



IN THIS ISSUE: THE DISCONNECT

For a self-governing nation, where the people are supposed to be sovereign, there certainly is a large disconnect between the people and the governing classes. Only a minority of Americans express confidence in major institutions, according to Gallup. A plurality if not a majority of Americans do not support legislation recently passed by their representatives: a new health care law (with its mandate that people must buy insurance), new financial regulations (which do not address the causes of the financial meltdown), bank bailouts, state public sector union worker bailouts, car manufacturer bailouts, and debt and deficits as far as the eye can see.

What are the characteristics of this disconnect, and how might it shape the future? We excerpt several treatments of the subject below.

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1 – VOTERS VS. THE POLITICAL CLASS

According to Rasmussen Reports, just 28% of voters believe increased government spending is good for the economy, while 52% believe increased government spending is bad for the economy. But among the Political Class, 67% believe increased government spending is good for the economy.

The same disconnect exists on deficits, creating jobs, and cutting taxes, according to Rasmussen.

In addition, only 23% of voters believe that “the federal government today has the consent of the

governed.” A remarkable 62% of voters say that our government does NOT enjoy that consent. These figures highlight a massive failure of leadership from both Republicans and Democrats among the nation’s political elite, according to Rasmussen: “The gap between Americans who want to govern themselves and politicians who want to rule over them may be as big today as the gap between the colonies and England during the 18th century.”

2 – REALITY GAP: US STRUGGLES, DC THRIVES

America is struggling with a sputtering economy and high unemployment, but times are booming for Washington’s governing class, reports Politico. The massive expansion of government under a Democratic Congress and White House has guaranteed a robust job market for policy professionals, regulators and contractors for years to come. The housing market, boosted by the large number of high-income earners in the area, many working in politics and government, is easily outpacing the

markets in most of the country. And there are few signs of economic distress in hotels, restaurants or stores in the DC metro area.

As a result, there is a yawning gap between the American people and DC’s powerful when it comes to their economic reality and their economic perceptions: roughly 45% of “Washington elites” say the country and the economy are headed in the right direction, while only 25% of the general

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population agrees. (To qualify as a Washington elite for the poll, respondents must live within the DC metro area, earn more than \$75,000 per year, have at least a college degree and be involved in the political process or work on key political issues or policy decisions.) Among these elites, President Obama has a 66% favorability rating, while 34% view him unfavorably. Outside of Washington, only 48% of respondents view the president favorably, compared with 47% who view him unfavorably.

In prospective 2012 matchups, Obama never falls below 60% support among the DC elites. Yet among the general population, the president doesn't win more than 48% support in any of the pairings. On the question of the 2012 presidential election, the general public gave a generic Republican candidate a 5-percentage-point edge over Obama, 42% to 37%, while among Washington elites, the president would cruise to reelection by a 2-to-1 ratio – 56% to 28%.

3 – AMERICA IS AT RISK OF BOILING OVER

Peggy Noonan in the Wall Street Journal:

The biggest political change in my lifetime is that Americans no longer assume that their children will have it better than they did. This is a huge break with the past, with assumptions and traditions that shaped us.

But do our political leaders have any sense of what people are feeling deep down? They don't act as if they do. I think their detachment from how normal people think is more dangerous and disturbing than it has been in the past. I started noticing in the 1980s the growing gulf between the country's thought leaders, as they're called – the political and media class, the universities – and those living what for lack of a better word we'll call normal lives on the ground in America. The two groups were agitated by different things, concerned about different things, had different focuses, different world views.

But I've never seen the gap wider than it is now. I think it is a chasm. In Washington they

don't seem to be looking around and thinking, *Hmmm, this nation is in trouble, it needs help.* They're thinking something else. I'm not sure they understand the American Dream itself needs a boost, needs encouragement and protection. They don't seem to know or have a sense of the mood of the country.

And so they make their moves, manipulate this issue and that, and keep things at a high boil. And this at a time when people are already in about as much hot water as they can take.

When the adults of a great nation feel long-term pessimism, it only makes matters worse when those in authority take actions that reveal their detachment from the concerns – even from the essential nature – of their fellow citizens. And it makes those citizens feel powerless.

Inner pessimism and powerlessness: That is a dangerous combination.

4 – ARE AMERICANS BIGOTS?

William McGurn in the Wall Street Journal:

Moralizing about the ugly motives of the American people has become common. Whether it's a federal judge declaring there exists no rational opposition to same-sex marriage, a mayor railing against those

who would like a mosque moved a few blocks from Ground Zero, a Speaker of the House effectively likening the majority of her countrymen who did not want her health-care bill to Nazis, or a State Department official who brings up the Arizona

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law on immigration in a human-rights discussion with a Chinese delegation, the chorus is the same: You can't trust ordinary Americans....

In New York City we have a mayor who preens how an Islamic Center built close to Ground Zero is exclusively a test of religious liberty. Surely it is possible to respect religious liberty and nonetheless believe that with a bit of neighborly solicitude, we might reach a workable accommodation by moving the center a few blocks. But Mayor Michael Bloomberg prefers to see the 61% of New York residents who disagree with him as people who ought to be "ashamed of themselves."

