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THE  
WORLD  
THEY  
INHERIT



## ➤ A Road to Global Disaster

**In these early years of the twenty-first century, humankind faces unprecedented dangers at the same time as it enjoys unique opportunities. The shifting patterns of history—demographic, technological, economic, and political—have brought us to a crossroads from which divergent paths lead in very different directions. As a result, we face a series of unprecedented dangers.**

The world Generation We will inherit is a world shaped by the decisions (conscious and unconscious) of the Baby Boomers and the generations that came before them. Like every generation, the Boomers and their predecessors have had a responsibility to pass along a world that is at least as healthy, peaceful, and prosperous as the one they received from their ancestors. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the Boomers, they appear to be failing in that responsibility. Instead, they are bequeathing to the Millennials a world that may be heading down a catastrophic path, unless we start making smarter choices—and soon.

Let's examine the world Generation We is inheriting.

*“The most dangerous threat to our global environment may not be the strategic threats themselves but rather our perception of them, for most people do not yet accept the fact that this crisis is extremely grave.”*

AL GORE

## ENVIRONMENTAL COLLAPSE

Generation We inherits a world in which climate change and global pollution threaten an unprecedented environmental collapse—one that could even spell the end of human existence on this planet—because of unconstrained extraction and desecration of natural resources and reliance on carbon-spewing fossil fuels.

The so-called debate over global warming has long been settled—at least, to the satisfaction of the vast majority of scientists who have studied the issue. There are still a few stragglers who deny the reality of global warming, pooh-pooh its importance, or dispute the role of human behavior in causing it. Most of these self-proclaimed “climate skeptics,” however, are either on the payroll of OPEC countries or corporate interests whose primary goal is to fend off action that will reduce their profits, or doctrinaire conservatives who pander to big business and whose ideology prevents them from admitting that free-market principles can ever produce less-than-ideal results.

Obstructionists and shills aside, the overwhelming consensus among scientists is that the world’s climate has been changing and is continuing to change at a rate that appears to be unprecedented in history. There is also agreement that the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is an important contributing factor in this change, and that human activity—in particular the burning of fossil fuels such as oil, gas, and coal—has played a major role in the creation and build-up of these gases. Even most conservative Republicans (who long denied the reality of global warming or the fact that human beings are contributing to it) and business leaders (whose companies will be dramatically impacted by any effort to reverse the dangerous warming trend) have largely come to accept these realities.

The questions now are: What are the likely impacts from the climate change processes that are already underway? What can be done, if anything, to avert a possible environmental catastrophe?

Because the current climate change is of a kind that has not happened since the end of the last ice age, and because massive climatic change inevitably includes complex side effects that cannot be fully understood or precisely anticipated with our current technology, scientists can’t fully predict the nature and extent of the damage or what it means to humans. There are signs that even forecasts made in the last decade may already be outdated. For example, the observed acceleration in summer melting of the Arctic icecap is occurring at a markedly faster rate than climate scientists had predicted. It is conceivable, by some models, that the icecap over Greenland could melt almost entirely in the next 50 years, releasing an amount of water so large it would cause ocean levels to rise more than 20 feet and submerge many developed coastal regions worldwide. No natural disaster or act of God in human history comes close to the sheer suffering, loss, and

displacement that would result from such a crisis.

The notion that trends accelerate as they mature is even more sobering. As the melting of glaciers, permafrost, and poles continues, it systemically assists in furthering planetary warming so that an accelerator effect takes place. Take permafrost in the Arctic regions as an example. Once the ground melts, the frozen carbon-based elements in the soil start to decompose, emitting massive amounts of carbon in the process and multiplying the effect of the warming. The scariest part is that nobody can model or measure how profound the effect will be.

Here are some of the latest findings from the 2007 report of the authoritative Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):

- Eleven of the 12 warmest years on record have occurred since 1995. Between 1950 and 2000, average temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere appear to have been the highest in at least the last 1,300 years. The likelihood that these trends were caused mainly by human activities is greater than 90 percent.
- If current trends continue, the impact on climate during the twenty-first century will likely be greater than that experienced during the twentieth century.
- Among the effects to be expected are rising sea levels, more severe and frequent storms and droughts, global deforestation, and dramatically shifting patterns of rainfall.
- Human populations will suffer deaths—perhaps in the millions—due to increases in malnutrition, heat waves, drought, infectious diseases, and air pollution.<sup>1</sup>

As for what can be done, we shift here from the area of science into that of public policy, involving government, industry, consumer behavior, and almost every other element of human society. In a later chapter, we'll look at possible solutions to the climate change problem, focusing particularly on the leadership role Generation We will be called upon to play. But for now, let's consider how our actions are contributing to the slow-motion ecological disaster we now see unfolding on our planet.

The single most dangerous fact about the American economy as it currently operates is our profound reliance on fossil fuels, in particular oil and coal. Our nation consumes roughly 24 percent of global oil production, by far the largest share of any country on the planet. (China currently is in second place, with oil consumption running at 9 percent of the total; Japan is third, at 6 percent.) Measure our consumption on a per-capita basis, and the discrepancy is still large: The average American uses about 2.8 gallons of gasoline per day, versus 1.8



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**The average American uses about 2.8 gallons of gasoline per day, versus 1.8 gallons used by the typical Japanese consumer (in second place).**



gallons used by the typical Japanese consumer (in second place).

Coal is close behind oil as a source of energy in this country. More than half the electricity generated in the United States comes from coal, most of it from “dirty” power plants that are between 30 and 50 years old and lack modern pollution controls.<sup>2</sup>

This dependence on fossil fuels has enormous economic, political, and military effects on our country, which we’ll consider later. But the environmental impact alone is significant. The burning of oil creates 44 percent of our nation’s carbon-dioxide emissions—over 1.5 tons’ worth of carbon injected into the atmosphere per car, per year. These emissions are a major cause of the greenhouse effect that is driving global climate change. Coal-burning power plants, second only to automobiles as a source of carbon-dioxide emissions, produce other forms of pollution, including sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and toxic mercury contaminants. (As an unexpected side effect, coal emissions that drift over the oceans are causing the mercury poisoning of seafood, making much of it unfit for human consumption.)

Currently, the industrialized nations of the Western world—especially North America, Europe, and Japan—produce the vast bulk of the greenhouse gas emissions that threaten our environment. But that is changing. Large portions of the developing world, especially the two Asian giants, China and India, are rapidly industrializing. Factories and even entire cities are springing up overnight, often constructed hastily and with little consideration of environmental and safety concerns.

The economic rise of “Chindia” is, in many ways, great news for the world. It is bringing tens of millions of people out of poverty and creating a huge new middle class that is already becoming part of the global marketplace. These newly empowered citizens will eventually also press their governments for democratic reforms and an end to the corruption that is rampant in their countries.

But the rapid development of Chindia also worsens the environmental threat we face. Tens of millions of newly middle-class people will mean tens of millions of new cars on the roads, all spewing the same greenhouse gases that have already brought our planet to the brink of disaster. Coal-fired power plants without any meaningful environmental regulation or cleanliness standards, which use “dirty” coal with high moisture content and impure combustible matter, are popping up by the hundreds every year in Chindia and producing gigantic quantities of air pollution at rates that even exceed those found in the Western world. (Whereas coal is responsible for just over 50 per-

cent of the electricity produced in the United States, it is the source of 69 percent of India's electric power and 78 percent of China's.)<sup>3</sup>

The individuals building the plants are not thinking about the long-term or planetary consequences. They are thinking about their countries' need for energy to fuel their rapid growth. It's understandable—and a recipe for disaster.

We in the rich nations of the West can't simply demand that the developing nations of Chindia halt their economic development or do without the luxuries—such as private cars—we've long enjoyed. But our planet can't afford a new round of industrialization as heedless as the one Europe and North America experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—not with potentially catastrophic climate change as a possible consequence.

Americans have much in common with the people of Chindia. Our countries need to collaborate on inventing and deploying new energy technologies, cleaning our existing power-generation capability, and applying strict pollution standards to automobiles.

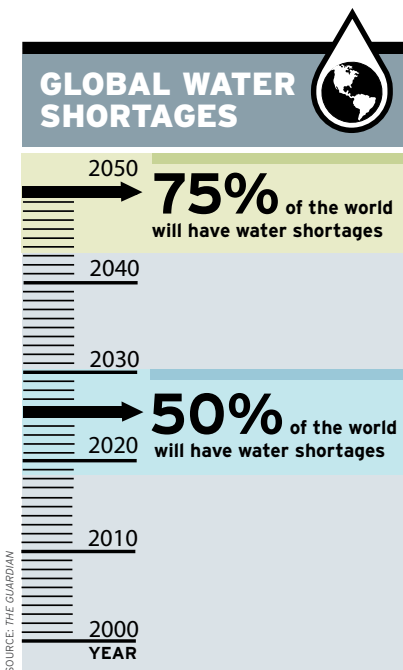
Global warming is not the only environmental danger our species currently faces. There are a host of others, including irresponsible extraction and squandering of resources, from minerals to timber; overfishing of the world's waters, threatening collapse of the planet's last reliable source of wild protein; pollution of the seas by petrochemically derived plastics that take generations to degrade and are helping to create vast dead zones in the world's oceans; and air pollution that is helping to cause acid rain, deforestation, and epidemics of lung disease and cancer in both the developed world and the developing nations of Asia and Latin America.

