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EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW DEMOCRACIES

This morning, as I was reviewing *Towards a New Democracy* and “A New American Democracy” to post them on nedcrosby.org, I realized two important things that need to be said:

1. Something important was left out of “A New American Democracy”. When designing a new democracy in a professional way, it is vital that this be done under the guidance of an informed microcosm of the public, either a Citizens Jury or a Citizens’ Assembly, that is run with the proper design so as to elicit an authentic voice of the people (see my 1996 article of this name). Unless this is done, the professionals who design new democracies are likely to come up with suggestions that please those who sponsor or fund the effort, rather than something “of, by and for the people”.
2. An interesting way to start out on this effort would be to set up a Citizens Jury to guide the work of different teams of grad students at a school of public policy, like the Kennedy School or the Humphrey Institute. This would cost only a modest amount: \$100,000 to \$300,000 depending on how elaborate the Citizens Jury is.

It would be very easy to undertake point #2. Any university large enough to host a significant public policy school should be able to find the funds for this. There are dozens of American foundations large enough to fund such a project. Indeed, a state legislature could astonish skeptics like me by deciding to fund a project, the challenge being not the amount of money, but getting legislators to admit that planning for future democracies is important and that it should not be under the control of some interest group or ideology.

It is not clear, however, whether a small project like the above would make any difference. It is likely that no significant steps will be taken to adopt a new democratic system until a major effort is made to create an informed political will among Americans so that they can demand a new democracy to serve them well in the 21st century.

I have been working on a “grand idea” for doing this, but have not had time to complete it properly. I am attaching it below so that those curious about my hopes for American democracy can learn what I am considering. My hope is that before the end of 2015 I can work on this long enough so that it can be posted on nedcrosby.org, rather than simply attaching a draft to an essay.

So my current view on new democratic systems is that there are ways to experiment with demonstration projects that should be relatively easy to undertake, but that the implementation of a new democratic system will require a mobilization of the public that will be very costly and possible only with major support from billionaires. New forms of democracy are badly needed, but will fail unless there is an informed political will strong enough to understand the reform and support it strongly.

Building a New America

April 27, 2015

Vision: We must overcome the politics of divide and conquer that now dominates our political system. We must find a way to unite Americans through methods that enhance reason and compassion.

Key Points:

1. Methods exist that can do this.
 - Several new democratic methods have been developed and thoroughly tested over the last four decades.
2. The support of a group of patriotic billionaires will be needed.
 - A group of billionaire philanthropists already exists.
 - No other method of rebuilding American democracy will succeed without billionaire support.
3. It will take careful designing and experimentation to make this work.
 - An initial pilot demonstration would cost about \$500,000.
 - Pilot projects at the state level will cost in the range of \$20 million.
 - Full implementation on the national level will cost at least \$1 billion.
4. We must act now.
 - If we wait until the need to act is obvious to all, it will be too late. The years before WW II are a good example.

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Executive Summary

Vision: We must overcome the politics of divide and conquer that now dominates our political system. We must find a way to unite Americans through methods that enhance reason and compassion.

Goal: Get the people of America to agree on some key things that unify them and then use this set of agreements to elect a President and Congress committed to carrying these out.

Five Steps: Use the tools of deliberative democracy that have been developed over the last few decades to create this unified public. This does not mean a complete consensus, only that a significant majority of Americans from around the nation can agree on some core things they want government to achieve. The five steps to accomplish this are:

- Get a microcosm of the public to agree on three policy areas that could unite Americans in terms of creating a strong future for our nation.
- Set up a few committees around the country to check out the details. Since the devil is so often in the details, will the original hope for agreement hold up when a close look is taken at what needs to be done?
- Check the public reaction to the areas selected for possible agreement. Even if an agreement is possible among microcosms of the public taking a close look at an issue, will a majority of the voting public agree?
- Build a novel public relations campaign. New approaches must be sought out to get the public to understand that a new game of politics is being created and that this is something they can trust.
- Implement. Once it appears that a majority of the public can support the evolving agreements, decide if this is a stable enough position for action to be taken. If so, then:
 - At the national level, mount a major electoral campaign to elect a president and congress prepared to put the American people ahead of special interests and lobbyists.
 - At the state level, a governor may choose to use this method to adopt a few major policies that are in the long-term interest of the state.

