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This book is dedicated to our children and grandchildren

A day may come when our nation is measured not by its gross national product or its tallest buildings nor by the accumulation of vast wealth, but by the well-being of its people; by the opportunities to learn and better themselves; by the ability to earn a fair wage; by the safeguards we have in place to take care of those who are in need or disadvantaged; by the integrity of our public officials; and by the fairness of our laws with respect to our governance.

-N.E. Parks

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PROLOGUE

NOW IT'S PERSONAL

Our economy in America has been declining over the past several decades and with that went jobs, income levels, pensions, local tax bases, technology and innovation, education, trade skills, and more importantly, the spirit of a free America, a land of opportunity, governed by laws, all of which our nation was founded. And with it we gained trade deficits and budget deficits.

The new American republic established in 1776 was the beginning of a democratic commonwealth that would one day possibly extend to many nations. This new form of government was envisioned by a select few founding fathers, designed to allow for separation of church and state, the emancipation of all people, and established controls on the power of the state. The four page hand written Constitution still serves as a manual to our political framework and the greatest form of government in the world. The forethought found in the document is unbelievable.

But it is only as good as the paper it is written on if the principles set

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forth as the foundation are not practiced and protected by the American people.

The President and Congress establish the rules by which our economy functions and how it directly affects Americans' job opportunities, tax liability, retirement savings, health care and educational opportunities, interest rates, and inflation through the laws enacted, policies and programs implemented, and regulatory practices. Therefore, politics is driving our economy. Unfortunately, the nature of the beast is **reelection**. If public officials allow lobbyists, campaign funding, big business, and political party caucus and gridlock to drive their decisions or inaction,

Americans will be and have been adversely affected in their standard of living and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Since the Supreme Court has allowed unlimited campaign funding, our only option is to seek out better candidates to run for public office and vote for these candidates, regardless of political party affiliation or amount of campaign funding.

Americans are tired of political games supporting lobbyists and big money policies, they want consensus and action on important national and global issues.

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Americans are tired of extreme political parties, finger pointing, and the party caucus system that promotes party unity at the expense of bipartisan consensus and the unity of our nation. They want action directed toward the middle, for the greater good.

Americans are tired of the federal government and Congress managing and passing legislation by crisis. The policies are reactive and not necessarily appropriate, may be vastly more costly, and create more problems.

Americans are tired of government overreach, unaccountability to public responsibility and values, fraud and wasteful overspending of tax payer dollars. Some recent examples are the Internal Revenue System, Veterans Administration, Obamacare, the border crisis, social security disability and welfare fraud, and executive orders that are unconstitutional just to mention a few.

Americans are tired of low and stagnant wages, unemployment/under employment, and raising costs for food, gas, education, and health care. Americans are tired of job and retirement insecurity caused by outsourcing jobs, creating what looks like to some as corporate greed and un-American values.

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Americans are tired of home devaluation and the inability to secure refinanced mortgages with lower interest rates and being subject to fraudulent mortgage loans and home foreclosures while the CEOs and banks that tax payers bailed out are faring well with high incomes, severance packages, and bonuses.

It is time to rethink our political framework and the structure of the federal government. I believe both Congress and the federal government are “too big to function effectively” and have actually been spoiled by excessive spending and excessive funding without accountability or national priorities. We need to take back our government and rethink priorities, policies, and values that are impeding progress toward a larger middle class and a better quality of life for all. The President and Congress can share the blame for not having the work ethic to create alternatives to fix the actual budget and policy problems and focus on policy reform and federal priorities that are impeding our future growth and prosperity as a nation.

It is apparent that politics is standing in the way of adequately serving

the American people and making any progress towards change. The arrogance of both branches of government is appalling. Don't forget that the legislative branch is elected by the American people to serve as public servants to the citizens of the U.S. and the executive branch is elected and funded by the American people to carry out federal government missions

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and foreign policy necessary for the good of the country. Neither should function for self-interest. Over the past 40 years, public policies have helped the wealthy and harmed the less fortunate, forced American businesses overseas, and directly exposing so many average working Americans to such widespread insecurity.

