

Earth Manifesto



The Common Good, Properly Understood

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Introductory Observations

The common good is a core value for humanity, and it is taking on vastly increased importance as our population has grown over the years. Back in the hardscrabble days of hunting and gathering, before methods of growing crops and domesticating animals emerged, small clans of nomadic peoples lived in the most advantageous niches on Earth, and their impact on the natural world in their struggle for survival was relatively slight. Today human civilizations have grown to include more than 8 billion people, and they have become much more widespread and destructive all around the planet, starting with the choicest places and expanded to more and more marginal ones.

Our human numbers have quadrupled since 1930, growing from only two billion people at that time. This rapid growth is causing a wide array of significant problems. Our proliferating needs are depleting fossil fuels and mineral resources, and decimating wildlife populations, overexploiting fisheries and causing extensive harm to wildlife habitats. We are also rashly causing erosion loss of vital topsoil, and polluting waterways and oceans. We are paving over wetlands, clear-cutting vast tracts of forests, and dumping large quantities of wastes and toxins into the environment. We are even causing portentous changes to the temperature and alkalinity of the oceans, and altering the gaseous composition of the atmosphere, contributing to ominous changes in weather patterns all around the world. We are thus upsetting the crucial natural balance of ecosystems on Earth.

We are confronted with a growing realization today that the survival and well-being of our species is becoming increasingly threatened by these developments. The best hope for our heirs in future generations is that we will find good ways to mitigate the most severe impacts of our activities. Competition for natural resources is getting more intense as they are being depleted, and the dog-eat-dog nature of our profit-prepossessed economic activities is becoming a serious liability. The wiser collaborative qualities of our human natures are consequently becoming ever more important to the overall health, well-being and sustainability of life.

Our understanding of common good goals, and of the best means to collectively achieve them, is becoming more critical to our flourishing and survival. This essay explores these big issues, and casts the bright light of sanity and common sense on better ways forward.

Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* stated, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." Let's figuratively start the world over again, and do so in ways promisingly consistent with the greater good!

Perspective on What Constitutes the Common Good

President Theodore Roosevelt was one of the greatest conservationist leaders in American history. He played a pivotal role in having created the U.S. Forest Service in 1905, with a responsible mission of sustaining the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands in order to meet the needs of people in current and future generations. Gifford Pinchot, the first Director of the Forest Service, sensibly defined conservation as being "the greatest good to the greatest number of people over the longest period of time".

This concept is also an excellent definition of what constitutes the common good. The main things that characterize the common good are a productive economy, broadly-shared prosperity, measures that ensure fairness of opportunity and a strong middle class, good governance, responsible leadership, public safety, good

public schools, fair access to healthcare, an affordable social safety net, effective measures to improve the overall quality of life, fair political representation for all citizens, democratic self-determination, strong commitments to collective security and peace building, robust checks on political corruption, sensible regulation of banks and big businesses, prudent preparedness, openness and accountability in politics, a reasonably independent and non-partisan judiciary, fair trade, a free press, a clean and secure energy system, smart investments in both urban renewal and well-being in rural areas, well-managed public transportation, and guaranteed freedom of speech and civil liberties, beginning with those guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. The common good also requires strong protections of healthy ecosystems, fresh water sources, unpolluted air, and a stable climate, along with reasonable safeguards to preserve biological diversity and protected parks, open spaces and wilderness areas.

In contrast, there are many things that are drastically antithetical to the common good and well-being in general. These include things like allowing water and air pollution, environmental damages, the stimulated depletion of resources, wasteful energy policies, uncontrolled emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, suburban sprawl and "tragedy of the commons" assaults on the ecological commons. Many other aspects of human actions, behaviors and institutions are contrary to common good goals, including monopoly practices, harmful abuses of power, excessive corporate influence in elections and lobbying, unfair cronyism, fraudulent activities, severe inequities, no-bid government contracts, discriminatory employment practices, excessively expensive education, unaffordable healthcare, boom-and-bust economic policies, harm-engendering special perks and privileges for elite constituencies, government secrecy in vital civic matters, overly harsh punishments for those who commit crimes, ruthless racial injustices, oppressive gender discrimination, and aggression in war.

People could, and should, strive to create fairer societies that operate in much better harmony with public health and the common good, and with core principles of human dignity, individual liberty, fair representation and equal treatment under the law. The common good is much broader than corporate goals, because corporate purposes are narrowly focused on just two overriding objectives -- maximizing profits and limiting liabilities of owners and top management. This essay examines these topics, and other related ones, in detail.

"The status quo has many guardians, but the future is an orphan."

--- Timothy E. Wirth, United Nations Foundation

Invisible Hands of Self-Interest

Famous Scottish economist Adam Smith wrote the veritable manifesto of capitalism and free enterprise in the momentous year 1776. His book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, postulated that the wealth of a nation is measured by the productivity and living standards of *all of its people*, not just by its accumulated wealth in the hands of a few. His belief was basically that private interests and self-interested behaviors contribute to the good of the whole of society. He was clearly interested in the greater good of a nation and society in its sum total. This is a consequentially important idea.

Adam Smith contended that "the invisible hand" of individuals pursuing their own self-interest naturally serves, in a free market, to promote the good of the whole of society. He believed that the welfare of the entire community would generally be improved by private interest activities and self-motivated behaviors. But he didn't seem to have foreseen the extent to which social and environmental ills associated with industrialization would be made worse by unbridled greed and abuses of power inherent in human nature and capitalist economic systems.

