

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

A concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens.

The very nature of government implies group or “collective” organization to serve common needs. As Rep. Barney Frank said: “Government is simply the name we give to the things we choose to do together.” Under the idea of democratic government, we create a governing structure that concurrently serves the needs of the group while respecting the rights of the individual.

As is the case with any activity in society, the pursuit of the personal objective and the achievement of the common end requires an exchange of the absolute objective of each for a balanced realization of both: personal rights are to be honored to the point where they do not endanger the welfare of the group and the interest of the group is advanced to the level where it does not harm the individual.

The same is true for economic systems. The “capitalist system” (free enterprise and free markets) has proven to be the best method for producing the goods and services required by society. However, without government oversight and regulation, the “pure capitalist” approach eventually implodes, usually leaving behind the wreckage of financial collapse and human exploitation. A “socialist” economic system (means of production and distribution owned by a group or government), while favoring economic justice for each member of the group, often devolves into a mechanism of autocracy, and participants are robbed of both the dream and the power they were promised.

During modern times in the western world the notion of “Social Democracy” has emerged, most notably in Scandinavia, where its countries have achieved for citizens what is recognized as the highest standard of living among advanced nations. These Nordic nations, with their low inequality, free politics and strong rule of law, represent success stories. They credit this success to a mindset that favors a “group” or “community” solution to pressing human needs. They embrace the notion that what serves the common good also serves the better interest of the individual.

The Scandinavian lifestyle is characterized by high incomes, a strong middle class, universal health care, state-supported public and higher education, and high psychological wellbeing. Much credit for the later component is given to the reduction in personal stress made possible affirmative governmental support for public health and education, thereby allowing more discretionary time for building personal relationships.

Social democracy is defined as: a concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens (i.e., healthcare, education, etc.). It is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for

a good life. Social democracy may be viewed as a distinctive combination of democracy, welfare and capitalism.

It is important to note that social democracy is not “socialism” as negatively connoted by those whose central objective is often focused on individualism and the lowering of taxes, especially for the wealthy and corporations. Again, economic socialism is defined as “the ownership of the means of production and distribution by a group or a government” and such ownership is not party to a discussion of social democracy.

The economist Joseph Stiglitz uses the name: ““progressive capitalism,” to describe the agenda of curbing the excesses of markets; restoring a balance among markets, government and civil society; and ensuring that all Americans can attain a middle-class life. The term emphasizes that markets with private enterprise are at the core of any successful economy, but it also recognizes that unfettered markets are not efficient, stable or fair. . . This new breed of American democratic socialists — or call them what you will — is simply advocating a model that embraces government’s important role in social protection and inclusion, environmental protection, and public investment in infrastructure, technology and education.”

Social democratic programs do come at a cost and we pay taxes to sustain them. In return we receive services, and we commonly refer to them as “public services.” Most Americans are comfortable with paying for services they receive. However, some may believe by implication that a governmental program, rather than a free enterprise solution, is inherently unproductive, even evil. For sure any program, public or private, that becomes oppressive or exploitive is indeed “evil.” However, by its nature democracy has a self-policing advantage – the requirement for public transparency. And let us not overlook the alternatives: the tyranny of autocracy or the chaos of anarchy. These lead to the very definition of evil.

Let us remember the words of former Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: “I like to pay taxes. With them, I buy civilization.”

Social democracy is about mobilizing the resources of both the public and private sectors, honoring the contribution of each, and achieving outcomes essential for living in a civilized society. In essence, social democracy is the unique marrying of the public and private sectors for the purpose of achieving a desired outcome – one beneficial to both. This approach may be best described as “public/private joint venturing.” After all, the true measure of our nation’s success is the well-being of our population.

Americans love their vast array of public services, regardless of whether we refer to them simply as “government programs” or from the vantage of political theory as “social democratic/democratic socialist” services. Implemented over generations, these address the everyday needs of living in a “civil” society, including the provision of law and order. Over time they have evolved into more sophisticated systems and programs that improve community life and elevate humankind. These are programs consonant with the ideals of democracy - favoring equal access and opportunity – and with the goal of creating a more just and productive society.

The Programs and Services of American Social Democracy:

Adjudication (settling civil law cases)

Civil Courts – remedy for non-criminal legal action.

Criminal Law – prosecution of those responsible for the harm and endangerment of others.

Legal Representation – assurance for and provision of when needed.

Business Development

Small Business Administration (SBA) - support for entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Government Contracts – resource for business and employment opportunity.

Economic Development Agencies – promotes and competes for new and expanding businesses.

Tourism Agencies – promotes travel and business development to special areas.

Communications (ensuring stability and integrity of our airwaves)

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) - federal agency that regulates the radio, television, and phone industries.

Consumer Protection

Federal Trade Commission (FTC) - enforces antitrust law and promotes consumer protection.

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) - promotes consumer product safety standards.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) - provides consumer protection in the financial sector.

State Trade and Professional Licensing Agencies – sets standards, tests, and screens applicants for trade and professional employment.

