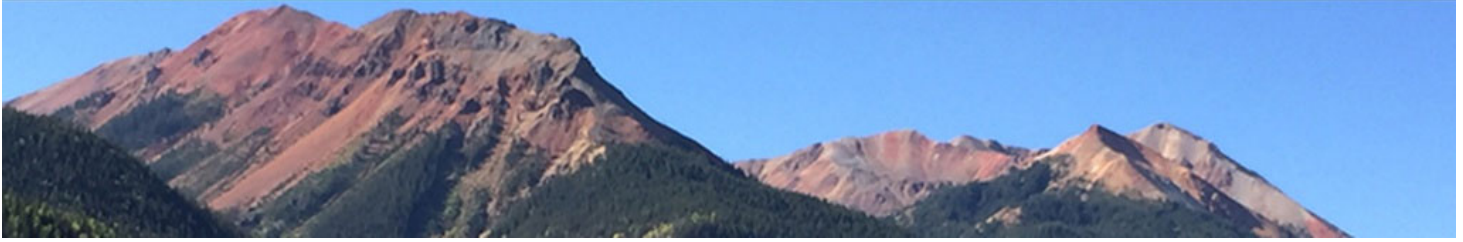


Earth Manifesto



The Con Goes On: A Triumphant Coup by Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalists

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
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A daunting development haunts humanity here in the third decade of the 21st century. Crony capitalism has become unacceptably unfettered by ethical constraints. We must now see clearly, and join together in acting responsibly. Understand the following nefarious aspects of this Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalist Con, a swindle that deeply deceptive politicians and their donor supporters have foisted on the American people ever since Ronald Reagan launched his folksy revolution of regressive taxation in favor of the rich, and made concerted efforts to curtail the ability of working people to collectively bargain for fairer pay and benefits. Recall that these tax cuts are being financed by borrowing unprecedented amounts of money and adding it to a spiking level of national debt. It is bizarre that Republicans lionize Reagan in light of the fact that he married these fiscally irresponsible, inequitable and anti-populist top priorities with a crusade against regulations that govern big banks and corporations, and that he promoted excessively high and profligately wasteful spending on the military.

The American people have been subjected to this crony capitalist con for many years, but with the electoral coup by Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress in 2016, this über-scam really took off. The fourteen main defining characteristics of this capitalist con are set forth below. Note attentively that these insidious initiatives are being perpetrated not only in the USA, but also in other countries around the globe, so our leaders should work together with peoples everywhere to rectify these wrongs.

Grotesque greed drives these capitalist schemes, as evidenced by the rash flip-flop by the Trump family related to environmental protections. In 2009, Donald Trump and Ivanka, Donald Jr. and Eric all signed a full page open letter printed in the New York Times urging President Obama and world leaders who were headed to international climate negotiations in Copenhagen to act on climate change. The letter stated, "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet." Once they realized that a huge amount of money and power could be gained by aggressively siding with fossil fuel industries against sensible precautionary actions, Donald Trump zealously began denying climate change and pandering obsequiously to polluting fossil fuel companies. As president, he reprehensibly doubled down on the planks of his avaricious agenda by signing a flurry of anti-environmental executive orders, thus contributing to the probabilities that we will suffer "catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet". This is a pathological rejection of social responsibility, fairness and intelligent action.

Defining Characteristics of the Crony Capitalist Con

Number One. Capitalist vs. Worker -- the Ultimate Coup. Ever since the Industrial Revolution began, capitalists have been taking advantage of working people to amass large fortunes. They are able to do this because they have more power and they "control the means of production". Workers are not able to fairly share in increases in the productivity from their labor, and the repetitive work they often must do makes them little more than cogs in a machine. Capitalists and entrepreneurs generally treat working people like disposable machines, and have been increasingly replacing them in recent decades with automation, leaving many unable to earn a living. Capitalists were so successful in the 19th century that by 1848 a manifesto was published urging "Workers of the World, Unite" -- to gain fairer compensation and safer working conditions and a modicum more security in a ruthless capitalist world. That manifesto became a source of ideological conflicts that intensified during the Cold War, and threatened to destroy the world in M.A.D. nuclear annihilation. Fairer compromises between power-abusing capitalists and working people are

a key to creating a healthier, safer and more stable world.

The ideals of economic fundamentalism are, in theory, quite laudable. They hold that free markets are guided by what Adam Smith called an 'invisible hand' that supposedly creates the best conditions for the public good. Unfortunately, our economic and political systems are corrupted by institutionalized bribery, monopoly abuses, deceptive practices, unfair vested-interest political influence, dishonesty, ruthless banking schemes and other financial shenanigans, pork barrel spending, imperialistic abuses of power, and distorting influences that militate for war and war profiteering. Giant corporations often cheat working people and the public to make bigger profits instead of improving their products or their production methods, or they strive to gain large government subsidies that perpetuate inefficient and polluting industries. They also indulge in exploitive "rent-seeking" behaviors that do not create wealth, but merely allow them to grab a bigger proportion of the national wealth for themselves. And they generally treat workers unfairly, and externalize environmental costs onto society, and indulge in unfair tax avoidance scams by using tax loopholes and offshore incorporation.

