



## Core Values of Democracy - and How to Thwart Conspiratorial Threats Against These Values

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Happy September! When I began this essay in July 2018, I wrote, "Bravo, my fellow Americans, as we commemorate Independence Day on its 242nd birthday! Our democratic republic has much to celebrate, but we currently face one of the most consequentially serious sets of crises in our history, and we must deal honestly, honorably and effectively with this colossal challenge." Today, these dilemmas have gotten vastly more daunting.

Let's all exit our echo chambers, and congregate in the middle to seek collaborative compromises that improve our hopes for realizing greater good goals. Let's listen, and talk and debate respectfully, and seek common ground in principles most likely to contribute positively to *The Common Good, Properly Understood*. FOR ALL.

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I'll meet you there."

--- Rumi

This essay is dedicated to a clear understanding of the core values of a true democracy, and the many threats against these propitious values. The fundamental tenets of democracy include an overarching commitment to common good goals and personal liberties; a reasonable modicum of equality of opportunity and justice for all; fair dealings toward everyone in their individual pursuits of happiness; popular sovereignty that assures fair representation and power to the people; inclusiveness in diversity; virtue in public service; fiscal responsibility; and honesty and patriotic dedication to human rights and these core values of democracy. In the United States of America, these Enlightenment Era-informed values are laudably set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and in evolving rules of law and a good many significant documents, speeches and writings.

The word crisis is represented in written Chinese by two characters, roughly meaning "danger" and "opportunity". Manipulative and deeply dishonest politicians have gained extremely narrow and domineering control of our country through a long litany of illegitimate means, and they are arrogantly abusing this power for a variety of wrongheaded purposes. *We the People* should rightly seize the day and use this period of dangerous opportunity to right our ship of state and restore assurances of healthier and safer communities, cohesive unity, expanded freedoms and future well-being. We must recommit our nation to vital values, and reclaim the virtues of good government by throwing off the shackles of the hegemony of excessively narrowly focused, profit prepossessed, scandalously corrupt, chaotically bamboozling, and tyrannically anti-democratic rule by the wealthy. Ecologically sane ways of living are called for. Drive out corruption!

There are many enemies of democratic values. They include authority-abusing leaders and freedom-infringing opportunists and others who support excessive power for the rich against the common good interests of people in the middle class and the poor. There are those who assault truth and undermine the freedom of the press, those who advocate primary privileges for white males at the expense of females and people of color, and those who champion corporate power over the rights, safety and well-being of individuals. There are way too many extreme conservatives in the judiciary and demagogic leaders who take ruthless advantage of people's emotions to greedily gain personal benefits and power. There are many influence peddlers and others engaged in pay-to-play politics and self-dealing and other forms of political corruption that are corrosive of core values of democracy.

One category of enemies of core democratic values are authoritarians abroad who interfere in our domestic affairs, especially including Vladimir Putin in Russia, who worked to help get Donald Trump elected and give power to swindling repressive authority-abusing conservatives. Let's start here, with Putin and Russia. The initial title of

this essay was *The Odd Conspiracy Between Scheming Republican Politicians and Russian Subversion by Vladimir Putin*, so one focus of these ideas is on nefarious Russian influence on our society.

The U.S. all but bankrupted the Soviet Union during the exceedingly costly internecine competition of the Cold War arms race in the years between 1945 and 1990. This was a very dangerous hyper-militarized confrontation between nuclear superpowers, and it was colossally costly not only in terms of money, but also in lives lost and skirmish wars fought, and incalculable quantities of natural resources wasted, and the many opportunity costs associated with squandering so many resources on misdirected priorities. Now Russia seems to be exacting a serious measure of revenge by interfering in our elections in a "sweeping and systematic fashion", and thereby undermining our democratic institutions, perverting our national decision-making, exacerbating racial strife and helping enable rich people and giant corporate entities to get away with many corrupt anti-democratic schemes. These abusers of power are intimidating and oppressing those who oppose them, and sowing discord to deprive the American people of greater unity, health, tolerance, egalitarian fairness, security and personal liberties.

Russian trolls and bots have engaged in cyber-attacks on people in the USA, churning up antagonistic divisions between Americans. This was demonstrated once again in the aftermath of the assault rifle massacre by a teenager at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14th, 2018, when a surge of inflammatory social media activity bombarded millions of Americans. Quite a Valentine's Day present, Vladimir!

Revealingly, *General Valory Gerasimov*, the chief of staff of Russia's armed forces, published an article in 2013 that identified how Russia should engage in new methods for waging war against the United States and other Western democracies. He basically said information warfare and disinformation should be used to weaponize political divisions in other nations, so that hackers and skilled propagandists could replace riskier and much more costly head-on interventions by the army and air force against perceived enemies. In other words, Russia shifted from its main Cold War geopolitical tactics, and began planning "a wide-ranging, multifaceted campaign to attack Western institutions and undermine Western democracies. The clandestine operation was to include cyberattacks, information warfare, propaganda and social media campaigns. Here was the *Gerasimov doctrine* at work." This observation was made by Michael Isikoff and David Corn in their book, *Russian Roulette - The Inside Story of Putin's War on American and the Election of Donald Trump*.

We should remember Abraham Lincoln's warning that a house divided against itself cannot stand. A populace divided more easily falls victim to the power-abusing predations of democracy-undermining demagogues, con men, authoritarians, cantankerous exploiters and despots. Vladimir Putin knows even better than Trump and Republican politicians that success in driving wedges between people is a key to imposing authoritarian control over a people, for he has used this internecine tactic extraordinarily effectively against his own people.

Enabled by this shrewdly manipulative understanding, Russian operatives have weaponized social media platforms to exploit polarizing wedge issues. Woe the fact that the dastardly influence of Vladimir Putin in our 2016 elections helped give domineering control of our government to uncompromising deceitful demagogic "leaders" who are vigorously promoting oligarchy and bankrupting the country with irresponsible debt-financed tax cuts. These regressive efforts are sadly being coupled with aggressive efforts to make draconian cuts in social safety net programs and budgets for almost every savvy aspect of civilized society. This includes budget cuts related to public education, affordable health care, smart green energy initiatives, sensible social insurance plans, public service-oriented public broadcasting, protections of public lands and the environment, and even funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Too greedy!

"Conservatives" in the United States are not only working hard to impose austerity measures on the masses, but also to bolster corporatocratic power and imperialistic militarism and authoritarian police and deportation forces, and to sacrifice the global ecological commons and convert Earth's natural resources to cash at the fastest possible rate to goose profits. And they are rigging the de-regulated laissez-faire capitalist economy more and more unfairly, so that a grotesque preponderance of the ill-begotten and artificially maximized profits will continue to be funneled into the unprecedentedly large bank accounts of the richest 1%.

It is unconscionably irresponsible for Republican politicians to have run up the national debt by more than \$25 trillion since 1980 with their irrationally regressive debt-financed Tax Cut swindles. They rationalize this con job

by trying to sell people on believing in their Trickle-Down economic theory, but this scam is based on a Big Lie. Clearly, what has actually been trickling down since the reign of Ronald Reagan is not propitious benefits and widespread prosperity, but spiking extreme inequities, poisonous divisions, hard-nosed austerity for poor people, costly levels of debt and poor preparedness, in addition to the harmful effects of toxic wastes, polluted air and water, environmental despoliation and depleted natural resources. Don't buy this Big Lie!

Please, treacherous Republicans and Vladimir Putin, relent! Dante would have consigned you all to spend your afterlives in one of several of the nine circles of his *Inferno* for your greed, abuses of power, propagated harms, deceit and treachery. Look what you have given us. As Professor Robert Reich wrote in 2018, "The GOP under Mr. Trump isn't the first political party to bend its principles to suit political expediency. But it may be the first to jettison its principles entirely, and over so short a time." Surely we should throw this authority-abusing tribal cult out of power so that we will be able to more definitively pursue greater good goals.

Robert Reich added: "If Republicans no longer care about the federal debt, states' rights or Russian aggression, what exactly do they care about? What are the core principles of today's Republican Party?" His answer: "Winning and getting even. But as a year with Mr. Trump as president has shown, this is not a good formula for governing. Most press coverage says that the Republican Party has moved to the right, but this is not exactly accurate. The party has become increasingly sycophantish toward the mercurial Trump, who is altering modern conservatism into his more nationalistic mold and making what was historically a movement of ideas into, mostly, a cult of personality. The conservative party of Republicans is actually decreasingly conservative and increasingly reactionary." This is decidedly not good!

Trump treats government "as purely a tribal battle between one side and the other, and expects public servants to put loyalty to him before loyalty to country or the rule of law. Republican congressional leaders should not remain complicit in this debasement," states the Washington Post's Editorial Board.

Let's believe two of Donald Trump's relatives about the man. "He has no principles! None! None!", exclaimed his own sister, the former federal judge Maryanne Trump Barry, in a leaked recording. Any his niece Mary Trump portrays his venality, toxic narcissism and general unfitness in her revealing book *Too Much and Never Enough*.

There is a long list of Trump scandals, but in the big picture they are all a part of a single mega-scam, "the corruption of the American government by the president and his associates, who are using their official power for personal and financial gain rather than for the welfare of the American people, and their attempts to shield that corruption from political consequences, public scrutiny, or legal accountability." Trump is trying to protect himself and his cronies by utilizing "an authoritarian model of law enforcement, where the president personally decides who is prosecuted and who is not, based on his own political agenda". And they strive to shield themselves and their inner circle from legal consequences.

Trump, like run-of-the-mill authoritarians, thinks he can get away with deceiving and distracting the people, and that he is above the rule of law, and that he cannot be held accountable. He had tweeted before the election. "I will Make Our Government Honest Again -- believe me." That promise turns out to have been colossally dishonest! The noose is tightening on the law-violating administration. History will not regard this kindly.

As extreme short-termism and reactionary Trumpism wreak havoc on the world, an opening springs to the spotlight. Heightened risks and declining security for tens of millions of Americans are accompanied, most fortunately, by great opportunities for a revolutionary shift to safer and more providential directions. This new path should be guided by sensible, adaptive, inclusive, green, progressive, sustainable and ecologically sane ideas.

