

Earth Manifesto



Real Live Experiments in Applied Trickle-Down Theoretics

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"May you live in interesting times", goes an old Chinese blessing and curse. And the times we live in are surely getting curiouser and curiouser, especially in North American politics. A curious concatenation of circumstances caught my attention mid-way through the second decade of the twenty-first century, and I encourage readers to give it attentive consideration.

In Canada, voters surprised most observers by choosing the young Liberal Party candidate Justin Trudeau as their next leader in their national elections on October 19, 2015. Trudeau won a come-from-behind landslide victory by making promises to progressively reform the tax code by cutting taxes on everyone's lower levels of earnings and increasing them on higher levels of income, and to responsibly invest in improving Canada's physical infrastructure. This vision is startling and upsetting to conservatives in the United States, who have been in bondage for 35 years to misguided trickle-down tax cutting ideologies that primarily benefit the rich.

Chrystia Freeland, a Liberal Member of Parliament who won re-election easily in her Toronto district, made an essential point: "It's really important that people not approach economic policy as ideology or with quasi-religious convictions. Economic policy is about the facts and the circumstances."

In stark contrast to Canada's new direction, Kansas Governor Sam Brownback foolishly declared that he would conduct a "real live experiment" in doubling down on trickle-down economics, expecting to prove conclusively that this big boon to his wealthy supporters would also be good for the people of Kansas. But he proved exactly the opposite. He and Republican lawmakers enacted big tax cuts for top income earners in 2012, and since then Kansas has faced severe budget problems and has been forced to cut spending on schools and programs that benefit workers and poor people. As a direct result, he and his staunchly ideological Republican cronies were forced to raise sales taxes in 2015 that disproportionately impose hardships on poor people and those in the middle class. Any economist not in the Republican echo chamber of "movement conservatism" could have told them that this would be the outcome of what is a persistently deceitful and inequity-stoking agenda.

Justin Trudeau is just beginning his own real live experiment in progressive taxation and far-sighted investments in a better society today -- and in a better future -- and this experiment in Canada will likely have relatively more positive outcomes than the ones people in Kansas are experiencing. It will also provide a revealing contrast to the economic and social disaster taking place in Kansas, where the negative impacts are adding up and things are deteriorating because of the Republican-engendered shift in taxation to benefit the wealthy at the expense of everyone else.

Justin Trudeau won the election with the help of a persuasive TV ad on an escalator, *Harder to Get Ahead*. This 30-second ad became a YouTube sensation and was brilliantly effective in conveying the understanding that the trickle-down economic ideology is bogus. The ad basically explained Keynesian economics by featuring Justin, the handsome

son of Pierre Trudeau, an iconic Prime Minister of Canada from 1968 to 1984, as Justin walked up an escalator as it was moving down. Unable to get ahead on the escalator, Trudeau explains that the experience mirrors "what's happening to millions of Canadians in 10 years under (the Conservative Party's) Stephen Harper."

Harper's "ideas to give benefits to the wealthy but make cuts to everything else has made it harder for most people to get ahead," says Trudeau, as the escalator jolts to a halt. "And Mulcair (the other candidate in the election) promises more cuts. Now is not the time for cuts." The escalator then starts up, heading in the right direction as Trudeau walks to the top and announces, "In my plan, we'll kick start the economy by investing in jobs and growth and lowering taxes for our middle class. That's real change."

The echo of Barack Obama's 2008 campaign motto, "Yes, We Can", reverberates in my memory. And I realize clearly that much more positive change would have been achieved in the United States in the past eight years without astonishingly stubborn opposition by Republicans to President Obama's every attempt to improve conditions for the middle class and the general welfare and the collective prospects of *We the People*.

With a similar bold embrace of progressive taxation and smart public investment and a more humane approach to economics in the United States, the American people could celebrate President Obama's accomplishments and demand that the new administration take honest steps to actually achieve better outcomes for all Americans.

Trudeau's impressive victory over the conservative incumbent Stephen Harper was gratifying to all supporters of his Liberal Party, especially in conjunction with the success of many Liberals in their contests for Parliament. This triumph was also facilitated with an outstanding "Sunny Ways" whiteboard video presentation titled *An Economy that Benefits Us All*. This seven-minute video gives a stunningly simple and persuasive explanation of why progressive plans will be better for Canadians than the agenda and performance of Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party over the previous ten years. This video helped Justin Trudeau get elected as the next Prime Minister because it presented smart ideas and convincing logic in a way that effectively rebukes conservative ideologies. As Trudeau states:

"Ours is the only plan that will invest now in what Canadians need -- things like good-paying jobs, reliable transit, and affordable housing. Ours is the only plan that will address income inequality by raising taxes on the wealthiest one percent so we can cut them for the middle class. Nine out of ten families will be better off under our plan than under Mr. Harper's. The Liberal plan will grow the economy, strengthen the middle class, and help those working hard to join it."

Charles Waterstreet, a prominent Australian barrister and author provided a trenchant observation: "Justin Trudeau preached that politics did not have to be negative and personal, and appealed to the better angels of our nature to win. He was inspiring. He asked the nation to get involved in politics and be optimistic and to have faith and to believe in hope and not allow the dream to die, as it can be a powerful force for change."

Justin Trudeau basically rejected excessive adherence to austerity economics and indicated that the Liberal Party would make smart public investments in Canada's infrastructure by running modest deficits for a three-year period. His victory proved that voters in Canada understand the difference between profligate spending and needed public investments. Championing the goal of rebuilding Canada's physical infrastructure, Liberals popularized the term "infrastructure deficit," and most voters recognized related risks and agreed that a time of low interest rates was a good time to invest in the future.

The aging and too-much neglected infrastructure in the U.S. is one of our "Achilles heels" in both international competition and public safety. After all, the prestigious American Society of Engineers has given the U.S. a "D" on its latest Infrastructure Report Card. These engineers give a "poor" grade to the state of schools, roads, dams, levees, inland waterways, drinking water, and hazardous wastes, and "mediocre" grades to bridges, rail lines and ports. So Canada is smart to invest more funds in maintaining and improving its infrastructure, and politicians in the

U.S. are acting stupidly by preventing similar investments because of budgetary constraints caused by giving historically low tax rates to high income earners and wealthy people.

The Big Picture

A more comprehensive understanding reveals one of the main things that have contributed to "What's the Matter with the USA." There are very legitimate reasons for the anti-establishment sentiments that roiled politics in 2016 and gave so much energy to supporters of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump. The American people's trust in their government has been seriously betrayed, mainly because of the degree that wealthy people and their corporate surrogates and *Dark Money* have served to corruptly rig our system to benefit the few while severely undermining the well-being of the many, and of all people in the future.

Sam Brownback should have known what is afflicting Kansas, for the native Kansan journalist and historian Thomas Frank had made it abundantly clear in his insightful book *What's the Matter with Kansas*. Thomas Frank provides a stunning explanation of how and why many people are goaded into supporting the economic agenda of billionaires rather than their own self-interest or that of their children and people in future generations. A better understanding of these issues would be salubrious for all Americans, and could energize hopes of creating a healthier, fairer and more sustainable society.

A sensational film revealing this truth is *The Brainwashing of My Dad*, which explores the personal implications of the dangerous propaganda pushed by conservative media outlets. In this documentary, filmmaker Jen Senko examines the rise of right-wing media through the lens of her father, whose immersion in it radicalized him and rocked the foundation of their family. Jen Senko discovered this political phenomenon recurring in living rooms across America, and reveals the consequences that it has had on families and the country. The rise of Trump itself is a product of decades of propaganda and divisively stoking people's fears and antagonisms that has been spread through right-wing talk radio shows and Fox News, and in fake news stories and false conspiracy theories and character assassinations on social media platforms.

Brownback should have seen the laughable folly of his shrewd and ruthless but doomed-to-failure plans. He seems to have fallen prey to an extreme form of "confirmation bias" that contributed to overconfidence in his conviction in the validity of trickle-down ideology and extreme "conservatism" in the face of overwhelmingly contrary evidence. His poor political decisions due to such confirmation biases have had a terribly high cost for millions of people in Kansas.

The intense competition between liberal political philosophy and conservative political ideology is interesting. It seems crystal clear that this choice involves having either fair representation of the best interests of the vast majority of the people or unfair excessive acquiescence to the greedy desires of the wealthy few. Think about this statement in the context of the real live experiments that are going on in the laboratory of states that lie just across the border from the Canadian province of Ontario. There, opposing economic plans have yielded a revealing contrast between consequentially positive outcomes of liberal economic policies and pathetically negative results of conservative policies. Just look at the neighboring states of Wisconsin and Minnesota, and a dramatic comparison of their economic trajectories in the last seven years.

Republican Scott Walker was elected Governor of Wisconsin in the year 2010, and Democrat Mark Dayton was elected Governor of Minnesota that same year. Scott Walker slashed taxes on businesses and rich people, reduced business regulation, assaulted collective bargaining rights of public employees, and imposed austerity measures to cut public spending. The state of Minnesota did the opposite, modestly raising taxes on the highest income earners and making big investments in schools and higher education.

The outcome is amazing. Wisconsin lags behind Minnesota in job creation, income growth and even in the stock prices for publicly traded companies in each state. At the time that Minnesota elected Democratic Governor Mark

Dayton back in 2010, there was a Republican legislature and the state faced a \$6.2 billion deficit. By mid- December 2015, state officials announced that Minnesota had a budget surplus that had reached \$1.9 billion.

How was this turn-around accomplished? Taxes on the rich were increased and minimum wages were raised and a state law was passed guaranteeing women equal pay. "You know," wrote Walter Eikenkel in Daily Kos, "stuff that Republicans usually say will end in a sky made out of fire with Jesus Christ riding on top of a horse, jousting with the ghost of Vladimir Lenin, while swinging a broad sword made out of fire. Well, at least in the case of Minnesota, the Democratic Party has been able to prove that using your government for good, to help the majority of people, versus the wealthy minority of businesses can result in both rich and poor doing better."

Separated by this deep gulf in ideology, the distinctly different outcomes for the general welfare of the people in these respective states brilliantly points the way to better practices, and they give a black eye, once again, to the greed-driven agenda of staunch conservatives. As Lawrence Jacobs, a professor of political science, has poignantly pointed out, "Evidence and common sense should matter more in our overheated political debates. The lesson from the upper Midwest is that rigid anti-tax dogma fails to deliver a convincing optimistic vision that widens economic opportunity and security."

An even more striking contrast can be found since 2010 between the state of Kansas, with its regressive actions under Sam Brownback, and the state of California, with its progressive actions under Governor Jerry Brown.