The most serious environmental problem of all is the coming shortage of clean water for human consumption and agriculture. This is the hidden crisis nobody likes to talk about. It is not by coincidence that much of the water rights in the western United States have been purchased by oil families and hedge funds. The coming water shortages will cause conflicts even fiercer than any oil war. Energy wars are about money, but a water war is about day-to-day survival.

Although our planet is mostly covered by water, only about 2.5 percent of the total is freshwater useable for drinking and cooking, and much of that amount is either seriously polluted or locked up in glaciers and permafrost. Right now, approximately 20 percent of the world's population has insufficient clean water. That's a billion people who, according to UN experts, are drinking polluted, disease-carrying water every day. Ailments ranging from diarrhea (often fatal in developing countries) to schistosomiasis, malaria, scabies, cholera, and trachoma are associated with contaminated water supplies.<sup>4</sup> William Cosgrove, vice president of the World Water Council, says lack of safe water leads to the deaths of at least 2 million children every year.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, the problem is getting much worse. Deserts are spread-





**That's a billion people who, according to UN experts, are drinking polluted, disease-carrying water every day.**

ing, and with them starvation and misery on an unprecedented scale. By 2025, climate scientists are warning that 50 percent of the world can expect to suffer severe water shortages, with the percentage rising to 75 percent by 2050—well within the life expectancy of the Millennials. By that same mid-century date, half of the world's currently arable land may no longer be suitable for agriculture—again, as a result of the deepening water crisis.<sup>6</sup>

In the United States today, we already have severe drought in once-fertile agricultural regions, and wildfires are burning the West at historically unseen levels. Climate change, irresponsible agriculture, and uncontrolled consumption are altering our ecosystem. We've built oasis-like cities in the desert; they're beautiful, but the water that fills those fountains and waters those gardens has to come from somewhere. It typically comes from a fragile ecosystem which is being plundered unchecked by any political power, since nobody understands the inevitable consequences.

Perhaps surprisingly, the water issue and the energy issue are related. There is an unlimited supply of water available in the oceans, but desalination is a costly, energy-intensive process. A cheap new source of clean energy would permit desalinization on a massive scale, eliminate starvation, and permit the replanting of our deserts and forests, which in turn would produce rainfall, climate cooling, and the absorption of carbon by plant life. The vicious cycle in which we're currently stuck could be replaced by a virtuous one.

We must innovate our way out of this complex set of problems, discovering and implementing solutions that will work on a global scale—and we need to do it soon.

## HEALTH CATASTROPHE

In the developed world, the twentieth century was a time of steady advancements in human health. Food became cheap and plentiful, improved sanitary conditions slowed and stopped the spread of many infectious diseases, and antibiotics dramatically reduced infections, once the leading cause of death. As a result, life expectancies greatly increased, mortality rates declined, and millions of additional people got the chance to live long, productive lives.

Today, unfortunately, much of that progress is threatened.

The Millennials' world is threatened by epidemics of chronic disease and infectious diseases. These problems are made worse by an increasingly overburdened, ineffective, and unequal health system, as well as by environmental, nutritional, agricultural, and industrial practices that serve financial and political power interests rather than human needs.

It now appears that the emergence and rapid global spread of AIDS in the 1970s, abetted by the failure of authorities in the United States and around the world to take the threat seriously and invest in the

systems needed to uncover, analyze, track, and treat the disease, may be merely a harbinger of even more deadly health threats to come.

Diseases of which most Americans are only vaguely aware, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (“mad cow disease”), SARS (which infected 8,400 people in 2003 and produced estimated losses of 60 billion dollars to the world economy), Nipah virus, and potentially pandemic avian influenza (“bird flu”), have the potential to spread worldwide and cause thousands or even millions of deaths. So do other diseases that are better-known but equally dangerous, including new drug-resistant strains of tuberculosis and the resurgent polio virus.

Does this sound overstated? Listen to how Margaret Chan, M.D., the highly-respected director-general of the UN’s World Health Organization, summarizes the current situation in WHO’s 2007 World Health Report (for emphasis, we’ve highlighted selected sentences that might otherwise be overlooked in the flow of Dr. Chan’s sober prose):

The disease situation is anything but stable. Population growth, incursion into previously uninhabited areas, rapid urbanization, intensive farming practices, environmental degradation, and the misuse of antimicrobials have disrupted the equilibrium of the microbial world. *New diseases are emerging at the historically unprecedented rate of one per year.* Airlines now carry more than 2 billion passengers annually, vastly increasing opportunities for the rapid international spread of infectious agents and their vectors.

Dependence on chemicals has increased, as has awareness of the potential hazards for health and the environment. Industrialization of food production and processing, and globalization of marketing and distribution mean that a single tainted ingredient can lead to the recall of tons of food items from scores of countries. *In a particularly ominous trend, mainstay antimicrobials are failing at a rate that outpaces the development of replacement drugs.*

These threats have become a much larger menace in a world characterized by high mobility, economic interdependence and electronic interconnectedness. Traditional defenses at national borders cannot protect against the invasion of a disease or vector. Real time news allows panic to spread with equal ease. Shocks to health reverberate as shocks to economies and business continuity in areas well beyond the affected site. *Vulnerability is universal.*<sup>7</sup>

**Insufficient Clean Water**

**20%** Approximately 20% of the world's population has insufficient clean water

**Ailments associated with contaminated water supplies**

Diarrhea	Scabies	Schistosomiasis
Trachoma	Malaria	Cholera

SOURCE: UNESCO



Life-threatening infectious diseases aren't the only health problem we face, of course. We are already living through an epidemic of preventable chronic disease. An estimated 133 million Americans—45 percent of the population—suffer from a chronic illness such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease. These illnesses kill millions of Americans every year and absorb an estimated 75 percent of total healthcare costs. If current trends continue, fully one-third of all the children born in 2000 will develop diabetes during their lifetimes.<sup>8</sup>

The sad fact is that this epidemic could be largely prevented through proper nutrition, a cleaner environment, and preventive medicine. We are sickening ourselves while insurers and pharmaceutical companies rake in record profits treating symptoms rather than curing people.

Even more insidious is the practice by hospitals of setting up diabetes treatment centers as loss leaders to attract patients for amputations and treatment of congestive heart failure, two common results of diabetes that also happen to be highly profitable. It's a perverse form of customer acquisition that serves the hospitals, not their patients.

Flawed incentives create destructive practices by insurance companies as well. High rates of patient churn make it natural for insurance companies to be basically unconcerned with the long-term health of their clients and to focus instead on immediate financial gain. Driven by short-term considerations—annual profits, quarterly results, share prices—they have no reason to reimburse customers for the cost of preventive care. Instead, they focus on denying care

and treat only acute cases they cannot avoid. The inevitable long-term result is a population that is steadily getting sicker.

Meanwhile, conditions that contribute to chronic illness, such as childhood obesity and exposure to toxic chemicals, are growing steadily more prevalent and serious, encouraged by corporate purveyors of junk foods, dangerous chemicals, and other products that exacerbate the problems. Today more than 15 percent of kids are obese, as compared with fewer than 5 percent in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Millions are being raised on processed, fake, and junk foods that lack fiber and other nutrients, filling up instead on sugar, corn syrup, steroids, hormones, and the residues of chemical herbicides and fungicides, as well as artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives whose long-term effects are largely unknown.

Today one American in five will suffer from prostate or breast cancer, with younger and younger people being diagnosed every year. Some in the for-profit medical world blame genetics (though it seems odd that human genetics would change so dramatically in 20 to 40



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years). What about the possible role of steroids and hormones in the meat, poultry, and dairy we eat, in causing these hormonal cancers? Agribusiness cattle-raisers use these substances to make a nine-month-old calf reach the one-ton weight that would normally take two years to achieve. When a human drinks the milk, the steroids and hormones are still in the cells. Paid experts claim it's safe (the same claim they once made about smoking), but there have been no real studies into the long-term effects of animal hormones and steroids on humans.

Yet despite the seriousness of these issues, many of the health-related problems threatening our world could be addressed by medical technologies that are currently available. Our failure to do so must be blamed on economic and political factors. Simply put, we aren't addressing the healthcare needs of humankind—either around the world or in our own country—because the powers-that-be have little incentive to do so.

The litany of problems with the U.S. healthcare system has become a familiar one. It begins with costs. Here's how one recent study summarizes the situation:

Already, more and more middle-class Americans find themselves priced out of the health care market. Since 2000 the cost of health insurance has spiraled by 73 percent. Over the same span, the number of uninsured Americans climbed by more than 6 million. As of 2005, nearly 48 million Americans were “going naked,” in insurance industry parlance—and not all were poor. Roughly one in three uninsured households earned more than \$50,000 a year....

And it is not only the uninsured who are vulnerable to being blindsided by the levitating cost of essential care. These days, more and more families who think they are covered are discovering that the blanket is short.... In 2005 nearly two-thirds of all families struggling to pay medical bills *had insurance*, according to a survey conducted by *USA Today*, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health.

At the same time, health care inflation has become a pervasive economic problem for American businesses, affecting labor negotiations, jobs, pensions, and the nation's ability to compete internationally.<sup>10</sup>

The amount the United States spends on healthcare is staggering. In 2007, healthcare spending in the United States amounted to 2.3 trillion dollars, more than 16 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). If present trends continue, the figures in 2016 will be 4.2 trillion dollars and 20 percent of GDP. Even more alarming, if the current growth rates persist, health expenditure requirements by the gov-

**Today more than 15 percent of kids are obese, as compared with fewer than 5 percent in the 1960s and 1970s.**

## NOT ALL UNINSURED ARE POOR



One in three uninsured households earned more than \$50,000 a year.