Here is an illuminating understanding from an article titled *Trump is finding it easier to tear down old policies than to build his own*: "After being the 'party of no' during the Obama years, Republicans are still trying to figure out what they want to achieve in this unexpected Trump era -- beyond just rolling back what Obama did. Even some Republicans have raised questions about what the party now stands for, as opposed to what it is against. When Republican Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska was asked during an interview for a Politico podcast what the Republican Party stands for today, he responded: 'I don't know.'"

Note to Senator Sasse: Oh, come on! You mean that you don't know what moral principles Republicans stand for. But, duh! -- Follow the money! It is obvious what the Republican Party stands for. The top goal of all Republican politicians is to gain and maintain power, regardless of the negative impacts of their hegemony, so that's what they stand for, and it is damnable that they pursue this priority so single-mindedly by pandering excessively to rich people and cash-supercharged corporate entities. After all, what this often means is that the majority of people will be harmed, most folks even in the Republican base will be further disadvantaged, the common good will be undermined, the unfolding climate disaster will be rashly exacerbated, overpopulation will compound, and existentially disastrous Tragedy of the Commons outcomes will be facilitated.

Steve Benen, the award-winning producer of *The Rachel Maddow Show*, has written a new book that exposes the Republican Party as a gang of impostors. "*The Impostors* serves as a devastating indictment of the GOP's breakdown, identifying the culprits, the crisis, and its effects ... Republicans, in a sense, have simply quit governing." As Steve Benen charts in *The Impostors*, the contemporary GOP has become a "post-policy party." Republicans are effectively acting as a gang of impostors who have abandoned their duty to govern, gravely endangering American democracy. They present themselves as officials who are ready to take seriously the substance of problem solving, but their main focus is the pursuit and perpetuation of power. "Despite having billed itself as the 'party of ideas', the Republican Party has walked away from the hard but necessary work of policymaking. It is disdainful of expertise and hostile toward evidence and arithmetic. It is tethered to few, if any, meaningful policy preferences. It does not know, and does not care, about how competing proposals should be crafted, scrutinized, or implemented."

Somehow *We the People* have chosen, by hook or by crook, to make a bargain with the devil, and Donald Trump is milking it for all he can get. Authoritarian followers in the Republican base have enabled this outcome, as made clear by Bob Altemeyer, a now-retired Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Manitoba, who outlined the basic nature of authoritarian followers in his 2006 online book *The Authoritarians*. It is sad that these authoritarian followers have been so willing to go along with Trumpism and "Art of the Bad Deal" fraud. One particularly harmful way Republicans are advancing their retrogressive agenda is by getting many partisan right-wing male judges appointed to federal courts, some of whom the American Bar Association deems "not qualified", and who will often side against poor people, women, gays, racial minorities, immigrants, progressives and environmentalists in favor of corporations, rich people and an overemphasis on Trump followers in red states. This, unfortunately for all, will prove to be a self-spiting lose-lose situation.

When the late Senator John McCain once urged his colleagues to reject the torture facilitator Gina Haspel's nomination to lead the CIA, he uttered these thought-provoking words, "... as I have argued many times, the methods we employ to keep our nation safe must be as right and just as the values we aspire to live up to and promote in the world." Trump, self-interested, apparently doesn't give a damn about righteousness and justice.

We should make good use of understandings like this, because though inflammatory rhetoric is being used to divide us, we can utilize the resulting passion-stoked energy to transform feeling into remedial action and progressive positive change. Let's seize the moment and turbocharge a new cooperative energy focused on enabling us to better address the sea of troubles in which we find ourselves.

### Russia Bolsters Plutocracy and Oligarchy in the USA

Think about the words written by the incisive investigative historian Eric Zuesse in a scientific study titled *The US Is an Oligarchy, Not a Democracy*. The study's opening question was, "Who governs? Who really rules?" in this country. The study found the U.S. is no longer a true democracy, but instead a deeply corrupt oligarchy.

Zuesse wrote, "Despite the seemingly strong empirical support in previous studies for theories of majoritarian democracy, our analyses suggest that majorities of the American public actually have little influence over the policies our government adopts. Americans do enjoy many features central to democratic governance, such as regular elections, freedom of speech and association, and a widespread (if still contested) franchise to vote. But when policy-making is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously undermined." Thought provoking!

Vladimir Putin is a saboteur of liberal democracies who began his career as a spy, having been a KGB foreign intelligence officer for 16 years before entering politics. But he has engaged in something more consistently diabolical than mere espionage, counterterrorism and intelligence intrigue. He has made sustained efforts to subvert foreign governments by influencing their domestic politics, interfering in their elections, sowing discord, stoking racial antagonisms, demonizing immigrants, giving excess power to fossil fuel corporation treachery, and supporting reactionary political parties and schemes devised to divide people.

History tells us that Russia and the West have been practicing subversion for a long time, and Russians are said to still be angry over the "the Lockhart Plot" incident. This was a big deal late in 1917, when Latvian soldiers were paid by the British to launch a counter-coup against the Bolshevik government. Bolshevik revolutionaries had capitalized on the successful February Revolution of 1917 against Tsarist autocracy by staging their own armed insurrection in Petrograd. Led by Vladimir Lenin, they won a triumphant October Revolution, and then a number of British operatives allegedly tried to assassinate Lenin in an attempt at regime change sanctioned by the British government (though this is still denied). The Bolshevik government reaction to this plot was to strengthen its secret police to protect against outside interference, and to send spies abroad to discern the plans and possibly evil intentions of others. We are paying a steep price for this totalitarian reaction in the USA today, and Russia is playing a dastardly role in drastically upsetting our domestic tranquility.

Lenin blamed the First World War on capitalism, contending rather convincingly that it was the workers who suffered the most in wars, while profiteering industrialists, weapons manufacturers and other collaborating capitalists made money at a terrible expense to the people, opportunistically making profits from the severe perils suffered by the working class. The First World War had caused horrible hardships in Russia, so Lenin sued for peace and pulled Russia out of the war. As a result of the treaty that ended the war in Eastern Europe, the aggressor Germans moved men from the Eastern Front to the Western Front, and the massive influx of soldiers greatly worried the leaders of armed forces on the Western Front. That's presumed to be why they sought to get Russia back into the war through the Lockhart Plot to assassinate Lenin.

Fast forward 99 years, and the Republican reaction to Russian subversive efforts in 2016 was actually to encourage it. When offered "dirt" on Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump Jr. declared, "I love it." Republicans wanted desperately to grab power and thereby push their controlling, profiteering, unjust, anti-egalitarian, progress undermining, public debt burdening, fraudulent, anti-democratic and anti-environmental agenda. This subversive Russian interference was thus a conspiracy against the American people. Robert Mueller provided an elaborate picture of this intrigue. These same Republican con artists and others like Trump's third Attorney General, Bill Barr, deceitfully spun the Mueller investigation in denial of the many scandalous schemes that have taken place. They claim Trump is above the law and too busy, despite all the time he spends watching TV and on golfing vacations, working to supposedly Make America Great Again, but in some perplexingly counterproductive bizarre ways. No one should be above the law in our democracy, and especially not to get elected, or when engaging in treachery or numerous instances of financial malfeasance.

While the British failed in their alleged plot to assassinate Lenin, Vladimir Putin is getting Russian revenge by succeeding in imposing a ruthless Republican regime on the people of the U.S. with an illegitimate puppet leader who has "conservatives" in Congress cowed and compliant and complicit. *We the People* must stand up and reject this rule! With the triumph of so many Democratic candidates in the House in November 2018, the bright light of honest examination of Republican skullduggery is making the year 2020 fascinatingly tumultuous.

Vladimir Putin regards global geopolitical strife as a zero-sum game, according to Michael Isikoff and David Corn in their book, *Russian Roulette*. Putin also regards the United States as trying to impose a "unipolar" world on Russia and other nations, and he blamed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for turmoil in Russia after many protestors took to the streets credibly alleging vote fraud after Russia's elections in December 2011. Putin used this occasion to crack down on dissidents and stir up nationalistic fervor to gain support -- and to engage in a relatively inexpensive campaign to torpedo Hillary Clinton's candidacy and get Trump elected.

In the USA today, Trump's former digital media director and campaign manager Brad Parscale adopted social media microtargeting and information warfare tactics in increasingly desperate attempts to stay in power.

### Big Money Is Having Destructive Impacts

Far worse than the Russians, some say, is the nefarious influence of the "Kochtopus", the evocative name given to the billionaires Koch brothers and their network of cronies, "which for more than six decades has helped to finance and cultivate the ideological uprising that has now, at long last, established itself at the very heart of Republican power." Why was it, again, that God kept hardening the Pharaoh's heart?

The Koch organization announced it would spend \$400 million to influence 2018 election outcomes, partially as a thank you for the huge tax cuts the Republican Party gave them. They stated that they want "to change the trajectory of this country." Bernie Sanders' gave an astute explanation: "The Koch brothers are the extreme right-wing 'libertarian' family. They are the third wealthiest family in the country -- worth some \$120 billion. They also, unbelievably, have more political power than either the Republican Party or the Democratic Party."

By abusing the power of their unwarranted and corrupting influence, these billionaires will gain more than \$1 billion every year in tax breaks from the Republican tax cut bill, financed by borrowing money from every taxpayer in the future. So the Kochs could easily pay the \$400 million on the 2018 election out of their own pockets and still come out way ahead. This is dastardly corruption incarnate, and it is made vastly worse by the degree of harm that the agenda they are pushing is having on working people, the health of the natural world, the stability of the global climate, and the survival prospects of other life. Some of their specific goals are to privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs, Social Security, Medicare and public education. In fact, they want to repeal virtually every piece of major legislation designed to protect working people, the elderly, children, the sick, the poor and the health of the environment that has been enacted since the 1930s.

