

Families and Children in the Next System

Building on best practices

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The stories from Flint, Michigan, were horrifying: a whole city's water poisoned by lead and other metals, leached from ancient pipes by acidic water from the Flint River, chosen to supply the city as a cost-cutting move by the State of Michigan; a governor urged to resign; a city's children suffering from brain damage and other physical impairments that may be permanent.

Americans and the rest of the world reacted in shock to this dire tale from a poor, mostly African-American city in the world's richest nation. Yet Flint is only the tip of the iceberg. In parts of California, lead levels in children's bodies are as much as three times as high as in Flint.¹

A focus on Flint may end its poisoned water crisis. But the current global economic system extracts a terrible price from children and families everywhere, even in many of the world's richest countries, and especially in the United States. Indeed, as we shall see, the United States, whose leaders, both Republican and Democrat, proclaim its "exceptionalism" at every opportunity, is most remarkable for its poor performance among wealthy nations concerning the lives of children.

There's a dark secret hiding in American homes. It did not appear in the 2016 presidential debates, nor was it spoken of seriously as part of either campaign, though Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton did argue for parental leave, child care and early childhood education. Our children's lives are just about the *worst* in all rich countries. The United States is, in the words of Italian economist Stefano Bartolini, "the example *not* to follow."²

A decade ago, when I was making a film for public television called *The Motherhood Manifesto*, I interviewed Janet Gornick, a sociologist at the City University of New York. Whenever she traveled around Europe, Janet told me, she would be asked, "Why do Americans hate children?"



It seemed like a strange question. Of course, Americans don't *hate* their children. On the surface, we Americans love our kids just as much as anyone else. But the Europeans that Gornick spoke with were making a different point. They'd seen international data comparing childhood poverty, abuse and social safety nets and to them, for whatever reason, it appeared that we Americans didn't care a whole lot about little Ronnie or Susie.

They knew that the United States was among only a handful of countries—the rest poor and small—that didn't guarantee maternity leave when parents had a child, or paid leave to take care of sick children. They knew that American child poverty rates were double those of Europe and had been generally growing since the 1980s. They'd heard we had the highest rates of child abuse and child homicide among rich countries. How could it be, they wondered, that this was happening in the richest country on earth? Fast forward past the financial crisis and recession, and the comparisons haven't changed. We have a lot more data now, but it only confirms what Gornick was saying in 2005.

This paper is an attempt to explore these current deficiencies and show how a new economic model—the “next system,” based in part on the best practices currently in use somewhere in the world—might better provide for flourishing families and children, both in the United States and around the world. In structuring this assessment, we rely in part on Abraham Maslow's well-known theory of needs, understanding that this theory is a general one and has often been criticized. Nonetheless, Maslow's theory of a “relative pre-potency” of needs is a useful device for providing structure to an analysis that might otherwise become quickly overwhelming, disconnected and confusing.

What is a family?

In this paper, we consider families as individuals who have committed to living together, and their children, by birth or adoption. We include extended families, nuclear families or single-parent families, and do not

discriminate between traditional male-female parents or gay parents. We include individuals who are married to each other and those who are in long-term relationships regardless of formality. We understand that it is the love and support shared in a “family” that matters for its success and its children's futures, not its structure. In our view, if parents have the time, economic and social support to provide security, love and guidance, children will generally flourish, whatever the type of family. On the other hand, where insecurity and harsh, arbitrary actions lacking empathy prevail, children are likely to fare poorly.

Social reproduction

Families in America have changed enormously over the past generation. The nuclear family with a father breadwinner now represents only a small share of American families. In two-thirds of cases, mothers with children now also work outside the home, a near doubling since the 1970s.³ Yet the family is as important to our society as ever, as an economic unit (even more so as government and other supportive services have been cut back) and importantly, as the germinator for our future community members and leaders. While the economy produces built and financial capital, the family, and institutions such as schools, are still responsible for the *social reproduction* that builds the human and social capital necessary to hold societies together. In recent years, this social reproduction has been neglected in our focus on *economic* progress and growth. If we are to build strong families and allow children to flourish, social reproduction must again become a priority.

Structure of this paper

Using Abraham Maslow's model, we begin with a look at the current wellbeing data for children in wealthy countries (how well they are meeting the needs Maslow outlines), understanding that conditions for families and children are even more dire in many poor countries. We examine, first, present conditions, particularly in the United States, the primary model for corporate capitalism in the 21st century, and for the “neoliberal”

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

economic reforms—cutting taxes, regulations and safety nets, etc.—that have been at the forefront of capitalist development since the 1980s.

We compare UNICEF and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) data on child wellbeing and consider current policies, both international and domestic, that seem to provide the best *results* in *today's* global economic system. We then suggest how these “best practices” might be incorporated into a larger model for family and child wellbeing in “the next system.”

We proceed to consider new ideas not yet implemented that can improve outcomes, and finally, we suggest some pragmatic, step-by-step strategies for moving toward a world that offers the best possible outcomes for all. Any pro-child, pro-family agenda must move beyond immediate and transitional fixes or “Band-Aids” toward transformative, system-changing policies. In this sense, we hope to offer what Andre Gorz once called non-reforming or radical reforms.

In comparing the lives of our children with those in other rich countries, we rely on two important comprehensive studies and data sets. The Organization for Economic Cooperation’s *How’s Life 2015* report⁴ provides reliable information about a host of quality of life measures for its 30-plus members, which include most of the world’s richest nations. A fifth of the 265-page report explores children’s quality of life. But while more than 30 aspects of children’s lives are explored in the report, data on some of them is not available for all countries.

A smaller data set, *Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries*,⁵ published by UNICEF in 2013, helps fill in some of the gaps. Together, the two reports provide a remarkably consistent picture. For example, UNICEF ranks the United States 26th of 29 rich nations, topping only Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, while OECD, with a slightly different mix of countries, has it tied for 25th place among 27 nations, topping only Turkey when it comes to an *overall* evaluation of children’s wellbeing.

Not all countries are included in these data sets because of differences in collection of statistics. Our data analysis is supplemented by *qualitative* reasoning from a variety of sources concerned with the welfare of families and children (eg. Robert Putnam’s *Our Kids*).

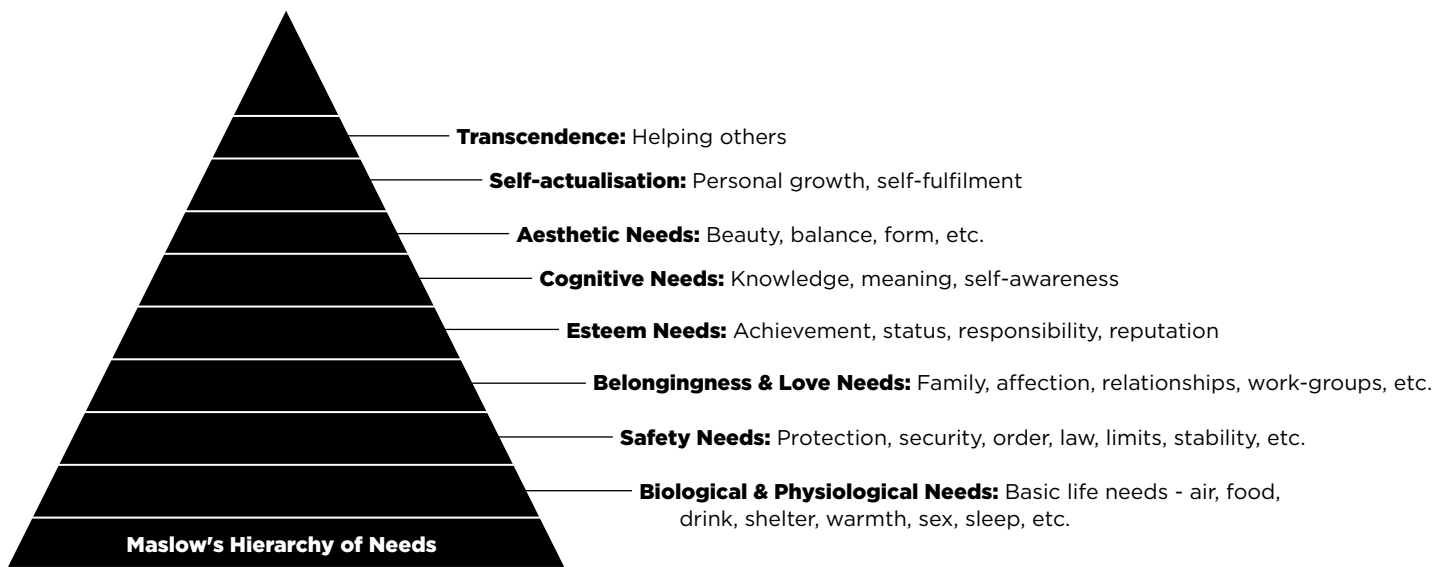
Lest it be argued that 2013 or 2015 data may no longer be valid for comparing US with those of other rich countries given growth in the US economy since then, it should be pointed out that according to the *2018 United Nations World Happiness Report*⁶ the US actually slipped several points in relation to other rich countries during the past decade, and life satisfaction in the US actually fell between 2010 and 2017, from an average of 7.2 out of ten to an average of 6.9. More recent Gallup studies show a continued decline in satisfaction. So, if anything, the data presented here for the US may be too rosy rather than too bleak.

In part, we consider quality of life for children as a proxy for quality of life for families, recognizing that there may be exceptions to such a view. For example, American adults fare better than their children in terms of quality of life, ranking in the middle among OECD nations. The Netherlands, by contrast, does better by children than adults, though it does well for both.

Maslow’s theory of needs

Psychologist Abraham Maslow worried that his profession focused too much on the neuroses and psychoses that define mentally unhealthy individuals and the life events, cultural norms and personal behaviors that led to such abnormalities. Maslow believed in the need for a *humanistic* psychology that examined the life experiences and behaviors that produced healthy, satisfied, well-adjusted human beings. In his thinking, he might well be considered the founder of *positive psychology*, though others have also claimed that mantle.

Maslow believed that to understand healthy human beings one needed to start with a unified theory of human needs. If these needs were met effectively, he reasoned, nearly all individuals would become



well-adjusted, contributing members of society. Maslow put forth his groundbreaking theory of human needs in 1943, in the middle of the darkest days of World War II, when the disastrous results of widespread social psychoses were obvious. He revised it several times, finally in his 1970 publication, *Motivation and Personality*, written shortly before his death.⁷

As mentioned earlier, Maslow claimed that human needs could be understood as making themselves known to individuals through a general hierarchy of “prepotency,” with the most immediate physiological needs calling attention to themselves first, and more complex social and psychological needs coming to the surface *after* the physiological needs had been at least partly satisfied. Put simply, for example, persons starving to death would, in almost every case, require respite from their hunger *before* they could appreciate a work of art. Maslow never argued that the “lower” physiological needs had to be completely satisfied before higher needs could make themselves felt. He proposed a *relative* pre-potency, not an absolute one. His theory is still widely taught in psychology departments.

Physiological needs

Per Maslow, the first needs to assert themselves are the most basic *physiological* requirements of human beings—air, water, food, sleep, shelter from the elements, adequate clothing to fend off the cold, for example. Roughly, as we consider country-by-country satisfaction of needs for families and children,

Maslow’s physiological needs can be evaluated using such statistics as mortality rates for children and adults, presence of malnutrition and hunger, air and water quality, access to basic health care protections against sickness, rates of poverty, homelessness or inadequate housing, and similar data. Poverty often means that basic physiological needs are met poorly, if at all. In the United States, the poor are less likely to have access to paid leave when they are sick, for example. In some expressions of Maslow’s ideas, health needs are identified as *safety* needs, rather than physiological needs (see diagram above).

Certainly, some needs cross between groupings. Long-term chronic illness, for example, presents safety needs, but an immediate, debilitating illness may carry the awareness prepotency of severe hunger. Shelter and clothing are immediate, pre-potent physiological needs in some climatic conditions but not in others.

Safety/security needs

For those not overcome by hunger, thirst, hypothermia or severe illness, etc., another set of demands that Maslow called *safety needs* begins to assert itself. Fear of sudden loss and imminent danger make it difficult for people to concentrate on work, friendship and other aspects of the quality of life. A life of constant insecurity often leads to unhealthy behaviors, commonly referred to judgmentally as “bad choices.” Those without access to gainful employment might be tempted to turn to crime, for example, endangering both themselves and

others. Various measures of life satisfaction show that people who do not feel safe and secure or cannot trust others, are notably less happy with their lives.

Considering safety needs in our international comparisons of quality of life for families and children leads us to an examination of employment opportunities, or assistance when one cannot work or find a job, including various forms of insurance such as old-age pensions, social security, healthcare and disability compensation. In the more immediate sense of pending danger, it includes rates of crime, incarceration, and risky behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse. In a broader sense, it includes longer-term deprivation in the case of unsafe housing, pollution or chronic illness. Growing inequality also decreases trust, an important safety need and a key factor in life satisfaction.

People's sense of insecurity is often preyed on by authoritarian leaders, most recently in President Trump's tirades against immigrants, MS-13 or urban crime. Maslow himself warned that sudden threats to safety may lead to acceptance of war or dictatorship.

Belongingness needs

Satisfaction of physiological and safety needs to varying degrees begins to bring to our attention a new set of concerns that Maslow called *belongingness needs*. As social animals, human beings need each other. Physiological, safety and belongingness needs all assert themselves immediately in newborns who must have warmth and mother's milk, constant protection and a chance to bond with their parents. Those who are shortchanged where these things are concerned may be stunted and negatively impacted for the rest of their lives.

Various measures allow us to determine relative satisfaction of belongingness needs. We can ask how many close friends people have or can count on. Here, Robert Putnam and others have found a decline in the number of such friends Americans report having. Self-reported chronic loneliness is another sign that belongingness

needs are not fully met. Studies by the University of California at Los Angeles for American Association of Retired Persons and *Time* magazine find a dramatic rise in loneliness among Americans over 45.⁸ Levels of bullying in schools or crimes against immigrants and ethnic minorities are other keys that their needs for belonging at not being met, but may also be powerful *safety* needs if truly threatening.

Indicators of policy success in improving belonging include adequate parental leave, which allows mothers and fathers to bond with newborns. Here, the United States joins Papua New Guinea in the distinction of being the world's only countries that do not at least require paid maternity leave.⁹

Esteem needs

As human beings develop into life they begin to need not only love from others, but respect. They begin to be concerned with their status in society—do I matter? Maslow refers to these needs for personal recognition as *esteem needs*. Without recognition from others we are less encouraged to use our personal gifts and talents. Formal education is a key way that people, particularly in richer countries, develop competencies or capabilities that allow them to earn respect. We can measure our success in providing the competencies that build self-worth partly through our access to education and its results in providing useful knowledge. Such esteem can come in various ways. In the United States, we often associate it with power or riches; we look up to the rich and powerful, as with Trump, who divides the world into winners (the rich) and losers (the rest). But many other cultures are more likely to respect service, intelligence, grace and a life where making a difference trumps making a fortune.

For many years, the concept of "self-esteem" has been widely promoted in America, often in shallow ways that involve nothing more than exhortations like "I am somebody!" Such approaches are not wrong, but incomplete. We are more likely to experience strong self-esteem when we feel like we have earned it and

when we also sense respect from others. The conservative scholar Arthur Brooks of the American Enterprise Institute makes this point in his book *The Battle*, but uses it to argue for a diminution of the social safety net, claiming that material assistance creates dependence, whereas picking oneself up by the bootstraps brings the pride of earned respect. I have argued at length that for children, it is hard to argue that a five-year old should pick herself up by the bootstraps, on the contrary, support for education, health and family bonding provides a solid *foundation for independence*.¹⁰ That is also the view underlying the Nordic social service system.

Our emphasis on material comparisons and our extreme capitalist economy—in contrast to many other rich nations—promote competition as the path to esteem, rather than cooperation with others. But such competition means some winners and many losers and may result in lower self-esteem overall. Teen competition for status—either through conspicuous consumption (the hot car, the new smartphone, etc.), or online image—has led to a wave of anxiety, depression and even suicide.