Every person who is familiar with the scientific method knows that in any experiment it is good to have a comparison case where contrasting policies are enacted. Conveniently, in this case, California voters chose an opposite course in 2012 from the experiment in Kansas by enacting a more socially responsible and civilized plan of making the California tax code a bit more progressive, with slightly higher taxes on the highest income levels.

The scientific method holds that the best way to determine the validity of any hypothesis is to subject the theory to a test and then objectively evaluate the results. So, fast forward a few years, and the results are in. And -- surprise!? -- Kansas is suffering hard economic times and big budget shortfalls, and California is booming economically, and is in unusually good financial health (relatively speaking!). California is an international leader in climate action, and Kansas stubbornly opposes proactive steps to mitigate the unfolding risks. And income tax revenues in Kansas have fallen by hundreds of millions of dollars, unsurprisingly to any objective observer, while a predicted economic boom in response to the tax cuts on top earners has failed to materialize.

When a theory is consistently disproven, especially in matters that are vitally important, it would be eminently reasonable to regard those who promote such a delusional theory with deep suspicion. The evidence on trickle-down theoretics is conclusive -- it is a Big Lie told repetitiously to deceive people into supporting charlatans who are serving as political skills for the rich, for the sake of their own selfish ambitions and purposes. It is disastrous that voters in the U.S. have not voted for honest candidates who propose valid philosophies, but instead have fallen for the manipulative ruses of those who champion the agenda of rich conservatives.

This outcome is severely undermining hopes for making our country a fairer, more sustainable place. We should rightly have sent conservative Republicans back to the Siberia of politics instead of enshrining them in the corruptly rigged halls of power. That way, they would have been forced to go back to the drawing board and contemplate more honorable approaches to big problems in the world, and begin to support truly fairer policies.

Further Incisive Insights

The Canadian election campaign was 11 weeks long -- the longest amount of time since 1872 for national elections in Canada. Meanwhile, it was more than seven times longer by the time U.S. national elections rolled around on November 8, 2016 from the moment Senator Ted Cruz of Texas became the first major candidate to announce he was running for president in late March 2015. So the U.S. election process took an agonizing 78 weeks -- a year and

a half! -- and the American people were real sick and tired of the intrusive barrage of attack ads, toxic accusations, political advertising, urgent fund-raising appeals, frequent political emails, rancorous debates, deceptive spin, blatant misinformation and misleading rationalizations that flooded the airwaves, especially in hotly contested battleground states.

Huge sums of money are being spent in our money-corrupted politics in the United States -- 'UGE SUMS! *We the People* need to demand serious and far-reaching campaign finance reforms in order to preserve our democratic republic, and Congress should enact a fair-minded law to overturn the Supreme Court's narrowly decided *Citizens United* ruling and the subsequent *McCutcheon* decision. It is time to *Move to Amend!*

The investigative journalist Jane Mayer explains how truly nefarious secretive "dark money" is, in her book *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. It is easy to see, when you learn more about it, how influence peddling has rigged the system against the best interests of the people and is a menace to proper governance and a downright transgression against fair-minded decision making.

The fierce competition to win the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 featured a bizarre mix of bombast, insults, rancorous hostility to President Obama, unfounded ideological proclamations, excessive pandering to wealthy donors, gotcha politics, fear-mongering, militaristic aggression, scapegoating of Mexicans and Muslims, promises of growth-stimulating economic miracles, fuzzy math in sketchy and dishonest budget proposals, and misleading information peddled to the public. To help one of these characters achieve the goal of winning the powerful position in the White House, the Republican Party used egregiously underhanded means, including widespread suppression of voting rights of racial minorities and college students, contorted gerrymandering of congressional districts, and taking obscene advantage of people's fears, prejudices and absolutist religious convictions to gain power so that they can then impose an economic agenda favorable to billionaires on the masses, along with a retrogressive brew of "right-wing social engineering" plans. When Republicans win elections using such shrewd but sociopathic strategies, it would be reasonable to conclude that one reason they use them is because they can't win based on the fairness of their national plans alone.

To gain a clearer understanding of the depth of grotesquely inegalitarian bargaining that goes into the slick formulation of our national tax policies, recall the compromise that President Obama and Mitch McConnell made in private in December 2010, just before the huge deficit-financed Bush tax breaks of 2001 and 2003 were set to expire. McConnell drove a hard bargain, offering a one-year extension of unemployment benefits and a temporary stimulative payroll tax cut in exchange for a two-year extension of the Bush tax cuts. It is stunning how obscenely inegalitarian those tax cuts actually were. According to Ron Suskind in *Confidence Men*, "The total ten-year tab on the Bush tax cuts was \$2.5 billion in so-called middle-class tax cuts, which went to most taxpayers, and \$700 billion for those at the top making over \$250,000 a year." Good God!

The bottom line effect was to give the top 2% of Americans a total tax break that was almost 300 times more than the amount given to the bottom 98%. The rich people who dictate our national tax policies obviously do not merely drive a hard bargain, but a mercilessly extreme and stunningly unfair deal in which capitalist ruthlessness is maximized to an extent that is all but criminal. Shame on Republican politicians and their crony cohorts for this stubborn refusal to address the driving forces behind dangerously growing inequality in the U.S. over the past 35 years.

Paul O'Neill was Secretary of the Treasury when the original Bush tax cuts were put into effect in 2001, and he declared that tax cuts are not as stimulative as Republican supply-side enthusiasts have long claimed. He noted that they did not return anywhere near the amount of tax revenues that would be lost, and that it was unprecedented and irresponsible to cut taxes in a time of war. O'Neill was fired soon thereafter for his public disagreements with the Bush administration and its party line. He was fired, in other words, for being honest rather than obediently going along with deceitful Republican ideology.

After the 2004 national elections, Vice President Dick Cheney famously interrupted Paul O'Neill's warning that growing budget deficits posed a threat to economic stability with the words, "You know, Paul, Reagan proved deficits don't matter; we won the midterms -- this is our due." It's a curious idea that irresponsible deficit-financed tax breaks for rich people are perks owed to a political party because they have managed to win an election, especially by underhanded means. The brilliant American journalist Ron Suskind elaborates: "O'Neill turned out to be even more famously correct: the tax cuts blew a \$2 trillion hole in the U.S. balance sheet, contributing mightily to the \$1.1 trillion annual deficit that Obama inherited when he arrived in office."

Bill Scher provided a striking perspective in 2014: "The back-to-back Bush and Obama administrations allow us to easily compare the effectiveness of liberal and conservative economic policies. President George W. Bush's record is highlighted by tax cuts largely aimed at giving the wealthiest Americans more money with which to invest, and a looser regulatory regime on businesses. President Obama implemented the Keynesian-style American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (also known as "the stimulus"), repealed the heart of the Bush tax cuts, greatly expanded the federal government's role in health care with the Affordable Care Act, and tightened regulations on several industry sectors including finance and energy."

How do the Bush and Obama economic records compare? "Let's start with the big issue: jobs. During the eight years of the Bush administration, there was a net loss of jobs, and the unemployment rate almost doubled, while there has been a net increase of more than thirteen million jobs during the Obama administration (as of 2014)."

"Never admit mistakes", resounds a stalwart Republican refrain, even though the illuminating light of historical perspective and revelations of caused-effect consequences cast a clear understanding on how misguided the values were during the George W. Bush administration, and how shortsighted the policies enacted were, and how contrary the actions taken (and not taken) proved to be, relative to the common good. From ignoring warnings by counterterrorism experts of possible airplane hijackings in the months before 9/11 to giving giant tax breaks to wealthy people, to the refusal to include negotiations for reasonable prices for Medicare prescription drugs in creating a new entitlement in 2003, to rash ideology-driven deregulatory actions that contributed to the worst economic crisis since the Depression of the 1930s, it seems obvious that admitting mistakes and learning from them would be a much more socially important way to formulate providentially positive national policies.

Extreme conservatives in the Republican Party want complete control over governments in all 50 states and in Washington D.C., and many of the candidates that campaigned for the position of president championed the exact same mistakes that led America into a decade of economic instability, fiscal calamity, rapidly increasing national indebtedness, radically growing inequalities in income and wealth, aggressive use of the U.S. military, and widespread tragedies of the environmental commons and natural ecosystems. Deceptive propaganda is a poor substitute for honesty, and distorted information is a lousy substitute for realistic understandings.

Republican politicians strongly advocate spending more money on the military, and less on all other priorities. Their staunch support for increased military spending is like a giant make-work project that ignores the need for fiscal restraint and accountability in the Department of Defense, and smarter overall priorities.

Conservative politicians pursue their ambitions with a coldly ruthless Machiavellian calculation that in practical effect is subversive of the common good and treasonous to the general welfare of the people. It is for this reason that Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders declared we need a peaceful political revolution to overthrow the domination of our nation's governance and policy-making by Big Money interests. This call for a revolutionary change is more patriotic than the strident calls of all Republican politicians for a national agenda that would perpetuate all the mistakes made under George W. Bush that brought us 9/11 and the two longest wars in U.S. history along with bubble economics and earnings stagnation for the middle class followed by financial crisis and enormous bailouts and a hardship-wreaking spike in unemployment for years.

Our Founding Fathers would have agreed. Hear again, as if for the first time, what they said in the Declaration of

Independence: "To secure these rights (of Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness), Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, 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."

I recently participated in a democracy-in-action annual meeting of a member organization where contentious issues were at stake, and in which all members were given an opportunity to express their opinions and feelings concerning the issues. The meeting leader asked everyone to be civil and respectful in all comments made, and to listen to others and to take the opportunity to be heard, and everyone agreed to abide by the majority decisions. I have similarly strived to maintain civil stances in the perspectives I advocate and the opinions passionately expressed in this manifesto. It is my clear-eyed hope that the uncompromising attitudes adopted by extreme conservatives will give way to more collaborative approaches for the common good, recognizing the urgency and injustices that characterize the modern challenges we face, so that we may succeed in altering the dysfunctional aspects of our economic and political systems in sensible ways.

Political Synopsis

Donald Trump and all the less successful Republican presidential aspirants in 2016 appear to have had one main goal, and that is to get elected by championing tax cuts for the wealthy. The tried-and-true scheme of getting Big Money donations from rich people and giant corporations is a shrewd strategy that serves to funnel big profits into private pockets. To make big tax cuts for the well-heeled possible without rashly adding to the national debt, Donald Trump's plan assumed a 6% growth rate in the economy. Jeb Bush, less energetically, proposed almost equally big tax cuts for the wealthy and assumed a 4% growth rate to make his plan appear feasible. And both these politicians would impose more austerity in national policies by cutting programs that help working families in order to finance their proposed additional largess for the wealthy.

