

22 June 2007

Are Americans Unready to Boil?

by Joel S. Hirschhorn



The frog-in-boiling water model helps us understand political upheavals: how citizens wake up early enough (or too late) to respond to social and economic oppression. Sometimes the greed and arrogance of Ruling Classes makes them careless and social waters heat too quickly. Sensing doom, alert citizen-frogs escape or revolt. Or they stay complacent and boil. The Bush Administration has turned the heat up on us, explaining why nearly 75 percent of Americans believe their country is on the wrong track and 70 percent think the economy is worsening.

Mexico is the richest Latin American country but has extreme economic inequality, which measures social temperature. Mexicans are jumping out of oppressive waters en masse, right into the U.S., exacerbating our rising inequality. The Chinese have learned to offset oppressive communist forces with materialistic capitalism – like our affordable materialism keeps Americans distracted and docile (with help from Chinese imports). In colonial America the greedy British motivated our Revolutionary War, but with oppression now coming from within, will Americans wait too long?

Some Americans keep warning us – people like Michael Moore, Cindy Sheehan, Aaron Russo, Dennis Kucinich, Lou Dobbs, Ralph Nader, Ron Paul, Bill Moyers, Jon Stewart, and Keith Olbermann. They entertain complacent “frogs” and preach to the choir of alert “frogs” that also know the temperature is rising dangerously. Many of the former keep hoping that putting better Democrats or Republicans in office will get us back on the right track. Many of the latter are ready to jump to what our Constitution offers us: an Article V convention.

And once you know that plutocratic elites from both major parties have for decades opposed the Article V convention to propose constitutional amendments, YOU should favor what THEY oppose.

We frequently see a knee-jerk fear reaction to an Article V convention. Such fear is misplaced and baseless. Only the rich and powerful elites running and ruining our nation should fear a convention.

It is fatalistic to fear that a convention could make things worse by removing valued parts of the Constitution or adding terrible things. Naturally, no one knows with certainty what a convention might propose. But we do know with certainty that whatever a convention proposes must satisfy the Constitution’s rigorous ratification requirement. That two step process is part of the genius of the Constitution. Recall that a convention is the alternative to Congress proposing amendments. And what do Americans think of Congress?

A measly 23 percent view Congress positively. Expecting Congress to enact really good laws, spend our taxes wisely, and keep the president and executive branch agencies from abusing us is like a joke on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. It is laugh-at-loud funny to put trust and faith in Congress. It matters not whether Democrats or Republicans control Congress. Nearly all members are under the thrall of moneyed interests.

Congress is a national embarrassment. Our misrepresentatives are partners in corruption, dishonesty and oppression. Over decades they have allowed the presidency to accumulate imperial powers. Do you really believe they are worth \$165,200 a year, with generous health and pension benefits?

Still, we live in a great nation. But great nations rise and fall.

America is no longer close to what it should be – or once was. It no longer fairly serves and protects all Americans. Too many Americans are working poor, hungry, homeless, poorly educated, imprisoned, debt-ridden, crime victims, facing economic insecurity, nonvoters, and lacking health care.

What we have is a plutocracy run by and for the Upper Class that sucks up a huge fraction of the nation's wealth. Lobbyists ensure that public policy increases economic inequality and rewards corporate interests, even if it requires preemptive wars like the Iraq fiasco, sanctions massive illegal immigration, and sends good jobs overseas. That so many people escaping other nations (with hot or boiling water) want to come to the USA should not blind us to the creeping decline of our democracy and the heating of our social waters.

How much worse does American democracy have to get before public outrage demands what the Constitution's Framers gave us in case citizens lost confidence in the federal government? Haven't Americans lost enough trust to use what elites have fought and feared? Can't we trust ourselves to have a peaceful populist rebellion through an Article V convention before we boil?

If America's distracted citizen-frogs stay glued to their large plasma TVs, SUVs, electronic devices, and obese-friendly foods they may find themselves boiled. Our constitutionally protected freedoms will be gone. George W. Bush has shown how easily that is done. Our middle class will be gone. Our national sovereignty will be gone – sold out through globalization chicanery. For all but the rich, our quality of life and standard of living will be gone. The Upper Class will be richer and happier in their opulent gated McMansions and private entertainment and vacation spots, protected and pampered by their private police and servants.

If Congress finally obeys the Constitution some fear that convention delegates will be corrupted through special interest money just like current politicians. That is highly unlikely.

First, many Americans will actively watch and influence how state legislatures select one-time delegates. Second, the incredible novelty of the nation's first Article V convention will ensure intense coverage by domestic, foreign and Internet media. Third, that novelty will also engage enormous numbers of Americans – especially school and college students – now rightfully turned off by our political system, ensuring citizen oversight of delegates and the convention. Fourth, the only group working for the first convention – Friends of the Article V Convention – has committed itself to creating and ensuring strong oversight of the convention process.

Imagine our first Article V convention under intense scrutiny in today's techno-media world. It will be the ultimate reality show, enticing Americans to use their brains over shopping and mindless entertainment. Conversations about possible amendments will flourish. Surveys and polls will constantly determine what Americans support and oppose. The convention will remind Americans that citizenship requires civic engagement. Convention delegates will know that they are being scrutinized. They will know that their proposals must be ratified by three-fourths of the states. They will be listening to US. In sum, we have more than enough safety nets to prevent the convention harming our Constitution.

Why not dream about a restorative convention with hundreds of smart, patriotic Americans as delegates? We have enormous numbers of brilliant, wise and honest Americans – just not in politics anymore. If we can trust the lives of people to juries, we can trust carefully selected convention delegates to find intelligent ways to improve our government and political system through amendments. In the last part of the process, we can tell our state legislators whether we want them to ratify specific proposed amendments.

Will the first convention be mesmerizing and entertaining? Will it help educate and inform Americans about our Constitution and government? Will it put Ruling Class elites on notice that we the people are seriously pursuing governance we can trust? Yes, yes and yes.

Should we wait until 95 percent of Americans think the nation is on the wrong track? Until just 5 percent approve of Congress? Until we belatedly find ourselves boiled? No, no and no.

Support the effort to get the nation's first Article V convention, especially if you sense our societal waters becoming hotter – sometimes faster, as under Bush. Sign up at www.foavc.org. Don't let self-delusion and false hope in Republicans or Democrats blind you. Let freedom ring. Make Thomas Jefferson proud.
