I, like most others, could easily point out the symptoms of a diseased government. I could even put my finger on what I believed to be the cause of the sickness – a lack of accountability. What I could not do was find a cure for the disease. No one could. Democrats pointed one way, Republicans another, but the disease continued to grow.

On that fall day, as I was laying out a shower pan and wondering if all good ideas materialize in the bathroom, everything seemed to come into focus. The cure was obvious. Why hadn't someone thought of it sooner? I had long believed that any fix to our nation's problem would be simple and straightforward – common sense. I was convinced I had found a practical solution to a problem that has plagued our nation for decades, if not centuries.

How one with no serious political training or ambition sets out to write a book to cure what ails our government I cannot say for sure. Back in the late '70s, while in high school, I was oblivious to what our government was doing. I knew Nixon lied, and I also knew I would not have to worry about being drafted because the Vietnam War was over. Outside of that, most of what I knew about American politics was learned from *Saturday Night Live* skits.

College was different. Far more focused on my studies, but still with plenty of free time, I started to form the opinion that I should care about who ran the country. All those lectures in Mr. D's history class about the importance of living in a democracy were beginning to stick. But as I look back now, I am surprised how much I trusted the words of those seeking office. Naïve perhaps, but I, like most, wanted to believe.

The next phase of life revolved around being married with young children. There wasn't much time to worry about politics while I was busy trying to keep my head above water. It did afford me the time to experience first hand what it means to struggle, and how important it is for government to keep from placing unnecessary hurdles between people and the success they hope to achieve.

I now find myself in a different place. The kids are older and heading off to college. Although I am still far from being financially secure, the financial stresses seem much less severe. I now find more time to be concerned about the country my kids will inherit, and have grown far more cynical about the men and women we have chosen to find workable solutions to real world problems, to lead us to a better place.

Our country feels broken to me now, and although our leaders still demand pay raises, it seems like things are getting harder for the lower and middle class. The country

is quietly crying out for a solution, and History will demand one, or the United States will join the parade of once great nations.

It is here that I expose my greatest strength or weakness. Locked into the mindset of an engineer who might seek a better circuit or a stronger I-Beam, at my core I believe there is a fix to this broken system we call government. But this solution is amazingly elusive, for it must be able to impact our government in a profound way, yet simultaneously avoid being too demanding for the ordinary citizen. It must also provide hope – a belief that things can, and will, change for the better.

The following pages will do more than simply discuss some of the problems our nation faces, and the ills present in a government which does little to deter our downward spiral. This book will attempt to provide a clear picture of what we, the People, can do to take control of our democratic government in a way that has never been attempted before. This is a book about a revolutionary solution to a well understood problem. A cure to a disease.

If It's Broke, We'd Better Fix It

Does anyone remember their elementary school science class? We learned about the stars and planets, conducted a handful of experiments with electricity, and learned about photosynthesis. Think back and you may even remember spending a few hours in the study of simple machines. Simple machines are the building blocks of all machines – the component parts of the complex machinery we see around us every day. Pulleys, levers, wheels, screws, wedges, and inclined planes make up the toolbox of low level parts from which machine designers can choose.

One of the benefits of simple machines is that they are exactly what their name implies – simple. Because of this it becomes an easy task to determine if a simple machine is working properly. If one pulls the rope riding atop a pulley and the rope does not move, we can easily deduce that the pulley is broken. If a screw does not bite when turned into a piece of wood it is obvious the screw is damaged, or being turned in the wrong direction. Simple machines. Simple analysis. Simple answers.

As machines become more complex they are comprised of several to many simple machines. In this case the dependencies and interactions between components increase. Problems can be much harder to diagnose because each simple machine could potentially affect the behavior of another. Consider a modern automobile engine, made even more complex by the addition of electronic control and feedback systems. Pistons. Bearings. Camshaft. Fuel injectors. Without a specialized computer to diagnose issues, most mechanics would be hard pressed to solve many of the problems they face. Some repairs are not even attempted by general mechanics as they farm out specialized work, such as transmission

repairs, to others. Perhaps the machine has become too complex.

Governments can become too complex also.

Here in the United States, we live under a government that was established in the 1780s, which makes it one of the oldest living governments on earth. Although at the time it was considered brilliantly complex, due to its system of checks and balances, the earliest version of the U.S. government must be considered quite simple by today's standards. There was no IRS, no EPA, no FBI, no DOE, not even a DOT. Social Security had not been thought of and the federal government was not responsible for occupational safety. Things have certainly changed.

It might now be possible to fill the better part of this page with the acronyms for departments and agencies directly or indirectly controlled by the federal government. The number of federal workers, excluding postal employees, is more than two million. This government of ours is a very complex system.

With such complexity in place, how can we hope to determine the overall health of the system? How can we say with certainty whether the system does or does not work?

When scientists want to determine what happens when baking soda is added to vinegar, they conduct experiments. This can be thought of as experimental science. When scientists want to know what happens when a star explodes they must rely on a completely different discipline known as observational science. This discipline can be used to gain an understanding of massively complex systems, such as economic, political, and environmental systems. Its conclusions are seldom reached with the same certainty as those drawn from reproducible experiments, but through time and repeated observations the continually refined

hypothesis can usually draw much closer to fact than fiction.

An Experiment in Democracy

Let us try to rely on observational science to determine if our government is truly democratic in nature. In other words, is the United States ruled by the people, or by some other political force not so clearly outlined in the Constitution? Our first step will be to define a hypothesis, which will ideally be confirmed or refuted by our observations. Staying with the theme of this chapter, and arguing from the negative, we can state our hypothesis as follows:

U.S. democracy is broken because it does not create laws and policies based on the wills and desires of the majority of its 300 million people.

Now comes the tricky part. We must find a way to observe our political system over the past several years and decades to determine if our hypothesis is correct. As observational scientists, we must look for the inputs and outputs to this system to see if they validate our initial assumption.

Sadly, most of these inputs can be blurred by sophisticated media coverage designed more to preach a specific doctrine, liberal or conservative, than to present the facts. Hopefully we can do better than that. We must try to remove the emotion from the inputs, investigate both sides carefully, make a best guess about what our nation really desires, and determine if our government bends in that direction. Here we go.

Issue 1 - Budget Deficit and National Debt

A budget surplus is reached when an organization earns more money than it spends. A budget deficit exists when an organization spends more than it earns, and this appears to be the norm for our federal government. When this happens, the shortfall must be met by borrowing money, and because of this the national debt continues to grow.

As the national debt hovered near the 2 trillion dollar mark, a cry rang out across the country that a crisis point had been reached. That was more than twenty years ago. For anyone paying attention, this debt has increased by more than a factor of five since then. It now sits near 12 trillion dollars, which amounts to almost \$40,000 for every man, woman and child in our country. This is a major force working against the health of our economy.

How many of us, in our business or personal lives, would consider spending more than we earn? To spend beyond one's means is a foolhardy practice that will lead to financial ruin. This is perhaps the simplest of economic principles. As we watched the current economic crisis unfold, there were many deep in debt that were forced to declare bankruptcy. I doubt many citizens would recommend this as a prudent strategy for the future of our country.

It would seem clear that the will of the American people is to avoid sinking deeper into debt. In fact, a number of polls have suggested that the majority of Americans favor a constitutional amendment to force our government to balance the budget each year. Can we safely say that the first input into our experiment is that the majority of U.S. citizens favor a balanced budget?

Unfortunately, the reality is far from the desires of the people governed. For 36 of the last 40 years, the amount of money spent by our government has exceeded the amount collected through taxes and other revenue sources. Congress has found countless reasons to show less fiscal responsibility than an eight year old might with his allowance. Can we conclude that this issue strongly supports our hypothesis?

Issue 2 - Social Security

During the Social Security System's lifetime, there have already been more than ten years in which it failed to bring

in more money than it paid out in benefits. Back in the 1980s, its demise seemed imminent, and a correction had to be made to keep it from dying an untimely death. Many economists agree that unless a further correction is made, the system will eventually grind to a halt. What they don't agree upon is when that will occur. Former President George W. Bush liked to talk about 2018 as the beginning of the end, but others feel the system could last until 2052. If the system is to fail, some Americans will face the grim prospect of having paid into a system that gives nothing back.

Determining the inputs for this issue seems less clear than in the previous case. There is much debate as to what will fix the system. Some Americans favor Social Security the way it is – just leave it alone. Others would prefer to see the money invested more like a 401k, where it might bring a higher return. Still others would prefer that Social Security fade away so they can take greater control of their own retirement options.

As the G. W. Bush White House pushed for privatization of Social Security, the American people pushed back. On the heels of major corporate scandals, American citizens were up in arms at the prospect of handing over their Social Security accounts to the same wizards who failed to predict the stock market collapse of 2001. They knew that if the retirement plans of Enron employees could vaporize, then maybe their Social Security could disappear as well.

Amazingly, Congress listened and President Bush's privatization plan was stopped dead in its tracks. We were left feeling we had achieved a partial victory, because nothing grew more desperate. Is this how bad things have become? When faced with a major challenge, we can actually feel content when our government spins its wheels. Is this indicative of a well functioning government? Perhaps it would be best not to score this issue, as it fails to support or refute our hypothesis.

Issue 3 - US Trade Deficit

Make no mistake about it, the US economy is the largest in the world. But that may change soon. Compared to most of the world, we have well compensated workers in our economy. Because of this, goods manufactured in other nations are typically less expensive than those manufactured here at home. Less expensive goods tend to be in high demand, and so our nation finds itself purchasing far more goods from foreign markets than we can sell to them.

It all sounds so cut-and-dried when read from an economics textbook, but when the inability to sell goods produced at home causes the loss of jobs, emotions can rise very quickly. Viewed from a distance, the net effect of this imbalance can be thought of as exporting a small piece of our economy to other nations each year.

The U.S. last had a trade surplus in 1975. Now, more than thirty years later, the trade deficit had grown to almost 750 billion dollars before dropping below the 700 billion mark due to a slowing economy. We imported roughly three-quarters of a trillion dollars more than we exported in twelve short months. That would be a disastrous way to run a business, and it seems every bit as dangerous for the health of a nation's economy. That number amounts to almost \$2500 for every person in the United States during a single year. Do we manufacture anything in the United States anymore?

Lake Okeechobee is a massive lake in Southern Florida. At roughly one-third the size of the Great Salt Lake, it serves as the primary freshwater supply to the Everglades. The name Okeechobee literally means "Big Water". Several years ago, the pace of development in South Florida picked up. In an effort to meet the area's demand for water, canals were dug to divert some of this water from its natural course to the growing communities nearby. Each month, a little more water exits the lake than enters

through rainfall. Unfortunately this resource is finite, and unless things are managed differently, there is a real danger that one day “Big Water” will cease to exist. In a similar fashion, with every additional day that our trade balance sheet is in the red, the more fragile our economy grows.

There is a great deal of debate about the role of government concerning an economic issue such as this. Some feel strongly that market forces will resolve the issue, but after more than 30 years we are still deeply in the red when it comes to trade. During that time frame our economy has become more vulnerable than most of us have seen in their lifetime. A strong argument could be made that government has a role in this, but during those same three decades our representatives have failed to slow this downward slide.

Things are most certainly broken.

Issue 4 - Illegal Immigration

There was a time when discussions on immigration centered around the policies set forth to allow limited numbers of people to legally enter our country each year. Most of us living in the United States can point back in time to the day when one of our ancestors immigrated to this nation. Today, the mention of immigration jars most people into thoughts of unlawful entry through our southern border with Mexico.

The Immigration and Nationality Act states:

An alien present in the United States without being admitted or paroled, or who arrives in the United States at any time or place other than as designated by the Attorney General, is inadmissible.

This piece of legislation is very large and confusing to someone who does not have a law degree, and probably somewhat confusing to those who do. Although most of us already know that the law of the land speaks out against illegal immigration, laws can change. If the will of the

American people is to allow this wave of unchecked immigration, then it would seem the act referenced must be changed. On the other hand, if the American people hope to turn back this wave, then a new strategy must be employed.

What is the will of the American people? Many have railed in the media that America is not a nation that builds walls. We can probably all agree with this, to a point. America is not a nation that will build a wall and tell its citizens they cannot leave the country in search of a better home. America is also not a nation that will prevent others around the world from entering legally, and our immigration policy speaks for itself. In 2006 Congress approved the construction of a 700 mile wall along the Mexican border, but its effectiveness and negative impacts are already being questioned.

Polls are conducted, opinions are heard, and protesters are marching on both sides of the debate. If the people are looking for an open border policy, they are not getting it through Washington. If they want a closed border policy, that is not happening either.

Issue 5 – Energy Independence

People tend to disagree about how to generate the energy needed to keep our country churning. Some prefer the burning of fossil fuels because historically it has met our needs. Others look for a more nuclear approach having witnessed some nations move in that direction. Still others want to see a rapid increase in the use of renewable energy. There is, however, another piece of the energy equation that offers tremendous agreement – energy independence.

Energy independence can be thought of as the ability of a nation to produce enough energy to meet or exceed its own needs. Both nuclear and renewable energy can help move us in that direction, as does the “Drill, Baby, Drill” strategy popularized during the 2008 political campaign. It

improves our national security and aids our economy. There are few willing to argue against it.

Shortly after the 1973 Oil Embargo, the Nixon Administration set the goal of achieving independence by 1980. President Ford pushed that date back to 1985, and President Carter reset the date again to 1990. Over the years some in Washington have recognized the importance of energy independence, but 35 years after starting our journey we now find ourselves further from our destination than when we began.

