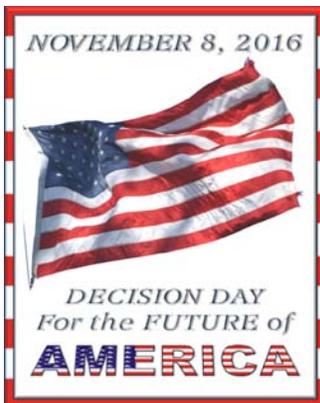




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Situation

It is January, and tradition dictates a sunny perspective for the New Year. I am passionate and positive about life and the future, but also a hardheaded realist. Our country is in deep trouble and the future of America is very much in doubt. This year's election is pivotal, and it will determine if our Constitution continues as the law of the land, preserving our liberties, or we sink further into dystopia.

This Focused Fire Newsletter is for future generations. Its purpose is to project the macro consequences of the national election on November 8, 2016. This decision will determine how you live, what freedoms you will enjoy, and what potential opportunities will be available. The pronoun "you" is carefully used

instead of the more collective "we," reflecting generational differences and opportunities. I grew up when study, hard work, good decisions, and entrepreneurship combined to create nearly unlimited opportunities. When young people made bad decisions, they were frequently able to learn and prosper from the mistakes. The government, for the most part, enabled business and personal freedoms. In fact, the Civil Rights movement justly forced the country into complying with its own Constitution. For these reasons, the struggle for liberty is not about older generations, but the kind of America citizens will establish, and their children will inherit. It is, perhaps, a form of Karma, but the people most affected by this election are the very citizens controlling the results through their votes, or non-votes. The key demographics include young adults, minorities, and women, but everyone has a role.

Options - type of government

The election involves two major governmental concepts with opposing consequences.

- 1 Do American voters want the freedom to control their future, or abdicate decisions to the "experts" of an ever-larger, more socialist government? It is already a bloated bureaucracy functioning to perpetuate itself, instead of working for the good of the people. The positive aspect of big government is that other people make decisions and we live with them. The government provides for the welfare of the people with more free programs administered by the government. The price that citizens pay is lost individuality, freedoms, property rights, diminished opportunities, and higher taxes. For many minorities, these programs are attractive, but as they become more successful, they become restrictions on the very opportunities they wanted in the first place. It is a demonstrated fact that America, on the path to socialism, is rapidly dividing into a two-tier economy. The top tier has the wealth and opportunities, and the lower tier becomes ever poorer with fewer opportunities. The middle class is disappearing, suffering from declining real wages.
- 2 The second choice is the free enterprise systems where citizens own the government, business, property, and the means to build wealth. The advantages are that each of us controls our own destiny by hard work, good decisions, and taking advantage of opportunities to better our circumstances and ourselves. The price paid is less governmental safety nets and fewer services, but also lower taxes.

Immigrants come to America seeking opportunities, then vote for the very people that will limit those opportunities. Why seek the land of the free, and vote to make it like the country they left?

Vision of a future America

If America is going to be successful, people need to know what kind of country they want. Before discussing the major probabilities for the future, here is my vision for America as posted on CompetitiveAmerica.us.

America must be as great for our children and grandchildren as it is/was for prior generations. Most Americans want the same basic outcomes. They want a strong economy, good jobs, a clean environment, responsible government, a viable education system, and reasonably priced health care. All are part of the American dream. Citizens deserve freedom from prejudice and unnecessary governmental regulation, freedom of religion, and freedom to pursue opportunities. That is the path to America's resurgence.

Freedom has never meant abdicating responsibility. We are stewards of our environment, resources, freedoms, and each other. Freedom is not free. It is hard work, and the intelligent use of time, resources, and personal values. It is being there for our neighbor, our military and law enforcement, firefighters, and brothers and sisters in the trench next to us.

It will take all of us to rebuild a Competitive America, and it starts by innovating the forth-industrial age, green and resource effective, led by American businesses.

God gave America abundant resources; we must be good stewards and not bury our talents. It is our choice.

This vision is the premise for the following discussion.

Perspective on the future of America

I am pessimistic about America's future for the following reasons.

Emotions and entrenched party loyalty approaching religious fervor determined our last four elections. With tools available, such as Critical Thinking, it is hard to believe that people rejected or ignored facts that countered party bias or preconditioned opinions.

The American public, told daily that "everything" is improving, regardless of information to the contrary, believe that propaganda is a fact.

Helicopter children, coddled and protected, are dependent on resources supplied by authority figures, which may well transition from parent to government.

