

We the People

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BY SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

We, the people, are the cornerstone of the 220-year-old U.S. Constitution. From the beginning, it was evident that our nation was built not on the divine right of kings, but the will of the governed. Bred in our bones is the democratic notion that we, the people, determine the role and direction of our nation. We learn in civics classes that we do this through elections and civic participation. We learn that we have three branches of government that balance each other—the theory is that one will provide a balance to another’s excess.

Over the years, there have been many shifts and changes within the parameters of the Constitution. The year after it was ratified, the Bill of Rights was added as its first ten amendments to protect individual liberties. Years later, slavery was ended, women got the vote, and presidents’ terms were limited.

Besides changes in the document itself, there have been more subtle cultural shifts with the changing needs of the times. In the last century, the New Deal was a response to the Great Depression, and government was seen as having a role in providing a safety net for citizens at risk. Social Security protected senior citizens from absolute poverty while Medicare later provided healthcare for seniors. President Johnson’s Great Society addressed racial discrimination, helped provide shelter for people in poverty and much more.

Beginning with post-Vietnam and post-Watergate disillusionment, citizens began to see government as more of a problem than a solution. President Reagan took this to a new level with the “get government off your back” rhetoric. We have survived 25 years during which this attitude has seeped into our culture. Congress has cut back on domestic programs. Administrations have privatized all manner of government services. Elected officials often refuse to resolve challenging issues, preferring to be reelected and keep special interests content. In this process, we, the people,

have been lulled into a complacency that is the antithesis of the inspiration that created our country.

It is time to wake up and claim our country back! We have reached a political crossroads where government is paralyzed and gridlock is considered a positive political stance. The only way to make a difference is that we, the people, must demand change. We must insist on government that returns to caring for the common good.

To that end, we at NETWORK are convening a broad cross section of Catholic organizations at a Convention for the Common Good in Philadelphia, July 11 to 13, 2008. Our goal is to claim back the best of our country’s idealism and demand that elected leaders resolve the most pressing needs of our times in the light of

Catholic Social Tradition. Before the Convention, we invite you and everyone we can find to work in small groups to wrestle with the aching needs of our time and what can be done about them. At the Convention we will adopt a platform for the common good and a Declaration of Interdependence

that we can use to ensure that politicians address our most pressing issues. On November 4, 2008, we will work to turn out the vote. And on November 5, we will begin the most important part of our work—holding our elected officials accountable and ensuring they know that we, the people, have not gone into hibernation until the next election cycle. We must demand both parties that our government be different.

We are waking up to the reality that we, the people, are the only ones who can make this change. Please join us in making this happen—our nation needs it, the people of the world need it, the earth itself is crying for it. We need a firm commitment for the long haul. Together we can create the change that will allow “We the People” to live our Constitution.

Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK’s Executive Director.

*We the People of the United States,  
in order to form a more perfect union,  
establish justice, insure domestic  
tranquility, provide for the common  
defense, promote the general welfare...*