

TOM PAINE FOR PRESIDENT
CAMPAIGN LAUNCH ANNOUNCEMENT
JULY 3, 2024:

Good Evening Citizens of Peoria... before I get started, I'd like to take a moment to thank William Butler and the Contemporary Art Center for graciously hosting this event. I'd also like to thank the staff at Jim Barrack's Catering for their great food and the excellent service. And thank you all for attending what I hope to be the genesis of a movement in this country toward unity, compromise and balance.

Two hundred and forty-eight years ago today our Founding Fathers began debating and editing a document that would literally change the course of human history. The Declaration of Independence was like no other document ever written, a fact that remains true to this day. A document both profound and simple. Thomas Jefferson, himself, later stated that he wasn't attempting to state things that had never been said before, but rather he tried to capture "the common sense of the subject in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent."

A group of fledgling colonies were bravely declaring that they no longer wished to be beholden to Great Britain - arguably the most powerful nation on earth, with an empire the breadth of the globe. A declaration so powerful that news of its existence reached Europe long before it was formally presented to King George later that year.

The United States of America's journey to independence and freedom had officially begun. And if one were to cull the Declaration down to a paragraph that captured the essence of that journey, it would be this:

And We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

And I think all of Us can agree that there is but one phrase that not only encapsulates the spirit of what America aspired to become in it's infancy, but to this day, serves as the unofficial American motto: Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. A line that set a country free from tyranny.

It took defeating the world's super power of the time, but eleven years after the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution was ratified and United States of America was officially a country with its own form government.

A government of the people, by the people, for the people.

So, what happened?

Almost 250 years later, we're as divided as We've been since the Civil War. And it's my belief America is engulfed in a Civil War as We speak, and have been for quite some time. Only instead of North and South We have Red and Blue. And rather than bullets on the battlefield, it's vitriolic "debate" endlessly regurgitated across every form of media possible.

It would be difficult to understate the myriad of problems America has right now... among them, a select few that seem to dominate the political landscape and the 24-hour news cycle; and those that are, inexcusably, being neglected and or outright ignored. Yet... none of those more demoralizing than how divided We've become as a nation.

It saddens me that We've become a country that is united only in name; and that We've come to embrace solely those issues which divide Us the most. We've been conditioned to disregard opposing views to the point We no longer respect the rights of others to speak their minds.

Gone are the days of healthy political debates, moderation and compromise. We loathe everything about those across the political aisle for no other reason than being on the other side of the aisle. As a nation, We've allowed ourselves to drift so far to the right or left politically, that We've begun to abandon logic and common sense.

Any of Us who spend any time watching the news or scanning social media are subjected to Democrats and Republicans battling back and forth, arguing, ad nauseum, about what the greatest existential crises facing America are, preaching that if the other party is in power, it will mean the demise of Democracy and Our country as we know. It's getting to the point of bordering on evangelical.

As I see it, the biggest crisis facing America today is our two-party system form of government. America is in the shape She's in for one reason, and one reason only. Nearly 175 years of rule under a deceptively strict political duopoly. The last U.S. President that wasn't a Democrat or Republican was Millard Fillmore... our 13th President who served from 1850-1853. That means that only a Democrat or a Republican has been in the White House since before the Civil War. And that is – by no means – any accident.

Shameful as it is genius, state leaders in both parties began adopting a “winner take all” approach when it came to electoral votes in each state. No longer was it as the framers had intended it, and as it should be in a Representative Republic. As early as 1824, most states had adopted a “winner take all” method of counting electoral votes. Two hundred years ago...

As I see it, now only Maine and Nebraska are currently counting their electoral votes as the framers had intended. Because once one removes “winner take all”, it means several candidates could run for President and have a realistic opportunity to receive electoral votes. More candidates means more choice. And having a choice is the essence of freedom. Ergo, the more choice We have, the freer We are as American citizens. And that's how We force our potential Presidents to truly earn those 270 electoral votes.

Even Teddy Roosevelt, President worthy of Mount Rushmore, only American in history to win both the Medal of Honor and the Nobel Peace Prize; creator of the National Park System... not even Teddy was unable to crack the winner-take-all gauntlet when he ran for President as a member of the Bull Moose Party. Not even giving a speech with a bullet in his chest before going to the hospital could propel him past inevitable failure.

That's how powerful America's political duopoly really is, and likely always will be – unless the American people do something about it.

Which then begs the question, are We really better off than We were 171 years ago?

Let it be known to the leadership of the Democratic and Republican parties, who both have a long history of governing this country with a “party first” mentality, while usurping the needs of the People. Having suffered under the establishment of what could best be described as a two-party tyranny, We, Centrists, would like share with the entire country our facts:

You have deliberately manipulated the electoral system as envisioned by our Founding Fathers, with the sole objective of guaranteeing only one opposing candidate running for President.

You've expanded the Federal Government far too much, severely infringing upon state, local and individual rights.

You have recklessly racked up \$33 trillion in debt, \$30 trillion of it in the last 44 years, over \$16 trillion in the last decade and a half alone.

