

Reconfiguring America from the Grassroots Up

A Fresh Piece of Political Analysis from One Citizen to Another

By Mark Fedeli
January 2010
mark [at] adeolumen [dot] com
<http://adeolumen.com>

The 2010 Crossroads

The page is turning. The rules have changed. The ground is shifting beneath our feet. One of the first signs that this tectonic shift is real is the fact that Barack Obama is our President and not Hillary Clinton. Another sign is the rapid rise of the conservative grassroots movement outside of the Republican Party. 2010 will be a decisive year in politics because the American people *en masse* are transitioning into a new kind of political media culture—one in which we the people can and will own the narrative and exert our collective will upon the insiders game of Washington. And by the time the first generation of young Americans raised on Facebook and Web 2.0 come of age that transition will be complete.

But we the people must take the right steps in 2010 if we want to hand off an America to our children that is better than the one given to us. To take the right steps, we must realize that we have reached a profound crossroads in America, and there are two paths before us. The paths do not go to the left or to the right. Though the so-called culture wars rage on in many circles, this is not about left vs. right. It is up vs. down. This is the crossroads that is now before us. Up, and the virtuous cycle of [Liberty](#) stands poised to thrust us into the light of America's best days. Down, and the vicious cycle of [Subservience](#) is ready to subject us to the darkness of the worst of America.

Such a choice is always before us, but now perhaps more than ever the game is changing. The decidedly top-down model of American politics, because it is controlled by special interest money and hierarchical party procedures, falls far short of the standard of just government outlined in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

We can hand off to our children an America that is better than the one we were entrusted—flawed as it still is—or we can hand off a nation that is a shadow of its former self. The choice is ours alone to make, the people of the United States.

The choice is ours because as the Declaration boldly stated above, just government begins with the consent of the governed. A government is just insofar as its operations and objectives are derived from the consent of the people. The citizens come first, not the lust for money or power! The beauty of our Constitution is that it created a set of interlocking pieces that brilliantly work together to keep the immediate passions of any group of people from driving the whole ship. At the same time, those pieces were filled with mechanisms to block the government itself from driving the ship. The vote, separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, and the bill of rights all work together to keep the people and our elected representatives on the right track.

But we are off track today. The consent of the American people is not the driver of American democracy. Now, many American people are waking up to see that fact. You can see it in online news outlets like Daily Caller and HuffingtonPost, the blogosphere, the town halls, the tea parties, and the low

approval ratings of health care reform legislation. The left and right wings of the mainstream media are doing what they can to impose an artificial left vs. right categorization on events. But that is incorrect. The swelling grassroots movement in America, which spans from the ideological left to the religious right, is about consent, not left vs. right. It is about up vs. down. The grassroots believes that both parties in Washington and most of the mainstream media are driven by money rather than principle, by a profit motive to expand power rather than to responsibly steward this nation for the next generation. Is the grassroots wrong, or is the political media culture wrong? This is the underlying tension of the 2010 elections.

The Rise of Interactive Politics

Undoubtedly, a deep conflict is brewing. It is moral. It is political. It is foundational. People in the grassroots are both fearful and fired up. A critical mass of voters see that Washington does not represent them effectively. The evidence is clear. Overgrown government. Massive national debt. Turf wars and bureaucratic barriers that hinder coordinated national security, even after 9/11. It tempts one to say our government has become more trouble than it is worth. Think about that. Have you thought that yet?

The grassroots movement in America is hard to define. The boundaries span from left to right. Different groups of people in it believe different things about the source of the problems we face and thus what America most needs right now. But what holds this movement together is the abiding sense that American government has become unconstitutional and unjust because the consent of the American people is not driving American government.

