Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/   For a knowledge-based peace, justice, and ecology movement and an informed citizenry as the foundation for change.

Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

Blog:  http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Facebook:  www.facebook.com/OMNIPeaceDept

j.dick.bennett@gmail.com

Contents

HISTORY

Zephyr Teachout, Corruption in America

US NATIONAL POLITICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Jeff Connaughton, The Payoff

Leibovitch, This Town, the Bipartisan Congressional/Media Money Game

Lee Fang, “Congress Incorporated”

Moyers and Winship, Do-Nothing Congress

Abramoff on Legislative Corruption
Earmarks
Arkansas Chamber of Commerce
In the Meantime, Presidential Power has Increased

CHANGING CONGRESS
Buffet Recommendations
Four Pledges
Feingold, Stop Insider Trading
Congressional Reform Act of 2011 and 2014
Congress and Peace—Pentagon Budget Reduction,
   Abolish Nuclear Weapons

Zephyr Teachout’s ‘Corruption in America’
Reviewed by THOMAS FRANK,
SUNDAY BOOK REVIEW, NEW YORK TIMES, OCT. 16, 2014

Photo
A reproduction of an 1871 Thomas Nast cartoon about a Tammany Hall scandal. Credit
Wind Picture Archives, via Associated Press

Continue reading the main story
Continue reading the main story
Share This Page

Email
Share
Tweet
Pin
Save
More

Continue reading the main story
The language of political corruption is the default invective of our jaded age. For all our disposition to believe the worst, however, Beltway knavery has only rarely been the object of sustained historical consideration. Most corruption writing, for reasons of journalistic necessity, focuses on particular scandals or individual rogues. TV shows on the subject, meanwhile, assure us that vice is simply a Washington constant; that it saunters along the streets of the capital today with the same easy, untroubled gait as it always has.

The true student of misgovernment knows that the story is grander and more complicated than that. Washington isn’t simply a Place of Wickedness, throbbing with sin at all times and always in the same way. The misdeeds of Iran-contra did not much resemble the turpitude of, say, the Crédit Mobilier episode, even if they did have a great deal in common with the screw-ups of the George W. Bush years. And so the most ambitious chronicler of political misbehavior looks for something higher: a theory, a dialectic, a telos of scandal.

Surprisingly few have been able to pull this off. There was the muckraker Lincoln Steffens, who called himself a “graft philosopher” as he traveled from city to city studying political machines at the turn of the last century. There was the historian Matthew Josephson, whose 1938 masterpiece, “The Politicos,” traced the marriage of money with politics from its dalliances during the Grant administration until its final, grotesque consummation in William McKinley’s electoral triumph of 1896.

And now comes Zephyr Teachout, a professor at Fordham University Law School and a candidate in this year’s Democratic primary for governor of New York. Her entry into the field, “Corruption in America,” includes plenty of the juicy stories that make the genre so much fun to read. We learn, for example, about a diamond-studded snuffbox that Louis XVI gave Benjamin Franklin, then our ambassador to France, and how the Revolutionary generation regarded this gift — the result of a noncontroversial custom in Europe — as a possible threat to republican virtue. We read about an officer of the Turkish government in the 1870s who agreed to sell the products of an American arms manufacturer to his government in exchange for a small consideration, and who then, having duly moved the units, went to court to have the deal enforced. Good stuff, all of it. You have probably heard pundits say we are living in an age of “legalized bribery”; “Corruption in America” is the book that makes their case in careful detail.
As you might have guessed, Teachout’s main target is the currently reigning money-in-politics doctrine of the Supreme Court, as defined mainly by *Citizens United*, the 2010 decision that struck down certain restrictions on political spending by corporations. Today’s court understands “corruption” as a remarkably rare malady, a straight-up exchange of money for official acts. Any definition broader than that, the justices say, transgresses the all-important First Amendment. Besides, as Justice Anthony Kennedy announced in the *Citizens United* decision, the court now knows that “independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption” — a statement that I guess makes sense somehow in law-land but sounds to the layman’s ear like the patter of a man who has come unzipped from reality.

The first few American generations, Teachout reminds us, saw things very differently; for them, corruption was a “national fixation.” Drawing on Montesquieu and their understanding of ancient history, the founders fretted about the countless ways a republic might be undone from within. “They saw their task this way,” Teachout writes: “How could they create a system that would be most likely to be filled with men of civic virtue but avoid creating temptations that might corrode that virtue?” Their answer was to build structural barriers keeping public and personal interests separated, without getting lost in considerations of whether a forbidden activity did or did not amount to what our current court calls a “quid pro quo.”

The dings and the dents in their grand design started appearing almost immediately. In 1795, it was discovered that members of the Georgia Legislature had been bribed to hand over enormous stretches of land to speculators. The guilty were promptly booted from office, but then things got complicated. Was it possible for a state to take back land that a corrupt but duly elected legislature had given away? The Supreme Court eventually decided it wasn’t — corruption was just too hard to define.

