



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

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Happy first day of Spring! And Bravo, my fellow Americans, as the 4th of July approaches and our great country is about to commemorate 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.

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

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing 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, personal liberties, a reasonable modicum of equality of opportunity and justice for all, fair dealings toward everyone in their individual pursuits of happiness, inclusiveness in diversity, popular sovereignty that assures fair representation and power to the people, virtue in public service, fiscal responsibility, 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 commendably 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 Chinese by two characters that roughly translate as "danger" and "opportunity". Manipulative and deeply dishonest politicians have gained extremely narrow but domineering control of our country through a long litany of illegitimate means, and they are arrogantly abusing this power for a variety of tyrannically 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 expansive freedoms, cohesive unity and future well-being. We must recommit our nation to important values, and reclaim the virtues of good government by throwing off the shackles of the hegemony of excessively narrowly-focused and anti-democratic rule by the wealthy.

The enemies of democratic values include authority-abusing leaders, freedom-depriving opportunists, those who support excessive power for the rich against the common good interests of people in the middle class and the poor, those who assault truth and undermine the freedom of the press, those who champion primary privileges for white males at the expense of females and people of color, those who champion corporate power over the rights of individuals, ideological extreme conservatives in the judiciary, demagogic leaders who take ruthless advantage of people's emotions to gain narrow personal benefits and power, influence peddlers and others who engage in pay-to-play politics and self dealing and other forms of political corruption, and all who indulge in despotism and strive to subvert the core values of democracy.

One specific category of enemies of our core democratic values are authoritarians abroad who interfere in our domestic affairs, especially including Vladimir Putin in Russia, who worked remarkably successfully to help Donald Trump get elected and to give power to reactionary 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 the nefarious influence of Russia on our elections.

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 an extremely dangerous hyper-militarized nuclear confrontation between superpowers, and it was colossally costly in terms of money, lives lost, skirmish wars fought, incalculable quantities of natural resources wasted, and the many opportunity costs of squandering so many resources on socially misdirected priorities. Now Russia seems to be exacting a measure of revenge by meddling in our elections and thereby undermining our democratic institutions, perverting our national decision-making, helping enable rich people to get away with many swindles, intimidating and oppressing those who oppose them, and sowing discord to deprive the American people of greater unity, tolerance, egalitarian fairness, security and personal liberties.

Russian trolls and bots are right now busy with cyber attacks on the USA, churning up antagonistic divisions between Americans. This was proven in the immediate aftermath of the assault rifle massacre by a teenager at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14th, when a surge of inflammatory social media activity bombarded millions of Americans. Quite a Valentine's Day present, Vladimir!

Revealingly, General Valery Gerasimov who is 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 that 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 cyber attacks, 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 Mr. 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 very effectively against his own people.

Enabled by this shrewdly manipulative understanding, Russian operatives are weaponizing social media platforms to exploit polarizing wedge issues. And the evil influence of Putin in the 2016 elections in the U.S. helped give domineering control of our government to uncompromising deceitful demagogic "leaders", who are now vigorously promoting oligarchy and bankrupting the country with debt-financed tax breaks for the rich. These regressive efforts are sadly being coupled with draconian reductions in social safety net programs and budget cuts on almost every savvy aspect of civilized society. This includes improved public education, more affordable health care, better social insurance plans, smart green energy initiatives, robust protections of public lands and the environment, public service-oriented public broadcasting, and even the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thanks, greedy rich folks!

"Conservatives" in the United States are not only working hard to harshly 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 liquidate Earth's assets at the fastest possible rate to goose profits. And they are rigging the de-regulated laissez-faire capitalist economy ever 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 \$20 trillion since 1980 with their irrationally regressive debt-financed Republican Tax Cut swindles. They rationalize this con job by trying to sell people on believing in their Trickle-Down economic theory. But this swindle is based on a Big Lie, and

clearly, what has actually been trickling down is not propitious benefits and widespread prosperity, but spiking extreme inequities, poisonous divisions, hard-nosed austerity for the masses and risky levels of debt, in addition to the harmful effects of toxic wastes, environmental despoliation and depleted natural resources. Don't buy this Big Lie!

Please, treacherous American leaders 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, propagated harms, abuses of power, deceit and treachery. Look what you have given us. As Professor Robert Reich recently wrote, "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 majority power so that we will be able to more definitively pursue greater good goals.

Robert Reich adds: "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 no 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."