Self-actualization

Maslow puts *self-actualization* or self-realization at the top of his pyramid. By this, he means the opportunities to meet our needs for creative expression, meaningful work, and access to a rich natural and cultural environment. In the richest countries, these may be the strongest felt needs. Some satisfaction of these needs comes with our jobs, but Gallup finds few Americans who are truly engaged with their work.¹¹ We can also find it in vocational activities—learning to paint or play an instrument, for example. We find it in hobbies. We can find it in spiritual “peak” experiences in nature or in the imagination. And we find it in play, especially as children. It is hard to find when we are rushed or anxious, or obsessed with earning enough to make ends meet.

In part, we can measure our success in providing for self-actualization by the amount of leisure or *free* time we offer everyone. Among the structural issues that block access to self-actualization for our youth are heavy loads

of student debt, which push them to seek high-paying jobs instead of those they would enjoy more and feel more creative in performing. Job insecurity and a weak social safety net put obstacles in the path to self-realization, making it hard to “follow your bliss.”

By contrast, Nordic “nanny states,” characterized by free higher education and a strong safety net, allow for greater freedom of choice, more leisure time and more opportunity to pursue one’s own path to self-actualization. Anu Partanen writes of this phenomenon in her book, *The Nordic Theory of Everything*, a comparison of life in the US and her native Finland.¹²

Cognitive and aesthetic needs

In his later work, Maslow suggests two further sets of needs, related to, and important for, self-actualization. *Cognitive* needs include life-long curiosity, an antidote to boredom. In a world of constant corporate “entertainment,” such needs may be thwarted in serious ways. *Aesthetic* needs include the need for beauty in its many forms, both natural and human-inspired.

Like Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, and many other critics of his time, Maslow suggested that the ugliness of modern industrial life leaves many, particularly the most sensitive individuals, unfulfilled and saddened, even if they do not recognize the source of their pain. New studies are finding that green space makes people with access to it both happier and healthier. Florence Williams’ excellent new book, *The Nature Fix*, provides a wealth of scientific support for the human value of a beautiful outdoor environment.¹³ Yet much of America is an extension of the Los Angeles-style commercial model of development based on asphalt, strip malls, parking lots, utilitarian block-like office buildings, endless neon or billboards, and other triggers of depression. Inner cities may fare even worse, with abandoned or burned-out buildings, bars on doors and windows, broken glass and trash in the streets, and widespread graffiti. While some would consider these cultural tastes, there seems to be evidence from surveys of life satisfaction that they are not.

American exceptionalism revisited

Americans have always believed we were an exceptional people, chosen, some of us even feel, by God. Our country, they contend, is a “City on a Hill” and a beacon to others. We take pride in our many firsts, in our armed might and our massive economy, the result, we think, of our remarkable work ethic. Few of us acknowledge the advantages that helped shape our economic success: the wholesale theft of vast lands from their native populations; abundant natural resources of every type; the material development made possible by our sin of slavery; the massive cheap labor supply provided by immigration; our isolation from countries that bore the brunt and suffered the destruction of world wars, and our vast domestic market, where nearly ninety percent of our production is sold, protecting us from much of the impact of global competition.

An “America First” attitude helped make Donald Trump’s presidential victory possible, while talk of being the “greatest nation on earth” comes from both major political parties. Hillary Clinton’s response to Trump’s call to “make America great again” was to claim that there was no need; we were already great. President Obama consistently evoked America’s greatness while making the mistake, in his enemies’ eyes, of suggesting that other countries, too, might believe in their own greatness. Charged with not believing America was exceptional, he proclaimed that, in fact, he did, and very much so. Our exceptionalism, he said, was the reason a young black man like him could become president.

Yet Obama might have agreed that, yes, America was exceptional, very exceptional, but for the wrong reasons. We are exceptional in that we are the world’s only rich country that:

- Has no guarantee of universal health care for its citizens.
- Has no requirement of paid vacation time for its citizens.
- Has no requirement of paid sick days for its citizens.
- Has no requirement of paid maternity leave for its citizens (a distinction it shares only with Papua New Guinea).

In each of these things, we are indeed exceptional. And each of them leaves us a step further behind other wealthy countries in quality-of-life outcomes for families and children.

We are exceptional in a positive sense in few measures beyond the totality of our Gross Domestic Product. Using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a way of understanding our strengths and shortcomings, let us compare some basic data from the world’s wealthy countries. Our reference point is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’s 2015 *How’s Life* data set. In short form, what we find in this data is that United States performs reasonably well—roughly near the middle among OECD

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nations—when it comes to quality of life measures for adults. But the data is dramatically different for children, and by extension for parents and families. In the case of children, US performance is near the very bottom, boosted only by high performances in such areas as smoking and drinking, where we find lower rates than in other nations.¹⁴

Racial divide

Of course, it must be acknowledged that the racial divide is wider in the United States than in other rich countries (though it has been increasing in Europe). People of color, except for some Asian groups, consistently experience lower incomes and life satisfaction and more real deprivation than is true for whites. White society, too, is slipping further into a rich/poor dichotomy of haves and have-nots, but minorities, particularly African Americans, still bear the greatest brunt of inequality. They are far more likely to live in poverty, to leave school before graduation, to lack healthcare and other safety nets, to be less likely to be enrolled in college or to be in corporate leadership positions, and more likely to die younger than their white counterparts. They are also victims of discrimination that especially affects families: black children are more likely to be suspended from school, even in the earliest grades; black teens, who do not consume more drugs than whites, are far more likely to be arrested and imprisoned for drug use. Their sentences are longer and they more often do jail time for victimless crimes, in some cases leaving children without parents to take care of them. They are also more likely to be the victims of

violence. Conservatives argue that much of this is black-on-black crime in the inner cities, but as Black Lives Matter and video cameras have made clear, much violence towards African Americans comes from the police, who are more likely to stop them for routine violations and then escalate the issue than they do with whites. Any policy to improve the lives of families and children must give special attention to this racial divide.

Physiological needs

Let us now return to Maslow in assessing quality of life for American children and families. Here is a brief overview of the data regarding *physiological* needs:

Poverty. Poverty rates may be the easiest proxy for our ability to meet the most basic needs. At just over 20 percent, our child poverty rate is fifth highest among 30 rich countries, and roughly double that of European nations. By contrast, the rate of child poverty in Denmark and Finland is only *four* percent.¹⁵ This is because while Americans boast the highest average net wealth and disposable income among rich countries, we are also among the most unequal. UNICEF, for example, rates the United States 30th among 41 developed countries for income equality. What is equally striking is that in 2017 half of all American workers earned less than \$30,000 a year, the equivalent of \$15 an hour for a full-time job, which is the *minimum* wage in cities like Seattle, and well below the *average* minimum wage of \$20 an hour in Scandinavia.¹⁶ Families simply cannot make ends meet in most of America on \$30,000 a year.

The top ten percent of American families earn 19 times what the bottom 10 percent does each year. In Denmark, by contrast, the gap is only 5-1 and the average for rich countries is about 12-1. Among 31 OECD nations, only Mexico exhibits a larger gap.¹⁷ Wealth is even more stratified, with the top one percent of Americans owning 25 times as much on average as the bottom 60 percent.¹⁸ Some estimates suggest that median-income Americans have

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

so little in savings they could survive but a few weeks without unemployment benefits if they suddenly lost work.

Infant mortality. While the percentage of American children who die at birth is small, it is twice as high as the European average and triple the rate in Japan, and even the comparatively- poor Slovenia.¹⁹ Some of this can be blamed on the high percentage of low-birthweight babies in the US, itself partly due to our considerably higher levels of teenage births which are often associated with low self-esteem.

Hunger. Hunger is a growing problem in the United States. According to Feeding America, the largest US hunger charity, “As many as 17 million children nationwide are struggling with what is known as food insecurity.²⁰ To put it another way, one in four children in the country is living without consistent access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy life.” ABC News reports that, “The consequences of malnutrition can be severe. Several studies have shown that food insecurity affects cognitive development among young children. And for older children...school performance is affected. Additional research shows that with hunger comes more frequent sickness and higher healthcare costs.”²¹

Hunger is much less common among children in other rich nations, with important exceptions such as Greece. In recent years, food subsidies have been cut, increasing the number of hungry American children. Paul Ryan, speaker of the House of Representatives, has argued that food subsidies increase dependency among poor Americans, but malnutrition is far more likely to lead to lack of economic success later in life. Breastfeeding can help prevent malnutrition among infants. About 70 percent of American mothers breastfeed, compared to rates of 97-99 percent in Scandinavia, where maternity leaves are much longer and breastfeeding is even encouraged in the workplace. On the other hand, only 50 percent of French mothers breastfeed, despite more generous maternity leave than in the U.S, so part of this is policy but part is culture.²²

Effects of American malnutrition or poor nutritional habits also include overweight and obese children. In the US, nearly 40 percent of children are overweight and about 10 percent are clinically obese. These are the highest figures among OECD countries, almost five times as high as the best-performing country, the Netherlands, and more than double the average rate in the OECD.²³ Poor diet accounts for part of this; children in poverty are likely to be more obese. Many poor American children live in “food deserts,” where access to fresh produce and other healthy foodstuffs is impaired. Their diets are high in starches and sugars, which agricultural subsidy patterns have made cheap. They may consume more soft drinks than water.

Sadly, the US seems to be moving backwards in this area. Sonny Perdue, President Trump’s new Secretary of Agriculture, has reversed rules regarding healthful school lunches put in place as part of former first lady Michelle Obama’s efforts to improve children’s health. But diet is not the sole culprit in obesity. Indeed, Dutch children consume more sugar than do American children. Obesity among children and adults is also in part a result of stress and sleep deprivation, which impair digestion. Life for American children is particularly stressful, as we shall see. Moreover, fewer of them get sufficient exercise. 50 percent of American children walked to school in 1971. Now, 13 percent do.²⁴

Housing. Homelessness in the United States, especially in large cities such as San Francisco or Seattle, is much higher than in other wealthy countries. *Homelessworldcup.org* finds that, “On a single night in January 2013, there were 610,042 people experiencing homelessness [in the US].²⁵ By 2016, homelessness had declined by 9% since 2007²⁶ but may now be rising again. However, unofficial estimates of total homelessness range from 1.6 to 3.5 million²⁷ and in 2013, 2,483,539 children experienced homelessness at some point.²⁸ By contrast, the United Kingdom, with one of the highest homeless rates in Europe, has roughly 100,000 homeless, comparable to about half a million in the US, were the two nations’ populations the same.

Safety and security needs

There is no question that the United States is a dangerous place to grow up, especially if you are poor. American children are considerably more likely to be victims of child abuse than children in other rich nations. The US ranks second only to Mexico in the likelihood that one of its children will die by homicide. Michael Petit, Maine's former human services commissioner, points out that American children are 11 times more likely to be murdered than Italians, three times more likely than Canadians.²⁹ More than 3 million American children are abused and neglected each year. The effects of such abuse cost Americans more than \$100 billion annually. Bullying has become a major concern in the United States and many other wealthy countries. 11 percent of American children report being bullied, slightly above the OECD average.³⁰

Red State. Blue State. The report *Homeland Insecurity* makes clear that children are far less secure in so-called "red" (Republican) states than in "blue" (Democratic) states. Indeed, when the report analyses children's welfare in all 50 states, only one red state, Nebraska, ranks in the top 10, while all states in the bottom 10 are Republican. A summary of the report concluded that, "Living in a 'red' state appears to be hazardous to the health of millions of American children."³¹ The report points out that red states tend to be lower-taxed, more unequal and more hostile to government, and provide fewer services for children than do the more social democratic "blue" states. These same red states are the most likely to have refused the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, making it harder for their poorest citizens to get health care.

Safety nets. As with children, so with adults. Former President George Bush called his effort to transfer safety nets like Social Security and Medicare into private accounts, "The Ownership Society." But what we seem to have is a "You're on Your Own" society instead. As Jacob Hacker points out in his book *The Great Risk Shift*, life has become increasingly insecure for American parents as well as children in recent years. Hacker

found that personal bankruptcies increased by seven times from 1980 to 2005 (prior to the Great Recession),³² while home foreclosures quintupled, and three times as many people worried about losing a job or saw their incomes decline. Defined benefit programs such as retirement pensions have fallen by two-thirds and there has been a GOP push to privatize Social Security, a decision that would put even more families at risk—particularly if we were to see another market crash as in 2007.

While unemployment has dropped recently, job insecurity remains high and many of the newly-created jobs cannot support a family beyond the poverty level, sometimes even with two parents working. Job prospects have become worrisome even for recent college graduates, many of whom bear sizeable student debt. They increasingly live at home and work as waiters or baristas, or as part of the growing low-wage "gig economy," despite their academic training. This phenomenon is not confined to the US. Marius de Geus, a professor at Holland's Leiden University, recently told me that Dutch college graduates also find it difficult to find jobs suitable to their skill level. They do not, however, have as much debt to overcome.

Sickness. Healthcare is a safety/security need, and here the exceptionalism of the US is even more striking. Among wealthy countries, we are the only one that does not guarantee healthcare by law to all residents. When President Obama took office, more than 50 million Americans were without health insurance, a situation that Harvard researchers found led to some 45,000 avoidable deaths a year.³³ The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) has cut the number of uninsured almost in half. The act forbids the exclusion from insurance coverage of people with pre-existing health conditions, and allows parents to keep their children on their plans until age 26. But the gains are tenuous; President Trump and the GOP-majority Congress are determined to repeal it, an act that the Congressional Budget Office estimates would strip health care from 24 million of us in the next 10 years, and 14 million next year alone.³⁴

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

On the other hand, even supporters of Obamacare acknowledge its shortcomings. Health insurance in the US, except for Medicare or Medicaid beneficiaries, is very expensive by world standards, and insurance companies raised rates sharply immediately before the 2016 elections.

Even many of those who have coverage are saddled with enormous deductibles that discourage them from seeking early-stage care of illnesses. Yet, health-care in the US now costs an astounding one-fifth (18 percent) of our GDP, and, on average, nearly twice as much as in other rich countries. Canada insures all its residents for half the cost, and with better health outcomes. Even the most expensive systems in other countries cost at least one-third less per capita than our system does, and, in each case, with more impressive results, as US life expectancy is now lowest among the world's richest nations.³⁵

Much of this higher cost results from the wider profit margins in our multi-insurer, lightly regulated system, but some is also the result of Americans' poorer health. Older Americans are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases than their counterparts abroad, and treatment of such diseases is the most expensive segment of our healthcare budget.

We are also the only rich country where life expectancy is no longer increasing—for the past four years it has been stable—and, shockingly, for the first time, many Americans are dying *younger* than their parents did.³⁶ In 30 percent of American counties, women's lives are getting shorter and studies indicate a similar pattern among working class white males with a high school education or less. While much of this is due to chronic illnesses, suicide also is a factor as are drug-related deaths. Methamphetamines and pain-killers have devastated parts of rural America and heroin use is on the rise in our cities.

Risky behaviors. In fairness, American children smoke and drink less than their counterparts in nearly all other rich countries.³⁷ This is the result of aggressive

anti-smoking and anti-alcohol campaigns; if you take a problem seriously, you *can* do something about it. There may be more than meets the eye in the numbers on drinking, however. At 15, most European kids are far more likely to drink than their American peers. Part of this may be simply cultural, since teenagers in Europe are often offered wine or beer with dinner and the drinking age in these countries can be as low as 16. Alcohol is not a forbidden substance and European youth often drink in moderation. The OECD data asks if they drink at all, so American children do better in this category. On the other hand, abuse of alcohol is likely higher at age 20 among Americans—our colleges report an upsurge in binge drinking.

American youth are more likely to use marijuana than most Europeans—though less likely than Canadians.³⁸ Again, the idea that pot is forbidden fruit may play a role here. It will be helpful to see if marijuana use by teens increases or decreases in states that recently legalized recreational pot. Drunk or impaired driving is far more of a hazard in the US than in most other rich countries, partly because American youths drive more, but also because of tough anti-DUI laws in Europe. In general, accident rates for children are higher in the US, where safety regulations are often laxer.

Crime. Crime in most rich countries has been declining since the late 1970s, with occasional short-term bumps. This is also true in the United States, where in general, most crimes are down. Seattle, for example, saw fewer murders in 2016 than at any time since the 1950s. But there are important exceptions. In Chicago in 2018, for example, people were shot at an average rate of eight per day, many fatally. Excluding the even-more-violent Mexico, the US is the top performer for murders, with a rate 10 times that of Japan and Norway and five times that of most European countries.³⁹ Much of this is attributable to weak gun laws here, but the underlying cause seems to be anger bred by inequality. Petty and property crimes in the US are comparable to OECD averages—pick-pocketing, for example, is higher outside the

US But though crime is actually on the decline, most Americans believe it is increasing, a claim made by President Trump on the campaign trail. Regular television viewers tend to believe the crime rate is about ten times as high as it actually is, responding to a diet of program violence and local news that highlights crime and death. Consequently, Americans are increasingly unlikely to trust each other, a key factor in unhappiness.

