

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Pioneering the Common Good**Shall We Stay the Course?**

So here we are, in a new era, fellow citizens in an American nation with all the tools of representative democracy at our disposal. For inspiration, we have our Declaration of Independence; for organization, our Constitution; for individual freedoms, our Bill of Rights. As a nation, and as communities within this nation, we have great resources and opportunities; we also face imposing constraints. What are we to make of this moment in history?

Our first choice is to stay with the habits we know. We live in the midst not only of wealth but also of chronic disappointments. Some of us prefer to see Republicans in charge, even if we know that not much will happen to change the chronic problems we face. And some of us prefer to see Democrats in charge, knowing also that America's chronic difficulties are not likely to shrink by any measurable extent. When areas of failure abound, expeditors become our heroes. "Sure, the system is broken, but so what? I can deliver favors in the midst of a broken system. Give me your trust."

Is this the better choice? Let's replay the inevitable consequences. Today's design templates will continue to undermine our well-being.

Short-sighted answers for urban and suburban transportation. America's suburbs have a simple approach to growth. Create a grid of major highways, spaced half a mile or a mile apart. Line them with strip malls. Fill in with housing subdivisions. Every now and then, leave room for a larger shopping mall. We've done it this way for years, and it's certainly an agreeable way to do business. No one has to think very far into the future; no one has to ask the hard questions about long-term consequences. No one realizes, in the day to day work of making suburbs out of old farms, that the physical supply of highway capacity, measured in Lane-Miles, cannot possibly keep pace with commuter Demand, expressed in Lane-Feet per Commuter Auto times Total Commuters. No one realizes that, in time, a million new motorists will materialize; no one realizes and they will need thousands of additional lane-miles of highway capacity, partly in the outer suburbs, but mostly as an addition to existing arterials, where the creation of new capacity is a physical impossibility. No one imagines that we might need a parallel form of public transit, to relieve the pressure on our roads. And no one imagines that the parallel form of transit might need a metro-wide system of rights-of-way. So the American city of the future is imprisoned by the short-sightedness of the American past. Why do we have so much gridlock? Because as suburban Americans we abhor long-term thinking. Are these rational habits for citizens of an advanced industrial power? Perhaps not, but they seem to be the best we can do. The impact of our short-sightedness undermines our civic infrastructure and weakens our human capital.

Short-sighted answers for medical industry design. Nothing better illustrates the limitation of our civic culture than the cautionary tale of how Americans cope with the business of providing medical care and paying for it. Again, as a people that hates to think systemically, we react,

continually, by making patchwork adjustments. Medicare gets patched, Medicaid gets patched, drug purchasing gets patched, insurance rules get patched, hospital regulation gets patched, compensation rules get patched, employer coverage rules get patched. Woe to those who suggest we learn something useful from other nations whose talents for thinking systemically are stronger than ours. It completely escapes our notice that the American medical industry functions as a de facto cartel. Its ability to raise prices and sell excessive amounts of care far exceeds the ability of all the separate patched-together pieces to limit prices and provide responsible amounts of care. America pays almost twice as much for medicine as anyone else, measured on a per capita basis. The central promise of free market capitalism, that modern technology will deliver greater value at a steadily decreasing cost, gets turned upside down by the cartel-like system we have created, yet the rest of the American business community is as anesthetized to what's happening to us as anyone else. Our employers pay too much. Our taxpayers pay too much. Our consumers pay too much. Yet we are so in love with short-sighted thinking, we are so enamored of our sweet-talking expeditors on the Right and the Left, that we don't realize how appalling our civic performance is. Economic capital suffers. Human capital suffer. Civic capital suffers. Our nation suffers. America loses more and more degrees of freedom, the longer this cartel-driven system survives.

