Participatory Research Action Plan:

A Proposal for Creating the Third House of Congress: the Public Assembly

for the Creation of a National Democracy in the United States of America

by

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"Every nation has a right to govern itself internally under what forms it pleases, and to change these forms at its own will." —Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Pinckney, 1792.

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Abstract

Now is the time to utilize modern technology to allow the public to vote directly via the Internet, thus creating a government closer to a pure democracy. This could be accomplished by an amendment to the United States Constitution, if necessary. The implementation of this plan would unfold, develop, and occur in an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary way creating the 3rd House of the United States Congress, the Public Assembly.

Introduction to the Action Plan, an example of participatory action research:

When the United States Constitution was written the forefathers wrote a general, all-encompassing and sweeping document that is still relevant, has stood the test of time, and has withstood the difficulties, controversies, and amendments that have occurred during its existence. But this document was written around 1776 and the society at the time was very different from the society of today. The forefathers, even with all of their foresight and all-inclusiveness were not able to factor in dramatic future changes in technology and, resultingly, in society. They could not have foreseen a future with telephones, radios, televisions, cars, airplanes, jet engines, rockets, computers, the Internet, etc. Now that the new technologies are here and will continue to grow, advance, and be perfected, we need to see how this affects society, the government, and the Constitution.

The United States in its military campaigns says it wants to promote and protect democracy. But is the United States a democracy? No, it is not; it is a republic or a representative democracy. An example of a democracy within the United States federal goverment is the U.S. Congress where the members debate and vote usually for a simple majority to win a case or a referendum or to pass a bill. When a presidential election is held today well over 100 million people can vote. The United States Constitution created the electoral college for, I have heard, several reasons and one of them is to prevent mob rule (but isn't that what democracy is?) or for a government run by the uneducated (though now, most people are receiving high levels of education in comparison with the past of the forefathers).I think another reason that the electoral college was institutionalized was because, at the time the Constitution was written, if a national election were to be held, tallying the votes would be an almost impossible task. A sack of votes, or the results of local voting, would have had to have been sent by a messenger riding horseback. Just carrying the votes from California (or from Georgia during the time of the thirteen colonies) to Washington, D.C. could take weeks, that is, if they ever even got to their destination. Today, we live in a very different world where messages are transmitted instantaneously worldwide via the telephone or the Internet.

I propose that, using Internet technology, U.S. citizens be allowed to vote directly on the issues and bills that are presented to the United States Congress as well as the state legislatures and county and city governments. On the national level this would entail creating a new branch of Congress: the 3rd House or the Public Assembly.

Cons	Pros
Only advantaged people having access to the Internet.	Everyone has access to the voting centers
Not every one has a computer now.	Soon computers will be as plentiful as telephones.
Mob rule by the uneducated.	Most people now have advanced educations
Too radical a change	The U.S. Constitution was a radical document at the time it was introduced
Too complicated	Can be done with computer, Internet technology
People what to keep things the way they are	A welcome change
Illiterate and uneducated people voting	Illiterate voters also vote in regular elections
People voting for issues they are not trained in	Legislators don't have expertise in all areas either
Internet fraud	Internet credit card fraud is about .088% at that rate the margin would be 880 votes out of one million, though this system could be regulated like online banking.
People don't want radical, revolutionary changes	The American Revolution: radical and revolutionary
It's revolutionary	No, it's not; it's evolutionary.
People are conservative and don't want to change	People want to live under a democratic system.

Phase 1   3 to 10 years:

Debate and Introduction to the Concept

Discussions and committees formed

Brain storming and think tank groups developed

Petitions and letters, email, talk shows, TV, radio campaigns

Public education of the concept

Writers and Artists commissioned

Software conceptualizing

Books and magazine articles are printed on the subject

Funding and economic issues are discussed

Funds raised

A suggestion hotline is established

An official website is created

Phase 2   2 years:

Organizing and structuring of the voting methods and procedures

Development of the Government Structure

Legal Documents developed

Constitutional amendment first draft written

Various committees appointed

Local referendums held

Phase 3   3 years:

Trial period when the procedures are developed, refined and the first results used

as an opinion polling collection device

Educating the public on the procedures involved

All of the above activities continue (website, etc.)

