Talk at Bennington College students and faculty on September 15, 2008

I want to talk with you today for just an hour. To bring order into my remarks, I will divide what I have to say into four categories: where we are coming from; where we now are; where we are going; and what you can do about the conditions that will shape your lives

First, Where we are coming from:

At the end of the Second World War, Americans had cause to be euphoric and we were. Most of us believed that the future was ours. Ours was the American Century.

The Cold War changed the world for both America and Russia. We like to think that we "won" the Cold War, but the history of events since it ended shows that we both really lost it. This is because of its impact on both Russian and American societies and economies. To match one another, we both were turned into militaristic states and our economies suffered. In America, we can trace our transformation -- perhaps uniquely in history – to a single piece of paper. Paul Nitze's National Security Council Paper, "NSC 68" convinced President Harry Truman that we could sustain our economic growth and ensure full employment by applying John Maynard Keynes' emphasis on the role of government in the economy but apply it in the military or "security" sphere. President Truman signed it as a basic U.S. policy doctrine on September 30, 1950. This was a program that the wise American specialist on national policy, Chalmers Johnson, has termed "military Keynesianism." (His "blowback" trilogy should be required reading in every American college.)

Following the new strategy, the government used the power of the purse to divert our then efficient and productive civilian economy to the military. So profound was this change that by 1960s we were no longer competitive in manufacturing and distributing most civilian goods. Our civilian industrial plant was allowed to become obsolescent or even to deteriorate. Worse, our managerial skills, on which we had prided ourselves, atrophied. The new American business ethos no longer emphasized competition because military contracts were often awarded without bid and were frequently awarded at cost-plus.

While our industrial plant and managerial skills began to decay. Japan forged ahead. From Japan we bought TV sets, our cameras, our computers, our cars. We were no long competitive in the world market. It is now estimated by the American Society for Civil Engineers that it would take $1.6 trillion just to bring our industrial plant and our supporting infrastructure back up to world standards. This was graphically demonstrated last week. As you probably read the automobile companies' executives have said that without massive government help they could no longer compete in the world market.

What happened was that we turned our skills and investments to military production: in the 1950s and 1960s, we were superb in weapons and space-related production but could no longer compete on civilian goods. We stopped trying to make many things our people wanted and were buying. Even those things we put out under American labels, like TV sets, were often just American wrappers on Asian components.

I watched this happen. I visited Japan in 1962 as a guest of the Japanese government. While there, I was taken on a tour of the Canon and Toshiba plants. I expected to see how cheap Asian labor was making possible the Japanese boom. What I saw was quite different. Labor was cheaper, it is true, but what really made the difference was automation, skilled technique, able management and intelligence.

Our companies didn't need these things: their market was increasingly our government. So why bother with making cameras or washing machines when you could make jet bombers or rockets. The profits were larger and distribution was no problem. Management could afford to be lax since mistakes could be repaired by overruns.
Even our universities fell into this trap. Getting government contracts was such an easy way to raise money. It was far easier than soliciting private support and it allowed expansion into new fields. Look at the budgets of even the private universities: Harvard, MIT, Chicago and many " came to rely on government subsidies for a large part of their expenditures and in return spent much of their intellectual energy on "security"-related studies. We even created new universities and dozens of research institutes for these activities. America was becoming a very different place than it was in 1945.

And the world began to see America in this new light. The America of 1945 was almost universally beloved -- that is not too strong a term. When, as a young student, traveling through Asia and Africa, I was often in danger: everyone in a village would come nearly to blows to determine who could entertain me. Today, America is feared and hated in much of the world. Now, if I went back to those same villages, I would risk being shot.

Second, where we are:

To discuss where we are, I am going to have to use a number few of us – that is those of us not studying astronomy --ever heard before: *trillion*. When I was a student in the 1940s, I got more or less used to hearing the number *million*. Then when I went into the government, I had only just got used to *billion*. As I returned to academic life, I was astonished when *trillion* came along. It is still difficult for me to imagine a trillion dollars. You can think of it as a pile. If you stack up dollar bills, a trillion dollars will be miles high. But I would like to think of it in another way: a trillion dollars would provide health care for the 47 million Americans without it plus giving quality pre-school education to every American child and make college feasible for every American student. Just the interest on a trillion dollars (according to the World Bank) would eliminate starvation and malnutrition or provide primary education for every child on earth.

