

No One is Minding the Store in Our Two-Party System

Gordon Anderson
December 1, 2014



Many people do not like President Obama's executive actions on immigration, but in his November 20 speech, he stated that if Congress did not like his solution they could pass their own bill for his signature. The failure of Congress to pass an immigration bill reflects a larger problem in the U.S. political system: our current two-party system.

Political parties, almost by definition, do not serve the nation. Rather, they serve the interests of their financial contributors, who do not contribute to the nation, but seek to get something for themselves from the government.

With our current two-party system, no one is minding the store. The current U.S. Government can be compared to a Wal-Mart in which people bribe a security guard to get in the store, and, once they do, take what they want from the shelves without paying at the cash register. Our elected representatives are those security guards, and, instead of representing the people, they have become operatives of political parties.



Gordon Anderson

American political parties are coalitions of economic interests justifying themselves through ideological rhetoric. They have become the factions that so worried the U.S. Founders, particularly James Madison:

By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.
– James Madison, *The Federalist 10*

U.S. government policies today are determined primarily by political parties, not by citizens. As much as possible, political parties place party loyalists on the ballot as candidates. Once elected, party contributors prepare legislation and hire lobbyists to help these loyalists shepherd it through.

What politicians call “across the aisle” legislation is generally a bill that combines multiple interests (“pork”) that gives financial contributors of each party an agreed-upon benefit at the expense of taxpaying citizens. When there is gridlock, it is often because one party wants to use the government to get something for itself at the expense of the other party. Immigration reform is one such issue.

Lobbying can bring a 1,000-fold return

Lobbying pays very well. There is hardly a business more lucrative than hijacking an unchecked government. Corporations listed in a Sunlight Foundation Study got nearly \$1,000 in return for each dollar spent on lobbying. This report did not list the rewards reaped by labor unions and government agencies that essentially do the same thing: lobby for citizen tax dollars to fund jobs and positions of power. Because agencies are lobbied by interest groups asking for money or a bureaucracy to correct some perceived social ill, today there are often many overlapping agencies tasked to perform similar and even contradictory tasks. These agencies, whether needed or not, tend to get annual cost-of-living increases.

What can immigration reform do for my party?

Rarely is party purpose the same as national purpose. When it is, it is usually only incidental. Immigrants, for example, have traditionally served Democrats' interests as potential Democratic voters. Democrats usually design legislation that will bring them votes from immigrants in exchange for items from the public purse. Illegal immigrants have served Republican business interests as cheap laborers, while remaining illegal and not receiving any social support that spends tax dollars. Immigration policy is not an issue on which parties can agree, because party interests are mutually exclusive; therefore there is gridlock. With this paralysis, President Obama, as did his predecessors, considered himself justified to

act, and, as much as possible, in a unilateral way that served his party's interests at the expense of both Republican Party interests and principled national policy.



U.S. Border Patrol agents load illegal immigrants onto a van near the Rio Grande in Texas.

Parties control all branches of government

It is not just Congress that is controlled by the political parties. U.S. Supreme Court nominations, appointments of agency heads like the recently-appointed Ebola Czar or the high-tech team that fixed the Obamacare website, and foreign assignments like nation-building in Iraq under George W. Bush, go to party loyalists as a reward rather than to people with the best skills to perform the task. When these projects fail or require an unnecessary learning curve, as is generally the case with inexperienced people in charge, it is easy for party loyalists to procure additional funding at taxpayer expense — thus causing ineffectiveness, inefficiency and political division.

The federal income tax opened the candy store

Since the U.S. was founded, there have been attempts to use government for non-public purposes. The Post Office offered some of the earliest opportunities for cronyism, as politicians could often get postal jobs for their relatives. Certain railroads received federal lands and grants that made some railroad barons wealthy and bankrupted others. Then, in the late 19th century, people who had been attorneys for railroads began assuming positions as Supreme Court Justices. They provided novel interpretations of the U.S. Constitution like “corporations are persons,” with legal rights like citizens. Large banks altered the system more profoundly as they pushed legislation creating the Federal Reserve and the passage of the 16th Amendment. This enabled a consortium of 15 private banks to control the money supply and earn interest on every dollar the “Fed” printed and loaned.

The 16th Amendment was needed to guarantee there would be enough money for the government to repay loans. That opened a candy store. In 1917, the U.S. government budget exceeded all payments made from the founding up to 1917, including Civil War expenses. First, states began lobbying for road money and other handouts. To get this new supply of money to lobbyists from corporations and social reformers, the 17th Amendment was required. This Amendment eliminated state legislative appointments of U.S. senators and ended their ability to curtail populist access to federal coffers. Under President Calvin Coolidge, the slogan became “the business of government is business,” as corporations fed from the overflowing trough. Then, under Franklin Roosevelt, entitlement programs for the general population began. These two constitutional amendments, more than any other actions, transformed a republican form of democracy with checks and balances on power into a democracy with elements of plutocracy and mobocracy. Eventually, these two elements came to dominate the agendas of the Republican and Democratic parties.

The party is over for the parties

It took a few years for enough people to organize and figure out how to rob the candy store, but today the U.S. has reached the point where the easy money has dried up. The big party in Washington is coming to an end, as more IRS compulsion is necessary to try to squeeze more money out of fewer taxpayers, causing a negative economic spiral that forces the Federal Reserve to keep interest rates at near zero (if

rates went up today, the government could not repay its debts). The U.S. is relearning the lesson Plato taught 2,500 years ago, that the Founders knew well:

Democracies are prone to unrestrained growth and factionalism of competing special interests seeking to influence leaders in order to fulfill private desires at the expense of the public good.
– Robert Kane, *Though the Moral Maze: Searching for Absolute Values in a Pluralistic World*, p. 122.

Reining in the parties

Rather than blame President Obama, the answer is to fix the broken system that forced his hand. That means reining in the influence of political parties. There are a few obvious solutions that can help return power to the voters, rather than the special interests that control political parties. None of these will be easy to implement because those reaping thousand-fold rewards from the current system will resist change tooth and nail:

1. Remove party affiliation from ballots. This will cause voters to actually think about their choices and make more informed and responsible decisions.
2. Ban all contributions from corporations, PACs, and political parties to candidates' campaigns, and limit contributions to individual citizens who cannot give more than a modest amount, like \$100, per candidate. This will restore the economic side of political campaigning to the citizens, more in line with "one person, one vote." It will also eliminate most mass media advertising and force the news media to do investigative reporting on candidates to present in their stories.
3. Repeal the 16th Amendment, which enables the federal government to circumvent states and created the federal candy store.
4. Repeal the 17th Amendment, which removed the states' representatives from their own union, the federal government, and made the U.S. Senate a redundant body, eliminating the most important check and balance in the U.S. political system.

These four areas currently give political parties both the financial and political power to trump genuine citizen and national concerns, like proper immigration reform, with their own agendas, and to impose gridlock when they cannot use legislation for their own selfish purposes.

Author's note: Reasons for taking these actions, and other ways to reduce the viruses and Trojans that have infected the U.S. political system are further explained in my book, *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, Version 4.0*.

Dr. Gordon L. Anderson (UTS Class of 1978) is the President of Paragon House, Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal on World Peace, and Adjunct Professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He earned a M.Div. in Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion from Claremont Graduate University. He is author of Philosophy of the United States: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness as well as Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, Version 4.0.