

Earth Manifesto

A Clear-Eyed Patriot Issues a Clarion Call for a Second American Revolution

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In times of trouble
Seeking words of wisdom
Let it be.

Friends, Washingtonians, countrywomen and countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to champion good ideas, and to constructively criticize all the bad ideas and shortsighted expediciencies that have gotten us into the perilous straits we find ourselves in today, in our marvelous world.

Twelve score and four years ago, our Founding Fathers declared independence from the despotic hegemony of the British Empire. These courageous colonists then fought an American Revolutionary War against the imperious "redcoats", using effective early guerilla warfare tactics, and they eventually won the war. After achieving victory, they set about working together to bring forth upon the North American continent a new nation, dedicated to liberty and the idealistic Enlightenment Era proposition that "all men are created equal."

To secure the "unalienable rights" that they had declared to be self-evident for all citizens, they commendably convened a Continental Congress of representatives of the people. Having asserted that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, our Founders assumed the important responsibility of hammering out a master plan for a new form of democratic governance that was guided by a Constitution, a Bill of Rights and an evolving framework of equitable rules of law. Importantly, the Constitution contained critical protections from tyranny in a form of strong constitutional checks and balances in government.

The colonists' experience with the despotism of King George III had left them wary of abuses of power, so they created a sensible balance of powers between the executive and legislative and judicial branches of the federal government, and between it and the various States. They did this in an effort to ensure the American people that they would be forever free from despotic abuses of power, and that they would be represented reasonably fairly in all national decision-making. Today, I say, Let it be.

In the many years that have passed since those formative times, much progress has been made in expanding these basic concepts of justice, guaranteed liberties, equality and fair representation so that they include people in racial minorities and women. These initiatives were designed to strengthen our Union in these United States of America, and to ensure that considerations of the general welfare are not ignored in the fierce competition between greed-driven individuals and narrowly-focused interest groups vying to gain advantages for themselves.

In the course of human events, and with the passage of time, corrupting influences have crept into our system of governance, and they have come to dominate our national decision-making. Our political representatives have been bought -- cheap! -- and they now mainly serve rich people and corporate executives and shareholders, NOT the best interests of the majority of Americans. Most of the politicians that are supposed to represent us are self-serving pragmatists who are afraid to tell the simple truth that the economy and our political system are rigged to be unfair to most people, and especially to younger persons -- and downright treasonous to the best interests of people in future generations.

Here is a provocative perspective from my 2009 essay *The Bailout Blues and Gut Check Soul Revue*: "The U.S. has been driving a hard bargain for the poor for decades by scolding them for lacking personal responsibility. Welfare

rolls and payments have been reduced, taxes have been made more regressive, and ever harsher and more costly punishments for crimes have been enacted. The influence of workers in determining their own fates has been insidiously reduced by corporations torpedoing collective bargaining rights. Many inner cities and schools have been discriminatorily neglected. Businesses and jobs have been moved abroad, and corporate prerogatives and profits have been rashly enhanced, contributing to inflation in the costs of healthcare, food, electricity, gasoline, rent and mortgages. In contrast, no such hard bargain for the rich has been undertaken. Give us a break -- this is a democracy, folks! We've got 'em outnumbered!"

The challenge of how to deal fairly with extreme levels of inequality is one of the defining issues of our times. Lamentably, conservatives lusting for domineering control have managed to seize almost unchecked power and are derailing our democracy, and they are in the process of abusing their authority to accomplish goals that are making economic and healthcare inequalities and social and environmental injustices much worse.

Backroom decision-making, crony favoritism, inept nepotism, harm-engendering discrimination, right-wing media spin, structural injustices, religious conservatism, machine politics and the undue influence of Big Money have been allowed to dominate our government for too long. Common sense tells us it would be wise to avoid the revolutionary strife associated with extreme desperation and violent "politics in the streets", by striving to reach a bold and fair-minded consensus on how to honestly actualize the ideals and values we hold in common.