In an article titled *Trump is finding it easier to tear down old policies than to build his own*, this idea is presented: "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. 'Asked during a recent interview for a Politico podcast what the Republican Party stands for now, Republican Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska responded: 'I don't know.'"

Note to Ben 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 Republican politicians is to gain and maintain power no matter what the consequences, so that's what they stand for, and it is damnable that they pursue this single-minded priority by pandering so excessively to rich people and cash-supercharged corporate entities. After all, what this often means is that the majority of people will be harmed, the Republican base will be betrayed, the common good will be undermined, the unfolding climate disaster will be rashly exacerbated, overpopulation will compound, and existentially disastrous Tragedy of the Commons impacts and outcomes will be facilitated.

Somehow We the People have chosen, by hook or by crook, to make a bargain with the devil, and the Donald is milking it for all he can get. Authoritarian followers in the Republican base have enabled this outcome, as made clear by Bob Altemeyer, an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Manitoba, who outlines the basic nature of authoritarian followers in his online book *The Authoritarians*. It is so sad that these authoritarian followers have been so willing to go along with Trumpism and *Art of the Bad Deal* fraud. Sure, they are getting many right-wing male judges appointed to federal court who will tend to side against women and gays and minorities and immigrants in favor of corporations and rich people. But this will prove to be a lose-lose situation.

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

When Senator John McCain 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."

#### 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 *US in an Oligarchy, Not a Democracy*. The study's opening question was, "Who governs? Who really rules?" in this

country. The study found that the U.S. is no longer a true democracy, but instead a profoundly corrupt oligarchy.

Zuesse provocatively observes: "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."

Vladimir Putin began his career as a spy, having been a KGB foreign intelligence officer for 16 years before entering politics. But there is something more consistently diabolical than mere espionage and counterterrorism intelligence intrigue, and that is when sustained efforts are made to achieve subversion of foreign governments by influencing their domestic politics, interfering in their elections, sowing discord, pressuring politicians and supporting reactionary political parties and schemes devised to divide the 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 incident of "the Lockhart Plot". 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. After that triumphant October Revolution, some British operatives allegedly tried to assassinate Lenin in an attempt at regime change sanctioned by the British government, though this is still officially 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 potentially evil intentions of others. We are paying a steep price for this totalitarian reaction in the USA today.

Vladimir 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 while 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 the armed forces on the Western Front, so they sought to get Russia back into the war by means of 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. Offered "dirt" on Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump Junior declared, "I love it." Republicans desperately wanted to grab power and thereby push their fraudulent, unjust, anti-egalitarian, debt indulging, anti-democratic and anti-environmental agenda. This subversive Russian interference was thus a treacherous conspiracy against the American people. Let's get to the bottom of this intrigue! These same Republican con artists are currently trying to discredit the revelatory Mueller investigation into their many scandalous schemes. They are claiming Trump is above the law and too busy honoring Kim Jong Un and trying to get him to give up his North Korean nukes, and scheming to counter-support or overthrow the theocratic rulers in Iran. Besides, he has lots of reservations on golf courses, so he can't be bothered with the inconvenience of the truth about his 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! Vote against Republican candidates in the November 2018 elections!

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 protestors took to the streets alleging vote fraud after Russian elections in December 2011. He 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.

## 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 Charles and David Koch 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 hardened the Pharaoh's heart?

The Koch organization has announced that it is committed to spending up to \$400 million to influence the 2018 election outcomes, partially as a thank you for the Republican Party's huge tax cuts for them. They declare they want "to change the trajectory of this country." Bernie Sanders provides 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 two billionaires will gain more than one billion dollars a year in tax breaks from the Republican tax cut bill, financed by borrowing money from everyone 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 stability of the global climate, and the health of wildlife and the natural world. 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 the elderly, children, the sick, poor people and 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 suppressing the pay of working people, undermining collective bargaining rights of workers, and giving corporate entities bigger opportunities to socialize health and pollution costs and to exploit public lands. Their latest nefarious scheme is to torpedo public transportation systems in the USA as an offshoot of their longstanding national crusade for lower taxes and smaller government and maximized profits for industries like oil, coal and natural gas.