That speaks about our government's priorities. What about us? How do we treat our economy?

First of all, we do not save. Privately and governmentally, we just borrow. We borrow from each other. Our National debt went up 70% under Bush administration; we also borrow from foreigners. We had borrowed about $3 trillion as of a year ago; now our foreign debt is much more. Our projected deficit government for this year is $410 billion. Our children and grandchildren will inherit the debt of this last 8 years.

But you will hear, we are earning enough to cover it. Unfortunately that is unlikely. According to the chief of our Central Bank, the Federal Reserve, economic growth will stagnate or even fall; Over 6 out of each hundred Americans who are trying to find jobs are out of work. About that many more have given up trying. Americans are losing their houses in record numbers. About one in each five owe more money on mortgages than their houses are worth. That is over ten million homeowners have lost their investments in their houses and foreclosures went up nearly 60 percent last year.

What has caused all this?

Partly it is our individual fault – visit the malls to see one part of the answer. The British

were once derided as a nation of shopkeepers; we are a nation of consumers. We are real "junkies" in our shopping for things we don't need.

But a part of the answer to our growing debt is our militarism: Our current Military budget is $541 billion. That is 58 cents of every dollar spent by US Government and it is more than combined defense budgets of all other countries and more than our combined spending on education, environment protection, justice administration, veterans benefits, housing assistance, transportation, job training, agricultural support, energy and economic development assistance.

We are told we need to spend this huge amount because our National Defense Strategy lays out our determination and "right" to make pre-emptive warfare, indeed to attack any country *whose dominance even of its own neighborhood thwarts us*. Coming into office in 2001 the Bush administration leaked information and that it was ready to "target" up to 60 other countries. Is this just posturing? Look at the sequence: the war in Afghanistan led to Iraq which led for the second time to Somalia and now has us attacking the territory of Pakistan and planning an attack on Iran. Are these necessary for our safety? Are we gaining or losing security by our involvement in them. I will briefly review them:

Consider, first, Afghanistan:

If anyone still thinks in historical terms, we should remember that the Afghans inflicted the worst defeat on the British Empire it suffered in the 19th century and they virtually wrecked the Soviet empire in the 20th. Are we more "successful?" With our overwhelming firepower, we have killed about as many Afghans as the Russians did, about one million and have far fewer soldiers. So far about 500 dead. Our invasion shattered what the Russians did not destroy of the Afghan economy. So the only remaining industry is the drug trade of which Afghanistan furnishes about 90% of the world's market. Our enemies, the Taliban, had banned it, but now they need the income they derive from it to fight us. And, sober observers report that the Taliban is returning both to favor and to geographical control. They are now not far from Kabul. Meanwhile, the warlords, whom the Taliban chased away and whom we have either supported or tolerated are again on the decline.

Consider, second, Iraq:

One and a half million Americans soldiers have served in Iraq. We now have about 140,000 men and women there. In addition, which few Americans have even heard about, we have there some 180,000 private contractors at a cost so far of $85 billion. Over all, the Iraq war has cost us through the end of this fiscal year $922 billion spent in direct (that is, in Congressionally-appropriated) outlays and perhaps $3 trillion in costs to our economy at home. These costs have been disguised from us by government borrowing from us (our national debt has risen 70%) and from foreigners (our government has borrowed from them more than $3 trillion).

But these are the trivial costs. The tragic costs are measured in blood and misery. We have now lost over 4,100 dead. Then there are the wounded. The Bush administration admits to about 25,000 wounded but that is wildly, even ridiculously, wrong: this year alone some 300,000 servicemen and –women are in treatment. The real total of wounded is probably at least 500,000 of whom over half have severe brain damage – concussions -- which will cause memory loss, severe headaches and confused thinking, for the rest of many of their lives. They will be a burden on their families and communities. 22,000 of them tried to commit suicide this year. No one knows – yet – about the number of cases of cancer that will develop from the use of depleted uranium bombs and shells, but the numbers could be very high. In addition to the impact of these events on wives and children, just consider the cost of treating the wounded. The best

guess is that, over their lifetimes, it will consume $1 trillion.

