



This? Just a ‘save America, save democracy’ little ol’ thing

By Jeff Edelstein - June 27th, 2013

“Has democracy had it’s day?” wondered the UK’s Prospect Magazine on April 24.

“Democracy in Retreat,” the title of a Council on Foreign Relations book, released this past March.

Residents of Turkey and Brazil — two democratic nations — in revolt.

Is democracy dying? Was the Occupy movement just the tip of the iceberg here in America? As it so far-fetched to imagine democracy faltering right here in our own backyard?

You know what? I’m not entirely convinced it’s far-fetched. There are so many problems facing this country right now, from wealth inequality to job growth to education, that there’s is a slight whiff of revolution in the air. The Occupy movement might end up being a preamble to the main event.

But it’s not too late. There are some simple, dare I say common sense, fixes to what ails us. I’m in no position to enact anything I’m about to write, but there’s about 300 million of us who are.

Limit political fundraising: This one to me is a no-brainer. There should be a very low limit attached to how much money a person, group or company can donate. Enough with the Super PACs and all other manner of squirming around through the laws. Campaign finance reform should be real. In short: You shouldn’t have to kowtow to rich people in order to get yourself elected to a national post. Speaking of rich people ...

Work out the tax system: I don’t have the answer here, but one should be simple enough. The more you have, the more you get taxed. This isn’t brain surgery. In fact, I’m quite confident brain surgery is easier. According to the the CATO Institute, there are over 54,000 pages of federal tax rules. A 100 years ago, there were 400 pages. I say we have one page. No more loopholes, no more charitable offshore trusts, no more nonsense. You make X amount of dollars, be it in salary, interest, stocks, bonds, sheep trading, you owe X times whatever percent the economists come up with. The end.

Elect scientists: Why is it that lawyers make up almost 50 percent of Congress? Who thought that was a good idea? I’m telling you, we switch out the lawyers for scientists — you know, people who need to find real answers to problems, not clever workarounds — we’d be a better country for it.

Path to work for high school students: The unemployment rate for 16-19 year olds is 24.5 percent. For 20-24 year olds, it's 13 percent. These numbers, however indirectly, point out a gaping flaw in our current thinking: Without a college degree, you're toast. Now granted, college is wonderful and it's the way up for many people. But some people are not college bound, and we need to do a better job getting them ready to work. There should be programs in place that take high school graduates and get them right into the workforce.

Wealth inequality: Here's a wacky plan, so bear with me: Social Security isn't going anywhere. This much is obvious. Old people aren't going to give it up, and when I'm an old person, I'm not going to give it up. But here's an idea: When you turn 18, you get a head start on Social Security. Let's call it \$20,000 or so. This money cannot be withdrawn until Social Security age, but it can be invested as you see fit. Upshot: Even those with nothing will know there's at the least the start of "something." That has to be worth more than the money itself.

Health care: No one — and I mean no one — knows if Obamacare is going to good, bad, or the same. Anyone who claims to know is an idiot. We're just going to have to wait and see. All I know is every first world country has some form of universal health care, and of all the problems facing first world countries, railing against universal health care doesn't seem particularly high on the list.

And lastly ...

End entitlement: I'm not talking about entitlement programs, like Medicare or Social Security, I'm talking about the dictionary definition of the word: "To furnish with a right or claim to something." Somewhere, somehow, we Americans — present company most definitely included — got it in our heads we're the chosen ones and we deserve — are entitled to — the good life of lobster tails and flat screen TVs and island vacations. Somewhere, somehow, we let our work ethic be replaced by ... well, not nearly as good a work ethic. We want to save this country from itself? We need to stand up and get dirty and do something about it.

Whew. That's a lot for me. Heavy thinking there. It's just I like this country and — call me an old fuddy duddy — I'm not entirely thrilled with the direction it's headed. But don't worry; I'm sure this is a fleeting moment. For me, I mean. A fleeting moment for me. In fact, come Sunday, I'm sure I'll have a column that mentions Snooki. (Not lying.)