First trials are done locally, first city, then county, then state, then national levels

During this period suggestions and changes are made

Software is developed

Security issues addressed

Computer and software bugs are worked out

Initial voting centers are established, these can be adjacent to post offices

Paricipants (intial voters) are assigned temporary voter registration numbers and

passwords, etc. chosen

The voter registration numbers are assigned through the voting centers in a way

similar to registering to vote and passwords are chosen.

(Voters are given up to 3 days to "edit or change" their submissions)

Phase 4   3 years

Voting Centers are established nationwide

Voter registration numbers are established partly containing

      a social security number

Voting Centers have the bills and plans to be voted on in booklet form

      and posted on the walls and these bills and plans are also

      available online for perusal and study

The voter registration numbers are assigned through the voting

      centers in a way similar to registering to vote and

      passwords are chosen

      (Voters are given up to 3 days to "edit or

      change" their submissions)

The opinion poll collection system continues using the online

      voting system

Strict felony laws against Internet abuse or direct voting fraud

      with severe penalties and punishments are passed

Phase 5   Continuing

Voters are able to connect to the voting system via the

Internet with their own computers, or continue to vote through

the Voting Centers, and become voting members of the

3rd House of Congress, the Public Assembly according

to U.S. federal law and also of state, county, and city

governments as laws of each state allow.

In the future, computers will be as standard as telephones and everyone

with a telephone will have a computer and the United States

government will become a truly participatory and

democratic government.

U.S. Senate: U.S House of Representatives: 3rd House: the Public Assembly:

as defined in the United States Constitution

During Phases 3 & 4 the 3rd House (3H) functions as

an opinion poll collection system.

Beginning with Phase 5, the majority results of the

votes cast by the members of theThird House

(all registered U.S. voters) count for 1/3 of the

decision by the U.S Congress in determining

the passage or non-passage of a bill or plan.

3H has an elected leader as general spokesperson.

3H leader is not identified with a particular party

but can facilitate voting and submit results.

3H leader has an office and staff in Washington, D.C.

The Third House has elected spokespersons in

each state and each with a staff.

The 3rd House votes on bills and amendments introduced

to the House of Representatives and Senate.

Plans or bills created by the 3rd House are submitted

to Expert Committees within designated

categories for approval and revision and

rewriting to fit the requirements for writing

a bill. The expert committees could be appointed

by a consortium of University experts.

Voting is done via the Internet using a developed

and secured voting (one vote per registered

voter) and counting system so that the

results can be viewed on the Internet

approximately 3 days after the last votes are in.

Each bill or plan has a 2 week period, unless otherwise

specified, during which the bill can be studied

and votes can be cast.

Voting Centers:

These can be adjacent to or in post offices.

Issues and bills to be voted on could be printed in booklet form and given

      to the voters and placed on the walls of the voting centers and

      also could be available online in full so that the issues can be

      studied by the voters.

During Phase 5 most of the voting will be done through personal

      computers away from the voting centers.

Use of the system and security issues:

Concerning the use of the system, many people would vote, after being educated in the procedures involved in online voting, during popular and controversial issues but the obscure, unpopular, or specialized issues would have fewer voters. But even if the voter response is only one percent of the United States registered voters that still would be over a million votes and this could reflect the views of the majority in the same way as an opinion poll (such as the Gallop Poll) which uses randomly selected participants to determine the general public opinion or stance on an issue with usually + or - 3% margin of error.