And so have the debates gone, right down to our own day. We think of all the laws passed over the years to restrict money in politics — and of all the ways the money has flowed under and around those restrictions. And finally, it seems to me, we just gave up out of sheer exhaustion.

According to Teachout, however, it’s much worse than this. Our current Supreme Court, in *Citizens United*, “took that which had been named corrupt for over 200 years” — which is to say, gifts to politicians — “and renamed it
“legitimate.” Teachout does not exaggerate. Here is Justice Kennedy again, in the *Citizens United* decision: “The censorship we now confront is vast in its reach. The government has ‘muffle[d] the voices that best represent the most significant segments of the economy.’ ”

You read that right: The *economy* needs to be represented in democratic politics, or at least the economy’s “most significant segments,” whatever those are, and therefore corporate “speech,” meaning gifts, ought not to be censored. Corporations now possess the rights that the founders reserved for citizens, and as Teachout explains, what used to be called “corruption becomes democratic responsiveness.”

Let me pause here to take note of another recurring peculiarity in corruption literature: an eerie overlap between theory and practice. If you go back to that “censorship” quotation from Kennedy, you will notice he quotes someone else: his colleague Antonin Scalia, in an opinion from 2003. Google the quote and one place you’ll find it is in a book of Scalia’s opinions that was edited in 2004 by none other than the lobbyist Kevin Ring, an associate of Jack Abramoff who would later be convicted of corrupting public officials.

As it happens, Teachout gives us a long and savory chapter on the legal history of *lobbying*. Once upon a time, lobbying was regarded as obviously perfidious; in California it was a felony; and contracts to lobby were regarded as reprehensible by the Supreme Court. Here is a justice of that body in the year 1854, delivering the court’s decision in a case concerning lobbyists and lobbying contracts:

“The use of such means and such agents will have the effect to subject the state governments to the combined capital of wealthy corporations, and produce universal corruption, commencing with the representative and ending with the elector. Speculators in legislation, public and private, a compact corps of venal solicitors, vending their secret influences, will infest the capital of the Union and of every state, till corruption shall become the normal condition of the body politic, and it will be said of us as of Rome — *omne Romae venale.*”

Well, folks, it happened all right, just as predicted. State governments subject to wealthy corporations? Check. Speculators in legislation, infesting the capital? They call it K Street. And that fancy Latin remark about Rome?
They do say that of us today. Just turn on your TV sometime and let the cynicism flow.

And all of it has happened, Teachout admonishes, because the founders’ understanding of corruption has been methodically taken apart by a Supreme Court that cynically pretends to worship the founders’ every word. “We could lose our democracy in the process,” Teachout warns, a bit of hyperbole that maybe it’s time to start taking seriously.

CORRUPTION IN AMERICA
From Benjamin Franklin’s Snuff Box to Citizens United
By Zephyr Teachout
376 pp. Harvard University Press. $29.95.
Thomas Frank is a columnist for Salon and the author, most recently, of “Pity the Billionaire.”

Jeff Connaughton's "The Payoff: Why Wall Street Always Wins" A Book Review

Comment Now
Follow Comments

Jeff Connaughton has a new job: truth teller.

The Payoff: Why Wall Street Always Wins is a memoir and more, covering Connaughton’s twenty-plus years working, one way or another, for Senator, and now Vice President, Joe Biden. He’s a “Professional Democrat” turned Washington lobbyist who sought answers, and pushed for reforms, as Chief of Staff for Senator Ted Kaufman.

The Payoff is a must read if you’re interested in the corrupting influence of lobbyists, the revolving door between Wall Street and those that govern and regulate the financial services industry, and how huge, and ultimately untraceable, amounts of money grease the wheels of government at every step.

Connaughton knows what he’s done by writing this book.

It’s time people understand why – and how – Wall Street always
wins. It’s not a tale of bags filled with cash and quid pro quos. It’s more subtle than that, and in some ways best told by my own personal story and the compromises I made along the way. Party cohesion and the desire to make a munificent living in DC go a long way to enforce silence. Yet I’m willing to burn every bridge.

The author’s profound disillusionment with the political process set in long before he decided to tell these tales. I wonder, though, would Connaughton be an exile if, rather than being banished on a technicality – his lobbyist past - he’d finally gotten “the payoff” after all those years working for Biden? Would Connaughton still be playing the good soldier if he was in the White House?

**Jeff Connaughton** joined Joe Biden’s first presidential campaign in 1987 as Deputy National Finance Director. He became his Special Assistant when Biden chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee. After graduating from Stanford Law School, Connaughton clerked for Chief Judge Abner Mikva of the United States Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit, then followed Mikva to the White House when Mikva was appointed Counsel to President Bill Clinton. In 2000, Connaughton founded Quinn Gillespie & Associates, a bi-partisan lobbying firm with Jack Quinn (Democrat) and Ed Gillespie (Republican).