**↑73%** Increase in healthcare costs since 2000

**48 MILLION**  
As of 2005, nearly 48 million Americans were uninsured

**6 MILLION**  
The number of additional uninsured Americans since 2000

SOURCE: MAHAR, MONEY-DRIVEN MEDICINE

ernment will be equal to *all* government receipts by 2060, when the Millennial generation is retired. What this means, in plain terms, is crushing taxation, severe rationing of healthcare, or just letting people die.

By contrast, healthcare spending in 2007 accounted for just 10.9 percent of the GDP in Switzerland, 10.7 percent in

Germany, 9.7 percent in Canada, and 9.5 percent in France, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. And in all those countries, *everyone* is covered by a national healthcare program, unlike the United States, which leaves tens of millions out in the cold.<sup>11</sup>

We Americans might not resent spending more on healthcare than other countries if the quality of the care we were receiving reflected the high cost. Unfortunately, the opposite is true. One study after another confirms that the healthcare received by Americans seriously lags both what is needed and what citizens of other developed countries enjoy.

Consider, for example, a few lowlights from a 2006 study of 13,000 Americans from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances conducted by the RAND Corporation (a government-sponsored think tank):

- Overall, participants in the study received about *half* the level of care recommended by physicians for such common clinical conditions as asthma, breast cancer, depression, diabetes, hypertension, and osteoarthritis.
- Serious gaps in care are found among citizens in cities across America and of every sex, age, race, and income level. As summarized by the RAND researchers, “*The bottom line: all adults in the United States are at risk for receiving poor health care, no matter where they live; why, where, and from whom they seek care; or what their race, gender, or financial status is.*”
- Do these gaps in care matter? Absolutely. The RAND study found, for example, that diabetes sufferers received only 45 percent of the care they needed—a shortfall associated with kidney failure, blindness, and loss of limbs. Only 45 percent of heart attack patients received beta blockers, and 61 percent got aspirin—two forms of treatment that can reduce the risk of death by over 20 percent.<sup>12</sup>

**Today one American in five will suffer from prostate or breast cancer, with younger and younger people being diagnosed every year.**

Or consider these facts from a similar national study, also conducted in 2006, under the auspices of the Commonwealth Fund

Commission on a High Performance Health System, which compared the U.S. system to those of other countries across 37 key indicators, such as infant mortality, life expectancy at age 60, availability of treatment for mental illness, and appropriate care for chronic diseases:

- The United States lags behind the leading nations of the world by one-third in mortality from conditions “amenable to health care”—that is, preventable deaths.
- The U.S. infant mortality rate is 7.0 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared with 2.7 in the top three countries.
- Gaps in treatment for diabetes and blood pressure lead to an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 needless deaths annually, along with \$1 billion to \$2 billion in avoidable medical costs.
- Seventeen percent of U.S. doctors have access to electronic medical records, as compared to 80 percent in the top three countries.
- Thirty-four percent of American patients experience errors in treatment, medication, or testing, as compared to 22 percent in the top six countries.<sup>13</sup>

In the countries of the developing world, persistent poverty is the main culprit behind the lack of good healthcare. But in the United States, poverty can’t be blamed for the failure of the healthcare system. Somehow we can’t manage to provide decent-quality healthcare to millions of our citizens, despite the billions we throw at the problem. Why not?

Many thoughtful analysts have examined the problem, studying the history of healthcare in the United States and comparing our jerry-rigged “system” to the delivery programs provided in most other countries of the developed world. Most objective observers point to the same root problem: our profit-driven medical system, which channels a huge percentage of healthcare expenditures to insurance companies, for-profit hospital chains, giant pharmaceutical firms, and other businesses, while shamefully neglecting “unprofitable” services and patients.

As a result, an estimated one-third of U.S. healthcare expenditures are wasted on “ineffective, sometimes unwanted, and often unproven procedures” (according to Jack Wennberg, M.D., director of the Center for the Evaluative Clinical Sciences at Dartmouth Medical School)—simply because that’s where the profits are.<sup>14</sup>

An even more shameful waste is the third of healthcare spending that goes to administration and overhead—filing of insurance claims, the back-and-forth of denial and adjudication, bureaucracy, red-tape, and supporting redundant parts of the medical infrastructure. Hence,



#### SUFFERING FROM CHRONIC ILLNESSES

**45%** of the population suffer from chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease.

**75%** of total healthcare costs are absorbed by these illnesses.

**33%** or one-third of all children born in 2000 will develop diabetes during their lifetimes.

SOURCE: PARTNERSHIP TO FIGHT CHRONIC DISEASE

only one of every three healthcare dollars is being spent wisely, a waste of almost 500 dollars per year per person in the United States.

American members of Generation We inherit a world of technological marvels and a nation with resources unmatched in human history. Yet thanks to decades of greed, mismanagement, plundering, and leadership distorted by rigid ideology, they also inherit a health system that is simply broken—one that may prove unable to treat them for the man-made diseases inflicted upon them or to protect them when the predictable next wave of diseases strikes some time in the next decade or two. There's a real and frightening danger that the healthcare enjoyed by recent generations of Americans may disappear by the time Generation We reaches old age.

## A FAILING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The American social contract has been based on equality of opportunity, and central to that is a good education. But today quality education is a matter of economic and social class rather than being a basic right for every citizen of the United States.

Inner cities and rural areas are the hardest hit. Lacking the large tax base of affluent areas, schools there lack the resources needed to pay for teachers, information technology, and other facilities. In 1999, the Department of Education reported that 127 billion dollars was needed to bring “the nation’s school facilities into good overall condition.”<sup>15</sup> In the years since then, conditions have steadily worsened. No wonder our students are failing to learn. How can they learn when they sit in classrooms with leaky roofs, work in science labs with outdated or broken equipment, and often have to do without such simple essentials as art and music studios, auditoriums, gyms, and libraries?

As the best teachers flee these decrepit facilities, morale, discipline, and learning plummet. Many schools turn into breeding grounds for violence and drug use. Gangs proliferate, and the pressure to rebel against teachers, learning, and society is almost irresistible. With the current war spending, disastrous economic trends, and skyrocketing energy costs, public expenditures on education are being further squeezed.

As a result, students who are not among the lucky, gifted few are being left with an inferior education that affects them and successive generations. We are creating a permanent underclass of people suited only to the most trivial of labors and lacking the training and work ethic that enables lifelong progress. The existence of this underclass means less income earned, less home ownership, lower economic growth, poorer health, higher crime, higher criminal justice costs, lower tax receipts, and greater demands on government-funded social services.

Lack of investment in education also makes our country vulnerable to overseas economic competition. Here the problems go beyond inner-city and rural schools to include lagging performance

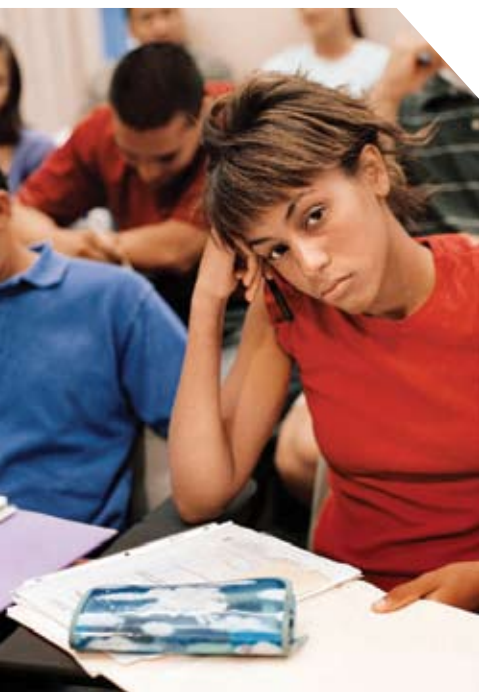


PHOTO: VEER IMAGES

by the entire educational system. Every three years, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducts what is widely regarded as the definitive study of student performance in schools from around the world. PISA focuses especially on science and math skills, since these are both comparable across cultures and languages and among the most important skills students will need to compete in today's technologically-advanced, global economy.

The latest PISA results are dismaying. Of the 30 nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (roughly equivalent to "the developed world"), American students in 2006 ranked seventeenth in science, twenty-fourth in math. Students from Canada, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan all scored higher than those from the United States, as did Poland (which raised its scores significantly in the last three years). The U.S. results are virtually identical to the last time the PISA tests were administered (2003), suggesting that President Bush's vaunted "No Child Left Behind" reforms have not yet had any noticeable impact on student achievement in science and math.<sup>16</sup>

The long-term implications of this problem are serious. In a 2008 study led by economists Eric A. Hanushek of Stanford University and Ludger Woessmann of the University of Munich, economic growth rates of 50 nations over 40 years (1960–2000) were compared with math and science skills like those measured by PISA. The results: Countries ranked among the leaders in those skills can expect a GDP growth rate that is noticeably higher than that experienced by laggards such as the United States. If the United States had managed to join the world leaders in math and science by 2000, for example, today's GDP would likely be some 2 percent higher than it is—a difference of 300 billion dollars in national income. A similar improvement projected into the future would project to a 4.5 percent boost to GDP by 2015, producing extra income sufficient to pay for *the entire country's primary and secondary school educational system in that year.*<sup>17</sup>

It's no secret that the American educational system is failing our students and our society. Practically everyone agrees on the nature of the problem, but nobody is doing much about it. Attempts to reform public schools have failed in part because entrenched union interests have prevented performance-based measures such as merit pay and competency standards from being implemented. The youth are being hit from two sides—a public apathetic to their needs and an entrenched bureaucracy that protects its own interests.