"Little Marco Rubio" proposed a plan that would have made big cuts in taxes on corporations and capital gains and top income levels, and would have eliminated tax obligations on rich kids' inheritances. His proposed cuts were so large that the New York Times creatively called his plan "the puppies and rainbows plan." Marco Rubio claimed that these enormous tax cuts would actually create a budget surplus "within the 10-year window." Really? "Absolutely," he asserted with completely unconvincing conviction.

Harvard's Greg Mankiw, who served as chief economist to President George W. Bush, described the idea that tax cuts boost growth so much that they pay for themselves as the province of "cranks and charlatans". Anyone responsible for devising a realistic and reasonably balanced budget knows that it is foolish to include wildly improbable projections of income in any budget proposal. The U.S. economy has not achieved a 4% growth rate since the year 2000. It turns out that the only way to achieve a 4% to 6% growth rate would be by putting into effect a radically different tax plan -- for instance, by increasing taxes on the highest levels of income and decreasing taxes for everyone on the lower levels of their incomes, and designing the plan to yield enough money to finance large public investments in infrastructure and education and greater good goals. Progressive changes in taxation stimulate economic growth and are beneficial for the general populace, and are "at the end of the day" ultimately good for the wealthy. Regressive changes in the tax code, like the ones being pushed by Republican politicians, contribute to economic stagnation, stoked hardships, and socially undesirable increases in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the richest people.

In the third Republican debate on October 28, 2015, Ohio Governor John Kasich blasted his rivals' tax-reform plans as "fantasy tax schemes." Not long thereafter, the Tax Foundation released analyses of tax-reform plans proposed by six of the Republican presidential contenders, and indicated that they all contained fuzzy math, and that every one of them would likely add at least \$1 trillion to the national debt. This is scandalous! These politicians are

following in the footsteps of George W. Bush, who fooled the American people by promoting this same old Republican Santa Claus tax cut story, alleging in 2001 and 2003 that it would be a stellar plan to give huge tax breaks to rich people. These were on top of the rash slashing of marginal taxes rates on the highest incomes that were still in effect from the Reagan years. Not once in 8 years during G.W. Bush's tenure did economic growth exceed 4%, and it averaged barely over 2%. My incisive essay, *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics* provides provocative perspective on the breadth of the treachery of supply-side ideological deceptions. Here is a relevant passage:

"Most damning of all, several authoritative economists have corroborated the stunning assertion made by Bernie Sanders that the top 0.1 percent of Americans have nearly as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. In a speech to students at Liberty University, Sanders concluded, "And in your hearts, you will have to determine the morality of that, and the justice of that." If we really want liberty and justice for all in the United States of America, as so many people implicitly declare when they recite the Pledge of Allegiance, then we cannot allow the wealthy to grab an ever increasing monopoly on the nation's wealth."

The conflicts of interest involved in Republican candidates proposals to slash taxes on the rich are glaring. Trump has been one of the greediest, most self-serving and unethical businessmen ever, cheating countless numbers of contractors and working people and investors, driving his companies into bankruptcy for personal gain on at least four occasions, and using lawsuits to screw people and take advantage of various communities, and to defend himself with aggressive high-priced lawyers against those he has wronged. Pretending to be the anti-establishment savior, he has nonetheless blatantly chosen to double down on the trickle down Big Lie. His sketchy deficit-financed tax proposals would cost trillions of dollars, and cut his personal tax obligations big time -- if, in fact, he pays any taxes at all, given the outlandishly generous nature of tax loopholes available to real estate moguls and billionaires. This, of course, cannot be determined because Trump has the almost unprecedented gall to refuse to divulge any information about his tax returns.

Abraham Lincoln was no doubt right when he said: "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." Let all American voters refuse to be fooled any longer by ideological deceptions!

George W. Bush once notoriously said, "There's an old saying in Tennessee -- I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee -- that says, fool me once, shame on -- shame on you. Fool me ... you can't get fooled again." His tangled thought process was abstruse, but never mind -- let's not allow ideological conservatives to continue fooling and confusing the American people into giving their support to a retrogressive agenda!

A central tenet of smarter and fairer "Middle-Out Economics" is that true economic growth comes not from the top 1%, but rather from the bottom 99%. Weak demand related to the economic stagnation of the majority of Americans has a negative impact on economic growth. Two studies lend strong credence to the thesis of Joseph Stiglitz and other economists who make the convincing point that the poor and middle class have a "higher marginal propensity to consume" than wealthy individuals. Entrepreneurs should therefore prefer more after-tax income for the middle class, not more tax breaks for those earning the most money.

One downside of a more steeply graduated system of taxation is that it might have the effect of encouraging high earners to indulge in even more tax evasion schemes, but if guilt at their swindling the government into ever more fiscally irresponsible straits does not inspire honest compliance, at least the force of law would make this cunning strategy more risky and filled with potential adverse consequences for tax evasion.

It is sad that most Republican dogmas are in actual fact simply aimed at securing more wealth for the richest Americans. People who want to participate in the American Dream need a safety net to fall back on, so health care shouldn't be tied to employment, and unemployment benefits should be generous, and education should be inexpensive, and students shouldn't be burdened with so much debt, and policies should be shifted significantly to

favor the strengthening of the middle-class.

"Mark Twain expressed moral outrage at wickedness in his times. He derided the gluttony of the Gilded Age and criminal malfeasance in the business world, and voiced strong opposition to American military adventurism abroad, and mocked people's absurd foibles and peccadilloes. It is healthy for us to laugh at the foolishness of our similar foibles in today's world. But while we are chuckling to ourselves, we should remember that our most important legacy to our heirs should be to "pay forward" some good deeds to offset the damages that our collective activities are causing to their prospects and to the planet. Let's just do it!"

--- *Sad Implications of the Two Dueling Santa Claus Strategies in Political Economics*

In the illuminating book, *They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010*, it is shown that the Democratic and Republican Parties are virtual opposites of each other in their economic records, going back to the earliest period for which economic data were available in 1910. More than a dozen studies have been done comparing economic growth, unemployment, average length of unemployment, stock market performance, inflation, federal debt, and other economic indicators during Democratic and Republican presidencies and congresses, and they all show stunningly better performance when Democrats are in power than when Republicans are in power. This understanding should settle, once and for all, the question of whether there's any significant economic difference between the two Parties. Yes, there is a surprisingly big difference, and it always runs in favor of Democrats in power. There might be other reasons for voting for Republican politicians, but all of the economic reasons favor voting for Democrats.

Ideas should stand on their own merits, not on a fictionalized distortion of the truth of the matter. Ideas and national policies should be evaluated using clear-eyed consequential ethical understandings, and they should honor the common good and social justice and fair-mindedness.

According to economist Paul Krugman, "The arithmetic on partisan differences is actually stunning. Last year the economists Alan Blinder and Mark Watson circulated a paper comparing economic performance under Democratic and Republican presidents since 1947. Under Democrats, the economy grew, on average, 4.35 percent per year; under Republicans, only 2.54 percent. Over the whole period, the economy was in recession for 49 quarters; and Democrats held the White House during only 8 of those quarters."

Policies promoting austerity in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008 had disastrous effects, going far beyond the jobs and income lost in the first few years. In fact, according to Paul Krugman, the long-term damage caused by cutting spending "is easily big enough to make austerity a self-defeating policy even in purely fiscal terms: Governments that slashed spending in the face of depression hurt their economies, and hence their future tax receipts, so much that even their debt will end up higher than it would have been without the cuts."

Astonishingly, all the Republican candidates for president in 2016 fawningly adopted ideological blinders and proclaimed that the trickle-down theory of supply-side economics is gospel truth, despite the proof that Sam Brownback has demonstrated that this form of voodoo economics is more a Big Lie than the truth. Sam Brownback has been Governor of Kansas since January 2011, and early on when he asserted that he would conduct a "real live experiment" to prove that trickle-down economics works for the betterment of everyone, I wondered, "What concoction of spiked Kool-Aid could he have been drinking to have been so convinced that this ideological subterfuge was really true?" After all, facts indicate that this belief is a transparently deceptive rationale that has already been disproven by decades of experience and statistics and circumstantial evidence that reveal it to be dishonest propaganda disseminated by pawns of the wealthy.

One might think that Sam Brownback has done a big favor to the phalanx of Republican presidential candidates who aspired to win the presidency in the 2016 elections. Since Brownback has exposed the profound folly of his "real live experiment" in supply-side economics in Kansas, a clearer perspective is now available to guide us to better public policies. It seems obvious to an independent observer that Brownback conducted this experiment for one

specific reason. He knew from direct experience that it would have the great personal advantages for religiously unprincipled Republican politicians of generating lavish financial support from wealthy donors in our *Citizens Divided* political system. And sure enough, the notoriously anti-progressive billionaires Charles and David Koch of Wichita have been making out like robber barons from the corrupt and inequalitarian tax realignment policy as a result of these corrupting "investments".

It must be admitted that Republicans have a simpler and more lucrative plan for fundraising than Democrats. Think about it. Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush and Sam Brownback have given trillions of dollars in tax breaks to the wealthiest 1%, and thereby made it easy to raise hundreds of millions of dollars from these wealthy people to support socially unjust policies and these politicians' political careers. Democrats, on the other hand, strive to invest in opportunity and infrastructure, and strengthen the social safety net, and protect the environment -- and this generates many small donations, but generally not as much money as the cynically shrewd Republican strategy. Money is power, and excessive power corrupts.

Rich people contributed record amounts of money to 2016 presidential campaigns, helping enable Republicans to gain unfair advantages in their contests in our national elections. The *Citizens United* ruling is proving to be exceedingly subversive of our democracy. One particularly pathetic outcome of this narrow decision is that wealthy individuals and corporations that are rooted in polluting industries have flooded our political system with money, and they are spending enormous amounts on campaign contributions to politicians with dismal voting records on things like clean energy, protecting clean water and clean air, and mitigating the impacts of global warming. A healthy democracy with a free press and an independent judiciary is essential to a healthy environment, so when we allow our nation's founding principles to be corrupted by wealthy interest groups, both democratic fairness and environmental sanity are sabotaged.

In 1948, President Truman made the provocative observation: "Republicans approve of the American farmer, but they are willing to help him go broke. They stand four-square for the American home -- but not for housing. They are strong for labor -- but they are stronger for restricting labor's rights. They favor minimum wage -- the smaller the minimum wage the better. They endorse educational opportunity for all -- but they won't spend money for teachers or for schools. They think modern medical care and hospitals are fine -- for people who can afford them. They consider electrical power a great blessing -- but only when the private power companies get their rake-off. They think American standard of living is a fine thing -- so long as it doesn't spread to all the people. And they admire the Government of the United States so much that they would like to buy it."