Concerning ethical issues, there could be the possibility, as in all areas of life and business, of the unethical use of funds along the way while creating this system as well as propagandistic advertising but this would be much less than that now utilized in the election of political candidates. Also the bribing of millions of voters would be next to impossible though, in the other view, finding a few swing voting legislators to slip tempting enticements under the table to is comparatively simpler to do.

One concern of the direct voting concept is the security issue. The Internet or computerized direct voting procedure is a decentralized structure and therefore not susceptible to the sort of attack that a congregated collection of legislators would have to guard against should another September 11, 2001 type attack be attempted. But the Internet can be vulnerable to computer vandals. The motivation of such vandals, except for the perverse thrill or mischief in commiting such an act or the desire to create an anarchic situation, would be slight since they are usually interested in debilitating monopolies and big businesses and are generally on the side of the common people who would benefit from a participatory democracy. But to subvert any attempts at espionage, system manipulation, or system destruction, strict felony laws with severe penalties and punishments could be passed to discourage and prevent any of those sorts of attempts. In the same way that computer security is accomplished with regards to credit card use, online courses, privacy issues, etc., technology experts could devise impenetrable systems as is done now using a system involving computer intelligence utilizing a matrix of security solutions involving encryption, cross referencing, passwords, statistical probability, etc., all of which could be utilized, developed and perfected for online voting processes.

The implementation of the participatory action plan for a direct democracy in the United States of America:

The most difficult part of implementing this plan would be to get a constitutional amendment unless the 3rd House remained to function only as an opinion poll collection system. Constitutional amendments are permanent additions to the Contitution, though they can be counter amended as was the case with the Prohibition Amendment, that require a 2/3 vote from both houses of the Congress and therefore very difficult to obtain. There have been twenty seven Constitutional Amendments with the most recent being in 1992 which involved no Congressional self salary increases while the legislators are in their terms. The twelfth Amendment concerning changing the method of electing the president of the United States using the Electoral College was added in 1803 after the first ten Amendments, the Bill of Rights, were added in 1791. Since the Congress is now divided half and half between the two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, passing such an amendment, or any amendment, at this time would probably not be possible since most Republicans would not vote on any changes to the Constitution and only some of the more progressive Democrats would embrace the idea. Also, since the Democratic candidate received 530,000 more votes in the 2001 election than his opponent but was defeated by the Electoral College system, it is not likely that the Republicans would vote against a system that allows them to get elected, though, conceivably, the Electoral College could remain intact and the 3rd House system could still be implemented. However, if this idea, the 3rd House — the Public Assembly, were to be introduced and publicly debated using the available media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, the Internet, etc.) over a period of several years with a trial period of several years people would eventually adjust to and then accept the idea and then the possibility of passing a Constitutional Amendment would increase. After all, the Constitution began with an idea and a blank piece of paper. Then the United States of America can, utilizing the techniques of participatory action research, move toward the direction of being the democracy that some people claim we already are.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concerning Establishing a Participatory Direct Democracy
in the United States of America

Abstract:

The real possibility of a direct democracy, through direct voting, on the local, state, and national level now exists with the advent of Internet technology. This review of literature discusses the possibility and explores philosophical concepts of democracy and reviews the books "Democracy, Real and Ideal" by Ricardo Blaug, "Democracy in America" by Alexis de Tocqueville, "Strategies of Change" by Steven Vago, as well as some websites devoted to the subject.

Review:

Largely a critique and analysis of the philosophy of the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, the book "Democracy, Real and Ideal" by Ricardo Blaug (1999, State University of New York Press) examines his philosophy in relation to the theory and practical aspects of democracy. Habermas' work includes a theory of democracy and his exploration of the realistic practicality of democracy and an in depth analysis of his normative theory of democracy and his theory of judgement. "Only where democracy is conceived as an everyday and real interactive process can we understand what it might mean to truly rule ourselves" (p. xv). In the study of Habermas' discourse of ethics, references are made to Hobbe's Leviathan and Locke's concept of protective rights (p. 12).