Short-sighted approaches to national economic growth. Gross Domestic Product grew handsomely for a quarter century, averaging 3.9% a year in real terms from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. Industry after industry imagined that the curve of rising growth would never level off. CEO's didn't pay attention to manufacturing quality. Politicians in Washington imagined that they could finance the War in Vietnam with all the debt they wanted, and never face a day of reckoning. Unions imagined that wages could always be indexed to consumer prices. America's economy stumbled badly in the 1970s, and once it had righted itself in the 1980s, something important had been overlooked. The nation had forgotten that the industries of the future often require an early boost if they are to ripen into major components of American economic power. Investors had turned their attention away from American growth and toward the fortunes they might make from globalization. Rising oil imports drained American cash. As America borrowed more from abroad, American consumers purchased more from abroad. Gross Domestic Product has grown at 2.9% a year for the last three decades, a full percentage point slower than before. The nation was stumbling, economically, even before the Great Recession that began in 2008, and still doesn't have a working theory about how to sustain faster GDP growth.

Short-sighted behaviors on deficits and debt. From 1950 to 1970, gross debt owed by the federal government rose by 2.0% a year. The folks in Washington had a bipartisan aversion to large deficits and a rising national debt. But in the 1970's, as the Vietnam War drove deficits higher and the economy stumbled, national debt rose by 9.1% a year. Presidents Reagan and Bush threw caution to the winds, growing the national debt by 13.1% a year during their Administrations. Growth in the debt slowed under President Clinton, to 4.4% a year, then accelerated again under President George W. Bush, to 6.9% a year.¹

Gone are the days when fiscal responsibility was a matter of bipartisan pride. Put a Republican in the White House today and, as recent experience shows, all notions of restraint are cast aside. The pall of national debt simply explodes. What happened to the Republicans who believed in fiscal responsibility? Purged, apparently, from today's Republican Party. Financial short-sightedness seems to be an infectious disease, and our friends in today's Republican Party

have lost all sense of how fevered they have become. So many balance sheet items suffer from this short-sightedness. Civic capital suffers, economic capital suffers, and, as an indirect consequence, human and environmental capital suffer as well.

Short-sighted favoritism toward America's most prosperous. A concerted campaign was launched in the 1960s and 1970s to scale back the Federal role in the American economy. Taxes were to be cut at the highest income levels, on the premise that investment rates would rise and growth rates would accelerate. It used to be the case, in the 1950s and 1960s, that the Lower Ninety Percent shared equitably in a growing pie. For every trillion in added pre-tax income generated by the American economy, the Lower Ninety pulled in an extra seven hundred billion. That has dramatically changed. During the presidency of George W. Bush, as the economy added an extra trillion in pre-tax income, less than four hundred billion dollars of this was collected by Americans in the Lower Ninety. The share of new prosperity going to America's middle class has been almost halved. On the other side of the coin, the Upper Ten Percent has done far better. Once the Upper Ten collected only thirty percent of each new trillion in pre-tax income; now the Upper Ten collects more than sixty percent. A growth strategy that enriches America's most privileged yields great benefits to those suburban communities that are home to the Upper Ten, but it puts all of America's other suburbs and urban neighborhoods and small towns at a great disadvantage. Civic capital suffers, economic capital suffers, human capital suffers.

Short-sighted Republican agenda for America. Today's national Republican Party can perhaps be proud of its services to America's elites, as the last paragraph suggests, but it is not clear that today's Republicans have an agenda for the nation that benefits all Americans. The last three decades have been much less beneficial to America than the preceding quarter century. With Republican economic principles dominant, GDP has slowed from 3.9% a year to 2.9% a year. The national debt once expanded at 2.0% a year, in nominal terms; now Republicans freely accelerate the growth in national debt at 7% a year, as they did under George W. Bush, or even 13% a year, as they did under Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Once America's Lower Ninety Percent received seventy percent of America's growing prosperity; now they receive only forty percent. Slower growth. Faster debt. America's middle class and lower middle class receiving a much smaller share of American prosperity than they once did. Given their track record over the past three decades, it is exceedingly difficult to make the case that the national Republican Party has the wisdom and the integrity to function as a responsible governing party. This is a tragedy for America, because this nation's well-being depends on both parties having sufficient competence to govern well during the twenty-first century. Main Street Republican voters owe the nation a better political party than the one they currently vote for. America's civic capital – on the Republican side of the fence – is not doing so well.

