

# Earth Manifesto



## The Fourteen Worst Ways that Powerful People Abuse Power

House Republicans were gloating and downright giddy as they celebrated their slim margin in narrow-mindedly voting to repeal the Affordable Care Act on May 4, 2017. Those politicians went straight to the White House after the vote to party in the Rose Garden, and to take a self-congratulatory photo op. Their proposed law to replace Obamacare was designed to give hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks to people earning over \$250,000 while slashing insurance coverage for tens of millions of Americans. This fact apparently did not reduce their coldly-calculating glee at having taken this step to triumph over disadvantaged people and the greater good. This shortsighted, outrageously anti-egalitarian and unethical legislative "victory" represented an abuse of power and a violation of the public's trust, and it was just the latest in a stunning array of power abuses that have marked the new Republican majority's rule in Washington D.C.

Think about these abuses of power, which have been ominous hallmarks of authoritarian one-party dominance of the federal government since Donald Trump's Inauguration Day on January 20, 2017.

(1) Republicans are championing corporate and banking power and strengthening the power elite by fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between business and government. Trump has appointed a hard-right Cabinet of loyal sycophants who are trying to gut protections of public lands and reverse climate action commitments and make it easier for giant corporations to externalize costs onto society so that they can artificially increase private profits. Republicans are enabling rampant cronyism and corruption and nepotism, and they are using the power of government authority to protect their inner circle from accountability. And their tax plans are highly inequalitarian, serving to concentrate wealth more extremely in the hands of the wealthiest 1% -- to the pathetic detriment of everyone else. One egregious instance of this abuse of power is found in the pandering stance toward Wall Street tycoons that allows them to evade paying large amounts of tax by staunchly opposing the closure of the "carried interest" loophole that lets wealthy investment bankers pay tax rates on their huge incomes that are lower than rates paid by working people in the middle class on their incomes.

(2) Trump has enacted a record number of anti-progressive and anti-environmental Executive Orders, and preempted the responsibilities of the legislative branch of government. Republicans in Congress have also engaged in an unprecedented abuse of the Congressional Review Act to overturn many sensible rules enacted by Barack Obama and his administration.

(3) Trump and his loyalists attack, and undermine and manipulate journalists in the mainstream media and promote fake news by engaging in demagogic diatribes against all media outlets that criticize Trump or Republicans, or that provide investigative reporting about abuses of power and anti-democratic initiatives. Conservatives support news outlets like Fox News and the alt-right Breitbart and ideological stalwarts like Rush Limbaugh that function as cheerleaders and apologists for hard-right ideological spin and "alternative facts" related to events and national policies.

(4) Trump shows disdain for human rights and democracy itself. He is trying to persuade Americans that human rights should be ignored, supposedly to make them more secure. He and his Attorney General push for things like deportations, more draconian enforcement of federal drug laws, harsher incarcerations of prisoners, and the suppression of dissent and protest. In taking hard line stances on crime and punishment, Republican politicians give police more power to enforce laws, and they demonstrate a willingness to overlook police abuses and curtail

civil liberties. They also pander excessively to the gun lobby, refusing to support even the most common sense restrictions on who can buy guns and assault weapons. Trump has repeatedly expressed support for other authoritarian regimes like those of Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Erdogan in Turkey, Abdel el-Sisi in Egypt, Narendra Modi in India, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and others. This support bodes ill for reasonable hopes for peace, and for truer liberty and justice for all.

(5) Republican Senators changed Senate rules to ram through the appointment of Neil Gorsuch as the newest Justice on the Supreme Court, after they had violated long-standing precedent by not allowing President Obama to fill the seat left vacant when Antonin Scalia died in February 2016.

(6) Republican politicians have been obstructing investigations into meddling by Russia in our elections that helped Trump win. Trump then fired the FBI Director because he would not relent in the investigation, and Trump and White House operatives and Republican officials in Congress are concealing Russian contacts and lying to the public and trying hard to distract the American people from the Russia investigation.

(7) Trump continues to hide his tax return information to conceal his business involvements in foreign countries and his many conflicts of interest and possible violations of the emoluments clause of the Constitution. This is an indelible sign of abuse of executive power and authoritarian overreach and personal misconduct.