Governor Brownback and the Laughter of the Gods

Mark Twain lampooned human folly and pretensions with sometimes brilliantly sardonic humor, so he would have relished the foolishly confident proclamation by Sam Brownback that he would prove conclusively by means of his "real live experiment" that the trickle-down theory was an honest-to-God sure way to stimulate economic growth and generate higher revenues.

The indisputable outcome of Sam Brownback and Republican legislators having put a package of tax cuts into effect in 2012 was that this action regressively shifted the burden of tax to all people's earnings in lower income brackets. The Kansas Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley (D-Topeka) explained at the time that the net effect of this initiative was to transfer the tax burden from rich people to those in the middle and lower classes. A review of the actual Kansas Tax Tables confirms this fact: high income earners pay much lower rates today than in 2010, and people pay more on all earnings less than \$15,000 per year. That change is really regressive, unconscionably unfair, and ridiculously wrongheaded!

The Republican governor had gained national attention for his aggressive tax cuts, and he brazenly touted his experiment as a model for other states -- and for the federal government. But less than one year after Brownback was narrowly re-elected by assuring skeptical voters that economic growth would preserve funding for schools and

government programs, his aides warned lawmakers that draconian spending cuts would be required if they didn't pass tax increases to fill the budget gap that was caused by a steep fall in revenues associated with their irresponsible tax cuts.

The sad upshot of the Kansas experiment is not only that it has nearly bankrupted the state, but it has also had a mean-spirited impact by detrimentally forcing harsh austerity measures to be imposed on the people of Kansas. Republican lawmakers should be deeply embarrassed and reverse course, but instead they chose to try to save face by increasing sales taxes, cigarette taxes and taxes on business owners and farmers in August 2015 because of ballooning budget deficits. Democrats in Kansas opposed these increases in sales taxes because they place a heavier burden of taxation on poor and middle-class families while preserving the excessive generosity of the income tax cuts for rich people.

Societies face many daunting challenges, urban and rural, and the best plan is to have an effective government that is adequately funded to nimbly deal with all the gathering challenges that face people in modern times. Crippling the government and hobbling economic growth by giving big tax breaks to the wealthy does not accomplish this crucial goal. Other states have seen Kansas's experience as a cautionary tale. Even in South Carolina, conservative Governor Nikki Haley, a Republican, outlined proposals for cutting income taxes in early 2015 but said, "We are not doing what Kansas did." In Nebraska, the Legislature considered following Kansas in 2013 but rejected the idea in favor of a tax study -- which strongly recommended against big tax cuts.

The bottom line is that Sam Brownback's "real live experiment" has yielded definitive conclusions and PROOF POSITIVE! This experiment has been underway ever since Ronald Reagan championed USC Professor Arthur Laffer's cockamamie trickle-down idea, which had been shrewdly hatched by rich people and the sycophants to whom wealthy people pay handsome rewards to concoct such corruptly anti-egalitarian, deceitful narratives. Economic policy should be about facts and circumstances and real evidence, not concocted lies!

It is exceptionally ironic to have seen all the Republican presidential candidates tap into working people's frustrations and anger and distrust of incumbent politicians, and their fears of terrorists, in order to use the support they gain to once again abandon the average American and advance a new round of regressive tax schemes that stoke class warfare by rigging the economy even more favorably for the wealthy than it already is.

With both income and wealth inequalities already at extremes worse than any time since the Roaring Twenties and the earlier Gilded Age of the late 1900s, as corroborated in Joseph Stiglitz' provocative book *The Price of Inequality* and Robert Reich's outstanding film *Inequality for All*, it seems bizarre that our political duopoly system can continue to give rich people overwhelming influence to set low tax rates for themselves. We need real campaign finance reform now, and honest Supreme Court decisions that will side with those fair-minded folks who recognize the vital importance of reversing the *Citizens United* decision. And all the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1964 should be re-affirmed.

The disastrous outcomes of Sam Brownback's "real live experiment" in giving tax cuts to those who make the most money have made Kansas Republicans look like idiots. They stubbornly stick to their story that this rigged ideological experiment in pandering to the wealthy is the best plan, though it seems obvious that they do it for personal enrichment, and that it is actually a pathetically maladaptive form of obtuse inflexibility. But one must admit that Sam Brownback was courageous to put his ideological certitude on the line in the glaring light of the fact that experts outside the echo chamber of his blind faith could have told him that his brazen stand would lead him to being rudely ridiculed, and that he would effectively be, as Shakespeare would have put it, "hoisted with his own petard"! He was, in other words, foiled by his own misguided plan, and worse yet, his folly has been extremely detrimental to the vast majority of people in Kansas.

"Everything is changing. People are taking the comedians seriously and the politicians as a joke."

--- Will Rogers

Republican politicians have had remarkable success since Barack Obama was elected president in gaining power in governor's races, state legislatures and Congress, but this success has had a profoundly adverse impact on the lives of millions of Americans. Republicans have not earned this power in honorable ways, but by betraying the trust of the people through pandering excessively to wealthy people and cynically opposing bipartisanship and striving tirelessly to undermine everything Barack Obama has done to improve the nation's prospects for the greater good. This "success" has also been facilitated by stoking anti-government sentiments, undermining voting rights, gerrymandering congressional districts, distorting facts, evidence and scientific understandings, and exploiting people's authoritarian impulses, fears, racist antipathies, anti-immigrant sentiments and religious convictions. And, quite unfortunately, conservatives generally do not support reasonable plans that would help us cope successfully with big issues like protecting the environment, conserving resources, mitigating the severity of unfolding climate catastrophes, or preventing the extinction of many endangered species of life.

The Role of the Supreme Court, and Charles and David Koch, in this Charade

Why did Republicans so adamantly block President Obama's nominee to replace the corporate-friendly Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court? To find the real answer to this question, we need to see who such obstruction really serves. We need to "follow the money!" The answer to that question leads straight to the donor base of the Republican Party. The Republican Senate and to an even greater extent the Republican House of Representatives primarily serves the economic interests of a tiny group of very wealthy people. These people stood to either lose billions of dollars spent complying with environmental, finance and labor laws and regulations if anyone other than a staunch ideological conservative replaced Scalia. That is what the fight was all about. "For the GOP and the billionaires who pull their strings, much ballyhooed rhetoric about abortion, affirmative action, union rights and voting rights are all subsidiary to this main event."

The most prominent members of this small group of people are arch-conservative Kansas billionaires Charles and David Koch. In the 2016 election cycle, the Kochs publicly stated that they and their compatriots intended to spend almost \$900 million, more than either the Republican or Democratic parties spent in 2012. According to an analysis in *Politico*, the Koch's privatized political network is backed by a group of several hundred extremely rich fellow donors who often meet at off-the-record conclaves organized by the Kochs at desert resorts. This political machine has at least 1,200 full-time staffers in 107 offices nationwide, or more than three times as many as the Republican National Committee. Charles and David Koch may be the most influential unelected political figures in U.S. history, and they are abusing the influence of their *Dark Money* for very dark purposes.

Soon after the conservative Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016, a spokesman for a far-right group tried to explain the rationale for opposing any nominee to the Supreme Court that President Obama would make: "The very fact that people on our side feel very strongly that there shouldn't be a hearing before we know the nominee is because it's not really about the nominee. ... Frankly, the real objection here is to Obama."

That admission is truly stunning! The Republican stalwart Senator Orrin Hatch from Utah came up with a weak though superficially plausible rationalization for Republicans to refuse to even consider the person President Obama would not long thereafter nominate to replace Scalia: "My personal feeling is ... that it would be better to not even have hearings. We are in the midst of one of the most obnoxious, terrible presidential campaigns that I've ever seen. I don't want to see the courts be smeared by being in the middle of the process."

Joan McCarter, Senior Political Writer for Daily Kos, eviscerated this logic with these words: "Right. It's all about protecting the institutions of the Senate and the Court, and all about saving the potential nominee from what could be a "demeaning" process. Of course, he's got no problem trashing the institution of the presidency, subverting Obama's constitutional duty to fill Supreme Court seats and thereby demeaning this president. That's perfectly fine. But, boy, we don't want the Senate to look bad."

Ha! What a travesty of justice. Patriotic Americans should have demanded that U.S. Senators fulfill their

constitutional responsibility. Partially by engaging in this unprecedented ploy, Republicans have gained more unaccountable power, and will have an easier time now to undo everything the black man in the White House has accomplished in the past eight years. They will likely put us back on a Bush-like path to more wars and economic crises, and "put women in their subservient place, the brazen hussies, and give a lasting victory to capitalists in their long-fought efforts to gain dominating influence over working people, the lazy moochers and complainers."

Unjust and wrong-headed laws tend to breed disrespect for government, so when we allow corruption in politics and widespread inequities, it tends to breed an undesirable disdain and disrespect for the law. Our top national priority should be a healthier and safer world for all Americans. This cannot be achieved by letting the wealthiest 1% gain an increasing portion of the national wealth while imposing austerity on everyone else. The cost of social insurance policies that reduce inequities would be much lower than the high costs of revolutionary discord and harsh incarceration policies at home and aggressive military policies abroad.

Realistic Understanding

In Canada, the ruling Conservative Party tried to silence scientists and deny the best scientific understandings. The Conservative Party sets itself in glaring contrast to the Liberal Party by deviously denying scientific knowledge, instead of taking it into consideration. "The war on science ends with the Liberal government", declared Justin Trudeau in a speech in Vancouver before the election. He was referring to tactics that were used by Canada's Conservative Party, which included assaulting reason and science by censoring government scientists, eliminating data monitoring programs, shuttering scientific libraries, chopping budgets, and depriving decision makers of vital scientific information on multiple environmental and public health issues. Watch the sensational documentary *Silence of the Labs* for a fuller understanding of these issues.

In startling parallel, conservatives in the USA use tactics that are disturbingly similar to those of the failed Conservative Party in Canada. They attempt to deny the best scientific understandings when such knowledge is inconvenient to powerful interests like the billionaire Koch brothers, Big Oil companies and conservative religious fundamentalists. Politicians in the House Freedom Caucus, in particular, are beholden to Charles and David Koch and their ilk, who want to subvert our politics even further for their own gain in profits and power and ability to take maximum advantage of workers by minimizing their collective bargaining rights and using up resources and damaging the environment while socializing many costs.