This movement could not be possible without the Internet. This is game-changing because the Internet is interactive, enabling citizens to learn about and engage with their political representatives more than ever before. The grassroots awakening has been initiated by Americans who can contribute their own data and perspective on events that happen in and through Washington. The Internet is now filled with countless voices whose collective political influence is beyond measure, and the fact that these voices do not fit neatly into left or right categorizations is exposing the inadequacy of the left-right narrative. Now millions of online consumers of political information are lit up like a Christmas tree with diverse perspectives. The diversity of the online political media environment may seem like noise to some, but to the listening ear it is producing a clear signal: the left vs. right narrative is outdated. It is too simplistic. It must now be replaced by something more true and sustainable. In short, Washington calls for drastic change.

There are echo chambers on the right and left, to be sure, but an intellectually honest person can do the hard work needed to let the political data to speak for itself. This is profound, because it means that anyone who wants to can reach that sublime experience of the lights coming in, which is the essence of *self-evidence*. Using good logic, a knowledge of history, and the light of conscience, any person can do online research that only a trained journalist could have done before. Great journalists are still needed—in fact, now more than ever—but today's citizens have an added imperative to reach further than a journalist because citizens have the unique responsibility to drive American democracy. Journalists that get this dynamic will be the big winners moving forward.

One thrilling aspect of this new situation is that there are interpretive keys available from the conservative, liberal, libertarian, and even the Statist perspectives that each play their own roles in making sense of political events. No one point of view in isolation can decipher America's greatest challenges or present the best solutions. It is in the diversity of perspectives and the scrutiny that comes from diversity in which we see the lights coming on, when a solution stands on its own as self-evident. This is our unique epistemological heritage in America. Thus, the intellectual pursuit of data and perspectives about politics through the Internet has a chance to move us out of the culture wars into something far more Constitutional, sustainable, and transferrable to the next generations.

The Internet, as a medium, is decentralized. This structure forces one to deal with information differently than with mass media. It demands the development of discernment, to pursue contrasting perspectives in order to make sense of events. At its best, this structure will elevate sound reason, thorough investigation, sustainable journalism, and more self-evident solutions. At its worst, this decentralized model brings like-minded people together to reinforce a narrow perspective, typically in opposition to another perspective. Life in the echo chamber is life down the downward path. It perpetuates the left-right narrative online.

The key factor in all this is *the choice* of the user. Choice is central to navigating the new political media environment, and it is also central to effective democracy. In light of choice, contrast the interactive functionality of the Internet with the passive nature of the previous medium that was predominant in American political culture—television. Of course, I acknowledge that many think that television is still predominant today. In certain circles it is, especially among older people. But on the national scale, television's predominance is dying, now that younger generations get [the majority of their political information from the Internet](#). There is no reason to think that a push medium like television, with its inherent structure of advertiser-driven lowest common denominator programming, can win future young minds away from the interactive, decentralized, content-rich medium of the Internet. If TV was a stock, I'd short it all the way.

Living in a Dream World

"Nothing is worse in times of danger than to live in a dream world" wrote the great French sociologist Jacques Ellul in his book *Propaganda*. Television is a dream world, created by a highly competitive industry (in which I have worked on the network and the production sides, and for which I have raised millions of dollars in investment capital). Programs in television are designed to keep you in your seat. Next time you look at your TV, stop and think, "What does this box want from me?" Behind the box are advertisers, network executives, and industry shareholders who in their own ways influence which programs are presented to keep you in your seat. But TV is not interactive. What it tends towards, ultimately, is dependence, to keep you coming back, to love what you see enough to tell friends—so they can depend in the box too. And over time, an audience dependent on television will have minds shaped by television, accepting the propaganda that the only choices of political perspective are the left or right views presented on television.

As the television industry has undergone competition over the years, and as the efficiencies that competition produces have hardened into certain best practices, you see the result in the kind of programming that persists on television. What images hold the attention of a highly diverse American audience? If popular programming is an accurate gauge, an efficient TV industry means things like immodest women and sexual situations. Men are suckers for immodest women.