Connaughton’s book is full of revealing quotes and anecdotes that describe a messy, self-serving, and sometimes ruthless, political process. As right-hand to Kaufman after Biden became VP, he was intimately involved in the legislative process that resulted in the Dodd-Frank Act. Connaughton does not paint a very pretty picture of democracy.

For two years, Senator Kaufman and I kicked Wall Street in the groin every day. We loudly advocated the prosecution of financial fraudsters, prodded the SEC to do something – anything – about high-frequency trading and the vertiginous market swings it was causing, and pushed for meaningful financial regulatory reform. Despite our nearly fanatical dedication, we and other reformers failed.

Jeff Connaughton first met Joe Biden in 1979 when he invited the Senator to speak at an event at his college, the University of Alabama. The young Connaughton was hooked in by Biden’s mastery of the crowd, an
extemporaneous ninety-minute speech, his tragic personal story, and a very personal touch. In the car on the way to the airport, the young student organizer asked the Senator for a memento of the occasion:

I wanted Biden to sign something, but all I had with me was a spiral notebook with me. He wrote on the back of it:

To Jeff and the APU,

Please stay involved in politics. We need you all.

Joe Biden, USS 1979

I did for the next 31 years, with that piece of cardboard framed and hanging on the wall of wherever I lived. Sometimes I eyed it with disdain, sometimes with admiration. Ultimately, I saw it as my meal ticket…

I met Jeff Connaughton in early 2010, in the midst of the debate over financial reform and the Dodd-Frank Act. A profile of Senator Ted Kaufman in BusinessWeek by Paul Barrett where I was generously quoted led to a meeting with Kaufman and his staff in Washington DC. I had thirty-minutes to pitch my concerns about how the sins of the audit industry during the crisis were being ignored in the post-crisis reforms.

I was also interested in a bill co-sponsored by Kaufman with Senator Arlen Specter to counteract the Stoneridge decision and bring back the right to private litigation for aiding and abetting by auditors, lawyers and other professional in securities class actions. I wrote after the meeting with Kaufman:

Most regulators and legislators avoid talking about wholesale change to the structure of the accounting/audit industry. It seems too big a task and untenable. The refrain I hear most often both when attending conferences and events is, “We can't get rid of the audit opinion. It’s required.”

Lack of vision and loads of cash. These are the fundamental obstacles to serving investors and other stakeholders with financial reporting that can be trusted.
I’ve also written about the strong and steady political contributions the accounting industry makes, party-agnostic, dictated primarily by the politician’s position and influence over the audit firms’ interests.

This Town: Two Parties and a Funeral--Plus, Plenty of Valet Parking!--in America's Gilded Capital

by Mark Leibovich  Blue Rider Press; First Edition edition (July 16, 2013)

The #1 New York Times and Washington Post bestseller

Tim Russert is dead.
But the room was alive.
Big Ticket Washington Funerals can make such great networking opportunities. Power mourners keep stampeding down the red carpets of the Kennedy Center, handing out business cards, touching base. And there is no time to waste in a gold rush, even (or especially) at a solemn tribal event like this.

Washington—This Town—might be loathed from every corner of the nation, yet these are fun and busy days at this nexus of big politics, big money, big media, and big vanity. There are no Democrats and Republicans anymore in the nation’s capital, just millionaires. That is the grubby secret of the place in the twenty-first century. You will always have lunch in This Town again. No matter how many elections you lose, apologies you make, or scandals you endure.

In This Town, Mark Leibovich, chief national correspondent for The New York Times Magazine, presents a blistering, stunning—and often hysterically funny—examination of our ruling class’s incestuous “media industrial complex.” Through his eyes, we discover how the funeral for a beloved newsmen becomes the social event of the year. How political reporters are fetishized for their ability to get their names into the predawn e-mail sent out by the city’s most powerful and puzzled-over journalist. How a disgraced Hill aide can overcome ignominy and maybe emerge with a more potent “brand” than many elected members of Congress. And how an administration bent on “changing Washington” can be sucked into the ways of This Town with the same ease with which Tea Party insurgents can, once elected, settle into it like a warm bath.

Outrageous, fascinating, and destined to win Leibovich a whole host of, er, new friends, This Town is must reading, whether you’re inside the Beltway—or just trying to get there.
Editorial Reviews

Review

“In addition to his reporting talents, Leibovich is a writer of excellent zest. At times his book is laugh-out-loud (as well as weep-out-loud). He is an exuberant writer, even as his reporting leaves one reaching for Xanax… [This Town] is vastly entertaining and deeply troubling.” —Christopher Buckley, The New York Times Book Review

“Here it is, Washington in all its splendid, sordid glory… [Leibovich] seems to wear those special glasses that allow you to x-ray the outside and see what’s really going on. Start to finish, this is a brilliant portrait — pointillist, you might say, or modern realist. So brilliant that once it lands on a front table at Politics & Prose Leibovich will never be able to have lunch in this town again. There are also important insights tucked in among the barbs… So here’s to all the big mouths, big shots, big machers, and big jerks. In case you’re wondering, Mark Leibovich is on to every one of you, and his portrayal of This Town is spot on.” —David Shribman, The New York Times