Can we conclude that this too is failure?

Issue 6 - Bailouts

There have now been two rounds of bailouts in an attempt to correct the economic meltdown of 2008. The first was introduced by the Bush Administration, and the second introduced by the Obama Administration. What percentage of Americans are disturbed by government stepping in to help big business? We all understand these are very complex issues, but words like “too big to fail” can be “too hard to swallow” for even the most naïve citizen.

It is hard to imagine government sitting back and doing nothing in the fall of 2008 as the economic world was melting. But the speed with which decisions and transactions were made looked more like a dishonest gambler running from a poker table, and less like responsible government making educated decisions. Only in the aftermath of the first bailout did we actually see how far off the mark this law had landed. Shortly after, as Wall Street executives received their bonuses for driving sound financial institutions off a cliff, it was easy to feel like we, the American taxpayers, had been duped.

It might be legitimate to say most Americans are unhappy with the bailouts, if not for their intent, for their shoddy implementation and monumental price tag. Yet in the

midst of this unrest, there are still rumblings of a third bailout on the horizon.

Experimental Results

Is it fair to say that observational science has supported our hypothesis? Certainly there are some who will claim the previous analysis relied too heavily on oversimplifications and invalid assumptions, attempting to create science from opinion. But bear in mind, there are also some walking around in white lab coats claiming there is no definitive link between cigarettes and lung cancer.

Admittedly, the problems our country must overcome can be difficult to analyze with scientific methods. This is why one news channel can convince us that government is broken, while another channel can convince us that things are running smoothly. Still, the problems do exist, and they do not appear to be going away.

So where do we go from here? What tools are left at our disposal to determine if our government is in desperate need of repair? Perhaps each of us must consider the information, and misinformation, available. We should look at the direction our country is headed and, much like members of a jury, we each must pass a verdict and then act accordingly based on that judgment.

Sadly, to some of us, it feels like a small group of individuals living in very nice houses, driving very nice cars, and sending their kids to very nice private schools are slowly stealing the American Dream. But as the old adage goes, admitting there is a problem is half the battle. Unless most of us arrive at this place of bitter acceptance, we will never push beyond our complacency to address the issues themselves.

There were always constants, things that never changed, that most of us accepted throughout our lives. We never questioned them because they, like mountains and oceans, seemed immovable, unshakable. The United States was

one of those constants. We never woke in the morning and wondered if the U.S. would become insignificant by the day's end, the week's end, or the decade's end. Much of that has changed now, and it seems more than plausible the sun may be setting on a global superpower.

If most of us can agree that real problems exist and are threatening the future of our nation – that the cost of continuing along our downward slide far outweighs the cost of implementing solutions to very challenging problems – then hopefully we can agree that we must turn things around. Two hundred plus years of history is a marvelous accomplishment, but let us hope, as a nation united, we can roll up our sleeves, accept the difficult task before us, and begin to fix that which is broken.

Why U.S. Democracy Won't Work

Turn on a TV news channel anytime of the day and you are almost guaranteed to see a political debate. Should our troops be pulled out of Iraq? Should we permit drilling for oil in Alaska? Should flag burning be allowed? While watching the intensity of these arguments grow it is easy to get the impression that American democracy is alive and well. How many other nations allow such unbridled debate? Where else in the world is the freedom to question government so widely practiced?

But as the drama subsides, we are left to wonder has anything really changed? At times in recent history it has appeared that Congress was more concerned with steroids in Major League Baseball than with balancing the budget. Sometimes comical, usually unbelievable, the priorities established by the legislative branch of our government make some of us want to scream while others want to cry. Why won't Congress get serious about the monumental challenges facing our nation?

There can be many answers to a question like this. Some extracted from the pages of a Tom Clancy novel and steeped in conspiracy; others are not quite as exciting. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to look at a few.

The Power of Gold

One answer might be that the power of gold has impacted government in a very real and negative way. It takes a great deal of money to win a Congressional election. In 2000, the average winning campaign for a seat in the House of Representatives cost more than \$600,000. Ironically, those seats were a bargain when compared to the 5 million dollar price tag to gain admittance to the Senate that same year. Who are these people that can gamble such vast sums of money on the hope of being elected? I know they don't live on my street, and chances are they don't live on yours.

When such an elite club gathers to make laws for the common good, how common is the ground on which they stand? How well do they understand the challenges facing a single mother or a jobless fifty-something? Will they be willing to pass legislation which promotes a better life for the majority, knowing it might reduce profits for a company they hold stock in? Will they respond to the voice of those struggling when it could jeopardize a lucrative government contract for a well to do friend?

How many of us could act so unselfishly? Even a virtuous man or woman would be hard pressed not to rethink some of their core beliefs when offered the avenues of power and riches laid at the feet of our representatives. How much worse for someone with less integrity? We all realize that some percentage of our government has been sold to the highest bidder, we just can't be sure what that percentage is.

Who's in Your Lobby?

When discussing government failure, we have heard countless reports of how lobbyists control our government. Special interest groups hoping to see a piece of legislation or specific policy in place can mount considerable influence for or against an issue. A lobbying group can put one or more staff members in place, expending large chunks of time and energy to achieve their cause. How can ordinary citizens ever compete against such a stacked deck? Even an issue as critical to citizens as health care can be strong armed by a well funded lobbying organization.

Lobbyists also seem to have a distinct advantage in this war over legislation, pressing for their cause year after year, until at last conditions are favorable and their law is passed. It's much like playing in the World Series, but only having to win one game for the title. Once that game is won and the championship decided, there need never be another contest.

The Bill of Rights actually guarantees the right for citizens to petition, or lobby, their government. Perhaps it is not all bad. One thing we seldom hear in the media is how this influence can be used for good. When a group of concerned citizens, such as MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers), lobbies Congress to pass stricter laws concerning drunk driving, there are few in the stands who cry foul. With this in mind, some might begin to wonder why we don't have professional lobbyists promoting the needs of people across America.

As we all know, there is also a very dark side. When an organization linked to the mortgage industry presses for decreased regulation, some of us might look for the referee's flag.

Would walking into a Senator's office with a handful of cash and a specific agenda be appropriate? Is this what is really happening to our nation? How do we determine when lobbying is appropriate, acceptable, or beneficial? Can we ever hope to protect our representatives from the ills of lobbying and, more importantly, hope to protect our citizens from the same?

Balance or Gridlock?

Imagine a government in which half the representatives were Republicans and half were Democrats. Not that hard to do, is it? Now imagine an important piece of legislation concerning Social Security reform, landing on the steps of Congress. Is it hard to imagine what the vote might look like? Since Social Security seems to be one of the many issues this two party system can never agree upon, we could probably expect a near 50-50 split between the yeas from the (insert your favorite political party here) and the nays from the (insert the other political party here). This happens time and time again, with nearly machine like precision. Consider another piece of legislation coming to a vote, such as renaming an airport to honor a previous president. Chances are there will be solid agreement on

this law. Our government seems capable of handling the trivial, but not quite up to the task of handling the critical. Is this balance at work, or simply gridlock?

Compare this to a husband and wife sitting down to pay bills, all of which total far more than the checkbook will allow. To accomplish a task such as this there must be balance and action. Balance, the give and take of two parties with potentially dissimilar interests but ultimately a common goal. Action, resolving issues that are pressing and must be dealt with. Gridlock and inaction is another possibility, but hardly in the best interest of this couple and definitely not in the best interest of our nation.

This is a small sampling of issues that could, and most likely do, plague the legislative branch of our government. Much like the cancers which attack our bodies, we see the symptoms of the disease and know they are at work, but we are often helpless against them. We lack the proper tools to fight the disease.

Article I of our Constitution dictates that all legislative powers will be vested in our Congress. It also details how Representatives and Senators shall be elected. Oddly, it remains silent on the question of whose interests shall be served by Congress. Most would argue that words written in the Preamble make the intent quite clear.

...promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity...

Could it be that some in Congress take a more arrogant stance when it comes to the Constitution's possible ambiguity? Could it be that some politicians actually believe they are following the Constitution to the letter by making decisions autonomously, apart from the will of the American people? If so, we must hold them accountable for their actions.

Sadly, further review of the Constitution teaches us that we are helpless. Our representatives cannot be held accountable.

It can be infuriating, but it is reality. The Founding Fathers carefully crafted the Constitution with a brilliant system of checks and balances, but there are loopholes. We have rules on who can hold the office of Representative or Senator. Rules on minimum age requirements. Rules on length of term. Rules on some of the many responsibilities owned by Congressmen. But once a representative takes office he or she is free to cast votes in any manner they choose. There are no rules to stop them from acting against the interests of their own constituents. Each new term offers a two or six year license to perform in any way a representative sees fit. Constituents might remember poor representation long enough to vote some out of office in the next election, but great damage can be done in two years. It might also be possible for a representative to sugar coat his or her actions in such a way that he or she secures a second, third, or even fourth term.

This lack of accountability has resulted in an ever widening chasm between the electors and the elected - a void carved by years and decades of distrust. How many disappointments must voters face before they become apathetic about their government and disengage? Once voters are disengaged, our democratic system grinds to a halt and we find ourselves living under a government no longer by the people. A broken democracy.

More Common Sense, an essay which can be found in the appendix, touched on this lack of accountability, and there are dozens of books written each year pointing this out in far greater detail. But without a practical solution to an ever increasing problem there can be little hope for the future of our country.

The Power of Layers

People have been writing computer software for a little more than fifty years. In comparison to other fields, such as home construction which has been around for thousands of years, the software industry is in its infancy. In that half century, however, many valuable lessons have been learned about how to write computer programs. Just as anyone in home construction knows to install a roof before finishing the interior of a structure, software people know a few things about minimizing headaches too. One of the most valuable lessons learned so far is that there is great power in layers.

Computer programmers are often presented with tasks that could result in wildly complex bundles of code. Because of this they are constantly looking for ways to simplify things. When presented with the challenge of building a sophisticated piece of software, they attempt to break the overall system into smaller components. It is true that the overall behavior of the system remains unchanged, but by correctly distributing the responsibilities into logical units, each individual piece becomes easy to understand. This in turn makes the entire project easier to understand.

We see a similar concept in the books we read. Authors typically do not sit down and write a 300 page novel. They break up the novel into chapters. Each chapter, or component, is far less complex than the complete book. Each chapter could stand alone as an individual unit, serving a distinct purpose. Each chapter works in conjunction with the others, to serve a greater purpose. In the software world these simplified components are often thought of as layers.

Let's look at a practical example to gain further insight. Most of us have surfed the internet from time to time, and

the software we use for this is called a browser. The browser basically sends requests to other computers around the world to retrieve or process information. Each request, ideally, results in a response from another computer, and that response usually appears in a browser as a new “page”.

Imagine you were assigned the task of writing a software component for a new browser that would handle the incoming response from another computer and display it for the user. To most people it might make sense to write line after line of code until the component does everything it needs to, but programmers are not like most people.

A programmer would probably look at the small handful of things this component is required to do and spread the functionality across several layers. Each layer would have its own set of responsibilities, would collaborate with other layers, and would help to achieve a greater task than it could if operating alone.