Bernie Sanders also confirms that the U.S. is becoming an oligarchy, partly due to the Supreme Court's narrow and extremely partisan *Citizens United* ruling. He points out, "we see one family not only making huge campaign contributions, but establishing think tanks, appointing university chairs and creating a number of organizations in almost every sphere of American political life. Their goal: to make the very rich richer at the expense of everyone else." Their strategies inimically include holding down the pay of working people, undermining collective bargaining rights of workers, and giving corporate entities bigger opportunities to socialize health and pollution costs, and exploit public lands. Another of their nefarious schemes is to torpedo public transportation systems in the USA as an offshoot of their longstanding national crusade for lower taxes, smaller government and maximized profits for industries like those that produce oil, coal, natural gas and vehicles.

The early muckraking writer Frank Norris ends the first evocative chapter of his novel *The Octopus* with the sudden appearance of a lone locomotive bursting onto the scene, startling the perambulating protagonist in California's Central Valley, scaring him to attention out of a reverie. The speeding train engine was a "terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon." But then the observer imagined seeing the railroad engine "as a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path (it had moments before barreled through a herd of sheep, crushing many of them); the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus." The Railroad monopoly!

The Kochtopus is surely less dramatic, but far more harmfully impactful on the lives of countless millions of people. The vast wealth and political influence of the Koch brother billionaires have been a driving force behind an influence network of system-corrupting rich people that has worked assiduously to get politicians to cut their taxes, corrupt our democratic processes, severely skew our democratic decision making, rigidly control working people, eliminate regulations that protect the environment, and distort our national priorities.

Fortunately, a study of history reveals that there have been many dark moments since 1776 when the politics of fear have been prevalent in the USA, yet the "better angels of our nature" have won the day. Jon Meacham provides many examples of this trend throughout American history in his compelling book *The Soul of American: The Battle for Our Better Angels*. Now is the time to begin again to head in the right direction!

### A Collateral Overview - Economics for a Sustainable World

John Fowles once trenchantly made it clear how necessary it is for capitalist economic systems to auspiciously

adapt as rapid change occurs. In *The Aristos*, he succinctly wrote, "Capitalism contains the seeds of its own transformation. And it is high time it started to nurture those seeds." He was thinking of such things as harsh injustices and inequities, spiritually bankrupt excessive materialism, wastefulness and myopic ecological harms.

Perhaps "solidarity economics" is an idea whose time has come. This may have started with an idea expressed at the World Social Forum that "another world is possible". Applying this concept to economics, the idea posits that it is possible to organize economies around fairer principles that are much different from those that characterize global capitalism today. We must reform capitalism to save it from itself!

The fact of the matter is that even admired companies are excessively obsessed with profits at the expense of the greater good. Facebook, for instance, for big fees, helped optimize its platform for Republicans in 2016, and the company gets lots of advertising income by facilitating the propagation of falsehoods, "fake news", disinformation, conspiracy theories and defamatory attacks. And Apple has evaded huge sums of taxes for years, hiding them abroad from 2005 through 2018 like countless other corporate entities, in wait for the next time Republicans would gain control and allow them to repatriate the money at cheap tax rates, to primarily benefit CEOs and the biggest shareholders.

The former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, an expert in economics, asserts that capitalism is going to make itself obsolete through an increased prevalence of robotics, artificial intelligence and mechanization. He warned that Karl Marx "will have his revenge", saying technology is going to "destroy a lot more jobs than it creates", and that capitalism will undermine itself as technology companies make other businesses obsolete.

The pandemic is drastically accelerating this jobs crisis. Professor Varoufakis said current systems will prove to be unsustainable due to the stunning fact that all the developed nations on Earth will experience high rates of job losses in many industries within the next 20 years, due to technological advances in automation, artificial intelligence, the use of robots and other labor-eliminating practices, according to an assessment made in 2013 by Carl Frey and Michael Osborne of Oxford University. Since more than 40 percent of jobs in many industries are likely to be eliminated in the next two decades, Varoufakis says governments must deal with the extremely destabilizing impacts of this transformation by enacting serious redistributive policies. One good way they could do this, says the economist, is to put 10% of all future issues of shares into a "common welfare fund", which would be owned by the people. From this fund a "universal basic dividend" could be paid to every citizen. This idea, remarkably, is similar in intent and impact to a global wealth tax recommended by Thomas Piketty in his incisive tome, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Let's give serious consideration to such ideas.

### An Aside on Hardened Hearts

The pressure of outraged reaction at the inhumane treatment of migrant children grew so great in June 2018 that Trump was forced to reverse course and sign an executive order to end his policy of forcibly separating illegal immigrant children and parents at the border with Mexico. This 'zero tolerance' policy had been put in place a couple months earlier by Jeff Sessions and Stephen Miller, along with Trump and others in his group.

First Lady Melania Trump visited immigrant detention sites in Texas in late June 2018, but the photo op was jarringly overshadowed by her wearing an in-your-face jacket on route that read in big capital letters on the back, "I REALLY DON'T CARE, DO U". That was an in-your-face attitude for the wife of the man responsible for inhumane "zero tolerance" family separation policies, and stealthy efforts to shred the social safety net. Then on a second trip soon thereafter, the First Lady visited Arizona and expressed great sympathy to border control agents who are doing the hard job of enforcing her rogue husband's child terrorizing, harm-engendering, virulently unempathetic, counterproductive and immoral immigration policies. Their jobs are compounded by the really bad optics of Stephen Miller's patently racist hostility even to desperate asylum seekers.

Trump was forced to end his administration's family separation policy because the optics revealed such outrages against decency and moral values, as well as his fascist-like and un-American ruthless lack of caring. Powerful pressure came from religious leaders and all five living First Ladies, as well as politicians in both parties. Even Laura Bush was moved to express how horrifying she found this coldly calculating strategy. "Period." At a meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic bishops, Cardinal Joseph Tobin publicly urged that a delegation be dispatched as

a "sign of our pastoral concern and protest against the hardening of the American heart."

Trump's executive order still mandates the jailing of migrant families seeking safety in the U.S., and it does not save or release any children from prison. "At best, it will ensure that children will be locked in family detention centers -- essentially internment camps -- with their parents, possibly indefinitely." Trump is hoping that this remedial order will distract the public and kill the momentum that built around stopping his administration's cruel and harm-engendering detention policies of immigrants and asylum seekers, and their exile in Mexico.

In the story in Exodus, God says He will harden Pharaoh's heart, and then He will multiply His miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt. But the Pharaoh would not listen. Then God rendered "mighty acts of judgment" against the Egyptian people, condemning them to the worst series of plagues in history, on account of the hard-hearted Pharaoh, even though that emperor was oppressing the Egyptians as well as the Israelites. The injustices in this patriarchal tale run very deep.

Stephen Miller was the chief architect of the unchristian racist separation policy, and he should be removed from office. The story of Miller's bigoted past, as reported about his high school days at Santa Monica High School, should have been sufficient grounds to disqualify him from his job as a White House senior policy advisor in the first place. It is a national disgrace that Miller is the type of person the Trump family wants to have in charge of national policy on such a serious and challenging issue as immigration.

Think about this understanding in an opinion piece by the New York Times Editorial Board titled *The G.O.P. Built Donald Trump's Cages*: "We should rightly help address the root causes that are motivating migrant families to stream to the U.S. border." In 2016, "more individuals sought affirmative asylum from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras in the last three years than in the prior 15 years combined." This is due to rampant violence in that region, and people being desperate to escape. "Helping these nations stabilize themselves is key to reducing the flow of asylum seekers. But Mr. Trump does not like complexity or long-term strategizing. He prefers casting blame and making threats. He has repeatedly vowed to cut off aid to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras unless they stem the flow of drugs and people into the United States." The act of "dehumanizing undocumented immigrants may be one of Mr. Trump's signature outrages, but it is hardly his only one. There is also his politicization of law enforcement, his attempts to undermine public faith in the democratic process, his attacks on the press, his family's suspect business dealings and his habitual lying."

The self-proclaimed "very stable genius" Trumpster wants to cut spending on foreign aid, even though "removing a financial lifeline from nations already in chaos is hardly a recipe for progress." Trump seeks personal triumph and self-enrichment through emotion manipulation, deceit and his dastardly scapegoating of immigrants and refugees and asylum seekers. He makes wide-ranging efforts to discriminate against millions of people in racial minorities, indigent folks, pregnant women and poor children. But surely it would be a much better world if our representatives acted with less partisan rancor, skullduggery and selfish advantage seeking.

The top tactics demagogues use include exploiting emotions and blaming others and whipping up a frenzy of outrage, grievance and angst. The family separation policy imposed by the Trump administration was one step too far, and the overreach illuminates the entire sordid agenda associated with strongman abuses of power and con man scams. Trump exerts control by taking ruthless advantage of people's prejudices and resentments through bombastic rhetoric, which he uses to scapegoat migrants and refugees. He dehumanizes these people by calling them "animals", striving to harden people's hearts against them. In general, he uses a similar strategy against Latinos, Blacks and people in other racial minorities to undermine their rights and prerogatives, and he works against the true well-being of women, gay men, lesbian women and poor people.

Instead of allowing schemers to divide us, all stakeholders should come together to seek a consensus on sensibly comprehensive immigration reforms that address all the complexities of the challenge. People fleeing violence and poverty in Central America and elsewhere should be treated with humanity and compassion, rather than being subjected to family separation, military troops and criminalization.

Some may think it seems real unjust for God to have supposedly hardened Pharaoh's heart and then punished the Egyptian people for what Pharaoh decided while under the opprobrious influence of a hardened heart. Why would



God have hardened Pharaoh's heart just so He could judge Egypt more severely and wreak His wrath upon them with so many horrible plagues? Religious authorities, of course, have an answer! "First, Pharaoh was not an innocent or godly man, he was a brutal dictator overseeing the terrible abuse and oppression of the Israelites, who likely numbered over 1.5 million people at that time. The Egyptian pharaohs had enslaved the Israelites for 400 years. A previous pharaoh — possibly even the pharaoh in question — ordered that male Israelite babies be killed at birth (Exodus 1:16). The pharaoh whose heart God hardened was an evil man, and the nation he ruled agreed with, or at least did not oppose, his evil actions. Second, on at least a two occasions, Pharaoh hardened his own heart against letting the Israelites go: 'But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart' (Exodus 8:15). 'But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart' (Exodus 8:32). It seems that God and Pharaoh were both active in one way or another in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. As the plagues continued, God gave Pharaoh increasingly severe warnings of the final judgment to come. Pharaoh chose to bring further judgment on himself and his nation by hardening his own heart against God's commands."