The early muckraking writer Frank Norris ends the first evocative chapter of his novel *The Octopus* with the sudden appearance of an unattached locomotive bursting onto the scene, startling the perambulating protagonist out of a reverie. The speeding train was a "terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon." But then he 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 Kochtopus is surely less dramatic, but far more harmfully impactful on the lives of hundreds of millions of people. The vast wealth and political influence of billionaires Charles and David Koch are a driving force behind an influence network of system-corrupting rich people that has worked assiduously to get politicians to cut their taxes, rigidly control working people, eliminate regulations designed to protect the environment, corrupt our democratic processes, distort our national priorities and severely undermine our democratic decision making.

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 new book *The Soul of American: The Battle for Our Better Angels*.

## An Aside on Hardened Hearts

The pressure of outraged reaction at the inhumane treatment of migrant children grew so great that Trump was forced to reverse course on June 20 and sign an executive order to stop the forced separation of illegal immigrant

children and parents at the southern border with Mexico. This 'zero tolerance' policy had been put in place a couple months before by Jeff Sessions and bigot Stephen Miller, along with Trump and others in his administration. Where were Ivanka and Jared? And why did fashion-conscious First Lady Melania wear an in-your-face jacket that read, "I Really Don't Care. Do U?", while traveling to and from a child immigrant shelter in McAllen, Texas?

Trump was forced to end his administration's family separation policy because the optics were too bad, revealing outrages against decency and moral values, as well as a fascist-like and un-American ruthless lack of caring. The great pressure came from religious leaders and all five living First Ladies, as well as politicians in both parties. Even Laura Bush, for Christ's sake, was moved to express how horrifying she found this harsh and coldly calculating strategy. "Period." At a June 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 immigrant 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. And it does nothing to re-unite the many families that have already been torn apart." Trump is hoping that this remedial order will distract the public and kill the momentum building around stopping his administration's cruel immigration detention policies.

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 will not listen. Then God will render "mighty acts of judgment" against the Egyptian people, condemning them to the worst series of plagues in recorded history, on account of the hard-hearted Pharaoh, even though their emperor was oppressing them as well as the Israelites. The levels of injustice in this patriarchal tale run very deep.

Stephen Miller was the chief architect of the unchristian and racist separation policy, and he should be fired. 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 so serious and challenging an issue as immigration.

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

Some may think that it seems rather unjust for God to have supposedly hardened Pharaoh's heart and then punished Pharaoh and the Egyptian people for what Pharaoh decided while under the opprobrious influence of a hardened heart. Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart just so He could judge Egypt more severely and wreak His wrath upon them with additional plagues?

Naturally, religious authorities have the 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 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 couple 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 and influence choose to harden their hearts so that they would feel less compunction about ruling harshly and acting in ruthless and heedless ways that are inhumane and severely lacking in empathy and compassion.

This cruel treatment is pathological, and it is sad that Trump is so coldly calculating as to regard 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.

Michael Brune of the Sierra Club proactively observed:

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 finally renounced his membership in the Republican Party 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 has indeed come to the USA today, and it is in the form of a demagogic Trumpian cult that is making a harsh crackdown 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 honest journalists, a free press, and what Trump rails against as "fake news" that is critical of his policies, methods and scandalous behaviors.

### Where We Stand

The U.S. government has come to resemble a banana republic, corrupt in politics and featuring all too many officials willing to commit improprieties and even illegalities to advance narrow self-benefiting, extremely inegalitarian, pathologically unjust and environmentally insane agenda. This is very scary, for the USA is a superpower and the world cannot afford to have it become like a banana republic, characterized by extremely stratified social classes, a large and unfairly exploited poor working class, political instability, and a crony capitalist, plutocratic, oligarchic, corporatocratic and authority-abusing ruling class composed of elites in business, politics, the military and corporate media networks. Having an incredibly dishonest, anger prone, bullying, emotionally unbalanced, dangerously vindictive egomaniacal narcissist in the Oval Office compounds this danger.

It should not be too much to hope that these self-interest-promoting hard-right representatives of a minority of Americans will see the light and change course, and commit to greater honesty and demonstrate a more inclusive concern for the common good, the general welfare, fiscal responsibility, peaceable coexistence, domestic tranquility, truer liberty and justice for all, a better overall quality of life, and a sustainable future.

### 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 sustained cyclone of tweets, conflicting viewpoints, manipulative spin, inflammatory rhetoric and propagated information and fake news on social media websites. Competing established 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 very tangible thread that should make it clear what needs to be done to remedy the threats faced by the American people and indeed all of humanity.

