

Earth Manifesto



Honestly Seeing Things Like They Really Are

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Wise Native American leaders advised an eminently valuable perspective that recognized the crucial importance of living in the world in sustainable ways. They taught a *Seventh Generation Principle* that posited the proposition that all significant decisions should take **into account how any contemplated action will affect descendants** for seven generations into the future. **This is a respect-worthy stewardship** philosophy that was important to peoples in Native American cultures, like the Iroquois in their *Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy*, and to indigenous tribes around the world. This understanding reveals how crazy it is for leaders in modern times to ignore precautionary necessities for us to choose to pay forward a fairer, safer and more auspicious legacy to our heirs.

We must find much more effective ways to give adequate respect to our children and grandchildren, and to all human beings that will be born in the future. It is our ultimate moral obligation to help ensure our descendents have reasonable prospects for health, well-being, security and flourishing in coming years and decades. Let's come together now, responsibly, in making this overarching collective commitment!

Humanity is embarked on an epic journey in the 2020s. And unlike Odysseus, who encountered fantastic mythical beings like Sirens and a Cyclops during his decade-long voyage home from the Trojan War, right now we are experiencing a rapidly worsening and viscerally real "long emergency" of the destabilization of the global climate, along with pandemic travails, economic turmoil, inflation, wars, resource depletion, air and water pollution, species extinctions and natural disasters like devastating storms and terrible wildfires in many locales. These conditions are visceral portents of a deteriorating environment. Compounding these grave challenges, there are a multitude of conflicts over political supremacy, abuses of authority, ruthless competition, ideologies, stubbornly embedded racial injustices, discriminatory sexism, overpopulation pressures, and the proper role of good governance.

A big picture perspective reveals that this situation features worsening inequalities and consequentially harmful racial and class and gender injustices that especially oppress Blacks and Latinos and women. This woe-filled state of affairs contributed to anger and widespread street protests against police brutality in the summer of 2020, after George Floyd was murdered and police and federal agents reactively engaged in repressive activities -- and abusers of authority fanned the flames, increasing the many threats to fairness in our diminished democracy.

Ida B. Wells, an African American suffragist and early leader in the movement to gain civil rights for Blacks, once wisely wrote, "The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them." Let these words show the way!

What's happening here should be perfectly clear. Here's the bottom line. First, the powers that dominate our politics and economy have rigged the economy to such an extreme extent that a small minority of the people is able to monopolize most of the wealth generated by using up natural resources and making big profits from the labors of working people. Both Republicans and Democrats have collaborated together in this effort by allowing wealthy donors to exert dominating influence to grab big benefits for themselves. Economic elites have severely corrupted our political system, causing extremes of inequality in income and wealth to become more exaggerated today than they have been since the end of the Roaring Twenties in 1929. To achieve this excessively unfair state, conservatives have cheated the majority of people by subverting our democratic system of representation.

Our economic system is a ridiculously unjust one featuring harsh swim-or-sink Tough Luck capitalism for the vast majority, and generous socialism for rich people. One outcome of this treacherous skewed state of affairs is that

the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is becoming dangerously extreme. Adversities associated with this rigging scheme are creating anguished conflicts between Americans. This essay will clarify the ways top dogs in our society are achieving and perpetuating this grotesquely inequitable condition.

What's happening here is that business owners, executives and investors are being allowed to gain too much of the benefits of economic activities. One way they do this is by foisting externalized costs on the public. They compound this problem by evading their common good obligations to pay more taxes so that adequate revenues are available to invest in social insurance policies against desperation -- by means of a stronger social safety net and healthcare for all. Republican tax cut swindles are also causing us to fail to invest enough in environmental insurance policies that would help protect fresh water, clean air and valuable public lands. And corruption in politics is causing us to fail to make sensible commitments to stabilize the global climate, contributing to incalculably large current and future costs of intensifying storms, floods, droughts, wildfires, rising sea levels and other natural disasters, together with increasing hardships and flows of desperate refugees from poorer countries. We must change course, and begin respecting basic fairness and precautionary principles.

An insightful Buddhist philosopher might observe with equanimity that we should sensibly be guided by Right Understanding, Right Intention and a commitment to responsible Right Action, three of the wise planks of the Noble Eightfold Path. This path guides individuals toward an end to suffering and a balanced and enlightened life. The best gauge of responsible right action is found in accurate and comprehensive assessments of the consequences of the impacts of any given action. The Earth Manifesto points the way in online epistles like *Good Proposals for Saving Humanity*, and *Intelligent Precautionary Principles Enunciated*, and a proposed *Bill of Rights for Future Generations*. Let's start here!