“In his new book This Town, Mark Leibovich commits an act of treason against the Washington establishment… Thoroughly entertaining… Leibovich is a keen observer and energetic writer.” —Reid Pillifant, New York Observer

“This Town is a frothy Beltway insider tell-all … rollicking fun and sharply written. A big, sprawling fun beach read of a book—snappy and well-crafted.” —Susan Gardner, The Daily Kos

“This Town is as entertaining for the broader picture it paints of a capital that corrupts even the most incorruptible as it is for the salacious gossip that dominated early reviews. Books like Leibovich’s are important resources for historians who, a century from now, will use This Town as a trove of background information for a pivotal period when our politics became poisonous.” —Reid Wilson, The National Journal

“Leibovich delivers the reportorial goods. He is in all the parties, and supplies a wildly entertaining anthropological tour.” —Jonathan Chait, New York Magazine

“Leibovich has written a very funny book about how horrible his industry can be... Uncommonly honest.” —David Weigel, Slate

“[Leibovich] is a master of the political profile… This Town is as insidery as Game Change” —Carlos Lozada, Washington Post

“Intensely anticipated…. [Leibovich] has a real affection for many of his characters… [and] also throws a few unapologetically hard punches.” —Ben Smith, Buzzfeed

“Witty, entertaining….the book is enlightening on how journalism is practiced in Washington… This Town could also be source material for your book about what’s wrong with these horrible people and — more importantly, but also much more difficult — how to fix the culture that led to their ascendance…. This Town is a funny book, but it should probably make you as angry and depressed as “Two American Families.” —Alex Pareene, Salon.com

About the Author

Mark Leibovich is The New York Times Magazine chief national correspondent, based in Washington, D.C. In 2011, he received a National Magazine Award for his story on Politico’s Mike Allen and the changing media
Until a few weeks ago, Joel Leftwich was a senior lobbyist for the largest food and beverage company in the United States. During his tenure at PepsiCo — maker of Cheetos, Lay’s potato chips and, of course, Pepsi-Cola — the company had played a leading role in efforts to beat back local soda taxes and ensure that junk food remained available in schools. But PepsiCo also faced new challenges at the federal level. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, championed by Michelle Obama, had placed new nutrition standards on school lunches. PepsiCo sent teams of lobbyists to Capitol Hill, deluged political candidates with donations, and fired off letters to regulators asking them to weaken the new rules. One such PepsiCo letter requested the redefinition of a "school day" so the company could continue to sell its sugary sports drinks at "early morning sports practices." Leftwich, a former congressional liaison for the Department of Agriculture, was well positioned to help PepsiCo shore up its allies in the House and Senate.
Last April, Leftwich paid a visit to one such friend, Democratic Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, then chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, to thank her for opposing nutrition guidelines for food stamp purchases.

Now Leftwich will have far more access to such friends. As the newly appointed staff director of the Senate Agriculture Committee, now under GOP control, Leftwich will have wide sway over the law that funds school lunches, which is up for reauthorization this year. PepsiCo can rest easier, confident that the guidelines already in place are unlikely to be strengthened — and may be weakened instead. Leftwich's new boss, Republican Senator Pat Roberts of Kansas, who took over the Agriculture Committee gavel in January, has set his sights on dialing back school lunch nutrition requirements, which he has called "Big Brother government that's out of control."

While all eyes were on the changing of the guard in Congress as Republicans seized control of the US Senate in January, there was an equally profound change taking place among Capitol Hill staff, as many GOP lawmakers handed over the keys to corporate lobbyists like Leftwich.

"We've seen a dramatic uptick in K Street moving into congressional staff positions since theCitizens United decision," says Craig Holman, Public Citizen's expert on lobbying and ethics. House Speaker John Boehner, he notes, has "encouraged new members to employ lobbyists on their personal and committee staff."

On almost any big issue coming up for debate during the final two years of the Obama administration — surveillance, trade, healthcare, entitlements, tax reform, climate change — corporate lobbyists will now be attempting to influence their own former colleagues, whose salaries are now covered by US taxpayers.

The new staff director of the House Intelligence Committee, Jeff Shockey, comes to the Hill after working as a lobbyist for many of the country's leading intelligence-agency contractors, including General Dynamics, Boeing and, just last year, Academi, the firm formerly known as Blackwater. The House Oversight Committee, a key investigative body, will now have a staff director named Sean McLaughlin, a former corporate lobbyist who spent the past three years as a principal at the Podesta Group. Tom Chapman, who earned compensation worth $1,531,453 in 2014 as vice president of government affairs for US Airways, will now earn considerably less as part of the counsel staff for the Senate Aviation Subcommittee, which oversees his former employer. And as Congress takes up tax reform, one of the latest hires to the Joint Committee on Taxation is Ben Gross, who spent more than a decade as international tax director for PricewaterhouseCoopers, a firm that specializes in helping corporations avoid American taxes.

