

The People's Initiative: The penicillin that will kill the fiscal disease

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Have you ever dreamed of being in the right place at the right time in order to make a profound and lasting contribution to civilization? We think of names such as Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill — and Alexander Fleming.

In 1928, on September 28, the Scottish bacteriologist Alexander Fleming noticed that one of his bacterial cultures had been contaminated by a mold and that there was an area around the mold that was free of the bacteria. What is notable is that Fleming didn't throw out the culture as corrupted and useless. Instead, he examined the culture with interest. Fleming determined that the mold was a type of fungus known as *Penicillium* and that the fungus was producing an antibacterial substance, which he named *penicillin*. As a result of diligent work by other British researchers, it became possible to mass produce penicillin in the 1940s, and, as they say, the rest is history.

Before the age of antibiotics, if you contracted a bacterial infection, you had to worry about the possibility of dying. But as of the 1940s, this threat has been relatively rare. The world has been transformed in a manner that would have seemed incredible or even miraculous a century before.

As citizens of Washington State, we are in the right place at the right time, just as Alexander Fleming was, and the question is "What are we going to do about it?"

The traditional form of democratic government is that of **representative democracy**, in which the citizens elect legislators to make laws. However, as of the 1900s, 24 states have adopted initiative processes, which are a form of **direct democracy**. For people who lock themselves into tradition, the initiative process is a contamination of the way that our government is supposed to work. As a result, political parties normally do not create and sponsor initiatives but, instead, work only for the election of candidates. But as long as this holds true, the disease of unrestrained taxing, borrowing, and spending that characterizes most representative democracies will remain virulent or, at best, in temporary remission, ready to flare up again when fiscal liberals retake control of the government.

What is the cause of the disease of unrestrained taxing, borrowing, and spending? The cause of the fiscal disease is that a legislator vote is public so that constituents can hold their legislators accountable. Unfortunately, this makes a legislature subject to the divide-and-conquer strategy of interest groups, each of which wants to get a cut of government benefits. And since a legislature can simply vote itself more money in order to satisfy the interest groups, this is what it usually does.

How do we solve this problem? Like Alexander Fleming, instead of throwing out the results of a culture that was contaminated by a mold, we need to study the culture in order to see why the mold provides the cure that we're looking for. Instead of ignoring the results of an election that was "contaminated" by an initiative vote, we need to study the initiative process in order to see why it provides the cure that we're looking for.

Why does the initiative process provide the cure for the fiscal disease? The reason is that a citizen has no constituents; hence, a citizen vote is private so that interest groups can't hold a citizen accountable for how they vote. In addition, when the citizens vote on an initiative for fiscal restraint, they are voting on restraining the ability of the government to get their money, and the citizens usually approve such restraint. This result is especially graphic in Washington State because Washington voters tend to approve initiatives for fiscal restraint even though they also tend to elect fiscal liberals to office.

The People's Initiative has been specially crafted to kill the fiscal disease as effectively as penicillin kills bacteria. In addition, the initiative will have a uniquely compelling appeal because it gives the people direct control of the ability of the government get their money by establishing a citizen-controlled ceiling on government income+debt. The ceiling is expressed as a percentage of the income of the economy, and this will allow government income to grow as the income of the economy grows. But the people can change the ceiling in response to a request by the legislature or through an initiative process, so the people can *lower* the ceiling over time through an initiative process, thereby driving the ceiling downward toward an asymptotic value.

As citizens of Washington State, we are in the right place at the right time, just as Alexander Fleming was. We have the opportunity to kill the fiscal disease in Washington and to thereby set the example for the other states and for the nation. We have the opportunity to start a transformation of democratic governance that will be as revolutionary and as beneficial as the mass production of penicillin was. The question is "What are we going to do about it?"