Short-sighted answers for housing. We Americans have long used our fears rather than our hopes to guide the nation's housing practices. Ethnic fears, racial fears, and fears based on class have all played a part. The exceptionally prosperous retreat into gated communities. Affordable housing is often in short supply, except, of course, when madcap financing funds overbuilding. An honorable housing market matches the supply it creates to the economic means and desires of the entire housing market; America's housing market falls well short of this standard. A nation that cannot provide affordable housing to people in all segments of the housing market places a heavy

burden on human capital; nor can it not rightly claim that its economic capital is vigorous and strong.

Short-sighted answers for public education. There are glimmers of hope in public education. Reformers in Washington have begun to let go of old ideas and insist on better performance from America's public schools. Yet institutional inertia persists in school districts everywhere, because no one in high leadership position has yet acknowledged that public education is in need of a significant paradigm shift. Great principals have figured out a stronger paradigm, as described in some detail earlier, but its true character so threatens the institutional habits of public education that America has yet to see a truly heroic school district emerge, one that has absorbed the meaning of this new paradigm and implemented it effectively from Kindergarten all the way through Twelfth Grade. Mainstream public education continues to leave behind too many children of poverty. Sixty percent of African-American males who don't finish high school will end up serving time in prison. At the high end of the spectrum, public education also under-delivers. America isn't producing nearly the number of scientists and engineers that it needs. The human capital shortfall continues.

Short-sighted policy on the minimum wage. America's principals and school teachers always make a pitch for studying hard and finishing high school. It is a noble call, the right thing for them to ask. Let a young person enter the labor market, though, and all that gung-ho spirit is for naught. The minimum wage has been deteriorating for years, and American business' message to low income employees is often disrespectful and blunt: "We don't think very highly of you, and we don't plan on paying you much, either." In America's inner cities, no wonder young men get caught up in the culture of the neighborhood gang. When the labor market turns its back on the young, the inner city gang cashes in. But beyond the gang dynamic, America also suffers because substandard wages discourage young men from seeing themselves as future husbands. The impact for human capital? Continuing damage.

Short-sighted welfare policies. Though not as free-spending as they once were, welfare programs continue to reward unmarried women for having babies. By subsidizing motherhood without marriage, this nation has created a social nightmare. Far too many boys and girls grow up in fatherless homes. The urban failure spiral is fed by many forces; this is one of the most potent.

Short-sighted answers for drug addiction. What is America to think of the drug user? Is drug use an illness? Or a crime? For quite some time, Americans have modeled the nation's drug policy on the principles of Prohibition. Selling is a crime, possessing is a crime, consuming is a crime. Though Prohibition was a failure, and canceled after little more than a decade, Americans have learned little from that failure. Outlawing intoxicants, whether based on alcohol or narcotics, raises prices and enriches smugglers. Today's policy plays directly into the hands of international drug cartels, whose vast profits and bloodthirsty violence arise only because drugs are both illegal and expensive. A rational America would treat drug use as a medical problem; of course, a rational America would also have an affordable medical system. A rational America would destroy the drug gangs by destroying their business model. Produce drugs locally and sell them cheaply, in a regulated environment, so that there's no money to be had from dealing illegal drugs. Instead, America's drug policy permits terrorists to fund themselves with drug sales and finances international violence. Today's short-sighted reasoning on drug issues undermines national security

and locks America's inner cities in a perpetual cycle of violence. Civic capital suffers, human capital deteriorates.