Honest journalism is a great strength of democratic self-governance, 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, Fox and Friends and Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh coddle the maniacally narcissistic and dishonest President, 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, it is often framed in demagogic ways that are emotionally manipulative, and it 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 fake news, deceitful narratives 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 if 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 that Trump tells are unbelievable. The Washington Post Fact Checker has tracked more than 3,250 false or misleading claims -- lies or distortions of truth -- in the first 500 days after he gained power. One of the most preposterous lies Trump tells is in regard to the impressive team of Robert Mueller and his fellow Special Counsel investigators: "TOTAL WITCH HUNT", he proclaims. 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.

Here's what we should do. Let's lavishly 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 brilliant deviousness, scandalous malfeasance, cunning swindles, blatant cronyism, bizarre nepotism, unprecedented eagerness to chum up to ruthless dictators, extraordinarily corrupt anti-egalitarian policies and retrograde anti-environmental priorities. Let's give recognition to his astonishing success in his larger-than-life outrageous arrogance and his impressive toxic avalanche of twittering madness and the chaotic administration of the government to which he is subjecting the American people.

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.

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 desperately trying to protect himself 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". He is doing this so that he will be able to shield himself and his 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! Subpoenas are surely coming, now that Trump is refusing to submit to an interview with the Mueller investigation team.

As reactionary Trumpism and extreme short-termism wreak havoc on the world, an opening springs to the spotlight. Heightened risks and declining security for tens of millions of individuals 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, progressive, inclusive, sustainable and ecologically sane ideas.

Consider this illuminating thing. The Grifter-in-Chief has 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 Attorney General of New York Barbara Underwood has 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." The New York Attorney General also sent referral letters to the Internal Revenue Service and Federal Election Commission in June 2018 for them to make a further investigation of possible violations of federal law, and for legal action by those federal agencies. In his self defense, Trump characteristically attacked back, claiming that "sleazy New York Democrats" were suing him for no good purpose.

The Trump Foundation is 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 since then it has been bankrolled almost exclusively by donations from Mr. Trump's friends and associates. The most prominent Foundation donors have been Vince McMahon, a professional wrestling impresario, and the New York ticket-reselling mogul Richard Ebers, and NBC Universal, which aired Trump's show, *The Apprentice*. Many of the contributions to the apparently 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 Mr. Trump's son, Barron. Comedy Central donated \$400,000 after Trump appeared on one of its celebrity roasts. Revealingly, Donald Trump has not contributed a penny of his personal fortune to his Foundation for many years.

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 reputedly saved millions of lives around the world.

In the bigger scheme than cheating on charity, Special Counsel Robert Mueller has assembled a formidable all-star team of expert investigators and lawyers to get to the bottom of Russian meddling 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 have already secured 22 indictments or guilty pleas. And Trump's ex-campaign chairman Paul Manafort has been sent to jail for witness tampering. This makes it clear that insistent Republican assertions that the investigation is a "Witch Hunt" are patently preposterous.

The whole "witch hunt" assertions are part of Republican attempts to protect Trump and his minions from being found guilty of wrongdoing. As the "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.

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, the former Ambassador to Panama, Donald 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 State Department's highest ranking diplomats 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 Feeley sees it as too dangerous for the U.S. to be ceding 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, strident calls for a wall on the Mexican border, political bait-and-switch schemes with regard to the young immigrant Dreamers, withdrawals from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, 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 trepidatious 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 as to go along with the ruses being perpetuated on us all.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions spoke on June 14 in Fort Wayne, Indiana to a group that included many law enforcement officers and others in the community, directly addressing "religious leaders" and "church friends." He 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."

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, asked about Sessions' remarks, 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."

[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 gain victory and thereby sabotage 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 succeeded in their treachery. Little Eric is outraged at allegations that Donald Trump is abusing power and undermining American democracy and obstructing justice. "Not even people." ZING! That's 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, Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto*, 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, and by persons and business entities that abuse the power of their influence for private advantage. 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 Donald Trump's egregiously irresponsible leadership. And it is neither hatred nor sour grapes that motivates us to oppose the unprincipled Republican power grab. It is instead fairness-honoring democratic values and respect for greater honesty and a truer patriotism than his Trump Family First focus. It is not hatred, it is disgust at all the pathological scams and malfeasance that is being perpetrated on the American people, as provocatively set forth in *See Clearly*.