You have created an astronomical trade deficit with China, which stood at \$6 billion in 1985 and has since skyrocketed to numbers like \$382 billion in 2022.

You have all but destroyed the middle class, to the point that fewer and fewer Americans can even afford the long-standing American dream of owning their own house.

You have taken a national education system that once ranked among the best in the world to one where an alarming number of students all over the country graduate high school at lower grade-skill levels in every subject, sometimes not even being able to read.

You have fostered a health care environment which ranks 54th in the world in infant mortality rate, where an average of 250,000 people are dying every year due to hospital error, and another 270,000 from to sepsis.

Your treatment of veterans in need of health care, housing and employment is abominable.

You've allowed just four companies – two of which are foreign owned - to gain control of the entire markets of Americas corn, soybean and cotton seeds. (*Bayer via Monsanto & Corteva*)

You've been evaporating the American production economy, turning Us into a country that consumes far more than we produce, while shipping jobs overseas.

You've allowed for the formation of far too many corporate conglomerates that are considered “too big to fail” and stood by while locally owned businesses across America have been decimated.

You have created a politically divisive climate and essentially eliminated the moderate voice from government.

And perhaps the most egregious of offenses, is that you have intentionally divided the American people.

What's the solution?

Step one... create an environment outside the current political machine. Because it's abundantly clear that – now more than at any point in American history – unity there is no longer a viable option among the elected leaders of our two national parties.

Case in point: The Democratic and Republican parties have clearly usurped their intended levels of power over the American people, as well as anyone who dare offer to lead the American people outside the two dominant parties.

Therefore, I have decided to establish the **American Centrist Party** to give independents, undecideds and moderates among all other parties their long-overdue voice at every level of this great nation's government.

The Four Tenants of our party are: The Constitution, Common Sense, Community and Compromise.

Words that speak for themselves, so rather than describing what's obvious, I'll simply state them again: The Constitution, Common Sense, Community and Compromise. Governing within these principals provide Centrist leaders – at all levels of government - a clear mandate as to how they will lead their constituents.

Step two... create a vision of the United States focused on maximizing our country's full potential; so that We achieve and maintain peace and prosperity among our fellow citizens; and remaining focused on defending America from our enemies, while enriching relationships with other countries that wish to reciprocate.

My vision, and now my mission is to create a plan to **Revitalize A Sustainable America**.

An America with sustainable resources – like our air, water, and food. Sustainable education from pre-school to high school and beyond. Sustainable employment across the American work sector. And Sustainable safety – so law abiding citizens can enjoy themselves in public without fear of being a random victims of violence.

And most importantly ... sustainable unity among the American People. Because when We're unified, We're at our best. And problems get solved.

Step three... develop a platform based on Our vision, and work to unify as many Americans as possible behind the vision. Also, be open to then altering that platform, once We listen the People and hear what they have to say.

The is the Platform We'll Begin With...

First, Massive Congressional Campaign Reform - - including, but not limited to, Term Limits, No Stock Trading While In Office, and Common Sense Redistricting and Abolishing Lifetime Pensions

Next... Whatever It Takes to Balance the Budget & Rebuild the Middle Class

Next... Trim, Trim, Trim the Federal Government, including but limited to, Reduce Cabinet to Nine Members, beginning with Abolishing the Dept. of Education, Simplify the Tax Codes and Cut the IRS staff in half

Next... Shift the Power Back to the States – because when the states have more power, the People have more power.

And finally... Veterans First. As a Centrist, I firmly believe that, first and foremost, We are American citizens, and breaking Us down into more and more political factions only serves to segregate us. However, when it comes to the men and women who serve our country, often giving their lives, I make an exception. Each and every Veteran should have a place to call home, food to eat, and free health care for the rest of their lives. And if they are having trouble maintaining any or all of those on their own, then the Veterans Administration has a way to help. Whatever It Takes.

Step four... Launch the Campaign. Living in a Representative Republic, it's the duty of every elected leader to represent their constituency to the best of their abilities, and what better way for a candidate to represent the People than to embed themselves among the People and listen to what they all have to say.

In the quest for Centrism, everyone's voice is not only welcomed, it's essential. Voices from the most liberal to the most conservative and everywhere in between. And the more people a candidate can have conversations with the better.

Step five... Will It Play in Peoria? If We're going to rebuild America, what better place to begin than America's very own microcosm – a city proven to have been the ideal testing

ground for just about anything since the days of vaudeville. I've decided to spend the next several weeks here in Peoria in an effort to get to know as many of you and as much of this city as possible.

I'm here to listen and I'm here to learn. This is a campaign of discovery, not one of rallies repeatedly espousing my beliefs and the Centrist platform. I want to hear directly from the people of Peoria about what you feel is working, and what needs improvement.

And while no city is perfect, and each presents its own unique set of challenges, I believe that the problems facing Peoria are the same problems facing many cities across America are facing as well. Therefore, it's the ideal city to explore new ideas and implement new solutions. Peoria could very well become the prototype for a sustainable community and a sustainable America.