Democracy is discussed in relation to the rationalism of Plato and the empiricism of Aristotle. The essay mentions that Locke's theory starts with the natural human rights, Hobbes' begins with rational death avoidance (or survival instinct), and Kant begins his premise with the idea of pure practical reason (p. 6). Kant says: " a person is subject to no law other than those he (either alone or at least jointly with others) gives to himself", a thought which is greatly influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau and Kant also refers to a social contract like Rousseau's. Kant's support of the moral law assumes that mankind is essentially good and moral by nature, a concept which figures heavily in democratic theory (but Hegel criticizes Kant's philosophy as being overly abstracted and not applicable to reality). Also explored are Aristotle's episteme (objective knowledge), techne (technical knowledge), and phronesis (practical reason) in relation to democratic theory (p. 23, 24).

The what, who, how and where of political theory including the location of the democratic process, as well as Rousseau's concept of popular sovereignty, are discussed. "The normative theory requires that the maximum number of people be involved and that the procedure they use be as fair as possible" (p. 50). According to

J.F.Bohman: "more democracy ... is possible ... so long as citizens find the public sphere a discursive space for criticism, learning, and new forms of associations" (p. 54). R. Bernstein says: "If we don't strive to realize the conditions required for practical discourse then we will surely become less than fully human" (p. 54). And from K. Baynes: we need a "robust and multifaceted model of the public sphere in which individuals can deliberate about the collective terms and conditions of the common lives" (p. 54). Blaug concludes his introduction with: "If we forget what he (Habermas) has taught us we will achieve nothing, for the world is full of theories of deliberative democracy that, lacking normative sophistication, amount to little more than heart-warming remonstrances, fantasies of positivistic control, or mere semantic incantation." (p. 127).Concerning the actual functioning of the democratic fora, Blaug mentions that the application of democratic theory in reality "has always had a profound distrust of the people" (p. 133) as evidenced by the American Constitution.

Habermas states (p. 134):

"What we need is a hegemony of democratic values, and this requires a multiplication of democratic practices, institutionalizing them into ever more diverse social relations, so that a multiplicity of subject-positions can be formed through a democratic matrix. It is in this way — and not by trying to provide it with a rational foundation — that we will be able not only to defend democracy but also to deepen it ... a project of radical and plural democracy ... requires the existence of multiplicity, of plurality, and of conflict, and sees in them the raison d'etre of politics".

In "Democracy from the Participant's Perspective" (p. 136), a discussion ensues concerning a "breakout of democracy", which has definitive characteristics and its own life cycle. When this breakout occurs and as public interest increases, the people will, in Rousseau's words "fly to the assemblies". "With a breakout of democracy we have Satre's 'group in fusion', Pizzorno's 'mobilization' type of political participation, Mansbridge's 'fragile bubbles' of 'unitary democracy', Phillip's 'internal democracy', Moscovici's 'consensual' participation, Arendt's 'oasis in the desert' or 'elementary republics', Charter 77's 'parallel poleis', and the opening of a Habermasian 'public sphere'." (p. 138).

Blaug mentions the democratic decision making process as having five elements: 1. problem recognition 2. deliberation 3. decision making 4. implementation 5. evaluation (p. 141). L. Goodwyn (1981, p. 146) mentions that democratic institutions build slowly so, in their development, patience is required. And Blaug says: "While mistrust of the political consciousness of the populace has served to ground the need for elitism in democracy, participation itself is just as frequently appealed to as the supreme educator. If practiced regularly, perhaps at first on tasks appropriate to the level of learning, participants can make signicant gains in proficiency." (p. 146). K. Elder refers to the three levels of society as micro, meso, and macro (p. 149).