One consequence of this pattern—by which TV or other sources of news and entertainment tend to focus on crime—is that Americans are more fearful for their children and therefore may be overprotective. Children who could easily walk to school, improving their health, are driven by parents because of fear of abduction. It's important to point out that walking to school now is no more dangerous—and may be less so—than in the 1960s, when most children walked. But there are some alternatives. In some communities, an innovation called the “walking school bus” operates, with different parents picking up lots of children on a prescribed walking route to their school. It works well.

Imprisoned parents. While differences in crime rates (other than murder) between the US and other OECD countries are not enormous, our response is distinctly different. Americans are far more likely to be incarcerated, even for victimless crimes. About one percent of all American adults are in jail or prison, a rate seven times the OECD average.⁴⁰ Sentences are longer as well. This greatly affects families and children. Although the imprisonment of more than two million Americans was done ostensibly to make us safer, it has had a debilitating impact on children whose parents are in prison.

Belongingness needs

Especially in the US, lifestyle patterns, including suburban sprawl, lead to isolation. Loneliness seems to be on the rise in many rich countries, and especially in the US Affluence has resulted in far more individuals who choose to live alone (this is also true in

Sweden and some other rich countries), though this situation reverses somewhat in hard times like the recent recession, when people are more likely to share housing for economic reasons. Robert Putnam and others have shown that the number of family or close friends Americans can count on in times of trouble has declined by a third since 1985. Fully a quarter of all adults report having *no one at all* to confide in in such cases. Even more troubling perhaps, a 2010 *Time* magazine /AARP study conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles found that the percentage of Americans over 45 who could be described—based on questionnaires—as “chronically lonely nearly doubled (from 20 to 35 percent) in the first 10 years of the 21st century. (see footnote 5)

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This is an astounding and frightening figure, not only because such loneliness is a painful tragedy for many who experience it, but also because lonely people are more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses, thus contributing to the rapidly rising cost of healthcare, since such chronic illnesses account for at least 80 percent of our health care spending. It might be suggested that inability to bond for many Americans begins in childhood. The lack of a paid family leave policy in the US leads to many children being placed in daycare when they are as young as one month. By contrast, more generous family leave in other countries allows them to bond with parents, leaving them both healthier physically and more self-confident and socially-skilled as adults. *This is not an argument against childcare:* After a reasonable opportunity to bond—at least four months—day care can help socialize children and reduce self-centeredness.

Belonging and health. Social connection is a strong predictor of both happiness and health. A long-term Carnegie-Mellon study found that even susceptibility to colds and other viruses was in no small part explainable by how many close friends people had and how often they hugged them. If a researcher entered a room and sprayed a virus among the people in the room, those who reported more friendships and social contacts were less likely to get the virus; connection strengthens our immune systems.⁴¹

A holistic strategy for need satisfaction

This thought leads to another point: in meeting needs, it's important to do so in ways that enhance our ability to meet others on the pyramid. There are many examples of this, starting with the ways we meet our most basic needs.

Food production, for instance, can be done in different ways, from family gardens to megafarms. Vast, mechanized, and chemically-based farms do produce large amounts of food at lower prices; in this sense alone, they are “efficient.” But smaller scale production offers other values. It allows for more sustainable and organic methods (which require more careful husbandry) that produce more nutritious (though more expensive) food. Over the long run, it is far better for the soil and environment, reducing long-term costs of restoration. Such food may also be more readily produced locally, thus requiring less energy use for transport and thereby, reducing air pollution, traffic congestion, and climate change. It is also healthier, reducing the costs of dealing with food-sourced illness. Where prepared from scratch rather than being pre-processed, it contains fewer additives, especially sugar and corn syrup, which are major threats to American health.

Moreover, small scale and local production involves more people and can help build community and belongingness. At its best—if most expensive—food production is an art. Well-tended gardens and farms, with a broad mix of outputs, are a joy to the senses

and for many, horticulture is a source of great self-actualization, while corporate farming tends to be a cold and distant enterprise for most. At every level, these considerations arise: How can we meet this need while not making it harder to meet that one? An example to consider with regards to belongingness: Many studies have found that living near easily-accessible green space results in less loneliness and better mental health.⁴²

Finding such ways to increase connection and reduce loneliness would also affect our ability to meet other needs. As Tim Jackson puts it:

These ‘human service’ sectors of the economy—care, craft, culture—are characterized by the fact that the time spent by people in the service of each other is the core value proposition. I (and others) have argued extensively that this concept of service provides for a new vision of enterprise: not as a speculative, profit-maximizing, resource-intensive division of labor, but as a form of social organization embedded in the community, working in harmony with nature to deliver the *capabilities* [see esteem needs] that allow us to prosper.⁴³

Re-localization

One way to meet a wide range of needs effectively, as suggested by the discussion above, is re-localization. Re-localizing reduces things to a more human scale. A focus on small businesses (rather than large corporations like Wal-Mart or Costco) might mean somewhat higher costs, but would have multiple positive effects. A local focus would allow for healthier food, higher employment, more direct connection between businesspeople and their customers and more support for local activities—local businesses are more likely to support a Little League team or school orchestra, for example. A vibrant local sector would increase trust and community engagement. It would revitalize small, family-owned businesses.

Cooperatives

For larger entities, a model of ownership based on cooperatives could ensure that companies respond well to all *stakeholders* instead of stockholders—workers, the community, the environment, etc. There are thousands of cooperatives in the US that are effectively serving communities, ranging from baby-sitting or pre-school co-ops that serve children well to large-scale consumer co-ops like Recreational Equipment Incorporated, Group Health (now part of Kaiser), Organic Valley, Land-O-Lakes and others. Producer co-ops like those that are now helping revitalize cities like Cleveland, are based on the inspiration of the Mondragon Cooperatives in Spain, which employ tens of thousands and limit the highest officers to nine times the income of the lowest-paid worker⁴⁴ (a sharp contrast to the 250–300 times difference in major US corporations). Such cooperatives can dramatically reduce inequality while also offering more harmonious work settings and more meaningful labor.

In the 1930s, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, and several others, proposed a model that may still be appropriate for the “next system.” Called the Cooperative Commonwealth, it posed co-ops as the central pillar in a three-tiered economic system. Natural monopolies like railroads, health, major banks and communications would be socialized and run by the state. Other large industries would be operated as co-ops, with input from all stakeholders, and small businesses such as cafés, repair shops, local retail outlets and the like, would remain private and family-run.⁴⁵

Esteem needs

Satisfaction of our innate needs for recognition can likewise take many forms. In the United States, competition for status and presumably scarce opportunities, prevails. The advertisements tell us we’ve made it—and should therefore *feel* esteem—if we can “buy” the right stuff—the hot car, the swanky clothes, the bling, a night in Trump Tower. Indeed, some recent marketing studies say it works—shopping makes

us happy if only until the glow wears off and the credit card bill comes due. Yet, our religious traditions tell us that our sense of self-worth is better improved by service to others, by lives of purpose and meaning and the ability to effectively use our talents for the common good. In either case, we must become *competent* in need satisfaction; we need to know *how* to do what we want to do. What this means is that education is an essential element in meeting esteem needs.

Unfortunately, in my view, education in America is both sharply unequal and centered around hyper-competition based on frequent testing, rather than on preparing questioning and well-rounded children and adults. There is wide recognition in the United States that our educational system is not performing well, but most of that perception is centered on international test scores. Ironically, on that basis, our educational performance is better than our measures in other OECD quality of life categories. We rank a bit below the middle in science, math and reading scores, about equal to Norway and Sweden, well below Japan, South Korea, the Netherlands and Finland, and above the southern European and less wealthy OECD nations.⁴⁶ But, as with health, where our results are less positive, we spend more money to get them.

The real issue in the US concerning education and a host of other deficiencies, is, as with other categories of needs, inequality. An NPR story reported that if Massachusetts were a country, its PISA test scores for 15-year-olds would be the sixth highest in the world. By contrast, were Mississippi a country, it would rank 104th.⁴⁷

What kind of education? But education, contrary to much recent thinking in the US, involves more than test scores or job preparation. In the future, employment will be even more dependent on the ability to think critically. The testing mania that began with “No Child Left Behind,” may slightly improve our PISA scores, but at what cost? South Korea and Finland are roughly equal when it comes to international

tests—at or near the top—but their philosophies of education are polar opposites.

The US seems to be following the South Korean model, which involves long school hours and school years, lots of testing and memorization, and expensive private after-school tutoring and “academies” available to those who can pay. It brings high test scores. It also brings high levels of child stress and suicide, health problems and conformity. South Korea has the world’s highest suicide rate for both adults and children.⁴⁸ South Korea’s Yonsei University reports that students in that country are the “unhappiest in the world,” with 86 percent reporting feeling stressed each week.⁴⁹

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The recess deficit. Until recently, American schools were also following the South Korean pattern of offering little recess to students. Nearly half of American school districts eliminated or sharply reduced recess, in an effort to increase classroom time. Even preschoolers now get outside only 33 minutes a day and 30 percent of third graders get less than 15 minutes of recess a day.⁵⁰ A Tacoma, Washington, school administrator explained that in her view, “We must maximize instruction time to prepare the children to compete in the global economy.” We’re talking second graders here! Much of the push to eliminate recess has come in poor, primarily minority school districts. Thirty-nine percent of African American students get no recess at all, compared to 15 percent of White students.⁵¹ But the evidence shows that recess time *improves* learning outcomes and creativity and this data is beginning to be taken more seriously.

Play is fundamental to children’s capacity to learn. The trend is turning. In Tacoma and other cities, teachers and parents who are more enlightened than the school administrators have fought back and re-established their children’s right to recess. This is not coming a moment too soon: OECD “How’s Life” data shows American children ranking among the worst countries in terms of children’s feelings of stress in school—though at only about half the South Korean levels.⁵² Still, anxiety and depression levels for American teenagers are now at least five times what they were in the 1950s and girls 10-14 in the US now commit suicide at a rate triple that in 1999!⁵³ Vicki Abeles powerful film, *Race to Nowhere*, documents the pressures on American children. Her book, *Beyond Measure*,⁵⁴ shows how our focus on testing has led to sleeplessness, overuse of Ritalin and other drugs, and a vast uptick in stress among students.

Finland does it best. By contrast, the Finns do almost everything differently from the South Koreans and from recent American trends. Their model reveres and empowers teachers, who must have master’s degrees and also earn healthy salaries. They distribute educational funds equally (with some additional support to low-income districts). But more surprisingly, they eschew competitive testing until after high school graduation. Teachers use quizzes not to grade their pupils, but to assess learning levels and give greater attention to those who seem to be having problems with the material. The school year and school day are among the shortest in the world, and every 45-minute class session is followed by 15 minutes of outdoor recess, even in the coldest weather. Learning is less top-down memorization and more group problem-solving. And there is virtually no homework as Michael Moore finds out when he asks Finnish students about it in his film *Where to Invade Next*.

The big question is: If you can get even the traditional (test scores) results the Finnish way, why in the world would you want to do it the Korean way?

The privatization threat. But besides the push for more testing, there are other threats to American public education. Trump’s education secretary Betsy DeVos seems set on privatizing much of American education through a so-called ‘school choice’ voucher system that could be used for private schools as well as public. Her plan is essentially another financial gift to the already rich, who currently must pay the full costs of their children’s private school educations. By contrast, poor children, given vouchers equal only to those the rich also receive, will see funds for public schools cut dramatically and will not be able to afford high-quality private schools. Countries such as Finland allow only public education and provide the highest quality to all students.

Charter Schools? In addition to the public/private debate and the push for privatization, the US has witnessed a debate over “charter schools,” which offer different educational models and have become accepted in many states. These schools may be either public or private, but they are outside the purview of regular school boards and have their own boards of directors. In terms of traditional results, they have seen mixed outcomes, with some performing well and others more poorly than the regular public schools. Teachers’ unions have often opposed such schools, fearing they will lead to privatization and to anti-union policies. In Washington State, where I live, voters approved a limited number of public charter schools, but it is too early to tell how successful they are. Often, they target poor students, though in some cases, they refuse to accept students who have not done well in traditional schools, thus assuring more positive results of their own.

But, if charter schools are a priority for conservatives like DeVos, they also have a potentially progressive function, and indeed, the best ones offer experiential and cooperative education similar to that in Finnish schools. Since the 1960s, educational critics and reformers like Ivan Illich, John Holt and George Denison have challenged the factory model of schooling, with its fixed grade levels, obligatory curriculums,

top-down teaching and focus on preparing docile employees for the business world. In states like California, some charter schools have adopted much of their thinking, and, alternative methods such as Waldorf and Montessori. In the economy of the next system, charter schools, offering a variety of learning models, will likely play an important role. The one-size-fits-all model seems to be failing both slower and faster learners. But charter schools must be kept public for equity’s sake.

In the meantime, a move to a public system based on the Finnish model seems a logical first step toward a next system, and experiments with such a system are easily achievable. When a Finnish school administrator spoke to educators in Washington State a few years ago, the question immediately came up: “Well, what Finland has done is impressive, but it works in a small, homogenous country. The United States is not like that. We are big and diverse.” Calmly, the Finnish speaker suggested that America doesn’t educate its children nationally, but rather state by state. And Washington State is an American Finland, with roughly the same population size and heterogeneity, and a somewhat *higher* per capita income. Like Finland, its economy is based on trade, natural resources and digital technology. We could do what Finland does if we have the political will.

Other important ideas for education come from the British International Schools, led by Wellington College in England. In addition to academic subjects, these schools offer a nuanced approach to teaching morality and citizenship. They also begin and end with *mindfulness*—periods of silent meditation that calm children down and, along with plentiful recess time, reduce problems of ADHD. Another great idea for school reform comes from the oil-rich city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The UAE’s ministry of education, like that of the much poorer nation, Bhutan, is focusing on developing skills for life satisfaction and happiness. We will do well to look at their progress as we do models in Europe to build a better education system.⁵⁵

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

Where it starts—childcare. While many rich nations provide free or very affordable high-quality childcare to assist working parents, in the US, childcare tax credit allowances pay for only a couple of months of care, which for moderate-level care can be more expensive than tuition at a state university. Many childcare centers are staffed by people with little or no educational background, and some are little more than warehouses where children are kept from abusing each other while they watch television.

Meanwhile childcare providers are often the second income in a household since they do not earn enough themselves to keep above poverty levels. While their costs continue to rise, state support for childcare is eroding and many providers tell researchers that the parents of the children they supervise frequently cannot pay the costs. Employees of childcare centers earn an average of less than \$20,000 dollars a year, at or below the poverty level. It did not have to be this way; a quality, low-priced national childcare bill was passed by Congress in the early 1970s but was vetoed by President Nixon. With their parents working long hours, some children get to daycare as early as 6 a.m. and remain there till six at night.⁵⁶

Screens and self-esteem. There is another elephant in the room when it comes to improving competencies and esteem for American children, and it is not confined to us; even the Finns are fighting a similar battle. This elephant is flat and rectangular and in most cases, very small. American children now spend most of their non-school waking time—about seven hours a day—staring at screens. Texting and video games are key time sinks, replacing television, which has always taken a lot of children's time. This screen addiction has numerous drawbacks. The constant increase in the speed of digital devices reduces attention spans which are essential to cognition and creativity.

Eyesight is also affected. In South Korea, where digital consumption is highest, nearly 90 percent of elementary school children now need eyeglasses and 14 percent are labeled as being “addicted” to video

games.⁵⁷ Staring at screens reduces both social connection and exercise. For children, the digital lifestyle may be a health time bomb waiting to happen. Moreover, sites such as Facebook have become havens for cyber bullies. They also come with a constant barrage of commercial messages, whose basic purpose is to wither self-esteem and then promise to reinvigorate it with the latest product.

