



Earth Manifesto

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

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

Eleven score and twenty-one 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 triumphed. 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" they had declared to be self-evident for all citizens, they commendably convened a Continental Congress of representatives of the people. Having asserted that the 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 fair-minded form of democratic governance that would be guided by a Constitution, a Bill of Rights, and equitable rules of law.

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, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government, and between it and the various States. They did this in an effort to ensure that the American people would be forever free from despotic abuses of power, and that they would be represented fairly in all national decision-making. As if!

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 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, and they now primarily serve rich people and corporate masters, and NOT the best interests of the majority of American citizens. Most of our representatives are cowardly pragmatists who seem to be afraid to emphasize the simple truth that our current system is extremely unfair to the populace, and especially to younger generations, and downright treasonous to the best interests of people in future generations.

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."

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 nation. It is time to put progressive policies in place, and to

reform campaign financing and enact policies that make the vast majority of Americans more secure. We must thus adopt initiatives that give Americans fairer opportunities to flourish and achieve prosperity and happiness. President Dwight D. Eisenhower made a provocative declaration of his own 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.

Backroom decision-making, crony favoritism, machine politics, religious conservatism 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 "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 introductory paragraphs were written before the ungodly triumph of Trump and extreme conservatives in Congress. This development makes it clear that Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont was right. What the USA needs is a peaceful revolution that brings positive change to the people. We need to radically alter the bittersweet system that burdens taxpayers and students with record levels of debt to facilitate an ever increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the greedy few, who right now are in the process of ratcheting up their advantages at the expense of the populace.

The challenge of how to deal fairly with extreme levels of inequality is one of the defining issues of our times. Unfortunately, conservatives lusting for power have managed to seize unchecked power and derail our democracy, and they are in the process of abusing this power to accomplish goals that will make inequality and social injustices much worse.

At a time when we clearly need a unifying leader who will honestly work to make our society fairer and more inclusive, and who will honor the Golden Rule ethic of fair-minded reciprocity, divide-to-conquer Trump is rashly violating these values. It would be best for the American people if he would see the light and change course to unite *We the People* through more egalitarian reforms that will be beneficial to the 99%. This, after all, will be the means of saving the 1% from the proverbial pitchforks, which are being sharpened as the prospects of widening unrest and social turmoil spike.

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 important and germane of their ideas is that a failure of elite factions to fairly compromise with the people has often led to violent revolution. Think about this incisive synopsis of everything Will and Ariel Durant had learned in a life long study of world history. Remember, this was published in 1968. They observed: "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." Sensational.

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 every issue 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 people recognized the need for a transformative leader who would find a fair compromise between the competing groups, and would do so in an equitable and peaceable manner. Somehow good sense prevailed and moderate elements secured the selection of a wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker named Solon, because he was known for having demonstrated the wisdom to fairly mediate between concerned parties, and he was given wide-ranging legislative powers to mediate between concerned parties.

Solon was consequently given extraordinary legislative powers by his fellow citizens, and he made a number of revolutionarily fair-minded reforms of the Greek political system and its economy that saved Athens from destructive conflict. He also laudably addressed a broad agenda of moral issues like slavery, debt bondage, and abuses of the system of inheritance. The most important reform 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.

My fellow Americans, make no mistake about it; the disparity of fortune between the rich and the poor in the U.S. has reached new modern extremes today, and the nation is in a dangerous tinderbox condition. The lessons of history provide us with an excellent alternative to gathering risks: smart leadership that is committed to making decent, fair-minded 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!

Professor Robert Reich has expressed optimism about the future of our great country. He points out that our history has a decidedly progressive trajectory, despite periods of backward influences. Reformers, he believes, will eventually succeed in making our country a fairer place than it is today. We are at a juncture where we need to honestly heed the will of the people and refuse to accept deceit and anti-populist agendas and the perpetuation of debt-financed low tax rates for the rich. We must boldly act to create a fairer country.

To achieve the common good, we need honest and 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 choosing wiser, more just, and more peaceable national priorities. For good guidance, it would be providentially positive for us to heed the provisions of a proposed Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

This is the counsel of the great ghost 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 a more virtuous, redemptive and morally fair-minded path into the future. For an interlude of fascinating information and 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, political, religious, historical and moral underpinnings.