A "war on the poor" is in effect being waged in 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 expense of millions of Americans losing their healthcare coverage. The majority supports improving public education, not slashing funding for it in order to subsidize privileged people and their kids in private schools. The majority favors expanded women's rights and empowerment, and they are against 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 forevermore in all future generations, rather than pandering to those who profit from the wasteful and polluting uses of fossil fuels and the abdication of 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 an intelligent 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 the devilish Donald, 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 some principle 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."

I beg to differ. Let's redesign our great country to resoundingly refute these treacherously divisive attitudes!

"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails."

--- William A. Ward

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, Paul Ryan 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. And this ideological denial is both cowardly and highly risky. The prominent economist Paul Krugman assessed the ramifications in an article in December 2015: "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."

Think about this in the context of the Know Nothing attitude of Trump Republicans in slashing funding for NASA's Carbon Monitoring System, and of the anti-intellectual scams of people like 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. True climate justice now!

Twenty-eight-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who upset a prominent Democratic incumbent in a June 2018 primary, will likely defeat her Republican opponent in November 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 is 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." Though the slogan harks back to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal program of infrastructure spending and labor reforms, she compared the program she envisions to the tens of billions of dollars spent on armaments manufacturing and 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 nearly a year after the deadliest hurricane in modern U.S. history, could be a testing ground for such a policy. "Our fellow Americans on the island have suffered horrendous losses and need investment at a scale that only the American government can provide," she said.

Cynthia Nixon, the former "Sex and the City" star who is challenging the Democratic governor of New York in an upcoming primary, endorsed and campaigned with Ocasio-Cortez. "This is a victory for the people over the powerful, for the grassroots over the establishment, for progressive Democrats over corporate Democrats," said Nixon, who was at Ocasio-Cortez's victory party in a Bronx cafe. "This is what happens when you give people a choice. They show up and they reject the status quo."

The Republican agenda is to gain power no matter what means is required, and regardless of 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 middle class supporters and poor people, their zeal to cut the social security safety net so as to give debt-financed 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 dedidedly 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 maniacal rallies that he would "drain the swamp" in Washington D.C. He claimed he had plans to make sweeping ethics reforms, and he declared that 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."

Really! Trump alone can fix the problems we face? Then 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 said Congress should fix the problem. He is using vulnerable children as bargaining chips to try to get Congress to authorize spending billions of dollars to build a long, tall wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Trump's immigration policies are being driven by Chief Policy Advisor Stephen Miller, a 31-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"? Laugh out loud!!! These assertions were 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, 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 and 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 careers, satisfy their own god-damned self-interest, and enhance their own fortunes.

The reason that solutions are not easy to implement is only 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, and 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 ever more unreasonably far right, it is serving to inspire stronger passions for honest and effective solutions to the big problems that affect us all. With governmental control in the USA having been seized by far right politicians kowtowing to Trump, 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 by huge corporations, especially including fossil fuel exploiters, pharmaceutical companies, health insurance companies, corporations involved in the military-industrial complex and gun manufacturers.

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 conservation and sustainability and precautionary principles, and that are not so extremely depletionary in their opposition to conservation and 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 be repealed 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 led a systematic rollback of consumer protections that could affect nearly every aspect of Americans' spending habits, according to reporters for the Washington Post. "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. 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 colossal con job that is being perpetrated with the help of a whole host of anti-conservation conservatives in Congress, for their own benefit and that of their corrupt corporate beneficiaries.

One of the sneaky methods Republicans have used excessively to impose their scams on the country is the Congressional Review Act. This is a law that empowers Congress to make expedited reviews of federal regulations and overrule them. The Republican Congress under Trump has 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."

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, rash efforts to undermine the general welfare and reckless fiscal irresponsibility. We can no longer afford to neglect extremes of inequality, desperate insecurity and gender discrimination. We can't continue to allow our infrastructure to deteriorate, and we must deal farsightedly with issues like shortages of fresh water, homelessness, overpopulation, gun violence and the conditions that contribute to the opioid addiction and drug overdose crisis.

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 and moral Right Understanding.

Meanwhile, partially masked by an obfuscating avalanche of tweets, fake news, hype, lies, stranger-than-fiction scandals, epic malfeasance and other 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 expanding investigations into his treacherous ploys with Russia and other aspects of his illegitimate electoral victory, including his efforts to hide information about his involvement with porn star Stormy Daniels and other women. Philip Rucker, the 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 radically wrong at the ballot box!

"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 this is one of the few things Trump has been honest about, being greedy: "I've grabbed all the money I could get." But Jonathan Chait makes it clear that "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."