Sometimes when surfing the web, sensitive information is passed in the requests and responses to and from computers. To protect this information an encryption program is often used to make things unreadable to snooping eyes, much like using a secret code. For our example, the simple encryption used will increment each letter by one position, 'a' becomes 'b', 'b' becomes 'c', and so on. Imagine a response coming back across the internet as follows:

```
<j>Efnpdsbdz jt gps fwfszpf</j>
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The first layer we write should probably be one to decrypt the incoming responses so they will be easier to process in subsequent layers. In our case this decryption would be trivial, but in the real world a decryption layer can be quite complex. After applying the decryption to the text above, we are left with the following:

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<i>Democracy is for everyone</i>
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In most cases, the information that travels from one computer to another is text that exists in a special kind of language called a markup language. For a developer working with a modern object oriented programming language, the second layer would probably read the incoming markup and build a number of objects based on what was in the response. For a browser, the pair of tags “<i>” and “</i>” are used to surround any text that should be displayed in italics, so whatever objects we create would need to associate our text with this formatting information.

Finally, in our high level design, the third layer would build up a screen to present to the user. Usually these screens are filled with text, images, and forms for user input, and would be based on the objects built in the previous layer. In our example, the display should read:

Democracy is for everyone

A curious observer might ask why not just read the markup and build the screen in a single step by combining layers two and three? The short answer is experience. Any programmer who has tried to do too many things in a single layer has found that complexity increases disproportionately, flexibility decreases, and some functionality can be implemented poorly or not at all. In other words, the benefits of employing fewer layers are usually outweighed by the costs. There are no quantitative rules used to determine the correct number of layers, just years of hard lessons learned when too few layers have been implemented. It will be helpful to rephrase and emphasize this important layering principle.

The benefits of adding additional layers, where appropriate, usually outweigh the costs.

From a high level, the properly layered software and improperly layered software behave the same way. From a low level, however, the properly layered software is easier to build, understand, and modify. Decades of software

development have proven this and it would be hard to imagine creating the software we have today without the notion of layering.

Layers do not exist solely in the minds of software engineers. Consider the assembly line at a factory. At some point in history industrialists figured out if they could break down the process of building things into many simple, repeatable tasks, each worker could easily master one task. Products could be built faster and of higher quality. Each task, or sub-process, has a well defined set of responsibilities, and could actually be thought of as a manufacturing layer. These layers cooperate with other layers to complete a much larger task.

Eventually it became clear that this was a monotonous way for people to work, but it was ideal for machines. Filling factories with machines to do simple tasks, over and over again, has completely revolutionized the world of manufacturing.

How about the business world? Consider a man who starts a printing business. At first he runs the entire show himself by answering phones, running the front desk, and minding the printing press. In no time at all his business is growing and he needs someone to manage the secretarial side of things. Not long after that he opens a new store, and then another, and another, each having two printing technicians and a secretary. Things are going quite well so he must re-evaluate what he has built. He decides to step out of the printing room and into the office, what we consider the upper management layer. A new middle management layer is then inserted, with one manager for each store, so the owner can be less concerned with the day to day operations and more focused on growing the business. Whether a business employs ten workers or ten thousand, there are usually layers.

There are a handful of attributes that layers possess which make them beneficial in many different applications.

Layers have a Purpose – By definition layers must accomplish something. It might be a software communication task, a management task, or a task on an assembly line. Either way, something must get done.

Layers are Specialized – The world has become a very complicated place and there are many complicated tasks to accomplish. Sometimes the skills required to complete such a task go beyond those of a single person. The skill set required for one man to design and build a car would be staggering. That is why we have engineers, draftsmen, technicians, etc.

Layers must Cooperate – A single layer seldom exists by itself. When it does, it is usually an indication of a poorly engineered solution to a problem. Usually multiple layers exist, and each layer must learn to cooperate with other layers. Middle managers in a company have two responsibilities. They must manage the people placed directly below them and they must also report to their own manager about how things are going. A station on an assembly line to package widgets would be useless without a station to construct widgets. Interestingly, if the station constructing widgets builds them at a rate of 200 per hour, and the station packaging widgets can only handle 100 per hour, there is a cooperation breakdown that can be detrimental to the system as a whole.

Layers can be Corrective – Goods and services are not always delivered with high quality. This lesson, learned long ago in manufacturing, gave rise to a new layer called quality assurance. When products are poorly made, the quality assurance layer applies a corrective force to the manufacturing layer so the quality of goods will improve. This corrective force can also be used to improve the level of service from doctors, lawyers, contractors, and even

government, although in these cases it can be much harder to apply.

Because layering is such an abstract concept, it becomes possible to consider it for the analysis of almost any complex system. For the purpose of this book it will be advantageous to take a very simplified view of the legislative branch of our federal government. In our model we will identify two layers, a legislative layer and a citizen layer, and study their roles.

The legislative layer is responsible to provide for the welfare of the citizen layer. Within this layer, representatives specialize in creating laws and policies to achieve that purpose. This layer must cooperate with citizens to learn what laws should be created.

The main purpose of the citizen layer, in terms of legislation, is to elect representatives that will create suitable laws. To accomplish this, citizens specialize in educating themselves about the various candidates so they can select the best people to fill these legislative positions in government.

The citizen layer can also apply a corrective force, by design, to the legislative layer.

Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom...to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

These words from the First Amendment guaranteed that citizens could always approach their representatives with ideas about which laws are needed and which are not, in an attempt to impact the decisions of government.

The first session of Congress in 1789 was comprised of 65 Representatives and 26 Senators to serve a population of roughly four million. Averaging things out we find one Representative for every 62,000 people, and most Senators served more. In 2009 there were approximately 308 million people in the United States, but only 435

Representatives and 100 Senators to serve them. A population increase by a factor of seventy-seven has been met with a mere six fold increase in representation. That means, on average, a Representative is now sent to Washington to represent over 700,000 people. Senators, two per state, represent anywhere from half a million to tens of millions.

Is there any wonder why it feels like no one in Washington is listening to us? How can we expect that so many independent voices will be heard? The output of the citizen layer has millions of voices that demand attention, but the government layer can only process a small number of them. It is as if two puzzle pieces have been brought together, one having two prongs, the other with only one slot. We can try all day to make these pieces fit, or until our country has been reduced to a shadow of its former greatness. It will never work.

The cooperation between the legislative and citizen layers is severely hampered, and without this cooperation it is nearly impossible to apply any type of corrective force. Without this corrective force government can, and will, stray from its designed purpose.

The Proxy Solution

The United States was built on a foundation of democracy. This radical notion appeared occasionally during the course of world history and eventually found a home in Colonial America. It gave political strength to those being governed, but sadly, most of that power has faded away. Representatives who should seek the best for their constituents are catering to someone else's agenda with little or no accountability. Lobbyists exercise great power in Washington and the smell of corruption permeates almost every government endeavor. It is time to introduce the Proxy.

Proxy, as defined in Webster's Dictionary, is a person authorized to act for another. A proxy, in other words, is a representative. Although it is true we already have representation in our government, we must introduce a new layer between the Congressmen so far away in Washington and the disgruntled citizenry everywhere. This layer will be well connected to the people who should have a voice in government, and also to those casting the votes on Capitol Hill. It will attempt to hold those in power accountable for their actions, and at the same time will itself be held accountable to those it serves. It will apply the united pressure of millions of voters to keep Congress mindful of its duty, and inspire those same voters to remain mindful of their government. It will monitor the actions of federal representatives and report to America how well those representatives are doing. The Proxy Layer, as it will come to be known, will eventually reaffirm the true meaning of democracy.

Sound too good to be true? We must be careful not to confuse something which HAS never happened with something that CAN never happen. It is time for change.

In short, citizens will select Proxies to represent the collective will of like minded voters. These Proxies can then apply pressure to a representative in much the same way a lobbyist might. But instead of marching up the Capitol steps with financial incentives and a corporate agenda, Proxies will carry the electoral strength of 5,000 to 10,000 voters. One can easily understand how a Congressman might ignore the passionate email of a single citizen, but would they be willing to ignore a single voice representing thousands? Would any Congressman gamble with the possibility of losing 10,000 votes in the next election? Would they act so recklessly when their decisions are being closely watched and reported to the very people they have sworn to serve?

Listen closely and you can probably hear the snickers and laughter starting to grow. Our government is so big, too big in fact, and everything it touches becomes wasteful and inefficient. The last thing we need is more government. While this is certainly true, maybe it would be better to think of the Proxy Layer as anti-government. With no direct link to the machine that most have grown to distrust, the Proxy Layer will exert the corrective force which acts to mold our government into more than it has ever been.

Consider for a moment the relationship between an author and an editor. One creates freely on an open page with no boundaries other than their own imagination. The other cuts and prunes, removing what is unclear or without purpose. They work together in an adversarial relationship to produce something far greater than either could ever do alone. This is exactly how the Proxy Layer should operate, affecting a purer and more efficient form of government.

A Proxy undertakes a variety of tasks to promote more responsibility from the representatives with whom they interact. This could mean spending time with constituents or in communication with them via telephone and email, to learn about their needs. This intimate knowledge of

constituent concerns allows a Proxy to petition representatives with the hope of educating them on how best they can serve those same needs. Petitioning, what we have negatively tagged as lobbying, was a right guaranteed in the First Amendment and will allow Proxies access to both Representatives and Senators. Proxies will use legitimate lobbying to undermine illegitimate lobbying in the same way controlled fires are often set to choke wildfires. Whether in the form of letters, emails, phone calls, or visits, the Proxies' voices will need to be heard because they speak for thousands. Additionally, Proxies will need to track how well constituent needs are being represented by Congressmen, and dutifully report this back to the people. These tasks, all crucial for the proper functioning of a representative democracy, are time intensive and could never be undertaken by individual citizens attempting to live ordinary lives.

In many ways, Proxies will be all about communication. Communication with Congressmen and their aides. Communication with constituents. Communication with other Proxies.

The Proxy Layer is the missing layer in our simple government model from the previous chapter. When sandwiched between the legislative and citizen layers, the Proxy Layer allows the cooperation that has been missing far too long. When was the last time you heard from your representatives? Doesn't it seem reasonable that a Proxy could do a better job of communicating with 10,000 citizens about what is really happening in Washington? Wouldn't you prefer to share your concerns about government with someone who has the time to listen, as well as the voice to make them heard by those in Washington?

Proxies are men and women, eighteen years of age or older, who want to see government respond to the will of its people. Some have local political experience, others

business experience, still others a recently earned college diploma and grand aspirations. They will post information about themselves and their stance on important issues at Democraseed.org so voters can learn more about them. They hope to represent thousands of citizens, but the numbers ultimately depend on who chooses them in an online election starting in November and continuing into the early summer.

Citizens search for a Proxy whose political beliefs are similar to theirs and who appear to have the skills for the job. The strength of a Proxy is dependent on the common ideology of the citizens he or she represents. Voters can search for a Proxy who is for gun control, tough on illegal immigration, and looking to overhaul Social Security. Just as easily they might try to locate one who is a proponent of sustainable energy, all for big business, and hoping to see a balanced budget. Proxies are not about Democratic or Republican platforms, they are independent thinkers who want to represent people with a similar mindset. Citizens may be unable to find a Proxy who sees eye to eye on every issue, but chances are they will find a much better match than what exists in the two party system we deal with today.

During the months between the November election and the end of June voters choose their Proxy. Once 5,000 constituents in a given voting district have chosen a Proxy, he or she becomes official and prepares to serve a one year term. They can secure an additional 5,000 constituents, but no more than that. It will be challenging enough to properly represent 10,000 citizens, more than that would only serve to minimize a Proxy's effectiveness.

These are not volunteers. Proxies are paid for their work. Citizens contribute \$30 per year, which is a small price to pay for a better form of government. But even two and a half dollars per month may be too high a price for some to pay. For each of these cases there will hopefully be others

willing to cover this cost through donations, to insure that every citizen in our country can have an equal voice in government.

In time, the Proxy Layer should pressure Congress into a position of greater fiscal responsibility and lessen the tax burden placed upon its people. Perhaps at that time we can look back on the annual \$30 cost as an investment that paid great dividends.

A Proxy representing seven thousand citizens would have an annual budget of \$210,000. From this they will be paid a reasonable salary with benefits, pay for correspondence with constituents, travel expenses, and other miscellaneous costs required to conduct their duties.

Proxies actually define their own budget, and this becomes a key element in each citizen's decision making process. Some Proxies will enter a line item for a \$50,000 salary, while others might be looking for twice that or more. This can be important, because if a surplus exists at the end of the year, each voter's share of the remaining balance will be credited to them for use in a number of ways. It could be applied to their account for the following year, used to assist others unable to join the Proxy Solution for financial reasons, or donated directly to a number of charities.

Although the Proxies control their budget, they do not control the money collected from those who put them into office. Democraseed does that. In the same way business people submit receipts for the reimbursement of expenses, Proxies will submit their receipts as well. During the year every dollar and nickel must be accounted for. This will insure that Proxies do not spend beyond their budget. Should a Proxy dry up his or her travel budget by the end of September, he or she would have the option of no longer traveling. Another option would be to ask their constituents for permission to re-allocate funds from other

categories. A simple majority of constituent votes would be enough to accomplish this.