Dante essentially expressed the opinion in *Inferno* that the hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality. Let's not be complacent with inequities and injustices in our world today. 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. Trump, be aware.

Wise Guys Speaks Out

"You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus."

--- Mark Twain

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 speeches ever at Gettysburg, 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 late 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, 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 himself was an investigative journalist who courageously dared to take on the railroad "octopus" that was controlled by the infamous Big Four -- Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker, and Collis Huntington -- whose railroad monopoly wielded excessive power and influence in his day.

David Sirota corroborates this interesting perspective that giant corporations and wealthy people largely dominate 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 resolutely 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 our society above all else, and they rarely 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 all the rhetoric we hear from our political leaders today. Yes, siree!

True patriotism consists of questioning and opposing abuses of power in one's country, and not merely accepting them without question. As Mark Twain once said: "My kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders."

My own modern sensibilities regard patriotism as less important than a kind of humanism that is loyal to fair-minded principles and Golden Rule reciprocity and the great ideals in their fullness that were espoused in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Patriotism is not unthinking obedience to the politicians and influential factions in 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: fairness, social justice, assured personal liberties, guaranteed human rights, sensible limitations on the intrusiveness of government, and fair representation of the best interests of all the people in our country.

Bravo for Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

The primary concerns expressed in the Earth Manifesto are environmental. That's why the provisions for a proposed Bill of Rights for Future Generations include important ecological ideas. Everything on Earth is inextricably interconnected and interdependent, naturally, so considerations for the 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 cannot be made independent of concerns for the environment.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. once warned Americans not to "treat the planet as if it were a business in liquidation". He wisely 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 that they should operate their businesses using the income they generate, and that they cannot stay in business for 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 ephemeral illusion of a prosperous economy, but all schemes that allow giant corporations to deplete resources and externalize costs onto society effectively force our children and descendants to bear the costs of these shortsighted activities.

Robert F. Kennedy also pointed out that we should make bigger investments in environmental protections because they help ensure the well-being and economic vitality of generations of people alive today as well as those in the future. In our free market capitalist system, when we under-value natural resources, we contribute to their 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 the 2011/12 session of the House of Representatives had the worst environmental record of any session in history, for House Republicans voted on more than 300 occasions to weaken protections of the environment. Since then, Congress has gotten even worse, according to the League of Conservation Voters, whose National Environmental Scorecard gave Republicans the lowest rating ever in 2014 and then again in 2015. And with Trump and Pruitt and Zinke, these environmental scores have gone below zero and far into negative territory. The time has come for leadership that demonstrates much greater integrity, and is more reasonable, so I urge Americans to demand that their leaders acknowledge and emphasize the importance of environmental concerns and protections.

Once again, the cogent words of the fair-minded 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 looks at photos on his desk of his five grandchildren, he observes: "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 future generations as those made in the best interests of children. Conversely, when we let entrenched interest groups defend the status quo by focusing on benefits for rich people and older folks, we effectively betray young people, and are too stingy with healthcare benefits.

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 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 is three times as much as the amount of our national debt, and represents almost \$500,000 for every household in the U.S.

These facts reveal that our national policies are an unkind 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 fair-minded 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 is said to have been 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 the ruling 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. "Conservatives" in modern-day America want to "drown government in the bathtub" and give rights of personhood to corporate entities, and to thus undermine the rights and power of ordinary people. Most of all, they want to give rich people larger tax breaks, and finance this generosity by slashing spending that helps poor people survive and middle-class folks to be more secure. Really! They want to save money on cheap and smart social insurance policies! They also want to facilitate the exploitation of resources, stimulate consumerism and eliminate many protections of the environment. And they want to take away rights of women to make their own personal decisions regarding getting pregnant and their reproductive health and the size of 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 all people in future generations to achieve misguided priorities. This is sort of stupid, and extremely unfair to our descendants. It would be a much better plan to act fiscally responsibly by creating rainy day funds for natural disasters and adaptive measures.