All who are Americans love their country but have not always been proud of it. Land and homesteads were taken from the native Indians by this country. Persons of color were discriminated against and treated inhumanly in all areas of life by this country. Vietnam veterans were not shown the respect and appreciation deserved by Americans as they returned from war. And now the Veterans Administration scandal and fraudulent treatment of our veterans in exchange for senior executive bonuses has set the lower bar of disgust. Then there is the IRS targeting political affiliation, the Benghazi affair in Libya, the Bergdahl swap for five imprisoned terrorist leaders, Obamacare, the border crisis, and the lack of foreign policy with regard to terrorists threatening our country. Enough is enough.

America is not perfect and democracy is an ever evolving state. There is much good about America and her people. We have the ability to change direction when our consciences tell us to, we just need to know what to change. This book is an attempt to highlight many ways the country

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has fallen out of the people's hands and ways we can get it back on track for the greater good.

We have known for decades that the governmental budget deficits and accumulating debt needed to be addressed to avoid future generations from suffering the ultimate impacts, including selling ownership of our country to other countries. The budget deficit is not the biggest concern for most Americans right now but it does hamper the government's ability to provide adequate programs and services and drives up costs due to interest payments we are paying to borrow money to cover overspending.

The American people are concerned with the revitalization of the economy in the form of jobs for those who want to work and focused fiscal priorities that provide better access to health care and education through lower costs, infrastructure improvement, and other public works. Education and health care costs continue to rise along with increasing unemployment, food prices, and until recently, gas prices. 12 million people were unemployed in 2012, down from 14 million in 2011, taking a toll on families' well-being.

The federal policies and regulations enacted over the years have deterred the growth and sustainability of small business and manufacturing in

this country, the practices of big business that outsource jobs overseas for more profits, the greed and corruption of the “too big to fail”, “too big to
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prosecute” financial institutions, the BP oil spill, and the contamination of prescription compound drugs not properly regulated, and the lobbyists and big business that control the politicians and public policy for their financial gain.

Trying to resolve the deficit in the wrong way is having a direct impact on the economy, jobs, and public welfare. There are a lot of moving parts to be analyzed in correcting these problems and they will not be corrected by “sequestration” or any other mindless strategy. It took years, if not decades, to get into this mess. Many policies, programs, and individuals have caused this mess. We must change consciousness to do what is right for the greater good, not for politics, greed, or the status quo.

So what are the lessons of the past and in what direction do we need to head to get Americans back to work, reduce the federal budget deficit, establish national priorities, make Congress functional so it can do its job, make the federal government more effective and efficient, ensure social security and Medicare benefits are available for those who have paid into the programs, address the shortfalls in health care affordability, mental health accessibility, reform the mortgage lending and investment banking practices, support small business, change the tax and trade policies, address the longstanding energy challenge, close our borders and initiate fair immigration policy, modernize the educational system, understand what America’s intentions are in the middle east, Russia,

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and other countries with regard to the current and future conflicts, and support our veterans and the military as they return from war with the many issues they now have to overcome.

The above issues are not new and they continue to worsen the longer we delay in successfully outlining and implementing specific actions that need to be taken to change the policies, programs, and infrastructure that support and contribute to these problems. One must recognize that we cannot legislate ethical behavior or stop personal and corporate greed and corruption. One must also recognize that implementation of these ideas and recommendations will not be possible without clear leadership, collaboration, innovation and bipartisanship. These values and behaviors will have to change if we are ever truly going to rethink the American Dream. These issues have become personal to most Americans, affecting their ability to live, prosper and meet basic needs.

However, the Statue of Liberty, a gift to the United States from the people of France, still stands in America. The statue represents the Roman goddess of freedom, upon it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776. It is an icon of freedom and of the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT HAS GONE WRONG IN AMERICA?

I drive through my small town in Xenia, Ohio, and all I see are financial institutions and pharmacies on every corner of the town. One corner is where the bowling alley used to be. I try to find a gym where my son and his friends can practice basketball during the week and there are no facilities available for the kids, even for a fee. I drive through the city of Moraine where the General Motors plant used to be and it looks like a ghost town. And, oh yes, we now have a super Walmart that has caused many smaller stores to close.

