

***“The great object (of government) should be to combat evil by establishing a political equality among all.”*** James Madison, the “Father of the Constitution,” author of the United States Bill of Rights, the fourth President of the United States and Enlightenment political theorist.

## ***The Way to a Government of, for, and by the People***

### **Eliminate the dominating importance of money in politics.**

One important way to accomplish this:

### **Realize the great potential of our airwaves to serve as a public forum for candidates.**

Campaigns are getting increasingly expensive allowing, more than ever, a tiny fraction of our most wealthy citizens to corrupt our democratic process to serve their interests, through the use of large amounts of corporate and personal wealth. We now have a government "*of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%*" as Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz has called it. Senator John McCain, the Republican presidential nominee in 2008, described our election and lobbying systems as "*nothing less than an elaborate influence-peddling scheme in which both parties conspire to stay in office by selling the country to the highest bidder.*" Conservatives, progressives and anyone else that knows of the torrent of cash flowing into our political system can see this obvious fact. Keith Ellison, co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, expressed it this way: "*We don't have elections, we have auctions.*"

Many injustices and unnecessary hardships for tens of millions of Americans have resulted from a political system of a design that inherently results in public policy being determined by a small economic elite. Eighty-six percent of people in a CNN poll said that "*our system of government is broken,*" implying the best interests of the majority are being poorly served or disserved, and a need for fundamental reforms.

We now have historic levels of political system dysfunction, with a 9% and declining approval rating for Congress, and historic levels of inequality. Both our election and lobbying systems greatly advantage a small economic elite. Radical election and lobbying system reforms are urgently needed.

Our elections system declines in quality each election cycle; it's an international disgrace. Ex-president Jimmy Carter, the world's most famous election observer, whose Carter Center has received international acclaim monitoring 93 elections in 37 countries 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”*

Past proposals including the Government of the People Act describe ways of publicly financing candidates for public office. Who qualifies for this assistance is determined by popular support levels, but these levels are to a large degree determined by mass media exposure. These reform proposals would use public funds essentially to multiply the power of corporate mass media coverage decisions. The mass media is poorly serving the public interest now; this will not change when its importance as a candidate filter, enormous now, increases as a result of election system reforms.

For example, look at what would have been the impact of the recently proposed “Government of the People Act” (GPA) on the 2016 election:

- Due to the far greater mass media exposure and other coverage biases towards major party candidates, they would have been able to get larger amounts of contributions under its limit of \$150 that is multiplied by either six or nine times for public subsidies. Donald Trump, for example, likely would have used some of the extraordinary amounts of free airtime the mass media gave him to appeal for small donations and probably would have raised many tens of millions of small donation dollars. Hundreds of millions in public funds would then have been given to him to buy more airtime.

We need a system that reduces the power of mass media coverage decisions. Minor party and independent candidates need a fair hearing, and it would be beneficial to give third party and independent candidates more exposure and end the dominance of our two major parties.

- Due to the high cost of airtime, public funds would have been used to buy 30-second broadcast media ads.
- Most proposals, including the GPA, have ignored the excessively restrictive, anti-democratic ballot access laws that unfairly limit third-party and independent candidates’ access.

The purpose of all the reforms is to eliminate or minimize the filter of corporations and a tiny economic elite in determining who can be part of the public debate, and so who can be elected. But the interests of a tiny economic elite and large corporations determine mass media policy to a large degree. **Six large corporations control 90% of our media content.**<sup>1</sup>

Although some prior election system reform proposals could have helped some candidates that otherwise could not compete, a disproportionate influence would still have remained in the hands of the relatively small group of people managing our mass media companies. These people have important common interests with those with the disproportionate influence the reforms are intended to eliminate.