In an article in *New York Magazine* that features Trump's face on the cover with a grotesque pig's nose, titled *It's the Corruption, Stupid*, Jonathan Chait makes it clear that self-dealing and corruption, rather than Russia, may be Trump's 'Greatest Political Liability'. Chait's cover story in the 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 is under serious incriminating criminal investigation for the fixing he has done for Trump.

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 a little financial information, Trump's May 2018 financial disclosure showed a \$5 million profit on \$40 million in revenues on this public property. It also showed that 59 political groups, 25 business groups and 7 foreign governments have paid for events or visits there.

"More than at any time in history, the president of the United States 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 stand up to Donald Trump and his self-interested administration, and to the Republicans in Congress who are complicit with him in pushing such a backward agenda!

### More Aspects of Corruption Incarnate

It should come as no surprise that instead of ethics reform, Trump has filled his federal government bureaucracy with almost 200 persons who were former lobbyists for industries they are now acting as insiders to give maximized benefits to, almost always to the detriment of the people. This has led to unprecedented scandal as the President has filled his administration with scam artists like all-but-evil EPA head Scott Pruitt and treacherous public lands exploiter Ryan Zinke, and most of them are engaging in making 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 corrupt practices by billionaire Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, former HHS Secretary Tom Price, EPA head Scott Pruitt, Interior Secretary

Ryan Zinke, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and HUD chief Ben Carson.

"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 the excessive indebtedness of students.

Trump and Secretary of Energy Rick Perry plan to stick utility customers and taxpayers with the bill for bailing out failing coal and nuclear plants, and they try to justify the move as a matter of national security. In reality, this action would simply shift the financial burden 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 readily available. And of course there are many other facets of swamp creature corruption, including the peddling of influence, pay-to-play politics, protection racket extortion schemes 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 May 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 perspective: "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 sagacious words:

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 The Post's Aaron Blake calculated, Pence praised Trump once every 12 seconds for three minutes: "I'm deeply humbled. ..." Judging by the number of times Pence announces himself "humbled," he might seem 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, on Jan. 27, 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, President Trump has broken tradition by not inviting players for the NFL champion Philadelphia Eagles or the NBA champion Golden State Warriors to the White House, snubbing them instead of commemorating their great success. This state of affairs prevails because courageous athletes on these teams have been outspoken critics of the injustices for which Trump stands.

*BREAKING: 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 scam that will run up the national debt by \$1.9 trillion over a 10-year period, and now, in an Election Year ploy, they are preparing "Tax Scam Round 2." This Tax Cuts Act was not true reform, but a new rigging of the tax system that is highly anti-egalitarian and fiscally irresponsible!

Six months after the passage of Tax Scam Round 1, here is what we know: 83% of the tax cuts are going to the richest 1%, while only 4% of workers have gotten a wage hike or one-time bonus due to the tax cuts. Also, the 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."

Despite these outrageous results -- ripping off the American people -- Donald Trump and Congressional Republicans are planning to double down before the November Election. They want to pass a Tax Scam Round 2 that could cost another \$1 trillion and would mostly benefit the wealthy at the expense of working families, seniors, people with disabilities and hungry children. Tax Scam Round 2 would be "just another giveaway to Republican donors, wealthy business owners and real estate developers like Donald Trump who game the system at our expense."

Due to the wrongheadedness of these tax scams, the following pledge is advocated by the Economic Policy Institute's EPI Policy Center, Americans for Tax Fairness, American Family Voices, Center for American Progress Action Fund, Corporate Accountability, Daily Kos, Demand Progress, Democracy for America, Good Jobs Nation, the AFL-CIO, People Demanding Action, People For the American Way, People's Action, Progress America, Congressional Progressive Caucus Center, RootsAction.org and Social Security Works.

"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."

Dateline Wednesday, June 27, 2018.

The record high national debt has roared past \$21 trillion and is headed for becoming the highest ever in our country's history, as a percent of GDP, projected to exceed the previous high incurred in connection with fighting a world war against fascist aggressors during the Second World War. Today, "the current bump comes amid a relatively healthy economy", suggesting a structural gap between how much the country collects in taxes and how much it spends."

It is folly to have passed a Tax Cuts law that will force the government to borrow an additional \$1.9 trillion over the next 10 years and to give more than 80% of the borrowed money to the wealthiest 1%. This will force every taxpayer to pay interest costs on these borrowings every year in the future, forevermore.