People are increasingly dependent on the government. It will be difficult for some demographics to take a chance on the free-enterprise system when it may negatively affect their well-being.

Perhaps the most important factor is the normalcy bias.

Normalcy bias

The normalcy bias defines how difficult it is for people to comprehend a massive, clear, and present danger. In situations counter to personal beliefs or experiences, we deny that extreme results are possible. In reality, bad things happen to people and countries all the time. No one is immune.

As a young Operating Room Technician in the Army, one of the horrible lessons learned was how rapidly situations change. A young man's heart stopped beating (cardiac arrest) during a routine tonsillectomy. When he checked into the hospital, all assumed he would spend the day in recovery and go home, instead of dying.

A three-year old child fell from a balcony, and quietly passed away to the click of medical equipment and sobs from a dozen-hospital personal surrounding the litter. The elevator door opened to evacuate her to another hospital, but no one moved, frozen in time and disbelief. The dangerous balcony had been a clear and present danger, and on that morning, the impossible occurred.

A close friend from our medical unit, an athlete and great dancer, had a car accident and his two leg bones were forced through his foot. A civilian medical protocol would have required an amputation. Our surgical team, headed by Dr. Fisher, an excellent surgeon, spent sixteen hours repairing the injury. When our friend had departed for his trip that morning, none of us imagined such a horrible accident.

In 1942, Jan Karski, a Catholic, diplomat, and member of the Polish underground, smuggled himself into a Nazi occupied Warsaw Ghetto. He discovered a horrifying genocide in progress, where the German army was exterminating the Jews, now labeled the holocaust. He passionately reported his findings in England and America, attempting to head off this crime against humanity. The leaders of both countries refused to listen, or did not think it would happen, and six million people died horrible and preventable deaths. (Google Jan Karski and discover an unsung hero).

In 1972, a study commissioned by the Club of Rome resulted in a book titled The Limits to Growth. It was an early computer model calculating the effects of exponential human population growth against the linear discovery and availability of resources. This report, along with other works such as Rachael Carson's, Silent Spring kicked off the environmental movement, which in turn began an avalanche of change that continues to have profound effect on our society and economy.

There were multiple, predictable, consequences and here are the top two.

- 1 Limiting population to zero growth later created a need for additional workers in America, and enabled the influx of immigrants.
- 2 The off shoring of factories to other countries led to an associated job loss.

In the 1980s, the vertically integrated factory system gave way to a horizontal (global) model. People and government welcomed the transfer of polluting manufacturing operations "out of our backyard." Everyone knew that massive production job losses would occur. They ignored this reality, and instead embraced the common, but foolish, concept that high-paying knowledge jobs would make America the service capital of the world. China, a backwards third-world country, would be the benefactors of our generosity. America gave them every trade concession they asked for, without any reciprocity.

We would be the designers, thinkers, innovators, and engineers needed to manage and control these less educated emerging economies, which brilliantly took our manufacturing. The consensus, at the time, was that America would go on being the land of opportunity. The development of the Internet, a disruptive technology, allowed this intellectual interaction to occur anywhere in the world. Manufacturing support jobs, such as computer technology, followed the operations to other countries. The consequences were significant reductions in opportunities for Americans, and striking the deepest for those persons once employed in manufacturing.

This is a prime example of the normalcy bias. The consequences were, or should have been, obvious to all.

The pending financial abyss

My vision of America is based on facts, some presented here, and others in my book Freedom and Opportunity. To make it easy for fact-checkers, the figures used in this newsletter are from two sources, <http://www.usdebtclock.org/>, and <https://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/series/USGOVT>.

On the day of this writing, employment numbers show government workers at 23.6 million versus 20.7 Million in 2000, an increase of 2.9 million. Manufacturing employees 12.5 million versus 19.3 million in 2000, a reduction of 6.8 million jobs in the last fifteen years.

Our national debt, on the day of this writing, is \$18.8 trillion dollars. In 2000, the debt was \$5.7 trillion, an increase of \$13.1 trillion. Every citizen of American now owes \$58,300. Taxpayer debt per person is \$157,184.

The gross national product is 18.2 trillion, and the national debt exceeds one year of GDP. This year, we paid 2.4 trillion in interest on the debt. If interest rates increase, so will the interest on our national debt. Our spending is 35% greater than income. If big government is broke, and the 35% rate clearly proves it is, how can it provide more services and freebies? The answer is obvious, take more of the productive money out of the economy, and spend it on non-productive government services that get politicians re-elected. Obviously, without capital investment, the economy is shrinking, and so are the jobs and opportunities.

