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IS GOVERNMENT BROKEN?
STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH ELECTION AND GOVERNMENT REFORMS

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PANEL ON GOVERNANCE REFORM:

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Closing Remarks:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

SPEAKER: Okay, thank you everybody for coming back reasonably promptly. The next panel is going to be moderated by Professor Archon Fung. Archon Fung is the Ford Foundation Professor of Democracy and Citizenship at the Kennedy School of Government, at the Ash Institute at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. It would take me about a year to get all that right, but I think I've got it now.

His research examines the impacts of civic participation, public deliberation, and transparency on public and private governance. His book, *The Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy,* examines two participatory democracy reform efforts in low income Chicago neighborhoods. Current projects also examine initiatives in ecosystem management, toxic reduction, endangered species protection, local governance, and international labor standards. So, he's qualified to talk about almost anything based on that list.

Anyway, so this is the panel that's going to discuss a whole series of governance issues in relationship to our democracy and I'm delighted to introduce Professor Archon Fung. Archon?

MR. FUNG: It's natural and appropriate for this discussion of strengthening our nation's democracy to begin by exploring ways to improve our electoral system, but it's critical that the discussion does not end there. Many Americans, especially politicians, but also political scientists, policy experts, advocates, and ordinary citizens, suffer under the quaint but mistaken illusion that democracy begins and ends at the ballot box and on Election Day. If only we could fix our elections, democracy itself would be healed. If our electoral system worked better, legislators and presidents could go about the business of making good laws and policies without worrying about mustering public support and legitimacy until the next election.

But this view of democracy as pivoting around the ballot box is mistaken. What happens between elections, before and after Election Day is also critical to the health of our democracy. A healthy democracy requires citizens to take an interest in their communities, in each other, and in the long term well being of the nation. It requires citizens who have the desire to inform themselves and it requires social and political institutions to give citizens opportunities to engage in

public life so that they come to see government at all levels as something that they own and control not an alien entity that they distrust and even fear.

Now, pollsters often ask Americans whether they think that "this country is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or whether it is run for the benefit of all people." Today, most Americans respond that they think government is run by a few big interests. Because so many Americans today do not trust their government or political leaders, elections alone simply cannot secure the legitimacy and mandate that they are meant to do. Politicians must prove themselves to the public not just on Election Day, but over and over again every single day.

This nation -- coalition of organizations to strengthen our democracy recognizes this reality. Some of the organizations in this coalition work to strengthen the habits of citizenship by creating opportunities for young people to get engaged in public service, others utilize community organizing and public deliberation methods to engage citizens in local democratic action.

One of our -- our first speaker, Martha McCoy, directs an organization called Everyday Democracy. Everyday Democracy works with hundreds of communities all around the country to help citizens and community leaders in those communities come together to solve difficult problems such as racial conflict, economic inequality, crime, and educational inclusion.

Other democratic deficits in our system of governance occur after Election Day, in the lawmaking process and in the policymaking process. Opinion polls show that many Americans are frustrated, even baffled, at the inability of those they send to Washington to move forward on obviously important public problems.

Thomas Mann, the W. Averell Harriman chair and senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution, will be the second speaker on this panel. He's an expert on Congress. He's written many books and articles on problems such as redistricting, campaign finance, and political parties. Today he'll help us understand why the legislative process has grown to be paralyzed by partisanship, polarization, and gridlock and, hopefully, what we might do about it.

One slogan from the Cold War was, "Trust but verify." Things may have declined in this country to the point at which the slogan is now appropriate not just for Americans in relationship to their foreign enemies, but for American citizens in relationship to their own government and

elected representatives. Transparency and information disclosure is one way that Americans can check whether the large organizations upon which so much depends are indeed trustworthy. Campaign finance disclosure properly done can help Americans know which interests support their political representatives. Public budget disclosure can help Americans judge whether their money is being spent wisely. Greater public access to information about relationships between regulators and industry, adverse drug reactions, or auto accident reports might help Americans avoid the next BP Deepwater Horizon, Vioxx, or Toyota accelerator fiascos.

Gary Bass directs OMB Watch, which is a nonprofit research and advocacy organization devoted to government accountability and openness. He spent many years working on government transparency and will tell us about the accomplishments and remaining challenges in creating an open government and open society.

So, let me welcome our first speaker, Martha McCoy.

MS. McCOY: Thanks, Archon, and good afternoon. It's great to be here with you all.

The Open Government Directive that the President issued his first day in office was really hopeful and exciting for many of us in this room and many people across the country. The three commitments in that directive, to transparency, participation, and collaboration, are critical aspects of the democracy reform movement. The challenge with talking about participation and collaboration is that the words get used incorrectly so often that most people don't even know what they mean.

The most common misperception is that they're just good PR. And while good public relations is often a good part of an effective participatory process, really effective participation also requires political leadership, analysis, and resources. Without that, it's just window dressing and doesn't change anything about politics as usual.

Unfortunately, the faux versions of participation end up getting a lot of press because they might make good theater or even offer up some good conflict for us to watch. The town hall meetings on healthcare reform last summer were great examples of how not to do public participation. In the past decade, when most elected officials or candidates have used town hall

language, they've been talking about explaining their ideas and taking questions or demands or sometimes insults from others. In the worst examples, though -- last summer's were not the worst examples. In the worst examples of the past few years, audiences for town hall meetings -- so-called town hall meetings -- were carefully screened and then the meetings were slickly portrayed as town hall meetings that had a range of perspectives.

So, one of the natural reactions to some of this is that more civility might seem like an answer, and that would be welcome, I think we might all appreciate that at times, but it's not an adequate response. Lack of civility is actually a symptom of a structural problem that requires a structural remedy.

Hannah Arendt once said, "Democracy needs a place to sit down," and it still does. We need structured opportunities to hear from people who are not like us, express ourselves honestly, work through issues together, become informed together, use conflict productively, talk with public officials, be heard by them, find areas of commonality, and then we need to use that participatory process as a basis for collaborating together to have an ongoing voice in the decision making and into solving problems.

This does mean collaborating with government, but it also means holding government accountable. It requires transparency at every step.

There are some major challenges that any leader who's trying to create good participation and collaboration will have to confront if he or she is going to help create the kinds of opportunities that can strengthen our national democracy. First, this isn't the way politics usually works. The power of money makes it very difficult to implement participatory processes even for public officials who might want to. That's why campaign finance reform and electoral reform have to go hand and hand with participation and collaboration.

Second, there is a profound lack of social trust between people with different views and a major distrust of government. Because of the way our media are structured, a sort of outrage industry -- I recently read that term; I thought it was pretty accurate -- has been created, and so the media exacerbate these trends on a regular basis. And as E.J. Dionne pointed out a few years ago when I heard him speak, "If the airlines advertised the way most candidates do, they'd be showing

the crashes of their competitors and no one would fly."

Now -- thank you, E.J. Now, instead of just the candidates demonizing each other, there's regular demonizing of "the other" across the board. The very fabric of our democracy seems to be disintegrating.

And third, there are large and growing disparities between racial and ethnic groups and people from different socioeconomic groups. We mostly don't talk about these issues as a country and that denial shows in our lack of attention and public will to do something about them. Disparities show up in how people are faring economically, in healthcare, in education, and in housing. As a country we don't spend time trying to understand where those disparities are coming from, even though they are undermining our ability to tackle some of our most serious problems. These disparities also get replicated in voting rates and in other forms of participation, and also in which forms of participation receive credibility, which further cuts us off from the voices of people who need to be heard if we're really going to solve our problems.

I would point you to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University who's been mapping and documenting many of these disparities.

