

The United States is at a moment of existential crisis as a result of massive and simultaneous failures of a broad range of public and private systems.

The number and scope of these failures – in our politics, in the quality of governance, in our public and private education systems, in the administration of justice, in the performance and values of our businesses and the media -- requires urgent, high-level, high-priority, and comprehensive efforts to address this crisis.

Systems failures may be the result of good systems poorly managed, of flawed systems, or of flawed priorities. In the worst case, the failures are the result of all three. That is the case in America today.

These concerns are real, they are relevant, and they require full and focused attention and leadership for a nation in desperate need of repair.

There will always be Donald Trumps. There is great reason, however, to be concerned about the crowds he drew, the votes he got, the cheers he received. There is reason to be concerned that we who have held ourselves out to the world as (and have been looked to as) a model of constitutional democracy find ourselves in a position in which voters will have no other option but to choose between two of the most disliked candidates ever to seek the presidency.

Many Americans are frustrated and angry. Not all of that frustration and anger is irrational. Some is the result of citizens being uninformed or misinformed. Some is the result of citizens being accurately informed and disquieted by what they know.

Here are some of the areas in which the American system(s) have failed and in which we must work to restore America's unique standing as a model of constitutional democracy. Each of them requires a fresh-start approach, setting aside political and ideological biases to forge consensus on goals and a

commitment to reform.

Education. Some will argue that it is a lack of funding that has driven the humanities – the ability to think critically, to assess disinterestedly – from the curriculum of most high schools and universities. Some will argue that it is teachers' organizations that focus on teacher benefits and tenure protection rather than student learning. Some will argue that too great a focus on 'vocational education' (emphasis on job skills) as opposed to citizenship preparation is the greater problem. For whatever reason, or combination of reasons, our elections and political discourse reveal an electorate weak in both knowledge and the ability to evaluate information. When football coaches make millions and students are graduated with inadequate educations, huge debts, and degrees that provide too little benefit, there are a host of problems that need to be addressed honestly.

The Media. The Founders guaranteed freedom of the press not to ensure that their friends who owned newspapers could accumulate wealth but because they believed it was important that the public be well informed, which required protecting publishers against recrimination. The Zenger case was the basis for that decision and *New York Times v Sullivan* showed how far the courts were willing to go to protect press freedom. This election should make us wonder why. In every sense – news coverage, providing free and often uncritical exposure to an extreme candidate (in Les Moonves' explanation: it's good for CBS), in the management of primary election debates – American journalism has been complicit in the success of the Trump candidacy. In addition, to anybody knowledgeable about politics and governance, there has been an obvious and appalling lack of understanding of these systems demonstrated by reporters from even the most prestigious journalism outlets.

The Election System. Whether it's the ability of the wealthy to have disproportionate ability to influence political campaigns, the party primary system that gives the same kind of disproportionate influence over candidacies to the most partisan and ideological parts of the electorate, the ability of partisans to draw congressional district boundaries, we have adopted election systems that reward bluster, hard-line ideology and incivility and punish merit, thoughtfulness, collaboration, good judgment and calm temperament.

Governance. People who express anger, frustration, or simply distrust about government have ample reason to feel as they do.

The Internal Revenue Service, the Veterans Administration, the intelligence and security agencies – it's a very long list – give citizens at all levels of government ample reason to believe their government is incompetent, overreaches, and is untruthful. There is fire beneath this smoke of discontent and distrust.

Business. Much of corporate America has built a wall between itself and the public, buying into concepts of maximizing shareholder return, short-term profit-taking, excessive management compensation, hard-to-navigate consumer-to-corporate communication, etc. Belief in the virtues of capitalism is fading not because of the value of socialism but because of the failures of capitalism, a system being damaged by its own practitioners.

You may agree with some of this and disagree with some, but I believe it's difficult to disagree with the conclusion that America is suffering from a catastrophic and simultaneous failure of multiple systems that together undermine citizen support for the status quo.

American government has been unique – a republic in governance but a democracy in selecting its leaders; a democracy in aspiration but a democracy that is mediated and constrained. That is the system which enabled us to move forward whether with Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt, Reagan, or Obama in the White House, and with Federalists, Whigs, Democrats or Republicans ascendant in the country and in Congress. It has been a system of flexibility, opportunity, and limits. It is in danger and we cannot pass the buck.