Kids as customers. Sweden and Quebec outlaw television commercials aimed at children younger than twelve. An effort to do the same in the US during the 1970s ended instead with a law making it illegal for the FCC to ban the targeting of children. As Juliet Schor and others have pointed out, children are a prime target for marketers, who spend billions to reach them. In *Born to Buy*, Schor lays out the data, which is bad enough, but the methods used to “capture” kids are enough to make parents scream. Marketing conferences are filled with speakers who talk of “empowering” children by making it easier for them to goad their parents into purchases.

Parents are commonly referred to as “gatekeepers” who have separated marketers from the children's money or the parents' own. Advertising aims to unlock the gate by increasing “the nag factor”—urging kids to nag their parents for a product until mom or dad gives in. Seven or eight nags ought to do it, their research has figured out. “Softening the parental veto,” was the keynote address by a McDonald's marketing director to one such conference.⁵⁸ Get it? Ralph Nader calls the targeting of kids by marketers “corporate child abuse.”

The goal of course is to train children to be consumers—it pays off for the corporations during both childhood and adulthood. Meanwhile, like adults with their “home entertainment” systems, children are shut in their rooms, away from opportunities to play and receive the benefits of nature and the outdoors. They learn impatience; each new toy becomes more quickly boring, or addicting, in either case reducing the autonomy of the child as well as his or her

health. And as the child's environment becomes ever more artificial and human-contrived, appreciation of alternatives atrophies. The problem is not confined to the United States; even in developing nations as poor as Bhutan, children appear hooked to their devices. When I spoke in Dubai in 2017, a member of the prime minister's staff told me of his dismay at his children's susceptibility to marketers and asked what I thought we could do to stop them.

Self-actualization

The opportunity to follow one's bliss or one's calling and use one's gifts, talents and proclivities to become a unique human being, recognized not for what one has, but what one is, is thwarted in societies in direct relation to the need for more money to meet basic life requirements. In this sense, the rich in America fare well. They can pursue their dreams, and, unless, they are addicted to money-making, can experiment with choices in life pathways and vocations. They can afford higher education and more training in subjects of their choosing. They can travel and experience other cultures and lifeways. They can afford to spend time as interns and volunteers, learning new crafts and increasing their vocational interests, competencies and opportunities.

By contrast, the poor may become quickly stuck in non-creative, long-hour service positions or manual labor. With half the US population living at or near poverty levels and having few or no savings at all, escape options are few. In the inner city of Los Angeles, half the children have never been to the beach, 10-25 miles away. Almost none have visited a national park.⁵⁹

Most Americans travel little beyond their own region—only 30 percent have passports.⁶⁰ Their lack of awareness of other cultures, lifeways and contributions to the world's heritage is not the result of deliberate ignorance but of narrowed opportunity. This deprivation is passed from generation to generation.

College debt. For many young people from poor and minority backgrounds and with limited academic

opportunity, there is only one way to gain broader experiences—join the military and risk life and limb, often in battles whose *raison d'être* no one can explain. And even many of those who make it to college can do so only by assuming massive debt loads. They cannot afford to take low-paying jobs in nonprofit organizations they believe in—not with the collection agencies at the door. The burden of massive debt among ex-students is an American phenomenon. In many other rich nations, college is free to those who qualify, and in some, such as Denmark, it comes with a stipend to cover living expenses. It is hardly a wonder that the Danes rank at or near the top in annual surveys of life satisfaction.

Even some poor nations like Bhutan pay for their students' college. So, at one time (before the Reagan "reforms"), did many American states. I remember attending the University of California at Berkeley, then the premier *public* academic institution in the country, tuition-free in the 1960s. How is it that at a time when the US was only a third as rich as it is today, it could offer free higher education to its youth? The graduates of my generation did not leave college deeply in debt and thereby could pursue occupations that appealed to their calling as well as their check-book. Moreover, as a result of higher education's high cost, the United States, which not long ago led the world in its percentage of college graduates, has now slid well down the pack.⁶¹

The time crunch. If money is one limitation on the ability to self-actualize, time is another. Families in the United States, in particular, are experiencing time poverty to a higher degree than in most rich nations. As with college education, it is a strange paradox that we are now able to do so much less with more. In the 1960s, when college was free or reasonably priced, salaries were also such that a single working parent could often support a family larger than today's average.

The women's revolution rightfully demanded the opportunity for women to pursue their callings in the world of paid labor to the same extent as men. While

many women preferred the role of “homemaker,” countless others felt confined and undervalued by it. Of course, most poor women had to work outside the home just to make ends meet. But for the broad American middle class, the new revolution gave women a choice of domains for their labor power. Where in 1970, only a third of mothers also worked outside the home, today two-thirds do. Women now make up as large a percentage of the workforce as men (though they are still paid less).⁶² This is all to the good, except the pay gap. Women certainly have every bit as much right to be in the workforce as men, and their higher college graduation rate makes them even more desired as employees.

The real question is why families are now putting in an average of 500 more hours of paid work than in 1970 and yet having a harder time making ends meet. Why couldn't two 30-hour a week jobs offer at least as much security as one 40-hour job did then? This of course gets us back to inequality (exacerbated by race) and the fact that for most Americans, real wages have remained flat since the mid-1970s and for blue collar workers, even declined. What we are seeing is that full-time jobs are now demanding about 47 hours per week.⁶³ Employment is essential to life satisfaction—the unemployed, even when receiving sufficient social safety benefits, are less happy. Work is important for meeting esteem needs and often for providing friendships. It also matters, though, that work is purposeful, that the employed feel like they are contributing, and are engaged in the use of their talents and interests.

Martin Seligman and other “positive psychologists” have done significant research demonstrating the importance of purposeful work to life satisfaction. Long working hours in jobs that we enter simply for the pay may make self-actualization more difficult. Here, it would be preferable to work fewer hours, sometimes even for reduced pay, and have time for hobbies and volunteering. Any employment solutions for the “next system” must take this into account, and indeed, there are already some “best practices” at work in countries such as the Netherlands to help make voluntary work

The real question is why families are now putting in an average of 500 more hours of paid work than in 1970 and yet having a harder time making ends meet.

reduction possible, as will be addressed in the next section of this paper. Shorter working hours and shared work can be important steps toward self-actualization.

Over-scheduled children. Sadly, the American workaholic culture, which is still far less common in Europe (though growing there as well), has trickled down to our children. Not only in our longer times spent in the classroom, but also in children's so-called “free time.” Pressure to compete for entry into the best schools leads middle-class parents to push their children to engage in an ever-increasing amount of extra-school activities, from music lessons to elite traveling sports teams to volunteer work to extra tutoring for admissions exams, etc. University of Minnesota family therapy professor Bill Doherty has warned of the stressful impacts of these activities on families. In his own state, students are sometimes wakened in the middle of the night for “ice time” to practice hockey, since rink space is limited. These activities are also expensive. Families spend thousands to gain access to “select” baseball and other sporting teams. The same parents play a continuous role as chauffeurs for their children from one round of activities to the next. Meanwhile, what little free time remains for children in such families is consumed by screen games and smartphones.

For these children, time is not only tightly structured, it is almost always supervised by adults. Two decades ago, Doherty pointed out that American children were spending one third less unstructured time outdoors than they had a generation earlier. Without question, that situation is now far worse. The average American child now spends only about half an hour

of free, unstructured play outdoors each week outside of school time.⁶⁴ By contrast, as a child, I spent most of my after-school hours before dinner in unstructured activity. “Go outside and play,” was what most middle-class mothers told their children then. Without adult referees and supervision, children learned to make up their own rules and cooperate in enforcing them.

I remember untold leisure hours spent building rafts on local ponds, hiking in the nearby hills or playing baseball at the park and football in the street. In those days, with fewer cars, the streets were safe for such sports; everyone parked in their one-car garages or driveways. Today, my suburban California neighborhood still looks much the same, but the one-car garages have all been expanded to two, and there are not only cars in all the driveways but parked in every possible location on the edge of the sidewalks. Children cannot play football in the street anymore.

It’s not surprising that OECD finds American children to be among the most-stressed, far more so than the world’s happiest children, the Dutch, who manage to be both well-educated and well-rested, with only a third the amount of extra-curricular activities as their peers in America. A cursory look at OECD data on children’s welfare and satisfaction might suggest that American kids fare so poorly because their overworked parents have so little time for them. That would be mistaken. The data shows that, except for Austrians, Irish and Australians, Americans spend the most time with their children among rich countries.⁶⁵

The issue is the nature of that time. Much of it is spent in transport from one activity to another, or, in the parents’ case, as spectators at their children’s activities. Little involves real conversation, and, except for the French, American children find it harder to talk with their parents than in any other OECD country.⁶⁶ Moreover, the parents are often stressed from balancing work and family commitments, and that stress is passed in unobvious ways to their children. Colleagues have begun to notice how such over-scheduled

children are not only unable to self-actualize but also to think creatively. Some are discouraging the activity-padded resumes they once welcomed.

Of course, this is primarily a middle- and upper-class problem in the US. Poor children suffer from the opposite—too few opportunities for enrichment. They are more likely to be latch-key kids while their parents—often single mothers—work long hours to provide the basics. And though they have the time, their neighborhoods are often too unsafe for free play. They end up spending long hours indoors in front of the television or other screens, which are as ubiquitous, if less extravagant and new, as in wealthier families.

Cognitive and aesthetic needs

There would seem to be several obstacles to the satisfaction and development of cognitive needs in the United States. Time pressure is one; long working hours leave less opportunity for free exploration of knowledge. Distraction, in the form of constant entertainment, especially visual entertainment, is another. The proliferation of so-called ‘fake news’ is also problematic, as is the issue of information overload. A stunning amount of information reaches us every day; a single Sunday *New York Times* contains more bits of information than a 19th century citizen would have been exposed to in a lifetime, and our plethora of digital news and entertainment sources adds far more.⁶⁷ The problem for Americans is not lack of information but lack of coherence, and a way of separating truthful and useful information from that which is either false or simply distracting.

This is clearly not solely an American problem, but in our polarized political environment, it may be worse here. For example, when Dutch political parties discuss environmental solutions, they agree to accept the factual data and interpretation of that data that comes from their national science center as a starting point.⁶⁸ They accept the *facts* of climate change even if some would do less to combat it. In the US, we have no such arbiters; even the Congressional Budget Office is now

being ignored by the Trump administration. And even though the overwhelming majority of climate scientists accept both the reality of global warming and its human causes, a majority of the GOP still denies it, making them alone among all major political parties in the rich world.

This is clearly not solely an American problem, but in our polarized political environment, it may be worse here.

The aesthetic dimension. As Maslow noted in his later work, there is evidence that beautiful surroundings are an essential element in our sense of wellbeing or happiness. Even children are not free from this need. Though it sometimes a trophies after one lives too long in squalor or ugliness, it seldom dies. Children from devastated inner cities find great inspiration on a backpacking trip to the mountains, for example, as John Muir has observed on several occasions.

In the late 1800s, Muir marveled that San Francisco's street urchins, living in squalor, asked him for flowers on his return from hikes on Mt. Tamalpais. "As soon as they caught sight of my wild bouquet, they quit their pitiful attempts at amusement in the miserable dirty streets and ran after me begging a flower. 'Please Mister, give me a flower, Mister,' in a humble, begging tone as if expecting to be refused. And when I stopped and distributed the treasures...the dirty faces fairly glowed with enthusiasm while they gazed at them and fondled them reverently as if looking into the faces of angels from heaven."⁶⁹ "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread," wrote Muir, "places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike." Yet much of America is no longer beautiful, or is becoming relentlessly uglier.

Much of this is easily visible, some of it less so. Parts of our cities are scenes of devastation; the unplanned, sprawling, strip-mall, Los Angeles version of America mars both the suburban and rural landscape; the lush hills of Appalachia are stripped and removed, while in the less visible category, a staggering amount of topsoil is lost in middle America, and a *hundred million* pine trees have died in California from drought and climate change.⁷⁰ Even our beloved national parks suffer, with a maintenance backlog of \$12 billion.⁷¹

Several times, I've ridden trains throughout Europe. The contrast between the rural towns there—prosperous, well-cared for, in a word, *beautiful*—and the derelict quality of so many rural towns in America—emptied out, boarded up, in a word, *forlorn*—could not be sharper. European cities also add to their charm and beauty by banning automobiles from large parts of their city centers. Think of the lovely Vaci Utca in Budapest or the area around the Duomo in Florence. Freiburg, Germany, was among the first cities to close off its center to cars. When I visited there 20 years ago, I marveled at how vibrant and beautiful the city center was and how frequently visited. Business owners who had once protested the change were soon thrilled by it.

Many European planners also understand that beautiful cities are places where people want to linger, and that people who linger and talk with each other in turn build stronger communities. In Copenhagen, for example, tables and benches are placed along busy streets so pedestrians can "stop and chat" with each other. Pedestrian friendliness not only makes cities more aesthetically pleasing, it also improves health, and trust—a fundamental factor in life satisfaction and one reason the Danes commonly report such high levels of happiness. It matters for children and parents. A sense of trust has been developed there that is so strong, mothers leave their babies in their strollers outside of stores while they go in to shop.

Best practices from other countries

As a first step toward suggesting the kinds of policies and arrangements that would best meet the needs of families and children in “the next system,” it’s useful to understand what is already working today. The 2013 UNICEF report on *Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries* includes an overview of 1) material wellbeing and/or deprivation 2) health and safety 3) education 4) risky behaviors and 5) housing/environmental quality. American children also rated their own life satisfaction as low; in that category, we finished 23rd among 29 nations. Why? How are the countries that are scoring well—almost all of them in northern Europe—doing it?

Germany comes in at number six. Melissa Pailthorp and John Zilavy, a Seattle couple with three children, understand why. A decade ago, when their youngest was a year old, they moved to Unterschleissenheim, a German city of 25,000 people near Munich, as part of Melissa’s work for Microsoft. “We were supposed to stay for two years,” says Melissa. “But we ended up being in Germany for eight.” Life was easier there for parents with children, she recalls. “It started with childcare. It was immensely affordable [about \$200 a month], and very high-quality with professionally trained day care people.” Health insurance was equally affordable, with full family coverage costing them about \$600 a month.⁷²

They were surprised to find that mothers were given a year of maternity leave by law, at 80 percent of their

salaries. And new legislation provided up to three months for fathers as well. By contrast, the United States is, along with Papua New Guinea, the only country in the world with no required paid maternity leave at all (a couple of states and municipalities provide exceptions). Only about one in seven Americans receives such leave from employers.

Both Melissa and John talked of feeling safer in Germany than in the United States, even during the three years they lived in Berlin, a huge city. “It feels dangerous here,” Melissa says. Laws regarding driving and even riding a bike are stricter in Germany, including required safety courses. “Here they call that a ‘Nanny State, but I thought it was good, actually,” John Zilavy says. There was also peer pressure to practice safe behaviors. The first time John took his kids across the street on a red light, a group of older women scolded him, even though there was no traffic. “And,” he added, “public transportation is very good and affordable.”

The taxes are worth it. Taxes, the big bugaboo for Americans, were not that much higher than here, John Zilavy pointed out, but “you get far better value for your taxes. I met fiscally conservative Americans who stayed in Europe because of the quality of life there.” Part of that quality of life included up to 15 annual holidays, in addition to substantial vacation time. “I got 30 vacation days a year by law,” Melissa added, “and pretty much unlimited paid sick leave, but

after three days you need a doctor's note. Everyone there, from executives to assembly-line workers, takes their holidays. It's odd for anyone not to take a real vacation. We met virtually nobody who wanted to go back to the US" John and Melissa came to enjoy the fact that stores were closed on Sundays so that workers had a chance to spend time with their families.

There were some downsides to the German system, Melissa remembers. Professional women with children, for example, often felt pressure not to work. But John, who was a "house husband," ended our conversation with a ringing defense of the German system. "I drank the Kool-Aid," he explained. "I can't think of anything they did over there that didn't make more sense than what I see over here."

Germany's family leave policies are not atypical in Europe. Czech and Slovak mothers can take as much as three years off when they have a child (with 28 weeks at full pay), and six years if their child is born disabled. Swedes get 16 months at 77 percent of salary; Danes get 52 weeks and Norwegians 46 weeks at 100 percent (Norway and Sweden also require that *fathers* take some of the leave), and the UK provides 39 paid weeks at 90 percent. France, the Netherlands and Spain offer 16 weeks at full pay.⁷³

Even our neighbor, Canada, is very generous: mothers get 15 weeks of maternity leave and can share another 35 weeks with fathers at 55-70 percent of pay, depending on the province. Why do these countries do this? They understand, with Seattle physician and UW School of Public Health lecturer Stephen Bezruchka, that "early life lasts a lifetime." Parental leave results in children who are healthier, happier, better adjusted, and more able to learn. Bezruchka and others say our refusal to pay for such leave when children are infants costs us far more later in poor health and other problems.