The overriding goal of capitalists is to maximize profits. One main means of accomplishing this is by minimizing costs. So corporate management has strong incentives to take advantage of workers and underpay them and dispose of them when convenient, and they generally have little compunction about firing employees and treating workers as shabbily as they can get away with. They also engage in efforts to rip off taxpayers by foisting "too big to fail" bailouts and other costs associated with periodic economic crises -- and then the pandemic -- onto taxpayers. They accomplish these perverse goals by abusing the power they gain through the undue influence of their deep pockets. They achieve this largely because Congress has failed to rein in campaign finance influence peddling, and the Supreme Court has corruptly allowed this in perniciously harmful rulings like *Citizens United*.

This is why sensible government rules and regulations play a crucial role in making our democracy healthier and safer. Shrewd Republican ideologies, and law making that blindly eviscerates these rules, is often wrongheaded.

Number Two. *Concerted Efforts to Concentrate Wealth and Power.* This scheme makes today's unprecedented inequality in the USA worse and worse, causing social unrest and increasing the potential damages of destabilizing turmoil. The brilliant linguist Noam Chomsky has adduced "10 Principles" that wealthy people use to enable this vicious and risky circle of concentrating wealth and power in the hands of the few; they are evaluated in detail in my essay *Thirteen Main Methods Used to Increasingly Concentrate Wealth and Power.*

Eight billionaires owned the same amount of wealth as the world's poorest 3.6 billion people in 2017, according to an Oxfam report on this aspect of the status quo. This is unacceptable, for it represents a monopoly on wealth that contributes to unnecessary amounts of hardship and suffering. In a more recent Oxfam report in January 2020, it was revealed that there are more than 2,150 billionaires in the world, and together they have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 percent of the planet's population.

Number Three. *Regressive Taxation.* The wealthiest 1% of Americans has increased their net worth in total by more than \$30 trillion since 1981, as a direct result of Ronald Reagan slashing tax rates on the highest income earners from 70% to 28%. This has been the primary factor in running up the national debt by more than \$27 trillion, from less than \$1 trillion in 1981 to a foolishly risky \$29 trillion in November 2021. Our representatives have basically embraced a radical antithesis of the precautionary concept of fairly balancing the federal budget, and they certainly have not sensibly invested in "a rainy day fund" for the plethora of costly challenges that are arising as our human population approaches 8 billion needy and greedy people in the next few years.

Low tax rates on rich people are causing not just huge budget deficits but dangerously increasing inequality. Recall billionaire entrepreneur Nick Hanauer's incisive words in *The Pitchforks are Coming ... For Us Plutocrats*, "If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us. No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counter-examples. None. It's not if, it's when." On January 6, 2021, a MAGA mob assaulted Congress, hoping to overturn the majority vote and reinstall Trump in power in an autocratic plot. *It Can't Happen Here?* "Like hell it can't!"

The trickle-down theory that rationalizes regressive changes in tax policy is creating dangers too serious to be

allowed to persist. Progressive tax reform, with more steeply graduated rates is necessary. See *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies* for good ideas on how this and other important changes in our national policies and priorities could help us create a dramatically fairer and more secure society.

We should rightly stop catering to the shortsighted compulsions of rich people to get an increasing portion of the economic pie for themselves. The unintended consequences of this myopic stance are to risk stoking severe unrest and an increased impetus for the proverbial pitchforks to come out against the rich. A most likely result of national policies that increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is to create economic instability and make racial and class conflicts worse. As these developments intensified, Trump and his authority-abusing henchmen ratcheted up their repression of those who oppose their abuses of power, and the American people are being deprived of some of their cherished personal liberties and desired security.

The Trump agenda was a devious one that is glaringly contrary to the populist propaganda that the Deceiver-in-Chief claimed to represent. He enacted huge new debt-financed tax breaks that are serving as a radically disproportionate boon for the wealthiest 1%, and the spending cuts he pushed cruelly affect most everyone else, with the harshest burdens falling on the poorest and most vulnerable persons. By cutting government spending and eviscerating many government agencies, hundreds of thousands of jobs were eliminated in the public sector, many of them precautionarily important. One sad side effect of these actions is that they have a destabilizing effect on the economy. Take note, Texans and other deregulatory profiteers!

"IN MY OPINION WE DON'T DEVOTE NEARLY ENOUGH SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO FINDING
A CURE FOR JERKS."

--- Calvin to Hobbes (Bill Watterson)

Number Four. Cost Externalizing Schemes. Vested interest groups are indulging in another rash ruse: cost-externalizing schemes, also accurately described as "the socializing of costs". These are über-betrayals of the people by the top dogs and corporations in the U.S. that are deplorably allowing many costs to be foisted on the populace as a whole. This strategy facilitates the excessive monopolizing of the spoils of resource extraction and the productivity of working people and the artificial profits realized through this cost externalizing scam.

The rigged rules that govern corporate entities not only allow Big Businesses to foist a variety of costs onto society to boost profits, but also give the top 1% of Americans more than two-thirds of the resulting capital gains -- and guess what! -- they pay really low capital gains tax rates of only 15% on these spoils, AND only when these gains are realized. Even more outrageously, they and their heirs pay NOTHING after a person dies because the "cost basis" of all investments is revised to the value at the date of death, allowing these windfalls to be transmitted indefinitely forward to every person who inherits these investments.

See what's happening here. These basic facts about how our economic and political systems are rigged urge us to exit our echo chambers and seek to better understand -- and to demand much more fairer reforms and leadership. See Dr. Tiffany B. Twain's *Top Ten Ways Our System Is Rigged* for enlightening understandings of the true nature of how our system really works against the interests of the vast majority of Americans.