(8) Republicans foment concerns over national security and stoke people's fears to motivate them to support excessive power vested in the Republican Party. Trump has engaged in nuclear saber rattling against North Korea, and he launched 59 cruise missiles onto a military base in Syria in an action that Trump's Commerce Secretary described as "after-dinner entertainment" for guests at Trump's Mar-a-Lago golf resort in Florida. Actions like this create heightened risks and tensions and potentials for war in the world.

(9) Republicans push for gigantic increases in funding for the military at the expense of adequate financing for common good domestic priorities like healthcare for millions of vulnerable Americans and other vital strands in the social safety net. In arrogantly trying to repeal and replace Obamacare, Mitch McConnell used blatant secrecy in developing a plan in the U.S. Senate that would give people earning over \$250,000 per year a tax break while reducing benefits for low-income people and older Americans and those with "pre-existing conditions." A majority of American voters did not vote to have extreme policies imposed on them like those that these politicians are trying to force onto the nation.

(10) Republicans engage in discriminatory policies that include blatant racism and sexism, and the Trump administration is excessively dominated by white males who effectively make traditional gender roles more rigid by working against equal pay for women, by suppressing women's reproductive rights to contraception and abortion services, and by turning their backs on lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people.

(11) Republicans utilize a wide variety of unscrupulous actions to effectively make elections fraudulent so that they can gain and consolidate power. To get support and accomplish these goals, they use demagogic fear-mongering and the scapegoating of immigrants and religious minorities. They rally supporters into a patriotic frenzy over terrorists and an alleged need to eliminate perceived enemies like immigrants, refugees, poor people and even liberals. They also engage in foundational abuses of power by working to restrict voter turnout in states governed by Republican majorities, and by gerrymandering Congressional districts into contorted patterns in order to get a disproportionate number of Republicans elected to the House of Representatives. They also stack state and federal courts with partisan ideological conservatives who will go along with legislative efforts to allow Big Money, in secret, to further corrupt our economic and political systems.

(12) Trump and most other Republican politicians promote powerful nationalism by constantly using patriotic mottos, flags, symbols, tweets, ideological rationalizations and slogans like "America First" and "Make America Great Again", and they strive to deceive many Americans into thinking they do this for the greater good.

(13) They suppress the power of working people by undermining labor unions and the rights of workers to collectively bargain, and by opposing overtime pay for overtime work and equal pay for women.

(14) They show disdain for intellectuals and the arts, and promote open hostility to higher education, academia and scientific understandings. In doing so, they intertwine government and religion and use Christian faiths as a

tool to manipulate public opinion, even when the government's policies or actions are diametrically opposed to the major moral tenets of religious doctrines.

Trump is an unscrupulous egomaniacal narcissist who is eager to enrich himself and his family and his cronies at the cost of sacrificing people's health and the environment and prospects for the well-being of people in future generations, and of all life on Earth. And he seems to give no regard to norms of fair-mindedness and the greater good to achieve his narrow-minded goals.

It should be understood that political ends do not justify the means used when the means are so unscrupulous as to violate laws and broadly betray the best interests of the people. Donald Trump used scurrilous means to seize power, and more and more of the sordid details are coming to light. In mid May 2017, less than four months after Inauguration Day, the Justice Department appointed a special counsel to lead its inquiry into interference by Russia in the 2016 presidential election, and by 2018 the secret findings are becoming more apparently sufficient to remove him from office. This prompts Trump to defensively decry the investigation, which he has called "the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history." History laughs out loud at this preposterous exaggeration and dearth of good judgment!

Trump knows that this is no mere witch hunt. This is the reasoned reaction of democratic institutions to violations of ethical norms, truth-telling, and the honorable premises of oaths of office, rules of law and the Constitution. Properly understood, the Trump campaign actions and subsequent executive orders and legislative initiatives have constituted a betrayal of the American people by men who have grabbed power to impose a backward, retrogressive, deceit-filled, dumbly anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic, oppressively authoritarian and anti-environmental agenda. This is far worse than mere overreach of authority.