Adam Smith did not imagine the far-reaching extent to which the majority of people would be manipulated by corrupting influences of Big Money, powerful vested interests, political propaganda and insidiously persuasive marketing and promotion. And he could not have anticipated how terribly divisive it would be for micro-targeted advertising on social media platforms to hijack people's emotions and skew national decision making and priorities. Adam Smith also did not recognize the significant risks the economy would encounter, or the adverse potential for economic depression and systemic collapse due to the short-term orientation of business goals. It has become clear that, when groups like bankers, investors and homeowners rationally ignore risks of "low-probability, high impact events", financial meltdowns can occur like the one suffered beginning in late 2008.

How should we rightly understand self-interest? -- Ah, here's the catch! Self-interest is one of the most powerful of human motivations, but self-interest is NOT identical to our own individual selfish interests. In the end, self-interest is necessarily linked to the common good. What exactly is right and proper with regard to self-interest and the public good? What is best for humanity as a whole? This essay grapples with questions such as these, and provides some good answers.

Economic fundamentalists and people in corporate-sponsored think tanks have used the metaphor of an invisible hand to conceal the actual hands that rig the system and exploit resources -- and take advantage of workers. These interests regard the maximizing of profits as the highest purpose. But the corporations and politicians that wield the most powerful influence in our society often contribute to increased inequities, harsh injustices and notably heightened systemic risks. They also are significantly responsible for environmental damages, and lamentably even for reckless aggression by the military, to the detriment of the common good.

Adam Smith also believed, it is stated in Wikipedia, that "a sort of system of social pressure persuades the wealthy to do, of their own volition, what the society around them requires." That was then; this is now -- many rich conservatives today seem to have developed a money-stoked hubris that makes them feel entitled to an ever-growing proportion of the nation's wealth, so they act as though they are immune to conscience-provoking social pressures and guilt and shame -- and acting responsibly. They consequently support politicians who reject voices calling for a more steeply graduated system of taxation, and instead they demand further public-debt-financed tax breaks for rich people and corporations. This disproportionately funnels profits into their pockets, thus undermining society's best interests and democratic fairness of elections and good governance altogether.

Mark Twain may have given indirect recognition to Adam Smith's ideas about rich people and their inextricable relationship with others in society when he noted: "In all the ages, three-fourths of the support of the great charities has been conscience money." But in this era of MAGA Republicans, fears of social ostracism for overly obtuse selfishness, brazen greed and compulsive pursuits of power sadly seem to be having a diminished effect.

Creating Fairer Societies

To promote the common good and improve the general welfare of the people, one of the most important things we must do is to strengthen our democracy. This has become sensationally clear at this moment in history because our democracy is under severe strain due to political polarization, deceitful misinformation, false conspiracies, big lies about widespread election fraud, insurrectionary sedition, and threats posed by divide-to-conquer abusers of authority and factions using Big Money to cement their domineering and undemocratic power in place.

Republicans profess a faith in trickle-down economics, but what they really do with large new debt-financed tax cuts for rich people is to radically increase inequalities in our society. This is dangerous. According to the highly respected historians Will and Ariel Durant in their brilliant *Lessons of History*, the wise Athenian statesman and lawmaker Solon was faced with a similar dilemma of conflict between influential elites and the rest of the populace in Greece more than 2,500 years ago. He was given the responsibility and power to reform the status quo to save the republic from violent revolution, and succeeded at this by instituting far-reaching changes in the Greek constitution and economy to deal fairly with this serious situation.

To achieve common good goals, smart Solon-wise compromises are needed between the Few and the Many, and we must farsightedly and wholeheartedly embrace progressive reforms designed to make our country much fairer.

Let's come to our senses, my fellow Americans! We've been sold down the river by politicians pandering to rich people and corporate entities that have corrupted our system of taxation and our national spending priorities, as well as our international trade deals and our elections, voting laws and our campaign financing rules -- and our federal courts and the Supreme Court and our system of criminal justice. Our very values themselves are being undermined by this misguided faith in a deceitful trickle down tax-cutting ideology. Our representatives have allowed vested interests to abuse the power of their money to deprive the American people of a fair voice in these matters. This shrewd strategy is now posing an existential threat to our great American experiment in democratic governance.

Mark Twain provided a good ray of hope in these matters, and some guidance, when he wrote, "In this country we have one great privilege which they don't have in other countries. When a thing gets to be absolutely unbearable the people can rise up and throw it off. That's the finest asset we've got -- the ballot box."

To strengthen our democracy, we should take steps to ensure more people are able to exercise their right to vote, and listen to voices of all constituencies, and not ignore the best interests of the vast majority of the people. We should reduce the determining influence wielded by corporations and their lobbyists in our national decision-making and governance. We should support strengthening the power of workers and organized labor to collectively bargain, thereby reducing the colossal imbalance of power between employers and employees. And we should make the judiciary more independent and less politically partisan, and enact reforms that a significant majority of voters want, like guaranteeing reproductive rights to women, protecting DACA individuals, passing more auspiciously effective gun safety laws, protecting the environment, and getting Big Money out of the driver's seat of our politics.

"We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive."

--- Albert Einstein

Having a megalomaniacal demagogue demanding to be elected to exert dictator-like control over a freedom-loving people is decidedly antithetical to the common good. Those who commit racial violence or hate crimes against Jews, Asians, Muslims or people of color are despicable, and so are those who dog whistle for such violence. Those who perpetuate sexual violence against women are also disgustingly reprehensible. And those who incite political violence are guilty of a horrible crime against the common good, shredding social cohesion and causing harm to people and our communities and societies. Such people are like mob bosses, the most guilty of all.