If citizens find that a Proxy does not manage their finances well, each voter has the right to select a different Proxy for the next year. Unlike in government, words are supposed to mean something in the Proxy Layer, and accountability is a very strong word.

Proxies serve a one year term that runs the calendar year. In January they have a few weeks to prepare before the Congressional session begins. Near the end of a term, citizens once again choose a Proxy to represent their concerns. During this time they will evaluate their Proxy and decide whether to continue, or start over with a different Proxy. Voters' positions on issues will change. Proxies' positions will change. There will be very little that remains static in the Proxy Layer.

To adequately represent the needs of 300 million people there will be many Proxies. New Jersey, with thirteen Representatives in the House, has more than six million people of voting age. Imagine half of those participating in the Proxy Solution. Since Proxies serve roughly 10,000 people, there would need to be approximately 300 Proxies in New Jersey. Nationwide, considering fifty percent participation again, pushes the total number of Proxies beyond 10,000. This might seem like a large number, but consider what this extra layer of representation has done. Is it plausible to think that members of the House might listen to the 20 or 30 Proxies in their district, knowing each of them speaks for 10,000 voters?

There have been many ideas brought to the table about how best to steer the federal government in a better direction. Most require some type of alteration to government. Some call for one or more amendments to the Constitution, while others call for a more dramatic fix, such as the complete restructuring of government to move

from a representative democracy to a direct democracy. The Proxy Layer is somewhat unique in this respect. It is designed to affect positive change in our government, but in a way that does not modify the foundation set by the framers of the Constitution at our nations birth.

Once we are confident the insertion of Proxies has made federal government more accountable, we might also apply this technique to state government. We should never assume that Washington has cornered the market on waste and inefficiency. It might even be possible for cities and large towns to benefit from this strategy as well.

Consider for a moment *More Common Sense* (see Appendix), we can see that most of the problems raised can be addressed by the Proxy Solution. Overall, greater accountability is established for our Senators and Representatives. The representation of citizens becomes closer to color than to black and white television as we move away from a two party system. Proxies make it more attractive for most citizens to become involved with their government, and we move closer to a collaborative democracy.

The signers of the Declaration of Independence could never have imagined where their pen strokes would lead Colonial America. As we stand at a crucial point in our nation's history it can be equally challenging for us to imagine a future where government responds as it should to its people, but without such a vision we will never find our way there.

The Incubator

The Proxy Layer provides a corrective force working to eliminate the ills of government. If this were all it accomplished, the effort would be well worth it. There are, however, additional benefits which have not yet been discussed and provide a stronger argument in favor of Proxies.

It would be hard for most citizens to imagine running for a seat in the House of Representatives or the Senate. Without large sums of money or substantial notoriety, there is little that can be done to compete with the current field of Congressional candidates. One has to wonder if someone as gifted as Abraham Lincoln, with equally humble beginnings, would stand a chance in such an environment. Perhaps with the addition of the Proxy Layer the playing field becomes a bit more level.

While the thought of securing 100,000 votes in a Congressional election is quite daunting, there must be many convinced they could garner 5,000 votes in a Proxy election. Because all *campaigning* occurs online, in one place, wealth and prestige should allow no significant advantage for one Proxy candidate over another. It is their words, their ideas, and their stance on the issues that will ultimately decide the outcome.

It is significant to note that Proxy elections are not a winner takes all competition. There are many people to represent, and this requires many Proxies. Therefore there will be many winners. Hopefully, this will prevent Proxy elections from the downward spiral into negative campaigning we are all too familiar with.

Once the election is over, those who have obtained at least 5,000 votes will go into the service of the people. During the course of that service, some will struggle and others will

thrive. Of those who thrive, some will find ways of connecting with citizens they never dreamed of. Some will display talents and virtues seen only in great leaders, and it will not go unnoticed.

Citizens will begin to recognize some Proxies as being larger than the office they hold. Just as in 2001 Rudy Giuliani became more than the mayor of a single city, but rather a symbol of American freedom and tenacity, it will become clear that some Proxies are fit to serve a different purpose. Rather than just enforcing accountability from our legislators, some will be called to serve as legislators. Citizens will talk.

For those who move beyond the Proxy Layer and into Congressional posts, there are a few distinctions worth noting. First, it will be a group of citizens spreading the word to other citizens and generating the groundswell needed that promotes a Proxy to Congress. This is in sharp contrast to an individual backed by a privileged few, leveraged into Congress by the continual funneling of money into a multimedia campaign. This is a very important difference because when a newly elected member of Congress moves into his/her new office, one of the first things he/she may feel obliged to do is thank those who put them there.

Second, when seeking a Congressional office, a person's character and abilities should be more important than their financial standing. It would be terribly wrong to assume that good leadership skills are bestowed only upon the rich and powerful. During their time of service Proxies will speak to people, meet with representatives, and write numerous letters, emails, and blog entries. They will make decisions, manage a budget, and represent more than their own self interests. Whether filling the role of Proxy after working as a custodian, an accountant, or a CEO, each Proxy will be judged by their service, and that service will

ultimately determine if they are qualified to graduate to the House of Representatives or the Senate.

In this way the Proxy Layer will become an incubator for America's leaders – a leader breeder. Less about financial standing. More about service. Less about celebrity. More about character. Isn't this the way it was always meant to be?

In time, if enough cream rises from the Proxy Layer, there may also come a day when the two party monopoly will be broken. It may come in the form of many political parties, or the elimination of political parties altogether, but whichever way it happens, it will be long overdue. Can you imagine a day when there are more than two ideas on the table?

What if laws and policies were allowed to incubate in the Proxy Layer as well?

The legislative process can be a long and confusing one, and not many of us fully understand what goes on beyond the votes and debates viewed on C-SPAN. There are ways in which a good piece of legislation can be made impassable, or a bad piece of legislation can be made passable. But once again, the united force of citizens exerted through the Proxy Layer might be enough to cause Congress to sit up and take notice.

What if average citizens could propose legislation to their Proxy? Perhaps an online process could be implemented that would allow citizens to submit, consider, refine, and vote for new legislative ideas that could be handed up, through their Proxies, to representatives. Suddenly the concept of collaborative democracy, where everyone can be involved, becomes more plausible than ever before. If enough people were involved this might actually streamline the path our representatives travel to ratify new laws.

Technological convergence can be defined as two technologies overlapping in such a way that each benefits

from the other. A hi-tech symbiotic relationship would be another way to think of it. A modern day example can be found in the intersection of medical research and computer science. Once well removed from one another, the two fields now find themselves joined at the hip. The medical field, with the help of computers, has gained the ability to analyze DNA, proteins, and other complexities never before imagined. The computer field has gained a better understanding of how to distribute massive jobs and data sets across multiple processors or multiple machines, shortening calculation times from the impractical to the practical.

In a couple of ways the Proxy Layer presents a similar type of convergence. Most important, it represents the overlap of a government with its people where the two elements are no longer disjointed and dysfunctional. Secondly, it represents a convergence of democracy and technology, allowing citizens to have more involvement and a greater impact on their government. This is a direction in which the Founding Fathers might have led us if the technology was available during the eighteenth century.

These are just a few ways in which the Proxy Layer might benefit the people of these United States. There could be others – unseen, unproven, unexpected – and if this experiment never begins, they will forever remain unknown.

A Numbers Game

There is probably no game that is more statistically analyzed than professional baseball. Hitters, pitchers, and fielders are monitored in at least half a dozen categories, and it is staggering to think this analysis has been going on for more than 100 years. Want to know what percentage of the time Babe Ruth hit into a double play with men in scoring position? How about the number of games Nolan Ryan won on three days rest? It is all there for the asking, and it represents an objective way to gauge each athlete's performance.

One individual who has had a major impact on the modern game of baseball is Bill James. He has effectively altered the way managers and coaches look at their players. Dissatisfied with the metrics of his day, he dedicated much of his life to discovering new ways to analyze this abundance of data. Eventually, Mr. James introduced an entirely new field of statistics by which players could be measured. At first most people discarded his ideas, but in time that changed. In 2003 he was hired by the Boston Red Sox. The goal was to use statistical information to maximize run production and pitching for a team that had not won a World Series in more than eight decades. In 2004 the Red Sox won it all.

Was it all stats? Certainly not, but the educated use of mathematical information made a very good team even better. Could it be possible to do something similar to improve the way our government functions?

Steven Wright, a famous comedian, once said that 47.3% of all statistics are made up on the spot. After listening to politicians speak, this joke seems closer to reality than fiction. We live at a point in history when information comes at us through television screens, computer monitors,

and wireless devices, and although we are bombarded with data, how much of it can we really trust? It no longer seems important that we harness more information, we just need better information.

If a baseball player told you they were doing a great job of hitting you would probably believe them. If you later found they were hitting .125 you would be forced to conclude that one hit for every eight at bats was horrendous. We are consistently told by politicians how well they are doing, but how can we be sure? Shouldn't there be a way to quantify a representative's performance as well? The obvious answer is yes, and one major goal of the Proxy Solution is to provide the tools that allow citizens to quantify the performance of their representatives in a non-disputable way on the Democraseed website.

So in what ways will this online tool slice and dice information to make it easier for the average citizen to make better decisions about their government officials?

Proxy Elections

In order to create the coalitions of like minded citizens that will be represented by Proxies, there must be Proxy elections. But with so many issues and so many ideas, how could one possibly determine who would be the best Proxy for them? There must be a way to quantify where people stand on issues.

As it turns out there is, and it is reminiscent of the many multiple choice quizzes we all took as students. It may not be a perfect science, but it will be helpful enough to weed out those Proxies with whom a citizen has very little in common. For each issue being considered, be it the Budget Deficit or Healthcare, a number of stances will be presented to choose from.

For example, when looking at an issue such as Energy, the following canned statements could be presented:

- The only practical energy policy is one based on fossil fuels, therefore we must expand our drilling and mining capabilities to meet the growing demand.
- Nuclear energy is the only viable option for the future of our country. We must ramp up our nuclear energy production before fossil fuels run out.
- We must become more aggressive with our use of alternatives, primarily wind, solar, and conservation, so we can safely move away from fossil fuels.
- A nuclear/alternative energy mix is the best option for our country.
- I have other ideas about how to address this issue.

Each Proxy filling out their profile would choose one response for a dozen or so issues of great importance to our nation. Then as each citizen visited Democraseed.org to search for a Proxy, their responses to the same issues would be compared to Proxies in their district, and a match score would be calculated and displayed. The match score, 0 to 100, will be a good indicator of how closely a citizen agrees with a Proxy's political views. This will greatly reduce the number of profiles each citizen must study to make a good choice for representation and will be essential to insure that Proxy selection is not too time consuming.

Legislation Analysis

Information can be a very powerful tool, but if it is not used correctly it is as pointless as the air surrounding a tire when you look down at a flat. Just as moving air from outside the tire to inside the tire can make all the difference, so can gathering the correct information for an upcoming legislative vote.

Can we imagine for a moment that Congress has been debating an important piece of legislation? To avoid the emotion inevitable with real world issues, we will identify

our legislation simply as HR9999, and examine the numeric dynamics occurring within a single voting district.

Now imagine in our district of 200,000 citizens there are 10 Proxies representing half the district, or 100,000 people. Each of these citizens is allowed to go on-line and specify their position on this resolution. As our Representative, James Johnson, prepares for the big vote at the end of the week, he is contacted by a number of Proxies informing him that Democraseed.org has the constituent results available and wants to insure proper representation. The results, per Proxy, are listed below.

Citizen votes for HR9999 by Proxy

| | Yea | Nay |
|----------|------------|------------|
| Proxy 1 | 8000 | 2000 |
| Proxy 2 | 9000 | 1000 |
| Proxy 3 | 3000 | 7000 |
| Proxy 4 | 8500 | 1500 |
| Proxy 5 | 7000 | 3000 |
| Proxy 6 | 7500 | 2500 |
| Proxy 7 | 1500 | 8500 |
| Proxy 8 | 9000 | 1000 |
| Proxy 9 | 8000 | 2000 |
| Proxy 10 | 3500 | 6500 |
| Total | 65000 | 35000 |

To some observers it might seem ridiculous that such large percentages of people associated with each Proxy would all vote the same way. But these are citizens that largely share common political ideology, and therefore the numbers do not seem that far fetched.

With a few clicks of the mouse, Representative Johnson has a good indication of how people are leaning on this issue, at least the half of his constituency that are members of Democraseed. But which way should he vote?

He might make the assumption that the remaining half of his district is similar to what he sees above, and therefore should vote Yea in agreement with the majority. This seems statistically reasonable and chances are the ideals of democracy will have been met.

Another option would be to vote Nay. He could rationalize that more than 65 percent of the remaining populace must be against the resolution. He might also be determined to vote Nay for other, more selfish reasons. In either case, if the issue was important enough, 7 of the 10 Proxies would be aware of this disappointing behavior, as would their constituents. It would be very difficult for Representative Johnson to explain away this behavior during the next campaign for office.

In all fairness, there could be times when the Representative feels he must go against the majority, having gained better insight to an issue. For these cases, it will be essential to communicate these reasons to Proxies and constituents in an effort to persuade them to see things from a different angle. Hopefully he will be able to convince a majority that he was acting in their best interest so that the foundation of democracy remains intact.

It is clear the numbers above represent a very idealized analysis, but the main point is that unless we begin to track the accuracy of our democracy, it may not really be a democracy after all.

Re-Election Analysis

It is seldom that we hear people speak about how happy they are with their government, yet the typical reelection rate for the House of Representatives is greater than 90 percent. Does this seem odd? We disapprove of the job our Representatives are doing, but we keep putting them back into office. We could look at the whys behind this phenomenon, but it might be more beneficial to look at how to break this vicious cycle.

In the previous section we looked at how a single piece of legislation could be analyzed to affect a democratic outcome. What we didn't consider was recording the actual vote of Representative Johnson on HR9999 with all the other legislation during his two year term, in contrast to the constituents in his district. What we might wind up with could be something like the following.

Citizen vs. Representative Voting in a District

| Bill | Yea | Nay | Rep. Vote |
|-------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| HR9987 | 63% | 37% | Nay |
| HR9991 | 20% | 80% | Nay |
| HR9994 | 45% | 55% | Yea |
| HR9999 | 65% | 35% | Nay |