A Major Problem: The Dominating Hegemony of the Corporatocracy

Our Founders created a democratic republic in which the American people had power because their voices were to be heard through representatives who were supposed to represent the people's best interests and the general welfare. Today, however, the USA is ruled by a corporatocracy -- a partnership of wealthy people, big corporations and crony government officials who are doing the bidding of corporate interests. Bruce Levine, a psychologist, explained: "In this corporatocracy, as in most modern tyrannies, there are elections, but the reality is that giant corporations and the wealthy elite rule in a way to satisfy their own self-interest. In this corporatocracy, it's in the interest of corporations and the wealthy elite that the winning candidate is beholden to them, so they financially support both Democrats and Republicans, and corporations and the wealthy directly and indirectly finance candidates who are then indebted to them. It's common for these indebted government officials to appoint persons to key decision-making roles who are friendly to, and lenient with, corporate entities and their executives. And it's routine for high-level officials in the government to be rewarded with high-paying industry positions or lobbying jobs after they move on, so that they use their relationships with current government officials to ensure that corporate interests will be taken care of." This often results in national policies and priorities that are unfair, unsustainable and basically wrongheaded, mean-spirited and cruel.

Early critics of capitalism like Karl Marx insisted that economics must be contained within an ethical context, and that social justice should be accorded higher priority than maximizing private profits to the detriment of the people. Then ecological philosophers came along and asserted that both economics and ethics must rightly take into account crucial ecological values. Republican politicians are brashly defying these understandings, striving to goose short-term profits by profligately using up resources and sacrificing the environment, and at the same time violating many codes of ethics, decency, honesty, public health and safety, cooperative good will, and the moral good. And they work relentlessly to erode democratic fairness and deprive many millions of Americans of voting rights and fair representation, thereby weakening the civil rights and overall well-being of most groups, especially those of women, people of color, gay people, poor people and immigrants and refugees.

Mark Twain famously observed that we Americans have the best government that money can buy. This satirical ridicule of the corrupting influence of moneyed interests in our politics has become an increasingly pathetic parody of propriety in the USA today. A massive flood of money is giving us rudely equality-opposing political leaders who are Orwellian in their manipulative dishonesty and ruthlessly divisive Big Brother treachery and harm-engendering

impacts. These "conservatives" preposterously pretend to care about people, but what they really do is to brazenly betray the best interests of most Americans to give bigger benefits to the few.

In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx astutely observed that the phrase "Après moi, le déluge!" is "the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Hence, Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the laborer, unless under compulsion from society." Workers, unite! Let's come together, and generate remedial compulsion!

Joel Bakan observed that big corporations are basically designed to socialize costs onto the public. He wrote that corporations are "deliberately programmed, indeed legally compelled, to externalize costs without regard for the harm it may cause to people and communities and the natural environment. Every cost it can unload onto someone else is a benefit to itself, a direct route to profit." Corporations should not be given the full rights in courts of law that are constitutionally assured to real people, for the good reason that far too many abuses of power have been made using rationalizations like the one that wrongfully asserts the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees corporate entities the same rights as individuals of Due Process and Equal Protection.

One way moneyed interests have succeeded in these schemes is by "deregulating" the economy. This approach allows those rigging the system to artificially inflate private profits in the short run through the expediency of externalizing costs, harms, risks and liabilities onto the populace. These externalized costs include health harms, damages to the environment, resource depletion, worse adversities for farmers and farm laborers, and high recovery costs from natural disasters that are intensifying due to a worsening climate crisis. Since 1980, elites have even managed to grab almost all of the bigger profits earned from increasing worker productivity.

"Deregulation" often is undoing laws that made sense in prior saner times, and doing the bidding of corporate executives seeking to maximize profits at the public expense. Deregulation is a shrewd process of reversing national rules that had enjoyed majoritarian meritocratic support before coldly-calculating politicians began obediently serving profit-prepossessed puppet masters. This strategy is maladaptive, for it wrongly allows more opportunities for Big Businesses to generate bigger profits by ripping off consumers, depriving workers of fair collective bargaining rights, foisting harms onto the people, and socializing costs and risks. Deregulatory zeal often torpedoed the common good by dismantling sensible protections from the predations of those who rig the system to their greedy advantage. This fervor undesirably facilitates the intensification of this assault on fair dealings, intelligent planning, good governance, propitious civic values, ecological sanity and sustainable living.

In the chaotic wake of the incited January 6 insurrectionary riot coup attempt, the Party pushing deregulation is now treacherously trying to regulate the hell out of voting rights in dozens of states around the country.

Republicans are living like there will be no tomorrow, hubristically demonstrating a heedless lack of concern for conserving resources, reducing pollution, or limiting the amount of toxic wastes generated. Worse, they try to change public policies in ways that will increase emissions of climate destabilizing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. They are broadly abusing the excessive influence they have usurped by pushing policies that will undermine prospects for the health, security and general well-being of all in future generations. They are thus acting like King Louis XV of France, who famously saw the writing on the wall, and said, "Après moi, le deluge."

