

# The State of the Debate

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Winston Churchill began volume six of his own memoirs – post-World War II memoirs, of course – with this subtitle: *How the Great Democracies Triumphed and So Were Able to Resume the Follies Which Had So Nearly Cost Them Their Lives.*” The fall 2004 election is well passed, the Year of the Rooster is upon us, and America and Britain, I suggest, have resumed their follies.



For America, the fundamental realities remain unchanged. September 11 could have been prevented. Osama bin Laden has not been captured. Without weapons of mass destruction or a link to September 11<sup>th</sup>, Iraq remains a killing field and has misdirected vast resources. Without a sense of history, America is repeating the mistakes in the Mideast of Britain and France. America remains dangerously vulnerable to nuclear, biological, and chemical attack. A huge American budget surplus has been turned into a huge deficit. The budget that has been just proposed is the latest installment of the stealth strategy to radically reduce human capital investments in the working class, the middle class, and poor. In terms of wealth and income, America is the most unequal country in the industrialized world. Compared to four years ago, the number of unemployed and health uninsured has increased. Poverty in America has increased during the last three years. The American government has neglected civil rights over recent years, and school segregation is continuing to increase. In spite of the highest incarceration rate in the world, America has homicide rates that are about the same as in the 1960s. The American criminal justice system remains racially biased. American media continue to be in the control of fewer and fewer hands. Mainstream media now, at least, have finally admitted to biased coverage in Iraq. And last, the American voting abuses of 2000 have not been corrected, and the result is further loss of American soft power around the world.

These realities reflect current policy, which is based on domination and misinformation by the ruling elite. Perhaps during questions we can discuss that underlying theme of present policy more. Instead of the current folly, we need, I suggest this morning, new policy that creates a stronger and safer America with a more secure economic and educational future. We need a fairer economic deal, more equitable prosperity, and more honest communication. We need a new climate of public morality and a more genuine grassroots democracy. We need a new policy based on the lessons of history, the evidence of science, and the common sense of David Letterman's mom.

So here, then, is an illustrative – just an illustrative – top-ten list of new policy principles and of the ways and means to get them accepted by the American people.

**One.** America needs a much stronger 21<sup>st</sup> century military that balances cutting edge technology with human ingenuity. Intelligence should be modeled on the independence of former CIA Director, Admiral Stansfield Turner.

**Two.** A stronger military must legitimize preventive multilateral diplomacy backed by force. We don't need John Wayne. We do need Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch in "To Kill a Mockingbird." Preventive multilateral diplomacy requires greatly increased and more cost-effective foreign aid.

**Three.** Jimmy Carter-like Nobel Prize-winning leadership must negotiate a two-state solution in Palestine-Israel that acknowledges this, the heart of Muslim hatred toward America. The UN-intervention that secured East Timor is at least a partial road map.

**Four.** New Keynesian demand side economic policy must rescind voodoo tax cuts for the Conservative elite, carry out a fairer economic deal of constituency-building tax cuts for the middle class, working class, and lower classes, and dramatically increase long-term human capital public infrastructure investment.

**Five.** America needs to simultaneously create more physical security against biological, chemical, and nuclear terrorism; more job and job training security against class warfare by the ruling elite; more education security through a national science education defense act; more health security through universal coverage based on a national medical defense act; more social security that acknowledges public opposition to privatization; and more voting security to help protect citizens from the hidden agendas of the ruling elite.

**Six.** America must acknowledge that, contrary to conventional misinformation, we do know a great deal about what works for the truly disadvantaged. The issue is not lack of knowledge, but lack of political will. The problem is not the boys in the 'hood, but the boys on the Hill. Based on decades of scientific evaluation, we must replicate to scale multiple solutions, from Head Start to full-service community schools to community banking, training first, Job Corps, community development corporations, and problem-oriented policing.

**Seven.** To secure and legislate this agenda, we must, among other initial strategies, strengthen the infrastructure of indigenous, grassroots, non-profit organizations throughout the nation. We need to strengthen the financial, organizational, fund-raising, communications, and advocacy capacities of grassroots non-profits. We must democratize the policy debate so rank and file people at the grassroots are better informed, more motivated, and more able to act day-to-day, not just every four years. People need to be involved in daily dialogue with their friends and their neighbors. As part of such common dialogue, indigenous grassroots organizations need to be the neighborhood hubs of training in George Lakoff-style training of policy issues and communications training in how to be effective in print and on electronic media. Folks associated with thousands upon thousands upon thousands of grassroots organizations need to be framing and communicating the same messages day in and day out.

**Eight.** In support of grassroots infrastructure development, national organizations modeled after moveon.org and other such organizations, need to be raising funds on the Internet through thousands of small donors. This funding needs to be leveraged then against funding from foundations and unions. National non-profits need to help ensure that local folks across the country are on the same page. More institutions, like the Century Foundation, need to be created to undertake and disseminate supportive policy analyses that are readable and usable at the grassroots level. National non-profits must press systematically for voting rights and campaign finance reform. So this infrastructure development needs to be grassroots and it also needs to be national.

**Nine.** We must follow the lead of national non-profits like Free Press to democratize the media as the founding fathers really wanted. We need to embrace the strategies of *Oh My News* in Korea, strengthen alternatives like Pacifica Radio, push for expansion of PBS funding, and publicize the link between media reform and campaign finance reform.

**Ten.** We must invoke the spirit and the wisdom of the late Father Geno Baroni. In the late 1970s, Father Baroni was Assistant Secretary at HUD for neighborhoods, non-profit organizations, and alliances among the poor, the working class, and the middle class. Geno would have successfully lobbied for Jesus to participate in the debates last fall and to focus on increased poverty, increased inequality, and increased segregation. In spite of FOX News attacking his long hair, Jesus, of course, would have won the debates and the moral high ground. Would not Buddha, the God of Moses, and Allah have done the same? Father Baroni viewed the federal budget as a moral document. Geno – and he asked us to call him Geno – told us that every economic and social policy issue is a moral issue. We must, then, frame future debate in the language of public morality.

It is immoral for almost a quarter of America's youngest children to live in poverty. It is immoral for America's CEOs to earn 400 times more than America's workers and 250

times more than its teachers. It is immoral for the states to spend more on prison building than on higher education. It is immoral for the white, prison-industrial complex to profit from the racially biased criminal justice system. It is immoral to torture and sexually humiliate prisoners abroad. And it is immoral for America to claim it is pursuing democracy-building and faith-based policy while we kowtow before an authoritarian, non-democratic, atheist China. This is the China that is committing genocide in Tibet. This is the China that is withholding democracy from Hong Kong. This is the China that at the same time is holding much of our financial debt and taking hundreds of thousands of our jobs. With this sense of public morality, the struggling middle and working classes, the increasing poor in America, and the increasing poor around the globe, must never forget that the radical American ruling elite is withholding the dream from all of us. The radical elite is deferring our dream.

“What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun, or fester like a sore, and then run? Does it stink like rotten meat, or sugar over like a syrupy sweet? Perhaps that dream just sags, like a heavy load. Or, my friends, does it just explode?” With passion and strategic action, we must, I conclude, stop the explosions and fulfill the dream.

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