Americans deserve better leaders, plain and simple. We deserve not being subjected to choosing between the 'lesser of two evils'. We deserve multiple Presidential candidates, each and every one with the opportunity to win electoral votes in any state.

Here and now is where it begins. At gatherings like this. Concerned citizens getting together to explore new ideas to help improve their community, and the lives of their fellow citizens.

Every single day conservative, liberal and moderate Americans put aside their political animosities while participating in any number of American pastimes. We choose to set aside our contempt for those who disagree with us when we're at the ballgame, or the movies, or school plays, or say, an art gallery.

If that's the case, it stands to reason the same could be accomplished in a political forum, especially if everyone stands to benefit from what's accomplished after setting aside our differences.

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I believe in the "wisdom of the crowd", which is why I'd much rather hear from the people of Peoria than I would a panel of experts. Wisdom of the crowd is a reminder that every voice counts just as every vote counts.

Everyone in this room has been in a wide variety of environments experiencing countless feelings from one end of the emotional spectrum to the other. And I think We can all agree that life is so much better when everyone gets along. Am I right? Where We embrace a community rooted in merit and mutual respect.

That's what America is... a community of communities. Our country was created as a community of states. Our states are communities of cities and towns. Our cities and towns are communities of neighborhoods, and our neighborhoods, communities of families.

It's important for Us all to understand that mutual respect among members of the community does not mean We all agree. In point of fact, living peacefully among those who disagree is the very cornerstone of what freedom is.

And I firmly believe that the true power within our "communities of communities" should be from the bottom up. In other words, We, the People have the greatest power in how We are governed. Our cities are next in line, followed by the states. And our federal government has the least amount of power in governing how We live our lives. -

Which makes perfect sense in a sustainable America. Because communities are the foundation, the very bedrock, of this country, and therefore communities should have the greatest amount of power in how communities are governed.

First, when We say We need to fix America, We need to stop focusing on how to fix America as whole with the same limited set of ideas. We need to fix each and every community using 1000's of ideas specific to the needs of each community.

Second, We need leaders.

Common sense would tell Us that somewhere among We, 350,000,000 Americans, there exists a percentage of the population who are willing, able and ready to serve their country as elected leaders. True citizen-patriots who care more about representing their constituents and solving the problems that plague everyday Americans, than they do about power and lifetime pensions.

And I don't say that lightly. It's supposed to be hard. Some say power corrupts, but I believe that power actually exposes people for who they really are... down to their soul. So I can understand the temptation to take advantage of one's power in life, especially if it's something one has never experienced it before.

Which is why it takes exceptional human beings to be great leaders. Something that American politics has been in dire shortage of for far too long.

Where are all the great leaders?

Say, for sake of argument, We say narrow it down to 1% of 1% of the population considered to have exceptional leadership skills and a desire to run for office. That's still a pool of 35,000 people to draw from.

President, Vice President, Senate, The House of Reps, The Supreme Court, the Cabinet and the Joint Chiefs of Staff... say 600 people total, when it comes to the most powerful positions in our government.

How can there not be 600 among 35,000, let alone 350,000,000? How is that even possible?

Us. It's our fault. Yes, We can blame everything that's wrong with America on Democrats and Republicans, because no else has been in power since before our grandparents' grandparents were born. But... we're the ones who keep voting them into office. Time after time after time after time.

Why? And I ask that only semi-rhetorically. Because I truly can't fathom why We vote for the very same candidates and expect anything to ever change. Some would call that kind of behavior insane.

Consider this... approval ratings for Congress, overall are usually in the teens or twenties, and candidates more or less live in the 40% and 60% approval ratings range. And yet, the incumbency rate for Congressional candidates is around 90%, and rarely has ever been lower than 70% in any election cycle.

What is wrong with us?

Nothing, really. Other than we're caught in the divide, forced into cult-like devotion to one major political party or the other. Because in the two-party system, division is what makes voters more predictable, which is good for the parties despite being bad for the voters.

Because the only way to maintain and expand the divide is to focus solely on those issues that divide Americans the most, while dismissing those that unite Us.

We've been conditioned to dismiss and disrespect those We disagree with. We live in a world of judgement rather than assessment.

That's why this campaign is about far more than just running for President. It's a call to action. A call to action for centrist-minded, moderate millionaires & billionaires, potential leaders and citizens such as yourselves to join the movement towards unity, compromise and balance. In other words, the movement to the creation of the Centrist Party.

Here and now is where it begins. It's time to Revitalize A Sustainable America.

I have a vision. You have the ideas. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

And tomorrow, when I'm watching the fireworks, I'm going to give thanks to our founding Fathers and all those who've sacrificed so that We can have a day to celebrate independence. And not simply independence from the British two and half centuries ago. Independence that many of Us seem to be taking for granted - especially when you consider the insufferable conditions and lack of personal freedoms that billions of people across the planet are forced to live with.

My name is Tom Paine and I'm running for President of the United States. Thank you for time. Good night.