Number Five. Healthcare Inequities. Another pathetic dimension of the Crooked Conniving Crony Capitalist Con is our fragmented healthcare system that discriminates against young people, the poor, the disabled, the unemployed and women. Consider how absurd our patchwork healthcare insurance system really is. Trends in coverage rates for employer-sponsored insurance are revealing. Coverage fell from 65% of workers in 2001 to 55% in 2019. And premiums for family coverage increased by about 72% from 2001 through 2021. In addition, the share of insurance premiums paid by employees continues to increase. With the pandemic sudden spike in joblessness, this situation GOT drastically worse.

In the big picture, it is cynically calculating to have a system that ties health insurance to having a job, then patches up the obvious defects of such a system with Medicare for older people who are retired, and Medicaid for poor people and workers who are too poorly compensated to cover medical costs, and a patchy system of health insurance coverage for children. This system is terrible for millions of people, and since it involves people's crucially important health, failures in this arena make Martin Luther King's observation poignant when he pointed out, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

We should create a truly fairer system of universal healthcare, starting with a good public option that offers people the choice of joining a low-overhead, non-profit healthcare system like Medicare. Lousy Republican plans to cover fewer Americans and "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act, and get rid of pre-existing conditions coverage, were made in oppositional bad faith in order to enable more tax cuts for the well-to-do.

Number Six. Demagoguery and the Illegitimacy and Tyranny of Hard-Right Rule. The Master-Manipulator-in-Chief and Republican politicians used extremely divisive tactics and emotionally manipulative demagoguery to gain power, and then rashly abused this dominating power. Shrewd strategies that are effective in opposition are not well suited to governing fairly, or in the best interests of public health and safety. Tactics like suppressing millions of votes and gerrymandering congressional districts have given a narrow minority of Americans undeserved and excessive power, effectively depriving the majority of having a satisfactory say in vital matters. The unjust ramifications of this abuse of power make this illegitimate scam morally wrong.

In fairness, politicians should try to win elections by honestly offering the people good plans for improving their prospects and overall security. Instead, many Republicans win their election contests by using a pathetic variety of unethical means, as adduced in detail in *Demagoguery and the Dangers of the Demise of Democracy*.

Consequential ethics tells us that despotism is deplorable in degrees, depending on the number of people that tyrannical rule adversely affects, and the severity of the oppression, and the nature of injustices perpetrated. The tyrannies imposed by Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet and Saddam Hussein are among the most notorious and lethal in world history.

One consequence of Trump's disastrous triumph was a significant increase in the number of incidents related to extremists and hate groups dedicated to anti-Muslim antagonism and neo-Nazi ideologies and bigotry and racism and anti-Semitism in the USA. This increase occurred in tandem with the incendiary rhetoric and ascendancy of the demagogic emotion-hijacking tactics of the Machiavellian Pretender-in-Chief and his cronies, like Trump's former provocateur chief strategist Steve Bannon and racist Stephen Miller.

The Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Report provides details of this deplorably divisive, dangerous trend: "After half a century of being increasingly relegated to the margins of society, the radical right has entered the political mainstream in a way that had seemed virtually unimaginable since George Wallace ran for president in 1968. A surge in right-wing populism, stemming from the long-unfolding effects of globalization and the movements of capital and labor that it spawned, brought a man that many considered to be a racist, misogynist and xenophobe into the most powerful political office in the world. Donald Trump's election as president mirrored similar currents in Europe, where globalization energized an array of extreme-right political movements and the United Kingdom's decision to quit the European Union. Trump's run for office electrified the radical right, which saw in him a champion of the idea that America is fundamentally a white man's country."

It is ironic for white people to establish such a belligerent precedent toward minority groups, considering that they are destined to become a minority group within 25 years or so. The USA was about 90% white from the colonial era up through the early 1960s, but by 2020 it was barely over 60% white, and the Census Bureau predicts this percentage will fall to less than 50% by the year 2045, due to current demographic trends.

Number Seven. The Oppression of Women. The far right compulsion to limit family planning options for women and to curtail their reproductive rights is an offensively male-centric, dominion demanding, obedience-expecting charade. The root cause for most abortions is unwanted pregnancies, and the most effective way to reduce abortions is to provide more funding for contraceptive choices and Planned Parenthood services that are provided to poor women who do not want to become pregnant. Opposition to these choices is wrongheaded.

I encourage readers to cultivate an expansive understanding of the rightful prerogatives of women, who have throughout the evolutionary history of human beings exercised "Original Choice" of their mates, as explained by Dr. Leonard Shlain in *Sex, Time and Power - How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution*. Females have one of the most basic of all human rights, to choose NOT to have an unsuitable mate or to be forced to carry the spawn of a male that rapes her or takes advantage of her in other ways. In cases of rape, there should be no hurdles whatsoever to a woman's right to choose to abort a fertilized embryo so abominably begotten.

There should be a litmus test for every candidate nominated to serve on the Supreme Court. Every one of them should pledge to uphold the reasonable decision made in the precedent-setting *Roe vs. Wade* ruling -- to give any woman who becomes pregnant the right to choose to terminate her pregnancy within the first trimester, before the embryo becomes a viable fetus.

Surely Sister Joan Chittister, a Catholic Nun, was ethically correct when she stated: "I do not believe that just because you're opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. And why would I think that you don't? Because you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is."