This is where we see how television perpetuates a dream world. To be successful, it must support certain interpretations of reality that conform to its inherent structure as a visual medium and its business model as non-interactive and advertiser-driven. If efficient television programming must constantly present women in sexual ways to keep the men watching and keep the advertisers writing the checks, what must television do to the women who watch? How are they to accept television's profit motive that elevates images of the female exterior over her invisible interior? How about redefining this shift of values to the woman's exterior as *sexual liberation*? Girl, use what you got to get what you want! Why live under the narrow constraints of conservative values?! Is this not propaganda we see? What if women viewers were to wake up and see their gender as being turned into sexual objects through television? Would they keep watching? Would the men in their lives?

Television has the ability to create a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy by delivering programming that consistently asserts an alternative to the traditional narrative of women as something *much more than sexual objects to titillate men*. Creating this sensibility in our culture naturally supports TV's business model with maximum efficiency. If you look back through history and trace the changing worldview in America away from a more traditional view of women, you can see that it coincides with the rise of television.

The dream world of television has become the dream world of our political minds. The longer we watch and accept the interpretation of events it pushes at us, the more likely we are to accept the left vs. right narrative. This narrative, like that of the redefined value of femininity, is a redefinition of proven tradition. The left-right perspective has some value, but does it represent history or present day America? Or its predominance in mass media also a form of propaganda, a dream world in which we have let ours be confined? Think about it. The left-right perspective serves advertisers by keeping viewers passive while feeling active. This narrative asserts there are two big enemy combatants—the Democrats and the Republicans—and each person is pitted in the middle of the battlefield. One you accept this narrative, it is natural to tune in for reports from the front lines every night at 6pm and again at 11pm. After all, one must know if the enemy is making key advances against your side's position.

And who are these advertisers anyway? Are they not also the large companies who write the biggest checks to the lobbyists to get favorable language or even earmarks inserted into federal legislation to help favor their businesses? To understand Washington's old political media culture, one must understand at the center of it all, is money. Like television, Washington runs on OPM (other people's money). The viewers do not control television directly, but advertisers depend upon the viewers' passive reliance on television. The voters do not control Washington directly, but big donors and the political parties depend upon the voters' passive reliance on Washington. This makes the entire political media complex something of a dream world.

Stop and think about that as you work hard for your paycheck. For those of us who have lived and worked in the DC for long enough to see clearly how Washington works, there is no doubt that taxpayer money is wasted on inefficient government at every turn. What is less clear to some, but is clear to us whose livelihoods depend on following Washington's daily operations, is the way Washington diverts taxpayer money to favor special interest groups through the lobbying process. Thus, the political media complex, like television, depends upon the voters and viewers accepting their propaganda dream world. The moment the audience stops playing along on its terms, the complex cannot be successful. It needs OPM. Vicious.

The Internet has challenged the dream world. We can now see the profiteers of the left-right political narrative in plain sight. The two-party system, incumbent politicians, political marketing firms, the pundit class, and lobbyists have each benefited from an American electorate that primarily viewed itself as either on the left or on the right. But that is coming to an end. This supposed conflict that motivated one to spend one's time and money to beat back the dark forces of the enemy is being recast. This is the story of the entire Boomer generation. To be fair, taking an *us vs. them* stance is an easy thing to do when the main battle of the culture war was so primal, with the battle being cast as either over a woman's right to choose or over the sanctity of life in the womb. The implications? An electorate distracted from seeing the unabated growth of government, as one party then the other convinced us that more government programs were needed to thwart the activities of the other party.

New Battleground: Grassroots vs. Incumbent Monopoly

So here we are, with a new grassroots movement that has used the Internet to start to make sense of things on our own, quite apart from the controls of the left-right narrative. These are game-changing developments, or at least they could be. But as we look at 2010 and the difference the grassroots movement could make, there is a simple metric that will tell us if Washington is coming back in line with the consent of the governed. That is, of course, the 92% incumbency rate.

