

THE COUNTRY IS DIVIDED ALMOST EVENLY DOWN THE MIDDLE

Gary Hart



GARY HART — an American politician, co-chairman of the US-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission (bipartisan project), a former Senator from Colorado (1975–1987), and a candidate in the U.S. presidential elections of 1984 and 1988. Hart currently works as a professor of political science at the University of Colorado at Denver.

He is also a chairman for the Council for a Livable World, a non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to reducing the danger of nuclear weapons and increasing national environmental security.

■ *In previous centuries, the progressive agenda was concerned primarily with a struggle for human rights. What characterizes the progressive agenda in the 21st century?*

I think what you are referring to as the progressive agenda roughly began with Franklin Roosevelt's election in 1932 and continued through to Johnson's period of the 'great society.' **The era basically ended with two events: America's**

involvement in Vietnam, and the first OPEC oil embargo, both of which caused the American economy to contract and led to the beginning of a resistance among ordinary taxpayers and middle-income Americans to pay for and support social programs.

The progressive agenda was also abandoned due to a third factor: globalization. We began to experience a serious loss of employment in the manufacturing sector because of foreign competition, particularly in the steel and auto sectors, but in other areas as well: television sets, clothes, and so forth. These three things together helped end the progressive era that lasted roughly from 1932 to 1974. There was not necessarily an absolute end but a great decrease in the willingness of ordinary Americans, average Americans, to pay the costs of the social safety net and government programs. **Since then, with the exception of one Carter term and two Clinton terms, we have been living in an era of conservatism**, which I wouldn't necessarily call reactionary, to use your word, but would simply say is opposed to higher federal tax and so forth. This is where America finds itself right now.

Now in the Obama period, when we might have returned to repairing and rebuilding social safety net programs, we have unfortunately been struck by a very bad economic recession that has prevented any resumption of a progressive government, with the one exception of the new health-care legislation.

Today there is great struggle. The government and the country are almost divided evenly down the middle, and it's not a good division, it's a bad division, because the friction and the tension between the Democratic party and the Republican party, or, to use your phrases, progressives and conservatives, is growing

more bitter and angry and it's very unhealthy for a country.

■ *Do you think the popularity of the Tea Party movement means that in the United States there's a new reactionary wave coming against the overblown system of social welfare, against the excesses of human rights?*

There has always been a minority in the United States politically (maybe 10 to 20 percent) who have been opposed to actions by the national government in the domestic arena. Quite often these are by and large very conservative people who support foreign interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq but consistently resist any increase in the size and cost of government here at home and in the arena of social programs. **They have been activated and expanded somewhat in the last two or three years in the form of the Tea Party to resist any expansion of government**, and that's primarily because of what I have said earlier: the increase of taxation and the increase of regulation. And I think there's another factor as well, that is the rise of conservative media, starting with the Fox network and Murdoch network. They have their own media outlets and reinforcements, so they can hear commentators who encourage this resistance on a 24 hour basis over the radio, on television, in print media, and so it strengthens and hardens their position. Quite frankly, their popularity has also been helped by the downturn in the economy.

If our economy was doing well, if we had only 4 or 5 percent unemployment, if people had solid incomes and hope for the future, then the Tea Party would be much much smaller. It all depends on how the middle-income people are doing; if they have jobs and incomes they become more generous with the poor and the elderly.

2011

The Modern State in the Age of Social Diversity

Global Policy Forum which is going to take place 7-8 of September, 2011 in Yaroslavl, Russia will be devoted to the topic 'The Modern State in the Age of Social Diversity'. Forum is traditionally held under the aegis of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

The first two Forums held in 2009 and 2010 were devoted to key problems of development of contemporary democratic states. The participants of Forum were the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev, the President of the Republic of Korea Mr. Lee Myung-bak, the Prime Minister of the Italian Republic Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, the special envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Yukio Hatoyama took part in the Forum, as well as prominent government and public figures, business representatives, scientists and experts, journalists from 32 countries.

Every year Global Policy Forum stirs growing interest of distinguished experts from all over the world. Meetings of politicians and public figures, businessmen, eminent scholars and practitioners in the spheres of political science, sociology, international law are covered and discussed by journalists from 165 popular global media agencies from 32 countries.

Section 1 'Democratic institutions in multiethnic societies'

The section is devoted to analyzing the experience of designing and building democratic institutions in multiethnic societies of the modern world. Russia has historically been composed of numerous ethnic communities, civilizations, cultural and religious groups. Russia's experience in building democracy is to be discussed in the context of other plural societies, including, among others, India, the United States, Brazil, and the European Union. Is cultural and ethnic homogeneity essential for effective democracy? One of the topics to be discussed at the section is the efficiency of democratic institutions and practices against challenges of illegal migration, ethnic apartness, separatism, and fundamentalism.

Russian moderator:
Gleb Pavlovsky

In spite of all the anger at government programs, there's very little interest even on the part of the angry people at doing away with social security and medicare. People do not want to take their grandparents back into their homes, which is what eliminating these programs would amount to. When it comes to decision-making it is clear that a large majority of Americans want to continue social security and protect medicare rather than return to 1920's policy. Any opposition is economic, not political.

■ *Do you think the idea of a global government can be called progressive? Can humanitarian intervention, as a means to global governance, similarly be called progressive?*

Here's what I think is going to happen, and I've written books and articles on this. I think that, owing to the new realities of the 21st century, democratic governments and even quasi-democratic governments are going to have to increasingly introduce a new era of collaboration and cooperation on a number of issues. I wouldn't necessarily label this as progressive or as a global government but we are all going to increasingly collaborate to prevent terrorism and it's something that we're doing already. America and Russia, for example, are cooperating on anti-terrorism measures. In a similar manner, the oil-consuming, oil-importing nations will have to increasingly work together to protect the world's oil supplies, not just the United States and it's navy, but other governments of the world that are dependent on Persian Gulf oil and other oil supplies.

We are going to have, what I would call, a networking government, one that operates not necessarily through new institutions but through modern communication, computers, and data-sharing systems. For example, the public health services of a variety of governments can be networked to help prevent the spread of pandemics. We're going to have to cooperate much more closely in matters like this as well as on restricting the spread of weapons of mass destruction. There is quite a list of other things that are not military in nature but do represent a threat to a lot of countries. Climate change is one such area where we have to cooperate much more closely.

So, you can see that the 21st century is much different from the 20th in that we have many more shared interests that can and need to be addressed by networking together governments from a variety of different countries. You could describe this as a new era of global government and it may end up being just that. **Whether we will repeat the experiences of 1945 to 1947, when all of our international institutions were created, remains to be seen.** I don't know whether this increased networking will result in entirely new international organizations or not. ■

Yulia Netesova exclusively for the Yaroslavl Forum