The pattern voters would be seeing is that for the entire district, at least for those citizens who are registered with Democraseed, this Representative seems to be going against the will of the people.

But not all voters or Proxies in this district agree with the majority, so it might be valuable to look at a summary based on a single Proxy, in this case Proxy 10.

Citizen vs. Representative voting for a single Proxy

| Bill | Yea | Nay | Rep. Vote |
|-------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| HR9987 | 32% | 68% | Nay |
| HR9991 | 29% | 71% | Nay |
| HR9994 | 44% | 56% | Yea |
| HR9999 | 35% | 65% | Nay |

Although Representative Johnson has failed to adequately represent the majority of Democraseed voters in his district, he has voted in line with what most of the Proxy 10 constituents have wanted. It is true that some will be pleased with his voting record, but the majority of this district's voters will have the statistical proof they need to look for a new Representative during the next election cycle.

Similar data can also be analyzed to determine if Senators are properly representing the citizens of their state. We could also look at nationwide data to determine if Congress, as a whole, is faithfully serving the nation. If not, we would really have something to complain about. We would also have the tools to make better decisions about those who serve and we could finally begin to impact the re-election rate for our own benefit.

Legislation Creation

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of the Proxy Layer is that it gives ordinary citizens the chance to suggest legislation. It is true that any one of us could contact our Representative and offer advice on new laws, but there

might be a way to place greater momentum behind an idea before delivering it to Congress.

Democraseed will facilitate an online process by which citizens can create short legislative proposals. It is not expected that every citizen will want to participate in this process, but there are obviously those with greater interest in their government that would find this very appealing.

Legislative submissions will be managed within each voting district. In other words, constituents across multiple Proxies would be working together to hand suggestions up to a single Member of the House. Each month, the most popular idea would be handed up to a Representative, and then the process would start all over again.

Let's take a closer look. Imagine 3 proposals being submitted by citizens within a district in Oregon.

The first would establish new television guidelines for election debates to allow a third and fourth party candidate to compete in all debates. The second calls for a flat income tax of 15% on all earnings beyond \$5000 to replace the complex income tax laws now in place. The third details a plan to establish a new national monument. By the end of the month the results are in. Of the 150,000 citizens aligned with seventeen Proxies, only 60,000 have taken the time to vote on these potential laws.

Legislative proposal voting in a District

| Proposal | Votes |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Flat Tax | 38,000 |
| TV Guidelines | 17,000 |
| National Monument | 5,000 |

As the month comes to a close, the Proxies in the district work together to finalize a proposal for a flat income tax. That proposal is then hand delivered to the Representative's local office.

As a new month begins, the process of creating legislation continues. The flat tax proposal is removed from the system and any new proposals are added. All vote counts are reset to zero and over the next 4 weeks a single proposal will rise to the top of the heap, finding its way into the hands of lawmakers.

There will be additional ways to analyze this legislative data. It might be that larger trends begin to emerge on a national level, and if so, it will be important to track these in relation to what laws are being established in Washington. If 64% of the citizens across our land are proposing a balanced budget amendment, shouldn't we expect that our lawmakers sit up and pay attention? Before long, we might find members of Congress and Proxies working together in an unprecedented fashion.

Re-Engagement

The first intercollegiate football game was played at Rutgers University on November 6, 1869. The scoring used was much different than today's game as Rutgers defeated Princeton in that contest 6-4. It was a tremendous day for Rutgers football. One week later the two teams met again and Princeton dominated the match 8-0. This marked a downward trend for Rutgers, and during the next 135 years the Scarlet Knights played in, and lost, only 1 bowl game. It is easy to understand why the average Rutgers student throughout those years was less than ecstatic about their team's prospects for success. This New Jersey school was remembered more as the butt of jokes, such as "What's a Rutgers?", than for its football prowess.

But something began to change in 2005. Greg Schiano, a young head coach hired several years earlier, was beginning

to turn the program around. During the 2005-2009 campaigns, the little known Scarlet Knights from Jersey posted 43 wins to 21 losses and made 5 bowl appearances. Some of this can be attributed to the recent proliferation of bowl games, but just as important, the fans in and around the school community were excited again. Tickets were selling and people were talking. This is re-engagement, and it doesn't just happen for sports teams.

During the 1960s the percentage of adults that turned out for three presidential elections was never less than 60%. Over the next two decades that number began to slip and in 1988 a mere 50% turned out to vote. But then in 1992 something happened. That year 55% of Americans stormed the polls and voted for not two, but three, presidential candidates. Ross Perot, an out-of-the-box Texas billionaire, brought a new energy to the campaign that had not been seen in years. This is an example of citizens refocusing their energy toward government when the hopeless finally becomes hopeful.

Our nation desperately needs to be energized like this once again. Not the partisan zeal to rise up and beat down an opponent with whom we disagree, but the excitement of citizens who are finally rejuvenated because their government is responding to the authority of its people. Not the periodic imagination and excitement that builds during a presidential campaign, but the daily interest in a Congress that functions to better the lives of all citizens across our land.

Citizens have disengaged from their political system because they feel it is a worthless proposition. The amount of effort they have spent to be heard has resulted in unfavorable results, and a feeling of hopelessness has settled in. Who can blame them? Only a fool would continue railing against a system where the possibility for positive change was approximately zero.

The interesting thing about re-engagement is that it typically does not take tremendous change to occur. The observation of slight change, or even the hope of change, is often enough to get the ball rolling. The Proxy Solution is a new idea, but if citizens recognize its potential we could witness a snowball effect. Even the smallest of improvements to our democratic system will generate enough inertia to keep this solution viable for decades.

Here in New Jersey's 11th voting district a new phenomenon is underway. Once or twice a year the phone rings, and a short message informs the listener that they will soon be added to a town hall meeting with Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen. Interesting. Knowing there must be more than 500,000 citizens in a district, some may wonder if ALL those citizens are listening. If so, and if each citizen's question/answer took one minute to complete, we would only need to be on the call for a little over 11 months. It is clear the numbers do not crunch. There must be a better way.

What if the 500,000 citizens in that same NJ district were represented by 60 Proxies? How much could be accomplished in a 3 or 4 hour meeting with Mr. Frelinghuysen then? Wouldn't constituents begin to recognize that their voice could be heard? Wouldn't they appreciate true representation that did not place great demands on their time and resources? Wouldn't they re-engage knowing their efforts produced results?

The game of baseball has been altered forever by the careful use of statistical information. It is quite reasonable to assume that our governments – federal, state, and local – could be altered in a similar fashion. The day our politicians are judged by their performance, instead of their carefully chosen and polished words, will be a great day for democracy. We need new methods of quantifying our representatives' contributions or we will forever be subject to the mediocrity that has brought this nation to its knees.

It could be we might fail in our initial attempts, but much like Thomas Edison and his more than 6000 experiments to invent the light bulb, eventually we will succeed.

The Road Ahead

There are several cars you can buy off the showroom floor that will go from 0 to 60 mph in less than six seconds. In addition to great performance, these cars exhibit stylish exteriors with interior luxuries that rival most living rooms – plush seats, quality sound systems, temperature control. This was not always the case. It took decades of research and development for the automobile to progress to its current form, and it is still evolving.

Although the thumb tack has changed very little in my lifetime, I recently went to the store to replace my can opener and found a radically different version of the tool I had used since I was a kid. Instead of cutting around the lid as every other opener I had used, this one separated the lid from the can. No sharp edges. No sticky round blades that would eventually bind. No bacteria build up to infect the next can I opened. It was a quantum leap in can opener technology. Why hadn't someone thought of this sooner? Why was it necessary to dish out \$3.59 every fifteen months for a crude implement when something better might have been sold? It was true that there had previously been other openers to choose from, some with smooth handles, others electrically powered, but fundamentally they all suffered from the same flaws as the original version. There are a few lessons we can learn from this.

First, most systems are not perfect from day one. There tends to be an evolutionary process during which refinements occur. The Founding Fathers labored for months to create our Constitution, but quickly realized it was not complete and added the first ten amendments, what we know as the Bill of Rights. Since then seventeen more amendments have been added. Is it fair to say the

Constitution was a failure because it did not get things 100 percent correct from day one? Not at all. Perfection is something we should always strive for, knowing full well it is beyond our reach as long as we walk this earth.

Second, even our attempts to correct things may be misguided. The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution was an attempt to prevent the manufacture, import, and distribution of alcoholic beverages. After this was passed it eventually became clear that it was not the federal government's job to become so involved in the personal habits of its citizens. Fourteen years later the amendment was repealed.

Our Constitution is a document written by fallible men, during a small window of time when their view of the world was as constrained by their historical footing as ours is. It is during the course of decades and centuries, as this document has lived and breathed, grown and been pruned back, that it has been allowed to reach for its potential.

This book has attempted to detail a new layer of representation, the Proxy Layer, that has the potential to revolutionize our government. The solution is not perfect and in no way does this book expect to have provided answers for every challenge that will be faced in the years ahead, but none of that should matter. What should matter are the ideas and inspirations that will flow from those who want a government more reflective of the ideals on which it was founded, in this generation, and in the generations to follow.

Armed with the knowledge that we have not achieved, and will not achieve, perfection, we can set off in this new direction knowing we will make mistakes. At times we will fail, but we must also be confident that we will find our share of victories. As our ever present lottery commercials tell us, "You gotta be in it to win it." If we fail to take this great opportunity to change our nation because of

uncertainty or apathy, then history has every right to condemn us for our failure to act. But if we, together, forge ahead in this great experiment, what are some of the bumps and challenges we can expect along the way?

First, it takes a community to build a community. If this endeavor is to find its wings, it must be with the assistance of hundreds or thousands, and with the interest and cooperation of millions. There are ideas that must germinate, policies to develop, an infrastructure to create, and an entire population to involve. Can America be galvanized in a way that leads to such radical change? It has in the past, and if we decide now, it will again. It really is up to us.

At this point in time, Democraseed.org is little more than a blip on the radar screen, a tiny website from which the notion of a bold idea is being broadcast. To grow this into an online platform suitable for the resurgence of democracy will take months to years, many hours of hard work, and money to keep the wheels greased. Yet if we succeed where so many others have failed, the price paid will quickly be forgotten.

To accomplish its goals Democraseed will take two forms, one as an organization, the other as a web site.

Democraseed the web site will have several responsibilities.

- facilitate all aspects of Proxy Elections
- provide citizen forums and Proxy blogs to improve constituent to constituent and Proxy to constituent communication
- offer polling tools so Proxies can survey constituents on important issues when needed and eventually compare those results to representative voting records
- create a reporting utility allowing Proxies to frequently publish information on representatives' performance

- implement an online legislative process that can be used to float ideas for sound laws through Proxies to Congress
- allow citizens to rate Proxies online to increase accountability

Democraseed the organization will take on the role of building and maintaining this site, as well as employing the Proxies and the team required to support them. Those who have pushed through the math can see this will require a substantial presence, both in number of people and in budget. It will be a challenge.

If all this were put into place and Proxies were allowed to skate through their days, then all would be for naught. We all hope individuals aspiring to these positions will be people of high integrity with a reasonable work ethic, but that may not always be the case. Democraseed, and the citizens involved, will need to insure Proxies are working hard to improve things in Washington. This type of accountability can take several forms. It might mean Democraseed must notify constituents when many complaints have been submitted online against a Proxy. It could be a phone call of warning to a Proxy from Democraseed when communication with citizens has been limited or non-existent. It might eventually be the removal of a Proxy, by a simple majority vote, for the blatant disregard of those they pretended to represent. Hopefully this accountability will seldom be needed, but it will be essential for a group charged with the task of pressuring Congress into greater responsibility.

When considering Proxy elections, the initial idea is that all campaigning will occur online. Unfortunately, there may come a day when Proxy candidates consider it worthwhile to supplement their campaigns with other forms of media or public appearances. If that day arrives, it might be that the office of a Proxy has become too powerful, too glamorous, and too seductive, much like the offices of

Congress. If the focus of a Proxy election can be the will of one wealthy man or woman, and not the will of 10,000 citizens, then the Proxy Layer will be in danger because the dignity and humility the office requires will have been lost. We must find ways to continually enforce accountability so that our Proxies are about serving their constituents, and not the other way around.

Another obvious concern at the outset is security. How is it a website such as Democraseed can insure that its users are United States citizens of voting age? Hopefully we can all agree that only legal voters should be involved in this attempt to improve our democratic system. Such security can be tricky to enforce at the polls each November, and it will be even more of a challenge for an online community. We must be realistic and recognize there will be no fault free solution to this problem. If we can find ways to minimize the abuses and corruptions then we might still draw great benefit where there was none before.

One idea might be to enlist several hundred verifiers throughout the nation. These volunteers should be willing to validate a reasonable list of credentials, such as birth certificate, driver's license, and a piece of mail. They would then provide a unique login ID and password that could be used by individuals to access the Democraseed website. This method would require a great deal of cooperation and is hardly perfect, but we must start somewhere.

As we begin this new journey we must not be so naive to think we see all the obstacles ahead. There are still more concerns before us, but more important than discerning the next hurdle is determining our next step. Do we forge ahead or sit down and let history rush by? Is there any possibility that things might improve if we start to implement the Proxy Solution, or does it seem too risky or ridiculous a venture?

The Manhattan Project was an attempt to end the Second World War by creating a weapon far more devastating than any that had been created up to that point in history. Some scientists at the time were concerned that once a nuclear reaction started, it might not stop until the entire atmosphere had been scorched. This was danger. This was risk. Some rigorous calculations eventually disproved this possibility, but there are other challenges still undertaken with great risk. How many individuals lost their lives in pursuit of human flight? Sometimes the possibility of achievement outweighs the risks to achieve.

Other times, however, great achievements can be attained without significant risk. Is there anything of great value to be lost in our Proxy experiment? Aside from \$30 per year, is there anything that would keep us from trying? Isn't the possibility of a legitimate democracy and a better future for ourselves and our children worth the attempt?