Some believe that charter schools or educational vouchers for parents to spend on private or faith-based schools can solve the problem. Although these ideas deserve more study, both have gotten caught up in cultural battles between left and right, and both ignore the vast majority of children. Rather than merely providing life rafts for a relative handful of students, the entire education system must be fixed.

**Lack of investment in education also makes our country vulnerable to overseas economic competition.**

*"It is incumbent on every generation to pay its own debts as it goes. A principle which if acted on would save one-half the wars of the world"*

THOMAS JEFFERSON

## ECONOMIC DISASTER

Generation We inherits a nation rife with economic peril and injustice. It's a world in which a privileged few are reaping nearly all the economic benefits from recent technological breakthroughs and productivity improvements, while the average American family is struggling not to slip backward.

It's also a world riddled with economic weaknesses—a world in which economic failure, possibly even resulting in collapse, could occur at almost any time because of uncontrolled debt, unknown financial exposure from derivatives and monetary engineering, unregulated speculators driving oil and food prices to unsustainable levels, insolvent entitlement programs, a massive trade imbalance, and lack of worker security.

From time to time, signs of the system's underlying weaknesses break through to the surface. For example, there's the current mortgage crisis, which has already led to more than one million home foreclosures. This number is projected by the Secretary of the Treasury (July 2008) to mushroom to more than 2.5 million in 2009. This crisis was triggered by lax, predatory lending standards invented to feed the market and value of complex derivative securities. These markets were created by and for speculators and produced a level of risk exposure no one could accurately estimate. As a result of the inevitable crisis, home ownership, once a foundation of American prosperity, is now becoming inaccessible to average Americans.

Even worse was the enticing of working-class and middle-class home owners into taking out unaffordable second mortgages and rolling up huge levels of credit-card debt to pay for consumption. Banks were selling debt like televisions. But instead of holding the debt themselves as they'd always done, the banks packaged the debt into pools that would be sold by speculators to speculators, with profits earned at every turn. Then the banks, hedge funds, and investment banks made money insuring each other against losses in arcane transactions called derivative swaps. Now the large banks have tens of trillions of dollars of financial exposure they can't control or even measure. Ultimately, the government—and the middle-class taxpayer—will have to pick up the tab.

Another cause of our economic weakness is the current run-up in the price of oil, which is boosting the cost of practically every product we purchase and which has been driven, in large part, by the impact of speculators who can trade oil futures electronically and with no regulation or oversight thanks to the so-called "Enron loophole" passed by Congress in 2000 as a favor to the financial industry. Oil was priced at 23 dollars per barrel prior to the Iraqi war. In mid-2008, it soared past 140 dollars per barrel, making a few speculators very happy. But millions of people can't afford to commute to work, some

schools are shutting down one day a week, and some businesses are laying off employees—all because of rising energy bills. With no end in sight, government officials are talking about plans that *may* reduce our dependence on fossil fuels—20 years or more from now.

The fuel crisis has caused much of the world's corn production to be applied to making ethanol. This has reduced the production of beef, pork, and poultry, and increased their prices. Poor families are substituting sugary drinks for more-expensive milk. Rising prices of rice, grain, and other foodstuffs are causing rioting in some parts of the world—mostly under the radar of the mainstream media.

Generation We is also inheriting financial burdens greater than those of any other generation in American history, thanks to the irresponsible behavior of their predecessors in generating massive deficit spending.

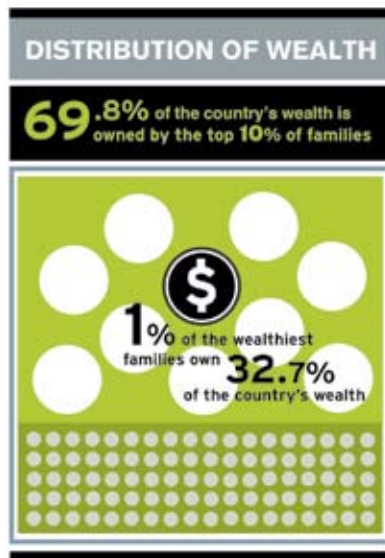
Most people are at least vaguely aware of the staggering statistics related to our national indebtedness, but here are a few of the frightening lowlights:<sup>18</sup>

- The U.S. national debt, which has been rising by about 1.4 billion dollars a day, will surpass the 10-trillion-dollar mark early in 2009. That amounts to about 30,000 dollars in debt for every man, woman, and child in the country, and equals around 65 percent of the GDP.
- About 44 percent of the publicly-held U.S. debt—some 2.23 trillion dollars—is owned by foreign governments and investors. Japan leads the way, followed by China, Britain, Saudi Arabia, and other countries from the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC). These holdings put our nation's economy at the mercy of foreign leaders, threatening our national security. (How does one say *no* to one's bankers in a time of crisis?) In the past, America could use its financial leverage as the weapon against its enemies; now our potential enemies can wield the same weapon against us.
- Interest on the national debt represents the third-largest item in the U.S. government budget, sucking up 430 billion dollars in 2007. Sums poured down this black hole could instead be invested in our nation's future through education, healthcare, energy and environmental research, infrastructure rebuilding, and other constructive programs.

Even the government's own auditors have been trying to warn us that our current economic path is leading us toward disaster. Here is just a part of what Comptroller General David M. Walker wrote in his report on the national budget, dated 1 December 2006 (emphases added):

**Generation We is also inheriting financial burdens greater than those of any other generation in American history...**





**...the average American is actually earning less today than his or her counterpart of a generation ago.**

Despite improvement in both the fiscal year 2006 reported net operating cost and the cash-based budget deficit, the U.S. government's total reported liabilities, net social insurance commitments [i.e., Social Security and Medicare], and other fiscal exposures continue to grow and now total approximately \$50 trillion, representing approximately four times the nation's total output (GDP) in fiscal year 2006, up from about \$20 trillion, or two times GDP in fiscal year 2000. As this long-term fiscal imbalance continues to grow, the retirement of the "baby boom" generation is closer to becoming a reality with the first wave of boomers eligible for early retirement under Social Security in 2008. Given these and other factors, *it seems clear that the nation's current fiscal path is unsustainable* and that tough choices by the President and the Congress are necessary in order to address the nation's large and growing long-term fiscal imbalance.<sup>19</sup>

Thanks in part to our staggering national debt, vital social needs are simply going unmet. We've already mentioned how essential school repairs are being neglected due to financial shortfalls. But schools aren't the only pieces of our nation's infrastructure that are crumbling. A 2005 report by the American Society of Civil Engineers declared that we are "failing to maintain even substandard conditions" in our highway system, draining more than 120 billion dollars from our economy in needless car repairs, lost productivity, and wasted fuel. The same report described the national power grid as "in urgent need of modernization," with annual maintenance spending having declined one percent per year since 1992 even as demand has grown steadily.<sup>20</sup> If blackouts, brownouts, and power failures seem to be more frequent in recent years, you're not imagining it. As a nation, we've simply ignored the basic, urgent need to take care of the systems upon which we rely.

As individuals, Americans are faring no better than their national government. Even as the economy—along with many corporations—continues to grow (albeit slowly), the working men and women who fuel that growth aren't receiving their fair share of the rewards. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor show that, while the productivity of labor has grown enormously since 1985, wages have failed to keep pace, creating a large and growing gap between industrial output per hour and real (inflation-adjusted) hourly compensation.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the average American is actually earning less today than his or her counterpart of a generation ago—the first time in our nation's history that this has been true.

For example, as shown in Census Bureau data, during the first quarter-century of post-war growth (1947–1973), real (inflation-adjusted) family income growth was almost the same, in percentage

terms, across the entire spectrum of Americans. During that period, the income of the lowest quintile grew by 116 percent, while the highest quintile enjoyed income growth of about 85 percent.

By contrast, during the period from 1974 to 2004, real family income growth was heavily stacked in favor of the wealthiest Americans. The income of the lowest quintile grew by just 2.8 percent; that of the second lowest, by 12.9 percent; of the middle quintile, by 23.3 percent; of the second highest, by 34.9 percent; and of the highest quintile, by 63.6 percent. Notably, *no* quintile performed as well during the last quarter of the twentieth century as all Americans did three decades earlier; but those who were already wealthy enjoyed at least reasonable growth, while those at the bottom of the ladder found themselves falling further and further behind.<sup>22</sup>

Even more disturbing are the trends in household wealth, which represent the level of assets owned by the typical individual or family and therefore reflect their long-term economic health even better, perhaps, than annual income. In recent years, the concentration of wealth in relatively few hands has accelerated. As of 2000, the top 10 percent of American families controlled no less than 69.8 percent of the national wealth—and almost half of that (32.7 percent) was actually in the hands of the top 1 percent of families. By contrast, the *bottom* 50 percent held only 2.8 percent of the national wealth, a pitifully small share that bodes ill for their future prospects.<sup>23</sup> More recent statistics suggest that this distribution has, if anything, worsened in the past eight years.

Generation We is well aware from painful personal experience that the national economy and their own financial prospects are on shaky ground. In an era when higher education is a prerequisite for most jobs with any career potential, many Millennials are finding it a painful financial struggle just to get through college. As tuition and related costs have mushroomed, financial-aid programs have shrunk and part-time job opportunities have dwindled.

The maximum Pell Grant, which covered 77 percent of the average cost of attending a public college in 1980, now covers just 33 percent



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of the same cost. As a result, getting a college education is becoming more and more difficult for young people who are not members of the economic elite.