So, when participation and collaboration are carried out well, they have the potential to confront these dynamics and even transform them. We can see that happening in a growing number of local communities of all sizes around the country from very small to very large, including tribal communities. A small but growing number of public officials from different political parties is figuring out that they need to govern differently and there are citizen innovators who are figuring out that they can collaborate with government, nonprofits, and the private sector, to help create these kinds of structured opportunities.

One great example of effective participatory process took place in New Orleans where America*Speaks* worked with the city to build a large-scale deliberation so that people from all backgrounds across the city and the Diaspora could have a voice in rebuilding; or in the South Bronx, a community that Everyday Democracy is working with, the faith community initiated ways for residents from all backgrounds and police to talk about public safety and community policing, and then to make regular decisions together about some of the policing that would be happening in the

community. Now, the borough is supporting those efforts along with the police department.

Some of our partners in the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, an international consortium of scholars and practitioners who are working to make these kinds of structures a regular part of democracy, are working on very similar efforts.

So, the point is, this is happening and it's having results on some very intractable issues. People are meeting in small groups to deliberate, meeting in large groups, sometimes meeting online, sometimes using technology. They are working with each other, they are building trust, they are working with public officials, and they are having a voice in decision making.

I recommend Matt Leighninger's book, *The Next Form of Democracy*, for anyone who's interested in reading more stories or examples.

And at the same time, there's a group of federal managers who are innovating within federal agencies to use strong and collaborative processes in their work. There is a long history of this in some agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, whose work actually led to the creation of the watershed movement in collaboration with many citizen groups around the country.

These innovators within agencies need more resources. They need more support to be able to take these practices to any kind of real scale. And for more examples of this work -- you can tell I'm going to give you reading homework to do -- I recommend Carman Sirianni's book, *Investing in Democracy.*

Another sign of hope is that there is a growing body of empirical knowledge about participation and collaboration processes. Archon Fung, for example, has looked at processes through the lens of democracy deficits, so that it is possible to see what kinds of processes address what kinds of needs and with what results.

There is also a growing community of practice, people and organizations that are dedicated to good engagement who are looking at this kind of research and using it. There's a growing consensus within this community on the principles that ground good participation and collaboration. As part of the open dialogue that came after the directive was issued, the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation collaborated with others to develop principles of public

engagement.

And finally, a growing number of participation efforts at the local level are finding productive ways to tackle racial and ethnic disparities and disparities among socioeconomic groups. These are some of the hardest issues to talk about or do anything about, but people are finding ways not only to talk about them productively and in diverse groups, but to tackle the very roots of the growing gaps we are facing and to do something about them.

With structured opportunities, people can meet and talk across racial divides, across economic divides, and with public officials and public institutions such as school districts. This is really difficult to do, but it's amazing that people are participating in these efforts by the thousands and tens of thousands. The field of racial equity and civil rights is a field that's an important component in this work and I'll give you one last reading recommendation before I leave you.

One last recommendation I'll make is Kathy Cramer Walsh's book called *Talking About Race.* Kathy is a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin. In this book she's analyzed the governance implications of the work and the networks of Everyday Democracy and hope in the cities and others who are doing work on deliberation on racial equity.

So, we need to build on all of these practices and the empirical knowledge we have and tap into the growing network of elected officials, nonprofit leaders, and citizen practitioners, to take this to scale. This is urgent and it is doable. It is doable. This would offer hope for bridging our largest divides and helping us solve some of our most critical problems. Those of us working on participation and collaboration cannot do this alone. We need to work with other parts of the democracy reform movement, media reform, electoral reform, racial equity, community organizing, youth engagement, civic education, national and community service, and transparency, and that's why we are all here today and that's why we're committed to working together to strengthen our democracy.

Thanks.

MR. MANN: Lest I be misunderstood in the remarks I'm about to make, let me be very clear that I'm very high on the agenda that's being discussed at this conference. I've been personally involved in campaign finance reform and redistricting reform, election reform. I applaud

the efforts of those within the Executive Branch, as reported by Norm Eisen earlier today, on the open government move, on ethics and lobbying reform, and so nothing I say will really go against that. But what -- I've been sitting here listening and while agreeing, I have this uneasy feeling. And I wrote myself a note just before I came up here and I said we are overestimating public engagement as it now exists or the potential for it to exist in the future, and we are underestimating the importance of party and ideology in our politics and governance today. Depending upon too deep a level of engagement by ordinary citizens or underplaying the critical importance of ideological differences now within -- I'm sorry, between the two parties, could lead to us too quickly concluding that all of government, some undifferentiated mass, is broken.

Now, I'd be careful when I say that because I did write with a friend a book called *The Broken Branch.* Nonetheless, I think there's almost an inchoate and instantaneous agreement that, ah, all of government is broken. And it might also lead us to promote reforms that fail to be enacted, or that prove ineffectual in improving governance. That's the edge that I want to present to you today.

Now, when I'm feeling uneasy and looking for wisdom, where do I turn? To *The Onion,* of course, and last week's offering, and I bet 50 percent of the people in the audience have seen this, but the title is, "Report: Majority of Government Doesn't Trust Citizens Either." Let me give you just one quote. "'All of the vitriol and partisan bickering in Congress has caused most Americans to form negative opinions of the U.S. Government,' Pew Research Amy Ratner said. 'However, over the same time period, the government has likewise grown wary of U.S. citizens largely due to their utter lack of foresight, laziness, and overall incompetence,' added Ratner, 'and the fact that *American Idol* is still the number one show on television doesn't exactly make our government burst with confidence.'"

Now, one could have viewed the first 18 months or so of the Obama Administration and the public's engagement to it and reaction to it, by bringing forth that old verity of American politics, no good governance deed ever goes unpunished by the American people. We used to say that about efforts to reduce the deficit and such other things. If you considered the nature of the problems confronting the country and the globe and the possibility of descending into a global

depression, if you look at the objective record of what has been accomplished in the 18 months with the multifaceted stimulus -- although we don't call it that anymore, "stimulus," it's American Recovery Act; financial reform -- we don't call it that, we call it Wall Street Reform, that's about to pass; health reform, it's really, by historical standards, really quite extraordinary. To say that government is in gridlock and can't get anything done is just wrongheaded, but it's also fascinating to observe how little the public has come to believe any of that has been of any utility.

Vast majorities believe that the financial bailout was a complete waste of money, even though most of those dollars have already been repaid to the Treasury and the financial system was stabilized; that the stimulus did nothing to increase the number of jobs or to revive a staggering economy; that health reform constitutes a substantial and dramatic increase in government run health care; and I could go on, that the best thing to deal with our problem of unemployment is for government and everyone else to cut back on their spending, and then we would be out there.

Now, Carolyn is working on a new America*Speaks* effort to try to engage and educate the public on some of these matters, but it really is discouraging at times to see the disjuncture between what you think is happening at the governmental level and what the reaction at the public level is. But the -- if you will, the public philosophy of good government reformers is to immediately say, the problem is inside Washington. They're out of touch; they don't know what real, ordinary, god-fearing Americans think out there in the country. And there's lots of academics who feel that same way. In fact, I would submit to you there's a debate that's worth engaging here.

One group, a friend of ours, a political scientist from Stanford, Mo Fiorina, has just published a book called, *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics.* This group sees the problem of American politics associated with polarization as largely an elite phenomenon in which the political class fails to connect with and represent the public, an instinctively wise and pragmatic citizenry frustrated by Washington. Others say Alan Abramowitz who's also just recently published a book called, *The American Politics,* see a polarization dynamic deeply rooted in an engaged public, one whose own, often, extreme views give sustenance and encouragement to their elected representatives to do the very things that we might say are counterproductive to good government.

That's an important debate, it seems to me, to have. The fact is, and one of the more discouraging thing is, if you're really looking at the level of non-ideological thinking, more pragmatism, more centrism, you don't find it among highly educated voters, you don't find it among those who pay most attention to politics, you find it among non-voters, people who spend almost no attention to politics. If you look at engaged citizens, they have moved with the political elite, the Washington crowd, in the same way, to find a compatibility between their ideology and party which has set up a powerful form of polarization, which dramatically changes the way in which our governing institutions in Washington work.