If you find these figures hard to believe, consider that from the effects of the 1991 Gulf War, which lasted only 100 hours, 300,000 men and women are claiming disability payments.

Then consider the Iraqis: According to a study made by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, we or Iraqis in the conditions we have created have killed at least 600,000 as of two years ago. The figure today is perhaps over a million and we have made or helped to make about 3 million into refugees. The physical damage is literally beyond count but could be several hundred billion dollars.

More important is the "collateral" damage: we have shattered the cultural heritage of the world's oldest civilization, watching and doing nothing while its great antiquities museum was gutted and the national library trashed.

Worse we have destroyed the social contract between the people and authorities. Let me dwell on this intangible issue: if any American city lost its social contract – a concept that our founding fathers and other 18th century philosophers well understood – the entire American army could not keep a semblance of order. That is what has happened in Baghdad. And we cannot control it with the world's most powerful army. The Neoconservatives advised our government that, by invading Iraq, we would create democracy. Instead, Iraq is a destroyed society.

We are told also that we are "winning" -- whatever that might mean – and that the "surge" is working: But the fact is that while violence has died down somewhat -- only 654 Iraqis were killed in May this year, making Iraq still the most dangerous country in the world – it is not more troops or a new strategy that have reduced casualties. It is the fact that neighborhoods have already been ethnically cleansed (so Iraqis are fighting less among themselves), we have built huge concrete barriers between them and we have drawn our troops back into secure bases from which they sally mainly in aircraft or tanks. These are tactical accommodations but do not lead to long-term solutions. In fact they lead in the opposite direction.

As even our former proconsul and current ambassador to the UN, Zalmay Khalilzad secretly wrote to President Bush, "the proposal to send more U.S. forces to Iraq would not produced a long-term solution and would make our policy less, not more, sustainable." Mao Tse-Tung, Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Gap could have explained why: we have provided more targets and angered more natives. Our much-vaunted counterinsurgency ("CI" in the military acronym) is just a replay of what we did when we lost the Vietnam War; even the sales pitch is the same.

Consider, Third, Somalia:

Somalia had less to destroy than Iraq. It is a small country. Few of us have even heard of it except in the film "Black Hawk Down." There we were shown our decent young men trying to free the Somalis from a bunch of murderous, raping thugs, the warlords. We failed and President Clinton pulled the plug. We got out. The warlords came back. Then the Somalis did a remarkable thing: they got rid of the warlord themselves without our help. But we didn't like the way they did it. Like most Africans and Asians, they had given up on Marxism and had fallen back on religion. Their Islamic fundamentalism had some of the ugly features we have seen in Afghanistan. But we didn't care about that. What bothered us was that we feared that their Islam would be hospitable to the al-Qaida people. So we sicked our Ethiopian friends whose government is Christian and who have long wished to dominate Somalia, on them. Actually we didn't just urge them to attack their neighbor; we joined in on the attack, not only with money and arms but also with our own aircraft, ships and troops. So we destroyed the Somali Muslim government, the "Union of Islamic Courts." Back to "Black Hawk Down:" on the heels of our

forces and the Ethiopians came the same murderous, raping warlords, now more or less our allies. So Somalia today is a crippled society, but one that bitterly hates us. So bitter is their feeling against all foreigners that even aid workers are now targets. Somalia too is a destroyed society with a shredded social contract as a result of our actions. We did not create terrorism in Somalia – the warlords did that – but Somalis' hatred of them has now been redirected toward us.