Trump and his spokespersons often try to change the focus of the Russia investigation to the issue of who is leaking information about the probe, obviously to deflect attention from the details of the scandal itself. But when people act as guilty as hell, there is generally a good reason for this guilty behavior. Trump and Jared Kushner and other government officials have taken steps to "lawyer up", as a consequence of their Nixonian efforts to cover up the scandal, and they are beginning to cross rules of law and obstruct justice and risk impeachment under the terms of the U.S. Constitution, which calls for a president to be removed from office if they commit "Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors."

The time has come for the majority of Americans to stand up and declare that they will not accept these broad abuses of power anymore! Imagine if Trump had won the popular vote by almost 3 million votes but Hillary Clinton had won the Electoral College, and then it came to light that a foreign power had meddled in the election to throw the outcome of the contest. Republicans would not have played nice and issued concessionary nostrums about the need for a peaceful transition of power. NO! They would have filed lawsuits everywhere like they did to stop the vote recount in Florida in the year 2000, which handed the presidency to George W. Bush at a colossal eventual cost to the American people in economic, military and social terms. Republicans would have hyped up outrage every minute on every TV channel and in every newspaper, and talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh would have amped up vituperative attacks until a crescendo was reached and a Constitutional crisis forced Trump's opponent to concede. Or imagine that Hillary had won and named the most left-wing Cabinet in American history, and it is easy to see that Republican outrage would be like a destructive succession of tsunami waves battering the coast of our collective consciousness.

So, *See Clearly* now! Aside from any and every aspect of Donald Trump's personal character and judgments about whether he may be good or bad for the American people, he is without question serving as a treacherous Trojan horse for the rich. As such, he is a poisonous pusher of increasing inequality. The bottom line is that he is a deceitful champion for greedy wealthy people who have unethically corrupted Congress and many state legislatures and our court system to serve a top priority that is consequentially cruel: to increase the lopsided concentration of wealth and privilege and power and control in the hands of a tiny minority of the people. Trump is acting as an outrageous opponent of government of the people, by the people and for the people, because he represents government of the wealthy, by the wealthy and for the wealthy.

Justice now! Let's do the right thing and honestly reform our system of taxation to make it more egalitarian.

It would be extremely easy to make our society fairer, safer, saner and more sustainable. Simply give every taxpayer significantly lower tax obligations on the first \$75,000 they earn, and pay for the resulting reduction in tax revenues by offsetting it with higher tax rates on all incomes over that amount, progressively graduated.

Many Trump supporters have been fooled, in effect, into believing with righteous enthusiasm in the rectitude of giving elite individuals and giant corporations the untrammelled right to socialize some of the costs associated with their business activities. It is unwise to give these prerogatives to corporate entities, for they are extremely undemocratic entities that serve as organizational tools for generating profits and concentrating wealth in the hands of the few.

Trump is a puppet of Big Business and an obtuse promoter of anti-democratic corporate entities and a merciless apologist for wasteful consumption and myopically materialistic values; and he displays a grotesque greediness and a sad preoccupation with excessively self-oriented goals. Like the wealthy people whose interests he champions, he always seems to be driven by trying to get more money and an ever-bigger slice of the economic pie. In so doing, he and they manifest a sinisterly despicable disregard for social justice and the common good.

#### A Powerful Reason in Favor of Intergenerationally Fairer Plans

A Seattle-based billionaire entrepreneur named Nick Hanauer made some sensational observations in an article titled *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*. Here is an excerpt, edited for brevity:

"I want to try to change the conversation with ideas -- by advancing "middle-out" economics. It's the long-overdue rebuttal to the trickle-down economics worldview that has become economic orthodoxy across party lines -- and has so screwed the American middle class and our economy generally. Middle-out economics rejects the old misconception that an economy is a perfectly efficient, mechanistic system, and embraces the much more accurate idea of an economy as a complex ecosystem made up of real people who are dependent on one another.

The fundamental law of capitalism must be: If workers have more money, businesses have more customers. Which makes middle-class consumers, not rich businesspeople like us, the true job creators. Which means a thriving middle class is the source of American prosperity, not a consequence of it. The middle class creates us rich people, not the other way around.