The Big Lie - A Massive Grift

The Big Lie has become "a grift" that is being used to motivate Republican voters and donors to give money to support conservative candidates and political groups and their often democracy-undermining agenda.

We are faced right now with a severe deterioration of U.S. elections and liberal democracy. More than 100 top political scientists and democracy scholars issued a joint Statement of Concern in June 2021 to express their "growing alarm" about events since the 2020 presidential election. "They all agreed: Trump's crusade to delegitimize the 2020 presidential election, combined with the GOP's state-level efforts to suppress voting in state legislatures across the country, 'call into question whether the United States will remain a democracy.' These aren't the words of online pundits or partisan talking heads. Leading experts on how democracies survive -- *and how they fail* -- are issuing an urgent call to action to the Senate: Do whatever is necessary to pass federal voting rights protections."

A sensational investigative report published in the *New Yorker* makes it starkly clear that conservative organizations funded by *Dark Money* -- like the Heritage Foundation, ALEC and the Federalist Society -- are primary pushers of big lies about election fraud being told by Trump Republicans, and they are using the ginned up outrage over Donald Trump's loss to push laws that disenfranchise voters of color and millennials and Democratic-leaning groups. They are cynically doing this under the guise of "election integrity." The insightful investigative journalist Jane Mayer tells this sensational story in her article *THE BIG MONEY BEHIND THE BIG LIE*.

Note: Black lives matter. White lives matter. All lives matter. Greater equality is the only acceptable recourse.

Internecine efforts to prevent greater fairness are scary and dangerous, in addition to being undesirably anti-democratic. Another sinister dark-money organization, funded by secretive donors, is the group FreedomWorks that was founded by the billionaires David and Charles Koch. This organization "once concentrated on opposing government regulation, and is now demanding expanded government regulation of voters."

For decades now, these groups have proven to be extremely successful at getting narrowly focused and often unpopular laws passed through state legislatures. Since the 2020 elections, more than 400 laws have been introduced in 49 states with the tactical aim of keeping voters from casting their ballots one way or another. This rewriting of elections laws to favor Republicans and their donor-class agenda has led to 18 states enacting more than 30 laws aimed at suppressing votes. These laws are designed to achieve the goal of further rigging election

outcomes to benefit Republicans, and white people, and men over women. Reactionary Republican elected officials didn't like what voters had to say at the polls, so now they are silencing them.

Richard Haven, a law professor at the University of California, Irvine, and one of the foremost election-law experts remarked about the array of new laws passed by Republican state legislatures since the 2020 election: "It's not just about voter suppression. What I'm really worried about is election subversion." Some provisions in these new laws would make voter intimidation at the polls easier, and allow state legislatures to put in place partisan election officials that could overturn the expressed choices of the majority of voters. Trump now completely controls the Republican Party, and is basically "laying the groundwork to steal the 2024 elections."

David Frum, a political commentator and former speechwriter for George W. Bush, evocatively observed: "If conservatives become convinced that they cannot win democratically, they will not abandon conservatism. They will reject democracy." This is reprehensible, and it is NOT good. And it is happening right now in the USA.

It is a falsehood that election fraud is widespread in America. Actual instances of voter fraud in the U.S. have been rare. However, the truth of the matter is that there really IS consequential malfeasance in elections, and it involves voting restrictions, extreme partisan gerrymandering, institutional bribery, discriminatory practices, misinformation, big lies, the stacking of federal courts with political partisans, and the excessive influence wielded by Big Money and Dark Money interests and corporate money in elections and lobbying.

To win political battles, Republicans use *The Reactionary Political Debate Playbook: Karl Rove's Bag of Dirty Tricks*. One of the worst of these tactics is to accuse others of doing what they themselves are doing. Since the 2020 elections, Republican operatives have been repetitively proclaiming that their supporters must "stop the steal". But look here -- the main steal that has been happening for years has been the steal of excessive political influence by Republicans. They probably gain nearly 20 seats in the House of Representatives through surgical gerrymandering of congressional seats. They win many election contests by successfully depriving people of the ability to vote who are likely to vote for candidates opposing their own. They use deceit, subterfuge and devious messaging talking points, and fear mongering and right wing propaganda financed by Big Money donors to usurp and abuse power and push trickle down policies.

Ideas Seeking Their Place in the Sun

In the context of these deliberations, let us seek the truth and implications contained in Senator Edward Kennedy's remarks (born in 1932, he died in 2009), when he said: "If by a liberal, they mean someone who looks ahead and not behind; someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions; someone who cares about the welfare of the people, their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights, their civil liberties; someone who believes we can break through the stalemate and suspicion that grips us, if that is what they mean by a liberal, I am proud to be a liberal."

One odd thing about extreme conservatives is that they stridently defend freedom, but many of their ideas about freedom are contested concepts that are grotesquely contrary to Golden Rule understandings of freedom, or truly fair stances. The insightful linguist George Lakoff evaluated the nature of contested concepts like this in his thought provoking book *Whose Freedom? The Battle Over America's Most Important Idea*. This book is a reply to repeated invocations of "freedom" by conservative people trying to justify their narrow agendas.

This issue became a hot button issue during the calamitous coronavirus pandemic. Conservative politicians politicized preventative public health measures like mask wearing and social distancing mandates and lockdowns during crisis hospitalization surges, and then when vaccine requirements were put into effect.