It's a long story and you've heard a great deal about it in recent months. I don't want to burden you with it, but it is striking for anyone who's spent a few decades in this town to see the changing nature of our political parties and how that affects the way in which the House and the Senate do business. The House has become even more majoritarian. The Senate, of course, because of the possibility of filibuster, has become the place at which we see a routinization of filibusters that is the routine requirement of a supermajority and the hurdle in the Senate, which was never anticipated by the Framers of the Constitution, and the proliferation of holds that make managing a very busy agenda exceptionally difficult. In other words, it's rules that use to work under a different set of -- a different culture, a different set of partisan arrangements, now prove extremely dysfunctional. And when something is done, it's not done by bridging the gap. It's actually done by one party amassing enough power to get something done. The only reason Obama was so successful is because he had so many Democrats, and just enough to get some matters done. He tried very hard to reach out to a party, but it was a party, in this case, that decided their best route back into the majority was to play opposition politics from the beginning, which complicated the matter.

So, I conclude with this, there are two kinds of strategies that are usually followed. One, political strategies, redistricting, you know, you take care of gerrymander and you have less polarization. Go for it, but it's 10 percent or less of the problem. Changing the primary system -- California's giving it a try. Starting third parties or something, I don't see much hope there. Campaign finance is healthy for reasons quite apart from this.

The other side on the governing is, hey, it'll work better with divided government because then both parties will have a responsibility for governing. I predict if Democrats lose the House, we will see subpoenas over the next two years and possibly an impeachment process. We can talk about the importance of supermajority rules which are supposed to push negotiations to the center and involve both parties -- doesn't work that way under this party system -- or a plea for bipartisan commissions. My own view of that is none of those will work, that basically the roots of the problem in Washington are to be found outside Washington in the country as a whole. It's going to take extraordinary political leadership to begin to reshape the nature of those parties to allow us to make some progress.

Thank you.

MR. BASS: On that optimistic note -- I don't know if transparency is the solution, but during the break and since sitting here, I just kept repeating my mantra: transparency, transparency. And for those of you who are watching on your PC or TV, what you don't know is there were massive thunderclouds, and for some reason after I kept saying transparency, there's now -- clouds departed, the sun came out. So I'm starting to wonder if collectively at the end of this event if we chant "transparency," what would happen in government. Maybe some change.

In any case, I do think that it has been often said that information is the lifeblood of democracy. If that were true, then I would argue that transparency is the heart of democracy. It may be for the reasons Archon described in his opening comments, in terms of its reach and power. Whether you are a family with children who want to know where to live and you look up to see whether there are toxic chemicals near you, whether it's the issue of BP and learning that even after the disaster in the Gulf, the government approved more permits, not only for deepwater drilling, but for ultra deepwater drilling. That could only occur by making them -- being the government -- making databases publicly available for the media and groups to analyze or you can go to any one of a range of issues. The White House representative, Norm Eisen, had raised a host of reasons to support transparency and openness.

The first panel, we talked about voting irregularities as a reason to monitor what is happening. Transparency can be incredibly empowering. It is a means for leveling the playing field.

More than that, it is also a vehicle by which the public can make informed decision making. It is also a tool to hold our government accountable.

Now, what's transparency? I mean, I'm not talking about just press releases here, right? Transparency, in its greatest form, is more than just simply access to timely, quality information; it's also about having the right information. If the government isn't collecting information around the recovery act in terms of who is benefitting, and yet the goal of the recovery act was to serve those most in need, how are we ever going to reconcile whether the money was being used right?

But it's also beyond just simply getting the right data. It's also about government providing the tools to allow the public access in a way that you can use the information for whatever purposes you need.

So, transparency is a very powerful issue.

What is it we want from a public interest point of view in terms of transparency in the end? What we really want, ideally, is a government that has an affirmative obligation to disclose information. The current model is where we have to go and request information. We need to flip that around, reverse it, and it should be the government's obligation to justify when it cannot give us information. The primary apparatus should be to give us the information.

Now, having said this, and starting with Miles' very first comment today about the siloization, I've got to say that transparency is not the most common organizing vehicle I've ever come around. Groups do not organize around that topic. However, it cuts across every single issue we deal with, whether it's childcare, whether it's healthcare, whether it's environmental protections, whether it's financial reform. Every issue-based group needs information and particularly from government information.

So, it is one of those cross cutting issues. While that's a strength, that's also a weakness because there is no natural base for that.

Moreover, I would say that transparency is just a tool. There are those who argue, transparency is the end goal. No, it's not. It is just the tool to achieve what you feel you need to do. For OMB Watch, my organization, it's about achieving areas around social justice. For other groups,

it's about more limited government. The point being that transparency is not a conservative issue, it is not a liberal issue, it is not a libertarian issue, it is the American issue. We can work together, whatever the ideological differences that Tom was just talking about, we can work together to pursue transparency.

I would also say it's not a replacement for regulation. Looking at a whole range of the electoral pieces, we can get a lot of transparency about money and politics. Has it changed? We need the laws and regulations of the land to make things right. Transparency gives us the vehicle to make our arguments for change. It is not the solution, at least in my book.

So, by the way, a positive thing I should mention before I turn to how the Obama Administration is doing, one thing that I found very interesting was a recent poll by ForeSee Results, which looks at government websites. They found that -- an interesting -- for those people who think of government websites as very transparent, where people compared to most transparent thinking websites, or most transparent to those who think they're crummy websites, there's about a 54 percent increase in trust in government from those who look at it as most transparent. There's about a 50 percent increase in participation, in like regulatory process and so forth.

So, maybe it does have some hope in and of itself.

How's the Obama Administration doing? Here we have the President that's the first transparency president ever. Now, there are lots of ways to judge transparency. We could look at, say, how it was in the last administration, and then I can safely say we're talking about night and day. It is vastly different. You had an administration that believed in secrecy in the last one. This administration firmly is committed to openness. I think the Bush Administration -- the Obama Administration, its strategy has been most intriguing. You've heard all about the Open Government Directive and all of that. From my perspective, there are three strategies this administration has used: one is policy change, the other is technology change, and the third is cultural changes.

On the policy change, they have just come out rip roaring, really great, with all kinds of policy changes whether it's on the Freedom of Information Act, whether it's the Open Government Directive, whether it's about declassification, they have come out with great policy changes absolutely consistent with what the public interest would want.

On the technology front, also rip roaring. They came out with social media. Today, I don't think you can say the word "transparency" and not think of online anymore. If anything, this administration has permanently engrained that. But it is more than that. Think of recovery.gov, think of data.gov. I mean, I don't know how many government .govs there will be around transparency, but there are a lot of them, and the government is pushing technology very rapidly.

On the cultural front, what is striking about this administration is they didn't just approach it by putting out a memo and saying, transparency is our message. They didn't just change the policy. They didn't just put technology in. They realized it has to change the environment in government, the actual way government operates, and to that extent I think we're waiting to see the results. But I will say one thing Norm Eisen, the White House counsel, didn't say is that there is a whole team for the first time ever in the White House that's addressing transparency. It's the first administration to install that. And moreover, they've been working with agencies through the Open Government Directive to really create this kind of energy in government that sort of pushes people up in sort of a "my agency is better than yours in transparency." That's very exciting. That's very different.

Now, the cultural change is going to take many, many, many months, if not years, to occur, but I think this administration has put us on the right path. So, they get an A+ for effort, but the implementation has been far short of what we all want, and it's that front where I think we have reason to be critical.