In 2006 Americans became aware of a business deal that would shift operations of six U.S. seaports under the control of a state owned company from the United Arab Emirates. Americans became enraged, and the phone calls and emails began pouring into Congressional offices. Congress listened and began applying pressure to block the deal.

It can happen. People can still, although rarely, be mobilized when a policy or issue appears frightening in its disregard for our national interests. Imagine if the will of the People, channeled through their Proxies, could force government to behave this way on a daily basis.

Throughout history, many endeavors have begun with tremendous enthusiasm and significant resources, but time corrodes dreams like no other substance known to man. If we are to succeed, we must not lose sight of the nation we might one day live in.

November 2008

On November 4, 2008 millions of Americans went to the polls to elect a new President. At that time they also cast their ballots to fill the House of Representatives and a number of seats in the Senate. But what if they did something shortly after the election that changed our nation forever. Suppose...

Word of the Proxy Solution began to spread during the Spring of 2008. Most considered it “a wing and a prayer”, but our nation was floundering and we had to try something to jolt our government out of its pathetic state. Why not Proxies? What else was there?

Proxy Candidates began to put together their profiles online during the summer months and it turned out to be a little more involved than most initially thought.

The *Resume* amounted to little more than an online form, the kind we all fill out when ordering DVDs from Amazon. It was easy to complete, but there was one notable exception to the questions being asked. There were no boxes to check for political affiliation. Republican? Democrat? Independent? It did not matter, because in the Proxy Layer people should not be placed in a box.

Priorities and Positions was used to provide information about where a Proxy Candidate stood on a dozen or so of the major issues confronting our nation. For an issue such as Energy it would be possible to describe their stance quantitatively by filling out what amounted to a multiple choice questionnaire. They could also detail what priority they felt each issue warranted; non, low, average, high, or top. This information would be essential to quantify a candidate's position and make it easier for citizens to make

quick comparisons between their ideology and those of Proxy candidates.

The *Voice* was a number of statements that had to be written about these same issues. Requiring time and careful thought, these words offered the best glimpse into each candidate's thoughts and allowed them to be more than just a resume. During this process some thought about how Thomas Jefferson, during two terms as President, stood before an audience to deliver a speech on just three occasions. The voice of his presidency was the written word. It would be the same for each Proxy candidate.

Finally, the *Budget* may have been the trickiest. There had never been a Proxy, so it was hard to imagine what a proxy budget would look like. Democraseed offered some guidelines, but these too were just best guesses. A year or two would prove things out.

Since Proxies can represent anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 people, each contributing \$30 per year, candidates were asked to provide two budgets. The low end budget of \$150,000 and the high end budget of \$300,000 would give voters a sense of fiscal responsibility and accountability. If a Proxy proved unable to live within their means then how could anyone expect them to hold Congress accountable? Office space, computer, salary, benefits, travel, communications, publishing. Slowly the numbers fit together.

It was true that these numbers were not completely accurate. Democraseed would need to offer a support system for the Proxies, a certain number of administrators to oversee the day to day financial operations, travel arrangements and other tasks that were best handled in a centralized fashion. There were also a number of costs associated with developing, maintaining, and deploying a website capable of serving a very large community. The

long term goal was to use one percent of the monies collected to provide these services. Considering the large up front costs, however, the initial slice would be four percent, or \$1.20 of every \$30 collected. Only time would tell if these numbers were realistic.

Toward the end of the summer there was a growing sense of anticipation amongst the Proxy candidates. Sometimes just clarifying one's political beliefs can offer some contentment, but there was more than that. There was actually a sense that maybe this time things could really change. To be standing on what was potentially historic ground provided quite a thrill.

The summer turned into fall and most eyes were on the upcoming election, but the eyes of some citizens were a little more clear this time around. Maybe this time Congress was not as far away as we had been led to believe. Maybe this time we would have a better idea of what was really going on. Maybe this time there would be some accountability.

The polls opened and closed on a day in early November, much the same as they always do. There were some close races for Congress, some dramatic upsets, but mostly predictable outcomes. Although many felt it was a critical point in our nation's history, the election was very typical. Things were about to change.

The sun rose Wednesday morning and most people headed off to work, but some were curious and sat in front of their computer as they drank their morning coffee. What was all this talk about Proxies? They surfed their way to Democraseed.org, typed in their state and district, and had their first glimpse of Proxy candidates. Sure, there was a joker or two trying to have a good laugh, but mostly there were sincere people with solid credentials and a desire to see things change.

There was Albert Smith, a twenty-four year old graduate of Penn State with a degree in Political Science. He had always dreamed of being a politician, but the reality of rent and a car payment had pushed him into a life of selling insurance. Maybe this was his big chance to serve the public. Back home in Bethlehem, PA he still heard often told stories about a once thriving steel industry that had withered away. Could it be that a different set of leaders might have affected a different outcome for the American steel industry? He wanted to try. He knew he was green, but he also knew he was intelligent, well spoken, and had nothing to lose.

Then there was Tammy Jones, the mother of a son and daughter. They were almost through college now, and she could finally see light at the end of the tunnel. She had never finished college, having met the man of her dreams her sophomore year. She dropped out, started a family, and lived happily ever after until her husband died at the age of thirty-five. There was some life insurance, but it wasn't enough. There were medical bills to pay, crooked teeth to mend, cars to purchase, and of course college tuition. She had made it because she was strong. She worked hard at her job, harder at raising her kids, but still she wondered about all the others out there who might not be so fortunate. Would anyone speak up for them? She decided that she would and entered these words into her profile:

We need a people willing to be involved in their government, and a government that is there for its people.

She knew her education and work experience might not be what people were looking for, but she also knew that life teaches many of the most important lessons. She had to try.

The Proxy candidates formed a varied group, with views and ideals that covered the complete spectrum of political

thought. Almost every citizen interested enough to point their browser at Democraseed that Wednesday found someone they could relate to. Of those unhappy with their selection, a few decided to throw their hat in the ring and make a run at becoming a Proxy.

Slowly, steadily, people were doing their research, comparing notes with friends, and talking about a system that might not be so far gone that it could not be corrected. Each day there were more visitors to the site. More curious eyes. More questions. More answers. Along the way there were decisions being made as well. Citizens were choosing their Proxy and the votes kept coming in.

Tammy Jones secured 5,000 votes in three short weeks and became her district's first official Proxy. It may have been that her hard-working message struck a chord with the average citizen. Whatever it was, it would be remembered as one of the proudest moments of her life, and she became more determined than ever to serve her constituents to the best of her ability. It would only be a few more weeks before she found herself with the maximum 10,000 votes and heading into a chapter of her life she never thought possible.

Albert Smith was concerned because after more than a month he was still riding at less than 2,000 votes. Maybe people felt he was unrealistic about his finances, after all, being single and without much overhead he set his salary requirements relatively low. Perhaps people just considered him too young and inexperienced. He had geared his message to a young crowd when he typed the words:

This nation has faced many daunting challenges. Each generation has their trophy, their great victory. Winning back this government will be ours.

A few weeks later, as the college crowd wrapped up their final exams and took their focus off school, the young vote

started pouring in. By the end of the year Albert found himself sitting atop more than 8,000 votes.

Work began in January 2009. Tammy decided to set up shop in her home, but Albert rented some office space from a friend who had started a construction business a few years earlier. Unlike members of Congress, Proxies do not have a D.C. address.

The first few weeks of the year were all about fundamentals. Learning how to communicate with their constituents through Democraseed blogs, email, or regular mail. Ideas on town hall meetings and other forms of communication. How to introduce themselves to a Representative and a pair of Senators. How to request money from Democraseed for travel, a paycheck, or the reimbursement of other expenses. There was a lot to learn, but it was far from being rocket science. Most Proxies made the transition without any difficulty.

As soon as Congress convened the real work started. Tammy did some research and learned of a health care bill that would hit the floor early in the session. She had made some strong points in her online profile concerning health care and felt her constituents were on board, but before she packed her bags and headed to Washington she wanted to take a poll and make sure. She wrote up an email to describe the proposed legislation and what she thought it meant to working families. She set up an online vote on Democraseed hoping to get input from her constituents, and was surprised to find that within three days over eighty percent had responded. The results were overwhelmingly in favor of the bill, so Tammy quickly made the necessary arrangements and flew to the nation's capital. She was not afforded large slices of time from the Representative or two Senators she sought out, but did make her position clear to each staff and stressed that she stood for 10,000 voters. She left Washington knowing she would keep communicating, keep watching, and keep pressing for

passage of the bill. Perhaps her next visit would be more welcomed. If not, 10,000 citizens would be made well aware of this indifference.

Albert was a little intimidated. He held a steady job for more than two years since graduating college, but in many ways he was now out on his own. He had one year to prove his mettle, and if for some reason he failed there would not be many willing to sign on for another year of mediocrity. He could not let that happen. He had a pretty good sense of the positions his constituents held so he began crafting letters to serve not only as an introduction to his three contacts in Washington, but as a reminder that 8,000 voters had banded together, were interested in some changes, and were now watching very closely.

Having grown up in a more electronically connected culture, Albert was more apt than some of his counterparts to rely on blogs to keep constituents in the know about his comings and goings. Several times each week he would log on to Democraseed and type out at least a few sentences, often a few paragraphs. He studied other Proxy blogs as well, not only to see what others were doing, but also to search for strategic alliances with other Proxies. He found one in Luke Worthington. Luke was an intelligent software engineer who lost his job to outsourcing and wanted to prevent others from suffering a similar fate. Together, perhaps, the two young men could find imaginative ways to mount greater pressure on the representatives in Washington to protect American jobs. The fight was beginning.

Tammy was more about phone calls and meetings. With both kids off to college she had large chunks of time available and kept her lines of communication open. She was building a team of thousands with common goals that would become a force for positive change.

The insiders in Washington remained skeptical. They knew there were a few million people involved in this experiment, and it was growing daily, but most in Congress felt it was little more than a fad. Then something quite dramatic happened.

Sara was a reporter for a mid-size newspaper in the Southeast and her run for Proxy was little more than a great story idea. When she found herself with nearly 10,000 votes a different idea began to form. Why not serve her one year term and write a book about her experience as a Proxy? She could earn a decent living and she might find enough free time to pen most of her book.

Understandably, the reporting bug never left her, and the more time she spent in Washington, the more curious she became. It seems a certain member of the Senate was found to have some very suspicious ties to Middle Eastern oil. This might not have been much of a concern had this Senator not been a key player in directing the nation's energy policies.

The story broke almost overnight. Sara wrote an incriminating blog entry that was picked up by several newspapers and suddenly Congressmen and Proxies were being bombarded with emails from their constituents. Unlike members of Congress, however, the Proxies were listening. They began leaning heavily on representatives. The scandal riveted the attention of millions, put into action thousands, and applied great pressure to hundreds.

Three weeks later the Senator was removed from his post on the Energy Committee. Although still a member of the Senate, the Proxy Layer had exerted its corrective force and government responded to the will of the People. The Proxy Revolution had begun.

Appendix A – More Common Sense

The following essay was written in 2006 to draw attention to our crippled democracy. It discusses some of the problems we face and offers a few suggestions for change. The essay was a stepping stone of thought, departing from point A, but never quite arriving at point B. Like so many other books, papers, and blogs, it failed to provide rubber meets the road solutions to the many issues that plague our government. It was, however, a necessary exercise along the way to discovering one potential solution.

Introduction

In January of 1776, Thomas Paine published an essay which was received like gasoline on a smoldering fire. He put into print many of the thoughts colonists throughout America had been wrestling with up to then. His words helped mold thirteen separate colonies into a single unit that stood against the greatest military might of the day.

Paine's essay, *Common Sense*, urged Americans to break free of a force which undermined the economic health of the colonies. It also spread the seeds of democracy in a nearly born nation. Economy and Democracy.

Here we are 230 years later. Our economy is being attacked from many angles: lopsided trade, outsourcing, illegal immigration, and corporate greed. Democracy has been largely replaced by a system favoring special interests. Economy and Democracy.

To this author, many things seem wrong with where our country is headed, and many of the solutions seem obvious – common sense. Yet day after day things continue on their downward slide. The big question becomes, do we

have the will, the discipline, and the strength to right the wrongs? I hope so, because if not, we might be the first American generation to hand our children a dimmer future.

Then and Now

It has often been said that history repeats itself. If I had not believed this as a young man, I certainly believe it now. Perhaps it is too easy to make the same mistakes, too easy to shy away from challenges, too easy to be complacent. Whatever the reasons may be, anyone cognizant thirty years ago must recognize what seems like a second run through the 1970s. Trouble in the Middle East. An energy crisis linked to our dependence on foreign oil. An ailing economy as we watch an economy rise in the Far East. World opinion of the U.S. is dropping. National opinion of our government is at an all time low.

Some of the comparisons are startling, but perhaps there is another decade in American history we can draw parallels to, and from that historical connection draw strength as well. Let your mind drift back to the 1770s when a loosely knit band of colonies declared independence from the most powerful nation on earth. When men considered it worthwhile to risk their comforts and their lives for the chance to become a free and independent nation. Certainly there must have been compelling reasons for such drastic action.

Most of us remember the history taught to us as children. In order to defend Colonial America during the French and Indian War, Great Britain accumulated massive debts. After the war, the British government looked into options for repaying those debts, most of which laid the burden directly on the colonies in the form of various taxes. Taxes on tea. Taxes on sugar. Taxes on 54 different types of paper, from playing cards to college diplomas. The government responsible for their protection and well being was slowly strangling them. Worst of all, the colonies had no representation in the government to remedy the

situation, and the cry rang out across the land: “No taxation without representation.” This simple phrase captured the two main desires of the revolutionaries – give us our own economic destiny and allow us a more democratic form of government. Economy and Democracy.