*The defect of the current system where a tiny fraction of the country, the major campaign funders, determine for whom the rest of us can vote, will be replaced by one where most often the mass media managers and major owners will determine for whom the rest of us can vote. The New Enlightenment's comprehensive media reform proposal describes the general nature of these interests, how they are aligned with other corporate interests or the interests of our major campaign funders, and how they are communicated and generally not violated throughout the mass media corporate hierarchy.*

Another problem with our election system and considered and prior reform proposals that we need to address is the tendency to encourage the use of 30-second ads, because of the high cost and limited nature of airtime. Substantive candidate policy proposals cannot be expressed in 30 seconds, so shallow, and often negative content on other candidates is commonly used for this time. The more ads of this type fill the airwaves, the less people respect or like any of its contestants, and even the contest itself. Thirty-second political ads do not serve our democracy well. Publically financing a large increase in 30-second ads is too far from an ideal election system reform. All prior public financing proposals would result in mainly funding 30-second ads.

Larger blocks of airtime are needed to far better communicate policy proposals and the character of the candidates. Since airtime is limited and valuable, we need a system that selects a limited, reasonable number of candidates for the necessary exposure with larger blocks of airtime. Qualifying for the free airtime needs to be accomplished through democratic processes and cannot have outcomes distorted by the influence of money. The New Enlightenment proposals serve these ideals, and create a government of, for, and by the people:

### **Free Candidate Airtime is a Necessary and Just Broadcast Stations' Requirement**

New Enlightenment policy is to institute a TV and radio broadcast license requirement to offer, free of charge, generous allotments of airtime to qualified candidates for public office. The allotments will be large enough so there would be no reasonable need for the purchase of airtime.

Air media companies do not financially compensate us for using our publicly owned airwaves. In exchange for its use, we have public service requirements and no more important obligation exists for air media companies than to allow us to use the airwaves to best serve our election process.

Air media companies are also obligated to serve the public because in granting broadcast rights we are also granting semi-monopoly status. A limited number of on-air stations can exist in an air media market so none of these markets can be fully competitive. And NASA and other government

research institution's work in developing satellite-delivered networks, digital electronics, robotic technology, computers and other devices has allowed commercial broadcasters to extend their programming range, automate operations and increase their profits at taxpayers' expense.

Many hours per qualified candidate in debates, question and answer public forums, and policy speeches are necessary, and provided by The New Enlightenment system. Now, largely due to the large cost of airtime limiting its use, 30-second ads using the manipulative techniques of marketers dominate, including in (or especially in) contests to our highest offices. These ads are often negative, shallow, or misleading. That's one reason most people do not base their vote on substantive information on the candidate and what the candidate would do with the power of office and that we have the lowest voter participation rate in the developed world.

In 2008, the President of the United States campaign team's "Change You Can Believe In" and "Hope and Change" advertising campaign won Advertising Age's "Marketer Of The Year" award based on the voting of members of the Association of National Advertisers. The runners up were *Nike and Coors beer*. Research has shown that most candidates have little or nothing to do with marketing their campaigns, including the content of their ads. Advertising content is mainly determined by hired marketing consultants whose job it is to win by using the most effective advertising techniques. Is this a sane way to choose the leader of the most powerful nation on earth or any of our government officeholders?

Both exposures to new ideas and new people are necessary for our political system. However, since available airtime is limited, increasing the number of people given airtime diminishes the ability for any one candidate to have sufficient time to express new or important ideas. The New Enlightenment's system limits the provision of free airtime to four candidates per national office contest because this maximizes the number of candidates for the desirable amount of airtime that we can practically offer per candidate. New Enlightenment less burdensome national ballot access rules will likely lead to more than four ballot-qualified candidates in most contests for national offices (but not excessively more), so a free airtime qualification process will be necessary. Candidates participating in The New Enlightenment free airtime system will not use 30-second ads.