It will take a dose of humility to change the incumbent monopoly that runs Congress. When I talk to people who have been in the political game for a long time, often I hear things like, "People hate Congress, but not their congressman." Such a statement shows that the American people have been buying what Washington has been selling for so long that the insiders assume this will not change. The skeptics may prove to be right. If this year's elections are going to bring about lasting change for the better (if you believe, as I do, citizen-driven government is better for America than donor-driven government), it is not enough to admit collectively that America should stop sending the same incumbents back to Washington. Individual voters must admit to being *wrong personally*. We must admit that in our previous votes, we have accepted the dream world that favors the monopoly of incumbency.

This leads us to THE question of the 2010 elections, and the world is watching us. Will individual voters admit that we should be the drivers of our democracy? Or, will we let the current administration's overreaching government continue down the path towards socialism? To make the right choice—to choose going up over going down—we must collectively transcend the left-right narrative that has been carefully pushed upon us to keep us passive and dependent. That means that from now until the 2010 elections, we must commit to doing the hard investigative work that the Internet now enables us to do about each candidate before us?

For the American people to do what is right in 2010—to take ownership of our Constitutional responsibility by taking the driver's seat in American politics—we must first admit that we have not done what is right up to now. It is that simple. And as is always the case with repentance, here we see the brightest silver lining emerge before us. The grassroots movement is filled with people who have chosen to take ownership of our democracy. That is what these Tea Party events are really all about. It is about saying

together, “Washington is wrong because I have been wrong and we the people have been wrong. But no more.”

Now, we must take the next step and *own the narrative*. That means collecting our own data, listening to multiple perspectives on the issues, questioning our own assumptions, mistrusting (without entirely dismissing) the easy left- right constructions of mainstream media, and developing sound conclusions that satisfy the conscience and yet leave room for new data coming in later. Is this not what the blogosphere enables us to do, from the grassroots up? By communicating together across ideological lines, we can weave the social fabric of a sustainable, representative, distributed form of democracy that, if we act wisely, may eventually lead us to America’s best days. Now that is hope for change I can believe in!

So where are we now, and what do we need to carry the day? The narratives that have emerged in the grassroots are still rather diverse. I see an urgent need for professional journalists to serve the citizens and our government by adding still more scrutiny to these grassroots narratives, and also by taking these narratives forward to evaluate Washington’s operations. This is where new media outlets like the Daily Caller and the HuffingtonPost can help change the game from the grassroots up, if the consumers chose to set aside the left-right constraints. Effective investigative reporting on the incumbent monopoly is critical to carrying the day. Too many fears and emotions in the mix, and the grassroots will lose its credibility with the mainstream of Americans who are also ready to move away from the incumbent monopoly and the left-right narrative but need to be shown where to land instead.

In Search of a New Narrative

Along this line, I have been doing my own research for many years into the long-term implications of our changing political media environment. One thing that has surprised me in my direct and indirect research is where people land when they move beyond the left-right game. One place where people land is outrage, expressed in deep voter dissatisfaction and even flat out mistrust of Washington. The data has been coming in for many years on [the expansion of the Internet and the blogosphere as primary sources of political information](#), [broad concerns about media bias and inaccuracy](#), [majority popular opinion that the Iraq War was a mistake](#), [detailed reports of Wall Street’s multi-billion dollar lobbying campaign of both parties for financial deregulation that ultimately lead to our present economic crisis](#), [a growing global warming scandal](#), and [major tax increases in health care reform legislation](#), to name some of the major evidences of voter mistrust of Washington.

This outrage has led people to play *follow the money* and make explicit connections between money and power in Washington. Here a new narrative emerges: the incumbent monopoly—the permanent interests that primarily shape Washington—have been shielded from thoroughgoing public scrutiny as voters have accepted the left-right narrative and become distracted from the machinations of those in power. These permanent interests constitute the *UP* in the new narrative, and the taxpayers are the primary *DOWN*. In this new narrative, things become very clear. The consent of the American people (down) has been declared the primarily authority in American government by our founders, but today the permanent interests (up) are using our money to fund their special projects. This new narrative simply says, Enough!