Lobbyists have been hired to help the offices of the most controversial addition to the GOP leadership team, Louisiana Representative Steve Scalise, now House majority whip. Scalise came under fire in December following the revelation that as a state lawmaker, over a decade ago, he had addressed a white supremacist organization founded by former Klansman David
Duke. But Scalise's return to Capitol Hill in January was hardly dampened by the scandal. In a party at the posh Capitol Hill Club, a private meeting ground for Republicans that has been sued by its employees for alleged racial discrimination, nearly 300 lobbyists cheered the embattled lawmaker as he laid out his agenda for the coming session, according to Politico. Scalise was flanked by one of his newest staffers, Bill Hughes, formerly a lobbyist for the Retail Industry Leaders Association, a powerful trade group that has pressured lawmakers to drop efforts to raise the minimum wage.

And why not celebrate? Scalise is beloved by Washington's army of influence-peddlers for his loyalty to the Beltway's lobbyist elite. In his previous position as chair of the Republican Study Committee, Scalise welcomed the "K Street community" at special business-outreach events attended by representatives of such major firms as Halliburton, MasterCard, General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman. The news that Scalise would move up the leadership ladder was celebrated by Koch Industries lobbyists, who threw a tony wine-tasting party featuring "pinots from Oregon and the central coast of California." Soon after ascending to his new post, Scalise shocked many by having a registered lobbyist, John Feehery, sit in as applicants interviewed for jobs.

Lee Fang is a reporting fellow with The Investigative Fund and a contributing writer at The Nation magazine. He previously covered lobbying and conservative movements as a blogger with ThinkProgress.org.

Lee Fang's reporter page »

Moyers and Winship | Do-Nothing Congress Gives Inertia a Bad Name

Bill Moyers and Michael Winship, Moyers & Company

Moyers and Winship write: "Sadly, such is the way of Washington, home of the scheme and the fraud, where the unbreakable chain between money and governance weighs heavy and drags us ever deeper into a sinkhole of inaction and mediocrity."

How else to explain a Congress that still adamantly refuses to do anything, despite some 90 percent of the American public being in favor of background checks for gun purchases and a healthy majority favoring other gun control measures? Last week, they ignored the pleas of Newtown families and the siege of violence in Boston and yielded once again to the fanatical rants of Wayne LaPierre and the National Rifle Association. In just the first three months of this year, as it shoved back against the renewed push for controls, the NRA spent a record $800,000 keeping congressional members in line.

And how else to explain why corporate tax breaks have more than doubled in the last 25 years? Or why the Senate and House recently gutted the STOCK Act requiring disclosure of
financial transactions by White House staff and members of Congress and their staffs and prohibiting them from insider trading? It was passed into law and signed by President Obama last year - an election year - with great self-congratulation from all involved. But fears allegedly arose that there might be security risks for some in the executive branch if their financial business was known.


Rev. *Public Citizen* (Jan/Feb 2012). Not only reveals his own corrupt and illegal behavior but gives details of how he spent $1 million a year in influence-peddling. Also offers proposals for cleaning up the profession of lobbying. --Dick

1.  *Jack Abramoff book expos**es Washington corruption | 89.3 KPCC  
   You +1’d this publicly.  [Undo](#)
   Nov 23, 2011 – Before being convicted of committing fraud in 2006, *Jack Abramoff* was widely considered to be the most powerful lobbyist in Washington.

2.  *Amazon.com: Heist: Superlobbyist Jack Abramoff, His Republican ...  
   [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) › ... › Leaders & Notable People › PoliticalCached
   You +1’d this publicly.  [Undo](#)

3.  *Jack Abramoff: >From Corrupt Lobbyist To Washington Reformer : It's ...  
   [www.npr.org/](http://www.npr.org/)jack-abramoff-from-corrupt-lobbyist-to-washington...  
   You +1’d this publicly.  [Undo](#)
   Nov 18, 2011 – Through his interview with Tell Me More's Michel Martin and his new *book*, former lobbyist *Jack Abramoff* is obviously hoping his past makes ...

*The Republic* - 16 hours ago
AP RALEIGH, NC — Disgraced Washington influence-peddler Jack Abramoff is telling a North ... He's recently written a book about corruption in Washington.

38 related articles

1. Jack Abramoff: Make Congressional Candidates Sign Pledge For ...

NPR (blog) - 147 related articles

FILM about Abraomaoff

“Casino Jack and the United States of Money,” by Alex Gibney.


EARMARKS

Taxpayers for Common Sense

http://taxpayer.net/

( How many earmarks and for what amounts did your Senator Congressman sponsor?)