Can this possibly work? There are four key reasons this can work: The public is very upset about our federal government, the methods for unifying the country have been proven to work, there are segments of the public that should be open to change and there are reasons why billionaires may be willing to support this.

Experimentation: The methods of deliberative democracy have been perfected over the last four decades and now are ready to create a new game of politics. But considerable experimentation is needed to take these to scale.

Funding: In order to change the current game of politics at the national level, at least \$1 billion will be needed, probably more. Billionaires are already exerting a heavy

influence on our elections. We now need to see billions invested in making democracy work, rather than simply promoting some interest or ideology.

Five Steps For Building A New America

Here is the initial rough draft.

We should use the tools of deliberative democracy that have been developed over the last few decades to create a solid agreement on one to three key issues. This does not mean a complete consensus, only that a significant majority of Americans from around the nation can agree on some core things they want government to achieve. The tools to use are:

1. Citizens' Assembly. This can bring together a microcosm of some 100 to 200 Americans. They should meet for about ten 2-day meetings to discover if they can find up to three major policy areas where they think a significant majority might be able to reach an agreement.
2. Citizens Jury process. This enables a microcosm of the public to explore a public policy option in depth to be sure that the initial positions that people might agree on will indeed work out once the details are examined closely. As soon as the Citizens' Assembly reaches in initial agreement, these will be convened. The hope is that they can do their work and report back to the Citizens' Assembly so that the participants in that will be able to reflect on what has been learned. Does the hope for initial agreement hold up? If not, is there another issue that should be examined?
3. In-depth surveys to learn how the general public is reacting to the agreements that are being reached by the Citizens Juries and the Citizens' Assembly. These will be done concurrently with the above two steps. This might also involve a standing group of some 300 or more randomly selected people who are in communication on-line. This would be similar to the "Televote" that Ted Becker invented in the 1970s, or to the "kitchen cabinet" that has been tried out in Oregon.
4. Build a novel public relations campaign. New approaches must be sought out to get the public to understand that a new game of politics is being created and that this is something they can trust. For example, prizes could be offered for those who create the best thing(s) to post on FaceBook. Then creative people would be engaged in developing videos that portray the spirit of how a microcosm of the public has worked together to agree on some key policies. The best of these could then be promoted, with the hope that some of them would go viral. Another novel approach would be to invite a microcosm of those who oppose the agreements to meet with the Citizens' Assembly to discuss in a respectful way whether the disagreements are fundamental, or whether some changes might be made that would draw them into agreeing with what the Citizens' Assembly is seeking to do.
5. 21st Century Town Meeting. Once a solid majority emerges in support of the evolving agreement, then call a 21st Century Town Meeting of several thousand people, a microcosm of the public. They will meet for one day to decide if they believe the time is ripe for political action. If a significant

majority votes in favor, then a major campaign will be mounted to elect a President and Congress committed to voting into law the agreements that have been reached. At the state level, this option will not be included, since it is the governor (or the legislature or both) that will decide if it is time to implement the policies agreed upon.

As the above five steps are implemented, it will be necessary to have a group that can make decisions as the process moves ahead. This will be called the People's Council. This is a group of a dozen people chosen by those who attend the Citizens' Assembly. They will monitor the progress being made and decide on important steps to be taken. Is there an evolving agreement in the Citizens' Assembly that is acceptable to a significant majority of the public? Is there any group that remains in opposition? If so, what can be done to reach out to them? Is there growing financial support from the general public for this to continue? If these methods have been tried for awhile and there is not a growing sense of unity, then the People's Council can decide to terminate the effort.

The People's Council will have some very important decisions to make along the way:

- Is the initial funding from major foundations and wealthy individuals acceptable to the general public?
- How long should the above methods be used to find areas of agreement before these agreements are used as the basis for an electoral effort? If an electoral effort is made too soon, the areas of public agreement may not hold up under the pressures of an election campaign. But if the electoral effort is put off too long, the core supporters and even the public may lose interest as they feel that action is not being taken rapidly enough.
- When will it be possible to stop relying on wealthy donors and foundations and continue the effort based on small donations from the public at large? This effort should be seen as a way toward a healthy democracy, but that cannot be sustained for very long based only on support from wealthy donors.