It was November 7, 2012, the day after the Presidential election. Half the country was apparently happy and half the country remained distraught, or at least that is how it appeared based on the electoral voting results. Regardless, change in the direction of our country looks remote, especially with little shake up in Congressional incumbents and the ongoing gridlock. The only hope is to change American politics in

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the direction of nonpartisan cooperation with national purpose, that which is best for our country as a whole.

The destruction in the northeast from hurricane Sandy weighed heavy on our minds as another storm headed their way. Nine days later many were still without power in the face of a nor'easter that headed their way. It seems we haven't learned much from Katrina in our natural disaster cleanup efforts except that the only change happening is climate change. It also seems we have not learned from the killing sprees in our schools and public places. The recent killing spree at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, by a lone gunman with mental issues has not improved our ability to identify and help persons capable of such terror. We couldn't anticipate the Boston bomber even when the U.S. was warned of the terrorist by another country, i.e., Russia.

The millions of people currently unemployed and the realities of longterm unemployment have direct effects on families' personal, economic, and emotional well-being. The federal deficit for 2012 was nearly seven times the level it was in 2007. Government debt in 2012 stood at 73 percent of GDP, twice the historical average. On the edge of the "fiscal cliff", Congress and the President could not agree on spending cuts and tax increases and so across-the-board reductions of \$85 billion in federal spending, known as "sequestration", took effect March 1, 2013, along with other tax increases that had taken effect in January. These

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across-the-board reductions total \$1.2 trillion over nine years, \$85 billion of which would occur in the remaining seven months of fiscal year 13. Austerity economics is not what the economy needs at this time when

it is trying to recover from one of the worst recessions since the Great Depression. We should replace the term sequestration with a “state of mind” that Congress, the President, and government officials need to acquire as a mode of operando to overspending when making budget and spending decisions.

Meanwhile, politicians argue and point fingers instead of making decisions on the size and role of the federal government and where wasteful spending can be curtailed. At the same time, corporations have not suffered. During the “recovery”, corporate profits, including some non-profit organizations such as major hospitals that are exempt from taxation, soared, but companies haven’t boosted hiring.

The Dow now being up “disconnect” with existing low income levels, job instability, loss of home values, and the poor mainstream economy is obviously not an indicator that the economy is recovered. Neither jobs nor wages have regained their pre-crisis highs. Home prices were still nearly 26 percent below their level when the Dow last peaked in Mar 2013, but about 14 million homeowners were underwater on their mortgages. The job market has recovered slowly, making this the worst labor market recovery since World War II.

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The stock market has basically recovered back to where it was in 2000, while corporate earnings have doubled since then. I do not believe the stock market recovery is a true indication of “recovery” when Americans are still doing so poorly. Federal policies have encouraged investors into the stock market because bond yields are so low. Corporations are doing well with fewer employees and investing, instead, in technology to enhance productivity and receive tax credits and deductions.

Supply and demand for jobs keep wages low. Profits and stocks are rising but hourly wages are stagnant. Instead of these austerity measures, the government would better serve the country by providing incentives for business to expand the economy in this country, not overseas, by repairing the crumbling infrastructure, creating training and educational opportunities to correct the skills imbalance, providing research and development grants, and create other job opportunities to improve efficiencies and help the nation’s people who have had their lives turned upside down through joblessness, homelessness, and natural disaster.

The government operates on tax revenues. Jobs create tax revenues and consequently support government services and needed social insurance programs. If there are no jobs, or wages are stagnant, people do not spend money on consumption and companies will not expand because they will have a hard time recouping their investment. So much for trickle-down economics. So the government needs to fund economic

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growth through public works, research and development, and other employment opportunities in collaboration with corporations and other investment opportunities. Tax reform is necessary to ensure individuals are contributing their fair share based on income and the corporate tax

rate of 35 percent needs to be lowered more in line with other countries. No one can agree if we should raise taxes or lower taxes or whether our country's debt is slowing economic growth or if we should put the brakes on austerity until the recession is behind us.

We collect about \$2 trillion a year in taxes but the government is spending almost \$3.5 trillion. This means that \$4 out of every \$10 the government spends comes from borrowed money. Government's sporadic and out-of-focus spending that doesn't support national interest needs to stop. However, under spending on focused national interests can have negative impacts, including economic recovery.