Social conservatives are incredibly stubborn and hypocritical on this issue. These anti-choice and supposedly "pro-life" hypocrites are inadequately concerned with children once they are born. Their agenda is about controlling women's lives and bodies and futures. Why do conservatives often tend to staunchly oppose family planning? It is virtually certain that if males got pregnant, abortion would be regarded as a sacrament, and they would champion the use of contraception and strongly defend the freedom to choose whether or not to terminate any unwanted pregnancy, and they would generously support paternal health care policies.

People are NOT honestly "pro-life" if they oppose abortion but support policies and politicians that promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act, oppose women's healthcare, gut public education, support the death penalty, and beef up militarization of law enforcement agencies that disproportionately kill people of color (Blacks and Latinos in particular). Being "pro-life" means nothing if it doesn't mean being "pro-all-of-life".

Additionally, it is crazy to rationalize damages to planetary ecosystems through resource exploitation activities in order to avoid the cost of taking precautionary steps to ensure that we leave a fairer legacy to all humans. Pro-life people, when they champion actions and national policies that are contrary to environmental safeguards, are acting in anti-life ways. The anti-birth control, anti-choice doctrines of the patriarchal minority are wrong for humanity and the prospects for survival of life on Earth. Exploiting hot button social issues for narrow power-prepossessed political advantages is immoral.

Since the number of human beings on Earth continues to grow rapidly, human population pressures on land usages and fresh water sources and wildlife habitats continue to intensify. Already, in less than the last 50 years -- as our numbers have grown by 3.5 billion -- we have contributed to wiping out 60% of the population sizes of all mammals, fishes, birds, reptiles and amphibians on Earth, according to findings of the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report 2018. SIXTY PERCENT!

Mike Pence is a religious zealot who became the first sitting vice president to address the "March for Life" when he participated in it in January 2017. At this annual anti-choice rally in Washington, D.C., he told the crowd, "Life is winning again in America." This is bizarre spin, and another one of the Trump administration's "alternative facts". In reality, these policies are leading to more women being forced to carry a pregnancy to term, and more abortions and more women dying from being denied life-saving health care.

Number Eight. Eviscerating Environmental Protections. Ronald Reagan once stated that "Preservation of our environment is not a liberal or conservative challenge, it's common sense." Today, Republicans are willing to sacrifice the environment to stimulate economic growth in the short run and maximize profits to be made, no matter how irresponsibly. See *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto* for an introduction to this broad range of ideas and proposals.

A critical environmental issue that will be significantly more serious in coming years is a severe crisis of fresh water shortages that is unfolding as human numbers on Earth approach 8 billion people. According to a report by the United Nations released in early 2015, shortages of fresh water for human consumption and farming could reach crisis proportions by the year 2030, with a stunning 40% shortfall in fresh water needs. That is soon! The United Nations recommended that significant global policy changes be made to address this ominous prospect. These proposals should be heeded, for many sources of underground water are already being depleted, and rainfall patterns are becoming more erratic due to changes in global weather patterns associated with the effects of planetary warming exacerbated by greenhouse gas emissions.

The United Nations World Water Development Report provides smart forward-thinking ideas for achieving more sustainable usages of fresh water. In light of these understandings, it is all but criminal to allow Big Oil to engage in unregulated fracking to extract fossil fuels, contaminating ground water resources, or polluting streams in connection with mountaintop removal coal mining.

Number Nine. Deregulation and Profiteering. Deregulation and efforts to enact corporate-friendly policies at the expense of the people serve to weaken government and give more power to corporations. As a sad result, corporations abuse this power, as confirmed by the significant decline in the amount of federal taxes they pay. Corporations paid more than 30% of all federal taxes in 1950, yet they have managed to skew national laws and loopholes so that they paid less than 7% of total federal taxes in 2019.

Deregulatory schemes resulted in extraordinarily large costs in the Savings and Loan debacle at the end of Ronald Reagan's tenure in office, and again during the "Great Recession" at the end of George W. Bush's time in office. The Dodd-Frank bill was passed to prevent future similar financial crises, but Trump Republicans are working to dismantle these protections and stoke the fires of predatory behaviors and risk-taking that will set the stage for a future episode that will likely be worse, given the huge overhang of a \$29 trillion national debt.

"Funny" aside: "The 'party of deregulation' wants to regulate the hell out of your fundamental right to vote."

Number Ten. Tax Evasion and "Tax Holidays". Multinational corporations in the United States evade taxes by squirreling them away in tax havens abroad, until Republicans gain control of the federal government, and then they get these supposedly conservative politicians to give them what they euphemistically call a "tax holiday" reward for bringing these profits back to the U.S. from their tax evasion havens at really low tax rates.

We have foolishly allowed wealthy people and corrupt politicians to rig our economic, social and political systems in ways that make our societies more unfair, and the periodic tax holiday on hidden profits is a classic example of this outcome. This constitutes a serious violation of the best interests of the 99% of Americans, so it is deplorable and morally wrong.

This top Republican priority is really a scam that rewards shareholders in big corporations who eagerly wait for the day they will receive the benefits of this scheme. Their 2017 action "repatriated" an estimated \$2.5 trillion that had been stockpiled in countries abroad, and did so at low tax rates on this corruptly "sheltered" money. The previous such repatriation was pushed by Republicans in 2004, when almost \$400 billion was brought back to the U.S. at an exceedingly low 5.25% rate, and most of it was given to a relative few through stock buy-backs and other schemes that primarily benefit those at the top.