Indiana University became ground zero for its eminently sensible requirement that students and faculty must get vaccinated to attend classes in person beginning in August 2021. This put sensible emphasis on the greater good of the student body and surrounding community. Eight students seemingly cynically filed an emergency appeal to the Supreme Court to overturn this requirement, despite the fact that it already allowed religious exemptions. They bizarrely demonstrated with signs that read MY BODY, MY CHOICE -- weird for a staunch red state where coldly-calculating politicians like Mike Pence have railed against women's reproductive rights for decades.

"Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on," wrote Mark Twain, "or

by imbeciles who really mean it."

It is sometimes valuable to give balanced consideration to all opinions. Steven Pinker, a respectable linguist and psychologist, wrote an article delving into the perspectives that George Lakoff provides to readers. He criticized Lakoff's analyses as a "cartoonish depiction of progressives as saintly sophisticates and conservatives as evil morons". But since truth generally lies somewhere between conflicting contentions, let's just agree that more honest perspectives on unalienable rights and fair-minded concepts of freedom and social responsibility are needed to ensure the broadest and most responsible possible constellation of personal liberties for the American people. Steven Pinker's astute summary is a bit abstruse, but worth hearing:

Conceptual metaphor, according to Lakoff, shows that all thought is based on unconscious physical metaphors, with beliefs determined by the metaphors in which ideas are framed. Cognitive science has also shown that thinking depends on emotion, and that a person's rationality is bounded by limitations of attention and memory. Together these discoveries undermine, in Lakoff's view, the Western ideal of conscious, universal and dispassionate reason based on logic, facts, and a fit to reality. Philosophy, then, is not an extended debate about knowledge and ethics, it is a succession of metaphors: Descartes' philosophy is based on the metaphor "knowing is seeing," Locke's on "the mind is a container," Kant's on "morality is a strict father." And political ideologies, too, cannot be understood in terms of assumptions or values, but only as rival versions of the metaphor "society is a family." The political right likens society to a family ruled by authoritarian parenting, whereas the political left prefers a family cared for with nurturant parenting.

Political debates, according to Lakoff, are contests between metaphors. Citizens are not rational, and pay no attention to facts, except as they fit into frames that are "fixed in the neural structures of their brains" by sheer repetition. In George W. Bush's first term, for example, the president promised "tax relief", which frames taxes as an affliction, the reliever as a hero, and anyone obstructing him as a villain. The Democrats were foolish to offer their own version of tax relief, which accepted the Republicans' framing; it was like asking people not to think of an elephant. Instead, they should have re-framed taxes as "membership fees" necessary to maintain the services and infrastructure of the society to which they belong.

Lakoff says that American conservatism appeals to a notion of freedom rooted in strict-father morality, but that this is a hijacking of the traditional American concept, which is based on progressive values of nurturance and empathy.

The left and the right are also divided by another cognitive style: conservatives think in terms of direct causation, where a person's actions have an immediate billiard-ball effect (people get fat because they lack self-control), while progressives think in terms of systemic causation, in which effects fall out of complex social, ecological, and economic systems (people are fat because of an economic system that allows the food industry to relentlessly promote unhealthy fast foods and lobby against government regulation).

An Aside on Foreign Entanglements

Theodore Roosevelt's strategy on the international stage was "to walk softly, but carry a big stick". This was an approach that is much more consistent with common good goals and the desire of our Founders to avoid foreign entanglements than our pursuit of interventionist military policies since the Second World War, and the use of the U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines to implement strategies that entangle us in foreign involvements. Aggression allows American armed forces and drone bombers to act as judge and jury and executioner in geostrategic operations that cause civilian deaths and casualties to countless numbers of innocent people, along with terrible turmoil and the displacement of millions, while heightening destabilizing risks of terrorist blowback.

George W. Bush once claimed that God told him, "George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq." I don't know if he was being stunningly delusional or coldly calculating and colossally deceitful in these words, but it seems suspicious that the rationalizations he used to sell the war in Iraq to the American people kept changing, and that they were formulated to downplay the costs and risks and highly probable negative outcomes of preemptive warfare aggression. I personally think Bush should have listened to a more reliable voice than God's, like Mark Twain's when he warned Americans that it is much easier to stay out of a war abroad than to get out. Mark Twain saw through

flimsy and deceptive rationales to the heart of the matter when he declared we ought to let peoples in other countries "deal with their own domestic questions in their own way". He expressed the convincing conviction that the American eagle should not put its talons into peoples in other lands, especially when motivated by fundamentalist religious motives to impose our values on *Persons Sitting in Darkness*.

The Ecology of Macro-Economic Theory

Macroeconomic theory provides the largest scale and biggest picture perspective of how we should rightly understand economic activities in terms of self-interest and the common good. There are basically two ideas of macroeconomics. One is that societies should be structured to maximize production and consumption and the creation of wealth. This theory posits that propitious prosperity will result from such policies, and that it will trickle down to the masses, and the prosperity will somehow allow the environmental harmfulness of business activities to be mitigated and the injustices associated with industrial capitalism to be alleviated.

A contrasting and more comprehensive idea is that we should emphasize behaviors and decision-making that create a broader prosperity that is consonant with the sustainable ecological health of human communities and natural ecosystems. This latter idea posits that only by nurturing, protecting and restoring the soundness of natural systems will a more salubrious and widely beneficial well-being be realized that will be most advantageous for the vast majority of people in the long run. This is the best and most probable route to a sustainable future.

"We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we now know that it is bad economics."