The measurements on the Open Government Directive are based on what they wrote their Open Government Directive about, it's did you do paragraph A, did you do paragraph B. I think we want much more than that. We don't want just simply compliance with the checklist of items. On top of it, I think they can be criticized as too much planning to plan. How many memos have we seen about let's form another interagency committee to wrestle with this issue? On the other hand, you know, they're moving forward.

Now, I could keep going with criticism, but I also want to say, it's remarkable how much they have gotten done in the short amount of space -- time they've had.

What do we want going forward? Let me give four quick items. This is from at least

an OMB Watch perspective, and maybe it goes beyond that. First off, when I said that the Open Government Directive is too minimalist, what I want to see is no matter which agency you go to, you want consistency in the type of information you get. I want accountability information. I want information about what Martha was talking about on what are their participation and collaboration means. I want information about their spending. And if I'm not going to get that consistently from one agency to the other, I'm going to face this kind of hopscotch kind of system where one agency is good and another is not and I'm not going to have any real understanding of what's going on in our government. Heck, we have now White House visitor logs. Congratulations to the White House. Why aren't we having that in every agency? I want to know about the lobbyists and other corporate powers and other kinds of powers that have come in to influence what the agency is doing.

So, first off, I think the Open Government Directive, we need to have, if you will, an open as floor. Agencies should go beyond that floor, but we should articulate what are those absolute minimum things agencies must do?

Secondly, I think we need a vision for federal spending transparency. We need to find ways to better understand how government is using money, but it is not just simply who's getting how much money, we need to know, are they spending the money wisely. We've got to find ways from a progressive point of view to link spending and performance in ways that help the public better see where government is doing good things.

Thirdly, I think we've got to build the building blocks, instead of just dropping item by item transparency items. For example, some of us in this room have been working to have unique identifiers established, or common identifiers in government. You can't link multiple datasets if you don't have a common identifier for companies. How will you look at spending by contractors and see how they're doing on regulatory performance, unless you can find ways to link multiple datasets.

Finally, the thing I started with, affirmative obligation for disclosure. We have got to put in place the laws and the regulations to have our agencies firmly -- firmly -- put information out there. We need to change the whole apparatus. You know, we need to move back to this notion of we the people, and the way you get to we the people is by making sure that government makes information available to all people, all the time.

And frankly, as a last comment I would make, I really respect the White House's ability to blog about events, but frankly, I don't want to see government by blog. Thanks.

MR. FUNG: We have time for a few questions. Does anybody have a -- yeah?

SPEAKER: I have a question for Martha McCoy. You mentioned media reform in your list at the end of your talk. I wonder if you could just elaborate on that a little bit please. I have my list.

MS. McCOY: Sure. And I am not posing this as an expert on media reform, but I think so much of what we've been talking about, especially in the appearance of extreme polarization and how that's playing out on the ground, much of that isn't -- while it's connected to the party system -- isn't a direct result of that. I believe that the primary thing that's changed has been the way in which the media are regulated and structured and corporate control of the media. And that has -- I mean, there have been whole studies written of this basically leading in a direct line to what we're seeing right now which is really extreme demonization and that has a huge impact on how people are perceiving, because how people get their information is also connected to transparency.

So, that -- and again, I know there's a whole media reform movement and I'm not going to be able to speak well to it and I'd love to hear what you have to say, but that's basically what I was thinking of.

MR. FUNG: How about back here in the blue shirt?

MR. NEIL: Thanks. Bill Neil. I write about the financial crisis. I have a deeper question that I'd like you to comment on. Some philosophers, John Gray, and commentators like Tom Friedman said -- would agree, we've been living under a market utopia in taking the background noise of economics and philosophy far to the right. Gray thinks it's narrowed the range of public discussion on economic choices. Friedman celebrates that. They're coming from a little different perspective. The Federal Reserve, the most powerful economic institution in the world, perhaps, is infamous to the whole spectrum for narrowing the public participation, doesn't want to share its secrets, and we're setting up a debt panel that also -- from President Obama -- which also is going to take (inaudible) hands out of Congress.

Don't you think that this economic and philosophical direction to narrow the range of

policy choices contributes just a little polarization and frustration to the part of voters? And just to bring that home in a very concrete way, think about the charges and range of options being hurled at Greece and the debtor states in Europe. It's virtually the Washington consensus back ten years later.

MR. MANN: Did you really say death panel?

MR. NEIL: Debt.

MR. MANN: Oh, okay, sorry. I thought we were into the Medicare commission.

Listen, I mean, I've been struck not by the sort of narrowness of perspectives on the financial reform, I've been struck by the range. They're a group of intellectual critics who have taken on the Federal Reserve in a very serious and telling fashion.

The real question is whether sort of policy makers are limited in what they consider to be sort of the legitimate scope for action. I think this -- some would argue it's because they're in the pockets of special interests. I would argue it goes much more to uncertainty about exactly what went wrong and how to keep it from happening again.

What I see the problem is reverting to sort of ideologically convenient positions, and stating them with great repetition, it's almost, in terms of the public domain, it's the banality of public discourse rather than the absence of range. It goes to the media question too. Everyone is looking for a speaker who will reinforce their gut feelings or preexisting views, or partisanship. Party is very much a part of the connection between ideology and media and free thinkers, and I just think it's limited -- it's limited the range of what can occur.

You know, I believe when Carolyn and America*Speaks* goes out and works hard to get people to come together, and just as some of the deliberative polls have done, to provide them information and create the social pressure to actually listen to someone else, then you actually engage in that kind of more open deliberation. Do you know how often that happens in the Congress today? It's not allowed. It's not permitted. I mean, Barney Frank, early on, worked with his republican counterpart, but as things move to a more visible setting, either in the full committee mark up or the floor, then suddenly they fall back into preexisting partisan positions and it just -- it diminishes the public debate. That's the problem we have and the trick is how we get out of it.

MR. BASS: Could I just add one quickie on that? Bill, I want to take one slice of it from a transparency point of view and look at why I think the public is so upset with bailout. It is about powerful special interests making themselves even more powerful, and what we had under TARP, for example, is the Treasury Department not allowing us to get the information that it had found out which contractors, which may have helped cause the problems we faced, were now helping to deal with the warrants that they had in selling off those warrants. You couldn't get that disclosure.

You mentioned the Fed. The Fed is probably the most secret, powerful agency in the world. TARP is like a small ant compared to the amount of money that has gone out through Fed and we can't get any sense of those dollars, of who has gotten it, and how much the government is underwriting our financial institutions.

So, transparency is an essential tool to addressing those wrongs.

MR. MANN: Just one word, it doesn't necessarily increase public trust in government, let me tell you. I'm all for transparency because I believe what you're after is increasing the engaged public from a half a percent to 5 percent. Boy, would that transform our politics in a meaningful way, but most of the early transparency on campaign finance led the public to be even more cynical about the role of money in politics. So, it's no panacea.

MR. FUNG: I think we have time for just one more question and we have a lot of hands, so I'll have to pick at random. Gentleman with the gray blazer and the blue shirt.

MR. BASS: That's everyone.

MR. GRINDSTAFF: Hi. My name's Hugh Grindstaff. You were talking about media -- social media. There is a Facebook page for every position in the world and you can be -- have a page that says they're against the Israeli actions for the flotilla and one for the Israeli action for the flotilla. But how is that determining what we really need to do to get together? And, would it be better if we had term limits for Congress again? Four years -- make the House of Representatives four years, six terms -- three terms in the Senate?

MR. MANN: No. No. The experience with term limits in state legislatures has been exceedingly negative. Immediately politicians being term-limited start thinking about the next office,

you'll increase the power of those who stick around, namely lobbyists working with the legislatures. It's really been quite a destructive process. It also imagines that building expertise in the craft of legislating is not important, that simply bringing in the new crowd, whatever their -- to go to Washington and to vote for two years or four years or six years and then go home is somehow going to lead to the kind of serious deliberation that the Framers had in mind.

Listen, that's the anti-federalist sentiment in American politics. It was present during the founding of the republic, it comes up all the time, but it doesn't offer much other than a kind of visceral feeling, you know, by god that'll keep them controlled in some way.

MR. FUNG: All right, so we just have a few minutes for the panel to wrap up, so I'm going to give everybody about a minute and a half.

MS. McCOY: Okay, great. I don't know if you all should trust me because I followed *American Idol* for the whole season, and I also want to reveal that I voted for the loser.

I actually want to go back to something that Clarissa said in the last panel which I think was really profound, and it really had to do with how people are activist right now and participating right now. So, I don't think we're talking about ginning up participation a little bit. I think what we're doing is we're talking about what kinds of policies and structures actually create the kind of vibrant, inclusive democracy that we're really striving to achieve. And I think what we're really talking about is building some sort of civic infrastructure where people can vent, like Clarissa said, but also work together.

I'll end with one example of something I just recently heard Chip Heath, who wrote a book about why change is so difficult, and he showed an example of how structures guide our behavior. And he showed a slide of cars driving down the highway with the dotted lines, of course, helping us drive in straight lines, and then he showed a slide with all the lines taken out of the highway. And all of the sudden it looks like complete chaos on the road. And he said sometimes we treat things like individual behavioral problems that are really systemic. And the example of that would be, okay, you can imagine all the billboards we would have: "Drive Straight, It's Sexy"; "Stay in Line." Because you'd be trying to get on the highway to keep driving straight. And sometimes I think we act about our civic life the way we act about those kinds of campaigns, when really we're talking

about, what are the structures, because we know when we build those structures people come together and they deliberate. So, let's build more of them or, you know, let's build transparency. We know it works where it's there, so let's build more of it.

So, that's in conclusion: drive straight.

MS. MANN: I think Clarissa made a lot of sense too. Listen, I've been too outspoken and too negative. I'm actually rather upbeat about the state of American politics. I just think it's exceedingly difficult in that we have to remember parties mean something, facts mean something, and that we've got to do whatever we can to figure out a way to get beyond the kind of pat, rhetorical, banalities that so dominate our public debate and reward politicians and parties who do the right thing.

MR. FUNG: I just wanted to make a couple of comments. I think, you know, Bill's question about financial reform brings up two important things, not just for financial reform, but for democratic reform and efforts to deepen democracy generally. And the first is that it's vitally important to have a range of ideas on any policy area, not just financial reform. And you can look broadly at other places that play with many more ideas about financial regulation and market structure in the United States, and there's a lot of reasons historically why the range of ideas that's on offer is quite narrow, even now in this period, but that's also true for democratic reform. You can look at other countries in Latin American and Europe in many other places, where the ideas about how to organize democracy are just much, much broader than they are here. And I think many Americans, from the very elite to the grassroots, have an impulse that the kinds of ideas about democracy that were okay 200 years ago -- if it was good enough for them, it's good enough for us -- I think we ought to be a little bit more imaginative about that.

The second, which is especially important in the financial reform sector, but also in others, is that one common thread of deepening democracy and strengthening democracy is the need to level the playing field. And there are lots of ways to do that, from campaign finance reform to electoral reform, to mobilizing citizens directly using their anger as has been suggested in the prior panel. And I think that that is an important objective that all of the organizations and advocates and thinkers that seek to deepen democracy share, is the impulse to find very creative strategies to level

that playing field that is not now level.

MR. BASS: Three points. First, I think it's ironic that this administration's openness agenda is probably the best kept secret in town. It's really quite amazing to me that they have done some really remarkable things and hardly anyone outside of this room and people watching it on TV or their PCs know anything about that.

Now, having said that, I'm already ready for transparency 2.0 and 2.0 is going -- as I was suggesting -- much further and much beyond what the Administration has done, and the outcome is always, as Archon suggests, leveling the playing field. That's the empowering nature of transparency which leads me to the third, I, as an advocate, cannot fight with my hands tied behind my back. Information is my mechanism of getting my hands free to make the fight. Whether it's about BP and what was happening on the flow of oil, or whether it's about the riser coming up and not sharing the information, whether it's about Massey Energy, whether it's about Recovery Act in terms of who's getting jobs and how much they're getting paid, what kind of support are they getting for wages and health care? I also want to know things like tax expenditures. Who's getting the tax expenditures? Why isn't that counted as federal spending? Why don't we know about those things?

When Norm Eisen talked about the revolving door he talked about it in terms of lobbyists. Well, I want to know it in the terms of the context of the revolving door of that culture where people at the Mineral Management Service also ended up going to other companies or coming from companies into the government agency regulating BP. I think there is much more we can do in terms of transparency and I want my hands untied for the fight.

MR. FUNG: Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. RAPOPORT: So, we've been here for -- thank you -- a great panel. We've been here for about 3 hours and 15 minutes, which is the average time for a baseball game this year. (Laughter) We've had about -- we've had eight innings of really interesting hits and fielding and really -- if you've listened carefully, you've learned a lot about a lot of different things and a lot of different possibilities and a lot of different policies that we need to be pursuing.

So, now it's the ninth inning and now it's time for the closers. And we have, to do this closing for us, to say, okay, based on what we've heard, based on what we know, based on

what's happening out there, what can we do? What can we do? What can we do to make things move forward?

And so, we have Carolyn Lukensmeyer, who is the president of America*Speaks*, one of the four sponsors of the event. And just a terrific person for listening, understanding what's really being said, and taking us forward. And secondly, E.J. Dionne, who people -- who needs no introduction here at Brookings, for sure, but who is one of the leading journalists and leading democracy theoreticians, I would say, in our country.

So, let me ask Carolyn and E.J. to come up and close it out for us. (Applause)

MS. LUKENSMEYER: Thank you very much, Miles. And let me add my thanks to Brookings for having this event here and to our compatriot organizations, Demos and Everyday Democracy and the Ash Institute, for putting already two years' worth of work into an idea that -- whose time we think may have come.

Every single person who is a leader of a democracy reform movement that I know -- and you met exemplary examples of them here today -- has from the time that I began working in this field, which was 15 years ago, made the following statement: that we believe there is a nescient movement in this country for a stronger democracy. A recognition that 200 plus years in, many, many other structures and processes about how institutions run have evolved and changed dramatically. And yet, the basic form both of the electoral process in American democracy and the governance process in American democracy has fundamentally not changed.

And in those few instances where it has changed -- and I'll take the term limits example that already got spoken about. We all understand the public's impulse to gain more ownership in their democracy and, therefore, to want to limit the terms of the people who represent them when they're dissatisfied that the people are making.

I was chief of staff in the state of Ohio when that reform passed in that state. And many of us, although we understood the impulse, we respected the public for the impulse, but we could have told you the day it passed what the actual impact in the state of Ohio would be. Only two. It would increase the power of the lobbyists and it would increase the power of the staff. So the well-intentioned impulse of the public to gain ownership in their democracy actually took a step backward

in terms of the efficacy of the reform.

We think these four organizations, that a fundamental dilemma about democracy reform in the United States is -- number one, it's always outside of government. Maybe, until just recently, it's always underfunded, competing for the same resources. And, in fact, it's just like the old tale of the elephant. One of us has the trunk, one of us has the tail, somebody has the left ear, somebody has the right hind leg. We've all got pieces of a puzzle that have to be looked at systemically. Have to be looked at systemically.

And it is in that spirit that we've attempted to build a coalition of the existing streams of democracy reform in the United States and said two things. This coalition of organizations, if we could, in fact, at least learn enough about one another's work so that at the right moments -- you know, America*Speaks* works on creating safe democratic spaces for people to influence public policy. But that doesn't mean at the right moment that we can't inform and educate our entire network and collaborators about the impact, potentially, of citizens united of even further decreasing the free, safe space for democracy in the United States.

Or I could take a flip example. Eddie said this part of it the best that he actually used the phrase at the end, whether it's voting rights or transparency or racial equity or whatever the issue is, we need to create a mighty river to push the reform.

Now, I have to admit that for a minute I got off-centered in terms of my thoughts about how to summarize what I felt was important out of today. Where he appropriately really pushed the issue, and I'd thought about using the *Onion* article myself, because it is true. People who hold positions of power inside Washington today distrust the public as much as the public distrusts Washington. And there are real reasons for that.

But where I would go at the end of your starting place is -- and I'm going to take the Senate side. If we're going to go through some decades in the United States of which we've already, think, been through three where we basically are whipsawed from one end of a supermajority to the other end of a supermajority and don't actually ever get the systemic reform that we want -- that the country wants -- on the fundamental issues facing us, then the question isn't so, therefore, should we be pushing the democracy reform? The question is it requires more structural reform than most of us

have yet been thinking about. It requires even more radical thinking about what is the fundamental relationship between the American electorate and the institutions which in fact are how our democracy behaves, both in elections and during governance.

I'm going to take a moment and give a reflection on 15 years work of America*Speaks*. Miles said it, Tom said it. We grew up to create large-scale public processes to bring the general interest public into debate on specific issues matched to real decisions being made at that time. We've done economic development, we've done health care reform, we've done budget priorities, you name it, we've done it.

There are four things -- and part of our credibility. We're completely non-partisan. We ourselves as an organization never take position on the issue and never advocate for it. We are advocating that ordinary Americans in this country should have more influence on policy as an antidote against money and special interest influence on policy.

There are four things -- we've been doing this now, kind of scares me to realize this, but a decade and a half. I don't know the total number of projects we've done here and abroad, frankly, but let me speak only in America. Four things that have happened in every single project we have ever done.

Number 1, the radical solutions on both the right and the left fall off the table in about 25 minutes. Okay? Doesn't matter which end of the spectrum, but when you get the total mix -- a demographically representative sample of that jurisdiction in the room -- the radical solutions fall off quickly.

The second -- and Clarissa said this before -- part of the American character, part of what's really unique about us is that we want to solve problems. So, in every case when given the safety and free space to have the discussion these same Americans are quite capable of coming to a collective decisions. They do it literally every time.

And now, something it isn't so well-known about us anymore and that I would posit we've lost a sense of this, partly because we no longer have national media processes that help us stay up to date with what I would call a really inclusive national narrative. Our national media processes, as they become more fractionated and become more individuated, focus on the

pulverization and that's what reverberates around the country continually. Until Americans begin to believe it about themselves -- but if you cut all that out, when you put people -- and it's about health care, it's about the financial crisis, it's about fiscal sustainability. When you bring us together in a room in large numbers -- we've done it as large as 10,000 at a time spanning cities all across the country -- the fact of the matter is, the vast majority of Americans -- and I want you to listen carefully to this -- still feel responsible for the common good. Got that? We're not as NIMBY; we're not as self-centered as 20 years of the drumbeat have said about us. And I'm going to come back to that point.

And the last piece -- and I think this is really good news. And the last piece, in every case, decision makers actually listen. Decision makers are actually influenced by what people collectively come up with as an outcome to a policy choice.

In every case that we've done this, when the public is asked at the end -- I might use the example of health care reform in California not so long ago, which could have, sadly, ended up not being instructive in the country's process. In the end, when people were asked for the reforms they supported -- and it was all you're familiar with: employee mandate, individual mandate, getting rid of self -- pre-existing conditions, a public option. When put in front of them, real numbers from the California budget office about their willingness to pay for these reforms, they overwhelmingly voted to raise their own taxes to pay for the reform. That is our experience, again, in every case.

But I want to make very clear the paradox we're in. And it's exactly what Clarissa said earlier today. These very same people, if you track them when they get into the electoral cycle and they're fed slogans set up to demonize the other party or the other person, these very same people who in August of 2007 voted to raise their taxes to produce health care reform in California would, by definition, vote in a very anti-tax mode. Same person. People's behavior is very much influenced by the social systemic structures by which they are surrounded. And for as long as we are dealing with this as superficial politics as we are dealing with in the electoral cycle, we will never get out of the mess we're in about supposedly the public not being willing to make the tough choices on cutting spending and raising taxes to deal with whatever it is we want them to deal with.

So, we see the glimmers of the solutions. Whether it's public financing of campaigns -- the glimmers, the seeds, the experimentation of solutions to the issues that we've been talking about up here all day today, they are already there. Some of them actually well-researched. Transparency will be the next, I'm sure, to get that level of in-depth look at how much change has it actually produced.

But the challenge is, how can we form -- you know, what we used to call it when I was chief of staff was, you don't get the big systemic changes without an honest-to-god authentic link between public will and political will. And when you get that authentic link, whichever party is in power at that moment in time, you get systemic change.

So, I want to say three things. Millions of Americans today are out there every day doing the behaviors that Archon very, very wisely listed as the broader statement about what does it take to be a healthy democracy. People caring for each other, performing community service, organizing around an issue they care about. Taking part in a community meeting, going one more time to the bloody school board meeting even though they've done it 32 times before. Voting, writing -- you just list it out. Literally, if we could see on multiple screens, millions of Americans are behaving that way every single day, behaving democratically.

Our challenge -- and remember, I also told you those very same Americans are behaving uniformed, voting against their own interests when a different strong signal is sent their way. So where should our efforts be for reform at this point in time? Not exhorting individuals so much to change their behavior, always inspiring them when we can. But focusing on what are those systemic structure and process changes that we could be making today that would in fact support the evolution of American democracy.

You know, one of my personal favorites -- and it's not one I'm working on, but -- can you imagine it's us who's in the bottom 11 countries around the world in terms of moving towards universal voter registration? We should be embarrassed, shamed, go for it. But you can list your own favorite one. The point is -- and it's why we're here together -- is there a way that your organization, your institution, can join the 50 or so others who have put a stake in the ground and are trying to work as effectively as we can with the current administration, the current Congress, to say

there are a specific number of things we could do that would strengthen our nation's democracy that would make it easier for Congressmen and women to take courageous stands from time to time, and that would inspire more Americans to stay engaged on an ongoing basis.

I want to say just one last thing, and I don't know if I even would have thought about it except Jon mentioned it earlier. When we held our conference last summer, I think to a person many, many participants said that the very most inspiring moments of that conference were listening to our colleagues from India, Finland, Estonia -- I don't even remember all where -- talking about the level of commitment, the level of intent, and the level of progress being made around the world about evolving the structures of democracy.

I think where we're caught is pretty natural. Just think about it as yourself as a human being. You know, when you're really, really good at something you get a little arrogant about it. You have a lot of hubris about it. And I think that's a place we've been really stuck in American democracy because of what an extraordinary gift that our Constitution and Bill of Rights put together at that time, that place was. We as a culture carry a huge amount of hubris about our own democracy. We need to take the scales off, we need to catch up to the fact that particularly amongst the emerging democracies in Eastern Europe, in the south Slavic states, in South Africa and many other African nations, in Latin America these kinds of democracy reform movements are actually financed and initiated from inside the government. Here, they are very much still pushed from outside the government.

In a healthy democracy you want both, because we could clearly give the examples -- probably particularly in Latin America, whereby the fact that they're coming out of government, by definition, means whole subcultures in the country still feel excluded. But the point is we think -- the four organizations that are here today joining with Brookings to say it's time for a broad-based democracy reform initiative which builds the coalition of the various parts that work inside the beltway, and need to work inside the beltway -- and rededicates itself to discovering the national narrative that actually matches the instinct that already exists amongst millions of Americans that we can do better than we are doing today.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. DIONNE: Thanks, Carolyn, for that inspiring talk. I also want to note that Miles referred to baseball and the average length of games. I'm a Red Sox fan and as you all know, Red Sox/Yankees games last about four and a half hours. But I promise you that I will not take all that time here.

And for those of you who know my dear home state, we believe devoutly in political participation. The late Mary McGrory, the great columnist for the Washington Post and, before that, the Washington Star, once said that every baby born in Massachusetts is born with a campaign manager's gene. We like politics so much that kids used to put bumper stickers on their bikes.

Now, this does not always match with honest government. I think that's -- there is a lesson here that we should not always pretend that participation automatically leads to honest. We used to joke in Massachusetts that there are politicians whose election slogan, whether explicit or implicit, was honesty is no substitute for experience. And I have always loved the story of the gentleman in Springfield, 70 miles from Boston, who was writing his will and said that -- you know, he said normal things in the will, then he said he wanted to be buried in a cemetery 70 miles from where he lived. And it turned out that this cemetery was in the district of a legendary state senator who regularly managed to get turnouts above 100 percent in the precincts he controlled. And a friend said, why do you want to be buried in Boston? And he replied that I see no reason why my death should deprive me of my right to participate in the democratic process.

Now I want to make very clear that no one involved in this event believes in that approach to democracy. But I also want to make clear reformers are seen as a dour and humorless lot and, yes, reformers do have a sense of humor even about democracy itself.

I want to salute Miles and Demos and all the groups involved here -- and I'm going to say this at the end as well -- for making democracy a centerpiece of what they are up to, for trying to make democracy itself a centerpiece of our national debate. And that's why we at Brookings were very happy to join in with this effort. I do want to thank at Brookings Christine Jacobs who did so much work on this, John Sao, Emily Lukens, Darrell West, and Tom Mann.

And I think when we think about democracy it's important to remember John Dewey's famous statement that democracy isn't simply a system, it isn't simply a set of formal

practices. Democracy is a way of life. Democracy involved values, and I will just mention two of those. It is based on a small R republican spirit that sees citizens not simply as passive recipients of services but as responsible actors defining and solving problems and looking out not only for their own interests but also for a common good.

And democracy is rooted in a small D democratic spirit that honors the equality of all citizens and sees wisdom as rising up from the bottom and not simply, or primarily, something that is imposed from the top.

Now, I was trained more as a political sociologist than a political scientist, so I want to put down as an aside -- and I'm going to get back to this -- that institutions matter, but ideas also matter. And social and economic underpinnings of political systems also matter. If we get the last two wrong, even the best structures that we could create will not work right.

Now, I was sitting -- I was blessed today sitting next to my friend Gail Leftwich -- I hope, Gail, you don't mind my citing you here -- who leaned over at one point at the beginning of the meeting and said, somewhere in the country our friends in the Tea Party movement are having a meeting on exactly the same question: Is government broken?

Now, I want to say right away that I hear a lot from Tea Party folks who tend, as it happens, to disagree with what I write more than agree with it. But I want to report that Tea Party members do have a fine sense of humor. Recently, as a protest against something I wrote I've gotten something like 75 tea bags in the mail sent by the protestors. And one person wrote that she was trying to figure out what tea bag she should send to a columnist, and she sent me a bag of Constant Comment. (Laughter)

Another said, I was trying to figure out what's appropriate to what you think and sent me a tea bag of French Vanilla. I want to -- so, I say god bless, and disagreement is actually one of the joys of freedom in democracy. And we don't always pay attention to that fact.

So, yes, it's true, many different people might say government is broken, but I think it's a mistake to pretend that everyone is angry about the same thing. It think it's a mistake to pretend that everyone has the same solutions. Yes, there are some overlapping views, and we should try to discover those areas where some reforms might bring us together. But there are also

big differences over what needs to be fixed. Some in the Tea Party movement, for example, want to repeal the 17th Amendment and end the direct election of United States senators. That would make us less democratic. And some in the Tea Party -- and this is a matter of principle for them -- I think really do value state's rights over direct democracy. Now, that is not a view, I suspect, is widely shared in this room. It actually divides the Tea Party itself.

So in addition to understanding that we have some forms of anger in common, I also think we need a big argument about democracy and about how we see it. And I only wish that Martha McCoy could moderate the argument every time it happens, because I've never seen someone present such a joyful spirit about this form of civic engagement. You would make everybody feel better as they screamed at each other and tossed tea bags or other things at each other.

Now, for what it's worth, I think that our government does need substantial improvement and renovation. But I don't think it's broken in the sense that it's incapable of producing outcomes that are or can be, in fact, in the public interest. I think we've recently seen examples where, despite a lot of struggle, a lot of nastiness, our government has produced some decent outcomes.

And I think there is a cost for those of us who believe in reform if we continually tell such tales of woe that we sent the message that everything we have tried in the past has failed. In fact, we are better off today because of civil -- the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We are better off today because of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We are better off because we extended the right to vote for those 18 years or older. Campaign finance reform, contrary to all its critics, worked better -- far better and worked quite well -- far better than they give it credit for and it worked quite well for many years. And it would work even better still absent a certain number of court decisions that actually limit the writ of the democratic branches of our government to enact reform.

America, in fact, has steadily become more democratic since the founding of our republic. The historian Sean Wilenzt wrote a wonderful book on our first 100 years tracing this rise of democracy. The growth of democracy -- we should not want to go back to 1789. We should want to build on generations of struggle on behalf of democracy. We should not think that we persuade

anyone by saying something like, our programs have failed, let us continue. That just doesn't work as an argument and, in fact, it's not even true.

We have to say that reform has worked before, and that it can work again. Let us build on our successes. And also let's remember that in a democracy government is not the realm of "them." It is the realm of "us."

Following Tom Mann's reading from *Onion,* I want to share what Barney Frank once told a very angry town meeting. He looked at this angry crowd, finally, and he said, you know we politicians are no great shakes, but you voters are no day at the beach either.

Now, you can tell from that that Barney represents a very, very safe district in Massachusetts. But I do think that we need to be as tough on ourselves. And yes, I include my media self in saying this. We need to be as tough on ourselves as we are on the politicians.

Martha -- again, Martha McCoy was absolutely right in saying we need to make the public sphere more inviting. We need to listen to each other better, we need to be more realistic about what we expect from government and less inconsistent in the things that we say. And, yes, I loved Clarissa's comment that people are dying to get into the very government that they think is broken. That was one of the contradictions that I was so grateful that she pointed to.

Just a word on false choices in our inconsistencies. Two classic American political scientists, Lloyd Free and Hadley Cantrell, described Americans as ideological conservatives and operational liberals. That means that in principle we say all the time that we can't stand government and in practice we say that we want a whole lot of things from government. I think that contradiction -- or let's call it a tension within us can be misleading when we try to talk about politics. And so we have a bunch of sort of silly arguments. More or less governed? Well, people tend to want more government in the spheres that help them and less government in the sphere that helps someone else. But really, we don't -- we're not at all consistent when we have that argument.

Right now we're having a debate between stimulus and deficit reduction. My own view is you need stimulus now, debt reduction later. Why is it so hard to have this conversation in a straightforward way? But we can't. We need good government and we need participation. We need expertise and we need democracy. Why do we cast democracy as the enemy of expertise?

If you think of this oil spill, we really do need expertise that we apparently lack to stop this oil from flowing into the Gulf. And yet, if we had had more participation in the whole process of debating offshore oil drilling, I bet you -- if I may sound like a former governor of Alaska -- I bet you that the public would have asked the oil company, are you ready with a worst-case scenario? And then the experts could have come together and we might have -- well, might not be where we are today. So, expertise and democracy are not at odds. Good government is not at odds with participation.

Another one, very popular now, the free market versus socialism. Socialism is under so much attack I am inclined to endorse it periodically. But I think most Americans believe, in fact, in rewards for creativity, for hard work, and for entrepreneurship. And here I'm actually paraphrasing a letter writer recently to the Washington Post. But they also believe in rules and regulations to protect consumers and workers and the environment. They also believe in social insurance programs to protect individuals and families from bad luck and hard times.

Now, does this make them capitalists or socialists? I think we're all capitalists until capitalism stops working and then we sound a little bit like socialists but never admit it and we just say we endorse these social protections. I always come back to something that Bill Cohen, when he was a Republican senator from Maine, said. He said, "Government is the enemy until you need a friend." And I think if we remembered that during our arguments we might be better off and be a little more rational. And one member of the audience asked that this be put on the table and I do think it's worth putting on the table.

In the circumstance of globalization, democracy is really challenged. Because democracy exists within the boundaries of nation states, and globalization kind of overrides the power of nation states. There is no simple solution to this, but I do think that if you care about democracy you've got to start -- we've got to start thinking about what democracy means in this new global circumstance.

I want to turn to some of the specifics we talked about today and then close again coming back to democracy. There are so many interesting and good proposals in this paper and that were raised today. I can't go over all of them, but I do want to say, somebody raised the national

popular vote. It's a great idea; some of you are active in this. The idea is to create a compact among states representing a majority of the electoral votes. And if enough states pass it, then they all agree to cast their electoral votes on behalf of the popular vote winner.

I believe that the experience of the 2000 election turned me into a supporter of the popular vote, not simply because the outcome would have been better from my narrow political point of view. But imagine 4 years later, John Kerry came within 100,000 votes of carrying Ohio. You could have had a result where President Bush won the popular vote by about 2 million and had lost the electoral vote. And so I think all of us, whatever our politics, have to think about the fact that the Electoral College as currently constructed is a problem waiting to happen again. And I hope that discussion enters the -- comes onto the table.

It wasn't mentioned today but there's a lot of talk about the alternative vote, which I think is something that is worth discussing. Fusion voting is another idea where parties can endorse and cross-endorse candidates. I would say, however, that fusion voting has been in effect in New York for many, many years and I don't know of a single New Yorker who's happy with their government at the moment. Nonetheless, I think it's worth talking about.

I'm glad the issue of Senate reform was raised. Yes, we're very inconsistent on this when your side's in the minority, you love having to get 60 votes. When you're in the majority you hate having to get 60 votes. Unless there's something very, very wrong with this -- especially in the United States Senate that is so unrepresentative of the country as a whole, where you can secure 41 votes from senators representing about 15 -- I've seen the numbers done a couple of different ways -- 15 to 20 percent of the American population. There really is something wrong here. I would favor much more radical reform of the Senate itself, that's not on the table now. But I think it is not an accident that the Senate is at the center of the discussion of those who care about democracy, because it is in many ways the least democratic body in our government.

We talked about some tradeoffs. I think campaign finance is a good area where we face some really difficult tradeoffs. Isaiah Berlin the philosopher said that the hardest choices are not between good and evil, but between competing goods. And I think as we search for ways of reforming the campaign finance system I think we want a balance between limiting special interest

power with the desire to finance politics adequately and promote broad participation in political action.

Now, I think that can involve some real -- some restrictions on the power of big money, particularly the effort to build a fence around this, I think, horrific Citizens United decision, but also create strong incentives for small donors. So we can expand the base of participation and have candidates themselves who have a much stronger interest in pursuing small money rather than big money. Nick represented here the option of the -- the public option, if you will, in campaign spending that exists in Arizona and some other states. I'd like to see more experimentation with that. I think it is a good system, but I think the idea of trying to create very strong incentives for mass participation would be a good idea.

Redistricting reform, yes. We're doing some work on that this year. But let's not pretend that this will end polarization, since as Americans we don't even seem to like to live near people we disagree with anymore. The great writer for the Austin American Statesman found that we -- counties produce big landslides on both sides, even in close elections. I'm as guilty of this as anybody. My precinct voted 80 percent for Barack Obama. There are a lot of people who live in precincts that voted 80 percent for John McCain. So, yes, we need redistricting reform, but don't -- let's not pretend that this will end polarization in politics.

And I want to offer Martha a challenge here, because I love what she is talking about. And I have always wanted chains of bars and grills to have special political evenings, you know? Applebee's or Chili's or Thank God It's Friday, that would invite people, I thought, for example, during presidential debates. I'd love them to invite people from both sides to have discussions. Maybe you could have half-hour presentation beforehand that would include a little Rachel Maddow, a little O'Reilly, a little Olbermann, also a little Lehrer NewsHour, some from my friends at NPR. And then kick off a conversation that would at least try to bring people together.

Politics needs to be fun. I think one of my biggest criticisms of the way we deal with politics is that we get so serious about it that we forget in our history, politics was once a great form of mass entertainment. People went to political rallies, for goodness' sake, because they liked seeing their friends, they liked getting together. We have lost the fun in politics. And so because I

have noted that you have such a warm spirit, I am charging you with restoring fun to politics. (Laughter)

And, Gary Bass, all journalists are for more transparency and disclosure, so I salute you and your work. I also salute you for your work on behalf of social justice. But I also salute you for noting that transparency isn't the solution all by itself. We need to create a political climate in which people actually allow the facts to play a central role in their arguments. We might at least commit to that together. (Applause)

Above all I want to salute Demos again for putting democracy at the heart of our national discussion. Some people say that the problem of democracy is too much democracy, too much participation of those who supposedly don't know enough. I don't take that view. I stand with Al Smith that most of the problems of democracy can be solved by more democracy, by more and more serious engagement, by expanded participation, and by the faith -- and it's really a modest faith -- that most of the people are right most of the time. I really and truly believe that and I believe all small D democrats have to believe that.

I want to close with the words of Vaclav Havel. He spoke 20 years ago to the U.S. Congress after democracy came to Czechoslovakia. And here's what Havel said. He said, "As long as people are people, democracy in the full sense of the word will always be no more than an ideal. One may approach it as one would the horizon in ways that may be better or worse, but it can never be fully attained. In this sense, you, too" -- and he was talking to us -- "you, too, are merely approaching democracy."

Yes, we are all still approaching democracy. And I salute all of you for continuing a struggle whose very existence is a sign of democracy's health and endurance, even if we will always be simply approaching democracy. And even if, as good small D democrats, we will always exercise our God-given rights to complain and to criticize and to fight to make things better.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

MS. LUKENSMEYER: Thank you very much, E.J. And, once again, thank you to Brookings for hosting us to share with you our notions about a coalition for a stronger democracy in our nation.

We do hope that each of you will pick up the recommendations that E.J. held up a few minutes ago and figure out if there isn't a way that your organization could participate and partner in this coalition process. And I think it's a fair statement that we know our work will never be done.

MR. DIONNE: I want to say that I was just looking over my notes and I totally forgot -- which I had scribbled in a margin -- to mention the whole issue of voting reform. Because -- and I think that's very important, because having told the joke about Massachusetts, I want to say there's something very strange that we are far more worried about fraud, which happens quite rarely, that we are about all of the obstacles we put in the way of voting. My colleague Bill Galston, Tom, and I may be among the only people in America who actually believe in compulsory voting like they have in Australia, which would actually get rid of a lot of barriers.

MS. LUKENSMEYER: Yes, yes.

MR. DIONNE: But the notion that our government that does all kinds of things to keep track of us can't manage to help us to get registered to vote is a real problem. And I'm sorry I slipped right by that in my notes.

Thank you, go ahead.

MS. LUKENSMEYER: Thank you. Two last comments. Most important is to thank all of you for coming today. (Applause)

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