Number Eleven. Consumerism and International Trade. Hundreds of billions of dollars are spent annually on advertising and product promotion to stimulate materialistic consumerism, and huge sums are spent on elections, lobbying and ideological indoctrination that allows this overarching scheme to be perpetuated. The reason this continues is because our national decision-making is dominated by corporations and elites who abuse the power of their wealth. This betrays fair-mindedness and rules of law in supposedly fairly representative democracies.

Our national priorities should be consistent with sustainable activities for humanity over countless numbers of coming generations. It is insane to blindly believe marketing messages and ideological rationalizations that promote consumerism that recklessly wastes nonrenewable resources on Earth. It is downright dumb to allow profit-driven business entities to irresponsibly externalize the costs of harmful impacts that their production activities have on people, wildlife habitats, natural ecosystems and the global climate.

In the Trumpian era of moral outrage, the majority of people were given a bad deal, especially Blacks and Latinos. There was widespread social irresponsibility as greed was unleashed and Trump demonstrated egomaniacal insecurity and liberty-threatening debt-incurring impulses and authoritarian compulsions. This age was characterized by manipulative deceit, anti-Solon-wise Twittered lies, exclusion instead of inclusion, discriminatory inequality against anyone who is not a white Christian male, cravenly sycophantish loyalties by politicians to extreme planks of the hard-right "conservative" agenda, and far-reaching ecological insanity.

The Demagogue-in-Chief won the election, in part, by blaming the loss of U.S. manufacturing jobs on bad trade deals and low wage competition in countries like China and Mexico. This characterization struck a chord with many voters in

Rust Belt states, but it was another example of a deceitful spin on reality. As the Managing Editor of *The Week* magazine pointed out, "A recent study found that 85 percent of manufacturing job losses from 2000 to 2010 were caused by automation, not outsourcing. American firms have been steadily cutting employees and replacing them with machines that are cheaper (they don't need benefits) and more efficient (they don't take vacations). U.S. factories now produce twice as much stuff as they did in 1984, but with only one-third of the workers. And smarter machines will soon steal a lot more jobs. One Oxford University study predicts that 47 percent of U.S. jobs will be automated over the next two decades."

Number Twelve. Infrastructure and Privatization. We have irresponsibly allowed our country's infrastructure to deteriorate, and Trump Republicans failed to make big investments in infrastructure improvements during their four years in control. They basically proposed the use of "private-public" plans to finance infrastructure -- a method of financing that is a form of scam in which private investors will get rich and taxpayers will get shafted, as Robert Reich makes abundantly clear in *Trump's Infrastructure Scam*. Trump's unfulfilled promises to invest in American infrastructure involved schemes that would give tax breaks to private "partnerships" with huge corporations that would strip the American people of their own resources, and give private entities the privilege of making us pay for the use of bridges, highways and other projects. Bravo for Joe Biden and his administration for finally having passed legislation in November 2021 to upgrade physical infrastructure.

Infrastructure maintenance is crucially important. This was made starkly clear in February 2021 when Texans suffered a deep freeze catastrophe due to a poorly maintained electric grid. It had also been made clear in February 2017 when a flooding crisis took place at the Oroville Dam in the foothills of California's Central Valley that resulted in an urgent evacuation of almost 200,000 people. This event confirmed that we do not merely need big new projects, which construction profiteers are eager to have the government undertake, but better maintenance of existing infrastructure. There are some 1,400 dams in California, and about 84,000 in the United States, and they should be more safely maintained, or removed, instead of embarking on a new era of aggressive dam building. Executives at Friends of the River and two other environmental organizations had warned in 2005 about risks of having an "unarmored spillway" at the Oroville Dam, and events proved them right. They now provide smart recommendations for ways to shore up unsafe dams and levees, or to decommission dams when they no longer serve the public interest.

The corporatocratic Puppet-in-Chief proposed that key public services be privatized, including the Veterans Administration. He wanted to slash funding of public schools and public broadcasting, and also favored expanding private prisons. Republican politicians in Congress want to go even further by privatizing Medicare, and the U.S. Postal Service, and National Parks, and air traffic control and other functions performed by the government. This is on top of previous privatizations of military contracts, and even food services in the Senate dining room and cafeteria and coffee shops.

"Privatization" means taking public wealth and assets that benefit us all, and turning them over to the private sector, where only a small subset reap the reward. When a road or bridge is "privatized", people must pay a toll to use it, so that the new "owners" of the road can make bigger profits.

There is another problem with privatization. Democratic governments aim to serve as a model of what the public wants, so they try to provide jobs with good pay and benefits. When governments are talked into "saving money" by privatizing, what often happens is employees are laid off, then private companies hire new workers, or rehire the old ones -- at lower wages with fewer benefits. The result is that laid-off employees are made worse off, while new hires are also impoverished because they are often no longer paid a living wage. A local, state or national government might "save money" in the short term by lowering wages and externalizing costs, but the communities -- and country -- where these people live ultimately suffer the consequences.

Privatization can contribute to an increase in home foreclosures, causing neighborhoods to lose value. This can cause the amount of property and income tax receipts to be reduced, and there are fewer customers for local businesses. Schools are stressed as many children become poorer, and the need for emergency government assistance like food stamps rises. So while privatization shifts benefits to a few, everyone is on the hook for bearing the costs and/or suffering the consequences.

While privatizers propagandize by promoting this kind of transfer of public wealth to private hands with claims that it

"saves money", privatization harms communities and often costs taxpayers more than it saves. More importantly, it *hurts people*. Avoiding such outcomes should be one of our main civic concerns.

