

The Nehemiah Proposals

[Paper No. 10 of the *Nehemiah Papers*]

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The ten Nehemiah Proposals presented in this paper are based upon the fifteen Postulates presented in Paper No. 9. Please remember that the Nehemiah Postulates include: America is heading for a life-changing decline; the Five Realms of Power are out of balance in America; American capitalism incorrectly dominates American democracy; and the impending decline can be averted through democratic revisions of our laws, placing service as a currency to balance the power of money, and by implementing Capitalism21.

Concerning Governance and Democracy:

Proposal #1: Strict term limits: A qualified American candidate should be eligible for only ONE term of office in one position, in succession. For example, after a two-year term, a U.S. Representative can immediately run for a seat in the U.S. Senate, or for other Federal, State, and local offices, but not for the House of Representatives until he or she has been replaced in that position for at least two years. New, incoming elected officials are usually quite competent people, so rest assured that effective representative governance would continue and actually thrive with more people involved. And the self-serving influence of PACs (Political Action Committees) and lobbyists will be better controlled and better exposed to the people. Career politicians (those who make a career out of being elected) are experienced in fund-raising and election campaigns having an incumbent's advantage. Stop them now.

Note 1: U.S. Presidents are currently allowed to have only two terms of office, without reference to being sequential or not. If the one-term limit is applied also to the Presidency, a qualified American candidate could be President for even three or more times, but not in sequence. Considering the consequences of the second terms of former Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, and Richard Nixon, prohibition of sequential terms for Presidents seems like a rather good idea.

Note 2: In the political conventions of the Democratic party, the "superdelegates" are basically high-level politicians who represent the "establishment" and perhaps the worst (and the best, if there is any) of political machines in America. The vast majority of Americans do not have any influence on how the parties conduct their business, but we should be watchful and wary.

Concerning Economics and Capitalism:

Proposal #2: Attack, reduce, and virtually eliminate government waste and corruption: Earmarks and pork-barrel appropriations must be eliminated. Subsidies for favored groups must be rigorously reexamined with open disclosures to eliminate further favors for those already affluent. Close examination and monitoring could identify corruption that should be exposed and prosecuted. New laws and enforcement of existing laws must be put into practice.

Entitlements must be reevaluated, especially those going into the hands of the affluent. Someone previously favored by one or more former laws (enacted by lawmakers under the influence of various sources of money) is not entitled to benefits while other income and assets are substantial. Enough is enough. Entitlement payments can destroy the national economy while placing much money into the hands of those who hardly need it. Progressive reduction of such benefits also applies to those who have enough for a rather comfortable living. In all cases, entitlements must be reexamined and appropriated with care, with reinstatement of prior benefits when one's quality of life has declined to moderate levels.

One idea is that the entitlements currently going to affluent people could be stopped and saved in an account for later distribution IF the person or spouse ever drops to a lower middle-class lifestyle. This is similar to paying for an insurance policy against poverty during life, except it is not paid out upon the person's death. Note: If it is not legal to restrain entitlements based on financial situations, then alter the tax codes to re-claim that entitlement money back to the government that made the payments.

Let's begin at the top. This control of entitlements should apply first and foremost to the past Presidents and Vice Presidents who could collect their entitlements if and when their enormous incomes from speaking engagements, consultancies, donor support, *etc.* drop below a half-million dollars per year. The same should apply to all legislators. Entitlements should go to those whose well-being depends on that income, not to people who are feathering their affluent nests.

Likewise, wasteful spending toward ineffective social welfare programs must also be reexamined and stopped where appropriate, as discussed in Proposal #7.

Proposal #3: Modernize American economics with appropriate controls on massive wealth. In Capitalism for the 21st Century (Capitalism21), very wealthy individuals, corporations, and organizations are encouraged to financially sponsor acceptable projects to assist sub-lower class people and neighborhoods to rise to levels where fairness for opportunity is more clearly evident. Recognition of the people and businesses that provide this financial assistance should be highlighted. In recompense, laws could allow massive deductions on income tax returns to offset what would otherwise be very high additional taxes on windfall profits, superstar incomes, and astronomical wealth never intended as a product of capitalism. The wealthy would essentially have the choice to have a say in where and how a significant portion of their vast income is spent, or to turn that money over to the U.S. Government (via tax legislation) for use in corresponding service efforts. One immediate objective could include the accomplishment of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. Always remember that the focus is to lift people from the sub-lower true poverty classes in America or overseas. In assisting the very needy, we must also solve serious problems as outlined in Proposals #6 and #7.