Fiscal expansion is a logical response to a weak economy. If there is a demand for goods and services because employment is high then business thrives and unemployment is corrected. Creating jobs adds to tax revenue and lowers government spending on social programs. This is not to say that austerity isn't important. Government borrowing, especially on the wrong priorities, deprives the country of a chance to make a better future.

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One has to ask how our country got into such a mess. Obviously, the housing crisis was the straw that broke the camel's back for our current economic woes but we didn't get into this overnight. In fact, it was a weak banking system and vast disparities in income levels that signaled the Great Depression. It has taken us decades to get into this mess again. Investment banks have taken excessive risk and "big business" (the pharmaceutical industry, oil companies, big insurance, military contractors, rich individuals, and super PACs) has been able to buy government policies through lobbyists and election funding. Long term personnel are fired, pensions are no longer funded, and investment fraud have taken life savings from many Americans.

Hedrick Smith, author of *Who Stole the American Dream?*, provides his view of how Americans have been robbed of the American dream. He explains how the American dream has been lost over the past forty years by legislative and corporate decisions that have had a direct effect on the middle class.

The cause he states began in 1971 with the "Powell Memorandum", written by Lewis Powell, a corporate lawyer who was later appointed to the Supreme Court. His memo, according to Mr. Smith, "sparked a business and corporate rebellion that would forever change the landscape of power in Washington and would influence policies and economy even now." The memo initiated transformations both in government policies

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and the behavior of American business leaders—causing changes to the politics and policy of the postwar era and the philosophy of giving back into the business and the economy that had provided for the prosperity of America's middle class from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s.

According to many, wealth of the super-rich, the top one percent, rose much from 2002 to 2007 prior to the Great Recession. Lower tax rates and corporate and other tax loopholes, policy on deregulation, foreign trade,

and outsourcing of jobs were all contributors to less federal government income, trade deficits, and unemployment/underemployment. Lobbyists and Super PACs continue to grow and corporations have not “trickled down” their profits, creating a break between the business and labor relationship, resulting in loss in income and pensions, and reduced job security, and less opportunity for the middle and lower classes in America.

So many agree that the current American predicament goes back to the 1970s. Wages of workers stopped keeping pace with their productivity. The profits of the top one percent continue to rise since 2007. Trickle-down economics is no longer a player. Lowering the corporate tax rate might bring some of the jobs and profits back into the economy. Many would like to see us returning tax rates on income, including dividends and interest and capital gains, to 1980 levels and eliminating some of the tax loopholes would go a long way to reduce the deficit.

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Of course, reducing spending, from earmarks for pork barrel projects, procuring military systems that are not necessary, to funding federal agencies that use the funds for other than mission essential purposes (i.e. excessive executive bonuses and more), and incurring debt from mismanaged programs such as Obama care, the VA, and the lack of government enforcement of immigration policy. Oh, and let’s not forget the government bailouts that some say saved our auto industry and our economy. The jury is still out on whether a lesson was learned. We should not ever have to be put in that position again.

Closing down the government in the government shutdown last fiscal year indicates the degree of political disorder in Congress. The inability of legislators to deal with legislation in an appropriate and responsible way. Holding Americans hostage to the implications of legislation or the lack of it in this case. Earmarks in legislation create havoc on our budget and our national priorities. Congress supposedly stopped the practice in 2011, but even the Continuing Resolution that reopened the government last year was loaded with earmarks.

The cumulative effect of all the problems on Americans today is why enough is enough. Stagnate wages for the middle and lower classes, outsourcing jobs overseas, risky and, in many cases, fraudulent mortgage loans, government deficit and fraud, understated inflation, lost and risky 401(k)s, loss of home values, including loss in home equity borrowed

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in order to stay afloat, governmental waste, inability to reduce health care and educational costs, inability to establish national and global priorities and fund appropriately, inability to contain DOD and other cost overruns in government contracts, duplication of effort among federal government agencies, excessive costs and spending on programs due to political self-interest, indecision, and gridlock. Programs such as Obamacare and all the costs associated are impacting employers, individuals, and the government, and immigration reform that has

turned into a inhumane and costly crisis with the influx of children across U.S. borders and criminals, and who knows what else (terrorists), is entering our country. These problems all contribute to an increase in crime and unemployment, especially in our inner cities. And let's not forget our veterans that have made it possible that I can write and we live in freedom. There is much to do to correct their health situation, let them go to facilities that can immediately help them.