When asked about the legitimacy of grass-roots opposition to the health-care bill, Nancy Pelosi dismissed protestors as people "carrying swastikas." Her counterpart in the Senate called them "evil

mongers." How convenient. If turning up to protest a health-care bill makes someone a Nazi or an evil monger, there's no point to having a real debate, is there?

These kinds of remarks, moreover, tend to be amplified by a press corps that seems to share many of the same prejudices.

As the controversy over the planned Islamic Center near Ground Zero escalates, we have had many secular sermons on the need to recognize that the vast majority of Muslims should not be confused with the terrorists. No argument there. But how much more fruitful our own debates might be if the Judge Walkers, Mayor Bloomberg's and Speaker Pelosi's could extend that same presumption of decency to the American people.

5 – AMERICA'S RULING CLASS – AND THE PERILS OF REVOLUTION

Angelo Codevilla in The American Spectator:

Never has there been so little diversity within America's upper crust. Today's ruling class, from Boston to San Diego, was formed by an educational system that exposed them to the same ideas and gave them remarkably uniform guidance, as well as tastes and habits. These amount to a social canon of judgments about good and evil, complete with secular sacred history, sins (against minorities and the environment), and saints. America's ruling class speaks the language and has the tastes, habits, and tools of bureaucrats. It rules uneasily over the majority of Americans not oriented to government....

The two classes have less in common culturally, dislike each other more, and embody ways of life more different from one another than did the 19th century's Northerners and Southerners – nearly all of whom, as Lincoln reminded them, "prayed to the same God." By contrast, while most Americans pray to the God "who created and doth

sustain us," our ruling class prays to itself as "saviors of the planet" and improvers of humanity. Our classes' clash is over "whose country" America is, over what way of life will prevail, over who is to defer to whom about what. The gravity of such divisions points us, as it did Lincoln, to Mark's Gospel: "if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand."...

THE POLITICAL DIVIDE

The ruling class has a party, the Democrats. But some two-thirds of Americans – a few Democratic voters, most Republican voters, and all independents – lack a vehicle in electoral politics. Sooner or later, well or badly, that majority's demand for representation will be filled....

DEPENDENCE ECONOMICS

By taxing and parceling out more than a third of what Americans produce, through regulations

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that reach deep into American life, our ruling class is making itself the arbiter of wealth and poverty. Laws and regulations nowadays are longer than ever because length is needed to specify how people will be treated unequally....

By making economic rules dependent on discretion, our bipartisan ruling class teaches that prosperity is to be bought with the coin of political support. Thus in the 1990s and 2000s, as Democrats and Republicans forced banks to make loans for houses to people and at rates they would not otherwise have considered, builders and investors had every reason to make as much money as they could from the ensuing inflation of housing prices. When the bubble burst, only those connected with the ruling class at the bottom and at the top were bailed out....

THE COUNTRY CLASS

Describing America's country class is problematic because it is so heterogeneous. It has no privileged podiums, and speaks with many voices, often inharmonious. It shares above all the desire to be rid of rulers it regards inept and haughty. It defines itself practically in terms of reflexive reaction against the rulers' defining ideas and proclivities – e.g., ever higher taxes and expanding government, subsidizing political favorites, social engineering, approval of abortion, etc. Many want to restore a way of life largely superseded. Demographically, the country class is the other side of the ruling class's coin: its most distinguishing characteristics are marriage, children, and religious practice....

Nothing has set the country class apart, defined it, made it conscious of itself, given it whatever coherence it has, so much as the ruling class's insistence that people other than themselves are intellectually and hence otherwise humanly inferior....

THE CLASSES CLASH

The ruling class's appetite for deference, power, and perks grows. The country class disrespects its rulers, wants to curtail their power and reduce their perks. The ruling class wears on its sleeve the view that the rest of Americans are racist, greedy, and above all stupid. The country class is ever more convinced that our rulers are corrupt, malevolent, and inept. The rulers want the ruled to shut up and obey. The ruled want self-governance. The clash between the two is about which side's vision of itself and of the other is right and which is wrong. One side or the other will prevail. The clash is as sure and momentous as its outcome is unpredictable....

The name of the party that will represent America's country class is far less important than what, precisely, it represents and how it goes about representing it because, for the foreseeable future, American politics will consist of confrontation between what we might call the Country Party and the ruling class....

If self-governance means anything, it means that those who exercise government power must depend on elections. The shorter the electoral leash, the likelier an official to have his chain yanked by voters, the more truly republican the government is. Yet to subject the modern administrative state's agencies to electoral control would require ordinary citizens to take an interest in any number of technical matters.

How the country class and ruling class might clash on each item of their contrasting agendas is beyond my scope. Suffice it to say that the ruling class's greatest difficulty – aside from being outnumbered – will be to argue, against the grain of reality, that the revolution it continues to press upon America is sustainable. For its part, the country class's greatest difficulty will be to enable a revolution to take place without imposing it. America has been imposed on enough.