Interestingly, in these biblical passages, pharaohic abusers of power chose to harden their hearts, presumably so that they would feel less compunction about ruling harshly and acting in ruthless and heedless ways, and in ways inhumane and severely lacking in empathy and compassion.

Cruel treatment of asylum seekers is pathological, and it is sad that Donald Trump is so coldly calculating as to regard young Dreamers and children who have become wards of his government as bargaining chips that give him leverage in negotiations for billions of dollars in federal spending on an offensive wall that he wants built between the U.S. and Mexico -- at the expense of American taxpayers.

Michael Brune of the Sierra Club observed just before the 2018 midterm elections: "Horribly, incredibly, the Trump administration has imprisoned thousands of innocent children at the border, but it doesn't stop there. There are the innocent children of Puerto Rico. There are the innocent children of Flint, Michigan. There are the innocent children who are growing up with polluted air and unsafe drinking water across the country. Children whose future Donald Trump has tossed aside because it has no value to him." ... "Our nation's immigration policies have been broken for decades. But instead of working on solutions that would treat human beings with respect, this administration has chosen a policy of intimidation and brutality. And though some of Trump's congressional enablers profess they don't have the stomach for what's happening to these children, their spinelessness makes them just as culpable." ... "We can hope that near-universal public outrage will be enough to finally shame them into decency. At this point, though, hope is not enough. We must act. We must do everything we can this November to reject their vision of an America where the land of hope and dreams is transformed into a citadel for the privileged."

Republican strategist Steve Schmidt renounced his membership in the Republican Party in June 2018 in disgust over the harshness of Republican politicians on this issue, declaring that leaders who are complicit with the establishment of internment camps for young children and teenagers "will carry this shame through history. These legacies will be ones of well-earned ignominy. They have disgraced their country and brought dishonor to the Party of Lincoln."

An observation apocryphally attributed to Sinclair Lewis declares, "When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross." A form of modern American fascism is indeed unfolding in the USA today, and it is happening in the form of a demagogic Trumpian cult that is harshly cracking down on migrants and refugees, subjecting them to indefinite detention, and cruelly separating children from their parents (until the optics of that outrage became too objectionable). This new form of right-wing hegemony over the people gains power by energizing a political base against not only immigrants but also honest journalists, a free press, and what Trump rails against as "fake news" that is critical of his policies, methods and scandalous behaviors.

### The Shrewd Exploitation of Political Dishonesty

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

--- Often attributed to Mark Twain

The unfolding "news cycle" is practically overwhelming, buffeted by a cyclone of tweets, inflammatory rhetoric,

manipulative spin, conflicting viewpoints, propagated disinformation and "fake news". Competing news networks on TV and online are interpreting scandalous developments to suit partisan agendas, but the astonishing tsunami of revelations and distractions are beginning to clarify into a tangible thread that should make it clear what needs to be done to remedy the threats that face the American people, and all of humanity.

Honest journalism is a great strength of democratic self-governance, and is crucial to the greater good. The Deceiver-in-Chief is making blatantly self-serving efforts to discredit those who are revealing the widespread malfeasance of his Republican regime. Journalists are the true patriots, NOT "the enemy of the people", despite what Trump has repeatedly asserted, echoing many dictators and autocrats over the course of the last century who have used this deceitful charge to delegitimize opposing voices and cripple the power of dissenters.

Meanwhile, Sean Hannity, Fox and Friends, and Rush Limbaugh coddle the maniacally narcissistic and dishonest rogue, helping to advance his reactionary agenda no matter how rationally indefensible. So a thoughtful degree of objectivity and Big Picture perspective is needed to sort out the competing narratives, and I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, aspire to provide such perspective in this manifesto.

Fake news is false information that has three main characteristics: It is factually inaccurate, is often framed in demagogic ways that are emotionally manipulative, and is optimized to be insidiously propagated by being shared on Facebook or other social media websites. Trump tweets about FAKE NEWS all the time, but what he means is real different. He has co-opted the term to apply to any news that reflects negatively on him, his self-serving motives, his dishonesty, his character flaws or the anti-democratic nature of his unjust policies and manipulative behaviors. Separating immigrant children from their parents -- how to spin this, in the face of widespread and growing condemnation and moral indignation at this abuse of toddlers and young people?

Many Republican politicians won their 2016 election contests partially by exploiting fears, stoking prejudices and propagating false narratives, deceitful spin and conspiracy theories that were forwarded on Facebook and other social media sites to millions of people. Trump now ironically charges that news stories are fake just because he doesn't like what they say, no matter how valid. Contrary to his claims, a news story is not fake simply because it is critical or inconvenient. It is not fake news merely because it calls into question a set of beliefs that some people cling to with fervent conviction. "It is not fake just because it's rejected by those in power. In fact, many of these are signs that the reporter is onto something."

The lies Trump tells are unbelievable. The Washington Post Fact Checker has tracked more than 20,000 false or misleading claims -- lies or distortions of truth -- between the day he was inaugurated and early July 2020. One of the most preposterous lies Trump tells was in regard to Robert Mueller and his fellow Special Counsel investigators: "TOTAL WITCH HUNT", he repeatedly proclaimed, despite those being found guilty all around him. Right, right, right -- Trump is as innocent as driven snow. And say, what a sensational turn-around it would be, if this were actually true, from the decidedly sordid details of his entire conniving career. Read more about it in the book *Dark Towers: Deutsche Bank, Donald Trump, and an Epic Trail of Destruction*.

Tim O'Brien, the Executive Editor of Bloomberg Opinion, provocatively tweeted, "Worth noting the obvious: President Trump is using the same tactics against law enforcement, intelligence agencies, civil service and the judiciary that he deploys against the media -- trying to discredit all of them so institutions that question or check his power are undermined." To more fully understand this, see *The 15 Warning Signs of Tyranny* that Professor Robert Reich articulated just before Trump took office.

According to John Feeley, a former Ambassador to Panama, Trump has "warped and betrayed the traditional core values of the United States." Feeley indicates that he was extremely dismayed by the Trump administration's hostility to diplomacy, so he resigned and wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post titled *Why I Could No Longer Serve This President*. Something like 60% of the highest ranking diplomats in the State Department have left their positions, and the void was so marked that when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was fired in March 2018, eight of the ten most senior positions at the State Department still had not been filled, "leaving no one in charge of arms control, human rights, trade policy, or the environment." John Feeley had been a Foreign Service officer for 27 years, and like his peers, he advocates an ethos of non-partisan service. Yet he saw it as too dangerous for the U.S. to cede its diplomatic leadership in the world, saying, "We're not just walking off the field. We're taking

the ball and throwing a finger at the rest of the world."

Additionally, Trump has offended U.S. allies with his bans on travelers from Muslim-majority countries, political bait-and-switch schemes with regard to the young immigrant Dreamers, strident calls for a wall on the Mexican border, withdrawals from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal, and his offensive attacks on allies like Justin Trudeau in Canada, as well as his cozying up to repressive authoritarians in many countries abroad. In addition, his heartless policy of separating children from their parents is causing widespread moral indignation, because as the UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein declared, it is "government-sanctioned child abuse" that will cause "irreparable harm." Al-Hussein added, "I am deeply concerned by recently adopted policies which punish children for their parents' actions. The thought that any state would seek to deter parents by inflicting such abuse on children is unconscionable."

Feeley sensed that Trump saw every unknown person as a threat, and that his first instinct was to annihilate that threat. "He's like a velociraptor," he said. "He has to be boss, and if you don't show him deference, he kills you." The emotionally impaired Trumpster seems to regard every perceived opponent as an enemy, so his narcissistically hyper-insecure reaction is to try to vanquish and humiliate anyone who objects to his tirades or criticizes his rash or immoral actions. No one should be so brainwashed or blindly loyal to cultish tribal identity with Trump as to go along with the ruses being perpetuated.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions spoke in June 2018 in Fort Wayne, Indiana to a group that included many law enforcement officers and others in the community. He directly addressed "religious leaders" and "church friends", and declared, "Illegal entry into the United States is a crime -- as it should be. Persons who violate the law of our nation are subject to prosecution. I would cite you to the apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order." Wow, really -- God supports the government, right or wrong?!

This tortured reading of the biblical passage in Romans 13 to justify his "zero-tolerance" policy that separates children from their parents as families seek to enter the United States "is exactly the strained interpretation that others have used before to justify slavery, segregation, apartheid and Nazism. The same interpretation could be used to justify Joseph Stalin, or Kim Jong Un." One observer wrote, "A more complete reading and understanding of Romans 13 -- and the Bible more broadly -- reveals more love and care for neighbors and immigrants than Attorney General Jeff Sessions would have us believe."

The White House press secretary at the time, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, was asked about these remarks by Jeff Sessions. She said: "It is very biblical to enforce the law." A sensible observer noted, "This isn't religion. It's perversion. It is not the creed of a democratic government or political party, but of an authoritarian cult."

Here's what we should do. Let's flatter the Trumpster by giving him a Special Oscar as soon as possible for his Outstanding Performance in the role of deceitful narcissistic hard-nosed immigrant-scapegoating blame-shifting demagogic con man who has triumphantly manipulated the populace with surreal evil genius and is ruling with deviousness, scandalous malfeasance, cunning swindles, blatant cronyism, unprecedented eagerness to cozy up to ruthless dictators, bizarre nepotism, corrupt unfair policies and retrograde anti-environmental priorities. Let's give recognition to his success in his larger-than-life arrogance and impressive toxic avalanche of twittering madness and the chaotic administration of the government to which he is subjecting the American people.