Going Dutch. The Netherlands, a crowded country of 16 million whose capital, Amsterdam, is now the world's most diverse city (with more than half its

population born outside Holland), ranks number one in the UNICEF study (and also in OECD's "How's Life for Children" report) by a wide margin, coming out on top in three of the five categories and in the top five on all. Its children also self-report the highest levels of life satisfaction. Anmarie Widener, an American who earned her PhD at Leiden University in the Netherlands and wrote a dissertation, *Sharing the Caring*, comparing family policies in the two countries, is not surprised by these findings. "It's just so different being a mom there," she says.

Widener moved to Waddinxveen, a small and conservative Dutch town, when her then-husband told her he wanted to live in Europe and found an IT job there. Their daughter, Eden, was then 18 months old. Anmarie found she could do a four-year PhD program in Holland for just \$2,500, even as a non-resident. The Dutch made every effort to support their family life. "We got child benefits, money," she explains. The benefit, called a *kinderbijslag*, was enough to pay for pre-school for her daughter. "It surprises you because you get nothing like this in the US and you go there and even though you are a foreigner, they care about you. You really feel cared for."⁷⁴

Anmarie's son Elijah was born in Holland. The cost was minimal and for the first eight days while she was home with her child, the government provided a worker to assist her with chores. She was impressed by the *peuterspeelzaal*, or pre-school, her children attended. "It was very social and all about learning to cooperate and interact. Mothers volunteered a lot of time there as well." Through early elementary school, parents escorted their children to school on bikes, and then the children rode by themselves or walked. The schools were close to where the children lived and most went home for lunch. In addition to being happy, "the kids were not spoiled at all," Anmarie remembers. "They were polite, helpful. I never met a Dutch child I didn't like." "The kids didn't have a lot of things—they all have bikes, of course—but nothing ostentatious. The Dutch frown on conspicuous consumption. We had some friends who had a big-screen TV and actually

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

seemed a bit ashamed of it. ‘This is really American of us, isn’t it?’ they told me.”

Instead of stuff, Anmarie’s Dutch neighbors spent their money on frequent trips, taking full advantage of the 30 or more vacation days that most receive. “It became clear that my neighbors kept going on vacation,” she explains. “It seems like they went every month or two. It was so natural and normal to them. They went during all the school breaks, for up to two weeks at a time. They wouldn’t even think of only a week off as a vacation. They went car-camping in France, Switzerland and Italy. They didn’t fly. They all had these little pop-up trailers they call ‘caravans,’” Many studies show that vacations provide youth with the strongest positive memories of their childhoods.

This may help explain why polls find the Dutch the sixth-happiest people in the world (Americans rank 18th)⁷⁵ with Dutch women and children coming in at number one. Happiness research shows that experiences, including travel, result in more long-term satisfaction than do material goods. Research also confirms that vacations improve health, reduce depression and strengthen family bonds. In addition to their own required paid sick leave, leave to care for sick children, and vacation time, Dutch parents also receive three “emergency” paid days off each year to attend to important family functions.

Encouraging part-time work. One important thing to understand about the Netherlands is that although the Dutch are very productive economically and work hard at their jobs, they put in the shortest annual working hours of any country on earth, about 400 less than the average American worker. “It’s the largest part-time culture on earth,” says Widener. Three quarters of female workers and nearly a quarter of men work less than full-time. They are encouraged to do so through the Hours Adjustment Act, passed in 2000, a law that allows Dutch workers to reduce (or increase, though few choose that option) their working hours while retaining their jobs, hourly salary rate, promotions, universal healthcare

benefits and pro-rated benefits like pensions or vacation time. Employers cannot refuse such requests unless they can demonstrate undue financial hardship for their firms, so the vast majority are accepted. Moreover, European law requires that part-time workers be paid the same as full-time employees for comparable work.

For families with children, a common Dutch pattern has fathers working four days a week and mothers three, reducing the amount of time children spend in daycare. The hours law was actually proposed by the conservative Christian Democratic Party as part of a “family values” campaign, but won broad support in Holland’s multi-party parliament. While it results in lower salaries, it usually also means ending up in a lower tax bracket reducing the negative economic impact on families.

And besides, Widener, points out, “one income is enough to cover families in the Netherlands. You see very little real poverty of the kind you see here.” Single mothers work 16 hours a week and receive housing subsidies and other supports, including paid vacation time. There is a slight catch. “I only go on two vacations a year,” one of them told Anmarie, explaining that she was a low-income single mother.

For her dissertation, Widener surveyed 100 American and 100 Dutch parents regarding life satisfaction, using in-depth interviews. Not surprisingly, in five of six categories she measured, the Dutch parents fared better. The exception was “self-esteem.” Anmarie Widener now lives in McLean, Virginia, and teaches Gender Studies part-time at Georgetown University. Like Melissa Pailthorp, she sees a downside in the Dutch system, while acknowledging that it is extremely popular with women. “Working women like it for the balance, they like caring,” she says. “But it’s very hard for women to advance to managerial positions there. The Netherlands, like America, needs to find a way to achieve greater balance so women have more opportunities to advance at work and men partake more in care-giving and housework.”

Right to request. Less onerous for business, but nearly as successful as the Hours Adjustment Act in allowing transitions to part-time work, is a British idea called Right to Request. UK workers have the right to ask for shorter hours without possible retribution from employers (in the US, people who request fewer hours are sometimes viewed as less committed to their jobs and may be fired by their employers for making the request). In the UK, their jobs are protected and their employer must consider the request, though he or she may deny it without showing a financial hardship as is required in Holland. The result is that nearly as many employers as in the Netherlands grant the request. Right to request laws are beginning to appear in American municipalities—Berkeley, California voters recently approved an initiative for Right to Request, for example. Charles Siegel, the lead advocate for the initiative, reports a YES vote of 80 percent.⁷⁶

In Germany, instead of laying off workers during declines in business income, companies are encouraged to shorten their working hours, and keep everyone employed.

Employment and income security—Flexicurity and Kurzarbeit. Both unemployment and income security are important factors in life satisfaction. Here, Denmark and Germany provide models for the rest of the world. Denmark calls its economic model *flexicurity*. After a series of economic shocks in the 1970s, the Danes developed a model that gives great freedom to businesses to create or reduce jobs, hire and fire. This policy, which also makes it very easy to start a business, is welcomed by conservatives and means that Denmark ranks very high in “economic freedom.” Forbes magazine ranked it as the #1 country for business in 2008, and the conservative Heritage Foundation ranked it ninth, just below the US, with

the comment, “The non-salary cost of employing a worker is low, and dismissing an employee is easy and inexpensive.” That’s the “flex” part.⁷⁷

But Denmark also provides security for the workers and families that are affected by layoffs. With the world’s highest taxes, it offers a safety net that provides two or more years of unemployment benefits at nearly the employee’s previous salary, and assistance with training and a job search. If this fails, the worker is offered a government job that must be taken to continue receiving any benefits, but this rarely happens. Because of large expenditures in workforce development, Danes usually find a new job well before the two-year period is over. They continue to receive lifelong training from the government to assure that their skills are up-to-date as the economy changes.

For families, the Danish system takes away the fear that American workers experience when they lose a job. Nonetheless, unemployed workers are often unhappy, even when compensated, because using one’s talents to be productive is an important factor in life satisfaction. Recognizing this, and the nature of the business cycle, Germany has established a system called *Kurzarbeit*, or “short work.”⁷⁸

Instead of laying off workers during declines in business income, companies are encouraged to shorten their working hours, to 90 or even 80 percent of full-time and keep everyone employed. Using funds from the unemployment system, the government then makes up about 60 percent of the lost wages, so that a worker who is cut to 80 percent time would make about 92 percent of his or her previous salary. The cost is not extravagant, and when business improves, the company can then continue with existing employees without having to go through the expensive process of new hires.

Some US states have adopted aspects of this model with positive results, and the conservative American Enterprise Institute joined the liberal Center for Economic and Policy Research in supporting a short

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

work bill in Congress. But the bill did not pass because *not a single* Republican member of the House or Senate supported it. During the 2008 economic collapse, Germany actually saw a *decrease*, rather than an increase, in unemployment, due to the application of the *kurzarbeit* policy. Proven policies like *flexicurity* and *kurzarbeit* take out the sting of employment insecurity for families. They are high on the list of best practices that can be quickly adopted in the next system, at least as part of a transition.

The Amador story. There is also evidence that, even without an unemployment subsidy to make up for some of the lost wages connected with work sharing, the idea may prove popular. In tiny Amador County, California, in 2009, Republican county commissioners faced a major budget cut from the state government, which was deeply in debt from the Great Recession. The supervisors decided to close county agencies on Fridays and save 10 percent on employees' salaries by cutting the workweek to four 9 hour days or 36 hours a week. At first, the workers protested, saying they couldn't survive a 10 percent pay cut. But the supervisors were unmoved and did not want to lay workers off.⁷⁹

They promised, though, that if the county still didn't have the money in 2011, the workers could vote to return to a full 40-hour week but with some layoffs. In 2011, the workers voted 71-29 percent to stay on the shorter workweek with less pay. Most explained their votes by how much they enjoyed their free Fridays. Men talked of going fishing while women (gender biases persist) used the time to run errands they'd normally do on Saturday, giving them the weekend free for their families. People often don't realize the value of leisure until they have it.

Universal healthcare. With the exception of the United States, all rich nations and many poor ones provide guaranteed healthcare for all of their citizens. They do it in several ways. The most straightforward is *socialized medicine*, as in the United Kingdom and Sweden, whereby all aspects of the system, including

the employment of medical personnel, are run by the government and paid for by taxes—in the British case, by a consumption or VAT tax. In *single-payer* models, as in Canada, the government covers all costs, again through taxes, but pays private or non-profit entities and doctors for the work. A more mixed model is found in countries like Germany, where citizens must buy highly subsidized private insurance, but the insurance companies cannot charge different prices (they can offer more services, and compete in that way).⁸⁰

In most of these countries, employers pay into a health pool, not per individual worker but on their total payroll (which means they gain no advantage in hiring fewer workers and working them longer hours, as is the case in the US system). Workers also pay into the system based on income and the government does likewise, from tax revenues. When workers earn more, they pay more and government pays less, and vice versa. In the next system, research will be needed to find the best model because each of these models has benefits and shortcomings. All, however, manage to cover everyone with good care, as opposed to the United States, where many of the near-poor—who are not eligible for Medicaid—are unable to find coverage. For families and children, this is a disaster, as good health begins in childhood and in family habits. In most other countries, prevention, rather than treatment, is the priority.

Education for happiness skills. One preventative idea, which is also useful in improving behaviors that affect life satisfaction as well as health, is happiness education. The small nation of Bhutan is a leader in this. Its schools include education for *Gross National Happiness*, the country's political ideal. Part of class time is spent teaching children the attitudes and behaviors that scientists, especially positive psychologists, have found are valuable for improving subjective wellbeing. The school day begins and ends with *mindfulness*, a short period of meditation, which Bhutanese educators find calms the children and allows them to learn more readily. Then, they are taught other

important *happiness skills*, such as gratitude, tolerance, altruism, patience, kindness and sociability. It is too early to assess the results of this program, which began in 2010, but early results are promising and the idea is spreading. The Council of British International Schools (COBIS) has also encouraged all its member schools to spend time focusing on mindfulness and wellbeing as well as academic subjects.

Rehabilitation instead of punishment. In today's United States, it often costs as much to house and maintain a prisoner each year as it would to send them to a private university, and one-quarter of the world's prisoners are incarcerated in the United States.⁸¹ African Americans are far more likely to be in prison than whites, reflecting persistent racism and inequality. Moreover, the US philosophy on criminals focuses on punishment. Some other countries put the emphasis on rehabilitation, which would positively affect families where children have parents in prison. In his movie, *Where to Invade Next*, Michael Moore examines Norway's system, which caps prison time at 21 years even for murder, and puts far more effort into rehabilitation. Whether or not one is morally in favor of tough punishment, the Norwegian model results in less recidivism, an important consideration for the safety of all. John Helliwell of the University of British Columbia has also found that Singapore, once known for its harsh policies including the practice of "caning," has transformed its system to a rehabilitation model, with a stunning decrease in recidivism.⁸²

State and local best practices. While, except for its exemplary campaign against smoking, which preceded that in most other countries, the US provides a poor national example in terms of effective support of children and families, some US states and municipalities have taken important positive steps. The minimum wage, long stuck at \$7.25 per hour nationally, is now \$15 an hour in several cities and will soon be raised to \$13 an hour in the state of Washington. Paid family leave on a small scale has been adopted in California, New Jersey, and New York with a more generous policy in Washington state, and paid sick

days are now required in several American cities and the state of Connecticut.

Experiments with near-universal health coverage are underway in Massachusetts and several other states. Seattle has passed a *secure scheduling* law, which requires that businesses provide their employees' schedules at two weeks prior to the work and changes must be voluntarily agreed to by the worker. This is of great importance for many families, as on-demand scheduling, pioneered by Wal Mart and others, made it very difficult for parents to plan for their children's childcare or other supervision. Even cities in red states have taken important positive steps; Oklahoma City offers improved and affordable childcare options, while Salt Lake City has adopted a model plan to combat homelessness through construction of microhomes.⁸³

Eldercare is a serious problem for families, especially for adults caught in the "sandwich" generation, who are caring for both children and parents. Here, policy should make every effort to allow elders to remain at home, through increased home nursing, cooking and cleaning services. Such ideas are hardly new, and are commonplace in Europe and in many US localities. Standardized nursing home care in the US is very uneven, and poorer Americans often can afford little more than warehousing. The cost is so high that elders who have saved throughout their lives often lose their entire savings and homes very quickly in paying for nursing care.

Another important consideration is generational segregation. Many communities designed for senior citizens prohibit residents who are younger than 55 and exclude children completely. This may have the perverse effect of increasing loneliness for elders. John Helliwell points out that the happiness of elders is enhanced by connection with children and young people. In Denmark, for example, children are brought regularly to nursing homes. Both ages relish these meetings.⁸⁴ We cannot do justice to the complex issue of eldercare here, but it deserves careful study to find the best ideas for the next system.

A best policies institute

There are simply too many “best practice” ideas for families and children out there in the world that are currently working well to adequately explore in a paper such as this. A transition to the “next system” would be enhanced by the development of an institute, located at a university, for online collection and assessment of the many policy ideas out there than can make life better for families and children. Such an institute would focus on quality of life, justice and sustainability for families. It would spearhead significant new research, collect databases of existing research, examine policy alternatives throughout the world, including American states and municipalities, communicate new ideas and provide learning enrichment activities for students and faculty.

A Best Policies Online Institute would include the following functions:

1. Collect family-friendly policy ideas from around the world, with actual language of the legislation and short-form Wiki-like descriptions of the policies.
2. Create an easy-to-access database of existing studies regarding best policies in other nations, states, localities and private institutions for improving quality of life, social justice and sustainability.
3. Collect case studies from other nations regarding these policies and their impact; evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of these policies and their possible revision for application in the United States.
4. Offer various universities and departments the opportunity to take leadership roles and organize study projects around particular policy foci (eg. Reduction of inequality).
5. Develop research projects in relation to holes in the knowledge base.
6. Create partnerships with research and academic institutions, faculty and student organizations and with community, business, labor and other nongovernmental organizations as well as public agencies.
7. Conduct polling and other research examining public attitudes toward these new policy options.
8. Examine cultural values that may enhance or impede establishment and application of such options.
9. Create curriculum materials for classroom use at academic institutions, including middle and high schools.
10. Conduct “best policies” overseas tours and educational seminars for university students and faculty.
11. Promote effective policy and personal change ideas through Knowledge Translation, using a communications team to translate academic data and reporting into accessible and engaging information; reach out to the media with this information.
12. Create and maintain a Best Policies Web site containing the above information, including various interactive elements, options to add comments and research and other ways of sharing data and ideas.
13. Encourage faculty to help students design study projects, papers, theses, dissertations and other activities to provide content for the Web site and information for policy makers.

