

David Boren. *A Letter to America*. (Norman, OK; University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), pp. 112. \$14.95 ISBN 978-0-8061-3944-9

“Dear American, This letter is to you. The country we love is in trouble. In truth, we are in grave danger of declining as a nation”, is how former U.S. Senator David Boren, a Rhodes Scholar, the longest-serving chair of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee, a former governor of Oklahoma and now President of the University of Oklahoma for the past fourteen years opens his new book, *A Letter to America*. With only 6 percent of the world’s population, how long will the United States remain a global superpower? The answer to Boren’s opening question is that he believes the outcome is largely in our own hands. The author explains with bold, simple clarity, and sense of alarm as Bob Herbert noted in the *New York Times*, why the country is at a perilous moment and why changes are urgently needed.

A Letter to America offers an outline of a plan that touches on four major areas: economic concerns such as the disappearing middle class, the loss of community in America, our dangerously partisan political system, and outdated foreign policy priorities. For political scientists, and students of political science, I will summarize his political and foreign policy recommendations.

Boren’s extensive experience gives him the credibility and authority to regretfully come to the conclusion that our political system is broken. It’s time to replace, in his view, pandering partisans with real statesmen, even if it means electing independents to Congress and a nonpartisan,

independent president of the U.S. Of utmost concern is breaking the vicious cycle of our increasing political partisanship. One of the major reasons grassroots democracy is being destroyed is the flood of special-interest money pouring into politics. He advocates campaign spending limits, a ban on contributions from out-of-state interests, no more special interest gifts and an outright prohibition on political action committee donations. He notes that partisanship clearly becomes destructive when partisan advantage is elevated above the national interest.

His political plan includes campaign finance reform, creating institutions that encourage bipartisanship such as the creation of standing bipartisan working groups or “mini-cabinets” both domestic and foreign, a bipartisan program for major public works and infrastructure investment, a bipartisan caucus in the Congress and the election of an independent president without forming a new third party.

Boren’s sense of urgency extends to foreign policy. “No single relationship will be more important to the peace and stability of the world in this century than the relationships between the U.S. and China,” he notes. “If freedom is to be expanded, democracy must be joined with many other elements, including an independent judiciary and specific rights for racial and religious minorities. It is wrong for us to think that the establishment of democracy by itself will lead to stable and free societies.” Boren believes if we allow ourselves to become adversaries, we could face a situation far more dangerous than we faced in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. He writes, “We should act now as if a multipolar world had already evolved and not wait to change our policies until that change has actually taken place. For example, we should work hard to develop joint projects with the Chinese in areas where we have agreement.”

His global plan calls for a better understanding the rest of the world, the establishment of an International Peace Corps, making sure our intelligence system provides the best possible information, the creation of an independent government think tank outside CIA like organizations. Additionally, he supports environmental policies with other nations and the creation of a standing military force composed of the world’s leading nations under the existing framework of the United Nations.

Boren personalizes many of the issues in the book by using examples of his own experiences and sharing what he has learned from his college students at the University of Oklahoma. As a result, he urges that

every college in America require that students earn college credits in American history and American government on their transcripts as a condition for receiving degrees. A nation that does not know how it became great will not remain great, he notes.

Extremely relevant in the current political climate, *A Letter To America* puts all the pieces together to provide a series of recommendations that are challenging, constructive, and critical for students and instructors to examine. The book draws upon the works of Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, and V.O. Key, among many others. It would be an excellent text for any political science course and would provide the basis for a much needed debate and discussion of the future of our country.

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