Consider this illuminating thing. The Grifter-in-Chief brazenly used his "charitable" Trump Foundation for improper and illicit purposes. Under the pretense of raising money for tax-exempt organizations like veterans groups, Trump collected millions of dollars and then engaged in what the then Solicitor General of New York Barbara Underwood called, in a civil suit against him, "persistent illegal conduct, occurring over more than a decade, that includes extensive unlawful political coordination with the Trump presidential campaign, repeated and willful self-dealing transactions to benefit Mr. Trump's personal and business interests, and violations of basic legal obligations for non-profit foundations." Barbara Underwood also sent referral letters to the Internal Revenue Service and Federal Election Commission in June 2018 for them to make an investigation of violations of federal law, and for legal action by those agencies. Trump as usual deceitfully attacked back, falsely claiming that "sleazy New York Democrats" were suing him for no good purpose.

The Trump Foundation was a private charitable organization started by Donald Trump in 1987 with money he made from his best-selling book, *The Art of the Deal*. Up until about 2005, the foundation was primarily funded by Trump himself, but after that it was bankrolled almost exclusively by donations from Trump's friends and associates. The most prominent donors were Vince McMahon, an impresario of professional wrestling, and Richard Ebers, a New York ticket-reselling mogul, and NBC Universal, which aired Trump's show *The Apprentice*. Many of the contributions to the phony Foundation appear to be in lieu of payments to Trump himself. People Magazine gave \$150,000 after it received rights to publish photos of Trump's son, Barron. Comedy Central donated \$400,000 after Trump appeared on one of its celebrity roasts. Revealingly, Trump did not contribute a penny of his personal fortune to his Foundation for many years. Unethical and illegal uses of the fund resulted in a \$2 million fine and a court order for it to cease operations in 2019.

Ten years earlier in 2009, the Trump Foundation gave \$100,000 to the Clinton Foundation, possibly hoping to curry favor. The Clinton Foundation, despite right-wing attacks on it, is a vastly more reputable charitable foundation that has done much real good in the world, including having reportedly saved millions of lives.

The Trump family has been involved in bigger schemes than cheating on their charity. Special Counsel Robert Mueller assembled a formidable all-star team of expert investigators and lawyers to get to the bottom of Russian interference in our elections and other malfeasance. These lawyers, combined, possess a vast array of experience investigating financial fraud, corruption, money laundering, foreign bribery and organized crime, and they secured many indictments or guilty pleas. And Trump's ex-campaign chairman Paul Manafort was sent to jail for witness tampering. This makes it clear that Republican assertions that the investigation was a "Witch Hunt" are patently preposterous, and their obstruction of justice and refusals to answer subpoenas are wrong.

The whole "witch hunt" assertions are part of Republican attempts to protect Trump and his minions from being found guilty of wrongdoing. As "60 Minutes" correspondent Lesley Stahl has said, Trump admitted to her that he attacks the press as part of a strategy to discredit reporters and news organizations so that he will be shielded from negative coverage. This negative coverage, which he inaccurately calls "fake news", is earned and richly deserved, and journalists should be commended for striving to protect our democracy by shedding light on these compulsive schemes and efforts to distract the people from the malfeasance that is going on.

### Eric Trump Weighs In

Eric Trump arrogantly characterized Democrats as "not even people" in June 2017 because they supported the investigation into his father's election campaign and the suspicious enthusiasm of Republicans for having Russian operatives, oligarchs and social media trolls and bots interfere in our elections to help Donald Trump grab victory and begin sabotaging our democracy. The unfolding story of how this was done is complemented with an improving understanding of how pushers of fake news, conspiracy theories and character assassinations manage to succeed in their treachery. Little Eric is outraged at allegations that his father is abusing power and undermining American democracy and obstructing justice. "Not even people." ZING! That comment was worse than deplorable! Eric's way of seeing is far from clear-eyed. In the heat of battle, conflicts intensify with deteriorating circumstances, and people say the craziest things!

Think about a fuller quote from Eric Trump: *"I've never seen hatred like this, I mean to me they're not even people. It's so, so sad, I mean morality is just gone, morals have flown out the window we deserve so much better than this as a country."* MORALS? LOL! In *See Clearly*, the immorality of the many financial scams that rich people use to subject the masses are revealed and evaluated, and they make it clear that the real unethical and immoral actions are those that rich people are engaged in, by persons and business entities that abuse the power of their influence for private advantage at the expense of the public. And with regard to "hatred", I'll speak for millions of decent Americans in stating that the privilege-addled young Trump has got it all wrong. We progressives ARE people, and we are a majority who do not support Trump's egregiously irresponsible leadership. And it is neither hatred nor sour grapes that motivates us to oppose the unprincipled Republican abuses of power. It is instead fairness-honoring democratic values and respect for greater honesty and a truer patriotism than the focus of Trump Family First. It's not hatred, it is disgust at all the pathological scams and malfeasance being perpetrated on the American people, as provocatively set forth in *See Clearly*.

A "war on the poor" is in effect being waged 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 is angry at the 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 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 every person in all 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 various members of the Trump family tell us, we must soon adopt good plans that will ensure we make a necessary transition to cleaner energy and a greater reliance on the use of renewable resources.

"Little Eric obviously didn't inherit enough of his father's genes and domineering stature," scoffed Roberto, the underground Mole, upon hearing these words, "so he isn't capable of playing a convincing role as Central Casting's perfect insult-hurling demagogic deceiver. It must be admitted that his clueless narcissistic hubris is an effete echo of his devilish father, and he sure is demonstrating a tendency to be completely unconvincing and excessively jejune in his efforts to manipulate public opinion." Huh?!

Donald Trump has shown how little loyalty he feels to friends and allies who honor principles higher than his self-interest. As Time Magazine Editor-in-Chief Nancy Gibbs wrote in August 2017, "Most successful leaders, certainly most Presidents, preach an American gospel about freedom, justice, imagination, ambition. They invoke values in the service of both achieving goals and healing wounds. But that is not this President's liturgy. Instead of summoning our better angels, he strums deep chords of grievance and resentment: The world is not a community, it's a business. If you're not winning, you're losing. And anyone who invests in a common good or a shared sacrifice is a sucker."

Let's beg to differ, and redesign our great country to resoundingly refute these divisive attitudes!

The rest of this essay examines the likely legacy being left to the American people by the treacherous subversion of our politics by Donald Trump, Mike Pence, Mitch McConnell, Devin Nunes and Vladimir Putin.

#### One Dastardly Result of Politicians Pandering to Giant Corporations

The Republican Party has become "dangerously extreme" in its denials of climate science. This ideological denial is both cowardly and highly risky. Economist Paul Krugman assessed the ramifications in a December 2015 article: "I'd urge everyone outside the climate-denial bubble to frankly acknowledge the awesome and terrifying reality. We're looking at a party -- the Republican Party -- that has turned its back on science at a time when doing so puts the very future of civilization at risk. That's the truth, and it needs to be faced head-on."

According to Nathaniel Rich, the climate crisis is an unfolding tragedy, but it is also a crime, "a thing bad people knowingly made worse, for their personal gain. That, I suspect, is one of the many aspects to the climate change battle that posterity will find it hard to believe, and impossible to forgive."

Think about this in the context of the Know Nothing attitude Trump Republicans display when slashing funding for NASA's Carbon Monitoring System and other valuable scientific understandings, and of the anti-intellectual scams of people like former Florida Governor Rick Scott and their efforts to suppress knowledge by prohibiting mention of the words climate change in all official state business.

Trump's arrogant and extraordinarily myopic renunciation of the Paris Climate Agreement is a blatant refusal to responsibly work together with leaders in all other nations on Earth to address one of the biggest existential challenges ever faced by human beings. Bold climate action and true climate justice are needed now!

Twenty-eight-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who upset a prominent Democratic incumbent in a June 2018 primary, easily defeated her Republican opponent in that November's elections in an overwhelmingly Democratic

district. Alexandria has a degree in economics, and progressive sensibilities, and she has outlined plans to lead the United States in a transition to a 100% renewable energy system by the year 2035. "It's a goal hailed by environmentalists as the last best hope of staving off the most catastrophic effects of human-caused planetary warming, and it's one already adopted by a coalition of mayors representing 42 percent of U.S. electricity use and representing major cities such as Atlanta and St. Louis."

What sets Ocasio-Cortez's proposal apart was her plan to meet the target by implementing what she called a "Green New Deal," a federal plan to spur "the investment of trillions of dollars and the creation of millions of high-wage jobs." This slogan harks back to President Franklin Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal program of labor reforms and infrastructure spending. Alexandria compared the program she envisions to the tens of billions of dollars spent on the rebuilding of Europe after World War II.

"The Green New Deal we are proposing will be similar in scale to the mobilization efforts seen in World War II or the Marshall Plan," she told HuffPost by email. "We must again invest in the development, manufacturing, deployment, and distribution of energy, but this time green energy." She has suggested that storm-ravaged Puerto Rico, still struggling to regain reliable electricity a year after the deadliest hurricane in modern U.S. history, could be a testing ground for such a policy. She indicated, "Our fellow Americans on the island have suffered horrendous losses and need investment at a scale that only the American government can provide."

Since the Republican agenda is to gain power no matter what means is required, Republican politicians show little concern for the negative consequences. The bottom line of their goal is to get control and money, no matter how harmful the impacts of their abuses of power, no matter how deceitful their tactics, and no matter how seriously they hurt people and undermine the common good. The proof of this contention is found in their shrewd double-crossing of their blue-collar supporters and poor people, their zeal to cut food stamps and social security safety net programs to give tax breaks to the highest income earners and the wealthiest people, and their ready willingness to betray the best interests of the American people and their healthcare and economic security and the decidedly providential soundness of the environmental underpinnings of our overall well-being.

Trump as a candidate made the preposterous assertion that he alone could fix the problems afflicting our country. He bombastically promised over and over again at emotion-whipped rallies that he would "drain the swamp" in Washington D.C. He claimed he had plans to make sweeping ethics reforms, and he declared he would get rid of corrupt political insiders, and eliminate government waste of public funds, and he actually did pledge to "make our government honest once again." This "charade of shenanigans" was an epic farce!