"Conservatives" have become increasingly unwilling to compromise with more moderate people for the greater good of society in the past eight years. They have been adamantly insisting for decades that high-income earners should be allowed to pay low 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 the military, no matter how wasteful or misguided or dangerous. Not exactly incuriously, 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 and narrow-minded attitudes are radically contrary to true and honorable conservatism. These are not patriotic approaches, and in fact, they are downright treasonous relative to our descendants in future generations. They are distinctly treacherous to the future of humankind, and heedlessly inconsiderate of a large number of 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 justice, peaceful coexistence and a sustainable future.

"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

President Obama Shared a Perspective

Barack Obama has 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 has 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 fiscal and economic terms, as well as in social and moral ones.

Consider this closely. Median household income roughly doubled between 1945 and 1980. This increase was about the same as increases in the productivity of workers. But wealthy people generally 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, shorter hours and higher compensation. This merciless termination started a long downward slide for American workers. Since then, all productivity gains in the economy have gone to the wealthiest 10% of Americans, instead of being more fairly shared with workers.

Inflation-adjusted compensation to working people has remained stagnant since 1980, despite another doubling in worker productivity in the past 36 years. This essentially represents a redistribution of wealth to the top. It is an outcome that reveals the extreme inequities in our econopolitical system, and it is an outcome that makes clear the understanding 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.

It really is sensational that the productivity of American workers has roughly doubled in the past few decades while their average hourly compensation has basically remained unchanged. One outcome of this situation is that wages are at their lowest share of GDP on record, while the profits corporations are making are at the highest share of GDP since the 1960s. Meanwhile, total taxes paid by corporations as a percent of GDP are the lowest in decades. These facts reflect highly unfair trends that should be reversed through sensible public policies. Otherwise, the pressure cooker of inequities will cause increasing adversities for most Americans.

Bankers Culpability

In the documentary film *Inside Job*, narrated by Matt Damon, the director Charles Ferguson provides a good comprehensive analysis of the causes of the global financial crisis of 2008. This crisis cost more than \$20 trillion worldwide, and it caused millions of people to lose their jobs and their homes in the worst economic recession since the Depression of the 1930s. Ferguson states unequivocally that pervasive Wall Street fraud was involved in this crisis, which nearly caused a global financial collapse.

"Three years after a horrific financial crisis caused by massive fraud, not a single financial executive has gone to jail," Ferguson later wrote. "And that's wrong!" This outrage inspired Ferguson to do more research and then write *Predator Nation*, a compelling indictment of both factions in our political duopoly.

No reports have yet come out whether any financial executives have arrived in the eighth circle of Hell. It is noteworthy that millions of small-time criminals, poor people, desperate people, and sellers and users of marijuana fill our prisons in the U.S. today. The really big crooks, however, have engaged in various shades of fraud in crashing the national and international economy, and yet have nonetheless secured trillions of dollars in bailouts and liquidity stimulus to prevent another Depression. These people are treated as luminaries and untouchable pillars of society, and they are members of a hyper-privileged elite that is ironically rewarded with most of the benefits of our national policies -- and low tax rates.

Not only has nobody gone to prison for the *Inside Job* that caused the Great Recession, or for all the widespread mortgage fraud, but no one is incarcerated for having misused risky financial derivatives to make huge sums of money, on which they paid low rates of tax. And no one is being punished for the ruses that resulted in a harsh

recession that necessitated huge government bailouts. Not a single person has gone to prison for these schemes, which caused tens of millions of people to lose large amounts of their home equity and retirement security.

If we truly want a happier ending for millions of hard-working Americans like teachers, firefighters and other government employees, we should stop blaming them for budget deficits, and instead blame the corporate CEOs, bankers and Wall Street fat cats who largely control the economy and helped cause the dire economic straits we have been collectively enduring since 2008. Tens of millions of people are being required to face unnecessarily austere measures as an unintended consequence of these adverse developments. Scandalous is far too mild a word for this state of affairs!

When Will a Year of True Economic Populism Arrive?