Michael Moore's outstanding film *Where to Invade Next* provides a funny look at a brilliant, simple plan -- seeking the best ideas in other countries to bring them back to the United States to improve our society. Ironically, Michael Moore often finds that the best ideas in other countries originated in the U.S., and we have merely forsaken them in the internecine political struggle by vested interest groups to maximize their own narrow advantages. It is curious, then, that the "war on science" employed in Canada may actually be a bad idea for guiding national strategies that they have imported from us.

Another pathological aspect of conservative politicians is their obsequious pandering to the military-industrial complex and the National Rifle Association. In this cowardly deference, they are in effect strongly supporting risk-laden international aggression along with easy availability of guns to anyone and everyone, including even those who cannot fly because they are on "the terrorist watch list". They do this apparently because they want to help gun manufacturers make bigger profits, and despite the fact that this tactic emphasizes profit making as being much more important than public safety or reducing deaths caused by gun violence.

A bipartisan bill was proposed in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre of school children and teachers that would have closed the background check loophole at gun shows and on Internet sales. When the NRA shut the legislation down, Senator Elizabeth Warren observed: "I stood on the floor of the United States Senate, stunned and appalled. I thought: What has happened to this country? What has happened to this democracy that one interest group can put the entire country at risk? Where is our political courage?" We should rightly ask this question again, with

determination, after the Las Vegas massacre on October 1, 2017 in which a man with dozens of weapons shot more than 500 people, killing almost 60. And Republicans want to loosen restrictions on gun silencers?!

The Hard Times Swindle of Conservatism

Religious social conservatism has been surprisingly strong in the past few decades, despite its increasing extremism. One of the biggest political mysteries in modern times is how conservatism, once a marker of class privilege, could have been adopted as the creed of millions of Americans in recent years. It is a real source of fascination that, more than 240 years after our Founders courageously declared independence and championed fair-minded democratic principles, this powerful contrary force of extreme economic and social conservatism has gained such strength on the political scene. One might wonder what the matter is with America that it allows this force to gain so much overwhelming influence. Why have radical conservatives been able to gain power and advance a narrow agenda that adversely affects the average American in such profound ways?

To understand this development, author Thomas Frank, the astute native of Kansas, set out to explore the reasons why people in Kansas in recent decades have been anomalously acting in ways that are glaringly contrary to their own economic self-interests. He saw that millions of Americans have given support to conservative politicians, particularly in Kansas and the rest of the Midwest and the South, and he asked the poignant question, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*

Amazingly, people in Kansas 100 years ago were liberal defenders of the best interests of working folks and farmers. Today, however, the majority of Kansans tend to oppose policies that help ensure the greater good of blue-collar workers, small farmers, poor people and folks in the middle class. They instead support conservative Christian Right politicians and the agendas of established interests promoted by wealthy people and large agribusinesses and giant corporations like Koch Industries of Wichita, which is owned by those danged archconservative billionaires Charles and David Koch (pronounced COKE).

Thomas Frank's compelling question yielded an interesting explanation. An intense marketing blitz barrage of ideological brainwashing has undermined once fair-minded economic and social sensibilities. This propaganda has been generated by narrowly focused economic elites to stoke people's resentments and hijack their emotions, and to shrewdly marshal their cultural anger for the purpose of giving powerful impetus to unrelated economic policies that radically favor the goals of big business interests and wealthy people instead of small businesses and the common good. The simple fact of the matter is that we need to develop more honorable national priorities that are much fairer to the vast majority of the American people.

Our national priorities are severely distorted by this hijacking of our economic and political systems by shrewd operatives whose main goal is to enhance the perks, prerogatives and rewards of wealthy people. One of the most insidious misguiding gimmicks they use to achieve their goals involves allowing corporations to maximize private profits by socializing costs, thereby foisting risks and obligations onto others. The outcome of such activities is to further increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of a relatively small number of rich people. Too many extreme partisans among these highly privileged Americans indulge in overly self-serving, greed-driven, and inadequately empathetic attitudes toward others. In the process, the stability, soundness and sustainability of economic activities are being sacrificed, along with the overall well-being of the people and the health of the environment.

Economic fundamentalists advocate a much more laissez-faire system of corporate capitalism. But many of our daunting economic, social and environmental dilemmas are made worse by the success of ideologues who rigidly espouse deceitful ideas like these. It seems stunning to me that people who fervently support fundamentalist economic policies are so easily able to take advantage of people's anger over hot button social issues and then utilize these divisive issues to achieve an overriding goal of ensuring that rich people are allowed to pay historically low tax rates on the highest levels of their incomes.

"I dream of a world where the truth is what shapes people's politics, rather than politics shaping what people think is true."

--- Neil deGrasse Tyson

By seeking to achieve their narrowly focused goals through the use of propaganda and emotional hijacking, these ideologues often use egregiously unethical and demagogic means to gain power. One of the main ways they have achieved their goals has been by stoking people's cultural anger and fears, misunderstandings, frustrations, prejudices, partisan political views and intolerant religious sensibilities.

"Anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding."

--- Mahatma Gandhi

Deceptive spin has been used to fool people into giving more power to shrewd conservative politicians, who pay back their financial benefactors by making regressive changes in tax policies that primarily benefit rich people. These politicians always seem to be trying to find ways to give big corporations more privileges, perks, influence, subsidies, low wage costs, lax regulations and narrowly advantageous international trade deal provisions. To find a really sensational confirmation of the validity of these contentions, read on.

A Classic Case of Conservative Ideology Temporarily Triumphant over Liberal Ideas

Sam Brownback and fellow Republicans are obtusely unwilling to admit the fact that cutting taxes on rich people has caused calamitous shortfalls. Get out of your echo chamber, Sam! Even a poorly educated high school student could tell you that reducing taxes would reduce tax revenues. Instead, Brownback bizarrely blamed the black guy in the White House for the red ink, which he and his cronies directly caused, and for the depressed business environment in Kansas. "The failed economic policies of the Obama administration are affecting states throughout the nation," claimed Brownback. "It is more important than ever that we continue our focus on growing jobs and creating a business-friendly environment that benefits Kansans," he deceitfully added.

Statistics are proving that Brownback and his economic policies are bad for business and wrong for the vast majority of the people. The real agenda of giving high-income earners a much bigger share of the Midwestern economic pie is to get wealthy donors like Charles and David Koch to give Republican politicians huge sums of money, but unfortunately for the people of Kansas, the detrimental outcome of this experiment has exposed the folly of such actions. "Heck of a job, Brownie." Reverse course, Sam!

The real failure here is one of Republican ideology. Supply-side "voodoo economics" and the trickle-down theory are deeply dishonest. Most other states are faring much better than Kansas, and the annual U.S. deficit fell every year as a share of the economy during Barack Obama eight years in office.

"Kansas cuts taxes on the rich, and its revenues fall through the floor. That's Obama's fault, according to the governor," wrote Professor Ian Reifowitz in *Daily Kos*. Obama raised taxes on the rich (by means of a small increase in tax rates on annual incomes exceeding \$400,000 per year), and this resulted in increasing federal revenues and a decreasing federal deficit. "Anybody seeing a disconnect here? I know Brownback has worked hard to weaken public education in Kansas. I guess he figures if no one in the state is educated, they won't be able to figure out he's been pulling the wool over their eyes." (Ha!)

A recent comprehensive study showed that states that kowtow to conservative ideological approaches to economic policy have weaker economic growth than those that don't. "But we can even get more specific than that. The author of that study, Menzie Chinn, also looked at two states where, in 2011, a Republican governor replaced a Democratic one and ushered in a radical rightward shift in state policy (Wisconsin and Kansas), and compared them to two states that did the opposite in 2011, i.e. elected a Democratic governor to replace a Republican one (California and Minnesota). It's worth noting that, of the latter two, California saw the most significant shift in policy as a

Democratic legislature combined with Governor Jerry Brown to enact an even more pronounced leftward shift starting in 2011 than Minnesota's Mark Dayton was able to accomplish with a legislature that remained Republican after he took office."

"What did Chinn find? Well, in terms of job creation since 2011, it's clear: The more liberalism, the more jobs. What's that you say? That's right. 'Pro-business' policies stink at creating jobs, and progressive policies, in contrast, do the job far better." ... And, "One last thing. We can compare the revenue shortfall in Kansas with California, where huge surpluses are allowing that liberal-dominated state to pay down debt."

"Evidence. Facts. Data. These are real. Conservatives can pretend that they aren't. They can wax poetically (or not) about 'liberty,' or about unleashing the capitalist genius of 'job creators' or any other nonsense they like. At some point, however, reality rears its ugly head. The reality is this: Sam Brownback is a liar. His state veered hard to the right on tax policy, and as a result its economy has underperformed the rest of country, and his budget is in shambles. President Obama's economy has performed far better than Kansas's, and his budget is in far better shape, and this after moving leftward on tax policy. But Brownback says the problems of Kansas are Obama's fault. Unbelievable!"

"I've read that emotion plays better than facts when it comes to politics. But, by gum, it's time for us to make the case, emotionally, with the facts. We have to shout from the rooftops that our policies are not only more moral, they work better. Progressive governance makes our economy both fairer and stronger. The two go hand in hand."

It was a sad day when the Koch billionaires and other moneyed interest groups succeeded in fooling the American people into reelecting Sam Brownback and arch-conservative Koch-money addicted Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin and other conservative Republican politicians in the November 2014 national elections, for they seriously impeded progress toward really making our nation fairer and smarter and healthier. "For the people of those states, and for all 50 of our states, the question is this: When you go into the voting booth, do facts matter? Will you compare the record of conservatism and liberalism, and vote accordingly? It's up to progressives to make the case as strongly as we can. I believe that if we do, the voters will respond." Tragically, voters elected Donald Trump in November 2016, but in all future elections, we must get it right.

The bottom line is that the future well-being of the people in Kansas is being imperiled because of a radical tax experiment by ultra-conservatives. The Republican Party has all but sold the souls of its supporters to anti-environmentalists, resource exploiters, industrialist polluters, corporate shells, conservative billionaires, anti-immigrant ideologues, male supremacists, anti-gay activists, intolerant religious reactionaries, uncompromising gun fanatics, inequality apologists, and those who oppose women's rights to choose not to get pregnant or to have an abortion. *What's the Matter with Kansas* has become an infectious affliction raging through America, particularly afflicting angry white men and partisans in the Bible Belt of the South, and this influence is having a negative impact on poor people in America and middle class folks, and women, students, blacks, Latinos, lesbian women, gay men, immigrants, refugees, and the long-term unemployed. It is also deplorably serving to rashly undermine the providential health of the environment that supports our collective well-being.