These understandings make it clear today that it is our right, indeed our duty, to throw off the hegemony of the misguided influences that have come to dominate our Union. It is time to put progressive policies in place, and limit Big Money in elections, and enact policies that make the vast majority of Americans more secure. We must adopt initiatives that provide all Americans with adequate healthcare and fairer opportunities to flourish and achieve prosperity and happiness.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower made a provocative declaration that should inform our understanding: "If a political party does not have its foundation in the determination to advance a cause that is right and that is moral, then it is not a political party; it is merely a conspiracy to seize power." Unfortunately, unprecedented challenges have arisen to the separation of powers in our government that help ensure our personal liberties, and freedoms from abuses of power have been under concerted assault since January 2017.

The philosophic historians Will and Ariel Durant provide many thought-provoking *Lessons of History* that they had teased from two lifetimes spent writing an eleven-volume outline of world history. One of the most germane and important of their ideas is that a failure of elite factions to fairly compromise with the people has episodically led to violent revolutions. Think about this incisive synopsis of everything Will and Ariel Durant had learned in a lifelong study of world history. Remember, these observations were made in 1968: "If our economy of freedom fails to distribute wealth as ably as it has created it, the road to dictatorship will be open to any man who can persuasively promise security to all; and a martial government, under whatever charming phrases, will engulf the democratic world." Stunning -- and ominous! And easily remedied?!

An Echo of Wise Solon Reverberates through the Airwaves

Economics drives politics. In Athens more than 2,500 years ago, disparities of wealth between the rich and the poor created a dangerous upheaval. One faction favored democracy; another favored oligarchic rule by the wealthy few; a third preferred a mixed form of rule with a strong constitution. Clan rivalry and many regional conflicts also played a role in the strife of Athens in the 6th century BCE.

According to Will and Ariel Durant in *The Lessons of History*, the historian Plutarch wrote that, in the Athens of 594 BCE, "the disparity of fortune between the rich and the poor had reached its height, so that the city seemed to be in a dangerous condition, and no other means for freeing it from disturbances ... seemed possible but despotic power." The poor found that their status got worse every year because the government was in the hands of elite factions, and the courts were corrupt, deciding way too many issues against the masses. Talk of violent revolt reverberated through the Athenian city-state. The rich were outraged at the brazen challenge to their privileges and property and power, so they prepared to defend themselves by force.

As these conflicts escalated between various factions vying for perks, privileges, power and control, many persons recognized the need for a transformative leader who would find fair compromises between all competing groups, and would do so in an equitable and peaceable manner. Providentially, good sense prevailed and moderate elements secured the selection of a wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker named Solon, who was known for having demonstrated the wisdom to fairly mediate between concerned parties. He was given extraordinary wide-ranging legislative powers to negotiate fair compromises.

Solon made a number of commendably fair-minded reforms of the Greek political system and its economy that saved Athens from destructive conflict. Solon also addressed a broad agenda of moral issues like slavery, debt bondage, and abuses of the system of inheritance. One of the most important reforms he made was the creation of a steeply graduated income tax plan that made wealthy people pay taxes at a rate 12 times as much as the poor. This idea forms the basis for sensible proposals to reform the U.S. tax code by making it more steeply graduated. THAT action would result in broad benefits that really would trickle down!

My fellow Americans, make no mistake about it; with the disparity of fortunes between the rich and the poor in the U.S. reaching unconscionable new extremes right now, the nation is in a dangerous tinderbox condition. The lessons of history provide us with an excellent alternative to gathering risks: choosing honorable leaders who are committed to making decent and egalitarian progressive reforms. Those who do not heed the lessons of history are more likely to be doomed to repeat them, so let's heed the lessons!

A few years ago, Professor Robert Reich expressed optimism about the future of our great country. He pointed out that U.S. history has a decidedly progressive trajectory, despite periods of backward influences. He stated that reformers will eventually succeed in making our country a fairer place than it is today. We are at a juncture where we need to heed the will of the people and refuse to believe BS spin or accept the hardships and vulnerabilities that result from the right-wing agenda. It's time to stop the why-isn't-it-trickling-down debt-financed swindles that assess low taxes on the rich. We must boldly act to create a healthier, fairer nation.