Activist and journalist Paul Rogat Loeb has captured the typical human cost in a vivid personal anecdote:

The encounter that crystallized the shift [for me] happened a few years ago, when I met a student who lived on the same Brooklyn block where

I had lived while attending college in the early seventies. I'd worked my way through school as a bartender, making \$5 an hour for twenty hours a week. I paid my tuition at a private university with costs as high as any in the nation, paid my food, rent, and books, and had money left over to go out on the weekends. Twenty-five years later, this student was working 30 hours a week for \$6 an hour, a fraction in real dollars of what I'd been making. He commuted an hour and a half each way to the City College of New York, a public school with tuition far higher proportionate to his earnings than my private college tuition was to me. He kept dropping out and working fulltime to try to avoid getting too deep in debt, but would still owe \$15,000 or more when and if he graduated. Though he was working harder than I had, the rules had changed to make his passage vastly more difficult.<sup>24</sup>

Things don't get better after graduation. As the Millennials grow up, graduate, and take their places in the work force, new sources of economic stress and dissatisfaction emerge. After adjustment for inflation, salaries paid to new college graduates have fallen by 8.5 percent since 2000. The average college grad now starts life carrying 20,000 dollars in student loan debt.<sup>25</sup>

No wonder Millennials share a general impression that they live in a more challenging economic environment than the ones their grandparents, parents, or even their older siblings faced. In our focus groups, they talked about having to work long hours—sometimes at two or more jobs—just to manage rent, food, and student loan payments. They worried about being stuck in dead-end jobs, and they

PHOTO: VEER IMAGES

were vociferous in their complaints about uncaring employers who provide little or no healthcare coverage, pension plans, and other safety-net programs.

News stories about predatory speculators and corporate malfeasance at firms like Enron only heighten the cynical attitude of Generation We toward big business. Most seem ready to agree that corporate leaders are only interested in lining their own pockets, and the idea of a “social contract” for the mutual benefit of workers and companies seems a distant dream.

The Generation We members we spoke to are also ready to acknowledge that their own behavior contributes to the economic problems we face, as individuals and as a society. In our focus groups, many spoke about the “mindless consumerism” encouraged by the mass media, and confessed to being influenced by commercials and peer pressure into buying “meaningless products,” even to the extent of being driven deeper into debt.

Of course, this is both bad news and good news. The bad news is that, in the words of Walt Kelly’s Pogo, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” The good news is that, to a large extent, we have the power to resist the system and to improve our individual economic circumstances—if we choose to exercise it responsibly. Generation We understands this and appears ready to take the appropriate steps to restructure the financial system and its governance, provided the right leadership comes along to help educate and guide them.

## CREEPING TOTALITARIANISM

Generation We inherits an America whose greatest political traditions, as embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, are being slowly sapped. They are witnessing the gradual weakening of American democracy through erosion of human rights, media manipulation, and citizen apathy, and the concentration of excessive power in the hands of special interests.

In her powerful book *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, Naomi Wolf writes of 10 changes that have historically characterized nations that slip from democracy into dictatorship. Among the country examples she studies are Mussolini’s Italy, Hitler’s Germany, and Stalin’s Russia. As she shows, each of the 10 changes—steps toward totalitarianism—can be seen and documented in the United States today.

The 10 steps include, for example, the invocation of an external and internal threat as an excuse for a crackdown on civil liberties—something the Bush administration hasn’t been shy about doing since 9/11; the establishment of secret prisons—which we’ve seen happen at Guantánamo Bay as well as at other sites around the world, to which terror suspects have been sent for abusive questioning, and

in some cases, torture; the branding of political dissent as “treason”—rhetorical labeling used frequently in recent years by conservative politicians, pundits, and outlets like Fox News; and the subversion of the rule of law—as illustrated by, among other scandals, the firing of Justice Department officials apparently for refusing to cooperate with politically-motivated prosecutions.<sup>26</sup>

Wolf’s book, consciously modeled on the revolutionary-era writings of such freedom-loving patriots as Thomas Paine, is written in the form of a letter to a friend named Christopher Le, a Millennial youth. We would echo Wolf’s call to young Americans to recognize the danger of creeping totalitarianism and stand up against it.

Does it seem exaggerated to compare the situation in the United States today with the early stages of totalitarianism under Hitler or Stalin? If you think so, we urge you to read Wolf’s book and examine the parallels she documents.

Or consider just one example of the kinds of extraordinary, illegal, and unconstitutional powers the U.S. government now routinely claims—the right to engage in “extraordinary renditions” of people (potentially including U.S. citizens) it considers, sometimes without evidence, to be an “enemy combatant,” “security threat,” or “possible terrorist,” all of which are ill-defined terms whose vagueness gives government officials excessive power they can use as they see fit.

An extraordinary rendition occurs when a person is seized by U.S. government authorities—including by law any one of thousands in the executive branch given that authority—and “rendered” to officials in another country, usually without any involvement by courts either here or abroad. In many cases, such renditions are used by the CIA and other intelligence organizations to get suspects into the hands of countries that are known to use torture as a way of gaining information. For example, since 9/11, the Bush administration has rendered

terrorism suspects to countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Morocco, and Uzbekistan, where their custody receives no judicial oversight and where they may be held indefinitely for no reason at all.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps this doesn’t sound so bad. After all, if someone is a suspected terrorist, isn’t it reasonable for the government to take extraordinary steps to prevent this person from doing harm and to learn whatever secret plans he or she may be hatching? Maybe—except that the government contends it has no obligation to demonstrate to a court of law that those it has arrested are, in fact, terrorists, which means that completely innocent people are almost certain to be included among those who are seized and tortured. At least one investigative journalist has already found that “dozens,” and “perhaps hundreds,” of innocent men have been caught up in the anti-terror frenzy.<sup>28</sup>

What’s more, the victims don’t include only foreign nationals

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**...our diminishing liberties may be the most serious of all the problems the Millennials face.**



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picked up on battlefields in Afghanistan or Iraq. They include people like Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen who works as a software consultant and apparently suffered from a case of mistaken identity when he was detained at Kennedy Airport by U.S. officials in 2002. Arar was rendered to Syria, where he was imprisoned for a year and repeatedly beaten with a heavy metal cable. After a two-year investigation, the Canadian government concluded that Arar had no ties to terrorism and his arrest had been an unfortunate error.

Similarly, Army Chaplain James Yee—a Muslim who made the mistake of speaking up to request better treatment for detainees at Guantánamo Bay—was arrested on charges of “espionage and possibly treason,” and held in solitary confinement in a U.S. Navy brig. Six months later, the government dropped all its accusations against Yee and released him, with the proviso that he never offer any public complaint about his mistreatment.<sup>29</sup>

If solid citizens with no history of any offenses, such as Arar and Yee, can be arbitrarily imprisoned and mistreated without recourse, how can we be sure future administrations won't use these powers to stifle dissent, intimidate political adversaries, and discourage criticism? It's not as though such outrages against human rights have never happened in America; just look at the use of violence, up to and including lynching, to terrorize and intimidate African-Americans in the South until well into the twentieth century; the wholesale incarceration of Japanese-Americans during World War II purely on the basis of race; and the stifling of political dissent through legal threats, public humiliation, and job loss during the McCarthy era of the 1950s.

Could the next Martin Luther King, Jr., or Susan B. Anthony be rendered, imprisoned, tortured, or even killed by the government for daring to dissent?

In those historic episodes, other excuses were used, ranging from the need to preserve “racial purity” to bogus claims of “threats to national security.” Today, the “war on terror” is the all-embracing justification. But the abuses remain intolerable—and today, the government’s claims of powers untouchable by any court are bolder and more dangerous than ever.

The gradual erosion of Americans’ rights is being facilitated by a mainstream media that have largely abdicated their traditional role as watchdogs of democracy. Investigative journalism that probes the failings and misdeeds of our most powerful institutions, as in the days of Watergate, is almost extinct, replaced by a mindless media focus on scandal and sensation. And government repression encourages the cowardice of journalists. Look, for example, at what happened when Bush administration officials criminally leaked the identity of covert CIA agent Valerie Plame for political purposes: The only person to spend a day in jail was not one of the officials responsible, but a journalist who covered the story, Judith Miller of the *New York Times*.

We see this abdication in the media’s failure to scrutinize and objectively evaluate the actions of the Bush administration, especially in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The anti-democratic provisions in the USA PATRIOT Act—commonly referred to as the Patriot Act—received scanty coverage on the television networks or on cable news. The horrific photos from the Abu Ghraib torture scandal were shown on TV, but those in positions of authority—Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, for example—were not held accountable. The administration was permitted to blame the outrages on “a few bad apples,” even after a handful of intrepid reporters uncovered evidence that higher-ups sanctioned the abuse.

The disastrous Iraq war itself was facilitated by a docile and compliant news media. Numerous accounts have shown how a series of lies—largely unchallenged by the mainstream press—allowed the Bush administration to convince Americans that war was necessary and inevitable. From the fake “Niger yellowcake” story, based on forged documents, which Bush himself retailed in his 2003 State of the Union Address, and the false claims about mobile biological and chemical weapons labs, to the unsupported insinuations that Iraq was somehow involved in planning the 9/11 attacks, the media allowed the administration to create a public atmosphere of fear and hysteria that overwhelmed rational analysis.