We are in desperate need of good plans to deal with challenges that confront us. Here's Right Understanding. It is an ultimately unacceptable wrong to allow corporate entities to make excessive profits by poisoning or destroying a wide range of wildlife habitats and ecosystems. Instead of having our representatives make unrestrained profiteering and wealth concentration our top national goals, we should look to a crucial leading indicator, the Living Planet Report, which is sending Code Red signals. These reports estimated the number of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes in thousands of representative species since 1970, and reveals that a startling average of 69% of them have been wiped out, mainly due to habitat destruction caused by agriculture, mining and real estate development. We are hacking away at the branches of the tree of life, and allowing profiteers to chop into the roots of biological diversity, all for bigger profits to be funneled to the few.

The Living Planet Index reveals that natural ecosystems are being degraded at a rate unprecedented in human history. See my Sustainability Index online for a clear-eyed evaluation of 45 important parameters that measure how humanity is doing in its efforts to live sustainably. As human numbers march above 8 billion people, it is crazy

for us to cause the carrying capacity of Mother Earth for our kind to be reduced by rashly damaging natural ecosystems and failing to adopt more sensible conservation measures. We simply must support more expansive family planning options.

Young people have a big stake in future well-being, yet their voices are being largely ignored in decision-making today. To cope with grave threats posed by the anthropogenic climate crisis, the young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg told elites in Davos they need to do whatever it takes to meet the goals of the Paris Climate Accords, which seek to limit global temperature rises to below two degrees Celsius. She had drawn global attention when she delivered an impassioned speech to world leaders at the 2018 UN climate talks in Poland, and she has inspired many thousands of young students around the world to follow her lead and take off from school on Fridays to demand serious action against climate disruptions. She warned, "At places like Davos, people like to tell success stories, but their financial success has come with an unthinkable price tag. We can still fix this. But unless we recognize the overall failures of our current system, we most probably don't stand a chance."

Our political system foolishly facilitates cost-externalizing schemes by allowing costs of production to be socialized when it should instead require them to be included in a full cost pricing of products and services. This tactic generates artificially high profits, and our corrupted tax system allows a large proportion of profits to be commandeered by the few. Making matters much worse, influence-abusing rich people and corporate entities use the excessive sway of their Big Money to grievously skew our national policies and priorities, and to restrict voting and institute even more tax cuts in a public borrowing swindle that succeeds by pushing Big Lie "trickle-down theory" propaganda. This lavishly propagated spin is targeted to make sure tax cuts are regressively structured to give overly generous benefits to the top 1%, as was the case with the Tax Cuts bill rammed through Congress in December 2017 without support from a single Democrat. This rapidly mounting level of national debt exceeded a titanic \$34 trillion as the year 2024 began. This is about 125% of 2023 GDP of \$27 trillion in the U.S., which is a threshold of highly risky and irresponsibly large debt burden.

Political corruption allows power abusers to obligate all taxpayers in every future year to pay interest expense costs on trillions of borrowed dollars, disadvantaging every taxpayer in every future year for the purpose of giving most of the spoils of this swindle to the already wealthy. Think about this. Even before the global pandemic, the bottom half of Americans had an average net worth of less than \$12,000 per person, and roughly 20% of Americans had zero or negative net worth. These folks are financially extremely insecure, so it is wrong for the top 1% to have managed to rig the system so advantageously for themselves that they have an average net worth of \$10 million each. Even more extraordinarily, the top one-tenth of 1% of Americans has an average net worth of about \$50 million each, and the 3 richest Americans have a total net worth of over \$500 billion.

"There are lies, damned lies and statistics," sagaciously stated Mark Twain. Sadly, there are really consequential opportunity costs related to reducing government revenues by making big Tax Cuts and assessing low tax rates on the huge amount of income earned from investments, compared to rates assessed to working people who earn income through their work. One of the worst of these opportunity costs is the necessity to reduce spending on contagious disease preparedness and people's healthcare, like making cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, as Trump Republicans strive to do in their annual budget proposals. Another opportunity cost is chronic underfunding of public education, failing our children and having the insidious collateral impact of causing student debt to more than double in the last decade. Outstanding student loan debt in the U.S. exceeds \$1.7 trillion, and this steadily rising level of onerous obligations are being incurred at usurious interest rates, exacerbating wealth inequalities and making hardships faced by countless younger Americans needlessly harsh. Intergenerational injustices like this are a betraying design feature of the real nature of our current economic system.

