

Creative Change

How we use power is also a choice.

— Martin Luther King, Jr. Information on *60 Minutes Overtime* beautifully illustrates how structure—in this case, architectural structure for hospitals rather than social groups, political groups or academia—can be rethought in terms of problem-solving for the myriad of uses and the diverse groups of people they serve: “MASS, an acronym for the Model of Architecture Serving Society program, recently worked with a nonprofit, Partners in Health, to design and build Butaro Hospital in Rwanda. Alan Ricks, co-founding principal architect of the Boston-based nonprofit, employed Thatcher Bean as filmmaker to document the voices of those who contributed to the process of building the hospital. Footage from filming of the 7-day trip changed Ricks’ understanding of how the project communicated and helped create a new narrative for MASS.” Bean explains, “I think...architecture is often told by photographs of an empty building, and that communicates that it’s a sculpture...not this changing, living thing...that really impacts people’s lives.”³ Bean hopes the team’s work with MASS will help people see architecture as a “mechanism to create change.” He states, “I think it’s about telling the stories of why these projects matter, of what is possible when we think about things through this lens of economic, environmental, social impact, health impacts, that you want to hear from the builders, you want to hear from the patients and the doctors, and that it can’t just be told through architecture alone.”⁴ The Butaro Hospital that Ricks and his team built in Rwanda fulfilled this vision by incorporating the principles of air flow, job creation, and beauty—surely a welcome contrast to being isolated on lockdown or quarantined in closed buildings during Covid’s long reign! Ricks and the MASS team found the static concept of hospitals as well as other buildings that have likewise been designed as closed structures keep people *apart* from nature, whereas the hospital built in Rwanda incorporates open spaces in waiting rooms and other areas of the hospital.⁵

By incorporating a simple principle of physics—air moves from lower to higher spaces and flows towards open spaces—Ricks and his team designed and built a hospital keeping in mind the *natural air flow*. Doing so improved not only the structure of the hospital, but also its *purpose* by preventing the “spread of diseases that are often rampant in enclosed wards and waiting rooms.”⁶ This was indeed creative change! The team also used a solar power system to provide heat and cooling at each window,⁷ eliminating the need for air conditioning and heating. After viewing Bean’s film footage, Alan Ricks realized he could also use different groups of society, as well as needs across multiple areas—science, technology, economic, morality, fairness, etc. to create a **multi-dimensional approach** to what he had previously viewed as a “static piece of sculpture.” He used the “empty artefact” idea of architecture to create change as the architecture was viewed through the lens of each group participating and being impacted by it. This discovery opened up multiple dimensions through which the purpose of constructing a project could be seen to serve diverse needs. The purpose became greater than any one viewpoint, creating impact in new ways and in new directions. In another example where a MASS-like model seems to be applied, gastroenterologist Dr. Sanjeev Arora wanted the Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes, or ECHO health project that he founded, to expand into rural and underserved areas. In these areas, as in his native country India, there are fewer medical care facilities and specialized doctors can be several days away from where needs are.⁸ Dr. Arora is bothered by people he sees dying “because the right knowledge didn’t exist at the right place at the right time,” and Project ECHO is currently set up in the vast rural areas of New Mexico, “a region with one of the highest rates of poverty in the United States.”⁹ Dr. Arora wants “to move beyond the model of one doctor ... We need an exponential improvement in capacity to deliver best practice care.”¹⁰ Dr. Arora wants to “democratize” his specialized knowledge, to “have specialists use technology and share their expertise with rural providers” so that patients can be treated closer to home.¹¹ During regularly scheduled sessions on Zoom that include “discussions on specific cases and mentorship,” ...ECHO uses a hub-and-spoke design to connect a hub of specialists to multiple participants in the spokes.¹²