Privatization, or government outsourcing, has been going on for decades, and is often touted as a cost-saving panacea. Today, state and local governments are reassessing whether turning public property and services over to private companies has really been a good idea. Story after story has appeared detailing horror stories of corruption, incompetence and general scamming by companies prepossessed with profit. Molly Ball reported in *The Privatization Backlash in the Atlantic*, "In states and cities across the country, lawmakers are expressing new skepticism about privatization, imposing new conditions on government contracting, and demanding more oversight. Laws to rein in contractors have been introduced in 18 states this year (2014), and three -- Maryland, Oregon and Nebraska -- have passed legislation, according to In the Public Interest, a group that advocates what it calls 'responsible contracting.'"

This sensational observation is contained in a report *Out of Control: The Coast-to-Coast Failures of Outsourcing Public Services to For-Profit Corporations*, which begins: "Eager for quick cash, state and local governments across America have for decades handed over control of critical public services and assets to corporations that promise to handle them better, faster and cheaper. Unfortunately for taxpayers, not only has outsourcing these services failed to keep this promise, but too often it undermines transparency, accountability, shared prosperity and competition -- the underpinnings of democracy itself."

Donald Trump initially instituted a government "hiring freeze" in 2017, which is a strategy toward privatization. Lauren McCauley explained in her article *In Step Towards Privatization, Trump Enacts Federal Hiring Freeze: As J. David Cox Sr. pointed out, the freeze would 'actually increase taxpayer costs by forcing agencies to hire more expensive contractors to do work that civilian government employees are already doing for far less.'"*

"Numerous studies have shown that contractors are two to three times more costly than each federal employee they replace," Cox said. "President Trump's federal hiring freeze will result in more government waste as agencies are forced to hire high-priced contractors to do the work that federal employees can and should be doing. When a sufficient blanket of anti-government propaganda has been laid down, the privatizers introduce proposals for "reform" and providing "choice." Of course the proposals are to hand over government functions for private profit.

One result of falling for the privatization scam is that taxpayers have been fleeced, services to citizens have been cut way back, and communities have been made poorer. But the companies that convinced governments to hand over public functions have gotten rich off of the deal. How is this a surprise?

"Imagine a system where someone makes a profit if more and more people are put in prison. This is known as a perverse incentive. Really, can you think of anything worse than getting a profit to get people put in jail? What you think could go wrong is exactly what does go wrong. These companies want profits, so rehabilitation becomes a 'cost'."

These companies push for government policies that put more people into prison for more crimes and for longer sentences. Prison-for-profit companies work with the notorious corporate lobbying outfit ALEC -- the American Legislative Exchange Council -- to come up with model legislation that they copy in states across the country to push things like "three strikes" laws and "truth in sentencing" that serve to significantly increase the number of prisoners and the amount of time they serve.

If you examine the claim that private companies are always more efficient than government, the argument starts to fall apart. Just how are companies more efficient? The first way companies are supposed to be better is cost-savings. But just how do they save money? There are two ways a company can save money over what government spends. The first is to reduce what it pays employees and suppliers. The second is to cut back on the amount or quality of the service the company is taking over.

The resulting wage and benefit cuts hurt the community at large. Retail sales decline, workers must rely more on public assistance, and there are more at-risk children in low-income families. On a recent phone call discussing the study, Greenwood said that when governments outsource, "the availability of middle-class jobs is affected, even upward mobility." She added, "Contracting to private corporations usually means big reductions in worker pay and benefits," and "lower wages often mean a shift to less experienced employees."

With outsourcing, says Janice Fine of Rutgers University, a study shows that there is often "a stunning lack of government oversight of contractors." She sensibly concluded that "oversight shouldn't be set aside because of cost, it should be an essential part of outsourcing."

Number Thirteen. Deeply Corrupted Petroleum Politics. The term "petro-aggression" has been used to describe the tendency of oil-rich states to instigate international conflicts. There are many examples, including Iraq's invasion of Iran and Kuwait, and Libya's repeated incursions into Chad in the 1970s and 1980s. Iran is justified in having long-standing suspicions of Western powers, having been the victim of the CIA conspiring to overthrow their democratically elected leader in a 1953 coup d'état. Some scholars have also suggested that oil-rich states are frequently targets of "resource wars." Several countries have nationalized foreign-run oil businesses because of abuses of power and interference with national politics by fossil fuel interests. Multibillion-dollar inflows and outflows of petroleum money tend to have worldwide macroeconomic consequences, and major oil exporters often corruptly abuse the influence they gain from their huge profits.

In *The Price of Inequality*, the brilliant economist Joseph Stiglitz discusses the concept of "rent-seeking". This term is used to describe the ways that political policies help insiders at the expense of the rest of us. Stiglitz writes: "Rent-seeking takes many forms: hidden and open transfers and subsidies from the government, laws that make the marketplace less competitive, lax enforcement of existing competition laws, and statutes that allow corporations to take advantage of others or to pass costs on to the rest of society." Oddly enough, countries that are rich in natural resources, and in fossil fuels in particular, are infamous for corrupt types of rent-seeking activities. Whereas one might expect that an abundance of resources could be used to help the poor and the middle class, countries with the most natural resources often have the most severe levels of public corruption and inequality and repression.