Early in 2014, some political pundits proclaimed that the year would be "The Year of Economic Populism". This sentiment was a marriage of optimism and a pragmatic recognition that on-going rash increases in inequality in American society, which began with the Reagan Revolution over 35 years ago, is going to turn out very badly for everyone, including the wealthy, unless courageous actions are taken to reduce the increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. Steve Bannon says that an "economic nationalism" movement has arrived that prioritizes American citizens above everyone else, and "the only question before us is whether it is going to be a left-wing populism or a right-wing populism." A clear understanding would vastly favor the liberal approach.

President Obama made a significant speech in December 2013 in which he called growing inequality and lack of upward mobility "the defining challenge of our time." He pointed out that the American Dream is being shattered by these dual problems of income inequality and declining social mobility. This idea is crucially important, so listen to some excerpts from the President's speech:

"People's frustrations run deeper than recent political battles. Their frustration is rooted in their own daily battles -- to make ends meet, to pay for college, buy a home, save for retirement. It's rooted in the nagging sense that no matter how hard they work, the deck is stacked against them. And it's rooted in the fear that their kids won't be better off than they were. They may not follow the constant back-and-forth in Washington or all the policy details, but they experience in a very personal way the relentless, decades-long trend ... that jeopardizes middle-class America's basic bargain -- that if you work hard, you have a chance to get ahead."

"I believe this is the defining challenge of our time: Making sure our economy works for every working American. It's why I ran for President. It was at the center of last year's campaign. It drives everything I do in this office. And I know I've raised this issue before, and some will ask why I raise the issue again right now. I do it because the outcomes of the debates we're having right now -- whether it's health care, or the budget, or reforming our housing and financial systems -- all these things will have real, practical implications for every American. And I am convinced that the decisions we make on these issues over the next few years will determine whether or not our children will grow up in an America where opportunity is real."

"The problem is that alongside increased inequality, we've seen diminished levels of upward mobility in recent years. A child born in the top 20 percent has about a 2-in-3 chance of staying at or near the top. A child born into the bottom 20 percent has a less than 1-in-20 shot at making it to the top. He's 10 times likelier to stay where he is. In fact, statistics show not only that our levels of income inequality rank near countries like Jamaica and Argentina, but that it is harder today for a child born in America to improve her station in life than it is for children in most of our wealthy allies, countries like Canada, Germany or France. They have greater mobility than we do, not less."

"So let me repeat: The combined trends of increased inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American Dream, our way of life and what we stand for around the globe. And it is not simply a moral claim that I'm making here. There are practical consequences to rising inequality and reduced mobility. For one thing, these trends are bad for our economy. One study finds that growth is more fragile and recessions are more frequent in countries with greater inequality. And that makes sense. You know, when families have less to spend, that means businesses have fewer customers and households rack up greater mortgage and credit card debt. Meanwhile, concentrated wealth at the top is less likely to result in the kind of broadly-based consumer

spending that drives our economy and, together with lax regulation, may contribute to risky, speculative bubbles.”

“And rising inequality and declining mobility are also bad for our families and social cohesion, not just because we tend to trust our institutions less, but studies show we actually tend to trust each other less when there’s greater inequality. And greater inequality is associated with less mobility between generations. That means it’s not just temporary. The effects last, and they create a vicious cycle.” ...

“And finally, rising inequality and declining mobility are bad for our democracy. Ordinary folks can’t write massive campaign checks or hire high-priced lobbyists and lawyers to secure policies that tilt the playing field in their favor at everyone else’s expense. And so people get the bad taste that the system’s rigged. And that increases cynicism and polarization and it decreases the political participation that is a requisite part of our system of self-government.”

Those words about “social cohesion” are of particular importance. Our national motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, means “out of many, one.” We Americans are so accustomed to divisiveness and political discord today in our outrageously monopolized and systemically corrupt political duopoly system that we do not feel the full force of the great value of social cohesion in our communities and countries. Social cohesion, though, is the original civilizing force that natural selection has chosen over thousands of passing generations as a crucial bond for the survival of human clans and tribes, and later agricultural communities, city-states, kingdoms and nations. And now today, fairer treatment of others is a form of social bonding that offers us the best hope of social cohesion that will help create civilizations capable of surviving the formidable social, economic, financial and environmental challenges that all humanity will face in the future. Demagogic Trumpism is the antithesis of this value.

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 in the hands of a few 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 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.

“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.”