Dr. Althea Gabrellas, of the Gallup Indian Medical Center, about a two-hour drive from Albuquerque, says, “It really helps sort of level the playing field.” Because ECHO provides easy access to academic medical centers, Dr. Gabrellas says, “We were able to treat a lot of people that had been waiting years to be able to access treatment. And we were able to cure a lot of patients.”¹³ Elsewhere I am critical of technology (Ch. 1c and 2b), for example, when some may have once thought of it also as an “empty artefact”—unbiased and neutral—akin to a static and hollow piece of architecture. Ivor Horn, M.D. MPH Director, Health Equity & Social Determinants of Health at Google, seems aware that computer data generated from algorithms and programmers is not an empty artefact. He is trying to compensate for the biases retained in the programmed data. Horn says he wants to provide a more diverse context and have more voices at the “table” of decision-making.¹⁴ Horn says, “We know that data shows that more diverse teams have better outcomes,” and he advocates for “the ability for everyone—whom’s at the table to feel like they belong and feel like they have a voice and give them space to do that.”¹⁵ From this perspective, Horn’s efforts may be similar to the MASS model of change. The MASS architectural concept seems already in use, naturally, in open-air projects such as community gardens, where people come to garden, but also hold food drives, share different cultural recipes, enjoy local musicians, and organize recycling projects, or hold neighborhood gift economies. Liesel Clark and a friend were troubled by the amount of waste that washes up on beaches in the Pacific Northwest. They founded the Buy Nothing Project (www.buynothingproject.org) in Washington State—neighborhood gift economies where, instead of buying new, “people can give and take from their neighbors and everything is always free.” Since then, the Project has “about 7 million participants ... and the only currency is kindness.”¹⁶ Using Ricks’ and Bean’s MASS model, I would like to see interfaith groups open holistic child care centers in every community. The views of children, parents, teachers, children without parents, foster care homes, nutritional and safety experts, mental and physical health experts, would all be invited to provide input and serve child care and possibly other needs. Each community could find some centrally located public rooms by schools, churches, or government buildings that are not used around the clock.

Some of the rooms might be re-purposed to provide “stigma-free environments” for occasional discussions among both young and old. A critical necessity would be rotating pairs of volunteers to provide adult supervision. A MASS model for child care centers is a kind of holistic appraisal of people’s needs—safety, after school activities, on-site tutoring, mental health resources such as counseling for teens, first aid, a local food bank, access to music and other arts, even service learning mixed with senior daycare—all would serve some of the needs of young people, parents in need of child care, and seniors whose mentoring might be welcomed. The innovation in such projects is the collaboration across **different segments** of society for community child care centers—that, like a hub-spoke design or like a kaleidoscope, meet the needs across all of those groups in different ways, supervising the activities intersecting is each person who cares about quality child care. Partnering with other people and other communities has the advantage of borrowing best practices and working collaboratively rather than reinventing the wheel with each new project proposal. David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, says there are \$430 trillion dollars of wealth on the globe today.¹⁸ I do not know if he is right, and I know that food crises in Yemen, northern Sudan, Pakistan, and now Gaza and elsewhere have intensified due to the wars in Ukraine and the Mideast. But \$430 trillion dollars sounds like there is money to spare for post-Covid needs that have moved center stage in America. For example, the oil and gas industry has made \$2.8 billion a day in **pure profit for the last 50 years**.¹⁹ It cannot be that just one day of profit, i.e., \$2.8 billion dollars, could not be used to set up child care centers for the people across America who for years and even now still consume much of that industry’s products. The example of Gov. Grisham in New Mexico is one all states could look to and implement (see 3c). In fact, it seems our governors are the real visionaries and leaders of creative change in society today (see4d). A project envisioned by Dan Froomkin of Press Watch, is an attempt to move newspapers in a creative direction—back towards serving the needs of local communities. Froomkin recently voiced concern about Jeff Bezos providing much of the technical support for content management services (known as ARC) needed to operate newspapers across the country. By providing the technical support (ARC) or platform for so many newspapers to operate, Froomkin has concerns about a monopoly over news sources.²⁰