Many of Russia's oligarchs, for instance, got their fabulous wealth by obtaining state assets at below-market prices, and then ensuring continuing profits through monopoly power. A similar trend ramped up in the USA when Trump appointed oil industry executives and corporate shells to positions in his Cabinet. One of the first regulations the Trump administration revoked was a rule intended to prevent coal mining companies from polluting streams. This action benefits coal company executives and investors while harming wildlife and untold numbers of people downstream from coal mining activities. Also, the Republican House before the 2018 elections used a radical legislative tool called the Congressional Review Act to "permanently" scrap critical protections against methane pollution from oil and gas drilling on public lands, and many Senate Republicans are thinking what a great idea this is, despite the fact that the well-being of countless numbers of people will be harmed by the detrimental plan.

Number Fourteen. Military Keynesianism. Major General Smedley Butler famously wrote a book in 1935 about war being a racket. "It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives." He went on to describe a racket "as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. ... It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes."

Of the First World War, he wrote, "a mere handful garnered the profits of the conflict. At least 21,000 new millionaires and billionaires were made in the United States during the World War. That many admitted their huge blood gains in their income tax returns. How many other war millionaires falsified their tax returns no one knows." ... "How many of these war millionaires shouldered a rifle? How many of them dug a trench? How many of them knew what it meant to go hungry in a rat-infested dug-out? How many of them spent sleepless, frightened nights, ducking shells and shrapnel and machine gun bullets? How many of them parried a bayonet thrust of an enemy? How many of them were wounded or killed in battle?"

"Out of war, nations acquire additional territory, if they are victorious. They just take it. This newly acquired territory promptly is exploited by the few -- the selfsame few who wrung dollars out of blood in the war. The general public shoulders the bill. And what is this bill? This bill renders a horrible accounting. Newly placed gravestones. Mangled bodies. Shattered minds. Broken hearts and homes. Economic instability. Depression and all its attendant miseries. Back-breaking taxation for generations and generations."

There are more than 40 million persons in active and reserve military forces in the world today, plus maybe 20 million in paramilitary forces. And the war racket seems to be intensifying as time passes, and will really be ramped up as

shortages of food, arable land and fresh water get worse with the net increase in human numbers of more than 70 million every year, year after year after year.

See *Reflections on War - and Peace* in this manifesto for an exhaustive exploration of this issue. An excerpt:

The stimulative economic impact of World War II helped bring the world out of the Depression of the 1930s. Since then, however, a stubborn ideological argument has gained outlandish influence that contends a permanent war economy with profligate military spending is a necessary way to make us safer, and to create jobs and stimulate the economy.

A full-cost accounting of lavish spending on the military-industrial complex contradicts this conviction. Lavish military spending is a waste-oriented and cost-maximizing perversion of self-correcting mechanisms of the free market system, which serve to minimize costs through the forces of competition. Chalmers Johnson investigated this topic at length in the last book of his Blowback Trilogy. Johnson indicated that what he calls "military Keynesianism" is a misguided ideology. This dogma holds that the stimulative debt financing of wars, weapons, munitions and large standing armed forces is good for the economy. In reality, such debt unfairly and irresponsibly defers costs to the future and reduces funds available to emphasize fairer, more far-sighted and more sensible priorities at home. Johnson called military Keynesianism "a form of slow economic suicide."

The U.S. permanent war economy suffers not only from wrong-headed priorities, but also from high cost no-bid contracts, procurement improprieties, and excessive spending on unnecessary military projects. The non-partisan group Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities released a report in 2006 that indicated federal spending priorities are scandalously wasteful, and that Pentagon financial management practices are a big "embarrassment". The report also expressed the opinion that such spending priorities effectively serve to undermine our true national security.

The federal government's spending priorities include large amounts of waste and hidden fraud in military procurement. Much of this is entirely secret ('classified!'), and hence it is susceptible to wasteful earmarks and financial shenanigans. These squandered funds represent a sustained non-productive use of capital and labor. They distort American values and divert resources from more peaceful, just and wholesome goals and investments. They thus represent an outrageous cost of lost opportunities and subverted better priorities.

War may be an ultimate expression of competition, but it gives us a compelling example of why fair and reasonable rules of law are required to achieve greater good goals. Wars and military occupations for ignoble purposes -- like resource grabs and excessive profiteering -- should be prevented. They are simply too devastating to millions of people around the world.

Both Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman considered war profiteering to be a form of "treason". Today, however, profiting from war seems to have become standard operating procedure as a means of allowing defense contractors, aerospace companies, war services corporations, and investors in these enterprises to make profits from lavish spending on wars and war preparations.

Harry Truman chaired a Senate committee during World War II that launched an investigation into shady wartime business practices. They discovered widespread "waste, inefficiency, mismanagement and profiteering." The gargantuan military spending of the last two decades is likely to be significantly worse. Truman argued that such behavior was at best unpatriotic. We seem to be so accustomed to profit-making for war preparations today that many people regard it as desirable 'business as usual.' But this does not hide the fact that war is a scurrilous way to make profits, and one that we should find honest ways to control with greater rigor and responsibility.

Concluding Commentary

These 14 aspects of our corrupt crony capitalist system constitute considerable outrages against many basic American values. We Americans treasure liberties and generally believe in fair dealing, inclusiveness and more broadly shared prosperity. These values are severely threatened by these shrewd schemes.

Trump's Chief Strategist Steve Bannon in 2016 and 2017 talked about dismantling "the administrative state." What he was really talking about is allowing corporations the right to do whatever they want, regardless of how consequentially harmful the impacts of their actions on American citizens or the environmental commons. When

Republicans talk about deregulation, what they really want, in effect, is to facilitate corporate predation and reduce citizens' ability to prevent corporate malfeasance. When Republicans have too much influence, like in most state governments, big corporations succeed in using their deep pockets to corrupt our national priorities.