Lastly, reflect on Terrorism:

Americans are obsessed by terrorism as a result of the September 11 attacks. There is, of course, reason to fear terrorism because of its unpredictability and randomness. But let us try to analyze it. Consider these facts:

- More Americans were killed by lightening and very many more by traffic accidents in the year of the attacks than by 9/11;

- We have never been opposed to "terrorism" as such. Our ancestors won the Revolution against the British using terrorism as a major instrument and we aided and abetted Afghan terrorism against the Russians in the 1980s. Then we renamed terrorists "freedom fighters" and, most important;

- Terrorism is a tactic used by the weak when they have no other recourse.

When a country is invaded and crushed, we should know from history, patriots take up arms. Regard the action of the Greeks and French in World War II, the Algerians against the French in the 1960s and our ancestors in the Revolution. Since they were unable to defeat heavily armed military units, they resorted to hit and run tactics against the foreigners and terrorism against the waverers or Quislings in their own societies. Invaders nearly always face – and are usually defeated by – this fact. As the noted English expert on the Middle East, Patrick Seale, wrote: "Al-Qaeda did not exist in Iraq before America's criminally misconceived war. It was America's invasion and its continued occupation which gave Al-Qaeda the chance to plant itself in Iraq. Only when the U.S. finally withdraws from Iraq can Al-Qaeda be defeated there…. it is only in opposition to Western aggression that it gains popularity." Echo that for Afghanistan and Somalia and let it be a portent for Iran.

Third, Where we are going:

The Neoconservatives, who have set the foreign policy of the Bush administration, have called for what they call The Long War. They expect it to last about half a century, that is for most of your lives.

What is it? What will it do to our position in the world? What will it do to our laws and our concept of civil liberties? What effect will it have on our society and economy? What will it cost in terms of money?

- The core idea of neo-conservatism is that America, alone among world powers, has the strength, the wisdom and the right to impose its will upon all the nations of the world, in effect to remake them not in the American image, as we would define it, but as subordinate states within a new American security system. These concepts have been spelled out in numerous articles and speeches by prominent neoconservatives within and outside of government. The most important have also been embedded in the 2005 "National Defense Strategy of the United States of America" which baldly states that

"America is a nation at war [which] At the direction of the President…will defeat adversaries at the time, place, and in the manner of our choosing." That is, to engage in preemptive military strikes. Adversaries are variously described, but among the descriptions are those who seek to "limit our global freedom to act" and "dominate key regions" or "develop and use breakthrough technologies to negate current U.S. advantages in key operational domains." Broadly speaking, "Our role in the world depends on effectively projecting and sustaining our forces in distant environments where adversaries may seek to deny us access." In short, the official doctrine of America is world domination.

- Attempting to implement this doctrine now has us engaged in wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Inevitably, these military actions spill over into neighboring countries. Fighting in Afghanistan has caused in the last week to attack targets in Pakistan (infuriating not only the pro-American government and causing it to close down our supply route to Afghanistan but causing great popular anger while doing little or nothing to improve our position in Afghanistan). We can be sure that wherever we try to implement the neoconservative doctrine, we will lose allies and friends while entrenching and embittering those we attack.

- The effect on the American society is already pernicious. Our government has acquired the habit of lying to us (as it did on the Iraq war), of withholding information even from the Congress (as it has done on the Department of Defense expenditures), of setting aside the Constitution (as it has done on incarceration and torture of prisoners of war and on invasion of privacy of our own citizens by wiretaps in violation of the law) and in numerous other ways that would have shocked our ancestors. In short we have taken several steps toward the ghastly world described by George Orwell in his novel *1984*.

- It has polarized our society to a degree that makes intelligent debate on public policy nearly impossible and often dangerous and has so skewed our economy that, as I have pointed out, we spend more on military power than the rest of the world combined and more than we spend on all other public programs combined. Doing so, and refusing the admit the costs, have caused us to go deeply into debt, to allow our cities and schools to degrade and kept us from addressing the ultimate security issue of any free society, the health of our citizens.

- The cost we can project to implement the neoconservative program is literally staggering. Some estimates, which are probably underestimates, run to about double our gross national product, upwards of $20 *trillion*.

Is this just a fantasy? A pipedream of a bunch of unbalanced, angry and frustrated neoconservatives?