To achieve the common good, we need clear-eyed understandings, and a hearty measure of fair-minded resolve. Now is the time for us to insist that our representatives begin to work together with an overarching goal of pursuing healthier, wiser, more just and more peaceable national priorities. For good guidance, it would be providentially positive for us to take into account the provisions of a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

This is the counsel of the shade of Virgil, the veritable voice of reason, and of the spirit of beautiful Beatrice, whose inspiration of an empathetic heart could provide us with the motivation to embark on more virtuous, redemptive and morally honorable paths into the future. For an interlude of fascinating introspection, see the Earth Manifesto essay *The Odd Brilliance of Dante's Epic Poem, The Divine Comedy*, for it provides additional understanding of Dante's great poem and its personal, religious, historical, political and moral underpinnings.

One belief Dante essentially expressed in *Inferno* is that the hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality or act in league with authority-abusing schemers. Let's not be complacent with inequities and injustices in our world today. Reject power abusers! Dante consigned those who commit acts of fraud to the eighth circle of Hell, so he placed them only slightly above the worst of his nine circles of *Inferno*, where those who committed cold-hearted intentional acts of treachery and treason were to be found. Conservatives shape up, and be aware.

Women, Ride to the Rescue!

Mark Twain once observed, "You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus."

In times of trouble, we need leaders to speak words of wisdom to us -- true words, well-informed words, honest words, responsible words. Women, it turns out, frequently make better leaders than men, as is being demonstrated in the current pandemic crisis. "From Germany to New Zealand to Taiwan and beyond, women executives are showing that compassionate, intelligent, and truthful leadership has proven essential in saving lives and stopping the spread of Coronavirus. Instead of laying the blame on others, these women are taking action and enforcing necessary safety precautions. They use policies grounded in facts and the latest technology. They listen to experts and don't let political issues affect decision-making. They show grace and humanity in thinking about how

this virus affects *all* of the people in their countries."

Donald Trump and the white male patriarchy, in contrast, have cunningly hijacked the government to advance a white nationalist agenda that cruelly discriminates against poor people, persons in minority groups, immigrants, women and gay people. It is a damning fact that African-Americans are suffering disproportionately from the deadly COVID-19 disease, at a rate far in excess of their proportion of the populace. This reveals an unacceptable aspect of the systemic injustices and socioeconomic stratification in our country, and the lack of fair representation that facilitates continued racial oppression.

"Women who seek to be equal with men lack ambition."

--- Timothy Leary

It is sensationally relevant to us today that our nation's Founders stated in the Declaration of Independence that whenever government becomes destructive of the ends for which it was established, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

After the ungodly triumph of Donald Trump and conservatives in Congress in 2016, it has become clear that Bernie Sanders has been right all along. What the USA needs is a peaceful revolution that brings positive change to the people. We need to radically alter the wrongly rigged system that burdens taxpayers and students with record levels of debt while stoking an ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. The few, of course, are right now in the process of ratcheting up their advantages at the expense of the populace. This is happening, ironically, at the same moment that the 2020 Pandemic is raging, and the divide between the fortunate and the unfortunate has become a gaping chasm. And Donald Trump has recently flipped the finger at everyone worldwide, trying to shift blame, by refusing to support the World Health Organization.

At a time when we clearly need unifying leaders who will honestly work to make our society fairer and more inclusive, and who will respect the Golden Rule ethic of fair-minded reciprocity, Trump Republicans have divided us to conquer, and are arrogantly violating common good values. It would be best for the American people if folks in the Trump base would see the light and stop supporting the authority abusers, and unite in common cause in championing egalitarian reforms that would be dramatically beneficial to the 99%. This, after all, would be the means of saving the 1% from the proverbial pitchforks, which are being readied as the prospects of widening unrest and social turmoil spike.

Wise Guys Speaks Out

The honorable Abraham Lincoln waxed eloquent about the ideals of our great nation after the bloody Battle of Gettysburg near the end of the terribly uncivil War Between the States. He made one of the greatest ever speeches on the battlefield in southern Pennsylvania in November 1863, proclaiming his vision of the importance of representative democracy and governance "of the people, by the people, for the people."

In 2002, the progressive Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota stated that he believed politics should be about much more than power, money and winning at any cost. He observed: "Politics is about the improvement of people's lives, lessening human suffering, and advancing the cause of peace and justice in our country and in the world." I salute these important concepts!

The plain truth of the matter, however, is that idealistic visions are not the main forces that guide our national policies. Much narrower motives drive most of the efforts made to codify into law the collective and often hopelessly skewed impulses of the constituencies that compete for ascendancy in our society.