Steve Bannon turns out to be not just a far right democracy-assaulting operative, but another grifter who was arrested in August 2020 and accused of using Trumpian anti-immigrant fear mongering and zealotry for building walls to fleece the aroused Trump base of millions of dollars of their money. And he played a reprehensible role in helping organize and incite the insurrectionary MAGA mob on January 6th.

No matter what populist rhetoric may say, when Republicans enacted huge tax cuts in December 2017, they structured the new plan to give most of its debt-financed benefits to the top 1%. Ever since then, until the pandemic emergency, they have been striving to rashly impose big cuts in federal spending on programs that benefit the poor and people in the middle class. These politicians are infringing on the hopes of the majority of Americans, and betraying future well-being, in a consequential outcome that violates true populism and destroys the vestiges of representative democracy under a lithified layer of recklessly mean-spirited and self-dealing double-crossing avarice. (Huh?!)

Economic fundamentalists promote national policies that often result in outcomes contrary to the greater good. "They promote it. They sugarcoat it. They sing its virtues. They fling rationalizations upon it, and they even greenwash it. But horse manure rolled in powdered sugar does not a doughnut make."

The four-year domination of our federal government by an illegitimate President represented a reactionary leap backwards. Trump's anti-precautionary actions and egregious abuses of power were a broad betrayal of the public trust in fair governance, and a rash trajectory of torpedoing honorable American values. Scandals pervaded the Trump presidency because of his many conflicts of interest and his efforts to deceive, telling lies Big and small. His unrepentant hubris, vindictiveness and overreaching abuses of power are abominable.

Entrepreneurs tend to be highly regarded in our capitalist society. But from the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution, unethical business tycoons and manipulative bankers and ruthless robber barons have exploited opportunities to take advantage of workers and abandon them, and to cheat laborers, screw taxpayers, and corrupt our political system to quash competition, allow monopolies, give subsidies, and evade regulations and accountability. Real estate moguls and Wall Street fat cats who think they are "masters of the universe" are just following the lead of these earlier entrepreneurs.

Donald Trump, a master deceiver, has sold himself as a successful businessman, though revelations in May 2019 that he lost more than \$1 billion between 1985 and 1995 belie this deception. What "success" he had was in manipulating public opinion and using a litany of some of the most ruthless, dishonest and dishonorable tactics imaginable. He has cheated employees, contractors, suppliers and taxpayers, and exploited tax laws, bankruptcy laws, copyright laws and real estate laws. He has used thousands of lawsuits to intimidate communities and evade responsibilities. He has marketed real estate advice in scheming ways to defraud "students" at "Trump University", and was forced to pay \$25 million for this fraudulent audacity. He has run roughshod over the environment to build luxury hotels, gambling casinos and exclusionary golf courses. He has brazenly concealed his tax return information from the public, who should be allowed to see the truth about his often dastardly dealings. And he generally acts in ways that are despicably greedy, dishonest and grotesquely manipulative.

Then he set his egomaniacal eyes on the ultimate power abuser's prize -- the most powerful position on the planet, and he used brazen demagoguery and foreign intrigue with authoritarian dictators like Vladimir Putin, and a long litany of profoundly unscrupulous strategies to triumph in this quest. And then he brought his selfish, cheating, exploiting, screwing, deceiving, manipulative ways to the White House, where he strong-armed compliant Republicans in Congress to corrupt governance. The anti-egalitarian consequences are proving to be catastrophic, and the unintended consequences may be even worse - and hard to control.

Maureen Dowd expressed her critical disapproval of Trump and his assaults against decency and democracy in her article *Bonfire of Trump's Vanity* on June 7, 2020: "Lincoln gave his life trying to stop a clash of civilizations, 'with malice toward none', while Trump spends his presidency ginning up a clash of civilizations, with malice toward all." This is all but evil.

It is time for patriotic Americans to stand up and shout that we are not going to take this corruption anymore, and to demand that our leaders begin to honestly represent the best interests of humanity, now AND in future generations, and give greater consideration to other species of life on Earth.

"If ever a time should come, when vain and aspiring men shall possess the highest seats in Government, our country will stand in need of its experienced patriots to prevent its ruin." (Exclamation point!)

--- Samuel Adams

Again Mark Twain's words resonate from long past, when he incisively wrote in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, "My kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its officeholders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease, and death."

Mark Twain made another sensational observation about patriotism more than 100 years ago: "We teach them to take their patriotism at second-hand; to shout with the largest crowd without examining into the right or wrong of the matter -- exactly as boys under monarchies are taught and have always been taught. We teach them to regard as traitors, and hold in aversion and contempt, such as do not shout with the crowd, and so here in our democracy we are cheering a thing which of all things is most foreign to it and out of place -- the delivery of our political conscience into somebody else's keeping. This is patriotism on the Russian plan."

Let's begin to champion true American values of democratic fair-mindedness and responsible inclusiveness and precautionary principles that respect the prospects of all our heirs in the future. Vladimir Putin seems to be intent on exporting his ruthless Russian plan, posing a threat to our freedoms, national security and valued self-determination, and Republicans are threatening our individual liberties and preventing us from achieving a more fairly shared prosperity. Let's support honest and honorable representatives to run our country!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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