Froomkin makes a strong argument for, rather, a non-profit to provide this technical know-how for the necessary management services (ARC) in both a transparent and open-source format, i.e., the very kind of format that creates trust among members of society. Doing so would revitalize local journalism and allow for more conversations across rural areas of the country. That might heal some of the rifts among communities that disinformation and political polarization during the pandemic left in its wake. Sinclair Broadcasting may now be developing such a model since its newscasts make use of “4,000 local journalists.” Such a program also might begin to rebuild trust because local news seem to connect communities more so than do large media conglomerates. The Gallop Poll finds that people trust local news more than national news—relating more to what we see occurring around us.²¹ Commercially-sponsored news articles or university donations could then be used to fund a “higher education” section in these local newspapers as a way of introducing research of common interest to a new audience of readers, such as knowledge of civics and history. If writing articles for local communities qualified for some or all of the “publish or perish” mandate that currently prompts faculty to write *only* for more specialized communities, the shared dialogues would benefit a wider audience and thereby aid in creating a more informed citizenry in different parts of the country. Currently, higher education seems obsolete, structured as it is, as a medieval hierarchy. To disseminate knowledge more widely and effectively to ordinary people, the current model of elites talking primarily among themselves and/or answering to corporate funding, might be rethought. Holistic community re-organization requires new thinking in leadership, leadership capable of thinking and acting on behalf of the collective interests of people but also willing to remove barriers for contributions from individuals who think differently—veterans perhaps, or former inmates who have served their sentences, or women immigrants from countries where their voices have not been valued. This kind of leadership calls for courage to lead by example but is also unafraid to **share power with** others. John McCain’s integrity developed at least in part from his experience as a prisoner of war, an experience that differed from what the majority of citizens had experienced, and therefore he offered unique insights. Likewise, Bernie Sanders, the clear, plain-spoken, independent voice of—not socialism—but a *democratic* socialism might provide a way to draw on the best of *both* individual uniqueness and the collective good of a society.

Colin Powell, who died during the pandemic, believed leadership is all about human interaction, and he treated people the way he expected them to treat each other.²² As a former 4-star Army general, Powell was aware of having **power over** others. However, he chose to meet people at a personal level, saying “Good morning” to all and seeing them as equals. His way of democratizing power in society commanded respect, yet he chose to operate on a level playing field.²³ Powell also believed “success is best shared, so as part of your life, make sure you are doing something for others, service, teach our youngsters how to help others, strictly from your heart and soul and for no other reason [than] helping people in need.”²⁴ Here we find rejection of *self-interest* in favor of Powell’s leading by example with generosity. Other people are not seen merely as pawns so that one hoards power, hangs on to it, and/or lords it over others. Rather, sharing power is seeing as helping people in need—for no other reason than making service to others a part of one’s life. Likewise, California Congressman Raul M. Ravez, an emergency room physician, vaccinated his own constituents in a Hispanic neighborhood outside Los Angeles that is medically underserved, to show that “government needs to work *for* the people.”²⁵ Leaders do what is needed, regardless of what others around them are doing, a North Carolina man saved a boy and says, “It just needed to be done, and I did it.”²⁶ Former Senator Jeff Flake’s comments on leadership seem prescient: “Leadership does not knowingly encourage or feed ugly and debased appetites in us...We were not made great as a country by indulging or even exalting our worst impulses, turning against ourselves, glorying in the things which divide us, and calling fake things true and true things fake...giving in ...to scapegoat and belittle threatens to turn us into a fearful, backward-looking people.”²⁷ The “backward-looking people” observation is telling because whatever greatness is in our country also needs to be *within* us, i.e., the values of each of its citizens—rather than looking back, hoping to be what is already gone and idealizing what is past. “Over the years,” said former Queen Elizabeth, “I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal, and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm and their inspiration, to work together.”²⁸