--- The Wilderness Society

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’s budget is 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. went from being the world’s largest creditor nation to the world’s largest debtor nation during the 1980s. 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 means of tactics targeted toward 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 very badly for most Americans today.

Examining the National Debt

The U.S. national debt first exceeded \$18 trillion in late 2014, and then exceeded \$19 trillion in February 2016 and reached \$20 trillion in September 2017. This debt represents more than \$60,000 for every man, woman and child in the U.S. This large amount of debt is undermining the potential well-being and prospects of people in future generations. We can no longer afford to allow the all-but-criminal evasion of taxes by the rich that has contributed to this unprecedented level of debt -- and the unprecedented size of their assets.

We should be clear about the starkly wrongheaded nature of borrowing huge sums of money to finance low tax rates for rich people. Consider the compelling reason why. Even if the principal balance of borrowed money is never paid back, the American people are obligated to pay the interest expense on this debt. The interest cost on borrowed money amounts to 100% of the amount borrowed every 15 years or so, assuming a long-term average interest rate of 5%. It is completely crazy to borrow trillions of dollars to give it to rich people today, knowing that the boon to wealthy people and their heirs will cost people in the future 100% of the amount borrowed every 15 years, over and over and over and over again. This is a downright stupidly expedient gambit!

I call on all our American leaders to come together to help enact a Fair Taxation Initiative enacted like the one that is proposed in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Make America Great Again*. This change would almost immediately make our economy fairer and healthier, and allow us to invest more sensibly in national infrastructure maintenance and improvements and healthier policies for our communities, and important protections of natural ecosystems. The American people would be more secure, the size of future deficits would be reduced, and our democracy would be made stronger and more resilient.

Irony is a subversive devil. After Admiral Mike Mullen declared that "Our national debt is our biggest national security threat", it should have become starkly clear that it has been a bad plan to spend more than \$16 trillion since 1980 on wars, weapons, the Pentagon, intelligence agencies and Homeland Security, and in one sense to effectively have borrowed the entire amount. The conclusion is inescapable: it would have been a much more sensible plan "to pay as we go." By failing to do so, we have put our nation's financial health in a precarious state that is, in itself, so fiscally irresponsible that it is among the worst national security threats of all. Stunning!

A Relatively Objective Assessment

Republicans obstructed almost every measure during the eight years of Barack Obama's tenure in office that would have helped him succeed in righting the economy and making our country a fairer and more progressive nation. This extreme intransigence is 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 the President 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, 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 -- particularly if it would have helped the black guy in the White House succeed, I reckon!

A Bizarre Development

A secretly-taped video surfaced in mid-September 2012 that featured Mitt Romney talking to supporters at a private \$50,000 per person fund-raising dinner. In the video, he declared that his job is "not to worry about" the 47% of Americans who pay no income tax. In the video, he conflated "47% of the people who will vote for the president no matter what" with 47% of people who pay no income taxes, and he expressed disdain that bordered on

contempt for the 47% of Americans "who are dependent on government, who believe that they are victims ... who believe they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it."

Embarrassed by the revealing attitudes he expressed to his well-heeled supporters in the video, but unyielding, he defended his statement the next day, conceding only that perhaps it was "not elegantly stated". Inelegance, Mr. Romney, was not the problem. It wasn't merely an unfortunate choice of words; it was a poor choice of words and ideological convictions. It was, in particular, a really poor choice of words and beliefs for a rich guy to profess in his attitude toward the middle class and working poor. Conservative columnist David Brooks provided a damning perspective about the Romney video. "The people who receive the disproportionate share of government spending are not big-government lovers. They are Republicans. They are senior citizens. They are white men with high school degrees. As Bill Galston of the Brookings Institution has noted, the people who have benefitted from the entitlements explosion are middle-class workers, more so than the dependent poor."

Romney's words reflected a glib eagerness to oversimplify issues, and to distort them to try to make them conform to his overarching and unapologetic capitalist worldview. One problem with his hewing to corporate economic orthodoxy is that it represents a basically untenable position of advocating a doubling-down on the regressive and unsustainable tax policies of the Bush era. Another problem is that it's difficult to sell unempathetic "you're on your own economics" to people who are struggling so traumatically with economic hard times. Romney's attitude seemed so out of touch and narrowly self-serving, and surely the vast majority of Americans would be better served by leaders who are better stewards of the public interest!

