

The image is a screenshot of a web browser displaying the homepage of the Independent Women's Forum. The website has a dark red header with the logo on the left and the text "About Us" on the right. Below the header is a navigation bar with four tabs: "News & Commentary", "Publications", "In The Media", and "The Blog", with "The Blog" being the active tab. Underneath the navigation bar is a breadcrumb trail: "Home / Blog / Article". The main content area features a date "November 1 2011" followed by social media sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instapaper, and an email icon. The article title "Super Committee: Is Our Political System Up to the Challenge?" is displayed in a large, bold, red font. Below the title, the author's name "CARRIE L. LUKAS" is written in a smaller, grey font.

I got my start in the policy arena as a junior Social Security analyst at the Cato Institute. That was back in the mid-1990s, and I vividly remember the debates of the time, the warnings that Social Security would start running a deficit in 2013 (actuaries were off by a bit, since we started running a deficit last year), and comparisons to the European pension systems, some of which were making needed reforms and others that were in worse shape than Social Security.

2013 seemed like a long way off then, and I remember feeling confident that sensible reforms would be enacted, since everyone agreed that was the prudent thing to do to avert a predictable crisis. That was naive, apparently. And today I find myself wondering the extent to which our political system is capable of making needed changes at all.

From a distance it's easy to be horrified by what's happened in Greece. How can the Greek people continue to protest and reject deals that are, frankly, far more generous than they should rightfully expect? This latest deal is now going to be put up to a vote in Greece. It may not be sufficient, but it's shocking to think that the Greeks may reject a deal that is nothing if not their best chance. The obvious question—exactly what is the outcome they are hoping for and how do they expect to prop up a system of such tremendous debt—seems not to figure much into their political conversation. The people want to demand more and seem not to care to contemplate the question, *more paid for by whom?*

While it's easy to shake your head at the Greeks' behavior, how different really is that than our own? The so-called "Super Committee" is a little more than three weeks from its deadline to come up with a plan to cut more than a trillion from the federal deficit over

the next ten years. That sounds ambitious, but is really small potatoes compared to our total debt (our deficit was well more than a trillion this year alone). Observers worry that it seems unlikely that the Committee is actually going to reach agreement on a plan to present to Congress.

Maybe it's too much to expect a small group of Congressional representatives to come to such an agreement. But our public discussion of entitlement programs—most significantly Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid—also seem divorced from reality. I wrote recently about feminist groups' demands to increase, yes that's *increase*, the cost of Social Security, and jack up taxes to pay the bill.

Politicians who dare to propose changes to those programs—the ones that are the absolute drivers of our long-term debt and deficit crisis and must be a part of any reform solution—are regularly lambasted by other so-called political leaders. The media parrots those attacks and they seem to work with the public. That leaves one with the depressing sense that our political system may not be up to the challenges that face our country, and that we are destined to be Greece years down the road.

I hope that's not the case, and there is a reason to have hope that America is better than that. Gov. Chris Christie's ability to institute pension reform in New Jersey shows that sometimes needed changes can be made and the electorate appreciates straight talk from politicians. The rise of the Tea Party in the wake of our economic crisis to demand less government contrasts with Greeks' riots against any changes in the unsupportable government welfare state.

Yet Americans should be concerned about what's happening in Washington today, and carefully watch the Super Committee. It's not so much that they hold the key to solving our deficit crisis, but they are another canary in the coal mine which will tell us if our political system is up to the challenges we face.