Societal Improvement Ideas

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What if you had the opportunity to become a benevolent dictator? Or could make a wish or wave a wand and magically make some change to society, anything you imagined, what would it be? Well, this kind of silly intellectual exercise is what led me to create this list. Hey it was either this or watch TV. This may explain why most of my side projects get started in the NFL off-season.

But I digress. To wit:

None of the ideas below are original, necessarily. Indeed it has been observed that any truly good idea tends to be independently thought of by many different people, and often around the same time. And I'm sure that I first heard of many, and perhaps nearly all, of these ideas below from others, some as far back as during childhood.

Also I know that there are complex trade-offs and edge cases involved with each. Sometimes an idea looks right, and looks like the ideal solution, only when it is painted with broad strokes. Yet when you zoom in on the implementation details you find a devil lurking there. I believe we can usually address these satisfactorily. If we choose to, anyway.

Also it is understood that there is both government inertia and cultural inertia. And special interests opposed to any particular change (eg. professional tax preparers wouldn't want taxes simplified or automated, and politicians wouldn't want to lose legislative make-work or fiscal policy knobs or lose opportunities to engage in endless political drama and propaganda each year.) Therefore between inertia and special interests it may be that few of these ideas will ever be adopted by any major government, especially not within the current USA. (Though some have been adopted already, somewhere, such as instant run-off elections, or total bans on public smoking.) Some ideas may only be feasible in an experimental community, or in some future startup nation. Some ideas may require greater education of our citizenry, or more championing within our communities.

Regardless of whether any are feasible for adoption by an existing government I think it is still useful to have ideas in mind, ready to draw upon. And it is healthy to have the mindset that there are always ways to improve our world, if only we try to look for them, and then choose to push for them, and only if others allow us to do these things.

Lastly I also realize I may be wrong about any of these. Perhaps I've overlooked a showstopper kind of issue. Therefore feel free to tell me when you disagree and why. I'll be reconsidering these and revising this document incrementally in my free time.

Thanks!

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(NOTE: list starts on next page)

Reduce US Gov Mail Delivery Frequency
To reduce Federal spending. Let private services fill the gap, for those who want it.

Discontinue Federal Funding of the Arts
Stop funding arts by Fed gov't. Reduces deficit. Artists can self-fund, seek patrons or sell their wares or services. Surely this should be near bottom priority when Fed gov running deficit.

Payoff Federal Debt and Eliminate Deficit Spending
The solution is obvious and non-magical, just takes political courage and multi-year persistence of execution to carry it out. It is not a fundamentally hard or unsolvable problem. Currently the US tax-paying public is subjected to a seemingly never-ending drama in Washington because of it.

Puerto Rican Statehood
Puerto Rico should become a state. If not, why Hawaii and not Puerto Rico? They are both islands that had non-European natives living there long before white people let alone Americans came along and occupied them.

Good Guys Don't Wear Black Hats
Stop funding or doing trade/arms deals with foreign governments which are autocratic and oppressive. Giving aid to dictators makes us look like hypocrites on the world stage. We are not The Good Guys just because we say we are. We have to act that way. Let's not keep setting ourselves up for Blowback.

Massively Simplify US (Income) Tax Rules
Flat N% tax rate (say 15%) for all income types, at all income levels. No exceptions, deductions, special cases, etc. Reams of tax code go away. IRS can be much smaller. Fed gov't payroll smaller. Reduces the number of lawyers, accountants, and tax preparers, roles that are essentially doing makework and therefore acting as an unnecessary drain on society. (Note: NOT saying all lawyers or accountants are doing makework and being a drain, but some portion are, due to the unnecessarily complex tax code.) The actual rate is not important (could be 10% or 20% etc), just that it's flat, uniform and inescapable. If 15% (or whatever given rate considered) would not produce enough revenue to the IRS to replace existing flow, then raise the value. If produces more, then lower it. Easy. Also reduces unnecessary spying by government on private individual lives. Math tells us that even when taxes are super simplified, flat, universal, exception-less, etc. it's still possible to yield the exact same level of total revenue to the government, all it takes is twiddling the percentage rate, to tune it. Even better than income taxes alone: do this for all types of taxes and tariffs.

Basic Universal Income

Ban Outdoor Dogs in Cities and Suburbs (or: Allow Only W/Bark Muffling, Bite Muzzling)
First… I love dogs. I know you love dogs too. That is not the point. I love music but it's rude for me to blast it outside at night, so I don't, and this is also why we have laws against it. Someone can love guns but they're not allowed to just randomly fire shots at people walking by. Continuing in that vein… Dogs regularly bark loudly (at night, in the mornings, when adults trying to sleep or relax or work, or just walking by innocently minding their own business etc.), jump fences and attack innocent people. They defecate seemingly everywhere so you always have to watch where you step, whether out in public or in the yards of neighbors. To strangers/

neighbors they are vicious, mindless and rude. Small, don't bark or kept indoors? Then probably okay. An alternative to banning, which would only address the sound pollution aspect but not the physical danger aspect, would be to come up with some reliable sound dampening system to prevent the sound of dogs barking from reaching other properties. For example, we could allow them outside, on your property (eg. behind a fence in the front yard or back yard) if the owner has something in place that prevents the barking sound from leaving their property boundaries. Indoor dogs as well as outdoor dogs in rural areas are both much less of a nuisance to non-owners so could probably remain unregulated. Dogs are worst in suburban or urban residential areas. Taking them for walks outside is ok, if muffled or muzzled, on leash, and don't let them get so close to strangers that the dog can bite them.

Ban Smoking in Public Outdoors

US: FDA & EPA Must Invert Their Standards For Allowing Substances: Assume Bad Unless Proven Safe, Plus, Consider Long Term Use Impacts

Eliminate All Asbestos Still Present in Previously Retroactively Allowed Buildings

Energy, Environment & Community Friendly Designs For Cities and Suburbs
        Design city and suburb layout to encourage and optimize for transit methods that are cheaper or healthier, such as trains, subways, buses, bicycles and shoes-on-sidewalks. The thumbnail success metric is to measure how many people walk or ride bike from home to work or shopping.

Telecommute More, Gas/Pollute/Asphalt/Accident-Commute Less
        Eliminate or reduce the "commute to work" culture. It's a waste of money, gas, metal, rubber, it pollutes, it endangers lives, it's monotonous, it requires having tons of asphalt everywhere, etc. Ideally as many people as possible should be able to work in their home or in a location very close to it (within 5 minute walk/bike.) Country becomes more efficient economically. Less dependent on foreign oil. Guts the power of Big Oil companies. Frees up resources for better uses. Not all jobs/work would make sense to do this, some travel will possibly always be needed for some activities, but let's shift as much as we can.

Electric Vehicles
        Since vehicles don't burn/combust gas, they don't emit polluting gases. Electric power can be created from multitude of sources then, not just gas/oil, such as solar, wind, geothermal, tidal, nuclear or even coal, gas and oil. Each power source has it's own unique set of ads and disads, and bang-per-buck. But this let's us make more choices, and let's us wean away from "bad" sources as gradually or as quickly as we want. Electric vehicles also tend to operate more quietly, causing less noise pollution.

Multi-Level Parking Buildings Rather Than Large Lots
        If must have parking area make multi-level or underground parking structures. Better than "miles-O-asphalt" which is ugly and an inefficient waste of space.

Preference-Ordered List-Based Voting with Instant Runoff Elections
        Current system encourages and perpetuates two party domination of US national-level politics, Presidency and Congress, by the Republican and Democratic parties. With preference-ordered list-based votes, a citizen's true intentions and ideal choice of government can be more

accurately captured and acted upon -- while not suffering from fear or reality of "throwing one's vote away" on so-called minor parties or candidates, or candidates or proposals that don't have big money backers. Also having instant runoffs are essential to making it fast, cheap and efficient, and to not discourage or prevent a lengthy ordered list of preferences from being submitted.