The American people must reject conservative politicians, and oppose Trump's regressive policies and the deep uncertainties associated with his divisive brand of egomaniacal and authoritarian power grab. Real conservatives must change course! The Hillary Clinton vs. Trump contest gave the American people a stark choice between democratic governance and reckless strong man rule, and now that the USA is going further right on a wide range of issues, grave threats to smarter national planning are materializing.

A particularly complicit enabler of many of the hardline conservative laws that are being enacted around the United States is the organization ALEC, the notoriously anti-progressive American Exchange Legislative Council. ALEC operatives design shrewd "model legislation" to serve Republican politicians throughout the 50 states so that new laws will be enacted that are deeply hostile to democratic fairness and the greater good of the people. The same is

true of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce with its anti-environmental stands, and the Federalist Society in its propounding of manipulative right-wing ideologies, and all of the Koch brothers' front groups.

It is tragic to let the propaganda of billionaires triumph over common sense and the greater good. One of the influential front groups financed by the Koch billionaires is deceptively named Americans for Prosperity. A more appropriate name that would accurately characterize this group would be Americans for Rashly Empowered Greed and Selfishness and Unrestricted Freedom to Exploit Natural Resources and Working Americans and Everyone in Future Generations. It is a pathetic and anti-social form of freedom to allow rich people to corrupt our politics and harmfully misguide our national decision-making.

Helping to drive right-wing offensives in the House and the Senate and the various states is a network of deep-pocketed business titans convened by the billionaire Kochs, who are principals in Koch Industries, the second-largest privately held corporation in the United States. Like the Kochs themselves, many of the donors in David and Charles' networks are not that interested in fighting against women's rights or LGBT rights, yet anti-choice organizations and anti-gay groups have seen their coffers swell with huge sums of the network's dollars.

"If you want to promote a pro-corporate agenda, you're only going to get so far," incisively noted Sue Sturgis, a Durham, North Carolina-based editorial director of the progressive website Facing South. "But when you start weaving in these social issues like abortion and other reproductive rights issues, then you're gonna appeal to a wider range of people, and a very motivated voting bloc. They will turn out. So it serves your larger cause."

Too bad that these passions are being whipped up for such socially detrimental causes!

Economics 101

One of the main claims of conservatives in recent decades is that lower tax rates for high-income earners will stimulate the economy and create jobs. They assert that low taxes are the best way to stimulate and facilitate entrepreneurial activity. This contention completely contradicts historical facts. Between 1950 and today, the GDP in the U.S. grew more than 6% in 8 different years when the top tax rate was above 70%. The GDP grew at a rate in excess of 4% for 16 other years, most of which were years with much higher marginal tax rates than today. The economy has not grown 4% since the year 2000, when marginal tax rates have been below 40% every year.

This correlation may seem counterintuitive. But just think about it. Regressive changes in tax rates reward the relatively few high-income earners, but they undermine the financial well-being of almost everyone else. As a result, the majority of people are less able to afford to buy as many goods and services as they would if they made more after-tax earnings. Businesses consequently see a downturn as demand declines for their products. And low demand leads to layoffs.

Demand-side "middle out economics" would be a smarter plan than deceptive and unfair supply-side economics. This is a better way forward. Fairly-shared prosperity would be better for all. It was George H.W. Bush who called Ronald Reagan's supply-side arguments "voodoo economics" in 1980, and today, the evidence is in: Yes, mumbo jumbo economic ideologies are distinctly counterproductive! All these facts together provide a strong economic argument for a progressive restructuring of tax rates. There are also many cogent moral arguments for fairer and more just national policies.

Officials in the Trump administration oppose a progressive restructuring of the tax system, and propose a really lousy plan that would eliminate the estate tax, creating a gargantuan windfall for the heirs of the two-tenths of 1% of Americans wealthy enough to owe any estate tax at all after they die. Let's just say NO!

An Aside on the Central Influence of Rising Authoritarian Sentiment

Cutting-edge studies are revealing that cunning opportunists like Donald Trump are activating "authoritarian impulses" in the American electorate. They do this by exploiting deep-seated existential angst associated with fears of social change and external threats and feelings of being left behind by the political establishment. The lawyer and professor Amanda Taub has proposed a convincing theory about what exactly is contributing to this dangerous development in our politics, and she provides readers with a good big picture understanding in *The Rise of American Authoritarianism*.

An oft-stated concern about Trump is that what is most scary is not the man, but rather the extent and fervor of his support. "Perhaps strangest of all," writes Amanda Taub, "it wasn't just Trump but his supporters who seemed to have come out of nowhere, suddenly expressing, in large numbers, ideas far more extreme than anything that has risen to such popularity in recent memory. In South Carolina, a CBS News exit poll found that 75 percent of Republican voters supported banning Muslims from the U.S. Another poll found that a third of Trump voters support banning gays and lesbians from the country. Twenty percent said Lincoln shouldn't have freed the slaves."

Amanda Taub delved into research presented by a PhD student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst named Matthew MacWilliams, who sought to explain political developments in connection with some studies of authoritarian impulses -- "not actual dictators, but rather a psychological profile of individual voters that is characterized by a desire for order and a fear of outsiders." People who score high in survey questions that reveal authoritarian tendencies look for strong leaders when they feel threatened, leaders who promise to take whatever action is necessary to protect them from outsiders and prevent the changes they fear.

The effects of authoritarianism on American politics are curious and worrying. In their provocative book *Authoritarianism in American Politics*, Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler explore this topic. Through a series of experiments and careful data analysis, they came to a surprising conclusion: Much of the polarization dividing American politics was fueled not just by gerrymandering or money in politics or other oft-cited variables, but by an unnoticed but surprisingly large electoral group -- authoritarians. They concluded that the GOP, by positioning itself as the party of traditional values and law and order, had unknowingly attracted what would turn out to be a large population of Americans with authoritarian tendencies.

Authoritarians express deeper fears than the rest of the electorate, and they want to have order imposed where they perceive dangers in changing circumstances. So they support a strong leader who promises to defeat those fears with force. The extreme nature of authoritarians' fears, and of their desire to challenge threats with force, has led them toward a candidate whose temperament is totally unlike anything we usually see in American politics -- and whose policies go beyond acceptable norms. "A candidate like Donald Trump, who embodies the classic authoritarian leadership style: simplistic, powerful and punitive."

Amanda Taub got in touch with Hetherington and MacWilliams and several other political scientists who study authoritarianism to better understand the theory that seemed to have predicted, with eerie accuracy, Trump's rise. Long before anyone thought a person like him could possibly win the Republican nomination for president, a small but respected niche of academic research has been laboring over a question, part political science and part psychology, that had captivated political scientists since the rise of the Nazis.

How do people come to adopt, in such large numbers and so rapidly, extreme political views that coincide with fears of minorities and desires for a strongman leader? This situation is reminiscent of the gripping drama depicted in the film *The Wave* by director Dennis Gansel. The film is based on a real-life high school classroom experiment in which students went from being normal undisciplined and somewhat cynical teenagers to being a cohesive group that accepted authoritarian order and discipline and conformity, and did so within the span of a single week's time. The film is a provocative revelation of the fact that human behaviors can be easily and quickly manipulated. We sure would be better off to structure our societies so that our collective behaviors are manipulated in positive ways, with liberty and justice for all, rather than allowing shadow elements to drive us ruthlessly toward ruin and divisive

intolerance and mean-spirited extremes of unfairness and greed.

The political phenomenon identified as right-wing populism lines up, with astonishing precision, with research on how authoritarianism is both caused and expressed. According to a theory articulated by Karen Stenner, there is a certain subset of people that hold latent authoritarian tendencies, and these tendencies can be triggered or "activated" by the perception of physical threats or by destabilizing social change. This leads those individuals to desire policies and leaders that are authoritarian.

More than that, authoritarian impulses reveal the connections between several seemingly disparate stories about American politics. And it suggests that a combination of demographic, economic and political forces, by awakening this authoritarian class of voters that has coalesced around Trump, have created what is essentially a new political party within the GOP -- a phenomenon that broke into public view with the 2016 election, but will persist long after it has ended.

This theory holds that people support extreme policies and strongman leaders as a reaction to experiencing certain kinds of threats. This social threat theory helps explain why authoritarians seem so prone to reject not just one specific kind of outsider or social change, such as Muslims or same-sex couples or Latino migrants, but rather to reject all of them. Today, authoritarians skew heavily Republican.

Authoritarians have affiliated with the Republican Party since the 1960s when the Party shifted electoral strategies to try to win disaffected white Southern Democrats by speaking to fears of black people and changing social norms associated with desegregation and the civil rights movement. The GOP also embraced a "law and order" platform with a heavily racial appeal to white voters who were concerned about race riots.

Research on authoritarianism suggests it's not just physical threats driving all this. Other types of threats -- larger, slower, less obvious, but potentially even more powerful -- push authoritarians to these extremes. These threats involve evolving social norms, such as the erosion of traditional gender roles or evolving standards in how to discuss sexual orientation. It also involves political and economic changes that disrupt social hierarchies, and rising diversity and demographic changes from immigration.

These social changes are accelerating, and working-class white people seem to feel especially victimized by them. It is conventional wisdom to ascribe the rise of the Tea Party and now Trump to the notion that working-class white Americans are angry, but there is much more to this sentiment. These people are faced with demographic and economic pressures that research suggests are highly likely to trigger authoritarian impulses, and this helps explain their gravitation toward extreme political responses.

Working-class communities have come under tremendous economic strain since the 2008 recession. And white people are also facing the loss of the privileged position that they previously were able to take for granted. Whites are now projected to become a minority group within 30 years, owing to migration and higher birth rates among Latinos and blacks than whites. President Obama is a black man, and non-white faces are growing more common in popular culture. This has had the effect of causing non-white groups to raise increasingly strident political demands, and often those demands coincide with issues such as policing that also speak to authoritarian concerns.

Trump's specific policies are not the thing that most set him apart from the rest of Republicans. Rather, it's his inflammatory rhetoric and style, and the way he reduces everything to black-and-white extremes of strong versus weak, greatest versus worst -- and his simple, direct promises that he can solve problems that other politicians are too weak to manage. "I alone can fix it", he absurdly declared when he was a candidate.

This trend toward authoritarian rule had been accelerated in recent years by demographic and economic changes such as immigration, which "activated" authoritarian tendencies and led many Americans to seek out a strongman leader who would appeal to white people and religious fundamentalists who want to preserve a status quo they feel is

under threat.

Curiously, white supremacy is taking on a desperate quality all these years after segregation was outlawed and the Ku Klux Klan was powerful. Non-Hispanic white people represented almost 90% of the American populace in 1950, and today it is less than 64%, and declining. White supremacists -- get over it! Start standing up for the rights of minorities NOW! Set a fair-minded precedent for your own future well-being.

The Republican establishment has demonstrated an inability to regain control over the renegade authoritarians, and the authoritarians are actively opposed to the establishment's centrist goals, and they are not particularly interested in its economic platform. For decades, the Republican Party has been attracting authoritarians by implicitly promising to stand firm against the tide of social change, and to be the party of force and power rather than the party of negotiation and compromise. But now it may be discovering that its strategy has worked too well -- and this is tearing the party apart, and harming the national psyche and future prospects. With Trump triumphant, and his petro state-like fossil fuel Cabinet in place, the risks of repressive rule and harsh dictatorship are dangerously increased.

Making a Fair-Minded Pledge

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands,
one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

--- Official U.S. Pledge of Allegiance from 1942 to 1954

Note that the words "under God" were added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 as a kind of propaganda initiative in reaction to stoked fears of godless communism during the Joseph McCarthy era and the Cold War. Republicans are now, seemingly cynically, using the name of God to try to further divide the country to advance their demands to impose a narrow "right-wing engineering" agenda. Since all religions have a spectrum of adherents that runs from the liberal left to the reactionary right, it is time that moderates and progressives in every faith reject conservative elements that have dominated their religious establishments in recent years.

Republican Dysfunction

This "hell-no caucus" of the Republican Party commandeered control of their increasingly dysfunctional political party in October 2015. These absolutists and right-wing extremists live in a gerrymandered echo chamber of uncompromising ideology. They demand a ridiculous degree of "purity" that is so sullied as to make rational understanding practically incomprehensible. They fervently believe that there is a God that cares more about a woman's egg from the moment it is fertilized than real living children or their mothers, so they are generally opposed to Planned Parenthood, often even preferring to religiously impose mandatory motherhood on raped women and victims of incest who become pregnant after being raped. This is an absurd stance for a male domineering faction of the House of Representatives that calls itself the Freedom Caucus!

The House Freedom Caucus is a group of more than 40 Republicans loosely associated with the Tea Party. It exercised a lot of influence in throwing John Boehner out of power as Speaker of the House, and initially demanded that any new leader of the House make a commitment to force the U.S. government into default on the national debt unless cuts are made to programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. It also demanded that a new Speaker refuse to compromise on a budget for the U.S. if it included any funding for Obamacare, the Iran nuclear arms deal, Planned Parenthood, or immigration "amnesty".

This contempt for compromise has undermined the Republicans' drive to prove that they can actually govern. The Republican Party is beginning to look like the "party of stupid", and this was confirmed after the Freedom Caucus drove John Boehner out of his position as the Speaker of the House, and then torpedoed his replacement-in-waiting, the "Young Gun" Kevin McCarthy, after he candidly admitted that the longest running congressional investigation in

history (into the Benghazi diplomatic compound tragedy) was really an effort that had a primary purpose of undermining the presidential candidacy of Hillary Clinton.

It is easy to imagine the indignation of angry conservatives at the characterization of their political party as the "party of stupid", because of the overly broad-brush nature and stinging kernel of truth contained in this generalization. But there is a good reason for this observation, since a more intelligent approach is to be open-minded rather than closed-minded, and to be aware of complexities, nuances and uncertainties rather than chock full of certitude and blind faith and indoctrinated ideological convictions. When a person is an unthinking Rush Limbaugh "dittohead", or a bigoted racist, intolerant of others, or is reactive and overly susceptible to fear or excessive gullibility, they are revealed to be more stupid than smart. As Bertrand Russell wrote: "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt."

Political science columnist Allen Clifton wrote a sensational article in April 2015 titled "*Republican Party Has Literally Become the Party of Stupid*". A reader might expect that an article with this title would contain gratuitous partisanship, but the validity of thought-provoking point after revealing point after convincing point concerning the incoherent ideologies in the right wing of the Republican Party would make any but the most stubborn or obtusely unaware or dishonest observer shake their head with disgusted agreement. Don't take my word for it -- read Allen Clifton's article!

Listen in. After mentioning climate change denial, oil company spin, Creationism in religious circles, and the fervent conviction that widespread gun ownership makes people safer, Clifton then transitions into this:

"Then we can't forget the religious folks who somehow believe that their freedoms are being trampled on because they're being prevented from denying millions of Americans their Constitutional rights. No matter how hard I try, I still can't wrap my mind around that ridiculous 'logic.' But then there's always the economic theory pushed by the GOP that if we just make rich people richer, that somehow the rest of us will benefit. Meanwhile, not only are Republicans admitting that income inequality is a problem -- they're pushing for more of the same policies that made it a problem in the first place."

"Then there are always my favorites: The people who rely on government programs, voting for people trying to cut or eliminate the programs they rely on to survive. Millions of people on Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, food stamps and other government programs are voting for politicians who essentially refer to them as lazy moochers who just want the government to take care of them. When Mitt Romney talked about the 47 percent, those are the people to which he was referring - and millions of them voted for him anyway."

Allen Clifton's perspectives are legitimate, and it sure does appear that many of the stances adopted by Republican politicians are coldly cynical calculations that are contradictory, irrational, hypocritical, prejudiced, dysfunctional and mean-spirited. It is exceedingly odd that conservatives often claim they are Christians and believe in Jesus, yet they are adamantly opposed to helping poor people by supporting social program spending if it means that the rich would be required to pay higher taxes on the top levels of their incomes. At the same time, they somehow rationalize in their minds being zealously opposed to allowing poor women to choose to limit the size of their families and to thus save the government large sums of money on the many costs related to poor families having many children.

Be Careful What You Wish For

Many extremely conservative Tea Party politicians have been elected in contorted congressional districts. The strategy of gerrymandering voters into bizarrely contorted districts is ethically corrupt, though both political parties have practiced it for more than 200 years since Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry concocted the scheme in 1812. Today, the anti-democratic aggregation of extreme conservatives into districts where they cannot be defeated is having the unintended and undesirable effect of finally causing the GOP to careen off the rails. This

was proven when the uncompromising rectitude of the Freedom Caucus led to Congress driving John Boehner from his position as Speaker of the House and his heir apparent Kevin McCarthy bowed out of his ambition to replace him after his gaffe of honesty about the Benghazi tragedy.

Right wing politicians and Rush Limbaugh dittoheads were angry and frustrated at President Obama's power and success, but their intransigent emotions threw Republican politics into chaos at the same time that a full 50% of likely Republican voters in December 2015 supported candidates for president who were politically inexperienced -- i.e., Carly Fiorina., Ben Carson and Donald Trump. The GOP was thus devolving into chaos at the very moment that crucial issues and deadlines loomed, including the need to increase the national debt limit and the need to take sensible actions on immigration, women's rights and campaign finance reform. The Tea Party-driven splinter group within the House of Representatives was not only rancorously anti-Obama, but anti-government, anti-evolution, anti-contraception, anti-abortion, anti-Planned Parenthood, anti-feminist, anti-gun regulation, anti-environmental protection, and rabidly anti-Iran, and most of them are climate change deniers who oppose doing anything reasonable about one of the most far-reaching threats ever posed to civilization.

To think of shutting down the federal government over a relatively tiny amount of funding for an organization that provides vital healthcare for poor women seems crazy. This stubborn stance alone should be political suicide, given that 50% of American voters are women and this position is so directly contrary to the prerogatives and rights of females and their healthcare and dignity of choice in their own destinies.

At the conclusion of his State of the Union address in January 2016, President Obama observed: "Democracy does require basic bonds of trust between its citizens. It doesn't work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice, or that our political opponents are unpatriotic." President Obama's idealistic words about presumptions of malice notwithstanding, there are people that an independent assessment of consequential ethics would judge to be malicious, and here is one example, and it is a fine kettle of fish.

News broke in late January 2016 that a Houston grand jury that had been investigating accusations of criminal misconduct against Planned Parenthood instead brought felony charges against the leader of an anti-abortion group who had made covert videos of the organization's employees. The videos had been maliciously edited to generate gruesome suspicions and passionate opposition, which was exploited by all the Republican presidential candidates. In particular, Carly Fiorina and Ted Cruz parroted outrageous mischaracterizations of the purposes and activities of Planned Parenthood clinics. The crude and misleading videos generated a toxic cloud that likely contributed to an atmosphere in which a domestic terrorist chose to shoot people at a clinic in Colorado Springs, killing three and wounding nine. The shooter expressed anti-abortion, anti-government views, and was apparently riled up by thinking that Planned Parenthood was selling "baby parts".

The upshot of this news is that anti-family-planning zealots are so religiously and self-righteously opposed to the idea of a private organization providing healthcare services to disadvantaged women that they broke laws and maliciously made and deceptively edited videos to stoke partisan emotions and distort the greater good represented by Planned Parenthood clinics. This development is a pathetic example of unethical exploitation of people's emotions to hijack our societies and strengthen support for the agendas of billionaires and the right wing. Even after this pathological ruse was glaringly exposed, Republican politicians continued to exploit the emotions generated by the "baby parts" meme for their own nefariously selfish purposes.

The strong character of Ma Joad in John Steinbeck's epic novel *The Grapes of Wrath* provides an inspiring counterpoint. Ma Joad showed feminine strength by offering a sense of domestic harmony and good connection and patient strength and an empathetic sense of compassion. She was rational and powerful because she was flexible and adaptive in the face of changing circumstances. In bizarre contrast, the Republican presidential candidate Carly Fiorina attempted to sound strong in the second Republican presidential debate by declaring she would not talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin if she was elected. Is this the best wisdom that this female Republican politician

could offer? Trump, in contrast, has had a suspicious bromance-like attitude toward Putin.

Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower's hometown was Abilene, Kansas, and he managed to deal with a Congress dominated by Democrats almost sixty years ago without having political gridlock, and government during his tenure as president was not paralyzed by intense ideological battles. The reason for this measured success was that 'Ike' pursued moderate policies and cooperation as a means to govern well.

In Kansas today, laughter could almost be heard echoing amongst the tall peaks of the Rocky Mountains just to the west of the state, and may even have rumbled across Mount Sunflower, the highest point in Kansas. Lying near the Colorado border, Mount Sunflower has a barely discernible summit with a small shrine on it and a guest book that has a postscript at the bottom of the first page. It notes: "Technically, to be a true mountain there must be a 2,000 foot elevation difference in a 10-20 mile radius, so Mount Sunflower is not a true mountain."

Not a true mountain! In delightful similarity, the trickle-down theory is not a true theory. No, not true at all. It is, in reality, a barely concealed bit of repetitiously repeated propaganda that is self-serving and deceitful. It is a bill-of-goods that has been peddled to the American people ever since it was concocted by some shrewd characters and promoted by Ronald Reagan to gain support and get money from wealthy donors.