There are fundamental flaws in our political system and the policies, cost, and function of the federal government that seriously need to be corrected for this country to be the great country it once was for all those seeking the American Dream. The American dream is different and personal for each individual but the concept revolves around the ability for all people to be free to self-actualize their talents, abilities, and desires, not just for fame and fortune, but in order to live a happy and prosperous

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life. Thus, the American dream is about ensuring that we look out for the greater good in our policies and legislation that support opportunities for health, education, housing, research and development, innovation, jobs, and retirement. We have contracted with our government officials to carry this out. If they are not willing to act then we must react by seeking out good candidates and voting for them.

This book is an attempt to provide some common sense approaches to correcting some of the country's largest economic and political problems. I don't intend that everyone will agree with all that is written here, it is simply an effort to put out ideas and concerns that many Americans are wrestling with, but too busy to think about as they struggle with everyday life. It is just a view from a common government servant for 36 years and an American worried about our country's future and our children's and grandchildren's futures.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE DOMESTIC PLAN

So here is where I suggest we need to start, assuming we have enough **elected** officials in Congress and a Presidency that will establish national and global priorities and work with corporate leaders and other government leaders to form coalitions that promote economic growth in the United States and climate change and security in the world.

I believe the Government has a role in the prosperity and equality of our society. It has a responsibility, through leadership and consciousness of our politicians and business leaders, to create laws, policy, and programs that provide for a democracy, the enforcement of laws, the creation of opportunities to sustain economic growth, and assurance that public funds are expended in a responsible manner.

In his State of the Union address, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, proclaimed that there are basic expectations by our people that make up the foundation of a healthy and strong democracy. The basic things

expected involved the health of our political and economic systems. He stated they are:

“Equality of opportunity for youth and for others, jobs for those who can work, security for those who need it, the defending of those who need it, the preservation of civil liberties for all, the enjoyment of the fruits of scientific progress in a wider and constantly rising standard of living.” He warned that these basic expectations of our economic and political systems could get lost in the modern world and that the degree to which these expectations are fulfilled would be the measure of strength in these systems.

Democracy cannot be sustained if all the opportunity is contained with the one percent. I am no economist, all I can add to this discussion is common sense. What I have been able to figure out is that the economy is cyclical in nature, obviously evolving around supply and demand. Business needs demand to expand. Business expansion creates jobs. Workers need jobs to have income in order to consume and pay taxes. The government needs taxes to provide services and other economic incentives. Business is in the business to make profits. The question is just how much profit at the expense of its employees’ security and product quality?

The problem is that businesses are not producing in the U.S. If they do not produce in the U.S., Americans are not working and paying taxes and businesses are not paying taxes in the U.S. Without tax revenue, the government cannot provide incentives to business without borrowing money from foreign countries, thus selling America to outsiders. The bottom line is that we need business to thrive in the U.S. and business needs to pay it forward or the whole game in America is over.

If big business, global, multinational companies like Walmart, GM, IBM, and Apple, and the “Billionaires Club”, don’t want to play in the U.S. then we should focus on small business in this country. There are approximately 442 billionaires in the U.S. Some 210 multi-millionaires joined the extreme wealth league last year, achieving 10-figure fortunes and the world now plays host to a record 1,426 billionaires, according to a 2014 Forbes Magazine’s study. However, I would like to see these companies and the wealthy join in on a domestic plan to turn America’s prosperity and opportunity around for the middle and lower classes. The creation of a domestic plan, a bipartisan initiative including industry and government officials, needs to be the guiding light, a focus for the future. There are many initiatives the President and Congress have on their tables but, just like how the government is too big, so are the issues facing the nation. Focus on national issues is necessary now, and should be a common goal for America. The State of the Union Address

was January 20, 2015. The state of the union address is designed to lay out legislative goals for Congress for the next year. However, I fear this address served politics rather than significant bipartisan opportunities for the coming year.

I propose a Domestic Plan that must be comprehensive, bipartisan, and could include the following: