

Introduction

Every observer of our society can see we are facing many serious problems. These problems are not isolated; they are connected through political and economic systems serving the majority of Americans increasingly poorly. The New Enlightenment describes some of the ways these systems are descending us into alarming levels of injustice and dysfunction, but its primary focus is on solutions. You will learn how we can create a more prosperous and far more just and democratic society, one in which prosperity will be more equitably shared.

Sometimes paradigm shifts are necessary to solve fundamental problems. Now is such a time, so innovative, transformative solutions are promoted here. They are evidence based to best serve the country as a whole. Few of us want what we have now, a political system mainly serving a small elite most able to influence it, and their dominance is growing. We can have a truly democratic republic through the political system reforms I detail in this book.

The beneficial transformations I design for—some are summarized below—may seem too large to be achievable. Many will believe that no policies can exist that will achieve these goals because if they did exist they would have already been implemented. However, if you consider the policies detailed in this book carefully you will see that this prejudice is misguided. The detailed program described in this book will:

- End unemployment or reduce it to historic lows.
- Create a minimum tax-free annual income of \$34,980 for full-time work. Expanding and reforming the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and raising the minimum wage to \$11.10 per hour (which increases the income of the lowest wage full-time worker to the maximum income where the largest EITC will be applied) will accomplish this.
- Reduce full-time work-hours to 36 hours per week. Despite 10% fewer work-hours, and consequently as much as 10% lower compensation from the workplace, people's take-home income whose income now is under \$160,000 will rise, and rise proportionally more the lower the income, due to either lower taxes or the expanded EITC.

- Transform the economic system to one where most economic activity will be performed by worker-owned and controlled businesses at the end of the designed 20-year transition period. Loans, grants, tax benefits and subsidies within several detailed programs will accomplish this. By extending democratic practices into the workplace, and substantial capital ownership to the workforce, income and wealth inequality reduction, productivity enhancements, and other important benefits result.
- Eliminate the dominating importance of money controlled by national public office candidates and their allies, and thereby allow a meaningful democracy to exist. This will be accomplished mainly by instituting a TV and radio station license requirement to offer generous allotments of airtime free of charge to four qualified candidates per national public office contest within a thoroughly detailed system. No reasonable need for the purchase of airtime will exist. All airwaves are publicly owned, so they should best serve the public interest. Also, support qualified candidates with postal, newspaper, and internet advertising subsidies, and institute a new Fairness Doctrine.
- Enhance democratic functioning with new, innovative democratic forms. Average citizens in deliberative groups involving 0.1% of the citizenry will develop some public policies.
- Create a vigorous media of, for, and by the people necessary for a well-functioning government of, for, and by the people. This book details these ways to accomplish this: Institute a license renewal requirement for worker-ownership and control of air media companies, and support it with loans, grants, tax benefits and subsidies. Motivate ownership and control by workers of other kinds of media businesses, also through loans, grants, tax benefits and subsidies. Media ownership and control by workers will eliminate important media content selection biases resulting from the character of current media ownership and management, and result in other important benefits. The media's role in the functioning of a democratic society is essential, and our media corporations' current structure is inevitably serving this role poorly. This policy will create a new and vigorous media culture more responsive and accountable to the majority.
- Eliminate tuition for two and four-year public colleges. This will help meet our stated ideal of equal opportunity for all and help create the well-informed citizenry needed for a well-functioning democracy and

economy. It will also remove an enormous burden from millions of future college graduates whose education serves the national interest.

- Increase Social Security payments by \$500/month to all recipients, and provide it to some who are currently ineligible. The United States ranks 30th among 34 developed countries in the percentage of a median worker's earnings that our public pension system replaces, and private pensions are becoming less common and generous.
- Eliminate the \$680 billion deficit (2013) and create over a \$500 billion annual surplus. We will maintain this surplus until we eliminate the federal debt and its interest payment. In 2013, this payment was over \$250 billion on almost a \$15 trillion federal debt. (The budgetary impact of all policies is determined relative to the 2013 federal budget.)

The economic and political system reform program detailed in this book will also have other transformative beneficial impacts if instituted.

Impossibly grandiose goals? They are not—on one condition: Your support and the support of many others for the detailed program in this book and the organization devoted to seeing it be instituted. Please join us so we can reach a critical mass in numbers for this change to be inevitable. Let this time of crisis be a time of opportunity, a time for a New Enlightenment. All of our lives can be improved, for tens of millions of us dramatically so, through policies that will create a far more just and beneficial political, social and economic order. Now is the time to make it happen.

Our current political system is in need of radical reform because, inherently, policymakers unwilling or unable to serve the majority are its result. When good and capable persons overcome nearly insurmountable barriers to their entry into elected office, they are largely disabled by dysfunctional rules of Congress and colleagues serving narrow, moneyed interests. So further decline or paralysis is inevitable without system change.

The person who may be the most well-informed judge on the relative quality of our election system is the internationally renowned election observer, former President Carter, whose Carter Center has monitored 96 elections in 38 countries. He said, *"We have one of the worst election processes in the world right in the United States, and it's almost entirely because of the excessive influx of money."* For this and other important reasons, the [U.S. Congress's approval rating reached an historic low in 2014](#)

[of 9%. Only 9% of Americans think Congress is mainly influenced by the voters they represent.](#)

The outcomes of our economic system are to a large degree determined by the regulation, tax, and government expenditure policies created by our political system, so major economic injustices and hardships are evident. A 2013 Gallup poll found that [20% of the U.S. population did not have enough money to buy the food they or their family needed at least once over the prior year.](#) In 2013, about 50 million, that's over one in every seven, Americans lived in poverty, a higher fraction than at any time since 1966, a higher number than ever. Our per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$52,800 in 2013, but in 1966 it was \$28,680 in 2013 dollars. So on average each person in the United States had an income almost two times higher in 2013 than in 1966, yet about the same fraction of the population was in poverty because nearly all of the country's income gains have gone to a small economic elite.

