**Big Ideas for 2023-Is Anyone Listening?**

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No matter what each party promises, both political parties are desperate to find new ideas that will make a difference. With an even more divided and divisive 118th Congress and the 2024 elections looming, will any ideas matter regardless of worth? Or will even good ideas be politically dead on arrival given the intense polarization of the country? But suppose good ideas were welcomed. Consider these:

Three ideas for repairing a failing government:

With $1.7 trillion set aside for infrastructure, jobs, chips, science, and inflation reduction, appoint appropriate oversight in the executive and legislative branches. The amount of waste, fraud and theft uncovered in the huge spending for Covid relief was intolerable. But worse, this may be the last chance to modernize much of America’s failing infrastructure for the 21st century. Effective oversight is vital.

Do not repeat the passage of the $1.7 trillion Omnibus Bill by requiring every member of Congress to swear or affirm having read and understood all legislation before voting. It is outrageous in the extreme for members of Congress to find out what is in a bill only after it is approved!

Require all officials running for public office to declare that their resumes and CVs are accurate and correct.

Three ideas for fixing national security:

Draft a national security strategy that is executable, affordable, and recruitable. Even at $858 billion, the defence budget cannot meet the demands of internal, uncontrolled real annual cost growth of 5-7% and inflation of 8-10%. And the manpower cohort will not sustain maintaining an all-volunteer active-duty force of about 1.4 million.

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Draft a viable strategy for ending the Ukraine War on favourable terms. What passes for strategy is keeping Ukraine in the fight but contained inside Ukraine in the expectation that at some stage, losses will force Russia to negotiate. But what if Ukraine cannot indefinitely bear the costs of war?

Reduce the mindless tariffs on China that are hurting Americans more than the Chinese. Such an action may also result in policies toward China that balance threat with reality and do not exaggerate actual, as opposed to perceived dangers and challenges that China may pose to its global neighbours.

Three ideas to reduce the already super-polarized divisions that are tearing American politics apart:

Do not regard the other as the enemy. Politics today is not only zero-sum. Worse, Democrats and Republicans so despise each other that winning and not governing has become the top priority. The next ideas contribute to how to make this idea work.

Be sceptical and cautious about what you read, and accept it as fact. In the age of smartphones, social media, and the Internet, it is too easy to allow rumour, innuendo, and accusation to become taken as truth and fact. Not what the other side is doing is all wrong.

Ask good questions. Democracies and republics die when the public is no longer engaged. Too often, people do not have the time to examine critical issues more deeply. Admitting that one does not know is far from a weakness. It is a great strength provided one asks the right questions to become better informed regardless of the issue.

What to do? Whether readers agree or not with these or other ideas, about 70-75% of Americans believe that the country is headed in the wrong direction. Ironically, perhaps the only time that figure was greater was in 1775 when the bulk of the colonists in America opposed the Revolution to leave Britain.

That reference is important because it should remind us of the most compelling sentence in the Declaration of Independence. “When government becomes destructive, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and establish a new one.” Too many Americans today regard government as failing and thus destructive. Yet, both political parties are unable and may be incapable of producing any ideas acceptable to more than half the public.

Why? A majority of Americans are not prepared to accept and agree on any big ideas. A majority of Americans are not prepared to debate each with respect and dignity for those who may dissent. And a sufficient number of Americans are unwilling to compel action on those ideas that will make a positive difference for the country. Despite Chinese, Russian, and other challenges, herein lies perhaps the greatest danger facing the country.

Bereft of ideas and means of implementing them, to rephrase Lincoln, asks if “a house so divided can stand?” We may find out in 2023. And that may not be pleasant.

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