Need For Experimentation

It is quite interesting to reflect on the different views about experimentation in engineering and politics. Sending a man to the moon in the 1960s provides an interesting example. By 1957 when Sputnik was sent aloft by the Russians, it became quite clear that sending a man in the moon was within the realm of the possible. But it would have been unthinkable for an engineer to say that no more testing of rockets was needed before a man would be launched to the moon. Experimentation is at the heart of a solid program, even when one is sure that the vision can be accomplished.

But in politics, it seems that one should not talk about the need for experimentation, lest that be taken as a sign that one doesn't really know what one is doing. Those of us who work on deliberative methods know that we have enough experience to implement the vision of Building a New America. But we need to do experiments along the way to be sure of it. Sometime in the 1940s, Werner von Braun held the vision of sending a man to the moon. But if he had tried to do it with the rockets available in 1950, the chance of success would have been slim. In the same way, those of us who are confident about building a new America must do tests to learn if the public is ready for this yet.

Then list some of the experiments that can be done.

- The test for \$500,000. How strong a desire emerges in a simple Citizens Jury for finding policies that can unify Americans and move to building a new America? Does the vision have appeal?
- The test for \$2 million. If the vision has appeal, then what happens when the details are examined closely and the idea is tested in national surveys?
- The test for \$20 million. Do the initial results for \$2 million hold up when an attempt is made to use novel public relations to get support from a majority of the voters?
- The implementation in a state for \$50 to \$100 million (see below).
- The implementation at national level for a billion or more.

The Need For Patriotic Billionaires

There will be five points to be made here:

1. It should be possible to find these. Already there are many billionaires pushing policy in the direction they want. It is hoped that there will be a few billionaires who care about democracy who would be willing to invest to preserve and promote it, even if they currently are very reluctant to give to anything “political”, given that this seems to mean that one engages in unpleasant activities to promote one’s own interests. Are those billionaires who do care about the future of America content to sit by and watch billionaires out to promote their own ideologies take over politics in America?
2. It will be much easier to get this off the ground if there is a coalition of billionaires who come together to fund this. Their willingness should be enhanced because the initial experiments will be relatively cheap. They will need to invest heavily only when it comes to the point where there is sound evidence that the implementation is likely to work.
3. In the process of searching for wealthy patriots, we should be aware that even if we can’t find any to support the vision of this paper, it will be a huge success to get them involved in supporting democracy in some way.
4. One of the tasks of the deliberative methods, especially the 21st Century Town Meeting, will be for the microcosms to see if they approve of the particular billionaires who are prepared to fund a major election campaign? If some of these are controversial enough, their support may be turned down. For example, the microcosm might insist that there be a mix of ideologies among the potential donors.
5. The billionaires should make it clear that they expect the American public to take over the funding of this if initial efforts are successful. What percent of future funding should come in small donations is something that all should consider as the efforts move ahead.

Implementation At The State Level

This is taken directly from a recent essay, with virtually no editing

It would be possible for a governor to call for some form of *Building* in his/her state. Lots of careful planning would be needed to do this properly, but here are some initial thoughts:

1. The funding for it most likely would come from the wealthy patriots who have decided to explore this as an option at the national level. But it conceivably could come from state government if the governor were clever enough, powerful enough, and lucky enough to get the legislature to adopt this.
2. The governor would ask for up to three areas of agreement about major policy areas where the state needs to make progress. He might list six areas, such as transportation, education, health, taxes, etc. and ask them to start with one to see how it might work.
3. At the national level the cost of a Citizens' Assembly vs. a CJ is a minor part of the cost of the whole event, so it always makes sense to start with a Citizens' Assembly. But at the state level there might not be enough money to start with a Citizens' Assembly. But there would have to be the standard elements to it, before they could make a final recommendation to the governor:
 - A. The initial microcosm that finds one to three areas of possible agreement.
 - B. The follow-up CJ or CJs to check out whether the agreement will hold up once the details are looked at closely.
 - C. The polling (televote and standard poll) to see how the people of the state react to it.
 - D. The outreach to those who disagree.
 - E. A PR campaign of some sort to convince a majority of voters to support this.
 - F. A people's council to guide this work and to report back to the governor. They would probably want to hire a press secretary to represent them.
4. The governor would undertake this with a promise to implement any agreement where 60% of the voting public agrees with the proposal.