Short-sighted responses to the urban failure spiral. To sum up, we live today in an urban America of bad answers. We have bad answers on housing and ghettoize the poor. We embrace bad answers on welfare and undermine marriage. We accept mediocre answers in public education and produce too many dropouts. We legislate bad answers for the entry level labor market and leave vast numbers of young people unemployed. We have turned a snap judgment on drugs into a permanent rerun of Prohibition, proving once again that the best way to incubate gang violence is to legislate into existence a black market of vast economic potential. On every front, middle class Americans willingly do their part to reinforce an urban failure spiral, and then, from within that failure spiral, underclass culture plays its role in deepening the problems even further. America's only answer for hopeless youth is to wait till they commit crimes so they can be incarcerated and forgotten. With almost two and a half million of our fellow citizens in jail, on this front we Americans have become a leading source of bad answers. Our core assets suffer on every front.

Short-sighted answers for energy. In yesterday's America, we were justifiably proud of our energy industry – from our coal mines and oil fields to our hydroelectric dams and our nuclear power plants. These were badges of America's technological prowess and financial leadership. Today, though, we have come down with a case of cold feet. Fossil fuel energy, it turns out, poses an intangible but potentially terrible risk. And it is a risk fraught with enormous inertial momentum. If we guess wrong, it takes half a century to unwind our technological mistake and centuries longer to unwind the excesses of carbon dioxide and rising temperatures in the world's oceans. A nation of great technological and financial prowess, one assumes, should be able to invent and invest itself out of this fix without breaking too much of a sweat. Shouldn't it? Alas, no. American have fallen into a trap of great short-sightedness. Though we are more than smart and prosperous enough to have created this industry, somehow we aren't nearly smart and prosperous enough to move this nation forward to next generation technologies. America, the nation of innovators, trembles at the thought that it might have to innovate, again, and develop new technologies for energizing the nation. It matters not that renewable energy has much lower variable costs than fossil fuel energy. It matters not that renewable energy will heal our balance of payments deficit with OPEC countries. It matters not that renewable energy will be a great engine of domestic job creation. All that matters, now, is that we cannot see around corners any more. Civic capital deteriorates, environmental capital deteriorates, and economic capital deteriorates, and we remain paralyzed.

Short-sighted answers for America's Social Security obligations. In a rational world, Americans would provide a perpetual retirement fund like Social Security with a perpetual Trust Fund, whose earnings over time would reduce, if modestly, the amount needed from taxpayers. But ours is not a rational era. In today's Social Security system, the game plan is blindingly stupid. Grow the Trust Fund. Then turn around and Liquidate the Trust Fund. People in private industry who behave this way are hauled off by men in white coats. Yet advocacy groups supposedly speaking for the elderly tell us that Social Security is "healthy." Claude Rains was spot on. Those who habitually tell half lies soon lose track of where they put the truth. The longer we cling to wrong answers for Social Security, the more expensive the repairs become. Short-sightedness here undermines both civic and

economic capital.

Short-sighted thinking by the Democratic Party. America's Democrats have no vision for urban America. The urban failure spiral has been locked in place for decades; where have the Democrats been? America's Democrats have no vision for Social Security; its plight, too, has been visible for decades, but as it is easier to run and win on half lies, Democrats have yet to tell themselves the truth about Social Security. Democrats have little real understanding of global warming, or they would realize that global warming cannot be halted till renewable energy has been fully phased in and fossil fuel energy has been fully phased out. Democrats pretend to care, but are still miles away from having an optimized solution that gives America the energy industry it needs while also protecting the common good and halting global warming. And where are the Democrats on issues of stuttering GDP growth and ballooning debt and the freezing of middle class earnings? Republicans have been on the wrong track for quite some time, but Democrats have been slow to offer a meaningful alternative. Short-sightedness is almost as serious an affliction among Democrats as it is among Republicans.

Short-sighted thinking by interest groups and voters. We are an impatient people. We prefer the comfort of a fast decision to the discomfort of slower indecision. We like speed, no matter how careless that makes us. And we are sometimes harsh and intolerant. Who wants to hear "Be hard on issues, but soft on people" when our gut says "The guy's a bum"? We also accept chronic failure. Few of us have experienced the shift from Just in Case to Just In Time, the shift from Corrective Quality to Preventive Quality. Because we haven't experienced it, we cannot imagine that it would ever be possible. Our parties accept low standards in part because we as citizens also accept low standards.