Concerning the democratic participatory process, Blaug states (p. 151):

When we begin to consider the a movement seriously challenging the power of the state, we reveal the extraordinary lack of knowledge we have accumulated over our history regarding what it actually means to rule ourselves. the flight into liberal democracy evinced by those countries who have recently joined the "democratic" club shows both the collective paucity of our understanding of such a process and also the dangers in imagining that one "revolutionary" push, one legitimating social contract, one constitutional founding, can relieve us of the need to preserve genuine democracy. Where we conceive of a social contract as an ongoing procedure requiring constant work and attention, so do we understand that deliberative capacities must be learned, practiced, preserved, and patiently extended.

Blaug also discusses the issue of emotions in the democratic process (p. 153) but mentions that, according to Rousseau, "once you have citizens, you have all you need" (p. 155). S. Behabib is quoted as saying: "the question is not whether discursive democracy can become the practice of complex societies but whether complex societies are still capable of democratic rule" (p. 156). I think that, with the advent of Internet technology, they are.

In "Democracy in America" (1848), Alexis de Tocqueville explores, in two volumes using a sweeping and panoramic view, the process of government in the United States and his view of its type of participatory government. His essays cover various aspects of American life and government including the sociology and psychology of the American people, discussions of local, state, and federal governments as well as an in depth analysis of the United States Constitution and discussions of the practical philosophy of democracy.

In "Why it can strictly be said that the people govern in the United States", he says (before the Internet, etc.):

In America the people appoint both those who make the laws and those who execute them; the people form the jury which punishes breaches of the law. The institutions are democratic not only in principle but also in all their developments; thus the people directly nominate their representatives and generally choose them annually so as to hold them more completely dependent. So direction really comes from the people, and though the form of government is representative, it is clear that the opinions, prejudices, interests, and even passions of the people an find no lasting obstacles preventing them from being manifest in the daily conduct of society.

In the United States, as in all countries where the people reign, the majority rules in the name of the people.

This majority is chiefly composed of peaceful citizens who by taste or interest sincerely desire the well-being of the country. They are surrounded by the constant agitation of parties seeking to draw them in and to enlist their support.

Steven Vago in "Strategies of Change" probes the three components of social change which are agents (leaders -- directors, advocates, backers, technicians, administrators, and organizers -- and supporters -- workers, donors, and sympathizers), targets (micro, meso, and macro), and methods (empirical-rational, normative-reeducative, and power-coercive). All of these components would be used to develop an interactive form of direct democracy following the principles of Peter Reason's Participatory Inquiry and Peter Park's Participatory Research, both of which are types of Participatory Action Research.

Some websites that explore the idea of direct democracy are:

http://lone-eagles.com/democracy.htm   (list of related links and sources)

http://egov.mit.gov.in/   (egovernment development in India)

http://www.developmentgateway.org/node/130619/?page_id=3647   (worldwide egovernment)

http://thomas.loc.gov/   (the proceedings of the U.S. Congress and egovernment development)

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de Tocqueville, Alexis (1848, 2000). Democracy in America. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.

Vago, Steven (1999). Strategies of Change (Chapter 9). Pearson Education, Inc.

"We of the United States are constitutionally and conscientiously democrats. We consider society as one of the natural wants with which man has been created; that he has been endowed with faculties and qualities to effect its satisfaction by concurrence of others having the same want; that when, by the exercise of these faculties, he has procured a state of society, it is one of his acquisitions which he has a right to regulate and control, jointly indeed with all those who have concurred in the procurement, whom he cannot exclude from its use or direction more than they him." —Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, 1816.

"We are a people capable of self-government, and worthy of it." —Thomas Jefferson to Isaac Weaver, Jr., 1807.

"No man has greater confidence than I have in the spirit of the people, to a rational extent. Whatever they can, they will."—Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 1814.

"To secure [our inherent and inalienable] rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." —Declaration of Independence as originally written by Thomas Jefferson, 1776.

My most earnest wish is to see the republican element of popular control pushed to the maximum of its practicable exercise. I shall then believe that our government may be pure and perpetual." —Thomas Jefferson to Isaac H. Tiffany, 1816.

