

MEMORANDUM

February 1, 2012

Whatever the outcome of the November elections, we will need to confront the diminished expectations that the nation faces in the near term, without sacrificing quality-of-life programs put at risk by cost-cutting. This is the theme of a commentary by William B. Dickinson written for the nonprofit Biocentric Institute, which promotes enhancement of quality of life for all peoples.

The phrase “age of diminished expectations” formed the title of a book published 21 years ago. Its author, economist Paul Krugman, subsequently has won a Nobel Prize and writes a column for *The New York Times*. At the time, the nation was experiencing some of the same economic problems that we see today – increased disparity of personal income, rising poverty, and no increase in real take-home pay. But so long as Americans did not encounter a severe recession or double-digit inflation, Krugman concluded, the public would view the nation’s economic policy as a success.

“Of course, in 2012 the nation is dealing with the fallout from a Great Recession,” Dickinson writes. “Will intellectual honesty trump political expediency?” Dickinson, a former Washington editor and journalism professor, says that a government with less to distribute will be forced to make hard choices about what to preserve. “We need to ask ourselves what is really essential to maintain quality of life for those who come after us,” he writes. “Our children and grandchildren must not inherit a bleak economic and social landscape picked clean by a fearful generation.”

Among the hard choices, Dickinson argues on behalf of the environment and education. “With U.S population projected to increase from today’s 313 million to more than 400 million by 2050,” he concludes, “environmental stresses can only grow. And so great is the crisis in education that no public policy deserves greater attention.”

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