--- President Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 1937

It is simple, really, in a complex kind of way. There are overarching considerations to all our individual, national and global problems. Ultimately, the only sensible and moral courses of action are those that are in harmony with the long-term common good, *including the interests of people in future generations*.

Morality, in its origins, consists of those things that are essential to the health and preservation of a social group. Moral right action should therefore be a function of sociology, and what is right for society depends on the well-being of the majority AND of people in the future. Right action is not merely a function of economic expediency or political ideology or of religious orthodoxy, theological dogma or stimulated fears. Since the things that are right and proper can most accurately be seen as the ones that are best in the long run, it is clearly not right to neglect the interests of our heirs in future generations by pandering principally to greedy and heedlessly short term oriented interest groups today.

If we irresponsibly choose to live as if there will be no tomorrow, the tomorrows that our children and theirs, and theirs, and theirs will inhabit will be ones that are far less salubrious than they could be, and should be.

Illuminating Reflection

We need a better gauge of what really serves to increase our "national happiness". This would be a truer measure of the common good, not just some cartoonish propaganda or manipulative whitewashed ideological deception.

The Golden Rule ethic of reciprocal respect represents a salubriously adaptive truth that provides the most auspicious guidance in human affairs. This age-old ethic predates the Bible, and embodies an evolutionary fact that cooperative collaboration within social groups is the overriding human good. Even in stiff competition, a reasonable modicum of fairness is a prime value.

Properly regulated competition has many positive aspects. In contrast, laissez-faire ideologies are anti-social and anti-democratic when they allow monopoly practices or harms to consumers or excessive pollution or financial fraud or the wanton squandering of natural resources or excessive exploitation of the populace or the absurd piling on of national debt to give the highest income earners nearly the lowest tax rates since 1929.

Praying for Ascendancy and Victory

"If you beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon a neighbor at the same time."

--- Mark Twain, *The War Prayer*

Barack Obama noted in his first Inaugural Address that "a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous." A broadly-based prosperity is much more in accord with the common good and the ideals of our Founders than a narrowly-focused one. It is a tragedy for the majority of Americans that the dominant ideological arguments of the Reagan, Bush and Trump Republican years rationalized bigger disparities of wealth in the world and a new age of conspicuous consumption and stoked inequalities. It is now time for us to redesign our system to ensure that trickle-down economics is replaced by policies that encourage middle class and bottom-up prosperity. It is time for governments and tax systems to be made fairer and more progressively structured.

Contemporary conservatives say that lower taxes, laissez-faire governance, smaller government and free markets are the best ways to achieve general prosperity. They promote public debt-financed tax cuts that mainly benefit taxpayers who have the highest incomes and highest net worths. They claim that tax breaks are the best strategy to stimulate the economy and create jobs and wealth, and ramp up investments. 'Trust us!', they say, claiming that such policies will trickle down to benefit all Americans. Such people are often basically trying to make economic and moral justifications for greed and selfishness.

On the other hand, many others see empathy-based moral values that champion both individual and social responsibility as being more important than conservative ideas that leave out the latter half of the equation. These people understand the compelling need for protecting the common wealth and assuring ecological sanity and striving for domestic tranquility and peaceful coexistence. Such people recognize an overriding need for us to restructure our societies to ensure greater economic justice. They see that it is much fairer to make the tax system more steeply graduated. They believe the government should be managed frugally and more efficiently. They know that federal and state governments need to demonstrate greater integrity to earn the trust of citizens, so they advocate that they play stronger, smarter, more sensible roles in preventing monopoly abuses of power and corporate corruption. They also understand that we should find better ways to prevent political influence peddling, institutionalized bribery, government waste and corporate fraud.

Many people also see the greater social good of higher minimum wages for workers, so they support rights for workers to organize to improve their bargaining power and obtain more of the benefits of productivity increases and a fairer share in the hard-fought struggle between capital and labor. And the need is glaring for reforms to be made to criminal justice laws and systemic racial injustices in the United States. At the very least, mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent offenders should be reduced, and initiatives should be implemented that would be effective in reducing recidivism. Bipartisan efforts in Congress to achieve some of these just and cost-saving objectives were stymied for a long time by political calculation, but were finally passed. Further steps to end the war on drugs and racial injustices in incarceration need to be taken.

The Proper Role of Government in Our Lives

The main institutions that have determining influence on our national priorities are corporations and governmental entities. Our economic system is flexible and resilient largely due to the initiative of private enterprise and small businesses and the processes of 'creative destruction' that allow well-run companies to prosper while poorly run companies go into bankruptcy. But the economy has gotten so complex that without effective Federal Reserve monetary policies and spending by the federal government, economic recessions could slide into worse depressions. Government bureaucracies, on the other hand, can be wasteful, inflexible and vulnerable to being exploited by corporate interests and public employee unions.

History shows that too little regulation of business, particularly of banks and large corporations, leads to unfair dealings and bad practices and many costs being externalized onto society. These things can cause significant social and environmental harms. Economic hard times generally reveal that inadequate regulation of the economy contributes to an increase in debt leveraging and overly risky speculation and the inflation and bursting of economic bubbles. And when the government allows huge businesses to dominate the economy, there are inevitably undesirable increases in malfeasance and inequities and injustices.