Concerning Religion and Faiths:

Preparatory note: America and the World are again faced with conditions in which the one true God has apparently selected two or more different societies as the chosen people at the same time. At least that is what fundamentalist Christians and fundamentalist Muslims would have us believe, although each would have us believe only their half of the condition. Other religions also have fervent believers. Even within religions there are serious differences that consume enormous amounts of time, efforts, resources, and sometimes blood. The resultant power struggles within and between the religious faiths contribute to the causes of the decline of nations.

Proposal # 4: Religious tolerance: If God is on your side, do not tell anyone; prove it silently by your humane actions. This cannot be made into a law in America. There is no harm in saying something like “God bless you” or “Allah be with you” to most other Americans. But overseas in some societies, zealot Christianity does not gain friends. Instead, this proposal is a statement to encourage Americans to do more and preach less. However, for learning and strengthening the core American values of ethical behavior and good deeds, the best locations to visit are generally the various places of worship (and not places of self-gratification). There is a strong connection between this Proposal #4 and Proposal #10.

Proposal # 5: As congregations and as individuals, do more for others through sharing and sacrifice. “Go the extra mile,” and even further so that America earns respect and appreciation. Do more as religious congregations. Separation of church and state does not prohibit one-way non-religious assistance by churches to help the state to accomplish its non-religious objectives of government, such as having adequate school buildings or providing disaster relief (while implementing Proposal #4 above). Make sacrifices as individuals (see Proposals #7 and #8). Make sacrifices as a nation through wise selection of representatives to instruct the American government to make some sacrifices to benefit others. Always be sure that domestic and foreign assistance is what is appropriate and appreciated, not imposed militarily or for our own economic advantage. And do not waste assistance on corrupt people and programs that do not live and align according to the Nehemiah Postulates and Proposals.

Concerning Justice and Law:

Proposal # 6: Massive crack-down on drugs, organized crime, and social vices. Great nations fall from power because internal rot has weakened them, making them vulnerable to outside aggression or economic blackmail. Too much prosperity can lead to tolerance of forces that weaken the moral fiber of the society.

There must be no societal tolerance for recreational (non-medical) use of addictive drugs. The demand must be eliminated. The distribution system must be destroyed. Then the supply will wither and can be stopped.

Likewise, organized crime must be crushed by unyielding and stepped-up enforcement of current or additional laws. Punishments delivered by judges and juries should be severe; forced hard labor in undesirable conditions with simple, health-sustaining food should be seen as a just penalty for all despicable criminal segments of society. Fear of such conditions of incarceration might become a deterrent for some potential criminals. Bad behavior in prison is punished with increased severity. Cooperate or eat only what is sufficient to sustain life.

Lesser social vices of drinking, smoking, and gambling would still be allowed but at heavy monetary prices proportionate to the vice’s destructive effect on health and social welfare. Partakers must comply with watchdog efforts to nip any excesses at the very first signs. One example is the immediate immobilization of any vehicle (using boots or chains or breathalyzers in cars) operated by a person who leaves a bar with an alcohol level above the legal limit. Another is the financial review of frequent gamblers and their family conditions, with required counseling if problems initiate.

Proposal # 7: Family-style “tough love” to be applied to society and welfare programs. To be nice, gentle, and sympathetic to a person in trouble is admirable, but too much tolerance can be easily abused. As it is in the family, so it is also in society. The welfare system must be overhauled and enhanced with far greater vigilance while being understanding. America’s welfare system is under-funded for the supervision needed to stop the over-payment

of benefits. An American form of “contractual welfare” should be developed. The minimum wage rate does not need to rise IF corresponding financial benefits (such as part of health care costs) to both employees and employers are arranged through related legislation. Our society must open the doors to semi-employment of people who have mental or physical difficulties coping with regular life in America. With extremely few exceptions, Americans on welfare between 16 and 70 years of age are able to do something in exchange for social services and monetary support. Physically challenged persons could be great tutors or story readers or assistants in a local school if transportation is made available, thereby working and contributing to justify their monthly support payment. As a guideline, many welfare recipients should be involved in some approved activity for at least the number of hours at minimum wage that would relate to the amount of their welfare check and services. Some of those activities could be job training. This should involve more financial support (not just from taxes, but also from charities) and supervisory labor (see Proposal #9 below) than in the current system while reducing the net amount paid to recipients.

Concerning Love and Caring:

Proposal # 8: Compulsory national service for every man and woman, young and old. This is universal compulsory service. If you live in America or claim American citizenship, you must serve, and not just once.