The renowned journalist Ambrose Bierce, a contemporary of Mark Twain's, created a pithy satirical dictionary in which he defined words with witty and incisive perspicacity. Here is one of his smart definitions that provides a relevant and intriguing insight: "Politics, *n.* A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles."

Ambrose Bierce was "right-on" in this definition of politics. All the high-falutin' rhetoric during U.S. election campaigns about vision, righteousness and the moral good -- and caring about the middle class -- is betrayed by the fact that the current intense competition for control of our government is really a conflict between greedy rich

people and social conservatives, on the one hand, and people with more fair-minded, empathetic, liberal and future-respecting perspectives, on the other. Ambrose Bierce was an investigative journalist who courageously dared to take on the railroad "octopus" controlled by the infamous Big Four -- Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker and Collis Huntington -- a monopoly that wielded enormous power and influence in Bierce's day.

Political commentator David Sirota corroborates this perspective that giant corporations and wealthy people largely control our government. In *Hostile Takeover: How Big Money and Corruption Conquered Our Government -- and How We Take It Back*, he makes it clear that these special interest groups are working to make sure the government operates in their own best short-term interests, and not in the best interests of the people. Both political parties in our duopoly system pander to the financial elites in society above all else, and they all-too-infrequently dare to take any action that would displease the richest 1%, or CEOs in big corporations.

This confirms Ambrose Bierce's second definition of politics in his dictionary: "The conduct of public affairs for private advantage." This common sense evaluation expresses a much truer reality than most of the rhetoric we hear from our political leaders today. Yes, siree! (2020 Pandemic relief bills -- fraud catapults).

True patriotism consists of questioning and opposing abuses of power in one's country, not merely accepting them without question. As Mark Twain wrote: "My kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders." Cult followers, become sensibly disillusioned, and break free!

My own modern sensibilities regard fierce nationalism as anti-social, and far-right "patriotism" as fraudulent. It would be better that we seek a kind of humanism that is loyal to equitable principles and Golden Rule reciprocity, and respects the great ideals in their fullness espoused in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Patriotism should not be unthinking obedience to the politicians and influential factions that wield domineering power. Patriotism in America should really be a commitment to principles and ideals and values this country honestly holds dear. This includes the main concerns of our Founding Fathers: unity, social justice, an amenable general welfare, domestic tranquility, assured personal liberties, guaranteed civil rights, sensible limitations on the intrusiveness of government, and fair representation of the best interests of all the people in the country.

Bravo for Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them something more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."

--- **President Lyndon B. Johnson**, upon signing the Wilderness Act of 1964

One of the basic concerns expressed in this manifesto is environmental. That's why provisions for a proposed Bill of Rights for Future Generations include vital ecological ideas. Everything on Earth is naturally inextricably interconnected and interdependent, so considerations for the real health of natural ecosystems cannot be made independent of comprehensive concerns for fairer economic policies and the greater good of society in the long run. Likewise, considerations of economic policies can't be made with little regard for environmental concerns.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. once warned Americans not to "treat the planet as if it were a business in liquidation". He astutely told people at a conference in Toronto, "To me, environmental advocacy is not just about protecting the fish and the birds for their own sake. It's about recognizing that nature is the infrastructure of our communities. When we actively destroy nature, we diminish ourselves. We impoverish our children."

Sensible business owners know they should operate their businesses using the income they generate, for they cannot stay in business long if they squander their assets and equity. It is folly for us to allow corporations to try to convert natural resources to cash as quickly as possible. Such a strategy may give us an illusion of a prosperous economy in the short run, but schemes that allow Big Businesses to externalize costs and deplete resources in effect force our children, and theirs, to bear the costs of these selfishly shortsighted activities.

Robert Kennedy also pointed out that we should make bigger investments in protecting the environment because that would help assure the well-being and economic vitality of generations of people alive today, as well as those to

come in the future. In our hyper competitive free market crony capitalist system, when we under-value natural resources, we contribute to their foolhardy excessively wasteful usage.