Today, Jocelyn Benson, Michigan’s Secretary of State, asks how we “want to redesign who we are and want to be in this country, a future democracy.”²⁹ If we focus on the hub-and-spoke design that is like the MASS concept, then the common denominator of what we see as democracy acts as the hub. But all citizens can be “spokes” contributing in different ways what we want to see change and/or will help to move the nation forward. Participating in this way will produce a rich amount of brainstorming from which we can use what builds collaboration **across** the concerns of most constituents to become “best practices” for a future democracy. Our government was set up with checks and balances on power to account for fallible human nature, but includes an assumption that human nature uses conscience to guide its responses. Liz Cheney, Adam Kinzinger, and all members of the January 6 House Select Committee showed uncommon courage for upholding their work of Congress only *say* they stand for: Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD) expressed hope that the legacy of the House Select Committee’s work of investigating the January 6 attack on the US Capitol would be their “unswerving devotion to the facts, evidence, and the Constitution.”³⁰ Richard Fierro, a Latino Army veteran jumped and subdued a shooter in Club Q in Colorado Springs, who had killed five and injured 17.³¹ His actions were reminiscent of the 44 passengers and crew aboard United Flight 93 who sacrificed their lives by forcing down a hijacked plane in Pennsylvania, rather than to its intended target of the Capitol or Pentagon.³² A large number of news reporters, many of them women, have demonstrated incredible courage in order to share with others their voices on the abuses of power we would otherwise likely never hear: Jane Ferguson in Syria and Turkey, Laila Malana-Allen in the Gaza and the Mideast, Nick Shiffen in the Ukraine and China, and Maria Ressa of the Philippines—to name just a few. America seems not to lack such leaders and heroes, but perhaps what is needed now is a careful and thorough reassessment of who it is we are electing to serve in a Congress that seems inept. Susan Page, Washington D. C. bureau chief at *USA Today*, notes that in Washington, the “safe bet [is] on partisanship and gridlock.”³³ This is mind-boggling when there is so much that needs to be addressed in this country.

Robert F. Kennedy once said, “It is the essence of responsibility to put the public good ahead of personal gain.” Since public trust in Congress is its lowest ever, we might ask who is and who is not doing this? In 2021, Gallop found 37% of Americans “trust the legislative branch.”³⁶ Two years later, in 2023, “20% said they trusted the government just about always or most of the time.”³⁷ After Biden’s election, Mitch McConnell set an adversarial tone by boasting he would do everything he could to block the President’s agenda. It is that blanket block that deepened our political polarization. Rather than weaving together the best of each side’s thinking on any particular issue, such block refusals serve only to polarize the country. No candidate should be elected to office who enters with a desire to block every idea put forth by another side. Now more than ever, we need people to represent us in Congress who have individual viewpoints, but are nevertheless committed to working *with* others, not against them. Nor should we elect more people who simply want to investigate the past rather than move forward. Bringing preconceived conclusions to the table omits examination of issues from all points of view and weighing the **merits** of the evidence before drawing conclusions. It preempts critical thinking. What follows is the see-saw of polarized politics digging us into deeper and deeper ruts, holding us down more rigidly in gridlock. If one considers the fight for independence was a fight against power as an inherited privilege of the royalty, then clearly “inherited privilege” has morphed into the advantage of incumbency along with handing power over to the same people, term after term. It’s time to give younger people with fresh ideas a chance to bring their voices to the table—not those seeking personal publicity, who claim to be “outsiders” or want to demonstrate how brazen they can be. We already have all that! Rather, *new* voices. A study in 2020 shows that “future caucus members and others under 45 years old are the leaders in reaching across the aisle on legislation.”⁴¹ That is change that provides reason for hope. Rep. Pete Aguilar (D-CA) is one who represents a more positive direction: “The American people clearly want us to work together...to solve problems.”⁴²