For adults under the age of thirty, there are two parts: A. Basic military training of four to eight months, and B. A cumulative period of at least two years of service prior to age thirty either 1) in the military (which will have redefined tasks to include building up friendly nations as well as destroying enemies), or 2) in a massively expanded existing or new service program (*e.g.*, Peace Corps and AmeriCorps), or 3) in approved private or non-governmental programs of meaningful service (excluding promotion of specific faiths) defined according to skills needed for building a better America and World.

For those aged thirty to sixty, an additional cumulative thirty months of service (average of one month per year) to be defined by laws, or perhaps a well paid person could make a payment of money equal to thirty months of gross income at the person’s highest earning level.

For those over the age of sixty, appropriate programs to give service would be made available for capable seniors and retirees from a coalition of public and private agencies plus individual initiatives. The “Gray Corps” could accomplish much, especially in America, but also overseas for those who are willing and able.

Reasonable but low wages and core benefits would be provided in relation to the duties of service. Abundant recognition should be given for service rendered.

Proposal # 9: Make “service” an alternative to money as a capitalist “currency” with corresponding power. In addition to service measured as time and effort, there is also service provided by financial resources. People who are very good at making money are to be recognized and rewarded in non-material ways for their provision of money to do the necessary functions of government and society. This is part of the revised economic system called Capitalism²¹ (see Proposal #3 above). For example, “Corporation X” might have a Super Bowl advertisement about its service efforts and include its logo formed by people in colored T-shirts who live in the area being served. Some of the large service projects could improve some of the worst conditions in America’s worst neighborhoods, or tackle environmental protection efforts such as reforestation for a devastated area, or build, equip, and staff educational improvement in a selection of impoverished high schools internationally. Individuals can perform direct services

(as in Proposal #8) or as stock shareholders who vote to instruct publicly traded corporations to undertake humanitarian actions, invest in environmental protection, and place limits on executive salaries.

Proposal #10: Bring order and decency into American society. For some people there is a fine line between correct and incorrect behavior; for others there is a wide gray area between good and bad. And the line or gray area can shift left (liberal or permissive) and right (conservative or intolerant) depending on who or what is involved. Throughout history, when prosperity arrives, permissiveness increases and eventually the whole society confronts decline. Sometimes a society or sub-group can save itself for a while with some self-imposed strictness; more often the decline is very serious or even devastating. Civil liberties are good, but they can be taken so far as to critically weaken even the greatest of nations. When rational limits are being abandoned, society can suffer the “tyranny of freedom.” One example: parental rights should not include the liberty to injure children physically, educationally, emotionally, or in any way which harms the child’s future. A parent on drugs (including alcoholism) should lose rights and face active surveillance, even household monitoring. America must come to grips with its internal decay and impose and enforce reasonable laws. This decay is a major reason for unsafe neighborhoods, substandard learning in schools, excessive need for social services, and much of the cause for unemployment. The same rules also apply to the rich, famous, and powerful who even flaunt their use of drugs and their exemption from full prosecution. A democracy must be able to control its own worst factions. Freedom is not free, and liberty is not absolute. Until America confronts the need for limits on liberty, the nation will further polarize and will fail to be one nation.

Commentary:

You could be thinking that these proposals are idealistic and impossible. Think again.

Proposals #1 (term limits) and #4 (religious tolerance) cost virtually nothing to implement if the population of America decides to adopt them. And the benefits would be substantial.

Proposal #2 (eliminate waste) should save far more government money than it costs to implement and supervise. All the elected officials talk about this. Now is the time to actually accomplish this task.

Proposal #6 (stop drugs and crime) is common sense about immediate and continual help for our fellow Americans. Although it will require significant funding at the start, eventually there will be lower costs, then recovery of the investment, and finally financial dividends to the whole society.

Proposal #7 (tough-love for welfare) might save money in the long run, but actually more money is needed initially for firm and fair implementation of targeted efforts to have every American as gainfully employed as possible.

Proposals #3, #5, #8, #9 and #10 (each with individual commentary below) are related as parts of Capitalism21 economics to help America possibly avoid the impending decline. They are expensive. They are not popular. They are not easy to accomplish. But they are fair. And they will show to the World that America is fair and caring and interested in more than the almighty dollar.

Proposal #3 (tapping the power of massive wealth) is a large part of obtaining sufficient financial resources to accomplish fair Capitalism21 objectives to eliminate extreme poverty and social problems. The important difference proposed is the option for directed funding instead of

turning money over to the government via taxes. Use wealth to provide service (as in Proposal #9).

Proposal #5 (sacrifice for others) is a war cry, a call for helping others. But it has no legislative teeth, no programs, and no evident expenses. But if accepted by the American people, it can move mountains for accomplishing Proposals #8 and #9 and perhaps others yet to appear.