Smart environmental planning is more important than ever in the world today, and it is getting more crucial with every year that passes. This fact makes it absurd that a League of Conservation Voters scorecard that rates members of Congress on how they voted on environmental issues found that the average score for all Republican Senators in 2017 was the lowest ever recorded, at 1%. In praiseworthy contrast, Democratic Senators averaged 93%. House Republicans have voted on hundreds of occasions to weaken protections of the environment and endangered species of life on Earth. The time has come for leadership that demonstrates much greater integrity, and acts more reasonably, so I urge Americans to demand that their leaders acknowledge and emphasize the importance of environmental concerns and protections. Insist on accountability! Throw Republicans out of office! And retroactively outlaw former coal lobbyists from being trust-violating administrators in the Environmental Protection Agency.

Once again, the cogent words of the insightful journalist Bill Moyers resonate in the interstices of my brain. Moyers noted that when he reads the news about all the things humanity is doing in the world, he concludes that it is not as if "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." As he looked at photos on his desk of his five grandchildren, he thought: "We do know what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world."

It is our collective duty to act more responsibly. It is for good reasons that Franz Kafka observed, "Nobody wants to introduce as many reforms as children do." Nobody's reforms would be as fair to people in the future as those made in the best interests of young people. Conversely, when we let entrenched interest groups defend the status quo by focusing on benefits for rich people and older folks, we effectively betray the young -- and are too inhumanely stingy with healthcare coverage.

Think clearly about the treacherous nature of the way we are treating the prospects of our children and our grandchildren. We are profligately using up natural resources, failing to conserve energy and water resources, allowing natural ecosystems to be damaged and wildlife habitats to be destroyed, and wantonly foisting the detrimental health and environmental costs of pollution, toxic wastes and greenhouse gas emissions upon people everywhere. And we are irresponsibly borrowing many trillions of dollars to hyper-stimulate these outcomes.

This whole litany of collective short-term oriented activities is being significantly exacerbated by the myopic expediency of promising a cornucopia of unfunded obligations for healthcare and retirement costs for millions of government employees, military veterans, and people over the age of 62. It is estimated that there is more than \$60 trillion in promised but unfunded obligations like this. Sixty trillion dollars! This far exceeds our national debt, and represents almost \$500,000 for every household in the U.S.

These facts are all but unbelievable. They reveal that our national policies are a form of intergenerational treachery. To allow this heedlessly shortsighted and unfair favoritism is irresponsible, and to facilitate it with accounting gimmickry and financial scams is misguided. This ruse resembles an odd new variant of a Ponzi scheme on an unprecedented scale, and it boggles the imagination to think we could be acting with such a lack of responsibility toward people in the future. Now is the time for clearer understandings, and for taking a courageous stand for a better future. The Dalai Lama is one of the wisest, most spiritually pure and cool, calm, and collected persons on Earth. Yet the happy and meditative Buddhist once declared: "In order to accomplish important goals, we need an appreciation of the sense of urgency." Hold that thought.

Common Sense Arrives on the Scene

Thomas Paine famously wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." Paine was an Englishman who became the consummate American patriot. He helped change the course of history by writing *Common Sense*, a highly influential pamphlet published in January 1776. *Common Sense* originally had the working title *Plain Truth*, and it spoke plain truths and made straightforward arguments about society and government. This was probably the best-selling pamphlet ever published. In it, Paine forcefully advocated independence from tyrannical rule by the

British, and he proposed enlightened ideas about the need and desirability for establishing a new form of government that would be more fairly representative, so that all people's voices would be heard.

It is noteworthy that Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* anonymously because the pamphlet was highly treasonous from the point-of-view of King George III and rulers in the British Empire. From our perspective today, this act of treason was one of the most laudably patriotic salvos against tyranny ever written. We now regard the cause of independence of the American colonies as having been central to the freedoms we enjoy today. I imagine the stirring music of fifes and bugles and drums accompanying the march of these ideas.

The relativity of patriotism and treason casts a bright light onto our political strife today. Think about this. So-called conservatives want "to drown government in the bathtub", and give personhood rights to corporate entities, thus undermining rights and power of ordinary people. Most of all, they want to give rich people larger tax breaks, and finance this generosity by borrowing public money AND slashing spending that helps poor people survive, and middle-class folks to be more secure. Really -- they want to save money by skimping on smart social insurance policies. They want to cut funding for Social Security and Medicare, and undermine affordable healthcare. They also want to facilitate the exploitation of resources and stimulate consumerism. And they want to take away rights of women to make their own personal decisions regarding getting pregnant and their reproductive health and the number of children they want to have in their families.