Because the nation’s much needed work—on immigration and the dreamer population, on affordable housing and foreign investment in our land, on drug trafficking, human trafficking and securing our Southern border, on strict accountability for all federal monies disbursed, and on balancing the federal budget—because this much needed work and more is not getting done—we are paying for gridlock when people refusing to work with others are elected. Why should we pay for more gridlock? It is not acceptable that year after year the nation’s problems fester while the same members serve four and five or more terms in Congress—and accomplish so little. It is time to revise a system whose inefficiency has caught up with its lawmakers. We need to watch carefully and elect people in 2024 who are committed—not to blocking one part of solutions—but to considering all ways to resolve a matter. Candidates who want “my way or the highway” should take the highway. The STOCK Act law, signed into law in 2012 by then-President Barack Obama, was intended “to increase transparency and curb personal financial conflicts of interest,” but *Business Insider* found a massive number of Congressional members violate the STOCK Act rules—and do so **without consequence**.⁴³ Congress openly admits this practice is corrupt, which makes suspect the functioning of any so-called Ethics Department of Congress.⁴⁴ Likewise, conflicts of interest are often ignored. Congress needs an independent and non-partisan kind of umpire to call out when one or the other party refuses to adhere to previously agreed upon processes. It has been said that justice is a process, not an outcome. When the process—or steps agreed upon to insure all are treated fairly—are bypassed, then we forfeit justice to power over us. Supposedly, a non-partisan parliamentarian exists, but does not seem to have any enforcement authority. For example, are Supreme Court Justices approved in the last few months of a president’s term, or not? Does a president simply ignore oversight provisions in a law by “firing” or replacing the umpire or someone selected for that purpose? Such examples do not demonstrate respect for the rule of law. A non-partisan “umpire” of sorts is critically needed, even if only to decide procedural questions and violations of *process* so that both parties play fairly and by the same rules they themselves put into place. CNN host Jake Tapper explains, “When one party erodes norms of justice, etc. the other party takes advantage of it, and does not give power back. When the right does not abide by the same procedure used by the left or vice versa, then we are not playing by the same rules.”⁴⁵ A blatant example of the abuse of fair play occurred when the Republican Party blocked the appointment of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court near the end of Barrack Obama’s term, but pushed through its own appointment of Amy Coney Barrett a couple of weeks before the end of Donald Trump’s term.

We cannot hope to respect lawmakers like Lindsey Graham and others when they do not engage in fair play any more than we respect those using steroids to compete with peers playing sports fairly. If both sides play unfairly, abuses of power will just fluctuate with who has power over the other. There seems to be no accountability for the lack of fair play, whereas the concerns of the American public— and service to that public—should be foremost. Access needs to be held accountable for its inaction—for **not** getting the nation’s work done. Perks, time off, health and other benefits, access to stock market, voting records, etc. should all be **openly** publicized when we are being asked to vote so that these matters are transparent and the public has a more thorough sense of who it elects. When I started college and heard about the problem of immigration at the southern border, we were told our immigration system was broken. More than 40 years later, I tell students our immigration system is broken—still. Students ask, how can this be? A country needs a border, and the last I recall hearing about the “wall,” we were told that instead of all the physical barriers that can be scaled or dug under and/or around, we need a visible border wall that also makes use of 21stc. technology. But—just as much—we need a means by which we no longer ignore a moral obligation to our neighbors by saying “it’s against the law”—when it is **we** who have refused to fix what we have known is a broken law for at least the last forty years. Rather, we need to provide a safe and timely way to consider legal immigration as well as refuge for those who need it. That means more judges at the border to decide cases within months rather than years and more careful inspections to restrict any form of drug, human trafficking, and/or other criminal activity. Texas Governor Greg Abbott seems to have stumbled on perhaps a part of a fair “solution” for those times of massive immigration when he began bussing immigrants to other cities—except ... his move seemed motivated by revenge for the problem. It makes sense, however, that all cities and states—and not only border states—should participate in receiving immigrants who have first been screened.