Currency (universal exchange of monetary value)

U.S. Treasury Notes – stable currency supported through the Federal Reserve System.

Disaster Relief

National Guard - emergency evacuation, protection and restoration agency.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - disaster assistance and relief management

Army Corps of Engineers – rebuilding of breached levees.

U.S. Coast Guard – coastal area protection and rescue.

Disease Protection and Emergency Assistance

Health Department – disease reporting, testing and control, emergency preparedness and response, education, immunization.

Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) - controls the introduction and spread of infectious disease, promotes environmental health and injury prevention.

Poison Control Center – 24-hour response for poison information and toxicology consultation, education.

Economic Rescue

Financial Bailout – federal rescue of failing industry, corporations and jobs.

Employment Assistance and Benefits

Job Training – governmental programs to gain or improve job skills

Job Services – employment centers that post and recruit for available jobs.

Unemployment Insurance payments – temporary financial assistance to unemployed workers.

Minimum Wage – minimum legal wage level for entry-level workers.

Sick Leave – legal unpaid leave from work for employees to address their health needs.

Employment Opportunity

State and Local Jobs – secure employment for all skill levels with benefits.

Federal Jobs – array of civil service and military jobs with steady pay and benefits.

U.S. Armed Forces – secure employment, benefits, job training and retirement benefits.

Contract Employment – wide variety of well-paying jobs with government contractors.

Equal Opportunity Employment - fair access to employment without discrimination.

Electricity (Federally supplied or supported electrical energy)

Hydro Electricity – reduced rate power provided from federal hydroelectric projects run by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation distributed to publicly-owned power systems (including the Tennessee Valley Authority).

Private Power – regulated power provided by privately-owned power systems.

Rural Electrification – low interest federal loans for installation of electrical distribution systems in isolated rural areas.

Energy and Mineral Development

Mineral Leases – access to federal lands for removal of minerals and precious metals.

Oil and Gas Leases – access to federal lands from removal of oil and natural gas.

Oil and Gas Production Incentives – drilling and tax incentives to encourage development of publicly-owned reserves.

Environmental Protection (maintenance of environmental quality, removal of toxic substances)

Clean Air - enforcement of air quality standards for vehicle, business and industry applications.

Clean Water - enforcement of water quality standards for culinary, agricultural, industrial and natural waterways.

Wetlands Protection – preservation of the “renewal” value of natural wetlands.

Hazardous Waste, Poison, Toxins Control – regulation of the use, storage and removal of poisons, chemicals and toxic waste.

Farming Assistance

Agricultural Subsidies – incentives paid to agribusiness and farmers to manage the supply of agricultural commodities (U.S. Department of Agriculture).

Irrigation Water – collect, impound and deliver water for agricultural use.

Financial Regulation

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) - insures bank depositors.

National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) - insures credit union depositors.

Food and Drug Safety

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) - federal agency that protects the public health by ensuring the quality of food and medicines

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) - inspection of meat and produce.

Department of Health – inspects and sets sanitation standards for restaurant and food vendors.

Health Insurance

Medicare – national healthcare insurance for those 65 and over.

Obamacare – expanded health insurance coverage utilizing state insurance company exchanges.

Housing Assistance

Public Housing Assistance – HUD housing assistance for low income, elderly and disabled.

FHA Mortgage Guaranty – HUD backed lender guaranty for low-down payment home loans.

VA Mortgage Guaranty – HUD backed lender guaranty for no-down payment home loans for veterans.

Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity – equal access to housing of choice.

Incarceration Facilities

City and County Jails – immediate holding facilities for offenders.

State and Federal Penitentiaries – place for imprisonment, punishment and reform of serious offenders.

Immigration Service

U.S. Citizen and Immigration Service – processes immigration and naturalization applicants.

U.S. Border Patrol – enforces customs regulation and border protection.

International Assistance

U.S. Dept. of State – rescue and evacuation where trouble strikes abroad.

U.S. Embassy – assistance with personal and business matters on foreign soil.

U.S. Dept. Of State – passport issuance for travel abroad.

Libraries, Museums, History and Zoos

Public Libraries – resource for centralizing information, research, reading and meeting place.

National Archives – repository of early documents and artifacts.

Museums – public collections of artistic, historical, scientific value, including the Smithsonian and national museums

Landmarks – monuments to historical places and events.

Presidential Libraries – official collections from each presidential administration.

Zoos – public exhibitions of wild animals.

Mail Handling

U.S. Postal Service – transmit letters and materials via mail, originated by U.S. Government

Medical Services Assistance (support for medical providers)

Health Care Provider Support – financial assistance for health care providers and hospitals

participating in the CHIP and Medicaid programs.

Medicare Part A Support - assistance for hospitals and nursing homes.

Medicare Part C Support – assistance for Medicare Advantage plans (HMO's and PPO's).

Medicare Part D Support – assistance for prescription and Medicare Advantage drug plan sponsors.

Military Benefits (supplemental support for those in military service)

Commissary Services – reduced priced food and merchandise for active military.

Medical Care – full medical coverage for active military and their families.