The simple fact of the matter is that we have been consistently avoiding difficult decisions required to fairly compromise between competing interests in our society, and we have consequently used the shortsighted expediency of borrowing huge sums of money from every taxpayer in every future year to achieve misguided priorities. This is sort of stupid, and exaggeratedly unfair. It would be a much better plan to act fiscally responsibly by creating rainy day funds for natural disasters and adaptive measures, and to invest in better preparedness for public health calamities like a global pandemic.

"Conservatives" have become increasingly unwilling to compromise with more moderate people for the greater good of society in the last few decades. They have been adamantly insisting that high-income earners should be allowed to pay ever lower rates of tax on the highest levels of their incomes. Many of them undermine efforts to conserve resources, and reduce protections of public lands in order to benefit private interests. Some advocate that we allow national parks, national forests and other public lands to be more easily exploited or privatized. And many believe we should spend more on building up the colossal military, no matter how wasteful or misguided or dangerous or belligerent. These are often the same people who advocate much more aggressive U.S. stances on the world scene -- and who want assault weapons to remain easy to obtain by anyone.

These obstinate ideological stances are narrow-minded attitudes that are radically contrary to honorable conservatism. This is antithetic to true patriotism, and downright treasonous to our descendants in the future. It is also perfidious to the future of humankind, and heedlessly inconsiderate of most species of life on Earth.

I, Tiffany B. Twain, Doctor of Philosophy and imagined illegitimate great-granddaughter of Mark Twain, have a vision for the greater good of humanity. This vision is informed by overarching fairness principles and ideas of sustainable stewardship of our home planet. It is a vision that encompasses ideas that would help foster more collaboration in good faith on the international stage, and attain common sense goals of having less strife and better prospects for health, justice, mutual security, peaceful coexistence and a sustainable future.

A Question of Ensuring National Security and Domestic Tranquility

Edward Stettinius, the Secretary of State in 1945, identified two fundamental components of human security. "The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts," he stated. "The first front is the security front, where victory spells freedom from fear. The second front is the economic and social front, where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace." PREPAREDNESS.

Think about the fact that there were a near record number of more than 45 million Americans living below the official poverty level in the USA -- before the pandemic. And understand that Social Security payments and other programs like food stamps, unemployment insurance and the Earned Income Tax Credit keep an additional 35 million people or so from poverty and worse hardship. These social programs keep many millions of Americans out of more

desperate circumstances, so they are a form of social insurance against more extreme insecurity of a large number of Americans. Social programs are thus a type of insurance against revolutionary unrest. These programs mitigate impulses toward the politics of anger in the streets, so they effectively allow the current system, jerry-rigged as it is -- so extremely in favor of rich people -- to be largely perpetuated, without being forced to enact big structural reforms. Social insurance policies are relatively inexpensive!

Oddly enough, many wealthy conservatives have been growing ever more adamantly opposed to paying for this smart form of insurance. This stance is forcing huge costs to be foisted onto our children and all people in every future year. It should irk every American that conservative rich people have been exhibiting such an eagerness to shirk tax obligations that help finance these insurance policies. Such opposition to unemployment benefits, nutritional assistance programs and the like is, in effect, crassly unempathetic, and sadly smacks of a sense of entitled hubris, severe shortsightedness, and even an attitude of arrogant and cruel hard-heartedness.

An "immense wedge" was being forced through American society during the Gilded Age by "the maldistribution of wealth, status, and opportunity," according to journalist Henry George, over 100 years ago. Bill Moyers noted that inequality has exploded in recent decades into what historian Clinton Rossiter described as "the great train robbery of American intellectual history." Stop these brazen villains now! And see the 2017 Republican Tax Cut law for what it is -- a debt swindle that is outrageously contrary to propriety, fairness and fiscal responsibility.