Thomas Paine wrote that Americans have it in their power to make the world over again. One thing is currently clear: We need to act now! A bugle horn sounds for solidarity of purpose. It's not like there aren't excellent plans out there to address all our national ills. Like Elizabeth Warren, "I've got a plan for that!" Good plans to transform our world are found in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Let's pay forward a better legacy! We should shift our national priorities from a primary focus on pandering to the donor class and wealthy vested interest groups, and instead declare it to be our top priority to emphasize smarter

national planning by acting in ways that are much more responsible, equitable, humane, ethical, moral, just and empathically peaceable. We should give greater respect to far-sighted precautionary principles, and be more ecologically aware. We must make concerted efforts to stop facilitating "Tragedy of the Commons" outcomes and allowing externalized costs to be imposed onto the general populace. The best way to accomplish this would be by ratifying a *Bill of Rights for Future Generations* -- and respecting its overarching guidance.

A reasonably objective observer would see how cynically immoral it is for politicians to pretend to care about "forgotten" men and women and children in order to gain power, and to then double-cross these folks with contrary policies and distorted national priorities. Making matters worse, MAGA Republicans deceive people about what they are doing, and why. Remember that the ultimate judge of what is the true moral good in an action is how consistent it is with the greater good, and how consequential its impacts are, for better or worse.

Let there be no doubt or confusion about what is happening here. Our democracy is under concerted assault by power-abusing politicians and corporate entities that are demonstrating consequential attempts to corrupt public policies, pervert national priorities, repeal sensible regulations, cheat in elections, pass unfair laws, and tragically undermine the common good. And MAGA Republicans are telling Big Lies and engaging in seditious conspiracy, making this *Amazing Disgrace* worse by obstructing remedial justice, covering up their misdeeds, violating laws and the Constitution, and tricking people into letting them get away with betrayals of public trust.

Bernie Sanders described Trump's 2020 Budget proposal as "breathtaking in its degree of cruelty and filled with broken promises." Trump had told Americans he would be a different type of Republican, that he would be a champion of the working American, and that he would not cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. But his budgets did the opposite of what he promised. At a time of stark inequalities of income and wealth -- which became drastically worse with the pandemic -- Trump's last budget proposal would have helped pay for huge tax cuts that primarily benefit the few by cutting \$1.5 trillion from Medicaid, \$845 billion from Medicare and \$25 billion from Social Security. Make no mistake about it: Trump's plans constituted a massive transfer of wealth from working class families to the wealthiest people and most profitable corporations in America.

Conservatives in effect wage a "war on the poor" through the federal budget, and the budget is also one of the main pressure points where public lands and the environment are being sacrificed. The majority of Americans did not support Republicans' arrogant attempt to repeal Obamacare and replace it with a "mean" new plan that would have given rich people \$800 billion in tax breaks at the cost of millions of Americans losing their healthcare coverage. The majority supports improving public education, not slashing funding for it to subsidize privileged people and their kids in private schools. The majority of Americans favors expanded women's rights and empowerment, and they oppose new limitations on contraception and safe abortion before fetal viability.

The majority supports environmentally sane planning and greater efforts to leave a more secure legacy to our children and grandchildren and all persons in future generations. The majority disapproves of leaders who pander to those who profit from wasteful and polluting uses of fossil fuels and abdicate responsibility for taking smart steps to ameliorate the effects of climate-disrupting greenhouse gas emissions. No matter what Republicans tell us, we must soon adopt good plans that will ensure we make an accelerated and necessary transition to cleaner energy, and reduce our reliance on the use of polluting non-renewable resources.

One particularly deplorable aspect of the current corrupted status quo is that the USA has become a terribly unjust *Incarceration Nation*. A main reason for this is that controlling interests use a discriminatory criminal justice system to repress persons who are adversely affected by excessively harsh laws. These interest groups have effectively put in place vile policies like draconian drug laws that have been used to lock up millions of people. Victims of this injustice over the decades include hippies long ago, and liberals, and disproportionate numbers of Blacks, Latinos and other disadvantaged racial minorities. To add insult to the injury of mercilessly depriving these wronged folks of many freedoms and personal security, the designers and enforcers of this highly unjust system further deprive them of having any voice about this situation by making it harder for them to exercise voting rights. Additionally, these politicians give big opportunities to businesses in the private prison industry to make huge profits from these inequities and prevent overturning of wrongful convictions.

In another swindle-like indulgence, "rent-seekers" carve out profits for themselves instead of contributing to

making the economic pie bigger, to the real detriment of the masses. This is one reason why half of the poor people in the world live in resource rich countries. The prominent economist Joseph Stiglitz explains the true dimensions of the negative impacts of this scheme, especially in countries corrupted by powerful fossil fuel interests, in his insightful book, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*.

Our national economy and the global economy are structured to maximize profits not only by extracting natural resources and taking ruthless advantage of working people -- especially "essential" but expendable blue collar folks -- but also by promoting materialist consumerism and profligately wasteful hyper-stimulus of the economy.