Donald Trump is the last person to trust to fix the problems we face. Take immigration issues. In June 2018, the Trump administration ironically refused to take responsibility for his outrage-provoking "zero tolerance" policies that separate children from their parents, and he said Congress should fix the problem. He has used vulnerable children as bargaining chips to try to get Congress to authorize spending billions of dollars to build a wall between the United States and Mexico. Trump's immigration policies are being driven by his chief policy advisor Stephen Miller, a 35-year-old Duke graduate who demonstrated "instance after instance of bigotry, xenophobia and homophobia" during his time as a student at Santa Monica High School. One student said Miller had "an intense hatred toward people of color, especially toward Latinos." Another student who attended elementary through high school with Miller called him "an unabashed racist," and said "he was constantly making disparaging remarks about the African American, Latino, and Asian students at our school."

And Trump will "make our government honest once again"? A cynical lie! This assertion was part of a colossal Big Lie, for all along and indeed throughout his career, he has been the antichrist of rectitude, a cheater and pathological liar, and his egomaniacal greed for money and power made it clear that he would engage in crass self-dealing and fill his Cabinet with schemers, Wall Street robber barons and other insiders who have blatant unmitigated conflicts of interest in personal enrichment and the advancement of their own careers.

Let's demand that our representatives implement common good solutions to all the big problems we face! Good solutions abound, and they would be simple, though not easy to implement. Why are our representatives not taking honorable steps to help solve the biggest of our national and international challenges? Ah, yes, of course: such progress is being blocked by corrupt pandering politicians because their top priorities are to get financial support,

advance their own self-interest, satisfy their ambitions and enhance their own fortunes.

The reason that solutions are not easy to put into effect is because the hubris-filled domineering few refuse to compromise, and they insist on imposing their wills upon the masses. They are making out like bandits from the Tax Cuts scam, excessive profiteering and cost externalizing gambits. Too, they are seeking excessively unfair political representation in their favor, and using deceit, demagoguery, fear mongering, divisive ploys, huge sums of advertising money, and the exploitation of workers' insecurities and vulnerabilities to impose anti-egalitarian national priorities. And they are staunchly opposing fair-minded collective bargaining rights and environmental protections by making anti-democratic efforts to torpedo progressive plans and politicians.

As American politics has become unreasonably dominated by the reactionary right, it is provoking more powerful passions for honest and effective solutions to the big problems that affect us all. With governmental control in the U.S. having been seized by Trump Republicans kowtowing to the wealthy and corporate interests, our national policies have lurched backwards, making our country less fair, more discriminatory, more disdainful of public health and safety, and more favorable to excessive profiteering -- especially by fossil fuel exploiters, health insurance companies, drug manufacturers,, and corporations involved in the military-industrial complex.

A much better prescription for our overall health and well-being would be for all voters to demand more honest representatives, less corruption, less wrongheaded leadership, and more honorable representatives who really demonstrate an overarching concern for the true greater good. We need national policies that place higher values on precautionary principles, conservation and sustainability, and that are not so depletionary and opposed to conserving resources and generating clean energy.

Knowledge, not ignorance, is the key to human well-being and long-term prosperity. Unfortunately, conservative politicians are trying to slash funding for accurate knowledge on consequential issues like climate science, gun safety, environmental protections and research and development in many government agencies.

Deceit by climate change deniers does not override the laws of physics and probability, and the truth of scientific evidence is not diminished by denial. As Neil deGrasse Tyson points out, "The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it." Demagoguery cannot indefinitely triumph over reason, and the Age of Enlightenment cannot long be suspended by cultivating fear, division and abuses of power. "Expertise, personal integrity and public service have all been debased and devalued in our dominant culture. That's how we wound up, for the first time in American history, with a president who had no prior governing or military experience but lots of liabilities that would have crippled previous candidates."

The Trump administration has systematically rolled back consumer protections that could affect most aspects of Americans' spending habits, according to Washington Post reporters. "At the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, for example, enforcement actions have dropped from an average of three-to-five each month during the past four years down to zero since a Trump appointee took charge of the agency in late November 2017. The Labor Department has delayed full implementation of a rule requiring financial advisers to act in their clients' best interest. And the Department of Education has withdrawn Obama-era regulations meant to strengthen protections for student borrowers. The new approach -- welcomed by banks and business leaders -- has alarmed consumer advocates who fear it gives an advantage to Wall Street and other powerful industries while leaving ordinary Americans more susceptible to fraud, discrimination and predatory lending."

These schemes are part of a gargantuan con job being enabled with help from a whole host of anti-conservation conservatives in Congress, for their own benefit and that of corrupt corporate beneficiaries.

One of the sneaky methods Republicans have used to impose their scams on the country is the Congressional Review Act. This law empowers Congress to make expedited reviews of federal regulations and overrule them. The Republican Congress under Trump used this law to nullify more than a dozen rules enacted by the Obama administration. Prior to 2017, the Congressional Review Act had only been used once in 20 years. "If Trump and Republicans had not reversed these rules, then companies applying for federal contracts would have had to disclose their labor violations; coal mines would have had to reduce the amount of debris dumped into streams; telecommunications companies would have had to take 'reasonable measures' to protect their customers' personal

information; individuals receiving Social Security payments for disabling mental illnesses would have been added to a list of those not allowed to buy guns; states would have been limited in the drug-testing they could perform on those receiving unemployment insurance benefits; certain hunting practices would not have been allowed on national wildlife refuges in Alaska; and states could have set up retirement savings plans for those who don't have the option at work."

The precedent has been set, and the need is great for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris to reverse large swaths of Trump's wrongful executive orders! Only by coming together to reject the manipulative dividers and exploiters, and their dastardly self-serving agenda, will we be able to adequately address the challenges of environmental despoliation, reckless fiscal irresponsibility and rash efforts to undermine the general welfare. We can no longer afford to neglect extremes of inequality, desperate insecurity and gender discrimination, and we can't continue to allow our infrastructure to deteriorate, and we must deal farsightedly with issues like shortages of fresh water, homelessness, gun violence and conditions that contribute to opioid addiction and overdoses.

May urgency and passion unite with peaceful revolutionary fervor to drive dramatic positive change for all Americans, and all peoples in other countries, and all life on Earth. To achieve greater prospects of peaceable coexistence, we should allow ourselves to be guided by reason, justice and moral Right Understanding.

Meanwhile, partially masked by an obfuscating avalanche of tweets, fake news, hype, lies, stranger-than-fiction scandals, epic malfeasance and incessant efforts to distract and misdirect attention from critical issues, Donald Trump is engaging in a Wag-the Dog-like scenario. "For Trump, each bold stroke is like a spritz of Febreze on his narrative of domestic scandal, momentarily masking" the investigations into his treacherous ploys with Russia and other aspects of his illegitimate electoral victory, including his efforts to conceal information about his involvement with porn star Stormy Daniels and other women. Philip Rucker, White House Bureau Chief at the Washington Post, continues: "By making brash and risky moves on the world stage -- from shredding the Iran nuclear deal to negotiating nuclear disarmament with the North Koreans to imposing tariffs on Chinese imports - Trump has a chance to change the way voters evaluate his presidency." He figures he can fool the majority indefinitely. Let's prove him conclusively wrong!

"My whole life I've been greedy, greedy, greedy," declared Trump during the 2016 campaign. "I've grabbed all the money I could get. I'm so greedy. But now I want to be greedy for the United States." It turns out that being greedy is one of the few things Trump has been honest about -- but still for himself. In the New York Magazine article *It's the Corruption, Stupid*, which featured Trump's face on the cover with a grotesque pig's nose, Jonathan Chait states: "Since Trump took office, his pledge to ignore his own interests has been almost forgotten, lost in a disorienting hurricane of endless news. It is not just a morbid joke but a legitimate problem for the opposition that all the bad news about Trump keeps getting obscured by other bad news about Trump."

Jonathan Chait also makes it clear that self-dealing and corruption, rather than Russia, may be the "Greatest Political Liability" for Trump. Chait's cover story in New York Magazine was accompanied by a separate piece, *501 Days in Swampland*, which was promoted online with the headline "501 Days of Trump & Co. Stealing America Blind." Obviously, Trump needs "a fixer" like Michael Cohen more than ever, but unfortunately for him, Cohen has been convicted on numerous felonies for the fixing he's done for Trump (and other crimes).

Trump made a lofty promise in his inaugural address. "The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer," he vowed. "For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished -- but the people did not share in its wealth." But then Trump has delivered another message, without saying it out loud, which was aimed at a much smaller, but very rich, audience. "The very first place Trump headed after being sworn in -- his true destination all along, in a sense -- was the Old Post Office and Clock Tower, which only 12 days before the election had been repurposed as the Trump International Hotel Washington. The elegant granite structure, whose architectural character Trump had promised to preserve, was now besmirched by a gaudy, faux-gold sign bearing his name. The carefully choreographed stop sent a clear signal to the foreign governments, lobbyists and corporate interests keen on currying favor in Washington: The rewards of government would now be reaped by a single man -- and the people would bear the cost." Forced to reveal financial information, Trump's May 2018 financial disclosure showed



a \$5 million profit on \$40 million in revenues on this property. It also showed that dozens of political and business groups and 7 foreign governments have paid for events or visits there.

"More than at any time in history, the president of the U.S. is actively using the power and prestige of his office to line his own pockets: landing loans for his businesses, steering wealthy buyers to his condos, securing cheap foreign labor for his resorts, preserving federal subsidies for his housing projects, easing regulations on his golf courses, licensing his name to overseas projects, even peddling coffee mugs and shot glasses bearing the presidential seal. For Trump, whose business revolves around the marketability of his name, there has proved to be no public policy too big, and no private opportunity too crass, to exploit for personal profit."

Let's force Donald Trump out of office, and thereby rid ourselves of him and all in his self-interested administration. Vote against every Republican in the U.S. Senate and the House who has been complicit with him in pushing such a wrongful and retrograde agenda!