A Gauntlet Has Been Thrown

John Steinbeck wrote in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* that ideas germinate in our minds and in the populace as a whole, but that they generally do not gain power and traction until they find the fertile soil of discontent to grow in. The force of this idea could cause a peaceful and sudden revolution in the USA today, for the soil has already been fertilized "well enough", and we have become ripe for such change. I judge that really unempathetic ruses against fairness in our societies, perpetuated by those people with the most money, are causing these energies to develop, and to gain force. Conservatives are harvesting populist discontent more effectively than liberals and progressives, but their policy prescriptions serve to make inequities, inequalities and injustices irrationally worse, even for folks in the Trump base. So the time is ripe for clearly seeing this truth and supporting wide-ranging reform movements to set things straight. Liberal policies are required, NOT worsening ones in a corroded Trumpian dystopia.

"There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come."

--- Victor Hugo

James Madison was first elected in 1808 to become the fourth President of the United States. Earlier, he had been instrumental in drafting the U.S. Constitution in 1789, and he was a key author and champion of the great Bill of Rights. Madison was thus one of the central figures among our Founding Fathers, and he deserves the respect of our attention. He says (paraphrased): "Beware of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments by those in power. More violations of people's freedom have been effectuated by those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations."

These words from one of our foremost Founding Fathers should give us pause for serious reflection. We should heed these words and unite to oppose the many abuses of power that are taking place today, because these abuses are a driving force behind ecological shortsightedness, and they are contributing to deepening inequalities, dire health outcomes, growing public debt, inadequate investments in infrastructure, declining social mobility, and a worsening general welfare in the USA. We should stop bowing to "conservative" ideologies, and instead champion liberal ideas of fairness and common sense concern for the greater good. The sensational growth of extremes in inequality of income and wealth between the top 1% of Americans and the other 99% is causing a real abridgement of people's economic freedoms, and the corrupting influence of wealth in our money-monopolized political duopoly system is facilitating despotic usurpations of power. The invidiously evil nature and extensive harms inextricably involved in these political games call for reform. Church leaders -- turn left.

Wealthy philanthropist Bill Gates once threw down the gauntlet to the well-heeled: "I believe that with great wealth comes great responsibility -- the responsibility to give back to society and make sure those resources are

given back in the best possible way, to those in need." Donald Trump's Pandemic Plan, in stark contrast, says Susan Glasser, is "*Absolute Authority, No Responsibility*". Let's pay closer attention to what is essential.

Further Observations on Inegalitarianism

A great strength of American democracy has always been its heartening capacity for self-correction. Political power fueled by the growing concentration of wealth is beginning to undermine this central aspect of our democracy, and to cast doubts on our collective ability to achieve socially salubrious goals. Anti-democratic usurpations and abuses of power are having a dire and corrosive effect on the economy and social cohesion, and on the long-term future of our country.

The United States is being crippled by the stubborn unwillingness of the highest income earners to pay taxes at rates that are even 60% as much as the lowest rates in effect during the 45 years from 1936 through 1981. Many adverse consequences result from our inability to collectively demand that narrowly-focused interest groups act more fairly to share prosperity. As we can see, obtuse and unempathetic avarice causes us, among other outcomes, to be unable to make adequate investments in improved healthcare, public education, a safe national infrastructure, sensible environmental protections, a good and affordable social safety net, a balanced budget, protected National Parks and open spaces, and a more stable climate.

The Wilderness Society states that "We are seeing a dangerously unbalanced approach to our debt crisis. Conservation programs key to ensuring our long-term public and environmental health are being cut to the bone, while corporate polluters like oil companies receive billions in taxpayer dollars each year. Using borrowed money to finance government activities has finally reached a risky tipping point where the expediency of enormous levels of deficit financing simply must be reined in. The people who have benefitted from this long reign of fiscal insanity should be the main ones who contribute to our nation's stability and recovery, and to reductions in federal deficit spending. Trump Republican budgets are immoral, and really, really the wrong way.

We have been collectively kicking the proverbial can down the road for so long that we don't even recognize the consequences of our fiscally irresponsible actions. The U.S. has gone from being the world's largest creditor nation in the 1970s to the world's largest debtor nation after Reaganism took root. The banking system was deregulated and risk-taking was stoked with borrowed money. Debt-financed bubble economic policies were instituted, and capital was given more free rein in its efforts to triumph over labor by curtailing the collective bargaining rights of workers. And a small elite segment of society usurped the wealth generated by increased worker productivity. These mega-trends are working out badly for most Americans today.