I wish I could tell you that it is. Sadly, it is much more. For example, we now have nearly 1,000 U.S. military bases in other countries. We have the troops and weapons in place to act anywhere in the world. The Bush administration maintains publicly that it has the authority to do so. The previously operative law, the War Powers Resolution (P.L 93-148 of 1973), which was passed by Congress over the veto of President Nixon, limits the president's authority to commit American troops into hostile situations and requires him "in every possible circumstance" to consult with the Congress before so doing. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on

the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President Bush convinced the Congress to grant him full authority (P.L. 102-1 of September 18, 2001) to "use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to (1) defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and (2) enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions regarding Iraq." President Bush has taken the position that this resolution gives him even wider authority over anywhere he deems a threat to exist. With this in mind, the Department of Defense, under Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, created a special secret force, said to number 55,000 men with a budget of about $80 billion, which does not have to report to Congress or even to civilian representatives of the Government, the ambassadors, but is authorized to carry out assassinations and even to overthrow governments. Members of this force were active in the Somalia invasion and are already said to be involved in covert activities in Iran. We learned on September 11, 2008 that some of them had been sent into Pakistan despite the refusal of its government to allow them.

It is, of course, possible to encourage proxies to act without committing American troops. This seems to have been the case in the recent crisis over Georgia:

What happened in Georgia may be almost as much a lesson for America as what is happening in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. The major difference is that an attack on Russia would cause a nuclear world war. Russia, under the Tsars, the Communists and Vladimir Putin, naturally was sensitive to what happened on its frontier – just as America, under the Monroe Doctrine, has always been in Latin America. Recognizing this strategic reality, James Baker, the first President Bush's secretary of state, promised the Russians that we would not move NATO ahead "even one inch." We have now moved it right into Russia's immediately neighborhood. I agree with Mr. Baker that this was not a wise move. But worse was to follow. You would have to read the press very carefully to learn that it was Georgia that attacked South Ossetia (whose citizens have Russian passports and which has been essentially independent for about 20 years). On August 7, Georgian President President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered the attack when, he claims, he was given a "green light" by the Bush administration. Anticipating the move, the Russians reacted in their usual heavy-handed fashion. So we were furious. Vice President Dick Cheney rushed to Georgia to promise them a billion dollars in aid and after considerable diplomatic arm-twisting a NATO delegation rushed in to commiserate. But then, of course, nothing happened. We would not go to war with Russia to protect South Ossetia. Nor would NATO. So we created a crisis where none existed and both Georgians and inhabitants paid the bill in suffering.

Now look at what lies ahead in Iran

Two issues have dominated discussion of Iran – its alleged attempts to acquire nuclear weapons and its supposed intervention in Iraq. Of course, also, many people, particularly women, dislike its regressive social policies toward women. But, on the nuclear issue bear in mind two things:

- First, it was America that got Iran started toward nuclear weapons. As Jonathan Power wrote, "Lost somewhere in the mists of history is the knowledge that it was the pro-American Shah of Iran who initiated Iran's quest to build a nuclear bomb. And it was the anti-American revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini that initially suspended work on the bomb." Also our most authoritative estimators of facts in foreign affairs, our 16 intelligence agencies, found unanimously last November that they had "high confidence" that Iran had no nuclear weapons and had no plans to attempt to build them.

- I obviously do not have access to all of the data available to intelligence community, but I have learned in my foreign affairs experience that to understand any other country's policies one must put himself, as it were, on the other side of the table, in the chair occupied by its leader. So what would I do if I were Ayatollah Ali Khamenei or President Mahmoud Ahmad-i Naiad? I would see that President Bush singled out three countries which he called "the Axis of Evil." Then he threatened them with "regime change." The Iranian leader would know that regime change is a euphemism for overthrowing their governments and killing their leaders. So what did America do? Iraq, which did not have nuclear weapons, was destroyed while North Korea, which did have nuclear weapons and so could not be safely attacked, was offered an aid program, money and food supplies. That leaves Iran. What would a rational, patriotic, practical Iranian leader do? No doubt he would try to acquire this ultimate defense tool as quickly and as secretly as he could. Even blowing up all the identified nuclear-related sites and killing all the nuclear-related technicians will simply delay the process and guarantee that Iran will eventually get the bomb.