Another new narrative is a blended, multi-perspective approach. This is the one I have embraced. To use E.J. Dionne’s construction from his book *Souled Out*, liberalism at its core is about overturning unjust social structures. Well, can we own up together and say the machine of Washington is explicitly unjust, according to the very first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. We need to come together as liberals and overturn this thing. Russell Kirk’s *The Conservative Mind* casts conservatism not as ideology, but as recognition of certain enduring structures such as family, tradition, and limited government as complementing one another when in the right balance. Can we all come together as conservatives and say this thing is out of balance, and we the people need to fix it. Murray Rothbard’s *Libertarian Manifesto* and the many Austrian school economists have recognized the role of the free markets as far superior to produce human flourishing than today’s government intervention, fiscal irresponsibility, and ineffective national security. Can we come together as libertarians and reconfigure this thing? I say, Yes, we can. Absolutely.

Another new narrative beyond the left-right where people have landed is the global conspiracy narrative. That is, they are wondering whether some sort of globalist conspiracy lies behind today’s political developments, where key leaders from both parties are secretly working together to usher American into dependence on a global socialist government whose core principles run counter to the Democratic ideals we

treasure. One obvious indicator of the level of popular awareness about such a conspiracy is the popularity of Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*. Another indicator is the volume, variety, and sophistication of [historical content](#) and [pop culture material](#) on the New World Order, the Illuminati, and all manner of related topics.

As an exercise on the size of this audience, do some research on the production quality of videos and the number of page views at YouTube and Google Video for content spanning subjects like the creation of the Federal Reserve, the Constitutionality of the income tax, FEMA death camps, poisoned vaccines, 9/11 as an inside job, even the hidden messages of Michael Jackson's Beat It and much of Jay-Z's music. The list goes on and on. There are some well-produced videos out there like [Zeitgeist](#), [What Lies in Plain Sight](#), [Freedom to Fascism](#), and others that would never see the light of day before the Internet, but now are in broad circulation. All this is in addition to the popular DaVinci Code and Angels & Demons movies based on Dan Brown's books.

Perception is reality in Washington. People act based on what they perceive. There is simply no way to measure how much the global conspiracy narrative is influencing the minds of American today, but I have learned directly that it is no small part of the grassroots landscape. So it must be reckoned with head on if we are to reconfigure America to reflect the consent of the governed.

In fact, I'd like to offer my own perspective on all this, based on my research on both the conspiracy narrative itself and on the nature of the shift to an Internet-based political culture in America. Let's begin by stating the obvious. The grip of the conspiracy narrative is entirely understandable when you consider that Lord Acton's famous aphorism that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Washington is overgrown and its machinations are opaque to most citizens. That makes people in power very susceptible to temptation to exploit their power for global control, even going so far as using taxpayer money to further their own ends over against the taxpayers themselves.

Let's take another big step back here and say that there are clear cognitive reasons why the conspiracy narrative is so gripping. Obviously, an unsolved mystery of global and historic proportions will appeal to any curious mind. But for those minds in America today who are leaving television for the Internet as a main source of information are leaving behind that central programming function that makes television work. But we do not leave the function behind in our minds. Nature abhors a vacuum, and our minds are no different. The Internet lacks this central decision-making function. Any mind that moves from television to the Internet for political information cannot simply turn off TV's natural training. The mind will start looking to a central decision-making function to understand the information streaming in if it was used to having that function before going online for political data. Conspiracy theories fill the vacuum quite nicely.

(Note: For those who have benefited from Friedrich Hayek's contributions to economic studies, check out his master work on psychology, [The Sensory Order](#), to see how important it is to [connect human cognition with our political and economic perspectives](#), especially as we make the transition from centralized economics to something more decentralized and sustainable.)