President Obama Shared a Perspective

Barack Obama once suggested that the best way to grow the economy is from the middle out, not from the top down. "It's time for a new economic patriotism rooted in the belief that growing our economy begins with a strong and thriving middle class," he said. The American people have been forced to try the top-down method ever since Ronald Reagan launched his folksy revolution, but the results have not been good. Well, admittedly they have been financially very advantageous for the rich. For everybody else? Disastrous!

Let's try a different way! Let's enact a new simplified income tax system -- one that is more steeply graduated. This means everyone will pay exactly the same amount of tax on every dollar they earn, as they do now, but that higher rates will apply on the highest levels of earnings. This is the right way forward. It is the proper way, in both fiscal and economic terms, as well as in social and moral ones.

Consider this closely. Median household income roughly doubled between 1945 and 1980, and this increase was about the same as increases in the productivity of workers. But rich people generally seem to feel supremely entitled to maximizing their earnings, so a strong resurgent movement began to crush the power of workers. This movement was stoked by Ronald Reagan's permanent firing of more than 11,000 air traffic controllers who had gone on strike for better working conditions and higher compensation. This merciless termination started a long downward slide for American workers. Since then, almost all productivity gains in the economy have gone to the wealthiest 10% of Americans, instead of being more fairly shared with workers.

Inflation-adjusted pay to working people has basically remained stagnant since 1980, despite another doubling in worker productivity in the past 40 years. This essentially represents a redistribution of wealth to the top. It is an outcome that reveals the extreme inequities in our economic system. Seeing this, we realize that income and wealth should rightly be more fairly distributed. The best way to accomplish this would be to enact more steeply graduated tax rates on income, capital gains, and rich kids' inheritances.

A Relatively Objective Assessment

Republicans obstructed almost every initiative during the 8 years of Barack Obama's tenure in office that would have helped him succeed in righting the economy from recession and making the USA a fairer, more prosperous nation. This extreme intransigence was consistent with their misguided top political priority: "The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president," declared Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell after the 2010 elections. Fortunately, McConnell failed miserably at that.

This hard-line stance by Republicans can be seen as a blatant form of political sabotage. Though it was designed to make President Obama fail, it had the terrible 'collateral damage' side effect of hobbling and harming millions of people in the process. By adopting a top political priority of defeating President Obama, Republicans gave this goal precedence over improving the economy, helping create jobs, investing in people's health, honestly dealing with the huge national debt, protecting the environment, or ethically making our country fairer. Republicans generally want to do aggressive "nation-building" abroad, but they seem dead set against more sensible and fair-minded nation building at home. They demonstrated a particular animus toward doing anything that would have helped the black guy in the White House succeed, I reckon!

True patriots would reject the new strain of extremism that has hijacked the Republican Party, and would oppose the worst of their plans. Hey, maybe we might even be able to end the "war on women" in all its economic, social, reproductive, psychological and cultural dimensions. That would be real positive! If we really want liberty and justice for all in our great nation, we need to work together to actualize this fair-minded democratic vision. Let's strive to reach unity through adopting win/win consensus plans. And let's reject ploys to establish win/lose outcomes, which evidence reveals are the inevitable result of ever-more unfair crony capitalist laissez-faire "deregulated" policies and skewed national priorities and an authoritarian agenda.

A second American revolution is needed to overthrow the insidiously despotic aspects of the new monarchs of tyranny in our nation. This second revolution must ensure that the architects of reactionary social and environmental injustices are removed from halls of power. The first American Revolution threw off the tyranny of an imperial and undemocratic political system and an unfairly exploitive mercantile economic system that taxed people in the colonies without fair representation. The second revolution must throw off the tyranny of corrupt corporate politics and the hegemony of wealthy partisans, whose selfish greed has saddled the people with undue austerity and is stealing from future generations to enrich the few today. Even smack dab in the middle of a terrible global pandemic. This new revolution should be peaceful, progressive and fair-minded -- and it should come NOW! It should be guided by a visionary Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as specifically proposed in the Earth Manifesto. This is just *Common Sense!*

I believe the English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton was onto something when he coined the adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword." The salvo of ideas in the Earth Manifesto is my attempt to set forth intelligent ideas to try to overcome the narrow idea-shaping spin and propaganda of irresponsibly exploitive interests. Let it be!

Truly,
Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
May 12, 2020