Congressional candidates we will support with less airtime and more postage subsidy for direct mailing constituents than candidates for president and senator, because air media market areas often overlap more than one congressional district so airtime messages by congressional candidates would often be heard by voters not in the candidate's district, inefficiently using valuable and limited airtime. Also, all qualified candidates we will provide large postal subsidies. For campaigns for president and senator New Enlightenment policies require air media companies to provide candidates airtime in these categories over nine weeks:

- Many 3-minute blocks per candidate we will offer within the time allotted for commercial ads of normal programming according to a detailed system. About 7.5 hours of airtime per candidate we will offer in 3-minute blocks.
- Four half-hour blocks per candidate for Senate for speeches
- Four one and one half hour debates by the candidates for Senate
- Five half-hour blocks per candidate for President for speeches
- Seven one and one half hour debates by Presidential candidates

All the above airtimes will be commercial free. (In addition to these airtimes offered to qualified candidates, debate airtime is offered to all candidates on the ballot as part of the qualification process.)

### **Radical election system reforms are necessary. More reasons.**

A 2012 Rasmussen Poll found that 43% of likely voters believe the U.S. Congress would be better chosen through a random selection of members from the pages of a phone book than through our current system, 19% were unsure. So 62% or almost 2/3 of likely voters, at least suspect the “phone book system” beats our current system, where members of Congress on average spending over half their time in office raising money for their next campaigns.<sup>2</sup> Most of the money raised purchases influence, often to the detriment of the public interest, which then is used for the purchase of access to airwaves already owned by the public.

By a five to one margin campaign cash goes to incumbents. In 2008, 80% of the \$5.3 billion spent on federal races came from 1% of the population; 60% from only 0.1 percent.<sup>3</sup> Knowing these facts, would anyone be surprised that the extensive study noted earlier found that when Americans with different income levels differed in their policy preferences actual policy outcomes strongly reflect the preferences of the most affluent; they bear virtually no relationship to the preferences of poor or middle-income Americans. America is a society ruled by, and exclusively serves the interests of, the wealthy and corporations. The U.S. is not a real democracy or a society organized in the interests of its people.

When a political system creates this result, not surprisingly, participation is low and declining. Only 36.4% of eligible voters voted in 2014’s midterm elections, down from 40.9% who voted in 2010. The last time voter turnout was that low was 1942, when only 33.9% of the electorate cast ballots, according to the United States Elections Project, when a large share of the voting population was involved in World War II. Voter turnout in presidential elections is generally higher than in midterms—58.2% of eligible voters voted in 2012, still low and trending lower. The United States has the lowest voter participation rate in the developed world.

After we institute New Enlightenment policies that make best use of the publicly owned airways, elected officials will be free and able to spend all their time in office serving the general public. As it is now, elected officials may be free to spend all their time serving the general public, but they cannot if they want to stay in office.

As Adlai Stevenson said when running for President in 1956: *“The hardest thing about any political campaign is how to win without proving you are unworthy of winning.”* Because of the many hundreds of a percent increase in the need for cash in campaigns now it is not just hard, it is almost impossible.

Thomas Ferguson, University of Massachusetts political science professor and a member of the advisory board for the Institute for New Economic Thinking, described each election cycle throughout the country in this way: *“The evils of two lessers determine who’s picked as the lesser of two evils by a declining share of the electorate.”*—a very clear and concise explanation why we urgently need fundamental election system reform. It's sheer poetry, packing a lot of meaning into very few words—a short poem on our “democracy” descending into the depths of a dystopia.

The information disseminating power of the internet notwithstanding, broadcast media remain the most effective way for candidates to reach and influence the majority of the population. This is why far more campaign dollars are spent on broadcast media than any other.

The New Enlightenment’s free airtime system will to an important degree treat the airwaves as a kind of public square for qualified candidates for national office to address the nation during campaign season. In the modern world television is a necessary tool for this purpose, and it is also justified to remediate some of the harm it has caused.

Television has played a significant role in our citizenry abandoning the real “town square.” Beginning in the 1940’s the exceptional powers of television atomized our population by sending it home from the town square to reorient their lives around TV sets. In 1950, 9 percent of households had a television, by 1960, the number had already reached 87 percent, the fastest adoption of a new technology in history, with major social consequences.