ENDING THE EARMARK ATM

http://taxpayer.net/budget/fy08earmarks/report.html

(Good read)

ARKANSAS BUSINESS/CONGRESSIONAL COMPLEX: HOW BUSINESS INFLUENCES CONGRESS

The Morning News (5-4-08), “Couple Regulars For Washington Fly-In” tells about a Fayetteville’s Jack and Jane Meadows who have attended “about 42 or 44 annual congressional dinners” put on by the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce.  Meadows is quoted: “I think it's a very good thing for the business community to have a good relationship with the congressmen, and especially the staffers.”  --Dick

Meanwhile, over at the White House
RISE OF THE UNITARY EXECUTIVE, DECLINE OF BALANCE OF POWERS

“Truman Transformed Office of President” by George Will, *TMN* (5-4-08), an excellent thumbnail history of the how Truman’s 1947 creation of the National Security State (Pentagon from Dept. of War to Dept. of Defense, CIA, NSC, and much more) led to concentration of power in the presidency, the present US empire, and fundamental change in the GOP from a party opposed to unchecked power to one that embraces a strong president and empire.

CHANGING CONGRESS

The Buffet Rule

From: jrs1936@cox.net
Sent: 10/18/2014

We must support this…pass it on and let us see if these idiots understand what people pressure is all about.

Salary of retired US Presidents . . . . . . . $180,000 FOR LIFE
Salary of House/Senate members . . . . . . . $174,000 FOR LIFE This is stupid
Salary of Speaker of the House . . . . . . . $223,500 FOR LIFE This is really stupid
Salary of Majority/Minority Leaders . . $193,400 FOR LIFE Ditto last line
Average Salary of a teacher . . . . . . . . . . $40,065
Average Salary of a deployed Soldier . . $38,000

I think we found where the cuts should be made! If you agree pass it on, I just did.

Warren Buffet, in a recent interview with CNBC, offers one of the best quotes about the debt ceiling:

"I could end the deficit in 5 minutes," he told CNBC. "You just pass a law that says that anytime there is a deficit of more than 3% of GDP, all sitting members of Congress are ineligible for re-election."
The 26th amendment (granting the right to vote for 18 year-olds) took only 3 months & 8 days to be ratified! Why? Simple! The people demanded it. That was in 1971 - before computers, e-mail, cell phones, etc.

Of the 27 amendments to the Constitution, seven (7) took one (1) year or less to become the law of the land - all because of public pressure.

Warren Buffet is asking each addressee to forward this email to a minimum of twenty people on their address list; in turn ask each of those to do likewise.

In three days, most people in The United States of America will have the message. This is one idea that really should be passed around.

Congressional Reform Act of 2014

1. No Tenure / No Pension.
   A Congressman/woman collects a salary while in office and receives no pay when they're out of office.

2. **Congress (past, present & future) participates in Social Security.**
   All funds in the Congressional retirement fund move to the Social Security system immediately. All future funds flow into the Social Security system, and Congress participates with the American people. It may not be used for any other purpose.

3. Congress can purchase their own retirement plan, just as all Americans do.

4. Congress will no longer vote themselves a pay raise. Congressional pay will rise by the lower of CPI or 3%.

5. Congress loses their current health care system and participates in the same health care system as the American people.
6. Congress must equally abide by all laws they impose on the American people.

7. All contracts with past and present Congressmen/women are void effective 12/1/14. The American people did not make this contract with Congressmen/women.

Congress made all these contracts for themselves. Serving in Congress is an honor, not a career. The Founding Fathers envisioned citizen legislators, so ours should serve their term(s), then go home and back to work.

If each person contacts a minimum of twenty people then it will only take three days for most people (in the U.S.) to receive the message. Don't you think it's time?

THIS IS HOW YOU FIX CONGRESS!

If you agree, pass it on. If not, delete.

**Congressional Reform Act of 2011**

Mon, 7 Mar 2011

The 26th amendment (granting the right to vote for 18 year-olds) took only 3 months & 8 days to be ratified! Why? Simple! The people demanded it.

That was in 1971...before computers, before e-mail, before cell phones, etc.

Of the 27 amendments to the Constitution, seven (7) took 1 year or less to become the law of the land...all because of public pressure.

I'm asking each addressee to forward this email to a minimum of twenty people on their address list; in turn ask each of those to do likewise.

In three days, most people in The United States of America will have the message. This is one idea that really should be passed around

**Congressional Reform Act of 2011**
1. Term Limits. 12 years only, one of the possible options below.

A. Two Six-year Senate terms
B. Six Two-year House terms
C. One Six-year Senate term and three Two-Year House terms

2. No Tenure / No Pension. A Congressman collects a salary while in office and receives no pay when they are out of office.


All funds in the Congressional retirement fund move to the Social Security system immediately. All future funds flow into the Social Security system, and Congress participates with the American people.

4. Congress can purchase their own retirement plan, just as all Americans do.

5. Congress will no longer vote themselves a pay raise. Congressional pay will rise by the lower of CPI or 3%.

6. Congress loses their current health care system and participates in the same health care system as the American people.