In the months leading up to the war, the media everywhere endlessly replayed the famous sound bite, “Do you want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud?” in which Condoleezza Rice threatened Americans with death from Saddam Hussein’s nonexistent nuclear



weapons. The media then sensationalized the propaganda presenting false intelligence delivered by Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations, helping to convince members of Congress to give broad war powers to the president and persuading the nation to go to war under false pretenses.

Once the war began, the administration mounted a massive public relations effort to manipulate the public into supporting it, again abetted by a complaisant news media, using supposedly independent “military analysts” as undisclosed shells for Pentagon talking points. As David Barstow of the *New York Times* has reported:

Hidden behind that appearance of objectivity, though, is a Pentagon information apparatus that has used those analysts in a campaign to generate favorable news coverage of the administration’s wartime performance...

The effort, which began with the buildup to the Iraq war and continues to this day, has sought to exploit ideological and military allegiances, and also a powerful financial dynamic: Most of the analysts have ties to military contractors vested in the very war policies they are asked to assess on air.

Those business relationships are hardly ever disclosed to the viewers, and sometimes not even to the networks themselves. But collectively, the men on the plane and several dozen other military analysts represent more than 150 military contractors either as lobbyists, senior executives, board members or consultants. The companies include defense heavyweights, but also scores of smaller companies, all part of a vast assemblage of contractors scrambling for hundreds of billions in military business generated by the administration’s war on terror.<sup>30</sup>

**Disturbing ownership trends in the U.S. media help to explain some of the failure of the media to stand up for the rights and interests of American citizens.**

The *Times* story was an all-too-rare example of independent investigative reporting that dared to challenge government manipulation of the news. But relatively few Americans have heard about it. Barstow’s expose was greeted with almost total silence by the broadcast and cable news networks whose malfeasance it described. Howard Kurtz,

media critic for the *Washington Post* and *CNN*, called their response to the story “pathetic,” and added, “If there has been any coverage of this on CBS, NBC, ABC, MSNBC or Fox, I’ve missed it. The story makes the networks look bad—and their response, by and large, has been to ignore it.”<sup>31</sup>

This story is just one example of how our understanding of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has been impeded by a spineless media.

Think about it: When was the last time you saw combat footage from those countries on the TV news—let alone a picture of a fallen U.S. serviceman or civilian killed in the fighting? Discouraged by government restrictions on access as well as pressure from pro-administration advertisers and corporate chieftains, the news media have given far less daily coverage to our current wars than the Vietnam conflict received 40 years ago.

Imagine if the government had had the power to impose a similar blackout on coverage of Hurricane Katrina! Is it a stretch to infer that the “conditions on the ground” in Iraq and Afghanistan may be as bad as those experienced in New Orleans’ Ninth Ward?

Disturbing ownership trends in the U.S. media help to explain some of the failure of the media to stand up for the rights and interests of American citizens. Content and distribution of media are now owned and controlled by the same corporate interests. Before Reagan deregulated media ownership and media concentration laws were gradually eroded, companies that created editorial content for electronic media had to be owned independently from the regulated distribution companies. Now that this separation is gone, those who need to rely on freedom of speech and the press—for example, TV news departments—are beholden to government regulators with a clear interest in controlling them because their satellite, broadcast, and transmission licenses can be revoked, thereby destroying their corporate earnings.

It’s easy to see how this kind of intimidation could work. Suppose NBC or MSNBC—both owned by General Electric, a major defense contractor—were to violate a formal or informal “decree of silence” about some topic issued by the executive branch. The parent company might find itself losing defense contracts, satellite and spectrum licenses, and television station concessions. This would affect earnings, share prices, and job prospects of the corporate officers. How much easier for the news producers to quietly go along with the government mandate, and leave the public in the dark.

Think this is farfetched? At least one network owner has already admitted being influenced politically by his business interests. In the 2004 presidential election, Sumner Redstone of Viacom, owner of CBS, endorsed President Bush, saying, “It is in the best interests of my shareholders.” (Redstone had been a life-long Democrat.) If you were a news producer for CBS, how eager would you have been to run stories critical of Bush or favorable to the opposition?

Some of the specific ownership links now prevalent in the world of media are even more troubling. For example, 10 percent of News Corporation, the parent company of Fox News, is owned by Prince Al-Walid bin Talal, a Saudi prince who has actually bragged about getting the network to alter news coverage he considered biased against Muslims.<sup>32</sup> (Al-Walid is also the largest single shareowner of the giant

financial institution Citigroup, and in fact, the largest foreign investor in the U.S. economy.<sup>33</sup>) Without Al-Walid's support, Fox might well become a takeover target, threatening the entire media empire of Rupert Murdoch. Is it a stretch to think that the prince has profited handsomely from the increase in oil prices since the start of the Iraq war? If so, how might this further impact the supposedly "fair and balanced" coverage provided by Fox News.

Millennials should also be aware that the same corporation that owns Fox—News Corp—also owns the social-networking company many Millennials think of as "theirs": MySpace.

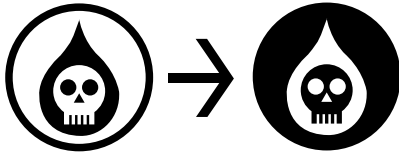
The nature of interlocking share ownership and large company interdependency means that our media is controlled by governmental and corporate interests that are run by members of older generations who are in thrall to the oligopolists, the plunderers, the petrodollar billionaires, and the propaganda network of the far right—people whose interests directly conflict with those of the Millennials (as well as the vast majority of Americans).

The idea of an independent news media prepared to challenge the powers-that-be on behalf of the people is almost dead. Today's mass media are effectively an instrument of mass consumerization. Commercials and editorial content both serve the same purpose: to brainwash viewers into choosing violent toys, processed food, fast food, and other poor lifestyle choices. They program us to spend our lives in front of a TV screen, video-game console, or computer monitor, where built-in tools for marketing, promotion, and habit influencing can work on us continually, making us sedentary, obese, diabetic, weak, and dependent on artificial stimulants. This then affects our cognitive ability and locks in spending, time, and consumption patterns. Before we know it, they own us. And if we are different and dissent, they marginalize us and ostracize us from society, abandoning us to lives of hopelessness, voicelessness, and poverty.

Thankfully, the brainwashing being practiced by the news and entertainment conglomerates is neither foolproof nor complete. The members of Generation We themselves are acutely aware of the effects their destructive media environment is having on them and their peers. In our focus groups, they spoke a lot about their dissatisfaction with the media—about the trivialization of news, the pro-corporate and pro-government slant of most media, and the sense that vital information is being withheld, distorted, or buried in an avalanche of irrelevant details. Generation We loves the Internet, and the power it brings to tap into myriad sources of information. But they also wonder, "How are we supposed to sort out what's true from what's false?" Many are searching for answers.

Some people might feel that the erosion of human rights and the corruption of the communications media by pro-government and pro-corporate interests are less significant problems for the average

**You may be tempted to think that abstract principles like human rights and freedom of the press are “none of your business.” In truth, they’re the business of every citizen—which is why our ancestors fought and died to defend those rights. Generation We must treat this challenge as seriously as our Founders did.**



**WATER IS THE NEW OIL**

person than the environmental, health, and economic challenges we've described. "After all," they may say, "I'm not a journalist, a political activist, or a human rights lawyer. So issues like Constitutional rights and media freedom don't directly concern me."

This may be true. Yet in a broader sense, our diminishing liberties may be the most serious of all the problems the Millennials face. After all, finding solutions to all the other issues we are struggling with depends on the existence of the freedoms we take for granted—freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to assemble and petition for redress of grievances, freedom to demand the truth from our elected officials, and so on. If we allow corporate interests to completely take over our government and our news media, how will the needs of average Americans even get a hearing on Capitol Hill or on the TV news? How will dissenters get their voices heard by their fellow citizens? How will candidates who advocate genuine change have a chance to win power at the polls?

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## A WORLD RAVAGED BY WAR

Finally, the challenges faced by Generation We are not domestic problems alone. As citizens of the most powerful nation on the planet, they bear a major responsibility for redirecting the course of a world in which warfare of unprecedented destructiveness is a looming threat. Terrorism, sectarian hatred, and violence abetted by spreading availability of weapons of mass destruction are the all-too-likely results of the mismanagement of international relations by previous generations, both in the United States and around the world.

It's important to note that there are powerful interconnections among the global dysfunctions we've listed in this chapter. For example, the dependence of the United States, and the rest of the developed world, on fossil fuels is not only an environmental and economic problem; it is also a major cause of political unrest, upheaval, violence, and warfare.

In a tragic accident of fate, the world's largest remaining known oil reserves happen to be located in a part of the planet where cultures and religions have clashed for centuries—the Middle East. Our need to keep the oil flowing has inevitably embroiled us in these ancient rivalries, distorting our foreign policy and helping to make the world a more dangerous place. Making matters worse, other oil-exporting countries elsewhere in the world also pose political threats of their own, further complicating efforts to maintain global peace.

The geopolitical effects of our reliance on foreign oil include:

- U.S. military and economic support for some of the world's most backward totalitarian regimes, including countries such as Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, and Libya, undermining our nation's traditional and avowed support for democratic reform. By propping up these regimes we are indirectly fostering anti-Semitism, oppression of women and gays, and suppression of political dissent.
- Continuing American military presence in the Middle East, driven not by the need to protect our ally Israel but by our need to ensure the free flow of oil supplies.
- Consequent resentment of American influence in the Middle East by those who feel oppressed or neglected by their nations' autocratic regimes, leading to support for terrorist and Islamist groups.
- Acceptance of totalitarian dictatorships devoid of human rights and free markets as acceptable allies, where malfeasance and evil are swept under the rug to feed our energy appetite.
- Ability of oil-exporting regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere that are actively or potentially hostile to U.S. interests—including Iran, Nigeria, Libya, and Venezuela—to blackmail the United States by threatening to “play the oil card” by withholding their oil supplies and thereby driving world prices through the roof.