It is also clear that governments have a propensity to become swaddled in red tape and fiscally irresponsible actions. The federal government has indulged in unprecedented amounts of deficit spending since 2001, dangerously driving up the national debt from \$6 trillion to over \$31 trillion today, and it excessively panders to

vested interests and gives ridiculously generous amounts of corporate welfare to companies that oppose innovative new initiatives and industries. The need for fundamental reform is abundantly clear. Instead, the only thing Congress generally delivers is timid tinkering, or even worse, misguided legislation that is regressive, retrogressive, and favorable mainly to interest groups that already have the most power in our dysfunctional political system. During the pandemic, huge amounts of money have been expediently borrowed for all kinds of purposes, piling obligations on every taxpayer in every future year to provide needed relief.

The main reason we do not have lean government and well-regulated businesses in the USA is because CEOs and large multinational corporations have excessive influence in our national politics. They make sure that laissez-faire ideological arguments have outsized influence, and that regulations are minimized. As a result, businesses are subjected to ineffective rules, and they pay low effective amounts of corporate tax. The reality is that our public policies are too myopically focused, and short-term oriented, so they are contrary to the common good.

The time has come today for us to work together to achieve goals that are more likely to result in the greater good. Our leaders should cooperate together to ensure that these goals are sensibly formulated. While powerful forces oppose a broadening of prosperity, our nation's true ideals offer positive guidance. Let us again hearken back to the ideals of our Founders.

Thomas Paine, writing in *Common Sense* in 1776, called government "a necessary evil." He argued that government should be constituted principally for the public good, and NOT for "despotic" ends. He believed true security for citizens is the proper purpose of government, and that national policies should be designed to ensure security at the least expense and for the broadest benefit. His idea of the optimum form of government was one modeled after a principle of nature: "that the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered."

Wow! -- How far we have come from that concept! Congress, take note! Congressional approval ratings have been very low in recent years, and for good reasons. For one, complexity, not simplicity, dominates our policy-making in Congress today, for the basic reason that the more complex a law is designed to be, the more fine print there will be in the law and thus the more hidden lobbyist provisions it can contain to advance the narrow goals of special interest groups. This complexity almost always comes at the public expense.

Thomas Paine envisioned an American nation that would have a fair and representative democracy and respectable guarantees of a maximum amount of individual liberties for all citizens. He asserted that such an auspicious form of government would be best suited to "embracing and confederating" all the various competing interests throughout the country. I feel strongly that it is of utmost importance for our society to become fairer and more just, and that effective mechanisms should be put in place to make sure our collective activities and resource usages are more likely to be indefinitely sustainable. To achieve these salubrious goals, a proper balance is needed between the extremes of anarchic freedom and centralized control.

What should the proper role of government really be in our lives? Ronald Reagan glibly declared in his first Inaugural Address: "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government IS the problem." With this, Reagan set off on a concerted effort to cut taxes for the rich and increase military spending, and to reduce regulations on banks and corporate entities, and to champion laissez-faire capitalism and weaken the power and prerogatives of working people. In contrast, Barack Obama stated in his Inaugural Address: "The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works for the majority of people." Surely we need a federal government that is less bureaucratic and less profligate where it should be, and smarter in its operations and spending and investments of taxpayer dollars. The overriding goal should be to make government work better for the vast majority of the people.

A significant development has been taking place in the past century that requires clearer understanding. The size of the U.S. government has increased dramatically, as measured by federal spending as a percent of Gross Domestic Product. Such spending was less than 10% in all the years before 1918, then it spiked to almost 30% in 1919 to help finance the First World War. Government spending averaged about 12% through the decade of the 1920s, and then 20% through the Great Depression. It spiked to more than 50% in 1945 in fighting the Second World War, and then it averaged 27% in the 1950s, 30% in the 1960s, 32% in the 1970s, 35% in the 1980s and

1990s, and 37% in the first decade of the 21st century. This increasing trend culminated in 2009, during the financial crisis and recession, when government spending totaled more than 45% of GDP, according to data at the website, usgovernmentspending.com. (It got even higher during the desperate days of the pandemic.)

This raises a question whether such growth in the size of government is a good thing or a bad thing for the greater good. People in conservative think tanks adduce a long list of reasons that big government is bad. These reasons are, on the whole, somewhat convincing. But other nations like those in Scandinavia have a higher average quality of life compared to people in the U.S., and their governments levy higher taxes and spend relatively more money than ours to provide their citizens with inexpensive college education, universal health care, better retirement programs, paid sick leave, more vacation time, good child care and more affordable housing.

The growth of U.S. government spending and the national debt seems like an undesirable state of affairs because it is a considerable risk to run huge budget deficits and have so much government debt, and to support what are unaffordably large military expenditures year after year after year. We face the serious dilemma today that if we take drastic steps to balance the budget, it could cause another recession and increases in unemployment. This is a lesson that was learned in 1937 and 1938, when cuts in government spending and a tightening of the money supply torpedoed a nascent economic recovery from the severe Depression. Actions that seemed to be responsible at the time were thus seen to have caused a contraction in the economy and higher joblessness.

Advocates of privatization point out that government ownership or control of resources gives political considerations more clout than economic considerations in determining how resources are allocated. Privatization is NOT, however, the panacea for all social ills, because it also creates many problems. Instead of promoting positive goals like lower costs, greater efficiency, better management and the improvement of society, the outcome of privatization is often a spike in price gouging, costly no-bid contracting, excessive fees, socialized costs, increased fraud, more unfair cronyism, and less accountability. The privatization of government functions and concomitant deregulation can create big new opportunities for rich persons and giant corporations to swindle taxpayers. These are NOT good things!

"A banker is a fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining, but wants it back the minute it begins to rain."