All these choices – economic choices, urban choices, environmental choices, partisan choices – really come down to one choice. Do we accept an America of chronic failure?

If we do, we will get chronic failure. And it won't come in isolated pieces, it will pervade many of the most important areas of our lives.

This book makes the case for a different choice. I have expressed this choice in many different ways:

Let's become a learning democracy.

It's time to take moral responsibility to scale.

It's time to learn the craft of institutional renewal.

If we don't turn society's engines of replication into our friends, they will run amok and undermine our well-being.

Common good optimization will restore America's bounce and vigor.

As citizens, we are sovereign. This places us in an executive review role, and it is a role we shall have to learn to fulfill responsibly.

An America of real solutions is a healthy America. An America of chronic problems is not a healthy America.

Many different ways of saying the same thing, and they all point toward the same gut-check decision. If we choose to see ourselves as authors of a common good future, we can make it happen. Institutions are malleable. Bad designs can in fact be replaced with better designs. Institutions that

pursue profit by undermining the common good can be housebroken; they can turn themselves around and become champions of the common good; they can become our best friends.

It is up to us. Are we creatures of habit, no matter how harmful our habits may be? Or are we people with sufficient heart to reshape our destiny?

As human beings, we almost always prefer the habits we know to the habits we don't. I remember this well from my cab driving years, in the 1970s. Two compensation systems were in common use around the nation, commission and payoff. Denver's cab drivers were then on the payoff system. Every day, we paid a rental fee, and kept all the money we took in over and above the rental. In other cities, drivers were paid a percentage of each trip. The more trips they ran, the more they made, and, in turn, the more the company made.

Cab drivers in Denver loved the payoff system and hated the idea of driving on commission. Cab drivers from other cities loved the commission system, and hated the idea that they might ever switch to a payoff system. As in the story of the country mouse and the city mouse, neither wanted to trade places with the other.

I am well aware of what I propose in this book. I propose here that we add a new set of civic habits to our repertoire, different from those we are accustomed to. Such an adjustment never comes easily. But I do not advocate doing this in a single leap. The adventure of protecting the common good, as described here, begins with a few explorers and an initial trial. And then another trial, and another after that, until these new ideas have been given the testing they require.

It is time to do some pioneering.

Stepping Up to the Common Good Adventure

Good ideas often start as new ideas. Total Quality was once a new idea. Just In Time Manufacturing joined it, a second new idea attached to a first. No one in America knew anything of these new ideas, till products that reflected their power began to capture the imagination and the dollars of American customers.

Here in America, a few pioneers decided it was time to understand these new ideas. These explorers visited the companies that had originated Total Quality and Just In Time. They learned techniques, tricks, specific ideas. They began to grasp the overall philosophy. In time they were ready to carry the message back. I remember sitting in a large conference room, somewhere in western New York in 1984, with several dozen others, as Professor Robert W. Hall, author of *Zero Inventories*, used an overhead projector to share his stack of transparencies with his audience. Powerpoint didn't exist, yet, and Hall's graphics were sometimes awkward, but the ideas made sense. We were all factory folk, of one sort and another, from various companies, and we listened attentively. Hall's presentation gave us an early taste of what the future might hold for us. On another occasion, a diverse group of us from Cummins flew on the company plane to Lincoln, Nebraska, for a tour of the Kawasaki Jet Ski plant. There we were given a very generous tour, and we saw for ourselves what Just In Time was all about. Those Nebraska folks looked like they'd been doing Just In Time all their lives, yet even there in Lincoln the Just In Time methods were fairly new. It was an exciting period, the early days of a cultural diffusion process that later grew into a mighty river of change.

Pioneering a new idea is a process of experimentation. How many times did Thomas Edison have to fail before he finally figured out how to make a light bulb? Many times. Americans understand trial and error; Americans understand experimentation.