By allowing our economy to become so heavily dependent on foreign oil, we've made the United States vulnerable to economic assaults—intentional or unintentional—from a wide array of sources, and created an interlocking global system in which turbulence in one part of the globe can trigger economic problems and even warfare half a world away.

Oil isn't the only vital resource that is likely to be a source of military conflict and violence in the decades to come. As global warming intensifies and produces disastrous environmental changes around the world, one probable result will be spreading desertification and deepening water shortages on one continent after another. China, southeast Asia, southwestern North America, North Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East are all overpopulated, prone to water scarcity, and likely sites where social and even military struggles for control of water could occur in the near future.

There are already signs that “water wars” have begun to break out over control of this absolute vital resource:

healthcare  
education energy  
social security  
infrastructure

Egypt, a powerful downstream riparian [that is, a river-based society], has several times threatened to go to war over Nile water; only the fact that both Sudan and Ethiopia have been wracked by civil war and are too poor to develop “their” water resources has so far prevented conflict. In the Euphrates Basin, Turkey is militarily more potent than Syria, but that hasn’t stopped the Syrians from threatening violence [over water rights]. And there are endless examples of powers that are similar in military might, but have threatened war [over water]: along the Mekong River, along the Paraná, and other places. In the Senegal Valley of West Africa, water shortages contributed to recent violent skirmishes between Mauritania and Senegal, complicated by the ethnic conflict between the black Africans and the paler-skinned Moors who control Mauritania. On the other side of the country, desperate Mauritians wrecked a Malian village after cattle herders refused to let them cross the border to water their cattle at a well.<sup>34</sup>

Oil, water, and other vital resources (such as strategic minerals, access to ports, fertile farmland, and sheer living space) have always been causes of war, though as population pressures and environmental degradation increase, it seems likely that tensions over resources are likely to grow in the years to come. But war has other, even less acceptable causes, including the urge to power and the desire for profits of arms manufacturers and other military contractors.

War spending has grotesquely distorted the economies of both the United States and the entire world. Consider the fact that, since 1996, even with no rival superpower threatening our country, U.S. military spending has increased by 50 percent (160 billion dollars), and now totals over 711 billion dollars—nearly half the total military spending of the entire world. American military spending dwarfs that of any conceivable rival power. For example, China (which has the world’s third-largest military budget, after the United States and Europe), spends “only” 122 billion dollars on the military, less than one-fifth the U.S. total. American military spending is greater than that of the next 45 countries—combined. It amounts to fully 43 percent of federal spending, crowding out desperately needed funds for Social Security, healthcare, education, infrastructure, energy research, and dozens of other important priorities.

Actually, the situation is *far worse* than even these statistics suggest, since the declared military budget *does not include* costs such as ongoing combat missions, veterans care, maintenance of nuclear weapons, and secret operations. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

are expected to cost taxpayers at least 170 billion dollars in additional funds during fiscal 2009 alone.

Driven by American military spending, world spending on arms and armies has also grown dramatically in recent years. As of 2006, it is estimated to be over 1.2 trillion dollars—this in a world where alleviating global poverty, eradicating infectious diseases, educating all children, and providing clean water and sanitation for everyone are deemed to be “too expensive.”<sup>35</sup>

Military spending profoundly distorts the world’s wealth. It drains money that could be more usefully spent on projects to benefit humankind; it channels huge sums of money into the pockets of arms contractors and service providers like Halliburton, Blackwater, and KBR; and it provides an artificial stimulus to the economy, becoming a primary driver of growth (at the expense of human lives) that governments find it increasingly difficult to do without. (It is no coincidence that the current administration is talking about troop cuts that coincide directly with its exit from office. They have an election coming up, and the effects of a war slowdown on the economy prior to that would be bad politics.)

The direct effects of war itself are even more appalling. In modern warfare, which targets not just uniformed combatants but entire societies, there are no winners. War cripples economies, ravages the environment, shatters infrastructures, and destroys countless lives—not just the lives of soldiers but those of their families and of millions of helpless civilian victims killed by bombing, landmines, wanton attacks, and the famine, drought, disease, and dislocation inevitably produced by war. The fact that governments around the world—including preeminently the government of the United States—devote the lion’s share of their discretionary spending to preparing for war and waging war is unforgivable.

And, of course, it is the youth of the world who bear the heaviest burden of war. The conflicts of the coming decades will be fought by Millennials—young people conscripted and forced by older

generations to kill one another and perpetuate cycles of violence that have never solved any problem or improved anyone’s life.

The saddest challenge Generation We faces is tens of thousands of their brethren coming home from war mutilated, dependent on prostheses, and suffering from record levels of post-traumatic stress disorder. The improvements in battlefield medicine have admirably reduced the number of mortalities, but the country is ill-prepared to support a generation that includes tens of thousands of veterans suffering from grievous long-term injuries. This is an incredible generational tragedy.

**The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are expected to cost taxpayers at least 170 billion dollars in additional funds during fiscal 2009 alone.**



In particular, it is the poor and underprivileged who do most of the fighting and dying. Unlike in past wars, members of America's elite and powerful families aren't serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. Only a handful of members of Congress, for example, have children or other relatives in the uniformed services. Instead, kids from rural, poor, and working-class families are being enticed, and aggressively recruited, to serve. As the wars drag on, the military has been forced to lower standards for recruits' educational, criminal, health, and psychological status in order to fill their stretched ranks. Fairness? Equality of sacrifice? Those concepts aren't even slogans any more; they've simply been forgotten.

Generation We and all other citizens of conscience must have the courage and strength to stand up and say "Enough!" to the purveyors of war.

## MILLENNIAL PERIL, MILLENNIAL OPPORTUNITY

Simply put, Generation We inherits a planet in peril, in which plunderers who treat the world as their private property are exploiting institutions of government, society, and business to control resources, manipulate media and markets, and sell out the long-term interests of their nation and the world for personal short-term gain.

These hostile trends aren't accidental, nor are they unconnected. They form a pattern by which plunderers and speculators seek to manipulate society so as to maintain and expand their own power and wealth. A former president and first lady used to speak about "a vast right-wing conspiracy." Here, if anywhere, is the real conspiracy—collusion among business and governmental leaders, media moguls, educators, and religious leaders who have contrived national and inter-

national systems that serve to keep the people weak, fearful, helpless, and under control. The goal of this conspiracy is not to impose ideological or political doctrine but simply to control the world's power and wealth.

These systems keep people sick and drained of energy through food that is nonnutritive, healthcare that is unaffordable, and an environment that is toxic. They keep people ignorant through an educational system that stifles dissent, stultifies creativity, and deadens the mind. They keep people physically and psychologically dependent through reliance on illegal drugs, pharmaceuticals, other addictive substances such as nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol, and addictive behaviors such as gambling,



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**...systems that serve to keep  
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electronic games, and mindless entertainment. They prosecute and convict record numbers of youth, especially minorities, to keep them from exercising the power of their numbers in the political system. They keep people frightened through constant drum-beating for war, exaggerated threats of terrorism, and media-created bogeymen (from Islamist extremists to illegal immigrants). And they keep people helpless through out-of-control debt, brain-numbing work, and financial dependency.

Their goal: to create a world in which the majority of the population are like high-paid serfs, unable or unwilling to organize, protest, or assert themselves and capable only of serving their corporate masters.

Journalist and television commentator Bill Moyers has written eloquently about the decline in social and economic equality even as an ideal in American society:

Equality is not an objective that can be achieved but it is a goal worth fighting for. A more equal society would bring us closer to the “self-evident truth” of our common humanity. I remember the early 1960s, when for a season one could imagine progress among the races, a nation finally accepting immigrants for their value not only to the economy but to our collective identity, a people sniffing the prospect of progress. One could look at the person who is different in some particular way—skin color, language, religion—without feeling fear. America, so long the exploiter of the black, red, brown, and yellow, was feeling its oats; we were on our way to becoming the land of opportunity, at last. Now inequality—especially between wealth and worker—has opened like an unbridgeable chasm.

Ronald Reagan once described a particular man he knew who was good steward of resources in the biblical sense. “This is a man,” Reagan said, “who in his own business, before he entered politics, instituted a profit-sharing plan, before unions had ever thought of it. He put in health and medical insurance for all his employees. He took 50 percent of the profits before taxes and set up a retirement program, a pension plan for all his employees. He sent checks for life to an employee who was ill and couldn’t work. He provided nursing care for the children of mothers who worked in the stores.”

That man was Barry Goldwater, a businessman before he entered politics. It’s incredible how far we have deviated from even the most conservative understanding of social responsibility. For a generation now Goldwater’s children [i.e., leaders of the modern conservative movement founded

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*“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”*

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

by Goldwater] have done everything they could to destroy the social compact between workers and employers, and to discredit, defame, and even destroy anyone who said their course was wrong. Principled conservatism was turned into an ideological caricature whose cardinal tenet was of taxation as a form of theft, or, as the libertarian icon Robert Nozick called it, “force labor.” What has happened to us that such anti-democratic ideas could become a governing theory?<sup>36</sup>

The plunderers, sadly, have made a lot of progress in reshaping American society in the image they favor. Tearing down this evil image—literally an ideal that has displaced the sacred vision of freedom and equality on which our society was originally founded—will pose an enormous challenge for Generation We.