14. Encourage faculty to assist students in designing model legislation.
15. Work with elected officials to develop local, state and federal legislation based on best policies from other nations, states or localities.
16. Hold an annual national “best policies for family and children” conference bringing students, faculty and partners together across disciplines to share their research findings.

Sample policy: The Hours Adjustment Act. Let’s consider only one such option and how it might be treated in the context of the Best Policies Online Institute, to make clear how the Institute idea might work in practice.

As mentioned previously, in 2000, the Netherlands passed the *Hours Adjustment Act*. Its purpose was to allow workers to choose the amount of time they would like to work, without losing access to benefits or a job. Simply put, the law:

- Allows employees to request a shortening (or in some cases lengthening) of working time (for example, from five days a week to four days a week).
- Allows workers to keep the same hourly salary as before.
- Allows the workers to continue to receive all benefits such as pension contributions, unemployment insurance, sick days, vacation time, family leave and seniority, but in a pro-rated fashion.
- Requires that employers agree to a worker’s request unless the change would produce demonstrated hardship for the firm.

On the surface, the law has many benefits. Workers can choose to shorten their hours at times, such as when they have young children, so as to have more

time for family and other obligations, without the threat of losing their jobs, rights to promotion, benefits and health care. This provides a “practical sort of freedom” for the employees.

The law also has some obvious drawbacks for employers, such as the need to hire extra workers (though this is a plus for workers when dealing with high unemployment) and the employers’ discomfort with mandates. It also has some less obvious drawbacks—women, who are often the lower-paid breadwinners in a family, are most likely to use the law, potentially increasing the gender gap.

In general, the law has been popular, and the Germans have followed suit in adopting it. The Netherlands now has the highest percentage of part-time workers and lowest overall working hours in the world and ranks number one in the welfare of children, in part because of the law. More than 95 percent of employee requests under the law have been accepted by employers. But as expected, women are far more likely to take advantage of the law than men, and many employers do not like it. Many economists consider it a restriction of business freedom and shorter working hours mean slower GDP growth for the Netherlands (which can well be seen as a positive from an ecological standpoint).

Application of the law in the US would be harder to achieve than in the Netherlands. There is more business resistance to “mandates” and business owners have greater political power in the US. The European Union mandates “part-time parity,” requiring that part-time workers receive the same hourly pay as full-timers doing the same work; the US does not. Many US companies do not pay benefits to part-timers. Health care insurance in the US is very expensive.

How might the Best Policies Online Institute tackle a policy like this one?

1. The institute’s Web database would include the full language of the law and a less formal description of how the law works.

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

2. Comments regarding the law would be solicited from a variety of academic disciplines. Media and peer-reviewed articles about the policy would be collected as part of the Institute database.
3. Student study projects, perhaps conducted in concert with Dutch universities, could include interviews with employees who have taken advantage of the law and employers, including possible polling.
4. A university might sponsor a study tour to the Netherlands for students and faculty to study the law.
5. Student projects could include a thorough description of the benefits and disadvantages of the law as ascertained through 3 and 4 above.
6. A student team could consider the law in light of current US policy and US opinion, laying out the changes that might be needed to apply a version of the law in the US at either the federal or state level.
7. Another team could work with businesses on the possible voluntary application of the rights contained in the law.
8. A team could draft sample legislation modeled after the Dutch policy and approach federal or state legislators with it, then follow the legislative process as the bill is considered in Congress or a state legislature.
9. A communications team could create advertisements, press releases, slide presentations and other communications tools for creating awareness of the policy idea and encouraging debate around it.
10. Academic work on this issue would be multidisciplinary and bring departments together to focus on the issue, possibly including: sociology, political science, economics, business, labor studies, recreation and leisure studies, global studies, public health, psychology and environmental studies (for example, do shorter working hours improve individual environmental behaviors among the Dutch?).
11. Research findings could be presented at the annual “best policies” conference.

Involving students. The possibilities for such relevant studies and communication by students would seem boundless and the potential benefits to our society beyond measure. Many universities have been involved in similar projects of experiential learning and relevant research. For example, projects conducted by University of Vermont environmental students have led to the formulation of new policies regarding shrimp aquaculture in the Philippines that have helped change World Bank development grants and policies. Other Vermont students have designed watershed ecosystem management and services policy plans that are currently being put in place in several cities in the Puget Sound region of Washington State.

The University of Minnesota is considering an idea for student involvement that would have students major in a “challenge” (for example, health disparities or water quality in America) and learn multi-disciplinary skills in partnership with communities in an effort to find solutions (a model related to the radical educational ideas of the late Brazilian priest Paulo Freire), while minoring in a discipline such as sociology or Spanish. Students would develop skills to be social problem solvers on a wide array of problems. The effort to engage students in socially relevant studies and activities has a long tradition in the US, though only for a minority of students, and the ivory tower, overspecialized model of higher education has generally carried the day.

New ideas for the next system

In addition to existing best practices, many yet unimplemented ideas can be included in a set of policy options for the next system that might enhance prospects for children and families. Perhaps the most promising is a guaranteed annual income.

“The robots are coming...the robots are coming!”

If Paul Revere were riding now with the purpose of warning America against a clear and present danger, he might well proclaim, “The robots are coming!” For indeed they are, and quickly. Until now, though technology has reduced jobs at an ever-increasing rate, we’ve been able to create new ones just as fast, though many of these have been low-wage service positions and others, low-security “gig economy” activity. But the era of easy replacement and five percent unemployment may be quickly coming to an end. Automated check-outs reduce the need for clerks and tellers and new software may even soon eliminate such skilled positions as legal assistants and nurses. Driving, currently among the best options for working-class males, is not long for the market, with self-steering cars and trucks already logging millions of miles. The list of threatened jobs is long and growing longer.

Even as normally optimistic an economist as Larry Summers worries that there won’t be enough employment in the future, while others in his profession

predict that as many as 40 percent of US jobs will be history by 2030. So what can we do? Most economists still seek the answer in economic growth, either through “supply-side” or “demand-driven” policies. On the Right, the supply-siders want to cut taxes to encourage investment and employment, but as wealth is funneled to the top, where will we find the consumer power that can purchase the new output? On the Left, proponents of demand advocate greater equality and Keynesian stimulus, a solution fairer and probably more efficacious than “trickle-down.” Yet, is such growth even possible or desirable on a finite planet?

Free money. In his book, *Utopia for Realists* (titled *Free Money for Everyone!* in the original Dutch),⁸⁵ Rutger Bregman makes a powerful case for two ideas that aren’t new but seem to have been forgotten by our leaders. First, he suggests a steady reduction in working hours (down to 15 per week) to allow us to share remaining work. We need to shorten and share work, but that will still not provide jobs for everyone. Not all workers have the training and skills for these jobs even if shorter hours make them more available.

As the most important step toward ameliorating the impacts of artificial intelligence, Bregman suggests a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) in all countries like the US that can afford it. He cites numerous experiments with such “free money,” dating back to 19th

century England and shows how each were quite successful, especially the one tried in the city of Dauphin, Manitoba, in the 1970s. He points out that the idea of a guaranteed income has crossed ideological lines, often supported by liberals, but also by free marketers like Milton Friedman, and even by Richard Nixon, who promoted an income bill that passed the House of Representatives in 1971 (but failed in the Senate).

Bregman systematically destroys the basic arguments against a guaranteed income—that it would increase laziness and dependency, or that it's too expensive. Studies show that giving people enough money to stay out of poverty creates the security that allows them to take risks in creating their own businesses or working actively as creatives and volunteers. While it would be expensive, a basic income (provided to every American, poor or rich) of roughly \$1,000 a month would cost less than our current “defense” budget (or Trump's tax cut for the very rich).

Provided for everyone, and combined with a single-payer health care system and free education through college, it could both dramatically reduce poverty, and current bureaucratic, means-tested welfare programs. Some of it would pay for itself in other lower costs. It could be funded by progressive income or capital gains taxes, a tax on application of new technologies, carbon taxes, speculation taxes on stock transactions, and other sources. The new technologies are a legacy of the entire society's investment in education and science over generations, and thereby should be, in part, owned by all of us.

A guaranteed income by itself won't keep people out of poverty but will allow them to stay above the poverty line with much less paid labor, allowing them time to pursue happiness as they choose to. Today, many young people would prefer to choose work with nonprofits that is meaningful to them instead of a corporate path, but the low salaries paid by NGOs makes that option a hard one. With a BIG supplement, the supply of volunteers or part-time workers will be increased.

I would suggest that it makes sense to provide the same size BIG to all Americans regardless of where they live. This would encourage a dispersal of population to less-expensive places, helping revitalize rural life. It could help create a rural renaissance. It would give people a choice between longer, less desirable work in congested, expensive cities and a simpler life in the countryside, and many would choose the latter.

Most BIG recipients will not, Bregman argues persuasively, become slackers. Work has intrinsic value for us, especially when chosen because we like or value it rather than being pushed by economic necessity. Giving everyone this income would take the stigma, now associated with welfare away and enhance esteem for many poor Americans. BIG is a win-win for all of us. Currently several BIG experiments are underway or soon will be. While BIG lost overwhelmingly in a Swiss referendum, it appears the reason was its size—a very expensive \$2,200 a month—rather than the idea itself. Ontario (Canada), Hungary, the Netherlands and Oakland, California are only a few of the places that will be giving more moderate BIGs a try.

The big question regarding BIG is the size of the annual payment, which must be large enough to lift people out of poverty but not so large as to widely discourage people from seeking employment. An initial BIG of about \$1,000 a month could provide an important supplement for families that currently do not earn enough to avoid poverty. If large enough, BIG could replace existing welfare payments, but this must be tested in practice before it is adopted. BIG could help families better meet basic needs, and allow young people to choose careers that are more calling-based than income-based. It could allow some workers to choose to shorten hours and trade additional income for leisure time.

There are many Americans who reject the “something for nothing” idea behind BIG. Initially, the idea might be introduced for young Americans, who currently struggle more than middle-aged adults and seniors economically, and be tied to some sort of national

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

service—military, Americorps, Peace Corps, volunteering in nonprofits, environmental restoration, etc.

Food production. Another idea whose time has come is a reinvigoration of local, small-scale food production, an idea that has many adherents and appeals to a large cohort of young Americans. According to Elon Musk’s brother, Kimball, founder of the agricultural support organization, Square Roots,

Demand for real food is far outstripping supply. Highly-educated, entrepreneurial, and socially conscious young people have a great opportunity to think seriously about agriculture as a career. On the surface, this advice sounds dubious, given the well-documented, decades-long decline of independent farming in America. Between 2007 and 2012, the number of active farmers in America dropped by 100,000 and the number of new farmers fell by more than 20 percent. Ironically, however, the titanic, faceless factory farms are barely eking out a profit. That often means that an independent 100-acre farm growing high-demand crops can be far more profitable than a 10,000-acre commodity farm growing corn that may end up getting wasted as ethanol...⁸⁶

With this in mind, I [Musk] recently co-founded Square Roots, a social enterprise that aims to accelerate urban farming by empowering thousands of young Americans to become real food entrepreneurs. We create campuses of climate-controlled, indoor hydroponic farms in the heart of our biggest cities and train entrepreneurs how to grow and sell their food year-round. After their training, these young entrepreneurial farmers, in partnership with the US Department of Agriculture, can qualify for larger loan programs as a next step to owning their own farm—either soil-based or indoor. Whether they move on to their own farm or another business, they are prepared to build forward-thinking companies that will become

profitable and create good jobs.”

Such an idea is highly promising if enough government support is available. A major investment in training young farmers could help reinvigorate rural communities. It could also be helpful in urban food deserts, where “real” food would greatly improve the health of children. Students could receive an education in farming without cost, but with the stipulation that they then spend a minimum amount of time (five years?) working in alternative agriculture projects, as earlier government programs subsidized education for doctors with a requirement that they practice for a limited time in medically underserved rural communities.

De-growth. Popular in Europe and now even endorsed by French Socialist Party presidential candidate Benoit Hamon, this idea may be poorly named, but it could truly enhance family life in the next system. The 2017 World Happiness Report finds that the world’s happiest countries almost all had very slow rates of economic growth over the past five years. John Helliwell, a co-author of the report, pointed out that in wealthy nations, social connection and trust were far better predictors of increased life satisfaction than was economic growth. Rapid growth, both in economic and population terms, puts enormous pressure on cities—my home, Seattle, is a clear example—increasing both congestion and the cost of living, ironically attracting more homeless with the hope of employment, while pricing lower-income residents out of the housing market.

In the next system, efforts would be made to counter the constant movement toward megalopolis. With online tools and a guaranteed income, it should be possible to spread population more effectively, prevent urban sprawl and provide the green space and access to nature that children, especially, need. An effort should be made to enhance the quality of life in small and medium-sized cities and towns. While there are energy efficiencies in big cities—New York sees far more use of public transit, for example—they may be

offset when expansion includes sprawl. If backyards in small cities and suburbs can be connected and used for intensive gardening and green space opportunities, the results would be more promising than continuing to rush to the largest metropolitan areas.

While millennials are increasingly drawn to urban centers, many Americans move to the sprawling suburbs precisely because they feel they will be safer for their children and offer more access to green space, and because they believe the schools are better there. They are not always right—a Seattle study found greater danger of early death in the suburbs than in the city.⁸⁷ Murder rates were higher in the city, but traffic accidents in the suburbs accounted for three times as many deaths. But a move to greater density and sustainability must take these public preferences into account, especially among families with children.

Here, models like those of the Netherlands and Denmark are useful. Holland is a particularly densely-populated country, second in the world only to Bangladesh in that respect. Yet its model spreads population in small dense cities surrounded by lots of green space and made safe for children by an immense network of bike paths that are completely separated from auto traffic. Denmark designs its urban areas for conviviality and safety as well.

Economic and population growth carry unforeseen negative externalities. Not only do they consume resources more rapidly, they also reduce access to desirable elements of the commons. Fred Hirsch and Ivan Illich long ago pointed out the “social limits to growth.” Many goods are “positional” (Hirsch)—the expansion of luxury oceanfront hotels and condos means fewer people may have access to the beach, for example.⁸⁸ The proliferation of personal autos—great for growth—creates a “radical monopoly” (Illich) as other forms of transit—bicycles, walking, etc.—are made more difficult or pushed out completely.⁸⁹

Stark-raving mad. Growth is championed by both political parties in America. Democrats want to

distribute it more evenly, but they agree that a bigger “pie” is needed to provide tax revenues for social services, while the GOP suggests such growth will “trickle down” and lift all boats. But a next system that wishes better lives for families and children cannot accept a growth that pushes against biological limits.

A next system that wishes better lives for families and children cannot accept a growth that pushes against biological limits.

In many of his speeches, the late environmentalist David Brower used a powerful metaphor to point out the absurdity of our current faith in growth. He compressed the age of the earth, estimated by scientists at some 4.6 billion years, into one week, the Biblical week of creation, if you will. When you do this, a day represents about 650 million years, an hour, 27 million, a minute, about 450,000 years, and a second, 7,500. On Sunday morning, the earth congeals from cosmic gases. In the next few hours, land masses and oceans begin to form, and by Monday afternoon, the first tiny “proto-cells,” of life emerge. In the next few days of creation, life forms become larger, more complex and more wondrous. Before dawn on the last day—Saturday—trilobites and other strangely-shaped creatures swim by the millions in the Cambrian seas. Half a billion years later, in real time, we will be amazed by their fossils, scattered about the globe.

Around the middle of that very last day of the week, those gargantuan beasts, the Great Reptiles, some mild, some menacing, thunder across the land and fill the sky. The dinosaurs enjoy a long run, commanding Earth’s stage for more than four hours. By the late afternoon and evening on Saturday, mammals, furry, warm-blooded and able to withstand a cooler world, flourish and evolve, until, just a few minutes before

midnight, on that final night of the week, Homo sapiens walks erect on two legs, learns to speak, use fire and create increasingly complex forms of organization. Only about 10,000 years ago in real time, less than two seconds before midnight in our metaphor, humans develop agriculture and start building cities. At a third of a second before midnight, Buddha is born; at a quarter of a second, Christ, at a fifth of a second, Mohammed.