And pioneering is a process of sharing ideas with others, so that new ideas can be tested by

many different minds at the same time. Bring together people of like mind. Read a book together – this book, for example – and discuss its ideas. Ask around. Have you or any of your friends ever participated in a paradigm shift experience? In business, perhaps, or in sports, or at church, or in a community activity? Does the idea of learning a new discipline strike any chords? The idea of learning a new paradigm? Can such experiences help us understand how better to realize America's full potential? There is much to be talked over, especially in the early stages of pioneering.

Pioneering is also a process of declaring one's loyalties. Those of my generation will remember the Civil Rights Movement. (I started college in September 1960.) Those who were the pioneers for civil rights declared themselves as believers in Equality, ready to affirm their beliefs through nonviolent resistance. Whites and blacks boarded a bus together and called themselves Freedom Riders. Four black college students sat down at a segregated lunch counter and asked to be served. Again and again and again, almost always with nonviolence, those who were pioneers for civil rights declared their belief in equality and challenged the moral legitimacy of Jim Crow.

Of course, that was almost half a century ago. While yesterday's lessons carry inspiration, each successive generation is obliged to chart its own paths.

Today we have an opportunity to be pioneers by declaring that America's best future unfolds as an adventure in protecting the common good.

This new adventure will have its own stamp. Its pioneers will be different and fresh, its signature activities distinctive, its paths to success quite innovative.

Many Role Players, Many Opportunities

Creating a spirit of warmth. It isn't the common good if we don't have a feeling of warmth toward our fellow Americans. Those who know how to put others first will be among the earliest of pioneers. A good host makes all guests feel welcomed. The adventure of finding real solutions begins not with ideas but with ceremonial greetings and personal connections, and it begins with excellent hosts and hostesses.

Think of the worst doctor's waiting room you've ever visited. Pretty sterile, wasn't it?

Now think of the best. Call to mind the waiting room that was the friendliest and most comfortable. Being there made you feel, right away, that you'd come to the right place.

If, somehow, the adventure of discovering the common good can radiate the same sense of friendliness, half the game will be won.

Speaking for myself, I am not half as good at this as I ought to be. By nature I am an advocate. Fortunately, I also have some capacity to listen appreciatively. But the role of being a superior host? I will leave that to others.

Community by community, the work of seeking the common good begins with the work of building shared understanding and personal respect. There are codes to be learned, codes that will help us probe deeply into our issues and still retain a spirit of graciousness as we do so.

Learning the Craft of Scaling Up. Let's imagine that a small discussion group has taken the first step. It has created for itself a comfort zone of respect, within which people of different mind feel confident their ideas and concerns will be listened to and absorbed by others.

For starters, this group might ask itself to think about the topic of Core Assets. Does it make sense to say that society consists, in part, of environmental assets, human assets, economic assets,

civic assets? What do those broad terms really mean? Is there a difference between “healthy” and “sick,” a difference between “strong” and “weak”? What kind of core assets make a difference to me? To my friends? To my colleagues?

The group might also spend some time reflecting on the power of vast institutions. Does the notion of a Replication Engine make sense? An industry adopts certain design templates. And then it makes a living replicating those templates. At first, on a small scale. And then on a larger and larger scale. What happens when the design principles turn out to be flawed? One of the most notorious design errors led to the drug thalidomide, a sleeping aid that caused pregnant women to give birth to deformed babies. Ralph Nader first came to prominence chronicling unsafe automobile design. How do we know when a Replication Engine is safe? What happens when a built-in design principle becomes a source of recurring damage?

When things go awry, do we need institutional renewal? What happens to us if institutional renewal turns out to be almost impossible? Consider any one of the items on the list with which I opened this chapter. When replication engines carry us down the wrong road, what happens to society’s core assets?

Are we ready to speak up on behalf of three principles?