"The will of the people... is the only legitimate foundation of any government, and to protect its free expression should be our first object." —Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Waring, 1801.

"The measures of the fair majority... ought always to be respected." —Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 1792.

"I subscribe to the principle, that the will of the majority honestly expressed should give law." —Thomas Jefferson: The Anas, 1793.

"To err is human — and to blame it on a computer is even more so." Orben's Current Comedy
"Silence is the virtue of fools" Francis Bacon
 "Conversation is the slowest form of human communication." Anonymous
"What is now proved was once only imagined." William Blake
"The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it." Alan Saporta
"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" Neil Armstrong
"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Confucius
"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Eleanor Roosevelt
 "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Franklin D. Roosevelt
 "Words divide us, actions unite us." Slogan of the Tupamaros
"Everything has been figured out, except how to live." Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)
"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." Thomas Watson (1874-1956), Chairman of
        IBM, 1943

Discussion about Democracy:

The ancient Greek word *demokratia* was ambiguous. It meant literally 'people-power'. But who were the people to whom the power belonged? Was it all the people - all duly qualified citizens? Or only some of the people - the 'masses'? The Greek word *demos* could mean either. There's a theory that the word *demokratia* was coined by democracy's enemies, members of the rich and aristocratic elite who did not like being outvoted by the common herd, their social and economic inferiors. If this theory is right, democracy must originally have meant something like 'mob rule' or 'dictatorship of the proletariat'

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/greeks/greekdemocracy_01.shtml

Democracy arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects; because men are equally free, they claim to be absolutely equal.
In a democracy the poor will have more power than the rich, because there are more of them, and the will of the majority is supreme.   Aristotle

Karl Marx said, "democracy is the road to socialism", a statement which could make some devotees of democracy bristle with offense. However, some people could view capitalism as a form of economic democracy where each consumer "votes" with his money by purchasing what he desires and capitalism also has a democratic or socialistic slant to it when a company is owned by shareholders or people owning shares of stock in the company and this is also the case with taxation as well as insurance which is shared by all who are insured.

John Hobbes, in his book Leviathan, viewed society as a leviathan or whale, a giant living organism with each part having a synergistic effect in contributing to the functioning of the whole organism. Using this analogy of a giant organism as society, the roles of the intelligentsia and the educational system would represent the brain, the police and military would be the immune system, atheletes could represent the muscles, artists would represent the eyes, musicians would be the ears, farmers would be suppliers of nutrients, chefs would be the sense of taste, chemists as the glands, factory workers as the digestive system, construction workers as growth mechanisms and hormones, protective agencies as the skin, and so on. Philosophers and theologians have long debated the existence of the soul: is that the part of the giant organism of society, the leviathan, that has been missing from its body?

By adding the Public Assembly would we be adding the needed, missing body component, the mind/soul, to the body politic?

Democracy was discussed by Socrates and written about by Plato in Republic, Aristotle in Politics, Machiavelli in The Prince, Locke in Essay Concerning Human Understanding and Two Treatises of Government, Montesquieu in The Spirit of Laws, Hobbes in Leviathan, Rousseau in The Social Contract, and Thomas Jefferson in his writings. Democracy was first used in Athens, Greece before 500 B.C., where each of the male citizens voted directly on all legislative issues, thereby being a true democracy. It was considered impractical to have a direct democracy before now, primarily because there was no technology to supply it. Now, with computer and Internet technology, there is.

"In unity there is strength" from Aesop's Fables, The Bundle of Sticks.

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http://www.abc.net.au/ola/citizen/interdemoc/republic.htm
http://www.veritasdigital.com/ad_online/participatory.html
http://www.cpsu.org.uk/downloads/Modernising%20Background.pdf
http://www.publicus.net/ebook/
http://www.mail-archive.com/do-wire@tc.umn.edu/msg00045.html
http://policy.womenspace.ca/activities/brainstorm/policy/
http://www.analysphere.com/21Oct00/democracy.htm
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