Republicans and Democrats in Congress can't shrink government with wishful thinking. The only way to slash government for real is to go back to basic economic principles: You have to reduce the demand for government. If people are getting \$15 an hour or more, they don't need food stamps. They don't need rent assistance. They don't need you and me to pay for their medical care. If the consumer middle class is back, buying and shopping, then it stands to reason you won't need as large a welfare state. And at the same time, revenues from payroll and sales taxes would rise, reducing the deficit.

One Percenters take note: many of our fellow citizens are starting to believe that capitalism itself is the problem. I disagree. Capitalism, when well managed, is the greatest social technology ever invented to create prosperity in human societies. But capitalism left unchecked tends toward concentration of wealth and power and potential collapse. It can be managed either to benefit the few in the near term or the many in the long term. The work of democracies is to bend it to the latter. That is why investments in the middle class work. And tax breaks for rich people like us don't." I encourage everyone to read Nick Hanauer's entire article, because it is well worth reading!

#### Editorial Oddity

Two pages were evicted from the Introduction (pages 3-12) to ensure it would still end on page 12 when the Earth Manifesto Proclamation moved in on Earth Day 2018. Here are these paragraphs.

There are two primary positive aspects of what is unfolding to be the otherwise largely unmitigated disaster of Trump's rise to power. A strong movement has been energized to resist the far-reaching negative aspects of the Manipulator-in-Chief's anti-democratic and authoritarian agenda. This movement is giving great energy to understandings of the true values of protected liberties, fair-mindedness, inclusive policies, respect for

diversity and the promotion of peaceable coexistence. This fight to defend true American values will be crucial to creating a more positive future. We must sharpen our wits, and stop buying the terribly tarnished claptrap ideological propaganda and pervasive dishonesty and big lies and misinformation that the ruling elites have been all but force-feeding us for decades.

On a second positive note, Trump is likely going to do America a great service "by becoming the vehicle that will finally take down right-wing conservative politics for a generation or two", according to speculation by Peter Leyden in *Why Trump's Inauguration is Not the Beginning of an Era - but the End* (January 19, 2017). By rudely intimidating the conservative establishment to get it to buy into his regime's agenda, and by assembling a Cabinet of billionaires, establishment insiders, Wall Street operatives and military generals that is blatantly selling out to fossil fuel industries and the military-industrial complex and other giant corporations, the Demagogue-in-Chief is enabling ruthless corporate capitalism that will be so harmful to the American people that revolutionary discord will spread. "It will be a caricature of conservative policies," writes Peter Leyden. "In short order he will completely and irrevocably alienate all the growing political constituencies of the 21st century: the Millennial Generation, people of color, educated professionals, women. He'll eventually do the same for a significant number of more moderate Republicans. And does anyone out there really think Trump will do anything for the white working class that got him elected?"

"I think the backlash will be fast and furious. And it won't just be Trump that goes down -- it will be a large swath of conservative Republicans who will be almost helpless to stop Trump or distance themselves from him. They will pay the price for creating the conditions that created him. I think the next 4 to 8 years are going to see a serious sea change in politics -- to the left, not the right. The analogy is closer to what happened to the conservative Republicans coming out of the 1930s -- they were out of power for the next 50 years."

"A Hillary Clinton win would not have brought about that kind of political transformation. She would have ground out some progress through trench warfare and built somewhat on Obama's legacy -- but the Republicans would have locked her down worse than they did with Obama. Hillary would not have been able to finally bring down the conservative movement and its archaic ideology." What this means is that, assuming we are able to avoid an authoritarian dictatorship (and nuclear war!), a liberal renaissance may be just around the corner! David Korten writes, "My hope is that the transparency of Trump's attempted coup against democracy and our national security can bring us together as a nation unified in our dedication to our founding ideals that, though always more aspiration than reality, are now at risk of being entirely swept aside."

Trump has given his supporters a slap in the face by filling his administration with a phalanx of former Goldman Sachs bankers not long after he repeatedly vilified the huge bank during his deceit-filled campaign. He had declared that Goldman Sachs represented the worst aspects of American finance. Not only was it one of the architects of the worst recession since the Depression of the 1930s, but also hedge fund managers were "getting away with murder" with their phony rationalizations for very low tax rates for themselves. Once in office, however, Trump chose a former Goldman Sachs executive to steer the economy as his Treasury secretary, a man whose loyalties are with Wall Street, not Main Street, as is sadly true with most Republicans.