The first principle – See the Consequences – calls attention to the damage that is being incurred by society’s core assets. Perhaps environmental capital is suffering, perhaps human capital, or economic capital, or civic capital. This will pose an interesting opinion question for a small group. When is it the responsibility of the public to become a voice for “Seeing the Consequences”?

The second principle – Accept Moral Responsibility – takes the principle of moral responsibility to scale. In the view of the discussion group, has society properly accepted its moral responsibility for those institutions that cause repeated harm?

The third principle – Adjust Behavior – takes on a slightly different meaning inside a small discussion group. As I use the term, “adjust behavior,” I want it to suggest redesign. I want it to suggest a full and deep technical repair, if necessary, so that the institution in question is no longer a source of harm.

A small group is not the setting for a detailed redesign discussion. But a small group is well within its capabilities to insist on the broader principle at stake. Chronic problems need to end. Real solutions need to take their place. We “go to scale” when we learn how to call for Real Solutions. For example:

In public education, a Real Solution creates schools so powerful that every child learns.

In energy, a Real Solution produces Carbon Neutral Buildings, Carbon Neutral Vehicles, Carbon Neutral Factories, and Carbon Neutral Generating Plants.

On the broad sustainability front, a Real Solution will be consistent with the Five Zeroes of Sustainability.

In the arena of urban transportation, a Real Solution moves us toward a high capacity, uncongested public transit option to operate in parallel with today’s low capacity, heavily congested highways-and-cars transportation system.

Small groups can do an enormous amount of pioneering on their own. The questions I have just listed are a good launching point. The more rigor we give them, the more we learn from them.

Supporting Inquiry with Witnessing. Some folks will want to go beyond discussion and begin to speak out as members of the public. Taking moral responsibility to scale inherently involves a certain amount of witnessing. Do we feel a sense of stewardship for society’s core assets? One can

give public witness to this spirit of stewardship.

Does research show that society's core assets are being harmed? Has this harm been hidden from our consciousness? One can witness to the moral importance of "Seeing Consequences" and knowing when harm has been caused.

Has society been neglectful, indifferent to evidence of ongoing damage? One can witness to the principle of Moral Responsibility. See Consequences, Accept Responsibility, Adjust Behavior. It is the ethical magic that makes our neighborhoods livable; it is the ethical magic that makes nations behave better too. Much opportunity here for creative pioneering.

And is it time to speak out on behalf of Real Solutions? In a time when politicians offer short-term fixes, it is rare to see Americans speak up on behalf of Real Solutions. Those who want to pioneer on behalf of the common good can begin to change the social current for the better.

What we talk over in small groups helps us learn and grow as individuals. What we say, peacefully and respectfully, as public witnesses, helps us become part of society's learning process. Witnessing is an ever-fresh source of energy for a healthier American tomorrow.

Evidence-Based Advocacy. The common good is more than just a phrase. And it is not meant to be a stick that we can use, as angry adversaries, to beat up upon one another. It is a tangible principle, one whose status can be defined and measured, whose trends can be tracked and calculated and shared for all to see.

If I am to witness for the common good, in effect I offer myself to my fellow citizens as someone who understands the importance of doing responsible research. "If you listen to my concerns," I argue, "and study the issue with sufficient care, you will find that my conclusions about the evidence are solid." Let's walk through these issues with care. The more substantive the underlying research, the more confidence the general public will develop in the case being made on behalf of the common good.

Balance Sheet Projects. Some of the critical pioneering on behalf of the common good will be carried out by those who set themselves the task of creating Core Asset Balance Sheets. Within this large task, there are many roles to be played, many contributions to be made. And while the key participants will be up to their elbows in details, the public at large has a key role to play as well. Some ideas will make sense, and the public will give them a Thumbs Up. Some ideas won't, and the public will give them a Thumbs Down. These will be wonderful projects, full of details yet withal aiming to answer a simple question: How well are society's core assets faring? It is the quintessential executive review question.

All this will seem new and fuzzy, at first. In twenty years, though, once the Balance Sheets are established, we will wonder why we waited so long to set them up. Every self-respecting democracy in time will feel itself obligated to produce a robust set of Core Asset Balance Sheets.