The video was sensational because it showed Romney launching a hostile salvo against millions of Americans who he was trying to dupe into supporting him. It turns out that half of the nearly 47% of Americans who pay no income taxes don't earn enough money to owe any tax. Most of the rest who pay no income taxes receive tax credits that offset their meager incomes because they are senior citizens, low-income parents, or working poor people. Many military veterans are among the 47%. Revealingly, the top ten states where these 47% live are in the South, where Republican Governors preside over economic policy in states like Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina. There are also, curiously, 4,000 households that earn more than \$1 million per year in this 47% of Americans. Somehow these people twist the tax code into a selfish tax-free triumph.

The President should be responsible for serving all Americans, and should not abandon large segments of the populace in pandering to the Party base. "Personally," concluded David Brooks, "I think Romney's a kind, decent man who says stupid things because he is pretending to be something he is not -- some sort of cartoonish government-hater." Peggy Noonan, a conservative Wall Street Journal columnist and former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, described Romney's campaign as "a rolling calamity." Rush Limbaugh offered his own dumb advice: "Go ideological!" He wanted Mitt to pander more slavishly to the extreme right. He apparently believes Romney hadn't gone far enough toward the extreme ideologies of the "loony-tunes" crowd. Did Trump prove that Limbaugh was right? More accurately: Go demagogic, and damn ethics!

Mitt, trying to avoid providing specific details of his envisioned policies, once declared, "The devil is in the details. The angel is in the policies." If that's true, the angel policies are arguably the ones that make the lives of the majority of people more secure, NOT the policies that unjustly merely make the rich richer. The right policies are the best plan, NOT the far right policies!

Republicans rhapsodize with vaulting rhetoric about American Exceptionalism, but their bait-and-switch policies worship exceptionally generous policies for top income earners in the U.S. while proposing increasingly stingy policies for everyone else. They claim to represent "a shining city on a hill", but their blurry vision can be seen more accurately to resemble a glaring searchlight atop fortress walls that is blinding many Americans so that they will be deluded into opposing more common sense solutions to our society's numerous solvable problems.

In addition to their overarching goal of cutting taxes for people who are already wealthy, their goal of imposing a more reactionary form of right-wing social engineering upon the American people -- especially on women! -- is anathema to our national ideals. The American people value both liberty and religious freedom, and they dislike abuses of authority. A provocative quote often misattributed to Sinclair Lewis in his 1935 novel about

totalitarianism, *It Can't Happen Here*, provides a disconcerting perspective: "When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag, carrying the cross."

One of the Tea Party darlings at the 2012 Republican National Convention was Florida Senator Marco Rubio. Listen to his speech at the RNC at the time: "Our national motto is 'In God We Trust', reminding us that faith in our Creator is the most important American value of all." Is this value more important than honesty, personal freedoms, the protection of children, peaceful coexistence, protections of the environment, reducing poverty, and caring about others, including people in future generations? In 2016, Rubio ran to become President, but was steamrolled just like all other Republican competitors -- and all other Americans.

Marco Rubio's attitude was divisive, and unlikely to help us form a more perfect Union. There is a good reason that when politicians take their oaths of office, they place their hand on the Bible and swear to uphold the U.S. Constitution, and that they DO NOT put their hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible. A robust separation of church and state is an important principle for peaceable coexistence and democratic fairness.

True patriots would reject the new strain of extremism that has hijacked the Republican Party, and oppose the worst of Trump's plans. Hey, maybe we can end the "war on women" in all its economic, social, reproductive, psychological and cultural dimensions. That would be a positive plan! If we really do 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 rejecting ploys to establish win/lose gambits that are encapsulated in ever-more unfair "deregulated" policies.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." This arc can, and does, get bent backward toward more injustice for periods of time, but the majority of people should honorably oppose such trends. Let's reverse course, and move forward together!

A second American revolution is needed to overthrow the insidiously despotic aspects of the new monarchs of tyranny in our nation. This second American Revolution must ensure that the architects of radical 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 American 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.

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