As early as the 1960’s, a shocking three to four hours per person per day was spent on TV watching. This shifted our lives from public gatherings in the bowling alley, the park, playground and other public places to the privacy of our homes. Families retreated from other families, and over time the TV in the living room became TV’s in separate bedrooms, isolating family members from each other. The political scientist Robert Putnam found that the time in front of the TV is the most powerful single characteristic accounting for the decline in time devoted to civic responsibilities.

It's time to ensure that this powerful technology has as much redeeming social value as possible and that it be used to facilitate our meeting our civic responsibilities. This policy and The New Enlightenment media reform policy will accomplish this.

The New Enlightenment reforms will constitute a major change in our election process. Their goals are:

- Allow all good and capable people, as judged by a suitable number of the person's potential constituency, seeking national elected office to have ballot access with an appropriate degree of effort in a fair and equitable selections process. The ballot access selection process should require little or no candidate funds.
- Widely disseminate extensive information on the ballot-qualified candidates and the policies they propose or would otherwise support. Reforms should create conditions where the majority of votes will be cast based on far more information given wide exposure than is currently the case.
- The wide dissemination of extensive candidate, policy and related information should not require candidate funds. Candidate free speech to the constituency of the office they are seeking should, in fact, be "free" (unlike today where only money is truly free to speak because the majority of voters does not hear those with little money).

Achieving these goals is necessary for a well-functioning democratic republic to exist.

Our comprehensive election system reforms will allow viable "third" (or more) party candidates on the ballot for all national offices. Historically, third party candidates have played critical roles in our democracy by introducing popular and groundbreaking issues that were eventually co-opted by major parties, such as: the abolition of slavery, women's right to vote, social security, child labor laws, public schools, the direct election of senators, paid vacation, unemployment compensation and the formation of labor unions. Excessively restrictive ballot access laws exclude third-party and independent candidates that would make important contributions again.

The New Enlightenment election system reforms will break the long-term, bipartisan lack of action or even discussion on important issues, some where it is well established that the major parties are at odds with most of the American people. In a Gallup poll on Oct. 11, 2013, 60 percent of Americans, the highest Gallup has measured in the 10-year history of this question, said the Republican and Democratic parties "*do such a poor job that a major third party is needed*" A record high percentage of voters are now identifying as independent from the Democratic and Republican parties.

Four qualified candidates able to prominently and adequately express their views with substantial explanatory content to the majority of voters using a large and equal amount or value of airtime,

and other media exposure would be an advancement over our current system of great consequence. The large postal subsidies will also allow this. The four candidates will be democratically selected based on their ideas, not their fundraising ability. It's likely some candidates will have fundamental philosophical differences on public policy, so the public debate on how best to solve our most important challenges will be greatly widened and stimulated.

Ballot-qualified candidates can choose not to participate in the system but would forfeit all of its advantages, including the likely preference of voters for candidates not using money to promote their candidacy. Anyone choosing to participate would have to agree to all the system's provisions.

The system used to qualify the four candidates for the free airtime will not advantage any party and will allow candidates to be evaluated on their merits only, as judged by voters, and does not require any candidate funds. It will essentially be a kind of national primary. Ballot-qualified candidates we will offer airtime for debates, speeches, subsidized newspaper space, and space for platform information on a government website, to assure "primary" votes are well informed. Frequent broadcast station public service announcements will be required about the system and the responsibility to participate.

All the above systems are detailed in *The New Enlightenment*. Also included are detailed debates formats which eliminate the influence of mass media designated moderators on debate content.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6>

<sup>2</sup> The Huffington Post, Call Time for Congress Shows How Fundraising Dominates Bleak Work Life Jan 08, 2013, Ryan Grim, Sabrina Siddiqui [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/call-time-congressional-fundraising\\_n\\_2427291.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/call-time-congressional-fundraising_n_2427291.html)

<sup>3</sup> *America the Possible*, James Justave Speth, pg. 172