Redesign Projects. More pioneering opportunities await in the area of redesign. A common good redesign project, let us remember, is an effort that arises in Civil Society. It produces a Solution Scenario, or perhaps two or three Solution Scenarios. It is partly diagnostic: "What's the current state?" And it is partly prescriptive: "Which redesign scenario best optimizes our three main goals?" A good scenario protects the common good, promotes commercial success, and finds a properly balanced role for government. Scenarios grow organically, through dialogue involving many sorts of contributors, including at all times the public at large.

Within all of this, there will be roles for talented facilitators. And analytic types. And social networking mavens. And reinvention creatives. In a larger sense, such a project becomes a client-architect dialogue, with society as the client and the redesign team as the architect. Architects propose, as we know, and clients dispose.

Later on, when solution scenarios emerge from this process that have wide public appeal, there will be much more to do. A truly good solution doesn't become real unless it is adopted both by the industry that needs it and by the legislators with regulatory responsibilities.

Political Parties that Matter. One of the most interesting pioneering opportunities awaits those within the Republican Party and the Democratic Party who know that today's parties in different ways badly undermine the common good. Although Republicans are the pocketbook party, the hard truth is that Republicans cannot get the small government, low tax America they seek by walking away from the nation's problems. And while Democrats are the party that always wants to pass yet another government program, Democrats cannot get the social and environmental improvements they seek without being willing to cut away thousands of pages of unnecessary statutes and tax provisions and deliver maximum public value for minimum public cost.

Neither party, in other words, is worth a hoot if it isn't willing to tackle the challenge of optimization. Unless Democrats are willing to tackle affordability and simplicity, they aren't even in the game from a common good perspective. Unless Republicans are willing to protect environmental capital and human capital and so on, they aren't in the game either. What good are low taxes and small government, as principles, if the nation's core assets are being squandered? What good are repairs to the nation's core assets if government is too bloated?

America needs a Democratic Party that's competent enough to participate responsibly in the work of common good optimization. And America needs a Republican Party that's also competent enough to participate responsibly in the work of common good optimization. In the long run, Democrats will deliver far more value to their constituents by embracing the common good than they will by stepping on it, and exactly the same is true of Republicans.

Far-sighted Americans in both parties will recognize the truth of this argument. These are the pioneers who face the most difficult of challenges. But there is one thing in their favor. We are Americans first, not Republicans first. We are Americans first, not Democrats first. And it is as Americans that we can all benefit from institutional renewal. It is as Americans that we can all benefit from living in a nation lifted up by real solutions rather than held back by chronic problems. It will be quite the adventure, calling each party to its higher duty as a training ground for tomorrow's elected leaders.

America cannot afford to have either of its parties mess up the task of cultivating responsible leaders; yet any party that hates the common good will surely blow the task of grooming trustworthy candidates and elected officials.

Leaning Toward the Future

America's future pivots on the spirit of America's people. Are we a people so habituated to chronic failure that it is beyond us to learn a new craft? Or can we find it within us, as people of great generosity and talent on local matters, to elevate our ethics and our game to the national stage?

Success, as we know, begins with ambition. It grows with discipline. It ripens and matures with effort. As it is for individuals and communities, so it is for nations.

We know what happens if we have no ambition. We aim too low, we forget to be disciplined,

we throw away our efforts. If we have no vision, if we have no ambition, we will have no sense of design.

Without a design, we will have no tools for adjusting our systems and our institutional behaviors. And if we do not adjust our systems, we will never realize better outcomes.

When we forget to have hope, we forget to become authors of a better future.

That is not who we are. Because we are human, and because we are Americans, we are capable of imagining a better future. And because we know how to imagine, we can design. Because we can design, we can renew. Because we know how to hope, we can become authors of a better future.

The more we rise to America's promise, the higher the eagle soars.

¹ 2009 Economic Report of the President, p 377, Gross Federal Debt.