

America at the Crossroads: Statecraft vs. “Politics as Usual”

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As Americans are once again suffering through a barrage of nonstop negative political advertising during yet another “hold your nose and vote” election cycle, they yearn, desperately, for things to be different. Featuring a host of lackluster candidates pushing misleading issues, the 2016 presidential election is up for grabs. Stocks, bonds, commodities, and currency markets around the world are weakening.

Odds are that America’s relentless “War on Terrorism” overseas will again flashback to the homeland, and there is an increasing certainty that humanity is experiencing a devastating change in the climate. All of this poses a grave threat to the continuation of the United States as a free and democratic republic. Will the new president-whoever she or he is-be capable of resolving these dangerous issues and preserving the Constitution? What should Americans demand of all political candidates, and what should be their qualifications?

Recognizing that partisan politics is not the same as statecraft, can anything be done to attract statesmen (gender neutral) to stand for elections, address the true issues, and to represent the interests of voters? Must the financial elite and corporations be allowed to continue their wholesale corruption of kowtowing politicians who prostrate themselves before stacks of campaign cash and pander their office following election?

Statecraft. This is not the first time in history that a republic has been threatened by corruption, militarization, and dictatorship. Once they rid themselves of their monarchy, the Romans established a representative republic that lasted for four hundred years until Julius Caesar used his army to overthrow the government and establish himself-not only as a dictator-but as a living god.

We can read about these events in the extensive writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero. His works survived destruction by the orthodox Christians because he was declared a righteous pagan saint by early church leaders. Cicero was honored-not only as a philosopher and writer, but because he was a great statesman. His rediscovered work influenced the culture of the Renaissance and inspired the founders of the United States. Thomas Jefferson considered Cicero to be among a handful of men who created the concept of “public right” and acknowledged his contribution to the Declaration of Independence.

In *The Republic*, his classic six-volume publication, Cicero writes about the Roman republic and those who served in it. He rated governance of the Commonwealth as the noblest exercise of virtue, and he taught that those who used their counsel and authority to expertly manage the public business surpassed all “other men in useful knowledge.”

Cicero bemoaned office seekers “who are so totally devoid of experience” and who “know not how to govern.” He recognized that wise men were reluctant to seek the administration of public affairs; however, he believed philosophers should study the art of public speaking and the science of civil legislation. For Cicero, there was a difference between statesmen—who accepted public office as a duty—and mere politicians, who sought election as a means of gaining power and wealth. Ultimately, Cicero’s brilliant head was chopped off as the price he paid for his opposition to dictatorship and devotion to the Republic.

Preparing for Public Service. Avoiding the embarrassing question of whether *anyone* among the current gaggle of candidates for President of the United States has the intellectual, philosophical, and practical qualifications to be the alleged “Leader of the Free World”, what-if anything-can be done to improve the field of candidates in the future? Given the grave militaristic, environmental, and economic threats to the survival of humanity, much less the continuation of representative democracy in the United States, what can the American People do to improve their lives and safeguard their freedoms?

Not only must young people receive civic education in a free society-if they are to become informed and responsible voters-but elective office, whether as a duty or career, must have improved educational and ethical standards. Otherwise, voters will continue to be misled by greedy and power-hungry candidates, who will persist in catering to the plutocracy, rather than caring for the voters who elect them. That powerful force is so entrenched, it can be overcome only by a massive, nonpartisan political movement that leads to substantive constitutional change. The United States Voters’ Rights Amendment (USVRA) provides a nonviolent path toward these objectives.

First, the USVRA is a comprehensive voters’ bill of rights—in that it will remedy the destructive practices that have eroded the tenuous voting rights granted to the People by Congress and the states. The USVRA not only guarantees the basic right of all citizens to vote—which, amazingly, does not presently exist in the Constitution—but it also includes other provisions that ensure the votes cast by the People are *effective* in defining what they want their government to do and how they want it done. These include defining equal rights for women; maximizing voter participation and outlawing the suppression of voting; eliminating corporate personhood; controlling campaign contributions; supporting public funding of elections; prohibiting gerrymandering; increasing congressional representation; improving political education and public information; articulating policy issues; deciding policy issues by voting; eliminating the Electoral College; curtailing lobbying; and prohibiting conflicts of interest.

Second, in relation to the discussion of statecraft and the need to prepare young people for public service, the most pertinent of the USVRA provisions is Section Nine which states “It shall be a primary function of the government to ensure that the People are supplied with truthful, unbiased, objective, and timely information regarding the political, economic, environmental, financial, and social issues that affect them, and that all students are educated in the nature and responsibilities of representative democracy.”

The Amendment also establishes George Washington’s unrealized dream of a national university. The University of the United States will have as its primary goal the teaching of the values of liberty and freedom upon which the nation was founded. It will be a forum where all students discuss the nature of representative democracy and the rights, duties, and responsibilities of voting.

The university will include all of the military service academies under its umbrella—so future military officers are first indoctrinated with the nature and values of the government they will later learn to serve and defend. Moreover, the University will include other service academies—such as justice, education, health, nutrition and agriculture, energy, transportation, economics, science, environment, government, and diplomacy—where students can specialize after learning the essential values of a free and democratic government. Much like the present military service academies, admission could follow the existing nomination and merit scholarship process, with an obligatory period of national public service in the field of study. Graduates who later choose to enter electoral politics will be far better prepared to more effectively represent and care for those who elect them.

Choices. The current popularity of the anti-establishment presidential candidacies of Donald Trump on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left demonstrate there is a deep well of discontent—indeed anger—among a majority of Americans toward their government.

Elections should not be reality game shows played by dilettantes to amuse and entertain the electorate, and voters must plug their ears to the siren calls of demagogues. Instead, through the power of their vote, the People of the United States must demonstrate, once again, that they have the wisdom, ability, and resources to take matters into their own hands and to transform their government into one worthy of emulation. They stand at the tipping point, and the whole world is watching.

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