The Congressional Budget Office made it clear in a recent report that this debt dilemma will continue to get worse as the interest expense on this irresponsibly incurred debt will compound, driving up the debt to even more dangerous levels and putting extreme pressure on federal spending, imprudently increasing the risk of another financial crisis and recession.

The CBO projected this worsening status, confirming that the federal debt is "burgeoning". In the decades ahead, this spiking debt will result in reduced national savings and income, along with increased pressure on the rest of the budget due to growing interest costs. This irresponsibly-realized imbalance will also limit lawmakers' ability to respond to unplanned events and natural disasters.

Donald Trump had claimed to the Washington Post in April 2017 that he intended to eliminate the national debt "over a period of eight years." Given his propensity to radically distort the truth, this was a just a facile deceitful expedient, a claim made to promote his candidacy without a shred of truth to it. His administration has pushed for huge debt-financed tax cuts, and when this is combined with significant spending increases for the military and other things that were passed by Congress and that he signed into law, the national debt has been driven up rapidly, not reduced it.

A Collateral Overview - Economics for a Sustainable World

John Fowles once trenchantly expressed the necessity for capitalist economic systems to auspiciously adapt as rapid change takes place. He wrote these words in *The Aristos*: "Capitalism contains the seeds of its own transformation. And it is high time it started to nurture those seeds." He no doubt was thinking of such things as inequities, wastefulness, ecological harms and spiritually bankrupt excessive materialism.

The fact of the matter is that even admired companies are excessively obsessed with big profits at the expense of the greater good. For instance, Facebook, for a fee, helped optimize its platform for Republicans, and they grabbed lots of advertising income by facilitating the propagation of fake news, disinformation, untrue conspiracy

theories and defamatory attack ads. And Apple has evaded taxes for years, patiently hiding them abroad since 2005 like countless numbers of other corporate entities, in wait for the next time that Republicans would steal an election and allow them to repatriate the money to benefit CEOs and shareholders.

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 very possible to organize economies around fairer principles that are markedly different from those characterizing global capitalism today. See the riff in my essay *The Common Good, Properly Understood*, titled *Capitalism Is Coming To An End, Says World Renowned Economist*. This article concerns former Greek finance minister and professor Yanis Varoufakis, an expert in economics, and his claims that capitalism is going to make itself obsolete through the increased prevalence of robotics, artificial intelligence and mechanization. Varoufakis warned that Karl Marx "will have his revenge", saying technology is going to "destroy a lot more jobs than it creates." He says capitalism will undermine capitalism because technology companies will make corporations and the private means of production obsolete.

"The 56-year-old has said the current system is "unsustainable" as vast swathes of people become unemployed thanks to the advent of automation in many industries. To get around this, Mr. Varoufakis said governments need to enact serious redistributive policies. One way they could do this, suggests the economist, is to put 10 per cent 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 consistent with a global wealth tax recommendation made by the French economist Thomas Piketty in his towering book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*."

"This type of visionary plan is needed because of the fact that all the developed nations on Earth, astonishingly, will experience job loss rates of up to 47% within the next 20 years due to mechanization, artificial intelligence, the use of robots and other labor-eliminating technologies, according to an assessment made in 2013 by Carl Frey and Michael Osborne of Oxford University."

"Just as employment in retail sales is being disrupted by e-commerce, many jobs in other arenas are at high risk of being automated over the next 10 to 20 years. Refining this prediction in a September 2017 report, Carl Frey said human employment in retail could vanish entirely, and 80% of jobs in transportation, warehousing and logistics and 63% of jobs in sales are at high risk of automation. Amazon is a prime example of this trend." And Frey argues that "we are only on Day 1 of the impact of robot and artificial intelligence technology on employment." He adds, "Technological progress in sensors, data and software are as important as that in robots and drones to enable this automation."

While Frey argues that human retail jobs are going to disappear, the concept of consumerism is not, and people are going to be buying more and more stuff. It is just that a greater proportion will be done via e-commerce.

These understandings mean that we face colossal challenges, so it is titanically foolish for our leaders to be emulating the Roman emperor Nero, who fiddled while Rome burned. We must demand better, voters!