7. Congress must equally abide by all laws they impose on the American people.

8. All contracts with past and present Congressmen are void effective 1/1/11.

The American people did not make this contract with Congressmen. Congressmen made all these contracts for themselves. Serving in Congress is an honor, not a career. The Founding Fathers envisioned citizen legislators, so ours should serve their term(s), then go home and back to work.
If each person contacts a minimum of twenty people then it will only take three days for most people (in the U.S.) to receive the message. Maybe it is time.

THIS IS HOW YOU FIX CONGRESS

Stanford Law Professor Larry Lessig Bets 'Wikipedia' Approach Will Transform Congress

By Sarah Lai Stirland March 20, 2008 | 3:39:25 PM

Categories: Politics

Stanford law professor Larry Lessig plans to use collaborative software to change Congress.

Courtesy Larry Lessig

A prominent Stanford law professor on Thursday launched an ambitious project that aims to use collaborative software to harness the extraordinary levels of pent-up political energy and dissatisfaction that voters have shown over the past two years with their members of congress.

The Change Congress project's first mission is to diminish the influence of money in the legislative body by influencing the outcome of the 2008 election campaigns of 67 members of congress which are up for grabs. As the Change Congress project founder Larry Lessig noted in the project's launch Thursday afternoon, there haven't been so many seats open up for challenge in more than a decade.

Lessig, known for his decade-long role in trying to loosen the entertainment industry's vise-like grip on popular culture by shaping copyright law, is betting that the energy and dissatisfaction exhibited by voters against the status-quo in Washington DC, and the emergence of collaborative software that enables vast numbers of geographically-dispersed citizens to become politically active on their own schedule, will enable a new kind of transparency and accountability in political campaigns.

"The problem we face is ... the problem of crony capitalism using money to capture government," he said on Monday during the launch of his project in Washington, DC. "The challenge is whether in fact we can change this. The political experts tell you that it can't be done, that process always win over substance."

Lessig and Joe Trippi hope that their project will bring the beginnings of this change by getting
voters to challenge their members of congress to commit to Change Congress' four pledges. The project will rely on engaged voters to record and map both the responses by, and the positions of candidates who are running for open seats. The idea is to make what seems like an abstract idea visually tangible through a Google mash-up.

The professor wants legislators to promise to do four things which he says will reduce the influence of money on policymaking: To promise not to accept money from lobbyists and political action committees; support public financing of elections; commit to passing legislation to permanently ban the funneling of money to their districts' projects of questionable worth; and to commit to "compel transparency in the functioning of congress."

Candidates can signal their intentions to take any one or all of the pledges by filling out a form at the organization's web site, which then formulates code that provides a graphic that the candidates can then place on their election campaign web sites.

The Change Congress project hopes that citizens will track congressional candidates’ positions on these issues by reporting on them at the web site. The project will then map these results onto a Google map. Writing in The Huffington Post this morning, Lessig explained:

... once this wiki-army has tracked the positions of all Members of Congress, we will display a map of reform, circa 2008: Each Congressional district will be colored in either (1) dark red, or dark blue, reflecting Republicans or Democrats who have taken a pledge, (2) light red or light blue, tracking Republicans and Democrats who have not taken our pledge, but who have signaled support for planks in the Change-Congress platform, or (3) for those not taking the pledge and not signaling support for a platform of reform, varying shades of sludge, representing the percentage of the Member's campaign contributions that come from PACs or lobbyists.

... What this map will reveal, we believe, is something that not many now actually realize: That the support for fundamental reform is broad and deep. That recognition in turn will encourage more to see both the need for reform and the opportunity that this election gives us to achieve it. Apathy is driven by the feeling that nothing can be done. This Change Congress map will demonstrate that in fact, something substantial can be done. Now.

Lessig says that the project will, down the road, model itself on Emily's List in that it will recruit contributors to finance candidates who make reforming congress a central part of their campaign.

When the Democrats re-took congress in 2006, they won on a platform built by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s mantra of being against the Republicans' culture of corruption.

Yet the Democratic-led congress' current job approval rating is in the low twenties. This apparent dissatisfaction suggests that a large body of people might be ready and interested in volunteering for the Change Congress project.

So far, senator Barack Obama's campaign for the Democratic nomination for president has
surged on this theme of bringing change to Washington, DC. The Illinois senator's seemingly magical combination of inspirational rhetoric, off-line community-organization strategies, combined with the smart design of online social networking tools have fostered high levels of engagement.

The question facing the Change Congress campaign is whether Lessig and his colleagues at the Sunlight Foundation can motivate a bi-partisan electorate to become similarly engaged without -- at first at least -- the funds and advertising budget that's powering the Obama campaign.

In an interview, Lessig says that for now, he's going to focus on motivating people to volunteer their time to research members of congress' positions on transparency, accountability and public financing of campaigns.

"If you give them a big vision, and talk about all the good things that will come out of it, then I think a lot of people will be willing to do the wiki work [at home] in their pajamas," he says. "The hard thing is getting them to go to rallies and getting them to call their congressman."