My guess (after a minute of reflection) is that this would cost in the range of \$20 to \$100 million. The advantage of this approach is that it removes the need for the effort to become electoral. This would mean leaving out the 21st Century Town Meeting and the major funds needed for an election campaign.

Also, this would be a much better way to get existing politicians to buy into the idea. We could explore this with former governors and possibly use the Council

of State Governments to help us. And that, in turn, might be a good way to get wealthy patriots to pay attention to the idea.

Can This Possibly Work?

This page (or two) needs to be written very carefully. What follows are a few initial ideas about how to do this.

Public dissatisfaction with government

According to Gallup, the most important problem facing America is stated as dissatisfaction with government. It has been this for the last four months.¹ A good argument can be made that our democracy is in danger. How much danger, we will not know until some clear corner has been turned. But it is a time when strong corrective action is warranted. What can be done to combat the increasing public cynicism, so that people feel proud of our democracy again and take steps to make sure the government serves us rather than powerful interests?

Methods to Unify People Have Been Proven to Work

In this section, I should list some examples of how CJs have brought people together. They should also be examples where elites are trying to divide people into opposing camps. What follows is something on health care, borrowed from an earlier paper that could be inserted in this paper if edited and shortened.

- A. The health care issue is a paradigm case where the public can't have its cake and eat it too. The marvels of modern medicine have presented us with a set of dilemmas which societies of the past never had to confront. The problem is easy to state: how can we achieve universal health care coverage while keeping prices down and avoiding rationing? The answer is simple: we cannot. In spite of the fact that the Affordable Care Act appears to be cutting back on the rapid increase in health care costs, over the long run there are fundamental technological and demographic forces that will keep pushing medical spending up. At some point either taxes will have to go up to support the current programs or there will have to be rationing in some form. The voucher approach of Paul Ryan does not introduce rationing directly, but the subsidies given the elderly and the poor will surely not be enough to cover the services they want. They will self-ration by buying insurance with fewer benefits and more deductibles.
- B. In our current political climate, it is very difficult for a politician to be straight with the public about this. Prof. Uwe Reinhart has pointed out that: "Everyone now agrees that "hard trade-offs must be made" in health care -- but only for others. Alas, because it may appear selfish to say out loud that health care should be rationed somehow for everyone else but oneself, we use mellow euphemisms to make that case -- e.g., saying that "health care

¹ See: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181946/americans-name-government-no-problem.aspx>

- needs to be restructured” somehow, without being up front about exactly what that means.” Reinhart goes on to say: “is it any wonder that on this veritable Health Care Tower of Babel, with its obfuscatory language and multiple hidden agendas, national health policies and the health-care systems they beget have become a veritable Mishegaz? ‘Mishegaz’ is Aramaic for ‘a mess’.”
- C. All of this plays beautifully into the current game of politics. It is an excellent example of how the “divide and conquer” approach to politics plays out in America today. The Democrats can blame the Republicans for their hard-heartedness in opposing universal coverage. The Republicans can blame the Democrats for being those tax-and-spend liberals who want to adopt socialized medicine. This helps each party to play to its core constituencies and raise the funds needed for election. The public, accustomed to a political system which seems unable to make progress on key issues, willingly joins in on this blaming without realizing that there is a core dilemma which cannot be solved unless the citizenry as a whole is brought into the discussion in a meaningful way.
- D. Another view of the game that is now being played is given by Sam Baker in the *National Journal* of 1-7-14: “For Republicans, Obamacare is the gift that keeps on giving. Each day brings a fresh batch of horror stories of people losing their plans, getting cut off from their doctors, and shelling out more for premiums. But had Mitt Romney won in 2012 and let Paul Ryan have his way with Medicare, Republicans would be on the other side of the fence, trying to defend a health care overhaul that produced a nearly identical suite of horror stories.
- a. “That’s because, despite the political chasm between them—and though neither will admit it—Obama and Ryan are pushing similar policies in the bid to change the U.S. health system. Both rely on private insurance, sold through a competitive exchange, with help from a government subsidy.
 - b. “And though they apply it to different populations, both programs share a fundamental conceit: They move a big group of people into the private insurance market. Both Obama and Ryan argue their overhaul would improve the country as a whole, but neither can escape the reality that in a shift of that size, some people will lose out. And each plan’s losers would have similar stories to tell.”
- E. It will not be easy for a microcosm of the public to agree on this. Even if those in the Citizens’ Assembly think it possible, it is likely that the Citizens Jury that examines the details will find what a challenge it is for liberals and conservatives to agree on what to do. On the other hand, if they could do this, it would show how eager the public is to find a way to unite behind workable policies, even if it means giving up on some things dear to one’s heart. Liberals and conservatives

