

# Entrepreneurs are the Answer

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If entrepreneurs are the answer, then what is the question? In Jeopardy-like style, pick any problem presently facing the global community – from terrorism to world hunger to massive unemployment – and the solution keeps pointing to the entrepreneur.

The timing of this column is such that I'm writing it on the day control of Iraq has been given back to the Iraqi's – a day not too far from the United States' own day of independence. And we're likely facing (as you read this) a perennial round of devastating forest fires in the western half of the U.S. Taking a cue from nature's own approach to renewal, the forest fires remind us how nature recovers from major devastation. First to appear are the shade-intolerant, rapid-growth species like fireweed -- which are the plant world's equivalent of entrepreneurs. Without these pioneers, the rebirth of a healthy boreal forest is impossible.

What we need to do is prepare the soil and scatter the seeds for more fireweed in the world's most devastated economies. At the most basic level, we must prioritize policies that protect the right of people to keep the fruits of their own labor and land. Otherwise, there will be no incentive for entrepreneurship to take root.

Terrorism exists primarily because a large group of people on this planet has little positive to live for in this life, making them easy prey for a few misguided leaders. No matter how hard they work, they can never elevate their standard of living above a brutal, subsistence level because they live in countries governed in a way that makes this the norm – where they have no ability to own assets like a home or a growing business which is a crucial first step in creating prosperity. And without this prosperity, where people are struggling just to eat, it's easy for demagogues to distract them from the tyranny that keeps them impoverished by provoking hatred and envy of democracies. To promote democracy – and the right to private ownership that comes with it – would cause these misguided leaders to lose their power base. This means they're unlikely to take this step on their own.

That is why we must step into the breach. What we fought for in 1776 and have shed blood for ever since has been the right to keep the fruits of our labor and land. When George Washington had trouble raising an army to fight the British, the Board of War voted to provide every enlisted man with \$20 and 100 acres of land. Love of country and belief in the cause were noble sentiments, noted Washington, but even among the officers, those who acted upon principles of disinterestedness were no more than a drop in the ocean. "For the men, nothing would satisfy but a bounty and an offer of free land," he said. Washington got his army.

When China began allowing its farmers to keep a portion of the fruits of their labor in 1979 and in 1985, when the salaries of “enterprise” employees were linked directly to the profits obtained by their enterprises within the newly created special economic zones (SEZ), prosperity was unleashed.

When the late Willard Garvey, at one time one of the wealthiest men in America, focused on building homes around the world, he would tell people “Help a man get a home and he’ll take care of his other problems.” Similarly, when Thomas Jefferson originally wrote the Declaration of Independence, he wrote “life, liberty, and the right to private property,” which many of the founding fathers saw as the key to happiness.

Years ago, Gavin Clabaugh, the personal consultant to John Naisbitt who designed and managed the research process culminating in Naisbitt’s best-selling book, *Megatrends*, shared a fascinating thought with me. Being a futurist, Clabaugh ventured to predict the ultimate career choices we would be left with on the planet – a poet or a soldier! My take on his prediction is we will either create or fight (for the right to create!).

As entrepreneurs, we’ve sat on the sidelines too long, enjoying our freedoms and prosperity while our brothers and sisters have little. And we’ve become complacent in the United States, letting our society drift from one that was very entrepreneurial to a mentality of entitlement. It’s time that we get serious about the need to get both our own country back on a path of entrepreneurial thinking and exporting this thinking that allowed us to create a climate of unparalleled opportunity to the countries that need it most. Only then can we secure a more prosperous future for our children and generate the kind of economic activity that will lift all people out of poverty and provide the soil for fireweed to spread around the globe.