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huge part of the American story, that notion of pushing for change. I do think we're going to see that over the coming decade, because if we don't, we're witnessing such a transformation of what it means to be America and be American. That's a huge thing to just stand by and watch.

J.T.: *I know you write from time to time in The Nation Magazine, and recently wrote about the woman in Seattle's City Council who is a socialist. She's called for a \$15 minimum wage. (See our story in this edition, Page 10.) The Northwest has a history of being very socialistic and very progressive, but I see that as one indication as a real push for a broad movement - that people are ripe for that reform.*

S.A.: I do think that locally we're starting to see interesting political movements and ideas emerge, and that goes from the \$15 living wage movement, but also to local initiatives to try to create better health care delivery systems. There are all kinds of experiments going on, new ways of doing business.

That's all to the good, but there's no organizing or institution with the muscle of the federal government. It's a unique institution. Even though I think it's great that these things are happening locally, ultimately, there also has to be action at the federal level. There has to be things like the creation of a higher federal minimum wage. There has to be a massive investment in public infrastructure. There has to be a massive national conversation about taxation. Because one of the things that has happened in recent years is that an extraordinary amount of money has been lost to the federal treasury by under taxing wealthy individuals, corporations, wealthy estates and so on. And there are all kinds of solutions out there.

You could create a financial transaction tax, for example, and because hedge funds and other investors are doing so many transactions, by sheer volume you could raise tens, and by some measure hundreds of billions of dollars by an almost invisibly small transaction tax. And that money could be used to reinvest - in schools, in public workers' programs, job training. It could be used to build up public transport, used to subsidize the purchase of gas where there is no public transport and people are going bankrupt just driving to and from work. We could reinvest in the commons. We're going to have to but it's going to have to come from the federal government.

J.T.: *I think that there's intervention called for in the financial industry. You talk about student debt, and for vets coming back and getting aid. How might the federal government intervene?*

S.A.: One of the solutions that I advocate for is an educational opportunity fund.

With Social Security, we essentially created a social insurance for the back end of people's lives. Do the same thing with higher education. If you leave it purely to individuals, with more and more of them going into debt just to finance higher education, you build up massive levels of debt. There's more student debt in the country now than there is credit card debt. What if we socialized the risk? We create a line-item tax, like we do with Medicare and Social Security, for education. It could be one quarter of 1 percent. That would generate enough money so that every individual, at birth, would have \$5,000 invested into an education account. By the time they were of college age, it would be nearer to \$20,000 by most measures. That's not going to pay for higher education, but it will do a lot to reduce debt. Move it up to one percent, and that's \$20,000 for every child at birth.

That's one idea. There are many other ideas. There is absolutely no reason that we have to accept the status quo on this. That also goes to the level of debt we accept around health care. There are other models being talked about in America.

J.T.: *Sen. Bernie Sanders has introduced legislation: Medicare for all, is a good way to describe it.*

S.A.: I think Republicans fought so hard against the Affordable Care Act from the beginning because they realized that if it actually became a success, it would be something that would actually motivate people to get out and vote to maintain it.

But it's still trying to patch together universal coverage from an extremely messy system. In the coming years, however, we will come to expect that the vast majority of Americans will be covered with health insurance through the various exchanges or through the other parts of the patchwork. So I think it will become part of the debate in the coming years in election cycles.

J.T.: *It's the norm in so many other industrialized countries.*

S.A.: Exactly. When it comes to poverty, when it comes to things that trigger poverty like unequal access to health care, we do a whole bunch worse than most of the nations we like to compare ourselves with, and we have a lot to learn. When you realize the unique scale of not just American poverty, but American inequality in the 21st century, the fact that France doesn't have it, Germany doesn't have it, Canada doesn't, Australia doesn't. Even England, which is the closest to us in terms of economic models. Even the United Kingdom doesn't have the levels of inequality and social immobility that America has.

J.T.: *I think one of the ironic things is when people are struggling to survive, working as hard as they can, they don't have the time or energy to listen to really good news coverage and they get the shock jocks. The news is just to shock and manipulate. To me that is very scary.*

S.A.: I think the current way the media functions - there are areas where it's literally Fox News or nothing, or Rush Limbaugh or nothing - where basically the shriller you are, the louder you are, the more your message reverberates. Noise carries in this media culture. It's very destructive of a common political language or of understanding our community. It's a language of division. It's a language that sells by being divisive.

It isn't only a conservative issue. There are plenty of very shrill commentators on the left as well. I think one of the problems in the modern moment is we've lost our ability to think outside of our bubble. We're so saturated by media that we basically gravitate to someone who's going to say something we've already agreed with. I think increasingly readers are looking to be reaffirmed rather than be challenged.

J.T.: *You had a terrifying piece in your book mentioning the English political philosopher Stephen Lucas and writing about power. Could you describe that?*

S.A.: It's the idea that there are different ways of manipulating a society or an individual. That power is expressed at its most basic level with brute force. And then there are progressive levels of subtlety. You can get someone to do something by shifting the kind of information they have available to them. And at its most sophisticated level, you create a framework that's so uber-pervasive that it becomes invisible. It just becomes the backdrop and you no longer realize you're being manipulated; that the way you understand events or respond to authority has in a sense been predetermined. You think you're absolutely free to make decisions because you don't really understand where those decisions are coming from. The more sophisticated a machinery of propaganda becomes, the harder it is to see that machinery at work.

This interview originally aired on KBOO radio, courtesy of Jay Thiemeyer.

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According to the 2013 report by the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, more than one in five American children fall below a relative poverty line, which UNICEF defines as living in a household that earns less than half of the national median. The United States ranks 34th of the 35 countries surveyed with regard to the well-being of children, above only Romania and below virtually all of Europe plus Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.



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