Veteran Benefits – health care services for retired military.

National Security (protect U.S. from foreign invasion)

U.S. Armed Forces – protection of life and property by Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard.

National Guard - reserve component of the armed forces.

U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security – domestic protection from terrorist activity.

Ownership and Property Protection

U.S. Copyright Office - copyright and patent protection.

County Recorder – real property registration.

Motor Vehicle Office – vehicle and boat registration.

Plant and Wildlife Protection

Fish – hatcheries to sustain and supply fish for recreationists.

Endangered Species – special protections for endangered plants and animals

Political Representation

Elected Officials – represent your interests in our deliberative public processes.

Public Assistance

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) - financial assistance for aged, blind and disabled.

Medicaid – affordable health care for lower income individuals and families, and nursing home and personal care for some Medicare recipients.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – supplemental food assistance (food stamps).

National School Lunch Program – provisions of no or low-cost student school lunches.

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Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) - supplemental food and nutrition education for pregnant and breast-feeding women, and infants.

Energy Assistance – financial assistance for the cost of home heating fuels and electricity.

Public Education/Higher Education (publicly-supported certified education)

Elementary, Middle and High Schools - K-12 universal public education.

Technical/Trade Colleges - job skills training/certification.

State Colleges and Universities - higher education, professional degrees.

Student Loans – availability and regulation of student financial aid.

Grants – governmental educational subsidies (i.e., Federal Pell Grant).

Public Entertainment

Sporting Venues – subsidized stadiums and other venues.

Performing Arts – subsidized performance centers and arenas (i.e., Kennedy Center)

Public Facilities

Public Restrooms - maintained personal relief facilities.

Public Drinking Fountains – convenient water sources.

Public Parks and Playgrounds – play areas for children.

Recreation Courts - basketball, tennis, handball, pickleball facilities.

Athletic Fields – marked areas for field sports like baseball, soccer, football, lacrosse.

Recreation Centers – multiple activity family recreation facilities.

Swimming Pools – Indoor and outdoor swimming facilities.

Homeless Centers – Temporary housing facilities.

Soup Kitchens – food services for the homeless.

Public Beaches - maintained ocean, lake and river beach areas.

Public Lands

National Parks – scenic wonders held in public trust for everyone to enjoy.

National Monuments – historic and/or scenic gems recognized for their specific public value.

National Forests – vast public areas of forest available for recreation, hunting, and resource use.

BLM Lands – vast public areas available for recreation, hunting, grazing, and resource development.

Public Safety (protect self, family and neighbors from bodily harm, property loss)

State Police – statewide police protection and civil law enforcement.

County Sheriff – county-wide protection and civil law enforcement.

Local Police - town or municipal law enforcement.

FBI – U.S. domestic intelligence and security services.

SWAT Police – specialized police protection.

Fire Department – town, municipal or country fire protection agency.

Public Transportation

Public Carriers - public bus, van, rail, ferry and boat transportation.

Interstate Highway System - network of controlled-access national highways.

State, county and local roads - state and locally maintained open roadways, some with bridges.

Safe Travel – government regulated and policed highway safety.

Air Traffic Control – flight safety regulation and real-time monitoring of air traffic.

Transportation Security Administration (TSA) - provides security for the traveling public.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) - tests vehicles and sets safety standards to reduce crashes.

Public Works (township or municipal maintained services)

Garbage Collection – routine removal of household garbage and yard debris.

Snow Removal – clearing and sanding of roads and walkways.

Street Cleanup – removal of dirt and road debris.

Sidewalks – construct and maintain walkways through residential, commercial and public spaces.

Curb and Gutter – collect and channel surface runoff.

Culinary Water – develop, maintain and deliver drinking water.

Retirement and Disability Income

Social Security - social insurance program consisting of retirement, disability, and survivor benefits.

Scientific Research

Medicine – cures discovered through federally-funded research.

Consumer Products/Services – scientifically-advanced products and services discovered under federally-funded research, notably NASA research.

Weather Reporting – weather monitoring and forecasting provided by the National Weather Service, including emergency condition alerts.

Geological Research – identification of U.S. natural resources and its hazards.

U.S. Military - advanced surveillance systems and products, and firearm features.

Social Services

Adoption Services – facilitate and regulate child adoption.

Aging Services – nursing, home care and meals on wheels.

Drug Abuse – prevention and rehabilitation.

Child Abuse – child protection and foster care.

Disabilities – support, training and care for those with physical and mental disability.

Domestic Violence – support and prevention.

Workplace and Construction Safety

Building Codes – improves safety and increases value of private homes and buildings.

Occupational Safety – inspections and standards for safe working conditions.

Elevator Safety – safety inspection of elevators and escalators used by the public.

Voting (legally casting your vote in our democracy)

Voting System – government supported means for citizen voting and tallying of results.

Socialism is a scare word they've hurled at every advance the people have made. Socialism is what they call public power, social security, deposit insurance, and independent labor organizations.

Socialism is their name for anything that helps all people.

- Harry S. Truman, 1952