

A TIME OF GREAT CHOICES

Our country and the world are in a time of transition. We last saw change on this scale in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the first stage of the digital revolution converged with the creation of a global commonwealth. As another era begins, our generation must choose how to respond.

As in other transitions on this scale, legacy institutions are troubled or paralyzed. People still prefer democracy, but they wonder if it still works. They are anxious about the forces that AI will unleash. They question whether the country's foundations remain sound. They see the world changing and don't know how we should adapt.

Across America and throughout the free world, citizens ask: What is happening to the old order and what will replace it? What comes next?

This is a generational moment for an institution like Hoover. We are scholars. We are also citizens. We will respond as both.

THE AMERICAN EXAMPLE

For the last 250 years a republic founded in North America has been a laboratory of human progress. In all of human history there is no parallel for its example or the scale of its influence.

The ascendancy of the American republic was not, and is not, preordained. The path was often rocky. Many Americans thought, with reason, that their republic might not survive the challenge of the moment. Conceived, as Lincoln put it, "in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," our republic faced tests whether "that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure."

Once more we struggle to see the way forward. Instead of constructive policy ideas, we too often encounter the worst of politics -- recrimination and abuse, with little effort to find common ground.

In the past we met these tests. Each time, we found a way to renew the social contract among citizens and between citizens and their elective representatives. The Founders spoke of the "pursuit of happiness." That contract was never explicit but it was understood: We will govern in a way that will allow you to live a fulfilling and purposeful life and to pass that promise on to your children and generations beyond.

When the U.S. led a global alliance to victory in 1945, when we led the free world to replace the Cold War with a global commonwealth, we were a more confident country. It was an

earned confidence. A more confident country could act on the belief that we would be prosperous and secure if the world was too.

We stood for opportunity at home and opportunity abroad. We offered a model of progress that anyone could share. Not merely security. Opportunity.

We are losing the narrative on opportunity, partly to others, partly to our own failures.

We also stood for independence. Often others joined with us, out of choice. Voluntary partnerships don't weaken our sovereignty. They protect it. They keep our adversaries from telling us what we must do. Cooperation makes us more independent, not less.

The social contract of our republic, our confidence, our belief in opportunity, and our independence: all these are again being tested. Each side of the political spectrum can reflect on what they have contributed to the damage.

Sensing the void of constructive ideas, citizens swing between poles of populist resentment and institutions erode. Guardrails of civility crumple.

THE HOOVER INITIATIVE TO ENVISION AN ECONOMIC AND SECURITY COMMONS

The Hoover Institution had an unusual founder and founding moment. Our founder was a mining engineer who had worked in America and around the world. He was passionately dedicated to American individualism and free enterprise. A hundred years ago, seeing a world torn by war and revolution, he orchestrated help for millions of starving people in shattered societies. As his efforts astonished a grateful world, he founded an Institution that would pursue his ideals. It would contrast the records of violence and tyranny with a dedication to the future of free peoples who could work together to solve common problems.

Inspired by such ideals, the contemporary statesman, George Shultz, working at Hoover, used to speak of his hope to sustain an economic and security "commons." In that spirit we have launched a Hoover Initiative to envision an Economic and Security Commons. Facing another pivot of world history, we renew that bedrock commitment to free peoples working together.

We cannot turn the clock back. We must be open to deep or fundamental changes, if we think we can make a practical case.

We will not impose a party line. Besides, the parties themselves don't yet know what their new lines will be. Across the political spectrum citizens are searching for agendas and answers.

OUR GOALS

In this time of transition we should put forward and debate ideas that can:

- Show that democracy still works
- Create opportunity in the digital age
- Sustain foundations of the American Dream
- Adapt American power for a different world
- Deal with the ideas of friends and rivals

Under each of these five goals, we have organized teams of experts on nearly thirty topics. Many are from Hoover and Stanford, but we have already been looking beyond. More about these teams can be found at: www.hoover.org/economic-and-security-commons.

The teams are already at work. Each will have its own approach to how it will pull together the best scholarship and expertise.

They all must look forward. They have to help spot the choices coming at us and help chart a course. And they should think about the 'how,' not just the 'should.'

All the teams will present their initial thinking at a plenary conference the Institution will hold from September 22-25, 2026.

As the Initiative progresses, we will reflect on the emerging themes and the best ways to convey these ideas. We are planning to utilize the Freedom Frequency Substack channel to spotlight the "Commons" work.

A second large conference is planned for May 2027. Then we hope to be ready to share our refined ideas more widely, in time to influence America's and the world's conversations about 'what comes next.'

A 'private sector group' will reach out to some of the most capable business executives that are most in touch with production and business operations across America and beyond.

A 'political cabinet' will reach out to former and current political figures who can vet and react to emerging policy ideas and political themes.

THE NEXT 250 YEARS

America will soon celebrate 250 years of independence. The experiment launched in 1776 looked to have little chance of success. We sought freedom from the mightiest power on earth.

The idea that such a far-flung set of ex-colonies could self-govern through a four-page Constitution would come a little over a decade later. That too must have seemed unlikely to succeed. It was tested by a civil war that ended slavery, and then still more waves of violent upheaval that finished a second reconstruction of the union. And yet here we are, still standing as the best testament to the power of freedom that human history has ever seen.

The challenges of this era are solvable, and we must start by solving them at home. Not "America First." Rather: "First, America" Only then can America play its crucial role in uniting free nations across the world.

In 1953, in his first inaugural address, Dwight Eisenhower said: "For this truth must be clear before us: whatever America hopes to bring to pass in the world must first come to pass in the heart of America." Americans then were more confident about themselves. But we can forget how dangerous those times were. Those same Americans were anxious about whether the world would even have a future.

In 1963, John F. Kennedy reminded us: "Our problems are manmade--therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings." That same truth holds today.

This may be a time of doubts and social fractures. Yet it is also a time when, again, our inventiveness and enterprise opens possibilities that past generations could scarcely have imagined. Still dedicated to the potential of human freedom, the Hoover Institution will step up to this generation's problems "of human destiny."

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