Only a thirtieth of a second before midnight, we launch the Industrial Revolution, and after World War II, perhaps a hundredth of a second before midnight in our week of creation—again, on the final night—the age of consumerism begins. In that hundredth of a second, Brower and others have pointed out, we have managed to consume more resources than did all human beings all together in all of previous history. We have diminished our soil, fisheries, fossil fuels and who knows what other resources, by half. We have caused the extinction of countless other species, and we have dramatically changed the climate. We have done all of this in this blink of the geological eye.

There are people, Brower went on to say, who believe that what we have been doing for that last one-hundredth of a second can go on indefinitely. President Trump suggests we can grow 5 percent a year, thus doubling our consumption in a decade and a half. If they even consider the issue, they believe, without evidence, that application of new technologies will allow our continued hyper-exploitation of the planet's resources. They are considered normal, reasonable, intelligent people; indeed, they run our corporations and our governments. But, said Brower, really, they are stark, raving mad.

It will be hard to change their minds and hard to change our behaviors, but not nearly as hard as it would be to change the laws of physics. Brower always said that there will be no corporations on a dead planet. There won't be any families and children either. We simply can't grow on like this. And we don't have

to. The data from happiness science suggests that beyond a certain level of affluence (well below that of the richest nations) non-material pleasures and leisure time matter more for life satisfaction.

A caution on population

Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich once pointed out that the Impact (I) of a society on its environment is a result of Population (P) multiplied by Affluence (A) or consumption, multiplied by Technology (T), or $I = P \times A \times T$.⁹⁰ In this case, T includes technologies that can require either higher or lower impacts—solar's impacts are lower than those of fossil fuels, for example. In recent years, it has become more difficult to talk about population as one of the variables without appearing racist or anti-immigrant. And in many countries, including such socially-progressive countries as Sweden, safety net policies such as family leave are often favored in order to *increase* the population, and therefore, economic growth. A second notion is that as lifespans lengthen (outside the US at least) there will not be enough young workers to sustain the retirement of older workers. In many European countries, population would be declining but for immigration.

We have managed to consume more resources than did all human beings all together in all of previous history.

In my view, family leave and other safety net policies should be supported as ways to improve the health of children and reduce the stress of parents, not to increase population. The argument that a smaller cohort of young people will make it harder to sustain the pensions of older workers forgets that an increasing population creates scarcities—land, housing, schools,

etc.—that drive inflation and reduce the value of older people’s fixed incomes. In Seattle, where I live, pressures from a rapidly increasing population have driven costs of living sharply upward. Many fixed income seniors who do not own their homes are being forced out of the city (as are young people) by out-of-control rent increases. Food prices are also soaring, schools are unable to keep pace and become overcrowded, traffic congestion creates both stress and air pollution, parks are overcrowded and entertainment is also much more expensive. Ehrlich’s warnings are still valuable.

Phased retirement. Policies other than population growth could address the pressures on retirement income with fewer negative externalities. The primary threat to Social Security incomes in the US, for example, comes from limitations on the Social Security tax contributions of higher-income Americans. If the current cap on Social Security taxes were lifted, pensions could actually be increased, as “Social Security Plus” advocate Steven Hill points out, while greatly extending the current lifespan of the program.⁹¹

Moreover, conservatives have a point in suggesting that as healthy lifespans increase, the retirement age might be delayed. One potential way to do this with other positive outcomes would be to phase in retirement, so that workers might shorten their workweek to zero over a span of ten years or so, supplemented by a portion of their pensions (as *Kurzarbeit* does with unemployment benefits). Thus, workers could transition away from jobs, develop new hobbies and friendships, provide childcare for grandchildren, exercise more and also mentor younger workers, among other benefits. Phased retirement has been implemented in some occupations—it is common with college faculty, for example—and it seems such a natural solution to many possible problems, it’s hard to see why we don’t put much more focus on it. It would surely be a benefit for families.

A check list of current and future policies that can improve the lives of children and families in the next system

This is a list of suggestions based only on current best practices in place somewhere in the world and new ideas not yet implemented. It is not designed to be exhaustive, rather, as a basis for conversation and debate. Policies are listed by their closest connection to particular needs in Maslow's hierarchy, but many address more than one need.

Physiological needs

- Equal pay for women. Women are now the breadwinners in 53 percent of American families
- No discrimination against mothers. In half of American states, job interviewers may ask if applicants have children and turn them down if they do.
- A national minimum wage of \$15 an hour or a "living wage"
- A public bank providing loans for home ownership, as in North Dakota
- Subsidies for basic nutritional food items
- An end to mortgage deductions for second homes and an increase in deductions for limited-size family dwellings

- A national fund for homelessness with a focus on geographical dispersion
- A strongly graduated income tax, and consumption and luxury taxes
- A national maximum income—amount to be determined by democratic discussion. St. Augustine advocated this.
- A Basic Income Guarantee sufficient to pull all families out of poverty
- Laws limiting rates of usury to a fixed amount above the rate of inflation
- Paid family leave for a minimum of four to six months at near full salary, to be taken by fathers as well as mothers
- A training program for young sustainable farmers

Safety and security needs

- A single-payer healthcare system
- A focus on preventative health measures
- Tax incentives for healthy behaviors and excise taxes on unhealthy foods and beverages, such as sugary drinks
- A system of walking and bicycle paths

completed separated from traffic, as in the Netherlands

- Prison reform, focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment
- Special support for children of prisoners
- Greater controls on pollution and toxins
- A strong social safety net with generous unemployment benefits and job training
- Expanded Social Security benefits
- Adequate recess and outdoor activity for children
- Paid sick days
- Taxes on robots that reduce employment

Belongingness needs

- People-oriented urban design
- Paid family leave (see above)
- Tax credits for co-housing and other cooperative housing arrangements
- In-home care support for seniors
- Shorter work-time opportunities

Esteem needs

- Maternity and paternity leave (as above)
- Affordable quality childcare
- Equal funding of education and/or subsidies for low-income districts
- Outdoor education
- Cooperative secondary education as in Finland—reduction of testing
- Free higher education with living subsidies
- National service with educational components
- Active job retraining program
- Post-secondary vocational education program

Self-actualization needs

- Extended vacation time and other paid time off
- Basic Income Guarantee and income security

- Arts and culture funding
- Lifelong educational opportunities
- Community arts and landscape beautification
- Green space and wilderness access
- Paid work sabbaticals every five years, as in Belgium
- A legal right to reduce worktime without losing employment, as in the Netherlands
- A prohibition on mandatory overtime, as in Finland

Measuring success

You get what you measure. In the United States, particularly, economic success is generally assessed by the rate of growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Unfortunately, GDP is only a measure of the “final market value” of goods and services produced in a country annually. In general, if money—public or private—is spent on something it is considered to be a “good,” whether or not it enhances life satisfaction. Indeed, large amounts of *defensive* spending, meant to cope with negative externalities caused by previous growth, are counted as positives in determining GDP.⁹²

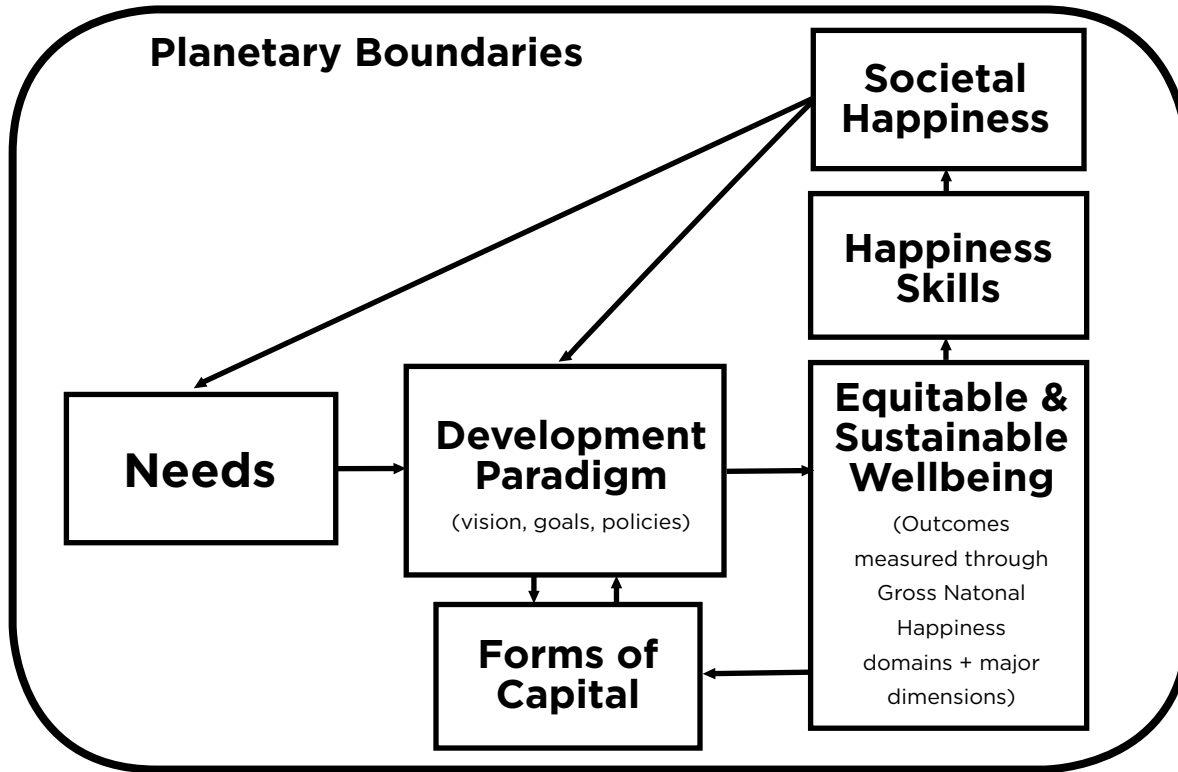
For example, the costs of cleaning up and litigating the damage caused by an oil spill or a traffic accident may add more to GDP than if the oil made it safely to the refinery or the automobile to its destination. Many of the activities that contribute most to life satisfaction do not involve economic transactions and do not add to GDP. Social relationships, easy access to nature, leisure time, and so forth, can be seen as a waste of time as far as GDP is concerned, and consequently, these real *goods* and services are devalued.

University of Siena economist Stefano Bartolini argues persuasively that one reason GDP growth is higher in the US than in Europe is that American consumerism has both decreased happiness by leading to overwork, and reduced the quality of the environmental commons as a source of satisfaction. It has also

led to greater social/relational deterioration, including greater loneliness.⁹³

People who lose time, friendships and a beautiful environment to sprawl, overwork and other aspects of a turbo-charged consumer economy, must buy these need satisfiers back through the market, thus adding to GDP. We seek social connection and esteem through cars, clothes, phones and other commodities. We substitute weekend flights to pristine tropical beaches for the nearby nature that is being developed out of existence, at great cost, adding substantially to GDP. Bartolini suggests that such purchases create a vicious cycle. We must work more to pay for them and therefore further reduce leisure time and social connection. We are also bombarded with consumer advertising, which asks us to compare ourselves with people who have all the expensive things and makes us anxious when we do not.

So, it becomes important to measure aspects of quality of life rather than merely GDP, and this realization is now widespread, if less so in the US. In 2013, I was part of an International Expert Working Group (IEWG) advising the small Himalayan nation of Bhutan to create a *New Development Paradigm*, based on “equitable and sustainable wellbeing and happiness,” or *Gross National Happiness* rather than Gross Domestic Product. This paradigm may be seen as a version of “the next system.”



The new paradigm model: Bhutan

While in Bhutan, the advisors sometimes disagreed over the relative importance of policy versus personal change, or the relative usefulness of the terms *happiness* and *wellbeing*, as well as other points. Enrico Giovannini, formerly Italy's Minister of Labor and Social Issues, created a positive synthesis from the disagreements among members of the IEWG.⁹⁴

The model starts with human needs, such as those described by Abraham Maslow and by a member of Bhutan's United Nations advisory group, famed Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef. In the model, the *development paradigm* is the economic system, modified in each society by market rules, policies, institutions and cultural expectations that employ *resources* to meet needs.

These resources may be described in many ways. For example, we often speak of resources as natural gifts—minerals, soil, etc.—that can be shaped into useful products. But in our companies, we also refer to *human resources* and we have our HR departments.

More recently, the new discipline of ecological economics has begun to speak of various forms of capital. Capital, until recently, referred to the factories, physical infrastructure and financial resources that businesses used to provide employment and consumer goods, but its meaning has been expanded to include *natural capital* (the gifts of nature, which provide both *resources for production* and *ecosystem services*), *human capital* (the health, competence and productivity of workers and other members of society), and *social capital* (the value of social connection and non-market institutions such as government and the nonprofit sector).

Happiness and wellbeing. In the *New Development Paradigm Working Model*, the terms *happiness* and *wellbeing*, commonly spoken of as just two ways to say the same thing, are *not* synonymous. Often, modern advocates of life satisfaction quarrel about this, with academics sometimes cringing over what they believe is the amorphousness of the word "happiness," while ordinary people often find the term "well-being"

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

overly academic. But in the new development paradigm working model, equitable and sustainable *wellbeing* is what can be measured through (generally) *objective* data—such things as income levels, life expectancy, literacy, pollution, voter participation, leisure hours, rates of depression, unemployment, poverty, etc. We say “generally” objective, because often even this data is a result of surveys which do rely in part on the assessments of the surveyed.

One promising way of measuring wellbeing is the *Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)*,⁹⁵ which has been adopted by some American states, including Maryland and Vermont. It starts out with GDP but then subtracts for negative externalities like the cost of pollution cleanup, and adds the value of things like housework and leisure time, which contribute to life quality but are not measured by GDP. The Maryland GPI contains 26 indices. It was developed by the natural resources agencies in the Maryland government, and, in my view, is too weighted toward energy and environment, but it’s a valuable start in the right direction. *The Canadian Index of Wellbeing* is another useful model.

In each area of life there are *minimum levels of sufficiency* that are needed to be able to say that basic wellbeing has been achieved in a society. Improving these objective conditions of life is the primary goal of *public policy*. And in this case, the policy examples referred to in this report can contribute to higher levels of wellbeing. But people may have sufficient conditions for a good life without being happy. Rich people are certainly not all happy, even if, generally speaking, higher-income persons report greater happiness than lower-income persons.

Happiness in this model is the *subjective* sense of people’s wellbeing, determined by survey questions—How do you *feel* about your health, your mental state, your access to nature, your finances, your time balance, your purpose in life, etc? People are also asked to evaluate their overall life satisfaction, using several 1-10 scales. This happiness, more about long-term

life satisfaction than hedonism, is akin to what Aristotle and the Greeks meant by the term *eudaimonia*. An excellent, well-validated survey measuring overall happiness, and people’s levels of satisfaction in ten areas of life including *material wellbeing, time balance, social support, community connection, education, arts and culture, faith in government, environmental quality, health and mental health* has been developed by the Seattle-based Happiness Alliance and can be found at www.happycounts.org. To date, more than 60,000 people have completed the 15-minute survey, which is available in a dozen languages. It would be useful to develop a version for children as well.

Happiness skills. Moderating between *objective* wellbeing and *subjective* Happiness are what the model refers to as *happiness skills* (which are part of the curriculum in Bhutan, as mentioned earlier in this paper). These are the tools of *personal* change. While conditions of life matter greatly for personal happiness, our great religions and wisdom traditions, as well as modern positive psychology and neuroscience, teach us that proper attitudes and behaviors are also essential and, in more comfortable nations, even more important. As an example, changes in public policy such as greater vacation time, shorter working hours and so forth may offer more leisure time to citizens and lead to greater *objective* time balance, but whether this leads to improvements in happiness depends in large part on what people do with the extra time these policies make possible.

If, for instance, they spend that time in front of the television, their happiness levels are not likely to increase and may even fall. On the other hand, if they use their increase in free time for greater social connection, or for community participation such as volunteering, they are more likely to become happier. Where happiness skills are high, we are likely to see a greater correlation between objective wellbeing and subjective happiness.

The attitudes and behaviors that constitute “happiness skills” (and may also be thought of as “character

virtues”) include such things as gratitude, altruism (it is indeed, better for happiness, “to give than to receive”), kindness, sociability, delayed-gratification, empathy, compassion, cooperation, and many other behaviors which education can play a part in cultivating. As with policies, the same happiness skills may be useful for increasing in meeting several types of needs. An educational program that systematically teaches happiness skills can help assure that good conditions of life, measured in objective terms, are fully correlated to higher levels of subjective happiness.