In 1776 a small group of men led thirteen American colonies in an experiment which would change the world. This band of politicians authored a document declaring independence from their motherland and guided their citizens through a war to insure that independence. We call them heroes now and study their words and deeds, but more often than not we fail to recognize their courage, sacrifice, and daring. What if the Revolution had failed? Would it not be John Hancock, John Adams, and Ben Franklin known throughout history as the first three hung for treason in the American colonies? Franklin was not joking when he uttered the words, “We must all hang together, gentlemen...else, we shall most assuredly hang separately .”

The politicians were not the only ones making great sacrifices. Farmers, blacksmiths, and carpenters picked up their rifles, left their homes and did their part as well. Something during the mid 1770s had galvanized colonists from Georgia to New Hampshire and brought them to the battlefield with a common cause. They had seen enough of a government which threatened their ability to provide for their families. They had seen enough of a government which had refused to listen to their wants and concerns. They had seen enough of a government which arrogantly ignored their rights and treated them as second-class citizens. They wanted more from their government and eventually it became obvious that the only way to reach their goal was by way of independence, and the only way to independence was through war.

It has been 230 years since those men laid the foundation of these United States. Along the way many have struggled, sacrificed, fought, and died to preserve the freedoms and economic successes that have become synonymous with the words “United States.” But as we look back over the great labors of the past two hundred plus year history, let us ask ourselves one simple question, is our current government what was envisioned by our Founding Fathers?

I believe most of us like to grumble about the taxes we must pay, but deep down, if this be the cost of preserving our nation, it is a cost most are willing to pay. But when government, through indifference and greed, ignores sound economic principles as simple as balancing a budget, it is gambling with the future of its people. When the interests of common citizens are overlooked in favor of large corporations, when lobbyists can bend the minds of Congress toward trade agreements stacked against Americans, one cannot help but feel that our ability to provide for our families will soon, if not already, be in jeopardy.

It is true that a democratic government was put in place more than 200 years ago so representatives could protect the interests of their people. Yet most of us feel frustration with a Congress that does little for its people, and the beautiful creation envisioned at the Constitutional Convention has become little more than an oligarchy. A government run by a select few, interested largely in doing what is best for themselves and their cronies.

Listen closely and you can hear the distant echoes of the 1770s. Our government is broken and needs to be fixed. They had the courage to do just that 230 years ago. Do we have the courage now to do the same thing? Do we have the foresight, intelligence, and determination to use our democratic system to correct itself? No guns. No bombs. No violence. Just radical democracy, the same brand that

came to life on a summer day in 1776 and changed the world forever.

Democratic Governments Protect Their People

When a Major League Baseball player gets lost at the plate and goes into a hitting slump, we hear talk about how important it is to get back to the basics. Don't overcomplicate, just get back to practicing the small handful of skills that made them proficient in the first place.

Sometimes governments get lost too, and forget the purposes for which they were created. The following passage from the Declaration of Independence provides good insight into what our Founding Fathers thought a government should be.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

They felt it was essential for a government to meet the needs of its people, and if government strayed from this course, those being governed had the right to “alter or abolish it”. These are strong words, but these are the words our nation was built upon.

Not much more than a decade later, those present at the Constitutional Convention agreed upon the following mission statement for our democratic government:

We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Once again, the words were painstakingly chosen to reinforce one idea, this government is being established to protect and care for its people. Is it safe to say we have lost our way? Wouldn't it be enlightening if we could ask James Madison and Thomas Jefferson what they think about our present version of democracy? These were men who, although each successful in their own right, were looked down upon by the "elite" of Great Britain. These were men who despised and railed against the notion that men could be born into a class of privilege. All men (and women of course) are created equal.

How many of us feel this equality? The more I see a small handful of men and women vote away the things I hold dear about my country, the less I believe this equality exists. How many times can our very own Congressmen dismiss the rights and concerns of individuals and bow to unnamed, unseen, yet very real forces?

Although the purpose of this essay is not to advocate one policy over another, but rather promote the democracy from which those policies are born, please allow me the freedom to consider two issues. These issues cannot be easily resolved, but when considering what must be done to protect our people, it becomes hard for my mind to imagine there is much to debate.

Energy – Can anything positive be derived for our citizens and our posterity by maintaining the current oil-centric plan? Won't we have less security? Less control of our economy? More reliance on governments that despise the freedoms for which we stand? Why doesn't our government act swiftly and decisively to set a new course?

Border Control – I understand the benefits for those entering our country illegally, but what benefit is it to the American People to have a porous border with Mexico? Less Security? Greater health care costs? More competition for blue collar jobs? Why has our government refused to enforce its own laws, which would ultimately protect the American People?

The above paragraph is not intended to show lack of sympathy for people in search of a better life, merely to state the obvious – our nation was not established to provide a home for everyone. If people outside our borders are looking for greater freedom and opportunities, perhaps they should work together in their homelands, just as our forefathers did in the eighteenth century, to form a “more perfect union.”

When governments fail to provide the things they were created to provide - freedom, economic opportunity, security - they must be changed or removed. I believe that the Sons of Liberty, those who led a revolt against a self-consumed government centuries ago, would attempt to right the wrongs that exist if they were alive today. What will we choose to do?

What Is Representation?

Even before the signing of the Declaration and the Constitutional Convention, representatives were sent to the Continental Congress. It was important that the interests of each colony were well represented, and in an era of slow transportation and slow communication, the notion of elected representatives was essential. After all, a person traveling from Georgia could take well over a week to cover the 800 miles to Philadelphia. It was a necessity to have a representative to voice the cares and concerns of each group.

To do this effectively, there were a number of requirements placed upon each representative.

1. They must understand the will and needs of the people represented.
2. They must dutifully represent those needs and desires.
3. They must possess the creativity and wisdom to resolve any unforeseen issues that arise.

The first item requires good communication skills and a willingness to listen to the people being represented. The second item requires honesty and integrity. The third requires good leadership skills. How do you feel your representatives are doing?

As I look at some of the decisions being made in Washington, I cannot help but believe that my representatives do not have the attributes required to do as good a job as I would like. And is it any wonder? It would seem that the lion's share of Senators and Representatives moved to their government posts from positions of great wealth and power. These are typically not humble people with a desire to serve. More often than not, these are people hungry for more power, people who long to be served by others and are probably willing to turn a deaf ear to their constituents in order to make their own way easier.

With a government comprised more of takers than givers it would seem we have a small handful of options.

We could do nothing, business as usual, allowing our freely elected aristocracy to govern. But with each vote in Congress which betrays the will of the people, democracy becomes little more than a fancy word to pacify a defeated people.

We could move toward pure democracy, where every adult citizen can vote on every issue. Although now technically feasible, the complexity and security required to run a government will probably keep this option off the table for many years to come. It is also unlikely that many of us could devote the time and energy required to keep up to

date on the many issues currently handled by our representatives.

Perhaps the most practical solution is to increase accountability for our elected officials to insure they dutifully represent the best interests of the people. I imagine most Americans feel our government is beyond their control. It is a living, breathing monster that we have created, now operating with a will all its own and at times making laws and decisions which appear to deliberately harm those it has sworn to protect and defend.

If the government will not have the backbone to represent the will of the people, then the people need to have enough backbone to create a new government – a government in which representatives understand and promote the best interests of their constituents.

Those who fail to represent their people should be promptly voted out of office, so they do not have the opportunity to build a career off their failures. We might want to consider a Constitutional Amendment to allow citizens to vote out, at half term, those representatives who appear almost malicious in their indifference.

But what then? Once a bad representative is voted out of office the current system will simply replace one selfishly ambitious politician for another, which leaves us no better off than we were before. Perhaps we need to look elsewhere. Perhaps instead of looking to lawyers, CEOs, and celebrities, those who chose wealth before service, we should be looking to those who chose service before wealth. Teachers. Veterans. Clergy. Peace Corps Volunteers. Perhaps there needs to be a way for people of great integrity, despite their financial situations, to rise up and serve. After all, it requires great character to do the right thing when offered great rewards for doing the wrong thing. We desperately need leaders who will continually do the right thing.

Who Should Be Represented?

One of the greatest frustrations about living in a democracy is when that democracy does not work. We have all seen it time after time, and the cynicism present is perhaps greater than at any other time in recent history.

The Constitution does not explicitly define who shall be represented in the American form of democracy.

However, it does clearly state that people will decide, one vote at a time, who their representatives will be. It should not be a logical leap, therefore, to expect those representatives to represent those who have elected them.

It would, however, be quite illogical to expect government to bow to the wishes of large corporations and/or lobbyists. There is nothing Constitutional about it, and yet, this goes on day after day in the hallways and conference rooms of Washington.

So what is the unseen force that drives this illegitimate machinery? Is it the almighty dollar? A lust for power? The promise of future prospects? Whatever this force is that jars men and women from their elected duties, it must be stopped.

The assumption can be made that if a majority of people in a given district vote for a candidate, then that representative should more often than not act in the best interests of that majority. Consider a large state with a sparsely populated county that is being considered for nuclear waste storage. It would seem that although there may be financial advantages for such a plan, the representative of said county should be concerned about the health and safety of his constituents and therefore vote against such a plan. And even though all those around him on the legislative floor cry “yea”, he must continue to fight for his people.

The sad truth is that many times we see representatives casting votes in the worst interests of their people.

Although most of these actions can be smoothed over by a silk tongued politician, the wreckage left behind cannot be so easily ignored.

How long will we allow powerful corporations and lobbyists to twist the minds of politicians toward their causes? How long can the voices of millions be ignored?

Accountability

“Read my lips, no new taxes”. These words, spoken by George H. W. Bush, caught the attention of many Americans who hoped to continue the run of prosperity that began during the Reagan Administration. Many of them voted for George H. W. and he found himself in the Oval Office. But there were new taxes and, read my lips, there was nothing we could do about it.

How is it that three hundred million Americans can be held hostage to the whims of fewer than one thousand? How is it that folks in Congress can ignore the hopes and desires of most common people and still vote for their own pay raise each year? How can there be no accountability?

It is too easy to end the discussion there. That's just the way it is. Accept it. The government will expect financial responsibility from its citizens and the businesses that operate within its borders, while it spends recklessly with no regard for the future. The government will, at its discretion, spy on its citizens, but we the people, the very ones who write their paychecks, have no right to question how decisions are made in government. The message they are sending us is a simple one, “Get me in, and get lost.”

Most people would reject this type of behavior from a baby-sitter, a person who will impact the lives of our children for hours to come. Should we accept it from our representatives, those who will impact the lives of our children for years to come?

In 1776 the colonists knew what it was like to live under a British government which had no accountability to the

American people. After victory in the revolution, those handed the task of building a new government chose their words carefully in order to prevent duplicating the evils that had plagued them not long before.

Term lengths testified to this fact. There would be no life terms for the legislative or executive branch of government. Therefore, every two, four, or six years, there could be an accounting of what was done and a decision by the voters as to whether an individual was upholding their responsibilities. But we have seen two problems surface.

First, it has become difficult to measure the effectiveness of our representatives and our president. What makes things worse is the distortion of reality that occurs during a campaign. Some of the events witnessed in recent elections seem almost Orwellian.

Second, life moves faster in 2006 than it did in the eighteenth century. Much damage can be done in two, four, and six year terms, especially by someone far more interested in themselves than the people they represent.

We need creative ways to rectify both of these problems. Millions of children and young adults receive report cards several times each year – a subjective interpretation of their progress. The same holds true for a large percentage of the work force when they receive a job review. Why not government?

If a representative commits a horrendous crime, or treason, it might be possible to have them removed from office. Incompetence and selfish disregard, however, will be tolerated with nothing less than a full term in office.

Power corrupts, and therefore it requires accountability. Our forefathers knew this, and put in place what they hoped would be an incorruptible system. Now it becomes our responsibility to try and improve upon their design.

Black and White vs. Color TV

One day when I was in the first grade, I came home from school to find my parents had replaced our black and white TV. Keep in mind that this was an era when television sets were designed to look more like furniture than electronic devices. Dark stained wood surrounded the screen and well crafted doors hid the built in radio and turntable. It was truly an architectural marvel. But none of that mattered to a six year old kid. The true marvel was the addition of color to those images flashing on the screen.

Color TV brought our favorite shows closer to reality. We could finally see things as they were suppose to be seen, instead of with a bland palette of white and black. Brilliant red sunsets. Dark green trees. Endless blue oceans. This was more lifelike. A better representation of the world we lived in.

If you think about it, US democracy has a great deal in common with black and white TV and too many people have grown tired of watching. Our nation has bought into a system of government where only two colors exist, Blues and Reds, Democrats and Republicans, Liberals and Conservatives. For every issue or concern there are exactly two opinions, two ideas, and two proposals, never more.

We hear news reports from around the world where elections are held with exactly one candidate and laugh at this absurdity. Yet we accept the fact that only two political ideologies can exist - -the right one(ours), and the wrong one(theirs). Isn't this America, home of free thinkers and visionaries? How have we grown so narrow in our thinking?

Consider the menu at a Chinese restaurant that allows you to choose one item from the ten available in group A, add to it one item from the eight available in group B, and complete the meal with one of three soups. The result is 240 possible combinations and a high probability that most

customers will find some combination of foods they enjoy from start to finish.

