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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Building a better government from the ruins of the old  
2 one

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 It's much easier to think about public spending when  
4 you've meditated on frugality. And it's much easier to consider  
5 your neighbors' needs when generosity is a constant companion.

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 WHEN AMERICANS consider the famous sentence of the  
8 Declaration of Independence we rarely get past first base.  
9 "We hold these truths" guides us through equality and  
10 unalienable rights, and then we land on "the pursuit of  
11 Happiness" as if we'd scored the necessary points.

12 But the sentence keeps going.

13 To secure these rights, "Governments are instituted  
14 among Men, deriving their just powers" through our consent. We  
15 are willing to be governed because we see that the government is  
16 good.

17 But even that is not the end of the sentence. The entire  
18 thing takes us through a restorative process: from order to  
19 disorder and from disorder to reorder. It's important to know that  
20 entire progression. If we can recite the sentence in its entirety, we  
21 may not fear the current disorder.

22 Disorder appears as a fundamental right. Should the  
23 people determine that the government has become destructive of  
24 our liberties, it is "the Right of the People to alter or abolish it."

25 This is an old story, one that goes back thousands of  
26 years. Just as the original tablets were destroyed, just as a god  
27 was crucified, just as the King was challenged at the Battle of  
28 Lexington, old forms can't always contain the energy of the times.

29 Disorder is the necessary consequence of superfluous  
30 moments. When rage and indignation spill over, the government  
31 loses its legitimacy, and orderly politics gives way to violence.

32 \* \* \*

33 THIS STAGE IS truly spooky. Destroyed tablets and  
34 crucifixions are not for the faint of heart. To find ourselves in a  
35 disordered world tends to bring out the worst in us.

36 Without the comfort of the established order, we tend to  
37 forgo concerns about our neighbors or even following our inner  
38 compass. Instead of maintaining our composure and staying  
39 curious, we want control at any cost.

40 Under the conditions of chaos, we may even give up on  
41 our principles, such as equality and liberty and the Pursuit of  
42 Happiness. Fear has a way of making us crazy.

43 Luckily, the sentence does not end with the right to  
44 rebellion. There is one more section to cram into the cranium.

45 Having abolished one government, we must now start  
46 anew, building a new government. Unlike the first government

47 that was described in the passive voice (“Governments are  
48 instituted”), this re-created government is a most active affair.

49 The People must lay “its foundation on such principles  
50 and organiz[e] its powers in such form, as to them shall seem  
51 most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

52 In other words, we have to work together to put together  
53 a new government. We have to work with our neighbors.

54 \* \* \*

55 LUCKILY, WE HAVE some sense of the principles: liberty,  
56 equality, and the Pursuit of Happiness (more on that later). And  
57 we’ve got some political theory to help us with the forms: mixed  
58 government, checks and balances, federalism, and the rule of  
59 law.

60 But the key element is our ability to design this new  
61 government through a deliberative process that leads to a most  
62 likely outcome, not a sure thing. The process of re-ordering is  
63 curious, open to different perspectives. It’s as loud as a pine tree  
64 in November seeded with starlings.

65 At the time of the founding, to pursue happiness was to  
66 work on one’s character through daily self-examination. “Without  
67 Virtue,” wrote Benjamin Franklin, “Man can have no Happiness  
68 in this World.” A happy man, wrote Thomas Jefferson, is someone  
69 “who is at peace with himself.”

70 These founders were avid fans of Cicero and other  
71 thinkers who promoted virtue as the condition of freedom. Only  
72 an aggregate of self-governing persons could become a self-  
73 governing nation.

74 State constitutions specify certain virtues. Vermont  
75 promotes a frequent recurrence to justice, moderation,  
76 temperance, industry, and frugality. New Hampshire promotes  
77 the principles of industry, economy, honesty, sincerity, sobriety  
78 and other “generous sentiments.”

79 To know civics was much more than knowing the  
80 mechanics of government. The central lesson of civics was to  
81 know yourself through a set of virtues.

82 This self-awareness is crucial for the re-ordering of our  
83 nation. It is much easier to be curious about your political  
84 opponents when you know that at the end of the day, you'll need  
85 to account for your sincerity.

86 It's much easier to think about public spending when you  
87 meditated on frugality that morning. And it's much easier to  
88 consider the needs of your neighbors when generosity is a  
89 constant companion.

90 When citizens pursue their happiness through daily self-  
91 reflection, they are more likely to build a better government from  
92 the ruins of the old one.

93 \* \* \*

94 LIKE ALL THINGS natural, the United States is going  
95 through one of its cycles where the old is being destroyed by the  
96 new energies of the moment. We won't stumble upon a perfectly  
97 ordered kingdom, we have to build this new government  
98 together.

99 Virtue and self-examination were the keystones of the  
100 first phase, and they will be necessary for this third phase.  
101 Luckily, we have the capacities, those unalienable rights, to re-  
102 order our nation in such a way that seems more likely to bring us  
103 all a more spiritual happiness.

104 But for us to take this on, we need to know more than  
105 the first segment of this famous sentence. The disorder of the  
106 second segment will be less disruptive when we know where  
107 we're headed next.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

108 **MEG MOTT** is a professor emerita and former town  
109 moderator. She will be speaking on the Pursuit of Happiness at  
110 6:30 on Thursday, March 19 at the Putney Public Library.  
111 Information: [putneylibrary.org/events/](http://putneylibrary.org/events/).

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

112      #####BEGIN MAXISSUE#####  
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LINKS:

113      #####BEGIN LINKS#####  
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VIDEO:

114      #####BEGIN VIDEO#####  
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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

115      #####BEGIN LOGLINE#####  
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