--- Mark Twain

The Supreme Court Sides with Corporate Dominance of our National Priorities

Republican appointees to the Supreme Court like Clarence Thomas, John Roberts and Samuel Alito have worked together to make retrogressive rulings on a variety of issues. The most blatant example of this was the January 2010 *Citizens United* ruling that overturned campaign finance laws that had restricted corporate spending in elections. The high court thereby "rejected the common sense of the American people, who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt," according to one of the dissenting Justices. The impacts of skyrocketing political spending have been harsh.

Congress should correct this challenge to the common good by enacting legislation that would make our government more responsive to the people. If American citizens are to have a fair voice in our national priorities, we need to find a way to govern corporations better so that their already powerful influence does not make institutional bribery even more pervasive, especially in light of Supreme Court rulings that effectively allow huge organizations to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence election outcomes. There are many good ways to accomplish this, including by enacting a 'Fair Elections Now Act' and expanding voting rights (NOT by restricting them!), and by ending extreme partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts.

Better Ideas and Better Plans for a Better Future

It would be an excellent plan for us to manage our national affairs better, and to support more sensible priorities and smarter, fairer governance. Instead, we have too much red tape, dysfunctional regulation and bureaucratic inefficiencies, on the one hand, and too little good supervision, oversight, honorable integrity, and smart policies and rules, on the other. And we have too much influence peddling and political corruption.

Many of these ideas were set forth well before Trump Republicans seized control of the federal government and began broadly abrogating most of the sensible proposals advocated herein. Check out *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times* for incisive perspectives on this development and its woe-filled impacts.

Regulatory agencies often fail to act in the public interest because of "regulatory capture". This refers to the process by which powerful vested interest groups and their lobbyists succeed in getting what they want for themselves to the detriment of the greater public interest. When such regulatory capture occurs, dominant businesses and industries use their insider political power and financial resources to "capture" favors rather than allowing the agencies to fulfill the regulatory purposes they were created to enforce. Regulatory capture operates in ways similar to the Tragedy of the Commons phenomenon in which individuals or groups with high-stakes interests in regulatory decisions or policy outcomes focus their energies and resources to gain outcomes they prefer, while members of the public, who each have a less focused individual stake in the outcome, are much less influential. When intently-focused entities devote their energies to particular policies by capturing agencies whose purpose is to regulate them, it almost always undermines the greater good. One glaring instance of this was the failure of regulatory agencies like the Federal Reserve and the SEC to anticipate and prevent the financial meltdown of 2008-2009.

Once Trump managed to grab power in the 2016 elections, regulatory capture was superseded by irresponsible Trojan horse agency heads who sabotaged the purpose and missions of the government agencies directly. This was true particularly of Scott Pruitt and his successor, the former coal lobbyist Andrew Wheeler at the Environmental Protection Agency, and Ryan Zinke in the Interior Department and his successor, the corporate lobbyist David Bernhardt, and Betsy DeVos in the Department of Education, and Bill Barr as Attorney General.

Since environmental issues are crucial to all people in the future, it was catastrophic to have fossil fuel interests largely control Trump's EPA, and demonstrate some of the most egregiously irresponsible ecological short-termism imaginable. New questions emerged almost daily in 2018 about EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's ethics violations and profligate spending, but his reprehensible assertion related to his position was even more worrying when he said, "the biblical world view with respect to these issues is that we have a responsibility to manage, cultivate and harvest the natural resources that we've been blessed with." Religious persons who interpret the Bible to mean human dominion over all other forms of life on Earth without responsible stewardship of Creation are rationalizing actions by immoral profiteers and treacherous spin doctors and cantankerous exploiters.

These facts once again lead to the inescapable conclusion that our economic and political system must be honestly and extensively reformed so that corporations and government are better managed in ways consistent with the greater good.

Thomas Paine noted that freedom can be dangerous in the hands of the poor, due to ignorance, just as it can be dangerous in the hands of the rich, due to excessive influence. This is why he advocated public education to overcome ignorance, and a robust representative democracy strong enough to prevent political corruption.

Both liberty and equality are important to the common good. To the extent that these two ideals conflict, we should wisely strive to establish the fairest balance between them to benefit the maximum number of people. Liberties should be protected by assuring openness in our societies and the freedom of speech and religion for all, and by establishing laws that guarantee a maximum amount of economic self-determination and individual rights. And equality should be guaranteed especially with regard to fairness of opportunity and representation for every individual. We need fairer elections -- not "electoral autocracy" afflicted by dirty election tricks, censorship, disinformation and repression. And we need equal treatment for everyone under the law. Persistent efforts by retrogressive leaders that serve to bring about more extreme inequalities are anathema in a democratic society, and they should be opposed and reversed.

Broader perspectives should be welcomed. Economists, when they are being cautious and honest, point out that it is unwise and improvident to borrow heavily from taxpayers in the future for misguided purposes. They know it is folly to promote priorities that are too short-term oriented because such courses of action are likely to leave a disastrous legacy for our descendants. Ecological philosophers and environmentalists advise that long-term impacts should be taken into account in all assessments of courses of action taken by governments and businesses. They

also provide us with cautionary tales regarding the damaging and risky impacts of activities like the depletion of fisheries and the clear-cutting of forests, and they warn us of the increasing costs of greenhouse emissions-stoked climate change and risks associated with recklessly wasteful uses of fossil fuels and fresh water and other natural resources. They tell us that there is an overarching need for a transformation in our societies to make them sustainable. And they remind us about the risks of failing to courageously address the causes and consequences of human population overshoot.