Hope for Change: Citizen-Driven Government

Understanding the grassroots movement in America today requires that one take into account the role of the Internet and its inherent decentralized structure, and what it means for a group of people to "awaken" by leaving a centralized medium for a decentralized one. Compare the Internet to the highly centralized mass media, and then compare the grassroots movement to Washington's highly centralized incumbent monopoly system. I think this helps explain why there is such intensity among many in the grassroots about conspiracies of all types controlling Washington and the world. It is in some measure a cognitive response of the Internet as a *medium* to television as a *medium*.

If the grassroots movement is going to bring a form of reconfiguration and even reformation to Washington by putting the American people into the driver's seat of politics, where special interests and party politics currently are seated, the people in the grassroots will need to look closely at this cognitive predisposition. This is precisely why I favor a pluralistic perspective in place of the left-right view, even though I think the conspiracy narrative needs to be carefully considered on its own merits. We must go further into the investigative process than we have gone—further than most of us can go on our own. We must move out of our own minds and look at the objective facts honestly. The means we accept the inconvenient truth that these conspiracy theories are not all wrong and cannot be dismissed out of hand, nor are they all right and worthy of being the new narrative after we transcend the left-right one.

This is why I am so thrilled about the Daily Caller's launch. We the people need the outside help of proven, unbiased journalists who are willing to take the claims of the grassroots seriously and examine Washington's operations against those claims of conspiracy. We need to do this with plurality and scrutiny because we need great sophistication and diverse data here. But there should be a sense of urgency. When we hear stories of militias armed with tanks that are ready to counteract the imposition of martial law, we should not simply dismiss the entire grassroots movement by accepting the common television narrative that calls the grassroots movement "the far right." Remember, television culture must protect itself, and that means shoe-horning events into the left-right narrative as much as possible. Those who run television and run Washington have some 'splaining to do, and it needs to take place in public for all watching eyes to see.

For my part, I can tell you that I have met numerous grassroots folks, and while many are committed to their second amendment rights, I have yet to meet a militiaman (as best I can tell). So let's chill on this point. And let's demand we shed the light of day on all this. We need good journalists to lead the charge to look closely at the many ways Washington is compromised, if not corrupted, by money at the expense of the American people. We need to follow the money. We also need good journalists to fact check people like Alex Jones who has produced unparalleled information on these developments, but who has also fed the establishment of the conspiracy narrative rather than something more sustainable and positive in the minds of Americans. Let us not forget that he may be acting patriotically, but he has also benefited financially from the adoption of the conspiracy narrative. All this needs the light of day, and I call on the Daily Caller to make it its mission to help we the people transcend the left-right narrative and then land in the right place as a new narrative.

If the journalists do not take on this key role, I see any number of unfortunate scenarios unfolding. The importance of the grassroots movement to reconfigure America around the consent of the governed could be overlooked by mainstream Americans, at great detriment to the future of mainstream Americans and their children. Also, those who accept the conspiracy narrative could feel suppressed because too few journalists give their case the light of day. And if the conspiracy narrative is true in some form, but not in the more dramatic and comprehensive form portrayed by Alex Jones and others, then these unjust social structures will persist to some unknown end state that is not Liberty or Freedom. Indeed, if one takes away the sensational Masonic side of conspiracy theories and simply looks at the way money runs Washington—from the Federal reserve to federal contracting to lobbying—one would see that many private agendas (i.e., conspiracies) have more pull in Washington than do the taxpayers. At that level, what's the difference between what we have today and the conspiracy theories circulating? Haven't we already given away too much of our precious Liberty?

The beauty and necessity of good reporting is that it can reveal where the grassroots movement's fears of conspiracy running Washington are substantiated and where they are unfounded. Either way, investigating the truth can greatly ease the tension in the grassroots and thus preserve a positive reconfiguration of American government around the consent of the governed. I suspect we will at least find clear evidence of a softer conspiracy, where private agendas are running Washington in surprisingly unconstitutional ways through private money. This will be largely our fault for neglecting our unique place at the head and not the tail of our democracy. When we accept this, we can then see the impetus for a grassroots resurgence of new leaders to enter the fray and restore the role of the Constitution, the individual conscience, and self-evident truth as the source of our common ground as Americans.