### More Aspects of Corruption Incarnate

It should come as no surprise that instead of ethics reform, Trump has filled his administration with something like 200 persons who were former lobbyists for industries that they are now acting as insiders to give maximized benefits to, almost always to the detriment of the people. This has led to many scandals as Trump first chose industry shills like all-but-evil EPA head Scott Pruitt and treacherous public lands exploiter Ryan Zinke, and many of them have indulged in extravagant expenditures with the public's money.

"This extravagant spending around public displays of status -- call it, with apologies to Thorstein Veblen, conspicuous corruption -- has become a trademark of the Trump administration", wrote David Graham in his article *A Cabinet of Conspicuous Corruption*. "Wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars by several Secretaries follows a tone set by the president." The Trump brand is not just tarnished, it is corroded and tipping into criminality. "There are so many cases of huge spending of taxpayer dollars by Cabinet secretaries that it's easy to lose track of them all -- or simply to become desensitized -- so here's a few of the lowlights." Graham goes on to mention the ugly details of misconduct and corrupt practices by billionaire Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, former HHS Secretary Tom Price, former EPA head Scott Pruitt, former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and former Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin.

"The impulse to live luxuriously on taxpayer dollars has become a pattern for this administration. It is not the only form of impropriety on display. The president has surrounded himself with crooks and liars throughout his political career, and there are more traditional forms of corruption at play in the administration. There was Carl Icahn apparently using a post as a senior adviser to further his own personal interests. There's Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross claiming he would divest holdings but not actually doing so (which of course echoes the non-divestment of the president himself). There are warnings that Ben Carson could be using his position to advance his son's business interests." And let's not forget billionaire Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, who favors funding of private schools over public schools, and appears to care a lot more about the student loan industry than students being saddled with excessive indebtedness.

Trump and Energy Secretary Rick Perry planned to stick utility customers and taxpayers with the bill for bailing out failing coal and nuclear plants, and they tried to justify the move as a matter of national security. In reality, this action would simply have shifted financial burdens away from polluters and onto families and businesses, which would be forced to shell out billions of dollars to keep these withering industries alive despite the fact that cheaper, cleaner and renewable sources of energy are available. And there are many other facets of swamp creature corruption, including influence peddling, pay-to-play politics, illicit Deutsche Bank financing, protection racket schemes of extortion and other highly suspicious activities that are coming to light.

"But why has extravagant spending around public displays of status become a distinctive form of corruption for this particular administration? It's probably impossible to answer that question definitively, but a few informed guesses make the excessive spending seem like a paradigmatic Trump administration scandal. One is that the president sets the tone for the rest of the administration. The George W. Bush administration began with a heavy focus on MBA-style management, reflecting its MBA-holding president. The Obama administration valorized Ivy

League intellectualism. It stands to reason that in an presidency helmed by a man whose name is synonymous with decadent displays of luxury, and who is famous for flying around the country in a private jet with his name on the side, Cabinet members would seek to emulate the same luxurious jet-setting lifestyle, with their own first-class travel, stays in luxurious hotels, and imposing security details."

"The problem is that Trump's private jet was just that: private, and paid for by himself. What these Cabinet secretaries are attempting to do is to live a Trump-lite lifestyle on the taxpayer's dime. In so doing, they often break rules about spending, as in Carson and Shulkin's cases; even when they do not, it looks awful, since no one wants to see their hard-earned money put toward lavish travel by political appointees. (The costs of Trump's travel have also drawn deserved criticism, though the rules and expectations around presidents are different from Cabinet secretaries.)"

### The Dastardly Duo of Donald Trump and Mike Pence

Conservative political commentator *George Will* wrote a scathing article in 2018 about Donald Trump and VP Mike Pence titled *Trump is no longer the worst person in government*. Listen to this excerpt of his incisive point of view: "Donald Trump, with his feral cunning, knew. The oleaginous Mike Pence, with his talent for toadyism and appetite for obsequiousness, could, Trump knew, become America's most repulsive public figure. And Pence, who has reached this pinnacle by dethroning his benefactor, is augmenting the public stock of useful knowledge. Because his is the authentic voice of today's lickspittle Republican Party, he clarifies this year's elections: Vote Republican to ratify groveling as governing." ... "There will be negligible legislating by the next Congress, so ballots cast this November will be most important as validations or repudiations of the harmonizing voices of Trump, Pence, Arpaio and the like. Trump is what he is, a floundering, inarticulate jumble of gnawing insecurities and not-at-all compensating vanities, which is pathetic. Pence is what he has chosen to be, which is horrifying."

Here are more of *George Will's* scathing and sagacious words from back in 2018:

Last June, a Trump Cabinet meeting featured testimonials offered to Dear Leader by his forelock-tugging colleagues. His chief of staff, Reince Priebus, caught the spirit of the worship service by thanking Trump for the "blessing" of being allowed to serve him. The hosannas poured forth from around the table, unredeemed by even a scintilla of insincerity. Priebus was soon deprived of his blessing, as was Tom Price. Before Price's ecstasy of public service was truncated because of his incontinent enthusiasm for charter flights, he was the secretary of health and human services who at the Cabinet meeting said, "I can't thank you enough for the privileges you've given me." The vice president chimed in, but saved his best riff for a December Cabinet meeting when, as Aaron Blake calculated, Pence praised Trump once every 12 seconds for 3 minutes: "I'm deeply humbled. ..." Judging by the number of times Pence announces himself "humbled," he seems proud of his humility, but that is impossible because he is conspicuously devout -- and pride is a sin.

Between those two Cabinet meetings, Pence and his retinue flew to Indiana for the purpose of walking out of an Indianapolis Colts football game, thereby demonstrating that football players kneeling during the national anthem (in protest of racism and police brutality) are intolerable to someone of Pence's refined sense of right and wrong. Which brings us to his Arizona salute last week to Joe Arpaio, who was sheriff of Maricopa County until in 2016 voters wearied of his act.

Noting that Arpaio was in his Tempe audience, Pence, oozing unctuousness from every pore, called Arpaio "another favorite," professed himself "honored" by Arpaio's presence and praised him as "a tireless champion of ... the rule of law." Arpaio, a grandstanding, camera-chasing bully and darling of the thuggish right, is also a criminal, convicted of contempt of court for ignoring a federal judge's order to desist from certain illegal law enforcement practices. Pence's performance occurred eight miles from the home of Senator John McCain, who could teach Pence -- or perhaps not -- something about honor.

Henry Adams said that "practical politics consists in ignoring facts," but what was the practicality in Pence's disregard of the facts about Arpaio? His pandering had no purpose beyond serving Pence's vocation, which is to ingratiate himself with his audience of the moment.

Hoosiers, of whom Pence is one, sometimes say that although Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky and flourished in Illinois, he spent his formative years -- December 1816 to March 1830 -- in Indiana, which he left at age 21. Be that as it may, in Jan. 1838, Lincoln, then 28, delivered his first great speech, to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield. Less than three months earlier, Elijah Lovejoy, an abolitionist newspaper editor in Alton, Ill., 67 miles from Springfield, was murdered by a pro-slavery mob. Without mentioning Lovejoy -- it would have been unnecessary -- Lincoln lamented that throughout America, "so lately famed for love of law and order," there was a "mobocratic spirit" among "the vicious portion of the population." So, "let reverence for the laws ... become the *political religion* of the nation." Pence, one of evangelical Christians' favorite pin-ups, genuflects at various altars, as the mobocratic spirit and the vicious portion require.

It is said that one cannot blame people who applaud Arpaio and support his rehabilitators (Trump, Pence, et al.), because, well, globalization or health-care costs or something. Actually, one must either blame them or condescend to them as lacking moral agency. Republicans silent about Pence have no such excuse.

In a final point regarding our national anthem, Mr. Trump broke tradition by not inviting players for the 2018 NFL champion Philadelphia Eagles or the NBA champion Golden State Warriors to the White House, snubbing them instead of commemorating their great success. Trump's reactive reason for this is because courageous athletes on these teams have been outspoken critics of the injustices for which Trump stands.

*BREAKING NEWS: Triple Crown winner Justify turned down an invitation to visit the White House. Asked why, the Triple Crown winner said, "if I wanted to see a horse's ass, I would've finished second. Ha! - "LOL."*

#### Another Look at Tax Scams

Just before Christmas in December 2017, Trump and Congressional Republicans passed a tax law that was somehow agreed will run up the national debt by more than \$1.5 trillion over a 10-year period. This Tax Cuts Act was not true reform, but a new rigging of the tax system that is highly inequitable and fiscally irresponsible. Since the passage of this Tax Scam, analysis has revealed that more than 80% of the tax cuts will eventually go to the richest 1%, and only 4% of workers have gotten a wage hike or one-time bonus due to the tax cuts. Also, the estimated cost of the tax cuts has ballooned from \$1.5 trillion to \$1.9 trillion, "emboldening GOP lawmakers to demand even more cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, education and more." Predictably, "Prescription drug companies, health insurers, Wall Street banks and other major industries are getting huge tax breaks and not sharing the wealth with consumers or their employees."

Due to the wrongful nature of these tax swindles, the following pledge is advocated by the Economic Policy Institute's Policy Center and many other progressive organizations: "I am totally opposed to any new tax cuts that benefit the wealthy and result in cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education and more. Instead, Congress should be voting to repeal the Trump-GOP tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations. I demand that you reject "Round 2" of Trump-GOP tax cuts that benefit the wealthy at the expense of working families."

#### Conclusion

Here's what's happening right now. Common good goals are being broadly undermined. This is being done to serve the top priority of our political representatives to further concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the few. We are sacrificing the primary postulates of sane governance by acquiescing to the desires of rich people, corrupt politicians, Big Money donors and big corporations squeezing out excessive profits. Our leaders are allowing debt-financed tax cuts to be given to corporations and rich people, and letting corporate entities externalize more costs onto society. These gambits adversely affect countless numbers of people, prominently including the vast majority of working people in the Trump base, which has been duped by his misdirection, lies and misrepresentations. Until the pandemic began, "In connection with these schemes and priorities, spending is being slashed on public health, fairness of opportunity initiatives, public education, research and development, scientific understandings, the criminal justice system, public broadcasting, family planning, protections of the environment, foreign aid, clean air and clean water, protected public lands, green energy and climate justice."