- Second, the Bush administration has charged that Iran was playing a significant role in thwarting our operations in Iraq – that is acting as we expected in our 2005 National Security Strategy. But the US intelligence experts found that these charges were exaggerated or unproven.

Again, if I were an Iranian policy planner, I would urge that my government do what it could to make American lives there difficult. As an Iranian, I would react as am American would if a foreign power, which proclaims itself our enemy, were occupying Mexico. Imagine our reaction to that! In fact, we don't have to imagine. We just have to remember the Bay of Pigs operation against Cuba.

We are not yet in a full-scale war against Iran, but if we attack Iran with nuclear weapons, the estimates are that we will kill upwards of 3 million Iranians but then we will be in a guerrilla war that will make Iraq look like a picnic. Iran has 150 thousand national guardsmen, already organized and fully equipped for guerrilla warfare – in 2003 Iraq had none at all – and Iran has a fleet of fast, highly maneuverable and lethal speedboats that will attack our fleet and above all oil tankers. On attacking Iran, the "free world" is not with us. Public opinion polls tell us that whereas at least the western Europeans used to regard us as the world's leader toward stability, many now think of us as a rogue nation. Americans would not use that term, but the latest polls in April this year show that 81% of us think that "things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track." In my meetings with conservative business leaders, I find that practically all think that an attack on Iran would be insane. Many think that our brief role as the world's leader is nearly ended, that if the 20th century was the American century, the 21st will not be. Now, for the first time, we are even being turned down for further borrowing by the great sovereign wealth funds. They have come to regard us the way a bank does a customer whose assets are pledged, who is spending too much and who does not seem to be acting rationally.

In Conclusion: what must your generation do?

First, on public policy:

Our country must bring itself back from the binge we have been on. We need to be more modest. One of the best Marine Corps commentator put it simply: "It used to be said that the side with the most guns won; today, the side with the most guns goes bankrupt." That is roughly where we are today. In his usual succinct way, Colonel Andrew Bacevich put it well: "America

doesn't need a bigger army. It needs a more modest foreign policy…Modesty implies giving up on the illusions of grandeur to which the end of the Cold War and 9/11 gave rise. It also means reining in the imperial presidents who expect the army to make good on those illusions."

On the nuclear issue which I, from my intimate experience in the Cuban Missile Crisis, particularly worry about, we missed the opportunity to get a moratorium on nuclear weapons; instead we multiplied what we had to fantastic numbers, 30-40 thousand when a dozen would have blown up most of the world. The result was Russia set out to match us. China followed, then Israel working with South Africa, then India and Pakistan fearing one another, North Korea et al. Now we are on the brink of a new "surge." We are again building bombs and upgrading those we already have instead of trying to curtail them. This is exactly the opposite of what we need to do. Every new country adds new risks. Several more countries are on the brink of deciding to "go nuclear."

What we could do is to begin with ourselves and set an example for the world. From our (and the Russian) initiative, we should branch out. The most dangerous area is the Middle East so we should start there. We should push for a regional nuclear ban. Israel is the only nuclear power in the Middle East, and it will have to play the key role. Why should it? There are two obvious answers:

- The first is that the value of nuclear weapons to Israel is psychological rather than strategic. They were not used in the 1967 or 1973 wars or in the Lebanese war of last year. Moreover, Israel doesn't "need" them since it already has the most powerful army and air force in its neigh hood.

- All that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons does is to ensure that some of its neighbors will get them; so nuclear weapons, far from being a source of security are a source of insecurity. In a decade or so, no matter what happens in Iran, other Middle Eastern countries will acquire them. So it would be smart for the Israelis to take the leadership in removing them from the Middle East. We can help in various ways and should.