The *New Development Paradigm Working Model* ignores neither the importance of *policy* nor of *personal behaviors* in achieving good lives for all. It does not force us to choose between *happiness* and *wellbeing*, but recognizes that they are different ways of measuring our success and both must be considered to get a clear picture of our quality of life. It excuses neither widespread inequality nor a cavalier attitude toward the ecological limits of our biosphere. But it is not a call for sacrifice; indeed, the research behind the model implies that that we can have a *better* life with less consumption in wealthy countries, while allowing economic growth in poorer ones where it really adds to wellbeing, and at the same time, protecting our planet. The sacrifice is now; “getting and spending,” as Wordsworth put it, “we lay waste our powers.” In the pursuit of limitless growth, we decimate our only planet for which there is no spare.

Next steps toward the next system

It is well and good to suggest a great menu of policies and ideas for families and children in the next system. But while many progressives have done an excellent job of demonstrating the failures of the existing economic order (A) and have provided appealing models for a new one (C), where we often fail is in examining the political steps (B) needed to get from A to C, including the leverage points most likely to be effective in the short run. Here, a few leverage points come quickly to mind, though in the short run, it may be more effective to push for these with local and state governments, rather than the federal government, which seems polarized to gridlock.

The recent struggles of the GOP in promoting its American Health Care Act, coupled with real dissatisfaction regarding Obamacare and its increasingly expensive premiums, may provide an opening for a real discussion of *single-payer healthcare*. *Paid family leave* is increasingly gaining currency, having recently passed in several states, and even Ivanka Trump has supported the concept at the national level. *Paid vacations* might also be a winner. Robert Reich believes that Democrats could gain substantial support by advocating a three- or four-week mandatory vacation. Vacations are valuable for family bonding, health, de-stressing and burnout reduction and even improvements in creativity and productivity. They also have a natural interest group to support them—the travel and tourism industry, which is, overall, the

largest private employer in the country. In addition to supporting families, these reforms would benefit all Americans.

Paid sick leave is another obvious leverage point. It has nearly 80 percent support among voters. Virtually every other country, include most poor ones, requires at least some paid sick days. It's widely understood that sick workers stay sick longer when they come to work sick, are less productive, and are likely to get fellow workers and customers sick as well. Epidemics may more easily spread when workers come to work sick or their children must go to school sick because parents cannot stay home for them. The Healthy Families Act, proposed by Senator Edward Kennedy more than a decade ago, would have provided a little over a week of guaranteed paid sick leave for workers. Versions of it still exist but are held up in a GOP-dominated Congress. The US remains the only rich country with no law requiring such leave.

Even in red states, there is strong support for *increasing the minimum wage*, which remains frozen at \$7.25 an hour nationally. *Affordable childcare* is now on the agenda, even in conservative venues like Oklahoma City. *After-school programs*, which allow supervision of children while parents are still working, find an unusual source of support: the police, who understand that youth crime and vandalism peaks between 3 and 5 p.m. A nonpartisan consensus is now taking

shape regarding *reform of incarceration policies*—even the Koch brothers are advocates of this, which, if it releases large numbers of prisoners incarcerated for victimless crimes such as pot smoking or dealing, can be helpful to many children who are separated now from their parents. These policy changes may be the low-hanging fruit and should well be the first targets of progressive action.

Strategic initiatives. Political strategist George Lakoff has long made the case that voters don't tend to respond to "issues" or data-driven arguments. They respond more to a larger moral vision that captures their imagination. Lakoff suggests that progressives develop themes for change and "strategic initiatives that can address many needs with the same programmatic vision. In his book, *Don't Think of an Elephant*, he described one of those ideas, the Apollo Project, an infrastructure-spending proposal focused on alternative energy sources. If implemented, Lakoff argued, Apollo would be a jobs project, putting many people to work, a research project expanding our scientific knowledge, a resource-conservation project and a climate change project. It might be useful to think in terms of a strategic initiative for families and children.

A decade ago, Representative Lynn Woolsey of California, the only former welfare mom in Congress, proposed an omnibus bill for families with the clever title of "the Balancing Act." It included sick leave, family leave, childcare, pre-natal care and other benefits. But there was no real effort to bring the Balancing Act into the national election conversation, so it did not gain momentum.⁹⁶

And Beauty for All. It may be that a direct appeal to explicitly social reforms suffers from positions that are already too polarized, though one can imagine Democrats raising some form of the Balancing Act as a theme in the 2020 elections. Another possibility is a strategic initiative that could improve many aspects of life for families and children without being perceived as a welfare measure.

"If anything can save the world, I'd put my money on beauty," said the late environmental champion Doug Thompkins, founder of the Esprit clothing company. Half a century ago, during the debacle that was 1968, folksinger Phil Ochs remarked that "in such an ugly time, the true protest is beauty." A strategic initiative with the moral mission of making America beautiful could have the galvanizing effect on a large segment of the population that Trump's "make America great again" theme had on his supporters. It could also have trans-partisan appeal.

Beauty, in fact, is not only in the eye of the beholder. Witness the diversity of visitors to our national parks, and this becomes clear. Families and children love our national parks—which now have a \$12 billion maintenance backlog. Vacations in the parks help bond families. Famed Yosemite ranger Shelton Johnson, says he sees this all the time. "Out here families connect on a whole other level," Johnson argues. One of the most popular Democratic initiatives was Lady Byrd Johnson's "Beautify America" campaign of the 1960s, which removed the billboards from many of our highways, and one of the most powerful ads ever to grace the television screen portrayed a tearful American Indian in a canoe as he surveyed a littered landscape. In a short time, the idea that it was okay to litter went the way of smoking.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Abraham Maslow included the need for beauty in his hierarchy of needs—at the top, as a factor in self-actualization. Conservatives as well as liberals revel in their flower gardens and appreciate beautiful surroundings. Twenty-five years ago, David Brower, proposed a large-scale focus on the restoration of America's damaged ecology. The time for that effort is now. In the first place, it could be an economic boon for much of rural America, the part of the country that voted overwhelmingly red, and has felt left behind by much of America's technological progress. Both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump called for large-scale new spending on infrastructure. Trump focused on America's admittedly unstable bridges

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

and damaged highways. Clinton, more broadly, proposed support for factories to build solar panels and other investments in alternative energy needed to alleviate climate change. Such programs would target areas of America left behind by the revival of the economy under Obama and provide increased employment security for many families.

As Clinton pointed out, the coal mining jobs of Kentucky, West Virginia and the rest of Appalachia are not likely to return. For the sake of the climate they *should not* return, and coal must be quickly phased out of our energy menu. But the miners and rural residents of Appalachia need to earn a living to support their children. They are independent people, who appreciate working out of doors and with their hands. They are deeply attached to the places where they live and their neighbors and extended families, and do not want to relocate to large cities or suburbs. They have sacrificed lives and health to provide the coal that Americans have demanded over the years. And though their land has been desecrated in recent years, they still appreciate the green space around them, however depressed their towns have become.

With an *And Beauty for All*⁹⁷ investment in restoring the mountaintops that coal strip-mining has removed in recent years, many coal-mining families can remain in their communities. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps did much to restore parts of rural America, build facilities in places like Great Smoky Mountain National Park for people to enjoy, and provide needed jobs for the unemployed. As author Harry Boyte points out, the experiences of many formerly unemployed workers in “building America” as part of the CCC were remembered as the high point of their lives.⁹⁸

Much restoration work is needed in rural America more generally. An effort to restore farmland soils might also include work on streambeds where overgrazing of cattle and sheep has caused massive erosion. Salmon streams have been clogged in various places by logging debris. This is complicated restoration

work, capable of providing many jobs, since salmon do need abundant forest detritus for shade and other reasons but where clogging prevents them from moving upstream, it must be removed or modified. Reforestation is needed in some areas. Healthy forests often provide more value, even in dollar terms, than their timber brings, because of the *ecosystem services*, such as water filtration, that they provide. Smart, sustainable farming and forestry can allow many families to stay on the land, in healthy surroundings.

Rural towns can be beautified in various ways. The Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression hired artists to paint the walls of post offices and other government buildings. They might well bring greater attractiveness to small towns through mural projects. The towns of Centralia and Toppenish in Washington state offer examples. Economic prospects in rural America would also be improved by more tourism opportunities. Here an emphasis on building bikeways or *rails-to-trails* projects linking rural communities could both provide construction jobs and encourage healthy, carbon-free vacation travel. Such construction should include campgrounds at the edge of rural towns.

Financial support for the construction of farmers’ markets and promotion of community gardens would also be helpful in many smaller communities. Farmers’ markets provide fresher, healthier food and build a sense of community. Bill McKibben reports that on a per capita basis people have ten times as many personal conversations in farmers’ markets as they do in supermarkets.⁹⁹ Another idea is the construction of town plazas or village greens throughout small communities, as seen in New England towns and some places in New Mexico, Santa Fe for example. They could be as beautiful as the marvelous piazzas of Italy or the town squares found throughout Europe. Children could be called on to decorate them with artwork, an activity that Slovenian immigrant Milenko Matanovic and his “Pomegranate Center” have brought to dozens of American communities already, with remarkable results.¹⁰⁰

Medium-sized cities in the Upper Midwest “rust belt” have provided another important source of red votes. Since the 1980s, both automation and trade deals such as NAFTA, as well as layoffs driven by stockholder drives for higher returns (remember Chainsaw Al Dunlap?) have hollowed out many such cities. In such places, where unemployment is high, low-paying service jobs have replaced the one-breadwinner wages of the industrial period. They are ideal for a revival of the Apollo Project, with factories producing solar panels and batteries and other needed alternative energy technology. These are still places where housing costs are moderate, and many residents might choose to stay even at lower wages than they might receive in bigger cities. Some such cities have been making great progress in downtown beautification, bike trails and pathways, and park improvements. Even minimal additional federal support would go a long way toward making such places more beautiful and appealing.

Medium-sized cities, unblemished by unregulated sprawl, will be an attractive option for many of America’s young people, who want more free time, less onerous commutes, less congestion and pollution, easier access to nature and a safe, friendly place to raise their own children. Medium-sized cities that offer beauty and culture can also, especially in the Internet age, provide a rich intellectual life. Paul Goodman once pointed out that only 30,000 people lived in Renaissance Florence. But the market alone will not create these life enhancements. They depend on public funding and cooperative planning.

Even in urban America, there is much that an *And Beauty for All* campaign could accomplish. In rapidly-growing, wealthy cities like Seattle, land is at a premium. But many poorer cities have large swaths of open space where buildings or parking lots once stood. A beautification campaign could tear up the asphalt, replace it with soil and offer subsidies for urban, organic food production. Detroit, Chicago and even New York offer fine examples of urban farming. Such farming, which might involve all ages, would also be enhanced by an investment in training

programs for would-be farmers and gardeners, the idea now being promoted by Kimball Musk and his Square Roots organization. The result would not only be a more beautiful city but an effective community builder bringing together people of all ages, and an important supply of nutritious food in areas that are now known as “food deserts.”

A beautification campaign would be a jobs creator. But like construction work on the Dakota Access Pipeline, the jobs will not necessarily be long-term, and they will not generally be lucrative. They are a stopgap measure to stem the potential avalanche of jobs that will be lost to robotization in the near and distant future. To be successful, they should be combined with a program of work-sharing, including a shortening of the workweek, to open more employment possibilities as digitization destroys the jobs of other working-class people in such areas as truck and taxi driving or retail sales. A guaranteed income could allow greater freedom of choice of work, help those in rural America stay on, even with lower-wage job prospects, supplement incomes for lower-skilled workers involved in restoration and beautification.

Where does the money come from? That is of course the question that will be posed even by those who see the desirability of an *And Beauty for All* campaign. There is no question that such a campaign will be expensive, more so even than the trillion dollars Donald Trump said he would spend on our roads and bridges. Yet David Brower had an answer for that. If these things are necessary for our children’s futures and even their lives, for saving our land and resources and wildlife, for filling our days with beauty and health, for bringing urban and suburban and rural America together again in common purpose, then the question we must ask is a different one: What is the cost of not doing them? It is a question we have not yet learned to ask but it may be the most important question of all.

We need research to estimate what that cost will be, and we will need to make choices among these ideas even if we are to go forward with an American

WORKING PAPER: Women and Children in the Next System

beautification plan. But at a minimum, one might envision a host of possible funding sources:

- A substantial tax on carbon
- Other so-called “green taxes,” which discourage polluting behaviors, resource waste and so forth
- A substantial speculation tax on stock transfers
- A windfall profits tax
- A more progressive income and estate tax
- Elimination of corporate tax loopholes
- More progressive land taxation
- A tax on new technologies that displace workers

Some combination of these would provide adequate funding for much of this proposal. It might need to be coupled with more government debt. But these are investments in our future economy and the quality of our lives. Corporations use debt financing to make investments they believe will pay off later. Why should government refrain from the same strategy? It should also be understood, as Paul Krugman and others make clear, that in per capita terms, the US debt is smaller than that of Japan or many other industrial nations.

A values transformation

The wish to ensure the right of all Americans to live, work and play in beautiful surroundings is, at its core, a plea for a change of values in our country, from an emphasis on quantity of stuff to quality of life, from a focus on economic growth to economic stability and life satisfaction, from rich families amid poverty to secure and happy ones. In this sense, even the calls of progressive Democrats like Sanders and Warren are too narrow, too modest. We must reduce inequality, but an enforced equality in a fundamentally unsustainable, unhealthy and unsatisfying way of life is not remotely radical enough. The next system demands radical reforms that current political leaders haven't yet begun to raise.

Half a century ago, when we were much more equal than today and more secure as well, the young

Americans of the counterculture, Bernie Sanders among them, recognized this truth. In his books, *One-Dimensional Man* and *An Essay on Liberation*, the counterculture's leading philosopher, Herbert Marcuse, argued for a move away from the false promises of consumerism and toward solidarity, community and beauty, a great refusal of the competitive performances, aggressiveness, waste and ugliness of consumer capitalism toward a slower, kinder, more feminine, more cooperative, more harmonious and closer-to-nature existence. Part of this includes a cultural transition from what George Lakoff refers to as the “strict authoritarian father” family model to a more nurturant structure where parents share power and children are influenced by good examples instead of corporal punishment.

In a real sense, a next system that wants to enhance the lives of families and children, cannot stop with program and policy change, but must change the values of industrial, consumer societies. The counterculture poet Gary Snyder, who moved to the countryside at the same time Bernie Sanders did, as part of the back-to-the-land movement, captured the very different ethos of that movement in lines from his poem, *For the Children*:

Stay together
Learn the flowers
Go light.

Solidarity, beauty, simplicity. They are, in this period of small dreams, big and bold ideas. Yet nothing else can ensure the future for children and families. Sustainable communities, nature, a beautiful landscape, health, compassion, equality, love and stewardship—they are the values at the heart of the Standing Rock protests, values more powerful than greed and the armed forces sent to drive the protestors off.

There is much to do. David Brower used to quote Goethe: “Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it/Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” The time for boldness has come.

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The Next System Project

The Next System Project is an ambitious multi-year initiative housed at The Democracy Collaborative which is aimed at thinking boldly about what is required to deal with the systemic challenges the United States faces now and in coming decades. Responding to real hunger for a new way forward, and building on innovative thinking and practical experience with new economic institutions and approaches being developed in communities across the country and around the world, the goal is to put the central idea of system change, and that there can be a “next system,” on the map. Working with a broad group of researchers, theorists, and activists, we seek to launch a national debate on the nature of “the next system” using the best research, understanding, and strategic thinking, on the one hand, and on-the-ground organizing and development experience, on the other, to refine and publicize comprehensive alternative political-economic system models that are different in fundamental ways from the failed systems of the past and capable of delivering superior social, economic, and ecological outcomes. By defining issues systematically, we believe we can begin to move the political conversation beyond current limits with the aim of catalyzing a substantive debate about the need for a radically different system and how we might go about its construction. Despite the scale of the difficulties, a cautious and paradoxical optimism is warranted. There are real alternatives. Arising from the unforgiving logic of dead ends, the steadily building array of promising new proposals and alternative institutions and experiments, together with an explosion of ideas and new activism, offer a powerful basis for hope.

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