### Conclusion

Here's what's happening right now. Common good goals are being broadly betrayed and undermined. This is being done to serve the top priority of our political representatives to further concentrate wealth 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 making excessive profits. We are, by hook or by crooks, allowing debt-financed tax cuts to be given to corporations and rich people, and allowing more costs to be externalized onto society as a whole. These gambits adversely affect countless numbers of individuals, prominently including the vast majority of working people in the Trump base, which has been duped by his misdirection, lies and misrepresentations. In connection with these schemes and wrongheaded priorities, spending is being slashed on public health, fairness of opportunity initiatives, public education, scientific understandings, research and development, the criminal justice system, public service broadcasting, foreign aid, family planning, environmental protections, clean air, 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, which 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! Fire Scott Pruitt and Ryan Zinke, and Steven Mnuchin and Wilbur Ross. Enact a Tax Remedy law that effectively eliminates 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 late last year.

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain  
Hannibal, MO

*Tiffany Twain imagines herself as the philosophic soul mate of Mark Twain and "the illegitimate great-granddaughter of the highly esteemed and irreverent writer, lecturer, humorist and philosopher." She has published Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto, a save-the-world treatise that contains wide-ranging and far-sighted observations dealing with all the biggest issues facing humanity here in the second decade of the 21st century. Check it out!*

Frankly, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain is a *nom de plume*, just like Mark Twain was a sly pen name used by Samuel Langhorne Clemens. How this whole project came about is a long and evolving story, and one that is better left a mystery than being disclosed in the full scope of more prosaic actual circumstance. See the autobiographical assertions made in *Happy Harbingers in Good Ideas for a Better Future* for some interesting images.

"Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the important thing is the IDEAS THEMSELVES, and not the author. Yet it is necessary to say that she is unconnected with any Party, and under no sort of influence, public or private, other than the influence of reason and principle."

-- Thomas Paine (gender revised)

#### Postscript One - Gerrymandering

Republicans have more than doubled their control of state legislatures in the U.S. since 2010, and with gains from the November 2016 national elections, they now control both legislative chambers in a record 32 states. Using this influence, they have 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 of Congressional districts 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 49% of the statewide vote.

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 unfortunately found narrow technical grounds to allow the corrupted status quo to continue. In so doing, they are violating their oaths of office. They rightly should have ruled that it is constitutionally 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 illegitimately appointed 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 ideological 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. This trend is seriously exacerbating inequalities, inequities and injustices in American society today, making "the land of the free" into a place that is antithetical to actually being a nation "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 honorably used his inheritance to lead a life of 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, relative economic equality and fair-minded interdependence. Inheritance taxes were thus a moral issue for Roosevelt, as well as an economic issue.

Listen to Roosevelt's words in his New Nationalism Speech in 1910: "The really big fortune, 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. On estate taxation, the wealthy industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie wrote, "Of all forms of taxation, this seems the wisest."

In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt took up the same 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. Only two out of every one thousand people! This 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 1%. 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, a risk-laden piling up of national debt, and unnecessary financing pressures and austerity measures that constrain

investments in things like public education, physical infrastructure, the 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 today want to not only abolish the inheritance tax but also to weaken the progressive income tax. The American people should be hearing meaningful debate on taxing vast fortunes, and the voices of moral outrage at the anti-egalitarian status quo should inspire "passionate reminders of the American ideal of equality."

The 100th anniversary of the estate tax took place in September 2016, and it is time for us to assess our present inequalities and pledge to reverse them. The persons on the Forbes 400 list of the 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. They financed anti-tax lobbying groups and a communications campaign 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 over \$270 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 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.

The most important thing we could do to improve the prospects of democracy in the world "is to fix our democracy at home." So says Professor Larry Diamond, a democracy specialist who was named "Teacher of the Year" by the Associated Students of Stanford University for his excellence in teaching, which was judged to admirably transcend political and ideological barriers. 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 pathetic impact on the length of people's lives. An article in the New York Times by Annie Lowrey explored this issue by comparing the 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."

There is a simple implication for the fact that socioeconomic status is becoming an increasingly distinct factor in determining longevity. 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 would be the right thing to do!

The Project on Government Oversight (POGO) commendably fights to end pernicious forms of legalized

corruption that allow a revolving door of easy access between government and special interests that puts industry profits ahead of the public good. In particular, the revolving door of defense contractors, moving in and out of government, is wrongheaded when it provides incentives of countless billions of dollars in wasteful spending on military procurement and war services.

Whistleblowers are a first line of defense against corruption and abuses of insider influence in the government -- and yet government agencies like the Department of Justice are implementing policies that could prevent whistleblowers from courageously coming forward to advance the greater good.

It is important to have independent government watchdogs like POGO fighting corruption and holding our government accountable.