Lessig says that his goal is to raise $500,000 to fund the project for the year by May 1. He hopes to hire a couple of staffers in the San Francisco bay area and an executive director.

The project has bipartisan appeal -- Republicans took over congress in 1994 with similar promises of sweeping change. As National Journal has thoroughly documented, many of those promises were not fulfilled.

This time, it could be different -- now that an engaged electorate has software and an open reporting system to hold their members' feet to the fire.

**Update:** In answer to the reader below's question on what happens if a member of congress takes a pledge and doesn't follow through, Lessig says that he anticipates that each district will have voters who will monitor their members' activities and report on them.

"If you violate the pledge, you've created a huge opportunity for people to attack you," he says.

**Update:** The Sunlight Foundation has posted footage of the lecture up on Google Video:

See Also:

- ETech: Lessig Calls for Geeks to Code Money Out of Politics
- Digital Culture Shift: Lessig Leaves IP Battle

PASS THE STOCK ACT

From: Russ Feingold, ProgressivesUnited.org [mailto:info@progressivesunited.org]

Sent: Monday, January 30, 2012 1:08 PM
To: sueactivism@mchsi.com

Subject: Prevent insider trading Join me and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and prevent insider trading. Share this Email on Facebook

http://www.democratsenators.org/o/44/t/11885petition.jsp?petition_KEY=422&track=PU&tag=PU

Sue,

It's a no-brainer: Insider trading should be forbidden for members of Congress. That's why friend and former colleague Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand introduced the STOCK Act in November after a "60 Minutes" report first exposed the issue of insider trading in Congress. Her bill would stop it once and for all, because no member of Congress should unfairly benefit from information they gain from their work as lawmakers. Americans have a right to know that their elected officials are playing by the same rules that they are. Fortunately, this important bill has gained significant momentum since President Obama endorsed it in last Tuesday's State of the Union address -- and now we need to do everything we can to get it passed. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is bringing this important bill for a cloture vote tonight. If it passes, it will get a final up-or-down vote. I'm urging you to make your voice heard now so members of Congress know that you're watching and expecting them to do the right thing. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and I are working together to make sure as many people are heard as possible. Click here http://www.democratsenators.org/o/44/t/11885petition.jsp?petition_KEY=422&track=PU&tag=PU to join me, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and thousands of people across the country who are urging lawmakers to pass the STOCK Act so we can make sure no insider trading occurs in the halls of Congress. We need clear laws on the books forbidding insider trading by members of Congress. It's one more part of Progressives United's mission to create a government that's more transparent and accountable to the American people. And to further promote accountability and transparency, the STOCK Act would require members to disclose major transactions within 30 days and make this information available online. The American people have a serious lack of trust in their representatives in Washington. They need to believe -- without a shadow of a doubt -- that lawmakers are acting in the best interest of our country, not for their own financial gain. If you agree, then please sign this petition now, before the big vote tonight. If members of Congress see that this law has overwhelming support among their constituents, they'll have a hard time arguing that there's no need for it. Click here to make your voice heard. Join the thousands of Americans who are demanding that lawmakers play by the rules and don't benefit from insider information. Thanks to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and President Obama, we're closer than ever to getting the STOCK Act passed. Let's seize the moment and begin the process of
Hello Bonnie,

Sr Dems might be interested in organizations that support Democratic congressional candidates. One is the Council for a Livable World. During every election CLW raises money and lobbies for two or more liberal candidates. This year they have chosen Senatorial candidates in Maine and West Virginia.

Here are CLW’s assumptions: “The only institutions left to protect the legislative gains of the last 80 years are the Democratic majority in the Senate and the veto pen in the White House. . . .We must keep a Democratic majority in the Senate.” And because the Koch brothers and other rich Republicans and corporations are pouring so much money into campaigns, small groups like CLW seek ways to make their money count. Two small states, Maine and West Virginia, “do not require massive amounts of TV money, where grassroots support and ‘showing up’ are key,” and two outstanding young women are running for the Senate, both have deep roots in their state, are pro-choice, support arms-control, and have a chance.

**Shenna Bellows**, Maine, dubbed the “Elizabeth Warren of Civil Liberties,” has put together a diverse coalition and is visiting all of Maine’s 500 towns. Maine has already elected an independent Senator, Angus King.

**Natalie Tennant**, West Virginia, was twice elected Secretary of State and has Jay Rockefeller’s support. Her “Republican opponent…has voted for every right
wing measure as a member of Congress.”

Some of us might want to support these Senatorial candidates to help ensure a Democratic majority in the Senate.

Dick Bennett

END CONGRESS NEWSLETTER #1

--
Dick Bennett

Newsletters
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/
jbennet@uark.edu
Blog: http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/
Facebook: www.facebook.com/OMNIPeaceDept
j.dick.bennett@gmail.com
(479) 442-4600
2582 Jimmie Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72703