Not only did his choice, Steve Mnuchin, spend many years as a banker at Goldman Sachs and found a hedge fund, but then in 2008 he bought IndyMac Bank, a lender that collapsed in the bursting of the real estate bubble and ensuing financial crisis. He rebranded it as OneWest and took in record profits by foreclosing on millions of homeowners, thus becoming known for his ruthlessness as a "foreclosure king". In a lawsuit against the bank, a judge wiped out one couple's \$525,000 mortgage and criticized the bank for "harsh, repugnant, shocking and repulsive" actions. Great, great, great -- a crony capitalist banker who supported harsh, repugnant and shockingly repulsive activities, just what we need to help remedy inequities and decide proper priorities.

Mnuchin is a powerful advocate for, in effect, exacerbating inequalities and causing the national debt to spike by helping implement a new round of tax cuts to primarily benefit wealthy people and giant corporations. In other words, Trump and Mnuchin are staunch defenders of new provisions that will serve to perpetuate and exacerbate the financial scams being perpetrated in the USA today. Mnuchin is intimately involved in helping formulate the skewed Republican tax cut plan, and in rolling back regulations on banks. And he will preside over efforts to increase the federal government's borrowing limit. It may be recalled that many Republicans

vituperatively opposed increasing the debt limit while Barack Obama was president, even shutting down the federal government for two weeks in October 2013 at a cost of more than \$20 billion while dumbly threatening to default on the national debt. Today, hypocritically, many of them say, "Never mind."

Mnuchin is a strong believer in the Republican orthodoxy of reversing consumer protections contained in the Dodd-Frank law governing Wall Street. He joins Jeb Hensarling in this effort, the chairman of the House Financial Services Committee and a scheming Republican from Texas who is spearheading plans to repeal the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. That Act was hammered out after the 2008 financial crisis to reduce the risks of having a repeat of that economic calamity and recession and associated costly bailouts. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau created by this Act was dedicated to helping American people fight back when financial institutions cheat or mislead them. In its five years of existence, the Bureau has recovered almost \$12 billion from banks and other institutions for more than 27 million people.

Mnuchin joins other Republicans in wanting to loosen regulations on bankers whose massive fraud cost trillions of dollars due to the 2008 financial crisis. Trillions of dollars! That crisis, it should be remembered, was engineered and exacerbated by bank executives, deregulators, ideological "conservatives" and speculators. When asked about the Dodd-Frank law, which took some needed first steps toward reining in predatory banking, Mnuchin said it was "way too complicated". I guess he thinks simple slogans are sufficient? He used the same weak rationalization against the "Volcker rule", which limited the ability of banks to gamble with federally insured deposits. Trump chose Gary Cohn, an even richer Goldman Sachs executive, to be his national economic council director. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic meltdown, Cohn also profited greatly at the expense of middle-class people. This Cabinet is a who's who of pro-corporate, anti-consumer and anti-environmental leaders. This is not what the American people want their government to be.

Among Trump's other Cabinet nominees ("I've seen better Cabinets at IKEA" read a handmade sign carried by a marching protester), there are many apologists for the maximizing of profits through rapid depletion of natural resources and the despoliation of the environment without regard to the consequences such activities will have on the health of people today or the prospects of billions of humans to be born in future generations. The Cabinet includes climate change deniers and opponents of precautionary actions to mitigate anthropogenic changes in weather, temperature and rainfall patterns. It includes partisans who are eager to cut funding on sensible social insurance policies, and who are opposed to measures that would help us recover from increasingly severe incidences of climate-related disasters, and allow us to invest in adaptive responses. Trump's chaotic Cabinet has too many people with conflicts-of-interest, like Trump himself, and too many compromised skills for Big Oil and Big Coal, whose corrupt influence is focused on dismantling the Environmental Protection Agency because it is just so inconvenient to polluters and cost externalizing industries.