The state motto of Kansas is a Latin phrase that means "*To the Stars through Difficulty*". Sam Brownback has unwittingly set Kansas on a backward journey toward ever-more daunting difficulties, and it would be wise for voters in Kansas to reject all the dishonest Republican politicians in the next election on account of their serious betrayal of the public trust. The sunflower is the state flower of Kansas, which is why Kansas is known as the Sunflower State, and it is of passing interest to know that sunflowers need full sun to grow well, not shade or darkness. For this reason, I surmise, it is odd that the "mushroom theory of management" works so well in these environs ("keep them in the dark, and feed them a lot of bullshit"). Curiously, sunflowers are sometimes used to extract toxic ingredients such as lead and arsenic from soil. There is a harmonious ring to the idea of cultivating a beautiful plant that provides economic benefits while at the same time helping protect from harmful substances.

O say, Kansans, can you see,
How auspicious it would be
To reject ideological toxicity
And reinstitute an overarching concern for the general welfare and the common good
For conquer we must, and this cause is just
And the greater good must prevail, and democracy must reign
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Sam Brownback should have been honest with the people and admitted that what's really the matter with Kansas is that "conservative" economic ideology is a misguided and misleading idea, not a truly fair-minded public policy. Honest economists like Robert Reich and Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman have made it abundantly clear over the years that the trickle-down theory is a scoundrels' ruse perpetrated by the wealthy, and that it is not even marginally fair to the vast majority of the people.

Sam Brownback made himself appear ridiculously gullible and susceptible to a foolish absolutism of conviction by setting up this economic experiment that was highly likely to definitively discredit beliefs in trickle-down ideology and expose it as a Big Lie. Any honorable intervening God would emulate Nemesis, the Greek Goddess of Divine Vengeance and Poetic Justice, and strike Brownback down with a bolt of lightning for his hubris and deceptive abuse of governmental power to gain personal power by rigging the system ever more extremely in favor of the wealthy. I am only speaking symbolically, of course. Voters, throw him out of office!

Principles and Consequential Ethics

"Republicans are principled", declared one conservative politician a couple of years ago. More like extremely

opportunistic to me, but if that statement is true, let's look again at the full scope of the evidence to determine what the real Republican principles actually are, in contrast to what conservatives may say they are. At the top of the list is a commitment to cutting taxes on rich people and big businesses. They do crow about freedom, but their main interest is demonstrably to champion the freedom of the wealthy to rig the economy ever more favorably for their own benefit, generally at the expense of the majority of *We the People*. They also want to increase spending on the military and cut spending on programs that are in the best interests of the vast majority of Americans. They want to get rid of healthcare under the Affordable Care Act for millions of Americans. And privatize education and prisons. Some of them want to deport millions of immigrants living in the U.S. illegally. They want fewer restrictions on gun ownership, which would make most people statistically more at risk of being killed by people with guns, and thereby increase national insecurity. They want to gain more power by restricting voter rights and gerrymandering congressional districts and preventing campaign finance reform -- and stacking federal courts and the Supreme Court with ideological conservatives.

Frank Zappa once expressed the angry conviction that, "Republicans stand for raw, unbridled evil and greed and ignorance smothered in balloons and ribbons." If one looks beyond the balloons and ribbons and Reaganesque imagery of a shining city on the hill, and judges the principles revealed by Republican actions rather than by their words, their principles are not high-minded, and are seriously tarnished by self-serving expediencies and obsequious pandering to wealthy people and intolerant religious folks and angry white males.

What can make greed especially nefarious is when it is accompanied by an unempathetic, obtusely mean-spirited "I've got mine, tough luck that you don't have yours" attitude and a smugly self-righteous and stubborn "purity". This is why it is so onerous for Republican politicians to use simplistic slogans, political chicanery and underhanded deviousness to fool voters into giving them the power to champion an agenda favoring rich people in return for strong financial backing for their political careers. Money and power are the bottom line of politics for these folks, not honorable public service or greater good goals.

Republicans generally do not support environmental protections, but when they do address environmental issues, their focus is often on denying climate change, expanding oil and gas drilling, and privatizing America's public lands. Republicans generally want to limit environmental protections and sell off national forests and other public lands, or to transfer them to state control, which might be a boon to Big Oil companies and private developers, but would result in the loss of cherished open spaces and fewer fishing, hiking, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Catering to the desires of rich people can be extraordinarily lucrative for politicians. When this activity results in scurrilously detrimental outcomes for the people, such self-serving pandering is morally reprehensible. Many Republican politicians are arrogantly uncompromising when it comes to their insistence on imposing anti-family planning ideologies on millions of women. Reince Priebus, the Chairman of the Republican National Committee, enunciated his "Principles for American Renewal" in October 2014, including this: "As Republicans we're pro-family; and we're also pro-life. So when a woman faces an unplanned pregnancy, society should offer our support and compassion. She should know that adoption is possible. Our laws should be improved to make adoption an easier path for families who want to open their homes to children."

This principle means they officially want to ban all abortions and force every female who becomes pregnant to carry an unwanted embryo until it becomes a fetus and eventually becomes viable, and then after a total of nine months, they will deign to allow a pregnant woman to choose to give up a baby for adoption. As a blanket policy, this principle is extremely unempathetic toward all the circumstances that may be involved in any woman's life, or how she became pregnant, and it is simply insufficient as a basis of national policy.

At the other end of life, anti-choice zealots oppose the right of terminally ill adults to choose a dignified, pain-free, humane death with help from their doctors. They have spread "death panel" lies about a policy to extend Medicare coverage to include voluntary end-of-life consultations between patients and their doctors. "It's a tactic we see

repeatedly," indicates the organization Compassion and Choices, "the use of deliberate lies to poison debate, create political controversy and restrict the rights of others to make their own decisions about care and comfort at life's end."

Females were likely to have been the first ones to have cottoned on, far back in human prehistory, to the fact that having sex with one particular male around the time of one of their full moon menstrual bleeding periods was directly correlated with giving birth to a baby nine months later. After they first made this connection, they understandably and justifiably adopted a strategy of being much choosier about what particular male they would be willing to have sex with. They wanted a good physical specimen and a responsible male that would not abandon his mate in the lifelong obligations of providing for their extremely needy and demanding offspring. Females today deserve this unalienable biological freedom to make such an "Original Choice".

A woman should have the right to freely choose whether or not to have a baby, because this is one of the most consequential events of her life, and no government or man should have the right to dictate her decision to her. The female oppressing anti-abortion debate really is a political stance and a moral judgment that a sperm and an egg once united have superior rights to the rights of a woman who might choose not to have an unwanted child after she finds out she has gotten pregnant. Sister Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, provides perspective:

"I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking. If all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed ... why would I think that you don't? Because you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is."

The Supreme Court guaranteed a woman's right to choose in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision in 1973. This decision was a fair-minded compromise, which stated a woman has a legal right to get a safe abortion during the first trimester of a pregnancy. With the 44th anniversary of this ruling in January 2017, it was a good time to consider this issue in a comprehensive big picture context as a new antagonistic presidency unfolds. Since 1973, Republican politicians have passed more than 1,000 laws to restrict a woman's right to choose, and the fervor to undermine this right has been ratcheting up in the past 5 years. The underlying reason for this fact is revealing, and is strongly correlated to another Supreme Court ruling, in the *Citizens United* case, which Bernie Sanders assails because it allows unlimited elections spending by corporations and special interest groups like anti-abortion groups, calling it "one of the most disastrous Supreme Court decisions in my lifetime. This decision hinges on the absurd notion that money is speech, that corporations are people, and that giving huge piles of undisclosed cash in support of politicians in exchange for influence does not constitute corruption."

The *Roe vs. Wade* decision was a big step toward protecting women's health and affirming their control of their own bodies. Unfortunately, extreme right-wing politicians have made it more and more difficult for women to actually access abortion care in many states, due in many cases to the federal Hyde Amendment and other anti-abortion laws. Efforts to make it harder for women to access reproductive health care by shutting down clinics are reprehensible. Making women travel hundreds of miles, or wait weeks for an appointment, or face harassment at clinic doors is a national disgrace. We should affirm not only the right to have an abortion, but we should offer pregnant women the right to safely access a doctor or clinic where that procedure can be performed. On a larger stage, we should repeal the Helms Amendment, which was enacted to restrict U.S. foreign aid from going toward abortions in other countries. This law is "a deadly policy that effectively denies abortion care to women and girls around the world who experience rape, incest, or life-threatening pregnancies."

An important reason to have rejected Republican politicians in the 2016 elections should have been to prevent a Republican president from appointing more ideologically driven corporate-friendly partisans to the Supreme Court, because they would not only continue to support rights of corporations to spend freely to corrupt our political

system, but they also could overturn *Roe vs. Wade* and make abortions illegal again, forcing many women to have dangerous and too often fatal backroom abortions. If abortions had remained illegal and Republicans had somehow succeeded in forcing every one of the estimated 60 million pregnant women to deliver their babies who have had legal abortions since 1973, the US population would be somewhere in the vicinity of 400 million today, instead of 325 million, and a higher percentage of the population would be black and Hispanic. Since 1980, there have been more than 1.4 billion abortions worldwide. If conservatives had had their way and they could have forced every one of those pregnant women to have kept their embryos until giving birth, the world population would currently be nearing 9 billion today, with a likely catastrophically more rapid onset of severe ecological and biotic consequences.

Conclusion

Progressive politicians in the U.S. and elsewhere would do well to learn that if they let orthodoxies paralyze them, they will have little to say to voters who, as Justin Trudeau declared on the night he was elected, are tired of the twin ideas that they "should be satisfied with less" and that "better just isn't possible."

We need to keep pushing forward on things like making college more affordable, passing comprehensive immigration reform, ending the excessive influence of big money in politics, reinforcing women's reproductive prerogatives, and closing growing gaps in inequalities of income and wealth. To do that, we need to elect progressive leaders who will make strong commitments to fighting for these things and building on them in the years to come. Hillary Clinton would have been an infinitely better bet than Trump to actualize these hopes.

President Obama explained it clearly in early 2016: "Time and again the 2016 Republican presidential candidates talk about more tax cuts for the folks at the very top, even though we can clearly see that there is no evidence to show that that would grow the economy. They want to roll back Wall Street reform and go back to letting the big banks run wild. And let's not forget -- of course, they want to repeal the Affordable Care Act!"

I urge my fellow Americans to stand up against the corrupting influences of conservative politicians and to set a new course towards a fairer, healthier, saner and more sustainable future! Right Mindfulness, Right Effort and Right Action are required!

Yours truly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain