

The Core Defect in Representative Democracy: Control of the legislature by interest groups

Philip Bitar, Ph.D.

campaign@LetsTearUpTheBlankCheck.com

www.LetsTearUpTheBlankCheck.com

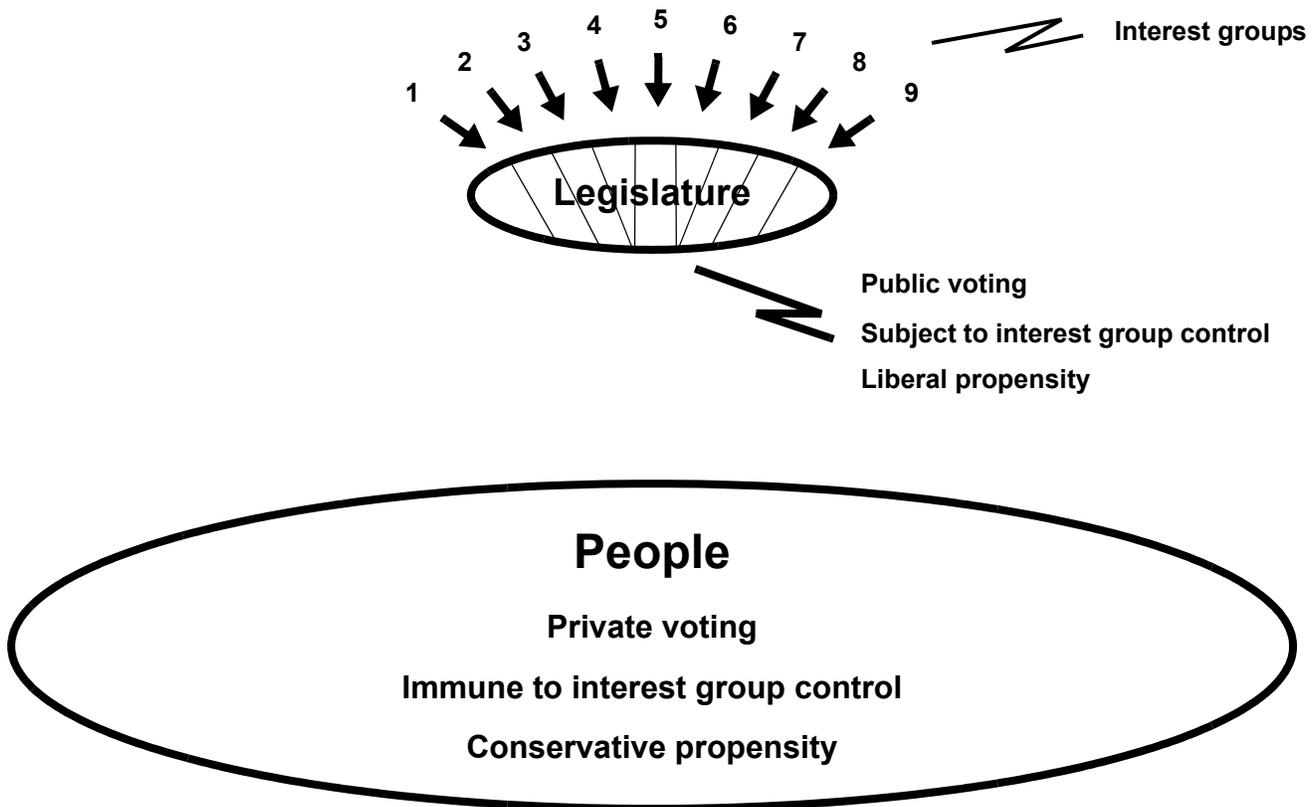
www.ThePeoplesAmendment.com

© 2011, 2012 Philip Bitar, Version 2012-06-19

Note. This is a brief introduction to the theory of commerce and government presented in my book, *The Second American Revolution: We The People vs. The Special Interest Groups*.

Representative democracy is a practical necessity because the populace at large lacks the time and interest to be apprised of the numerous policy issues, to debate them, and to vote on them. But representative democracy suffers from an inherent deficiency: the legislature tends to be controlled by interest groups who lobby on behalf of their constituents. The problem is not that the legislators or the interest groups are ill-intended or corrupt. Rather, the problem is inherent in the way that representative democracy naturally works. This is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1. Interest group control of legislature



Two notable results of interest group control are these: the American Civil War and the fiscal irresponsibility of representative democracies.

As for the Civil War, a small minority of southern citizens — wealthy slaveholders — controlled the governments of the slave states. Starting in 1791, the year of the bloody Haitian slave revolt, the slave states suppressed discussion of alternatives to slavery for fear that such discussion would engender slave revolts in the United States. This suppression of discussion prevented the slave states from maturing out of their slaveholding mentality, and 70 years later the result was civil war.

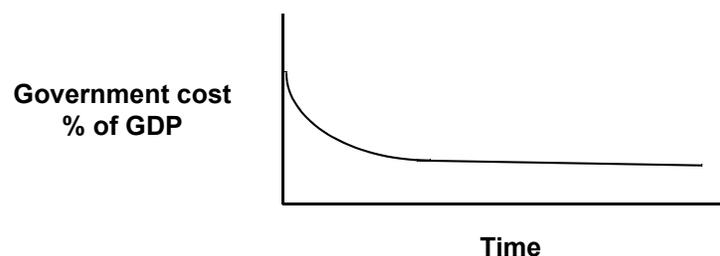
As for fiscal irresponsibility, an interest group employs a divide-and-conquer strategy on a legislature, securing the votes of some legislators, who in turn, secure additional votes by trading votes with other legislators. This is the way that representative democracy naturally works, enabling interest groups to get the benefits and money that they seek to obtain from the government.

How do we solve the problem of the control of a legislature by interest groups?

Representative democracy must be augmented with direct democracy through an initiative process. The initiative process is an innovation of the 1900s, so it was unknown to the framers of the federal constitution. Currently 24 states have an initiative process. As citizens of Washington, we are privileged to have an initiative process, and we can see the results firsthand. While the citizens of Washington tend to elect fiscal liberals to the legislature, they also tend to approve initiatives for fiscal restraint. The same occurs in California.

It follows that the way to make a representative democracy fiscally responsible is through a citizen-controlled ceiling on government income+debt, with the ceiling expressed as a percentage of the income of the economy. The income of the economy is the gross domestic product (GDP) for the federal government, and it is the state equivalent for a state government. The citizens can change the ceiling in response to a request by the legislature or through an initiative process. The initiative process will enable the people to drive the cost of government — as a percentage of GDP — down toward an asymptotic value over time, as illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2. Driving cost of government down to asymptote



This is the optimal solution for making government fiscally responsible and for minimizing the cost of government, for this will motivate the legislature and the executive to reduce government to its core functions and to perform those functions as efficiently as possible. The solution is not only optimal, it is also permanent because once the people get control of their money through the ceiling, they will never give up their control. Finally, this solution will provide the basis for minimizing the regulatory role of government because the implementation of regulations costs money.