The average wealth of the poorest 40%, 126 million Americans, was [negative \\$10,800 in 2013,](#) but as our GDP per capita indicates, we are a wealthy country, not a poor one. The [total wealth of just 400 people, less than .00013 % of our population, was over \\$2.3 trillion in 2013.](#) This is approximately the total wealth of the least wealthy 190 million Americans or 60% of the country, and is about the GDP of Italy, the eighth largest national economy in the world. The top 400 people have wealth equivalent to 12.8% of U.S. GDP in 2013. In 1980, the wealthiest 400 Americans had wealth equal to "only" 2.8% of U.S. GDP.

The Gini coefficient measures inequality, with numbers between 0 and 100 that rise with greater disparities. The UN-Habitat Monitoring and Research Division defines an income Gini coefficient of 40 as an "*international alert line*" indicating that a society's "*Inequality [is] approaching dangerously high levels*" that could "*lead to sporadic protests and riots.*" Our [income Gini coefficient is now about 48](#) and has risen to about [80 for U.S. wealth.](#) Our economic inequality is the highest in the developed world and our economic mobility the lowest.

We cannot have a functioning economic system if income or wealth is divided equally, but disparities so large that the top 1% of Americans have 24% of the nation's income is unjust and economically, politically and socially harmful.ⁱ The average income of the top 1% of U.S. households in 2011 was \$1,530,773, while the average income of Americans in the bottom

20% was \$9,187. The highest income for an individual was \$4.9 billion. Part 4, Note 1 details why this degree of income disparity is unjustifiable and harmful.

With the huge disparity in economic power inevitably comes a huge disparity in political power, resulting in greater economic disparity. This vicious cycle of growing power disparities will lead to disaster unless it is consciously and forcefully interrupted and reversed. Yet it seems we are continuing to run on this path of predictable outcome, like lemmings over a cliff.

Increasingly, people are aware of their powerlessness, so they no longer bother to vote. If people believe their interests will not be served whoever is elected, they have little motivation to vote. We have, by far, the lowest voter turnout in the developed world.

Concurrent with the decline in trust in our political system and leaders is a decline in trust in our business leaders and media. And this decline in trust is extending not just to our most important institutions, but also to one another as individuals. The percentage of Americans who believe that other people can generally be trusted fell from 46% in 1974 to 33% in 2012. Trust is essential to social cohesion and political stability, and it is negatively correlated with economic inequality. Trust in a democratic system of government requires trust in the few who represent the interests of the many.

These ominous signs for the future of our country and many other signs of societal dysfunction and decay we urgently need to address with robust policy solutions. Some of these other signs I describe in Part 1 of this book. For decades, both major political parties have allowed the development of, or created, a long list of shocking economic, political and other societal conditions. Why are we tolerating this?

We are a creative people, yet little creativity has been applied to the most important domains of ensuring that our economic and political systems best serve the majority of people. The debate on all the important related issues has been too narrow, due mainly to a dysfunctional media. But the problem runs deeper to those in our academic institutions' political science and economics departments, where adherents to failed dogmas are common—dogmas that, not coincidentally, have served a narrow elite, to the detriment of the majority. Academic economists have commonly supported or actively promoted the policies of removing important and necessary regulations on corporations, and of lowering taxes on high-income households and

corporations that have been instituted over the last few decades. These policies have served the country poorly. However, some members of these academic disciplines have had clearer vision or higher purpose, and some of the policy proposals in this book use ideas of some of these and other exceptional people.

Clearly, a mass movement is needed for fundamental change, and I hope this book attracts you to be part of the one in the direction it defines. Recent history gives the Occupy movement and the Tea “Party” as examples of important political forces that rose unexpectedly and quickly to great prominence. These movements are far from the limit of what can be accomplished, and what has been accomplished by political movements in the past.

I chose the name *The New Enlightenment* mainly because economic inequality was one of the most important motivations for the Enlightenment period’s societal transformations, including the one that created the United States. Data from medieval England and today indicate it is more extreme now than it was before the Enlightenment. For this reason and others, it is time for a New Enlightenment. These data and this analysis are in Part 1, *Now Is the Time for The New Enlightenment*.

If you are aware of the evidence that our economic and political systems require major reforms, you can skip most of Part 1 with little loss of continuity. The data from England before the Enlightenment are rarely seen, though, and their analysis and comparison with conditions today is original here, so I recommend that no one skip this Part 1 information and other historical and essential information in the first ten pages of Part 1. The facts in Part 1 may cause despair, but do not despair. The rest of the book is designed to create hope by providing the major part of a foundation for a New Enlightenment.

Robert Bivona

¹Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States (Updated with 2013 preliminary estimates) Emmanuel Saez, UC Berkeley, 1/25/15. The data in Saez’s document is determined using income tax statistics. Based on the authors communication with Emmanuel Saez, about 2% additional income share would likely result from taking into account income directed to tax havens.