will have to respect each other's dilemmas. The former will be quite reluctant to give up on the single payer approach, the latter reluctant to give up on health care vouchers. But the first Citizens Jury conducted by the Jefferson Center in 1974 showed that randomly selected citizens are able to appreciate this dilemma and discuss it in a sensible way. If this was possible in the primitive event conducted in 1974, it should be possible again after four decades of improving the method.

Segments of the Public Should be Open to Change

I should take some information like the table from Pew to make this case. We will never get some of the strong partisans to change, but we should be able to get enough of the public to support this to bring about a major change in how politics is conducted.

The 2014 Political Typology: Polarized Wings, a Diverse Middle

	Percent of ...		
	General public	Regist. voters	Politically engaged
	%	%	%
The Partisan Anchors	36	43	57
● Steadfast Conservatives <i>Socially conservative populists</i>	12	15	19
● Business Conservatives <i>Pro-Wall Street, pro-immigrant</i>	10	12	17
● Solid Liberals <i>Liberal across-the-board</i>	15	17	21
Less Partisan, Less Predictable	54	57	43
● Young Outsiders <i>Conservative views on government, not social issues</i>	14	15	11
● Hard-Pressed Skeptics <i>Financially stressed and pessimistic</i>	13	13	9
● Next Generation Left <i>Young, liberal on social issues, less so on social safety net</i>	12	13	11
● Faith and Family Left <i>Racially diverse and religious</i>	15	16	12
● Bystanders <i>Young, diverse, on the sidelines of politics</i>	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
N	10,013	7,999	4,767

2014 Political Typology. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. The politically engaged are registered to vote, closely follow public affairs and say they always or nearly always vote.

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Billionaires May Be Willing to Support This

I will have to think carefully what to put here in light of what was said in the section above on billionaires.

Complexities

There are a number of complexities that could be presented here. The purpose would be to indicate to policy experts some of the further details and

possibilities that could be considered. But if this paper is not intended for an audience that will read critically, then this section should be left out. For example:

1. Finding the initial agreement. Although the Citizens' Assembly has been conducted successfully, it has only been done three times. There are many lessons that could be learned if there were enough funds to experiment with several different ways of conducting this method. One example: The strength of the Wisdom Council method is that it can help a group of people become very innovative in developing novel methods for doing something. The drawback of Wisdom Councils is that they do not use witnesses and might come up with something unworkable. But if the Citizens' Assembly is divided into a number of committees of about two dozen people, one or two of these could be conducted like a Wisdom Council. All the committees would report to the full group and the best ideas would be selected. Certainly the final product might borrow from the work of several committees.
2. Novel public relations. This should be an area where invention is important. I have given only a little thought to this. It would be interesting to see what some brainstorming, done by PR professionals or by college students, could produce.
3. Getting a governor to sponsor. This, of course, would be a major effort. It might take a couple of years to accomplish, or it might be easy if one were lucky in the selection of a governor. Finding the right person so introduce us would be key.
4. Example of possible agreement: state revenues. Anyone who knows the history of the discussion of revenues and taxes in Washington state (and likely most other states) knows how complex this is. If a governor were interested in suggesting this as an issue, it would be possible to produce a 50 page paper discussing all the challenges and indicating how likely it might be that a microcosm ever could agree upon this.