"Merchants of death" is what our more free-swinging ancestors called the international arms dealers. In 1934, Republican Senator Joseph P. Nye thought that the arms trade was so pernicious and dangerous that private dealers must be excluded and arms supply aboard, if any, must be reserved to the Federal government. Effectively it has been. But the result is the opposite of what Senator Nye wanted: the American government has become the world's largest dealer in arms. Last year we gave away or sold $14 billion worth of lethal weapons and support systems. We did this opportunistically both to offset some of our costs and to win friends among other governments, but the effects on human beings have often been disastrous. Even selfishly, we must reckon that some of the weapons were used to kill Americans. We must end this pernicious policy which is destabilizing to world peace and order.

We must get serious about the environment. What we have done so far is little more than a PR happening. If we really care, we should organize the effort we put into the Manhattan Project to acquire nuclear weapons in World War II and the Apollo Program we put into landing a man on the Moon. If we act on the environment the way we did in those programs, we could save our planet. And it is, after all, the only one we have.

We must demand government transparency and accountability. Today, the non-partisan Congressional research organization has publicly admitted that it cannot find out how the Defense Department spends out money. Congress does not even demand that testifying officials

take an oath to tell the truth, and all they get asked for are sound bites. The pathetic testimony of General David Petraeus is a good example. He never gave a clear answer to a single question on American overseas military actions, pathetic as the questions he was asked were.

We must reform the electoral system. Our country is literally up for sale. A typical representative spends at least half of his effective time raising money, that is, to put it bluntly, renting himself out to lobbyists. He turns over to his staff the chores of reading reports and books. So, the level of ignorance and corruption in the House of Representatives must be witnessed to be believed. To put it bluntly, Congress has become a whorehouse. Everyone is on the take. There are an average of 5 lobbyists for each congressman and money is the main topic of conversation. Few representatives of the people get beyond it.

We must reform our educational system. By any standard it is appalling. Test scores of our students rank below most "Third World" countries. Studies by such organizations as *The National Geographic* show that few students even know where other countries are, much less who lives in them, what they think, what they want, how they earn their livings, etc. What passes in many universities as "education" is, in fact, merely job training? We pay our teachers poorly and get what we pay for. We do not apply standards to students – for many, the educational experience is merely a sort of enjoyable holding station between childhood and going out into the "real" world. As Thomas Jefferson warned us, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free…it expects what never was and never will be."

Second, your individual tasks as citizens:

First, you must inform yourselves. Be curious. Be skeptical. Demand facts. Don't settle for sound bytes. This is not easy. Governments since the time of the Roman Empire lulled their citizens with bread and circuses. Today, a government doesn't even need to do what Rome did. We lap up the pap put out by the pop stars of TV "news" programs as though it were gospel and allow ourselves to be guided by ignorant commentators. Hopefully you are getting in your education the ability differentiate real value from trash, real substance from pap. If you are not, you are wasting your time because developing standards is what education is all about.

Informing oneself is not easy. But it can be done. Everyone who has access to a computer can sample newspapers here, in Europe and Asia free just by typing in a few words. Anyone can sign on to a number of provocative and wide-ranging websites. Some of our publlic-minded fellow citizens do much of the job for us. At your request, they will send you what they manage to find. And anyone can ask his Congressman for government reports, most of which are reliable and readable, on all aspects of public policy.

Refuse to be marginalized. America has a long tradition of deprecating knowledge and distrusting excellence. But, the country has invested a great deal in educating you. You are national assets. And you owe the country the best you have. Do your jobs as citizens. Demand that your candidates tell you the truth and act with intelligence. Don't be a dummy. Be active. And don't just wait for the vote. Go out the carry your thoughts to your citizens and your candidates. Again, that powerful tool, the Internet, can be used as a giant lever for democracy. You can reach everybody.

Participate. You cannot afford to sit back and do nothing. If you do, you are almost certain to pay for your laziness. A democracy is not a holding company to be run by a board of directors. You are stockholders. Your life and your well-being are at stake. If you care about them, protect them. After you inform yourself, make your voice heard and put your actions

where your mouth is. Be a leader. Get your generation into action. Together you are strong.

Our future is in your hands. This is your country, your world, and your time. Make this the first day of the rest of your lives.