Universal Auditability of Elections

Every citizen of the US, whether employed by the government or not, whether belonging to any political party or not, or belonging to any particular media organization or not, etc. should have the right and ability to conduct an independent recount of all submitted votes and therefore independent recalculation and determination of the winning candidates or choices. Only by ensuring that *everyone* can do this can we minimize the chance that fraud has occurred. The more of the process which is done in secret, the more that is vulnerable to being fraudulently manipulated to produce a distorted, unjust representation of the actual will of the people.

Individually Merit Weighted Citizen Voting in Elections

Parental Licensing and Merit-Based

Fast Money Transfers

Transfers of money between banks (anywhere) should not take 1 week or more. should be more like 1-2 days at the very most. and even that is adding a lot of padding and being generous. Because the basic time cost of doing the communication between any two systems on a network can be measured in a fraction of a second. Databases and distributed transactions are a thing that exists, if only we use them right. Bitcoin has this feature, so we know it's possible from an engineering and adoption standpoint. The actual bottleneck is probably a mix of over-bearing laws combined with (and this latter part is more speculative on my part) profiteering or anti-competitive behavior on the part of banks.

USA: Go Metric

USA: English Only

The US gov and businesses should only print text in English for internal/domestic use; save money on paper, ink, translation services, and frees up more surface area for better uses. Private individuals are free to speak/read/write any language they want, and private businesses can choose to use whatever language they want in every case except when dealing with the government or with consumers who are US residents/citizens. Gov & business can use non-English when dealing with foreign countries/citizens that have not converted to it yet.

World: English Only

The entire world should convert to one standard spoken/written human language; it does not have to be English, but by several measurements it is the closest already to being the world's de facto standard language (particularly in science, business and software development), and therefore the most practical choice is English. To address the complaint that certain other languages have an elegant or unique term for a certain concept, that English does not already have, then, simply copy/import/adapt that word, expanding official English to include it. If someone chooses to use another language for artistic reasons, fine, that's their choice, but English should become the universal standard and the only one taught or supported with taxpayer money. (Again, does not necessarily have to be English, could be another, let's just

pick something. English seemed the fastest and most practical.) As part of this, all international groups/clubs/bodies/businesses would convert to English-only for all their business and communication, and the only language used in taxpayer-funded schools, etc. The universal world-wide adoption of a single human language will greatly increase international understanding, cooperation and goodwill, trust, and thereby also be a force for reducing the chance of war. Also reduces opportunities for national governments to use propaganda on their citizens to manipulate them into war or increased military spending. The less "alien" the citizens of a foreign nation seem, or members of a different culture or religion or ethnicity, the better off we'll all be.

US/World: Gov Leadership Must Heed Warnings, Obey Recomms of Scientist Consensus

For example: the clearly increasing climate change crisis and atmospheric carbon build-up, air pollution, water pollution, over-fishing, ecosystem collapse, species mass extinction, etc.

Establish Off-Earth, Sustainable Human Communities

Number one reason is insurance in the case of global disaster on Earth. Other benefits include: opening a new frontier for the bold, stimulation of the public imagination, inspiration for children world-wide, boost to scientific advancement, increased cultural diversification, and increased freedom to experiment/reset in terms of new government structures & laws. If there's one company and one person alive today we could clearly credit as being the biggest single proponent and practical enabler of this idea happening in real life, in the near future rather than the forever-maybe-someday: Elon Musk and SpaceX. Though obviously building on the shoulders of NASA and other major space agencies, and great thinkers & communicators like Zubrin, Savage, Sagan, Asimov, Herbert, etc.

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TODO: import/adapt my "Restrooms Done Right" elements
TODO: import/adapt my TaxZen proposal/design
TODO illegal/rejection for (diagnosed) mentally ill, (reasonable indications of) emotionally unstable or those on the FBI terror watchlist to buy/own guns/explosives (though this can be abused by the gov)
TODO increase requirements to be allowed Presidential candidate to meet some minimum percentage of truthful/fact-confirmed statements (ie. if a candidate is too ignorant or too much of a liar then it is not wise to let them become President); various easy ways to implement this, though imperfect (something better than nothing); additional requirements: some minimum IQ and level of certified educational attainment
TODO true/uniform anti-discrimination
TODO more flexible, modular, voluntary and experiment-enabling government structures