We must come together and diminish the influence of wealthy people like the Kochs, Mercers and Adelsons, and by corrupt politicians bought by special interests involved in the profit-prepossessed military-industrial-banking-

corporate-congressional complex. We should limit Big Money in politics with effective campaign finance legislation and a Constitutional Amendment, as proposed by the patriotic organization Move to Amend. This Amendment would sensibly take personhood rights away from corporations "to firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights."

Drain the Swamp! Now that Scott Pruitt and Ryan Zinke have been fired, let's get rid of Steven Mnuchin and Wilbur Ross. And let's demand that a Tax Remedy law be passed that will effectively eliminate every penny gained by all persons in the top 1% of taxpayers in connection with the debt-financed tax cuts that Republicans in Congress enacted in December 2017.

Better yet, we should institute a progressively graduated 2020 Excess Profits Tax, so as to interrupt the expediency of foisting gargantuan debt burdens on every taxpayer in every future year to finance so many swindles, and recovery efforts from the pandemic and economic recession.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

#### Postscript One - Gerrymandering

Republicans more than doubled their control of state legislatures in the U.S. between 2010 and 2018, and until the success of Democrats in the 2018 midterm elections, they controlled both legislative chambers in a record 32 states. Using this influence, they gerrymandered Congressional districts in such contorted manner as to give decidedly unfair over-representation to conservative partisans who control the redistricting process. This has resulted in a serious under-representation of the interests of progressives and liberals. Such exercises of extreme partisanship in drawing gerrymandered congressional districts constitute an egregious abuse of power, especially when doing so disenfranchises the majority of Americans.

The House of Representatives and the federal government have been severely corrupted by this practice of partisan gerrymandering to give an overwhelming preference to "conservatives" and their excessively narrowly-focused agenda. The evidence of this is convincing. In Wisconsin, after Republicans redrew electoral maps of the state in 2011 using "the most precise technology available to dissect new Census Bureau data and convert it into reliably Republican districts", Republicans captured a 60-to-39 seat advantage in the State Assembly -- even though they got less than half of the statewide vote.

Federal courts have declared extreme partisan gerrymanders unconstitutional in states like North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Ohio. This makes it suspicious that Justices of the Supreme Court agreed in June 2017 to hear a legal action concerning this extremely partisan gerrymandering in Wisconsin, but after slow-walking the considerations for a full year, the Justices then found narrow technical grounds to allow the corrupted status quo to continue. In so doing, they violated their oaths of office. They rightly should have ruled that it is unconstitutionally unfair for state legislatures to engage in extreme partisanship by drawing contorted congressional districts for narrow political advantages. A fair-minded ruling would strengthen voting rights and make our democracy fairer by forcing politicians to compete more honestly for votes, rather than illegitimately winning elections and ruling in a gerrymandered Congress.

Even worse, the Supreme Court in effect ruled that the Republican-controlled State of Texas can continue to use maps that a three-judge District Court had unanimously found were adopted for the purpose of preserving racial discrimination in congressional districts in Texas. This decision was tainted by a 5-4 vote that featured the politically partisan Neil Gorsuch as the deciding vote, and it means that, "after years of litigation and undeniable proof of intentional discrimination, minority voters in Texas -- despite constituting a majority of the population of the State -- will continue to be underrepresented in the political process."

Gerrymandering allows Republican politicians to impose their extremist policies on the American people, skewing tax policy radically in favor of the debt-financed increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and undermining the social safety net, and sacrificing protections of the environment to natural resource exploiters, and depriving women of reproductive rights. This trend is seriously exacerbating inequalities, inequities and

injustices in American society today, making "the land of the free" into a place where laws are too often antithetical to making our nation one "with liberty and justice for all."

### Postscript Two - Inheritance Taxes

A century ago, the American people were living in a Gilded Age of ostentatious wealth and dizzying inequality. It was "wealth against commonwealth", as muckraker Henry Demarest Lloyd described it. It was in this context that Republican President Theodore Roosevelt recommended an estate tax as a means to keep wealth from being concentrated in dynastic fortunes. Roosevelt was an upper class patrician who used the wealth he inherited to lead a life of honorable public service rather than a life of leisure, and he always believed that the transmission of enormous wealth to heirs "does not do them any real service and is of great and genuine detriment to the community at large." What really mattered, he felt, was to have a national community based on citizens' political equality and relative economic equality and fair-dealing interdependence. Inheritance taxes were thus a moral issue for Roosevelt, as well as an economic issue.

"The really big fortune", said Roosevelt in his New Nationalism Speech (1910), "the swollen fortune, by the mere fact of its size, acquires qualities which differentiate it in kind, as well as in degree, from what is possessed by men of relatively small means. Therefore, I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and in another tax which is far more easily collected and far more effective: that is, a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion, and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate."

The impetus for the estate tax was the grave threat that concentrated wealth and political power posed to our nation's fragile experiment in self-governing democracy. The voices calling for taxes on inherited wealth at the time ranged from rural populist farmers and urban reformers to enlightened industrialists. The wealthy industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie observed, "Of all forms of taxation, this seems the wisest."

In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt took up this crusade, striking out at great fortunes for both moral and economic reasons. "The transmission from generation to generation of vast fortunes by will, inheritance or gift is not consistent with the ideals and sentiments of the American people," he stated. "Inherited economic power is as inconsistent with the ideals of this generation as inherited political power was inconsistent with the ideals of the generation which established our Government."

Only two-tenths of one percent of Americans have a net worth large enough to owe any estate tax at all upon their deaths, under current tax law. This is only two out of every 1,000 people! Such elitist policy makes it abundantly clear that tax laws are among *the most politically determined laws of all*, given the lavishly generous treatment of rich people after they die, and of the money their children inherit.

Since 1980, regressive changes in taxation in the U.S. have given wealthy people huge sums of money, and this unaffordable largess has been rashly financed by borrowing trillions of dollars from people in all future years. The top tax rate each and every year from 1936 to 1980 was 70% or higher. Then Ronald Reagan began a radical experiment of regressive changes in taxation in 1981, cutting the marginal tax rate from 70% to 28% by 1988.

This political abuse of influence has been one of the main mechanisms by which wealth has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest few. Some of the worst and most socially undesirable consequences of this undemocratic concentration of wealth have been a dangerous increase in inequality in American society, and a risk-laden piling up of national debt. This is accompanied by unnecessary financing pressures and austerity measures that constrain investments in common good goals like improved public education, physical infrastructure, a strong social safety net, and protections of public lands, National Parks and a healthy environment.

The basic ways that our economic and political systems are corrupted to favor the wealthy are examined in *Assessment: The Top Ten Ways Our System Is Unfairly Rigged*. And the excessively consequential impacts of this corruption are examined in *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power*.

Republicans in Congress want to not only abolish inheritance taxes but also to weaken progressive income taxes. The American people should be hearing meaningful debate on taxing vast fortunes, and voices of moral outrage at the anti-egalitarian status quo should inspire passionate reminders of the American ideal of equality.

The 104th anniversary of the estate tax is occurring in September 2020. Now is a good time to assess our present inequalities, and to strive to reverse them. The persons on the Forbes 400 list of wealthiest Americans today have as much wealth as more than 60% of U.S. households. And in the first half of the 2016 presidential election, half of all campaign contributions came from 158 wealthy families. Given this corruption of our politics by Big Money, former President Jimmy Carter observed that we are becoming an oligarchy, and studies of social mobility reveal how the excessive concentration of wealth undermines equality of opportunity.

The estate tax has been under intense siege since 1997, when a number of dynastically wealthy families began to invest millions of dollars to save themselves billions, financing anti-tax lobbying groups and a campaign of slick communications to rebrand the estate tax as the "death tax." The estate tax has historically raised substantial revenue from those with the greatest capacity to pay. Even in its weakened condition today, it will raise something like \$300 billion in the next decade entirely from households in the top one tenth of one percent. "But revenue has always been a secondary consideration with the estate tax. Its primary purpose historically has been to put a brake on the build-up of concentrated wealth and the threat that this poses to our democratic institutions. The estate tax remains a piñata for anti-tax GOP politicians, and almost all of them want to repeal it. But we should move in the opposite direction by closing loopholes and instituting a more progressive rate structure."

### Postscript Three - Let's Reinvigorate Our Democracy!

When you see Republicans striving to win elections by tortuously gerrymandering congressional districts and passing state laws to restrict voting rights, it would be reasonable to conclude that one reason they do this is because they cannot win based on the force of the reasonableness of their ideas and national plans. In these pandemic times, we should restore the U.S. Post Office, and ensure that all American citizens can vote safely, and be assured their votes will be counted.

An important way to improve prospects of democracy in the world "is to fix our democracy at home", says Professor Larry Diamond, a democracy specialist who was named "Teacher of the Year" by students of Stanford University for his excellence in teaching, which was judged to admirably transcend political and ideological barriers. Professor Diamond has been honored for his "passion for democratization, peaceful transitions, and the idea that each of us can contribute to making the world a better place." Hallelujah for that passion!

The "Great Divide" of growing inequality is having a tragic impact on the length of people's lives. An article in the New York Times by Annie Lowrey explored this issue by comparing life expectancies in prosperous Fairfax County, Virginia and much poorer McDowell County, West Virginia. Men in the county of "haves" live an average of 18 years longer than men in the depressed coal area of the "have nots", and even women in the richer county have an average life span 12 years longer than in the poorer county. "Poverty is a thief," concludes a professor of social justice. Poorer people smoke more, have less access to health care, eat worse and so suffer higher rates of obesity, and suffer the "debilitating effects of more intense and more constant stress."

This reveals that socioeconomic status is becoming an increasingly distinct factor in determining longevity, so the only fair course of action would be to providentially change our national policies so that they do not facilitate an ever-increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. This is the right thing to do! And Black Lives should be made to matter more.