Wouldn't that sort of grassroots reconfiguration be better for America than the status quo? Wasn't that what the American people wanted when we elected Barack Obama last year? Despite the way he has strayed from his grass roots, don't we want him to get back to his promises for change we can believe in? It is not too late, Mr. President, to rise up and restore citizen-driven government to its rightful place by replacing donor-driven government. Your agenda is hitting a brick wall. Why not unsubscribe from your wealth redistribution program and embrace this sort of Alinsky-like radical revolution toward social justice? Yes, you can.

The Choice: Take A Stand or Take What's Coming from the Top Down

These are momentous times for all Americans. For my part, I have taken my own research forward one step into action, at the request of many people I respect and admire. Thus, I have helped launch a grassroots political campaign to introduce America to [Jim Trautz in his run for Congress in Virginia's 10th District](#). I will have more details on that shortly, including a 2010 Manifesto around which all grassroots

candidates and campaigns can come together, so that we take our duty seriously to drive American democracy. The incumbent monopoly is well organized and it will not simply stand down on its own. But I believe American history's past and future favor a present change away from the incumbent monopoly. Congress can be much more representative of the American grassroots, encompassing all ideologies, ethnicities, and orientations that agree to work out solutions that best position America for the flourishing of future generations.

I do not believe for a second that the best thinking on our complex issues has to come from the culture of Washington today. You should not believe that either. The incumbency of propaganda is a dead end. I am certain that better ideas in Washington will come from a growing body of grassroots candidates committed to the Constitution, utilizing Web2.0 technology to bring the citizens close into the process, and replacing the left-right narrative of political events with a more scrutinizing diversity of perspectives on the issues. Isn't this self-evident? So why don't we do it?!

All this begins not with new candidates, but with the American people admitting individually and collectively that we have been wrong to outsource our political perspective to those who have given us the left-right narrative. If insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result, we are insane to complain about Washington and expect it to change on its own. We must start with changing ourselves.

The Constitution is clear. If we want Washington to change for the better, the burden is on us. The bad news is that our 92% incumbent re-election rating tells us we have been rather insane to date. The good news is that this metric also tells us precisely where we must begin to change Washington into something more just and representative. If we can dramatically reverse the incumbent monopoly in Washington, there is every reason to think that the 2010 elections will be a watershed year, where we move America into an interactive era that we can hand off to future generations with great pleasure. The centralized, televised model of American politics is non-transferrable to those future minds that will come of age with the Internet for political engagement. Let us turn the page on the left-right narrative of the old political media culture.

If we want to reconfigure America from the grassroots up, we must start right now and critically evaluate every incumbent and their voting records. We must contrast their public speeches and communication with constituents against the business objectives of their top donors. We must look at their voting records and follow the money. The Internet has numerous tools to help with this effort, including [Open Secrets](#), [Open Congress](#), [Earmark Watch](#), [CQ Moneyline](#), and [Follow the Money](#). As we research, we must regularly ask the simple questions: Does the data I have collected say that this incumbent represents my interest or that of his or her donors? Can I conscientiously vote to send this incumbent back to Washington again? Is there a grassroots candidate who has been properly vetted and is worthy of consideration as an alternative?

The crossroads is before us. The time for blaming the left or the right in Washington is past. It is now time to own up to our responsibility and seize this opportunity to scrutinize every incumbent. We may not be able to entirely reverse course in one election, but we can send a clear message in 2010 that the American people are the drivers of American democracy, not the political parties or the special interests that fund Washington and benefit from the left-right narrative. There is no shortcut to realizing those essentials that the grassroots so desperately wants for us and our children: adequate security in a post-9/11 world, job creation through free market expansion, sustainable health care reform, and a balanced federal budget. We will not get them if shackle our minds to the left-right narrative. But we may get these things sooner than we think if we the people start acting like we the people. The choice is ours.