Proposal #8 (compulsory national service) will be expensive to implement, but the national gains are numerous:

A. Increased employment. National service might be paid as low, non-taxable income, but it will put millions of Americans to work in important jobs and keep them able to make purchases that help make our economy strong.

B. Strengthened national security: Every able-bodied young man and woman will have military basic training. Some will enlist in the “armed services” and be better paid when on duty in conflict areas. Many others will discover that regular (peace-time) military service will provide additional career training and travel opportunities, especially on “peace services” related to road and building construction, education, communications, medical corps, and advanced technologies.

C. Improved American presence abroad: The much-expanded Peace Corps will train and employ teachers, community development leaders, and medical staff to go into cooperating impoverished societies, but with stronger goals and more resources for sustainable local impact than is currently possible. Coupled with similar service-people from the other affluent nations, there could be literally millions of educated and motivated caring people who seek to bring the sub-lower-class people up to at least minimal decency in day-to-day living.

D. Qualified people for homeland improvement: At whatever age, the participants in national service will be available to correct the sub-lower-class problems inside of America. This will include compulsory time by some of America’s greatest minds and stars and business executives who will help create jobs and solve problems. To serve honorably in America’s national services should become a highlight in everyone’s eyes.

Proposal #9 (service as an alternative to money) is a cornerstone of the proposals. It says that people who have abundant money and assets are asked to diminish their rate of capital accumulation and even significantly reduce their assets until such time that the sub-lower-class has been elevated to at least minimal levels worldwide. This is a key part of Capitalism21. Voluntary participation in this alternative is highly unlikely. Compulsory participation comes in two types: A) taxes that designate the U.S. Government as the agent responsible for spending the funds for the needed efforts, or B) contributions appropriately acknowledged on tax forms for acceptable activities chosen by the contributor, even with his or her personal direction regarding the application of the funds. Use the stick to prod, or the carrot to entice, or some of both if needed.

Proposal #10 (order and decency) will be argued for years and fought in countless courtrooms. I have intentionally not been specific. If America is unwilling to tackle the issues of the other nine proposals, number ten will be of little consequence. Order and decency will not occur if America cannot implement plans for the control of money over our democracy, term limits, ending government waste, stopping crime, appropriate welfare, restrictions on runaway wealth, national service by everyone, and massive international assistance. But if America can bring itself to address the first nine proposals, then the natural collateral outcomes will include the insistence that American children attend schools where teachers are respected, the police are

empowered to enforce laws in all neighborhoods, and freedom of speech and the right to bear arms are protected but not exaggerated beyond the norms of rational civilized society.

None of this will be easy to accomplish. But it will be worth every bit of effort!

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Finally, just in case you missed something, here are four eye openers.

First, this is not an attempt to destroy capitalism; it is an attempt to bring capitalism under control in a way that strengthens America for the benefit of rich and poor alike. Throughout America's history, those with wealth have always been advantaged by the game rules of capitalism. Controls have been implemented (and some removed) during past centuries, but now is the time for a significant additional revision that is tentatively called "Capitalism21."

Second, our scope is the entire World. America can never live alone in this modern globalized World. We must have as many friends as possible. We cannot buy them. We must earn their friendship. Then they will assist us in the quest for stability that can avert the impending decline of America and other places. With the implementation of the ten Proposals, we will set a good example. Of course we should expect other affluent nations to do similar good things (and many of them are already ahead of us on some of these issues). And affluent individuals in the developing nations should also participate.

Third, we must be firm with those who are unfair to us or to their own people. I am thinking of the affluent individuals in the developing countries who have historically been unfair to their own people. Some will change, some others we can ignore, and some others we can pressure, but never should we allow our assistance to be misused by corrupt persons in needy societies. America is to regain its position of being a true champion for justice. Capitalism21 is NOT a blind give-away program. Recipients of assistance are not required to give up their rights of independence or cultural heritages, but universal aspects of decency and order and fairness must be incorporated and clearly evident in every culture assisted. Later essays will deal with some actual and probable situations. Expect surprises.

Fourth, when viewed on a worldwide basis, over seventy percent of Americans are in the "very affluent" category. Therefore, almost everyone should expect to pay something for the accomplishment of the ten Nehemiah Proposals. After all, we Americans (and people in other affluent situations) have been living quite well for decades while other human beings cope with starvation, illiteracy, poor health, *etc.* Our expenditures and efforts will be a small price compared to having a massive decline in American living.

Please remember that I am one of you.

I. M. Nehemiah
Your neighbor