

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY-BUILDING IN A FLAT, HOT AND CROWDED POST-AMERICAN WORLD**

An Ideological Approach to Local Governance Based on the Combined Geo-political Thoughts of Friedman, Fukuyama and Zakaria.

### **A Coherent Picture of the Future.**

The United States has always had a strategy for defining and advancing America's interests based on the idea that the government closest to the people was the best. Our nation started with a declaration based on principles of independence and freedom. As unlikely as it may seem, the lessons applicable to nation-building are useful when considering the situations of local governments in a global world.

Every small city and town is a "global" city, connected to the New Global Economy with high-speed broadband internet service. Small city businesses have immediate access to the global market place. Local governments have access to best practices, economic development strategies and infrastructure development models from around the world. There are fewer excuses for being unaware of the best way to grow an interesting, pleasant and prosperous small city or town for residents, businesses and visitors.

### **Three Companions.**

We are fortunate to have many smart and well-intentioned people worrying about the future of our world and our nation; many of whom are writing thoughtfully about our prospects. Three such people are Thomas Friedman, Fareed Zakaria and Francis Fukuyama. Their individual books from different perspectives, however, when taken together, they paint a coherent picture of a successful future.

The fact that the three books were written in the first decade of this century might lead one to think them no longer relevant. They were written after 9/11 and before the Great Recession; still an optimistic time in America despite the terrorist tragedy. Their observations and ideas resonate louder now that we have experienced the post-Great Recession malaise than they did when written. Each suggests attitudes and actions to take to secure our collective and individual survival and prosperity.

The three companion books are:

- ***State-Building, Governance and the New World Order in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*** by Francis Fukuyama, 2004.
- ***Hot, Flat and Crowded, Why We Need a Green Revolution – And How It Can Renew America*** by Thomas L. Friedman, 2008.
- ***The Post-American World*** by Fareed Zakaria, 2008.

Thomas Friedman quotes from the movie *The Leopard*, "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change". A great summary of our situation; a challenge to the things we value and want to preserve. What confronts us is a void. We have yet to re-state our fundamental values as a people in the post-Cold War period. We have yet to find our next destination and the path towards it...and the world is not waiting for us. Given national and international wanderings in search of purpose, local governments can establish community consensus visions and control their destinies with strategic investments in vision-consistent infrastructure for their social, economic and physical assets.

## Historic Perspective.

**President Washington** articulated our relationship with the world in four foundational principles which guided us for a century. The President told us to build a uniquely good society [the city on the hill], to contract alliances with other countries only on a temporary basis, to expand within the western hemisphere [Manifest Destiny], and to forbid European states to expand in the western hemisphere [The Monroe Doctrine]. With the end of the Reconstruction that followed the Civil War, the first American Revolution was concluded. The final piece of business started by The Founders was achieved; freedom for all was achieved to complement our strategy for the avoidance of world entanglements, expansion to the Pacific, the ousting of European powers from our shores and the construction of a good society.

With the closing of the American frontier in 1890 and exuberance of the Gilded Age, **Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt** fostered our active participation in the world through colonialization and empire building. America became a world force, a “super power”; solidified by our participation in World War I which was sadly followed by our rejection of **President Wilson’s** global view. Our isolationism, our rejection of a global role eliminated our ability to help Europe avoid the continuation of the First World War into the Second.

But, the balance of the powers of nations throughout the world became irrevocably important to the United States. With the end of the “hot” European war in 1945 came the “cold war” and our 50 year national policy of constraining communism through “containment” and the **Truman Doctrine**. The second period of American Revolution was achieved; the United States solidified its position as a [the] world super power with the fall of communism in 1989.

So what? What has this all been about? Do we have a destiny greater than the life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in America? Can we have happiness and prosperity in America if the world is unhappy and poor, and intimately connected? Can we have a rational immigration policy that meets the needs of the Nation? Can United States sovereignty survive the International System that puts global needs above national sovereignty and priorities?

## The Path Forward.

If the vision is to have small cities and towns that are interesting, pleasant and prosperous places for residents, businesses and visitors, the path starts with jobs; and jobs depend on education. The partnership between the business and education communities forms the base for the town’s prosperity. The institutions necessary to make this partnership work to its fullest are the chamber of commerce and the economic development commission, the school board and the community college, the public library, the local history museum and the community theater. City government is a funder and a capacity-building facilitator.

The vehicles for capacity-building are institutions; institutions matter. From time to time, we are disappointed in their performance, but the task is to make them work, not discard, decimate or demonize them. Professor Fukuyama provides standards that enable institutions to be useful at the local level of government:

- First, the community must have a coherent vision of its future.
- Second, institutions must clearly express their goals and how they contribute to the community vision...often they are murky or hidden and therefore, impossible to support by consensus.

- Third, there must be formal, public and transparent systems to monitor and measure their performance. Business is ultimately governed by the market and expires when unsuccessful. Business organizations, public agencies and quasi-public institutions do not have this test to meet and therefore need another way to prove they are meritorious and deserving of continued support.
- The fourth idea is that institutions are not businesses and while many principles of business are useful, different goals, talents and skills are required to lead and manage NGOs, public agencies and other community institutions. Public administration is a laudable and important profession that commands respect. The leadership of state-building institutions cannot be handed to just anyone; professional help is required.

Mr. Zakaria concludes by describing six specific guidelines to enable America a successful leadership role in the new world. These ideas translate directly to small cities and towns:

1. Choose a policy path; don't play the field; find and follow a vision.
2. Build broad rules, not narrow interests; develop a sustainable approach with a strong balance of social, economic and physical interests and assets.
3. Be Bismarck, not Britain...be the honest broker, not a diminishing power manipulator.
4. Order ala carte; pursue policies and programs that work, discard the rest.
5. Think asymmetrically, anticipate disruptions, respond with principle-based solutions.
6. Be, and be viewed as, legitimate; legitimacy is power.

### All Together Now.

So what do we think of all this? Having read the three books somewhat simultaneously and having listened through the media to Messrs. Zakaria and Friedman multiple times, their messages are useful to governance of small cities and towns. Isolationism is not an option; partnerships and collaborations make the best use of limited resources. Good governance and strong institutions are essential in a multi-cultural, resource limited, instantly communicative, intimately connected world where individuals are, in many ways, as powerful as great nations.

In a highly variable world, a community-based vision backed by strongly principled institutions is the best way to maintain a course to prosperity. Therefore:

- **Build and strengthen public and private institutions.**
- **Articulate and commit to a community-based vision.**
- **Let the community vision drive the strategy that directs all city actions.**
- **Monitor and evaluate every action within the context of the community vision.**

**Trust Innovation to Deliver** - Once we leave the tenuous security of the present, the path to long term order and security is the path of innovation. We can only innovate our way to a safe harbor, and I agree with Mr. Friedman that the only way "is to mobilize the most effective and prolific system of transformational innovation and commercialization of new products ever created on the face of the earth – the U.S. marketplace."