The Beltway Chinese Restaurant, however, offers a different menu. They offer Moo Shoo Pork with Vegetable Chow Mein and Egg Drop Soup. Some people, of course, may not find this appetizing. Not a problem. They also offer Chicken Low Mein with Sweet and Sour Pork and Wonton Soup. Exactly two menu options to meet the needs of all their customers. In the past, some people had proposed enough flexibility to swap Vegetable Chow Mein for the Chicken Low Mein, but those people were quickly labeled as unpatriotic agitators and no one listens to them anymore.

The truth is obvious, we do not all fit into two compartments, and trying to shoehorn everyone into the conservative or liberal space is unrealistic. There are people who think abortion is a terrible thing and more money needs to go to the impoverished. Those who feel that tax breaks for the wealthy will stimulate economic growth and alternate energy research must be aggressively funded. Stem cell research and tax breaks for home schoolers. These may sound like contradictions, but only because we have been beaten into a two idea system, and we have paid dearly for it.

Imagine going to the polls on a Tuesday afternoon and seeing fifteen candidates for US Senator. Imagine an election where five candidates each received at least ten percent of the vote. Not because they each spit out the doctrine expected by their party, but because each one presented his or her ideas for a better future which, in turn, resonated with a percentage of the electorate.

Is it really that unbelievable that we could have more than two columns on a ballot? More than two legitimate contenders for an office? It happened in 1992 when Ross Perot ran for President. America was hungry, perhaps

even starving, for change. Mr. Perot had a non-political, no-nonsense air about him and a fair percentage of the country loved it. He went from nothing to grabbing almost 20% of the biggest election in the land. Had it not been for an untimely withdrawal from the election, and then a strange re-entry, who knows what could have happened?

I understand the unwillingness of most voters to cast their votes outside the Democratic-Republican monopoly. No one wants to throw away their vote. But what if you considered voting for a system that refuses to change as throwing away your vote? What if your vote was used as a vote for change? What if third and fourth parties received 10% of the vote in 2006? Maybe in 2008 more voters would be bold enough to move outside the box, and those numbers could be around 20%. How long would it take to affect change if change is what we the people really wanted?

There is no doubt that in 1776, as acts and tariffs continued to bear down on the colonists, they could have taken it all on the chin and stayed their course. But there were no indications that things would improve. Things were moving in a downhill direction and the only way to reverse it was to take a bold step. There was a bold step.

We too have a choice to make. If our present course is toward a bright future then we should continue as we have, voting Democrat or Republican. But if our course steers toward dark skies and rough seas, ignoring the voice of the people, then we must be willing to affect change. Look beyond what always was, consider what could be, and be unafraid to turn the rudder by voting in a new column.

Collaborative Democracy

There is a method of code development in the software community known as Open Source. Its roots can be traced to the Free Software Movement, and it has evolved into a

force that is reshaping every major software company in the world.

Open Source allows everyone, key on EVERYONE, to view and modify the underlying source code of an application or software component to suit a particular need or fix a problem. These changes can then be fed back into the software community to improve the quality of the code. The process requires an amazing amount of cooperation, knowledge sharing, distribution of responsibility, and sacrifice, yet it has produced what is arguably better software than what has come from the world's most respected companies. In short, this method is based largely upon collaboration.

Perhaps it is now time for Collaborative Democracy. Cooperation. Sharing of knowledge. Distributed responsibility. Sacrifice. Words that we in America seldom use when discussing our government.

Imagine if a process were in place where citizens were allowed to take a more active role in their government by

- working together with other citizens to propose and vote on potential legislation with the ultimate goal of handing off the most popular ideas to their Congressman
- allowing citizens to vote on the same bills before Congress and then comparing Representatives voting records to make sure they are consistent with votes cast by the citizens they represent
- obtaining detailed, unbiased information about all candidates, not just the top two, for each election

These are just a few possibilities. Imagine how much our government officials could accomplish if they cooperated with citizens and each other. Imagine if our government wasn't run like a football game in which two teams, one in red and one in blue, try to annihilate each other in a winner take all contest.

We live during a time that has been dubbed the Information Age, and although we have only exposed the tip of the iceberg, there is no doubt that the internet can serve up information to the masses at dizzying speeds. Why not use this tool to create a more collaborative form of democracy?

Finally, most of us need to get involved. Life can be hard. There are bills to pay, kids to raise and an endless stream of challenges that greet us on a daily basis. Yet if we ignore our government and let government decide what is best for us, life will most certainly get harder.

Pay Me Now or Pay Me Later

During the 1970s there was an ad campaign for Fram Oil Filters that many people still remember. “You can pay me now, or you can pay me later.” The concept was a simple one. The concept was a brilliant one. Although few words were spoken it was clear we had only two options, pay a small amount of money now for preventative maintenance or pay a much larger amount of money later to replace a seized engine.

Since that time a number of ads have surfaced with a similar message. How many remember “Ignore your teeth and they will go away”? Once again, refuse to pay the smaller price of maintaining your teeth and you will pay the much larger price of not having them.

Many things in life fall into this arena, and some are questions that governments struggle with on a daily basis. For the U.S. Congress, there may have been no greater dilemma than slavery when a newborn government met in 1790.

In a nutshell, as the new government was being forged, thirteen individual states with thirteen individual goals and objectives were being brought under one roof. As this occurred, there were a number of hot topics that brought conflict between north and south, rich and poor, large and

small states. Perhaps foremost of these was the issue of slavery.

In 1790 slavery had already existed in America for more than 150 years. It had become a mainstay of life in the Southern Colonies but was nearing extinction in the Northern ones. As the first Congress was in session, a petition was brought forward to end the African slave trade.

To put things in perspective, consider our country in 2006 split over the issue of abortion (as it is), but those in favor living for the most part east of the Mississippi River, and those against living mostly to the west. Imagine the geographic tension that would build along the river, and how some, if not most, would eventually call for a split between the two sides.

Certainly the Congress was aware how contentious the issue of slavery was in the eighteenth century, but many also realized that the freedoms they had recently fought for and secured were the very same freedoms being denied the African Americans. Those who saw the slaves as more than property were faced with a dilemma. They could take the first steps toward abolishing slavery, which eventually would have meant assimilating approximately 700,000 new citizens into Colonial America and enraging the Southern States. This would have been a very difficult thing to do. As it turns out, after some debate Congress chose the easier alternative, which was to do nothing. Concerned with tearing the young nation apart at its seams, the problem was ignored and life went on as usual.

But we all know the story doesn't end there. Fast forward to 1865 and consider the price finally paid to resolve the slavery issue. More than 600,000 lives were lost directly from five years of war. The nation was physically and psychologically torn apart. The monetary cost was far greater than it would have been 75 years earlier, and after

the last shot was fired, there were still four million African Americans who needed to become part of free America – almost six times more than when the first Congress ignored the topic in 1790.

You can pay me now, or you can pay me later.

So here we are in 2006. The challenges facing our nation have definitely changed, but they are just as real as those facing the first Congress. A national debt that grows each day by more than most of us could earn in a lifetime. Global competition for jobs. Greater demand for energy and dwindling supplies. Immigration policies that protect the economic and physical well being of US Citizens. Social Security. Each issue would be a massive undertaking to address, and each issue grows worse every day it is ignored. Will we take on the challenge now or will we wait until a critical mass is reached that will uproot our world as dramatically as the Civil War did? Remember, those who fail to learn from history are destined to repeat it.

Sacrifice: A Forgotten Word

There is very little new wisdom under the sun. A couple of thousand years ago a man named Aesop was busy writing fables to enlighten the world. Most are familiar with the lazy grasshopper who sat around all summer, while the industrious ant sacrificed summer fun, preparing for the long winter ahead.

This lesson is played out time and time again. The student sacrifices to get a better job. The athlete sacrifices to improve performance. Parents sacrifice to make a better life for their children. Why do lessons learned by individuals go unlearned by our government?

Think for a moment about the history of the United States. It is largely the story of great sacrifice and great reward. The Revolution, Civil War and two World Wars. Millions of amazing stories about a country sacrificing comfort,

time, and in many cases life, to get to a better place, and each time succeeding.

Have we forgotten what it means to sacrifice? Have we become so complacent that we have no fight left? Would we rather just go into the history books as a once great nation that faded into mediocrity sometime in the twenty-first century?

There is no doubt that great leadership is needed to help a nation face great challenges. Imagine what it meant to the colonial soldiers when General Washington asked them in person to continue fighting even though their enlistments were over? What about Roosevelt's fireside chats to a nation reeling from economic depression and global war?

Another good example of this is the space race in the 1960s, kicked off with a speech by President Kennedy.

I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth.

These words laid down a gauntlet that would inspire a nation until man finally did set foot on the moon in July of 1969. Vision. Sacrifice. Achievement.

Energy. Terrorism. Social Security. Education. There is no shortage of challenges facing us today, but where is the leadership that will ask us to face these challenges and the courage that will help see us through?

Simple Laws Are Better Laws

Going back to another idea from the software community, KISS, or Keep It Simple Stupid, is nothing more than a plea for simplicity. Studies in the software industry have shown that for every dollar spent developing code another four dollars are spent to maintain it. It must sound odd that software requires maintenance like a building or a roadway, but as needs change and problems surface the code must be changed. These changes demand that software engineers dig into old code and introduce

modifications, which become dramatically more difficult and costly when the code is complex or confusing.

Perhaps the KISS principle could have profound implications on the way we create the laws of our land. The process for a bill to become a law is a complex one with many twists and turns. This in itself is not bad as it provides the checks and balances hoped for by the framers of the Constitution, but somewhere in the process lies the ability to add amendments.

Amendments, one can assume, were intended as a good thing. Bills that have progressed deep into the system need not be re-written when a simple amendment, a small tweak to the bill, can satisfy a majority in the vote for passage. But there are at least two scenarios where amendments can go drastically wrong.

First, amendments can be used for pork-barreling (adding a piece of legislation for a special interest). If added to a much needed bill, Congress can be forced to allow a small amount of “bad” to get a larger amount of “good”.

Second, amendments can be used to completely undermine a bill. If an amendment is found to be so offensive, or in sharp contrast to one political party's agenda, a bill can be rendered completely useless. Throwing the baby out with the bath water.

What if Congress began working with micro-bills? Tiny chunks of legislation that would be easier to comprehend, easier to debate, easier to vote on, and with no amendments allowed. What if an energy bill with ten provisions were reduced to ten separate bills? There would certainly be some additional overhead and inefficiency, but could the overall simplicity of each bill make up for it? Could an often stalemated Congress ultimately process more legislation? Could we derive a better understanding of the fine grained actions of our representatives, making it easier to hold them accountable?

Problems require solutions. Solutions require imagination. Imagination requires a willingness to think outside the box and do what has never been done before. Should we stay the course or try for something better?

Tough Questions

The following questions are not intended to sway the reader into any political affiliation, but merely to open the floor for debate on a few hot topics.

Are the rewards so great that a 200 plus year history spent acting primarily in defense of ourselves and our allies needed to be abandoned to overthrow a dictator in Iraq? I understand it is easy to play Monday morning quarterback when things have not gone well, but why didn't this question echo through the halls of Washington just a few years ago when it mattered? When the U.S. was still considered by most nations of the world to be a defender of freedom.

Aren't the potential rewards of adult stem cell research (not embryonic stem cell research, which is seen by some as ethically wrong) great enough that the federal government should offer aggressive funding? Adult stem cell therapies, such as bone marrow transplants, were saving lives even before we knew what stem cells were. Why don't we kick this work into high gear, because the ethical debate on embryonic research could go on for a long time?

How many illegal aliens are enough to handle all the jobs that Americans don't want? I keep hearing about all the jobs Americans don't want to do anymore, but I was happy to paint houses when I was in college because I needed to eat and pay rent. I imagine there are other Americans who would gladly cut lawns, pave roads, and build new homes.

Why would we be quick to defend Kuwait in the name of human rights during the first Gulf War and not be willing to quickly defend Bosnia in the midst of their civil war?

Why was it important to limit our involvement with Russia when they were a communist nation, but now it is not a problem to have a great deal of involvement with China? And if we are allowed to play nice with China, why not Cuba too?

Should our government be concerned about protecting the economic interests of all its citizens, or just its well-to-do citizens?

Is it more important for our government to stand for free markets and free trade, or to stand for its people by trying to institute policies that would prevent jobs from being lost overseas?

Is it important that our nation be seen by other nations as a beacon of freedom and defender of human rights, or just another dog in the fight?

Where To From Here?

In the opening paragraph of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, he writes:

...a long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in the defence of custom.

Status quo, however, does not make things right. For too long, we have accepted the misdirected will, the inefficiencies, the corruption, the bloat of government. That is the way it is. That is the way it always was. That is the way it will always be.

Sadly, I write this essay knowing things will probably never change, but also knowing they must. We must break free of our present apathy once and forever. If small change can occur, then small change over a long period of time can result in sweeping change. The Grand Canyon is evidence of this.

Our first step is to decide, as a nation, if we really want things to change. Then, and only then, we must find a way to unite our wills, our energy, our dreams, and our

creativity to slowly and steadily turn things in a new direction.

There are a few things this author believes are essential to finding our way. We must:

- find a way to gauge each representative's service to his or her people and hold that representative accountable when he or she fails to dutifully represent those people
- increase the number of political parties to much greater than two, or eliminate them altogether, so that new ideas and possibilities for cooperation will flourish
- simplify the definition of what constitutes a bill, which could cause the legislative branch to function more efficiently
- establish an avenue where people of great integrity and conviction, not just those of wealth, power and influence, can become legitimate candidates for government positions
- be willing to take on great challenges and make great sacrifices, for our families, our fellow countrymen, and our descendants.

No one man or woman can tackle these problems alone. We must work together. Democraseed.org, along with this essay, is one man's attempt to fan the flames of revolution. As the name implies, this is just a seed. If there is a better place online for this to happen, then we must all find it, together. In order for this revolution to occur we must communicate, and make no mistake, this revolution must take place. A revolution not of rifles and rockets, but of words and ideas so powerful they can mold the strongest government on earth into what it was always meant to be – a beacon of freedom, security, and opportunity to all who call it home.