Yet at the same time, the Millennials enjoy unique opportunities created by a series of powerful new forces.

## THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

As we’ve noted, Generation We is the first generation to have been raised immersed in the immense power of new information and communications technologies—computers, cell phones, cable television, PDAs, and the Internet. As numerous comments in our focus groups demonstrated, they’re well aware of the impact these technologies have had on them, and they view themselves as a generation where technology and instant communication is central to every aspect of their life, relationships, jobs, and education. One focus group participant put it especially well:

We’re like a cusp generation. Unlike our parents, we grew up with technology, so we’re comfortable with it and can take advantage of it. But unlike the kids today who are younger than us, we remember the world *before* the new technology, so we don’t take it for granted. And we don’t let it disconnect us from one another or from the world. We know why it’s important to get out of the house and be with people face to face. So we have the best of both worlds.

Millennials assume they have unlimited and free (or virtually free) access to information. For them, the Internet has the effect of obliterating the boundaries between what can and cannot be known. For many, it even demolishes the boundary between what is and is not possible. As one of our focus group participants remarked, “The Internet has made me feel I can do anything. Once I go online, there’s always a way to figure it out.”

Furthermore, they are a generation that loves instant messaging

and social networking. They constantly text each other and use the Internet to stay continually connected to their peers. They use online file-sharing, video streaming, blogging, and gaming as ways to socialize and compete with people from all over the world, without regard to race, class, or educational background.

Of course, the elimination of information barriers hasn't really made the Millennials all-powerful; it has simply brought them up against a new set of barriers, defined by economics, time, and social structures, that prevent them from accomplishing what they could achieve. But the sense that the Internet and other information technologies now make all of human knowledge instantly available to anyone with a computer has nonetheless had a profound impact on today's youth.

It means that, *in theory*, they believe they should be able to do anything. And that means that the societal, governmental, and economic barriers that are preventing them from achieving their dreams—for example, the massive efforts at censoring the Internet currently being mounted by totalitarian regimes around the world—are all the more frustrating to Generation We, and subject to being eliminated by the power of their social and political force.

Having been immersed in technology their entire lives, Generation We will have greater potential than any previous generation to innovate and benefit from other new and emerging technologies, from bioengineering to nanotechnology. They will seek hard technological challenges and be comfortable in doing so. As a result, they have a huge opportunity to improve life for millions of people.

Of course, technologies can be a mixed blessing. Some of the new healthcare technologies created over the past decades have saved and extended many lives. But this heroic role of technology masks other issues that must be addressed. Technology has helped drive healthcare costs through the roof, and competition among hospitals and healthcare providers to have the latest and fanciest equipment contributes to price escalation and the neglect of more basic yet more effective means of disease prevention and improvement of human health—things like better nutrition, exercise, and a cleaner environment.

There's another danger—that Millennials have become so accustomed to communication via computer, PDA, and cell phone they have forgotten how to engage with one another in the real world. Online social-networking is fine, but when it comes to political and social activism, it's no substitute for community-building and grassroots organizing. Some Millennials view activism and speaking out as something one does behind the safety of the computer monitor. The world is not so simple. Nothing replaces the power of direct human

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interaction, eye-to-eye contact, and public assembly.

Generation We needs to translate its social consciousness into real-life action. Happily, there are many signs they are beginning to do just that.

## THE GLOBAL SPREAD OF KNOWLEDGE

Generation We is acutely aware of the gradually spreading availability of higher education, both within the United States and around the world, and they view this as a trend with potentially enormous beneficial impact. It's something they see at work in their own lives. In fact, many participants in our focus groups spoke with pride about how they've enjoyed greater educational opportunities than their parents or grandparents could have dreamed of, and how this has opened doors in terms of lifestyle and career that otherwise would have remained forever shut.

In a broader sense, Generation We is benefiting from an emerging sense of unity among the world's peoples as cultures around the planet become shared and linked. It's something they can see, hear, and feel happening all around them. They see "world music" as *their* music. Problems of poverty, disease, and hunger in Africa and Asia are *their* problems. Opportunities for women in traditional societies to finally control their own destinies and for children to receive the nutrition, healthcare, and schooling they need to live full lives are *their* concerns.

This movement toward planetary integration can have either a negative or a positive impact. If it is controlled by plunderers, financial speculators, arms makers, megamedia, or energy companies for their own benefit, its overall impact will be negative, resulting in a world where individuality and indigenous cultures are homogenized or replaced by corporate-controlled replicas and where the wealth of local economies is channeled for purely private gain. But if the peoples of the world, especially the youth, insist that it be used for the benefit of all, its impact will be incredibly positive.

## ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND HOLISTIC THINKING

Because Generation We has been raised from infancy in the midst of a reawakening awareness of the fragility of the environment and an appreciation for its value, they are uniquely positioned to consider the long-term environmental impacts of everything they do. This is a natural remedy for the short-term thinking that has dominated most human behavior and that has helped to create our current dilemmas.

What's more, the heightened environmental awareness of Generation We encourages them to take a *holistic* approach to the prob-

lems they face. They are accustomed to thinking about the world as a set of interlocking systems that have profound, complex effects on one another, and they are acutely aware—perhaps more so than previous generations—of how the law of unintended consequences can produce devastating results when interactions aren't considered and planned for.

Millennials are inclined to extend this holistic mode of thinking beyond the natural world and into the social, economic, and political realms. When discussing problems in our focus groups, the Millennials routinely brushed aside the boundaries between the government, business, non-profit, academic, and civic worlds. They are impatient with dogmatic or ideological “rules” about the proper spheres of action for various kinds of organizations, and instead are accustomed to thinking pragmatically about how social groups and institutions can cooperate in search of solutions that serve society as a whole.

Former Vice President Al Gore said it well:

There is an African proverb that says, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” We need to go far, quickly.

We must abandon the conceit that individual, isolated, private actions are the answer. They can and do help. But they will not take us far enough without collective action.<sup>37</sup>

Generation We has embraced Gore's insight. Whether the most effective answer to a global problem can come from a government agency, or a for-profit business, or a university researcher, or a volunteer group, Generation We is happy to embrace it. For them, this is one world, and the combined efforts of everyone are required to make and keep it healthy.



# Q53

**Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the statement. (IF AGREE) Does this situation represent a crisis that our country must address immediately, a major problem that must be addressed soon, or a minor problem that should be addressed eventually?**

	Agree Crisis	Agree Major Prob.	Agree Minor Prob.	Dis-Agree	DK/Ref	Total Agree
Our nation's continuing dependence on oil has weakened our economy and stifled innovation, left us dependent on foreign countries - some of whom sponsor terrorism against us - and dragged us into unnecessary wars.	37	42	15	6	1	93
With costs rising out of control and the quality of health coverage declining, the healthcare system in our country is broken, and we need to make fundamental changes.	38	42	15	6	1	93
The growing burden placed on our country by our massive national debt is hurting our economy, stifling job growth and investment and making it harder for American businesses and entrepreneurs to be competitive in the global marketplace.	22	43	27	8	0	92
The health of our country is collapsing under an epidemic of chronic, preventable diseases as we slowly poison our own bodies through environmental pollution, overmedication, and unhealthy diets.	28	43	22	7	0	93
We have an unequal education system in our country, where students in affluent areas enjoy better resources and learning environments while those in rural areas and inner cities too often receive and inferior education.	31	40	21	8	0	92
Man-made causes are destroying our environment and the Earth's delicate ecosystem. As a result, we could see massive, irreversible damage to the Earth's landscape during our lifetimes.	35	39	18	9	0	91
Our country must take extreme measures now, before it is too late, to protect the environment and begin to reverse the damage we have done.	33	41	20	6	-	94
The federal debt is exploding, with no end in sight, shifting a tremendous burden onto future generations to pay for the failed leadership of the current generation and weakening America's economic growth for decades to come.	30	44	21	5	0	94
The changing nature of America's economy, where we import most of our goods and export millions of jobs to developing countries, is threatening America's middle class.	26	43	24	7	0	92
Long-term jobs that provide comprehensive health benefits and retirement security are becoming a thing of the past, and individuals in our generation will have to provide for their own health care and retirement security.	32	42	18	7	0	93
Americans' basic civil rights are being undermined more every day. Government and business have compromised our privacy, the corporate media tells us what they want us to hear rather than the facts, and justice is for sale to anyone who can afford the right lawyers.	31	38	24	7	0	92

*continues on next page...*

# Q53

(continued)

	Agree Crisis	Agree Major Prob.	Agree Minor Prob.	Dis- Agree	DK/ Ref	Total Agree
From the failed response to Hurricane Katrina to persistent fraud, corruption, and abuse, our government has failed to meet its most basic responsibilities and violated the very taxpayers who fund it.	30	41	20	9	0	90
Government is dominated by special interests and lobbyists, who give millions of dollars in campaign contributions to politicians, who in turn give even more back to those special interests, while the rest of us are left holding the bag.	31	42	21	5	0	95
Hurricane Katrina revealed the extent to which our country is divided into two Americas, one of which lacks many basic needs and is largely ignored by our government. The growing gap between the wealthy and the rest of us must be addressed, because no democracy can survive without a large, vibrant middle class.	30	40	20	9	0	90
Our reliance on fossil fuels is a by-product of the interests of those currently in power. We need to invest in and innovate new energy sources in order to protect our quality of life and prosperity.	33	43	19	4	0	96