Given all these aspects of the status quo, it is completely crazy to inadequately govern the wily predations of gigantic corporate entities, and to let these tax-evading behemoths prosper at the expense of the people. It is downright dumb to give wider latitude to Big Tech, Big Pharma, Big Oil, Big Coal, Big Chemical, Big Agribusiness, Big Tobacco, Big Insurance, Big Military, Big Gun Manufacturers and the corrupt (why tax-exempt?) NRA.

Big Tech is having some far-reaching harmful impacts on people, especially the young in our communities, and on the health of our democracy. In the exceptionally insight-filled Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma*, some of the creative people behind the success of gigantic companies like Facebook, Google, Twitter, Amazon and Apple make it clear that a corrosive business model and perverse financial incentives are fundamental to their success. These companies have become the biggest and most profitable companies in history by designing their platforms using profoundly persuasive psychological manipulation techniques to capture people's attention and get them addicted to their services or devices, and to profit from polarization by stoking culture wars and engaging in "cancel culture". A tragic side effect: a calamitous spike in suicides, especially among the young.

The ultimately irresponsible capstone of this concatenation of qualities that characterize the current corrupt establishment is a staunchly promoted pro-birth stance that is propped up by a deep-seated "be fruitful and multiply" opposition to family planning, contraception and reproductive rights for women to choose to have a safe and legal abortion. Anti-choice pro-natal promotion of births is a perverse way for vested interests to conspire to dominate women, and to push consumerism, exploit resources, plunder assets as rapidly as possible, deprive working people of the fruits of their labors, and get away with damaging ecosystems and killing wildlife.

Humanity faces daunting challenges in the world today in every sphere -- locally, nationally and globally -- so it is becoming imperative for us to deal comprehensively with the forces underlying these perplexing issues. The government of the United States of America has a moral obligation to solve complex problems, and not to make them worse by deceit and rigging the system even more reactionarily against the general welfare of humanity.

Excellent consensus solutions can be found to all these challenges, and it is pathological that the main way the puppet masters who control our misbegotten national decision-making get away with preventing these common good solutions is by driving wedges between people to keep them from gaining fairer representation. They despicably try to benefit by exploiting grievances, riling up resentments and provoking racial prejudices, and by taking crude advantage of tribal identity politics and people's fears and insecurities -- so that the largely white supremacist schemers can continue to dominate our politics and oppress the lower classes.

Let's respect this honorable understanding, and come together in common cause! Witness this conundrum that afflicts humanity: Control-obsessed "conservatives" demand dominion over all the people, and one of their main drives is to achieve an irresponsible goal -- to sell humanity down the river to an unnecessarily harsh fate by treating our home planet like a business in liquidation. They do this by helping convert natural resources to cash at the fastest possible rate in order to give most of the benefits of this insanely foolhardy course of action to a small minority of influence-abusing rich people. They achieve this purpose by deceiving people, wielding excess control in Congress, giving profit-obsessed corporate entities too much influence, stimulating demand for goods and services through ratcheted-up public borrowings to create what is a "fool's gold" artificial patina of a healthy economy, and enacting inequitable regressive tax cut scams. This, in addition to eliminating many common sense regulations and making concerted efforts to foist many cost-externalizing schemes and harms on the public, and lying to the people and railroading them using emotion-manipulating propaganda. Simultaneously, the top priority of scheming Trump and McConnell Republicans was to ram through a record number of overly partisan judges to side

with the rich over the poor, and Republicans over Democrats, and men over women, and the powerful over a majority of people whose best interests are hurt by these actions.

It is rudely unscrupulous for dominating conservatives to wield excessive influence by following Roger Stone's diabolically Machiavellian understanding that hate can be a more powerful motivating force than love. Some say that "You reap what you sow", and this applies doubly here, for hate viscerally harms those who are conditioned to hate, as well as their targeted victims. A sad side effect of such divisive gambits -- and MAGA Republican efforts to shift blame onto others -- is to make Americans into emotional wrecks. Republicans like the dirty trickster Roger Stone and others have used despicable smear campaigns and extremist rhetoric against rivals, and fomented racial biases with "dog whistles" to get stronger support from those in their baited political base.

These schemers regard negative political advertising and manipulative social media spin as highly effective and profitable ways to gain power and money. They are effective because they make it easy to hijack people's emotions, but though this shrewdly works, it seriously degrades civil discourse and undermines the vital qualities of unity and social cohesion that are needed to implement reforms and broadly positive collaborative solutions.

Dutch historian Rutger Bregman told billionaire elites at the economic summit in Davos in 2019 that the bottom line issue of almost every consideration is low taxes for the rich. "What Bregman said, put simply, was the Davos emperors have no clothes. They talk a lot about how something must be done about inequality and the need to address social unrest, but cavil at the idea they might be a big part of the problem." Bregman told his audience that people in Davos talked about participation, justice, equality and transparency, but "nobody raises the issue of tax avoidance and the rich not paying their share. It is like going to a firefighters' conference and not talking about water." He explained that the biggest factor causing extreme levels of inequality was "taxes, taxes, taxes, and all the rest is bullshit in my opinion." He later wrote that his activism "is about saving capitalism."

Budgets are moral documents, for they have determining impacts on people's lives and economic outcomes, and on the environmental commons upon which all future well-being is crucially dependent. All tax and spending decisions involve trade-offs, and there are winners and losers associated with every one. Government budgets and plans for raising revenues and allocating spending reveal the real priorities of our representatives, and these decisions are immensely consequential. Unfortunately, Republican changes in national tax law are dumbly narrow in their focus by being riskily short-term in orientation, and they cruelly make economic injustices worse. The real reason that the biggest element of the Trump Tax Folly was to cut taxes on corporations is because the top 1% of Americans receives more than two-thirds of all dividends paid out every year and the capital gains realized, so these tax cuts mainly benefit CEOs and large shareholders -- and the cunning politicians they buy. Capital gains, curiously, are taxed at exceedingly low rates. Rigged at every turn!

All of these scams are being achieved by pushing ideological propaganda to fool the people, as well as by using divide-to-conquer strategies targeted to trick them into accepting this sad state of affairs. But as income and wealth disparities and inequalities keep getting worse and worse, angry unrest is brewing in the USA. And matches were lit to the tinderbox after white police officers mercilessly killed George Floyd in Minneapolis. "One might wonder", I speculated before the widespread protests began, "how much harsher this insecurity and public corruption and moral turpitude and poisonous twitter spin will get before the rude ploys of succeeding by deceiving and dividing people FAIL, and powerful people and the wealthy find out how disastrously dangerous these system-corrupting conditions really are -- even to themselves -- and to freedom and mutual security."

Republicans portray criticisms and protests and dissent as anti-American -- and try to criminalize them. But in fact, these are often patriotic stands against injustices, corruption and power abuses. Open-minded folks see clearly that such misdeeds pose basic threats to our democracy, public health, civil rights and overall well-being.

Republicans are sticking with their Big Lie trickle-down theory, which they have been propagating since Ronald Reagan adopted it in 1981 to rationalize further enriching the rich. Bah, humbug! This ruse is a pathetic key in exacerbating extreme inequalities and associated hardships. The billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer made incisive observations about the folly of trickle-down propaganda in his article *The Pitchforks Are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*. In this 2014 article, addressed as a Memo to "My Fellow Zillionaires", Hanauer expressed this provocative understanding: "The problem isn't that we have inequality; some inequality is intrinsic to any high-

functioning capitalist economy. The problem is that inequality is at historically high levels and getting worse every day. ... Unless our policies change dramatically, the middle class will disappear, and we will be back to late 18th-century France. Before the revolution. And so I have a message for my fellow filthy rich, for all of us who live in our gated bubble worlds: Wake up, people. It won't last. If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us. No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state (repressive government). Or an uprising. There are no counterexamples. None. It's not if, it's when."

Our tax code really should reward work, not wealth. Yet politicians are egregiously preserving one of the most corrupt provisions of anything in the tax code -- the "carried-interest loophole". This is a notorious tax break that allows highly compensated private-equity managers, hedge fund managers, venture capitalists and investors in real estate to be taxed at very low rates. This violates the progressive principle of a more highly graduated tax system that makes the highest earners pay higher rates on the top levels of earnings. "These are guys that shift paper around and they get lucky," said Donald Trump before the 2016 elections. They were, he concluded, "getting away with murder." Then lax Trump Republicans generously gave a forgiving pardon to these people, despite knowing their guilt before Lady Justice, the great personification of the moral force in judicial systems.

Listen for the echoes of a stentorian female voice reverberating down from the skies above a burning bush on the Mount, and visualize a cartoon balloon with jagged edges crashing like lightning across dark skies, spelling out how deeply dishonorable and extraordinarily irresponsible the MAGA agenda is, with its anti-environmental, anti-democratic, anti-Black, anti-egalitarian, anti-immigrant bent. Another flash of lightning illuminates a stark panoply of parenthetical footnotes, including *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways Our System is Unfairly Rigged*, an essay that provides a fuller understanding of the underhanded schemes being perpetrated against Americans.

"If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed; if you do, you are misinformed."

--- Often attributed to Mark Twain

Where We Stand

Republicans have created a vicious cycle of minority rule and abuses of power in which they use *Dark Money* and voter suppression tactics and twisted partisan gerrymandering to exert excessive influence, using that power to make it harder for millions of people to vote, and to pack courts with conservatives. We should rightly enact fairer campaign finance laws and lobbying reforms to rectify the Supreme Court's wrongly decided corruption-enabling 2010 *Citizen United* ruling. And we must end partisan gerrymandering that allows politicians to choose their voters, instead of properly letting voters choose their representatives. We should also reverse all the restrictive Republican voter suppression laws enacted in recent years in states controlled by "conservatives", so that politicians are forced to compete more fairly for their influential positions. Do this by passing the proposed John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, and make voting by mail easier and even more secure.

We must strengthen our democracy by rejecting those who stubbornly refuse to compromise with the majority of people and their representatives. We should ratify a Constitutional Amendment like one advocated by the Move to Amend coalition that would make it clear that corporate entities are not persons, and should not have the same rights as individuals, because of their tendency to wantonly abuse power. Corporate behemoths should be broken up again today, like Theodore Roosevelt did when many corporate trusts had to be busted up into smaller entities to protect society from the negative monopoly outcomes associated with too much power.

Supreme Court conservatives narrowly ruled by a 5-4 vote in June 2019 to give state legislatures a green light to gerrymander congressional districts "to their heart's content, no matter how partisan or racist their motivations (and they're always partisan or racist)." This outrage against fairness in elections caused a new realization to dawn. The court of public opinion can be more powerful than federal courts, and people's voices become critically important when courts have been stacked with judges who act in accordance with partisan biases and suspiciously disingenuous rationales. So let's join together and apply powerful public pressure to our representatives to honestly and responsibly create nonpartisan districting in every one of the 50 states.

Under Trump, the U.S. government came to resemble an autocratic banana republic, corrupt in politics and featuring all too many officials willing to commit improprieties, and illegalities, to advance a narrowly self-serving and excessively unfair, pathetically unjust and environmentally insane agenda. This is scary, for the USA is a superpower and the world cannot afford to have it act like a rogue republic with a large and unfairly exploited poor working class, overly stratified social classes, political instability, and an oligarchic, plutocratic, crony capitalist, corporatocratic, influence-abusing ruling class composed of elites in business, politics, religion, the military and corporate media networks. We should never again allow an incredibly dishonest, greedy, anger prone, bullying, emotionally unbalanced, vindictive authority-abusing narcissist to occupy the Oval Office.

Despite the tinderbox conditions that prevail, it is very hard to get self-interested hard-right representatives of a minority of Americans to change course and commit to greater fairness and honesty and integrity, or demonstrate more inclusive concerns for the public health, general welfare, domestic tranquility, truer liberty and justice for all, fiscal responsibility, a better overall quality of life, and peaceable coexistence.

It is overly difficult to get special interests to change course because they are too busy using divisive strategies to keep people from uniting against power-abusing factions that insist they be allowed to continue rigging our economy and political system. They use powerful tools to perpetuate this division in organizations like the corporate-funded ALEC, which promotes sneaky "model legislation". State propaganda machines like Fox News, Breitbart and One America News grease the wheels of this corrupting influence, along with right-wing organizations like the Federalist Society that picks right-wing judges. "Dividers" have been successful in using social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to propagate falsehoods and confusion by emotionally hijacking people and taking advantage of their resentments, fears, racial biases, gullibility, and propensities to believe all manner of contorted conspiracy theories. By sowing seeds of doubt about everything, they are able to divert attention from the misdeeds that allow them to gain and misuse power, and from all the scandals and schemes they are perpetrating that are unethical and unconstitutionally contrary to people's best interests.

Those who relentlessly push a far right agenda of stacking federal courts with extremist judges basically want to undermine democratic fairness and torpedo unity and further enable the excessive concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. These judges fail to rein in cost externalizing scams, while rationalizing wrongs and repressing people. These are reasons why effective democracy reforms are needed, with a goal of altering the nefarious trajectory toward undemocratic rule, worsening inequitable outcomes, and policies that reduce protections of the environment, all in the interests of the greedy few at the expense of the many.

The House of Representatives first passed sensibly fair voting measures in March 2019 with the For the People Act (H.R.1), and such initiatives would be a good step in the right direction. In the Senate, however, Mitch McConnell stubbornly prevented this remedial legislation from even coming to the floor for a vote, ludicrously claiming it was an unfair "power grab" for regular citizens to have more influence. This is a grotesque contrast to his power-hungry devotion to allowing unlimited amounts of corporate money to drown out the voices of the vast majority of Americans! Since Republican politicians so staunchly oppose remedial actions, we should all figuratively throw open our windows like crazed Howard Beale in the film *Network*, and yell out "We're not going to take it anymore." We must throw the bums out of office with every vote made in all future elections!

On Patriotism

A true American patriot pledges allegiance to the principles upon which our republic was founded, not to political officeholders, and especially not to those who abuse the power of their positions to benefit themselves and rich people and corporate entities at the expense of everyone else. George Lakoff notably wrote in *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*: "Patriotism is about improving the lives of one's fellow citizens and improving one's country's contribution to the world. In the conservative moral hierarchy, our country is taken as simply better than other countries. This is jingoism, not true patriotism, which rests on progressive values."

It is traitorous to relentlessly push lies about election fraud and then desperately incite an insurrectionary coup to cling to power, and it is antithetical to patriotism to support leaders who engage in such activity. Robert Reich conveyed astute understandings on what really constitutes true patriotism in his 2018 article *Trump pushes destructive distortion of patriotism*. He observed, "America's core struggle has been one of inclusion, not

exclusion. ... Trump's patriotism centers on symbolic displays of loyalty like standing for the national anthem and waving the American flag. Real patriotism involves strengthening our democracy -- defending the right to vote and ensuring more Americans are heard, not claiming without evidence that millions voted fraudulently and pushing for laws that make it harder for Blacks and Latinos to vote. ... True patriots don't inundate government with industry lobbyists, attack the freedom of the press, or criticize judges who disagree with them, or fill the airwaves with lies. True patriots don't court foreign dictators, and don't excuse tyranny by denigrating America. True patriots don't fuel racist, religious or ethnic divisions. They aren't homophobic or sexist. To the contrary, true patriots seek to confirm and strengthen and celebrate the 'we' in 'We the People of the United States'. ... If we are losing our national identity, it is because we are losing those ideals: a commitment to the rule of law, to our democratic institutions, to truth, to tolerance of our differences, to equal political rights and equal opportunity, to participating in our civic life and making necessary sacrifices for these ideals we hold in common. Trump is doing everything he can to destroy these ideals. We must do everything we can to strengthen them. This is the true test of our patriotism." Kudos to Robert Reich for his clarity of observation!

Let's see clearly. As George W. Bush's former speechwriter David Frum states, the Trumpian GOP seems, in effect, to hate democracy because, as he writes: "The Republican party has a platform that can't prevail in democratic competition. When highly committed parties believe strongly in things that they cannot achieve democratically, they don't give up their beliefs, they give up on democracy." This is why "the GOP fights tooth and nail to make voting as hard as possible, to kick people off voter rolls, to gerrymander, to appoint ideologues to the Courts, to blow up all institutional norms in Congress: the new GOP has a twisted agenda, and they don't care how they get it. Democracy isn't to be protected, it's to be thwarted." This is tantamountly twisted! In *Trumpocracy: The Corruption of the American Republic*, David Frum persuasively clarifies the nature of a whole litany of rude shenanigans that were taking place under Trump, thanks to him and his Cabinet members and GOP congresspersons who tried to rationalize and hide all the far-reaching misdeeds. In the face of such wrongs, dissent and opposition are most patriotic! This is not fake news, or a hoax. And trying to hold perpetrators accountable was and is NOT a witch hunt! Trump's 3/30/23 indictment is well deserved.

Impeachment is the remedy prescribed by framers of the U.S. Constitution for a leader who seriously abuses power by putting his self-interest above the public interest, betraying his oath of office, and conspires with foreign leaders to gain personal political advantages. Trump is a clear and present danger to both national security and true fairness of representation because he promotes falsehoods, tells lies promiscuously and tries to cover up his malign influence and misdeeds. Republicans in the U.S. Senate became accomplices to these abuses of power through two impeachment trials, so are complicit in this malfeasance. Vote them out of office!

In March 2020, Trump had the inane audacity to retweet a piece that showed him playing the fiddle, with captions that read, MY NEXT PIECE IS CALLED ... NOTHING CAN STOP WHAT'S COMING. One can easily imagine ominous music swelling in the background, as the contagious coronavirus continued its insidious spread around the globe. Is irony dead? This Trump retweet was bizarre self-satire, for it evoked the Roman emperor Nero -- who fiddled while Rome burned. At that very moment, with the miserable viral disease proliferating, the Con-Man-in-Chief was lying, boasting, and revealing his ineptitude and treachery in administration. Having met an implacable adversary, immune to his spin, it was an ill-advised time for the moronically smug demagogue to be tweeting from Mar-a-Lago, where he was golfing and spending a sumptuous weekend -- and conspiring to cling to power for "four more years" by scaring and trying to fool the people again. Worse yet, Trump was not just witnessing this carnage, he was acting as a flame-throwing arsonist and violence-inciting demagogue.

Stop him and his MAGA disciples! To accomplish greater good goals, we need to follow the advice reflected in a handwritten protest sign seen at a Women's March: **MAKE AMERICA THINK AGAIN!**

Truly,
Tiffany Twain
March 3, 2024