Personal debt is 17.4 trillion, and student debt is 1.3 trillion dollars. This debt will someday require repayment, falling on the taxpayers of America - that is, you and our grandchildren.

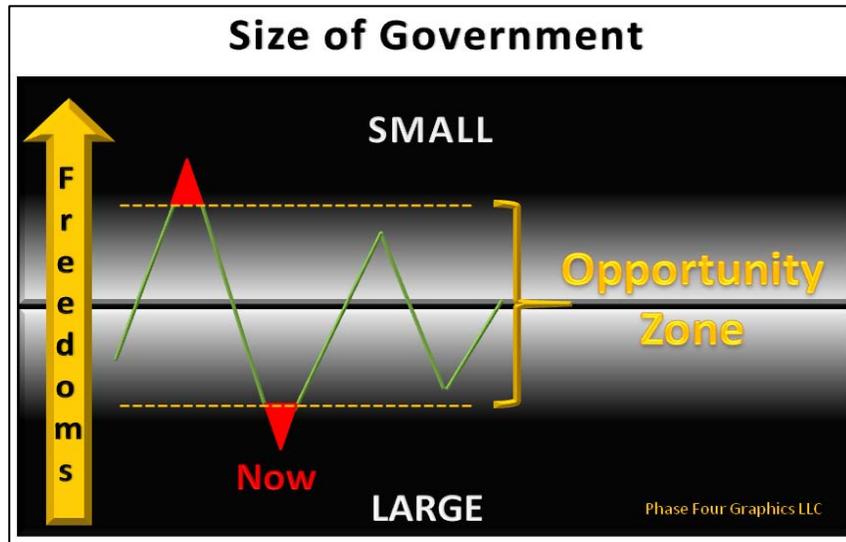
We are irresponsibly spending our children and grand children's money in a horrible display of stewardship.

Never, in the history of humankind, has any nation freely given away, and destroyed a major component of its wealth generation, receiving little in return. The only descriptive word is madness. For humans, fifty years is a long time, but brief in the rise and fall of nations. America has gone from the most prosperous nation on earth to a nation teetering on the edge of financial collapse. If we were a family, our home would be a mansion, our car a Rolls Royce, and our business would occupy the tallest skyscraper in the world. It is a façade, and the one advantage we have, it is the world's best façade.

Nations, like individuals, must eventually pay the price. The façade cannot last. At some point, the economy will go over the cliff into the abyss. The American people appear to suffer from the normalcy bias and are in denial of the negative consequences so clearly demonstrated by numeric facts and simple arithmetic.

The following illustration shows the options between more government and less. The extremes of either position result in unacceptable consequences, even authoritarian government. The zone of opportunity balances freedoms and social responsibilities. America, since WWII, has been in the zone, and a large middle class was one result.

America has slipped below the opportunity zone, and the new government will either move us back into the zone, or completely close the parameters for an opportunity driven society.



The data indicates that America cannot afford to make a mistake this election cycle. If we choose to grow the government, the country will fall into the abyss before the next election in 2020. If we elect poor leaders, they will not have the courage required to fix the problem. If they do not understand technology, they will be unable to comprehend the solutions. If they are divisive, the people will not come together and fix the problems.

We do not need a president with star power, or elected through succession. We need a highly intelligent and courageous leader who will roll up the sleeves, get to work, and put American back in the zone of opportunity. As an independent, I am less concerned about party and more about individuals and policy. If they can fix America, they have my support, if not, what value do they serve as president? At this moment in time, I am unconvinced the leader we need is even running.

Every voter needs to develop their own vision for America's future based on a study of the facts, and understanding of the consequences. If the majority of the people want big government and less freedom, so be it. However, do it on purpose, not through default, victimization, or the effects of the normalcy bias.

This election requires that people get the facts, think through the choices, and make informed, unbiased decisions. There will be consequences, and they will affect us all.

Can we avoid the abyss? I believe we can, and that is the basis for my vision and optimism for 2016, and taking the considerable time to write this newsletter.

An updated version of this newsletter will post on December 1, 2016. It may be a requiem for America. I pray, however, that it is a celebration, that Americans have chosen the pathway to the bright lights of future freedom and prosperity for every citizen.

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***Freedom
And
Opportunity***

**Stop
Redistributing
and Downsizing**

America

***Focused Fire Newsletter
Essays***

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