And because so much fentanyl and other drugs are found in places often overlooked, any and all goods might be banned from entering the U.S. Rather, those entering could sell the little they have before crossing the border and then buy needed goods here—run by nonprofits who do not want to take advantage of them. Americans returning to the states would likewise be forbidden to return with any goods. Seemingly unfair? Yes. Worth reducing the drugs pouring into the nation? Yes. There should be no reason why representatives holding different viewpoints cannot see that both or multiple changes are needed to solve aspects of a complex problem and then take concurrent steps to address them. Doing so means no longer kicking a broken law down the legislative calendar, but taking responsibility for the problems on our watch—seeing that we leave both needs—if not 100% solved, at least **better than we found them**. This seems to me a duty, as Americans and as befits our common humanity. According to Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody’s Analytic, compromise—the political will to incorporate different approaches—could even be used to reduce the deficit.⁴⁷ Republicans might impose taxes to substantially reduce the national debt. A good start would be to support Biden’s attempt to close the tax loophole on capital gains that allow the very top wealthiest Americans to pay zero taxes, even though they continue to share in the benefits of this country by using many of the same roads, hospitals, grocery stores, and other resources those who pay taxes use. Biden also claims doing so will reduce the deficit. The mega-wealthy have no **need** for more tax cuts when the country is in so much debt and homelessness is increasing. We are still in the midst of the huge cultural shift Biden initiated to revive the middle class of the country that has long been hollowed out by the 1% of the top rich not paying fair taxes and the 99% of others being pushed further into poverty. Los Angeles mayor Karen Bass spoke of the 40 thousand unsheltered in California, five of whom die on the streets of LA each day.⁴⁸ But Democrats may also need to support a reduction in social spending in some areas to reduce the national debt. Yes, there is much need, but most of the adults and elderly I know care deeply about leaving a better system for the young ones ahead of us, and that does not include more debt! Steps can be taken incrementally—grandfathered in—so that all are called to make sacrifices so that the nation comes out ahead. There also needs to be transparent and complete accountability once money is allocated for specific needs.

The country owes the president gratitude for his legislative accomplishments despite significant opposition both within and without his party and for his meetings on behalf of stabilizing and strengthening allies in Europe and the Far East. The president strove to make Washington look more like America, as he had promised. He sought balance to the self-interest of corporate power by encouraging workers to pull together in unions, and he upheld a women’s right to her bodily autonomy which found a natural union among women. Rebuilding our worn-out infrastructure is actually now underway, and states have received large amounts of federal aid to address their most pressing needs. Biden’s passing the torch to Vice-President Kamala Harris was an act of uncommon courage—a sacrifice of personal ambition for the greater good of the nation. Trump, whose automatic yearnings threaten rational thought, and his accumulation of the most division and debt per year served in office is not a responsible choice. Nor are those who line up and “heel,” eager to be loyal “yes, masters.” However, a form of real and *creative change* was recently high-lighted on the PBS series “America at a Crossroads with Judy Woodruff.” A nonpartisan, nonprofit group, Unite America, is “dedicated to reforming the electoral system” by bringing more voters into the process.⁴⁹ Executive Director Nick Troiano explains: “We have a system that over represents those at the fringes of both political parties, at the expense of the majority.”⁵⁰ The majority of races are decided in the primaries, where the “most partisan voters are more likely to cast ballots.”⁵¹ If 8% of voters nationally cast ballots in their party’s primaries, then we get “8% of voters electing 83% of our leaders.”⁵² For example, Matt Gaetz won his 2022 primary in Florida’s District 1 by winning just 73,000 votes out of nearly 550,000 registered voters.⁵³ Troiano’s idea is to have a single primary for **all** candidates, a change that appeals to non-partisans and independents: “Once voters from across the political spectrum have had a chance to weigh in during a primary, the top four vote-getters would move on to the general election. Voters can choose a single candidate or rank their preferred candidates one to four.”⁵⁴ Such a system gives Democrats, Republicans, and Independents all a fair chance to hear and vote for new candidates, beneficiaries of their choice.

Judy Woodruff tracked attempts by fifteen states, including Alaska and Nevada, to reform their primaries but that are being opposed by diehard party officials.⁵⁵ By opening primaries to everyone, we would be taking a giant step forward to having more bipartisan coalitions rather than today’s predictable gridlock. We might even eliminate gerrymandering. Such a change to states’ primary systems would have the additional advantage of opening up the primaries to a wider choice of candidates rather than the parties’ elite having a lockhold on who can and who cannot run. In short, the current system is clearly not a very democratic (small “d”) process by which to choose our candidates. Since party-elites, for example, McConnell or Schumer, decide which candidates get funded, they also pretty much decide who we hear about and who runs. Troiano’s analysis explains how our politics have become more and more extremist. His “Unite America” is both a practical and creative change to reintroduce majority interests in state primaries. It is a practical means to update years of old practices and resentments embedded in hardened party lines that are now less applicable to the largest voting group in America—the unaffiliated or independent voter.