Religious fundamentalists also weigh in on the common good, as they understand it. They proclaim they have the absolute truth about what is right and wrong, and what is good and evil, and what is best for us sinners. They derive their truths from a variety of ancient 'holy books' in which the alleged words of their particular God are interpreted by religious authorities in ways that are often self-serving, male chauvinistic, inflexibly rigid, narrow-minded, domineering and/or doctrinaire. Established churches should become less reactionary and more a force for good in our societies. They should cooperate with reasonable politicians, statesmen and diplomats to make sure they do not become forces that contribute to discriminatory prejudices, conflict, terrorism, war, genocide or ecological calamity. They should stop opposing family planning programs and contraception, because most of the biggest challenges that face humanity are made worse by having too many people using limited resources and contributing to ecological overshoot of the carrying capacity of the Earth for our demanding kind.

Let's emulate Thomas Paine in his responsible credo: "To do good is my religion."

The Long View of Historical Change

Our Founders made a courageous commitment to the creation of a nation based on ideals of individual liberty, equality, social justice, fair representation and limited government. They did this to "promote the general Welfare", as stated in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. Many Americans have been trying to ensure that we live up to these ideals ever since.

Many progressive milestones have been enacted to achieve these ideals, and to reduce the disparities between America's ideals and reality. Salient examples of this progress are the Bill of Rights ratified in 1791, the legal freeing of black slaves in 1865, the granting to women of the right to vote in 1920, various worker protections established during the twentieth century, the New Deal that included a Social Security system and other safety net programs that were created in the 1930s, Medicare for Americans age 65 and older that was established in 1965, and consumer rights, investor rights and civil rights that were strengthened in the 1960s, along with vital environmental protections set forth in the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Wilderness Act of 1964.

This progress has been difficult to achieve, and America has at times slid backwards, especially during times of war. For example, habeas corpus rights were denied during the Civil War; dissent was suppressed during World War I; Americans of Japanese ancestry were deprived of their freedom, rights and property when they were interned in prison camps during World War II; illegal surveillance was done on anti-war protestors and the underground press during the Vietnam War; and numerous incursions have been made against civil liberties, privacy and other fundamental citizen rights in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This is another good reason for citizens to demand that their government resort to war ONLY when all other alternatives have been exhausted, and to have a defensive strategy, not an aggressively offensive one.

Nonetheless, the long trajectory of American political history has been toward a fuller realization of Founding ideals. This includes a clearer recognition of the overarching importance of doctrines that emphasize fairness and the common good. After the original 13 colonies declared independence from Great Britain in 1776 in a Big Bang of revolutionary zeal, and joined together to form the United States of America, our Founders established a government with a strong system of checks and balances. They recognized with visceral immediacy the serious undesirability of abuses of power and taxation without fair representation, so they created a new form of government that governed under the auspices of a democratic Constitution and Bill of Rights and fair-minded rules of law. The Founders were justifiably suspicious of big government, big businesses, infringements on personal freedoms, entangling foreign alliances, and anything that would subvert the will of the people.

Today, another revolutionary transformation is required to ensure that we continue our historical progress toward making our societies better. Our nation's policies should be made more consonant with the bigger-picture greater good, and we really should strive to realize a new and more positive relationship between all of humanity and the web of life that includes and sustains us.

This new relationship should include a fairer and smarter balance between common good goals and (1) the goals of consumers, who want good values for products and services at low prices, (2) the goals of investors, who want to get high investment returns, regardless of the harm this may cause to society and the environment, (3) the goals of government employees, some of whom appear to be more concerned with getting bigger benefits for themselves than fairly serving the public, and (4) the impulse of corporations that serve as tools of the wealthy to maximize profits by getting subsidies, tax reductions and expanded allowances for them to externalize worker healthcare costs and pollution and environmental damage costs onto society.

This new relationship is unnecessarily hard to achieve because of the Supreme Court's *Citizen's United* ruling that overturned limitations on campaign financing. The way to establish this new relationship now is for Congress to honorably formulate intelligent rules that honestly help ensure that the best interests of *We the People* will be more fairly represented. With the ungodly ascendancy of too many extremist MAGA Republicans, unfortunately, these hopes are suffering severe setbacks.

Strategic Initiatives

George Lakoff wrote about strategic initiatives in his thought-provoking book, *Don't Think of an Elephant*. Such initiatives are plans that have broad impacts across many issues. For instance, conservatives give high priority to making regressive cuts in taxes, and such efforts accomplish a wide range of objectives they hold dear, including enriching wealthy supporters, receiving big contributions from donors, constraining social program spending, and reducing funding for government agencies that should be regulating corporations and holding them accountable.

An example of a contrasting liberal 'strategic initiative' is the Endangered Species Act. This law is designed to protect species and require companies to mitigate the environmental harms they cause, and help defend public lands from damaging exploitation. It also makes it more necessary to plan ahead wisely with a wise long-term sustainable orientation. A progressively structured system of taxation is another example of a liberal strategic initiative, for it raises money to finance a wide variety of needed programs and functions, and does so in a way that is equal for every person at every level of income. One goal of such a plan is to tighten controls on the fraudulent scheme of borrowing money from people tomorrow to give it to people who don't need it today.

George Lakoff writes about traditional American progressive values, principles and policy directions. It seems abundantly clear to me that Broad Prosperity, Effective Government, Mutual Responsibility and a Stronger America would be better goals to achieve than narrower conservative ideals of a Strong Military, Strict Father Values, Laissez-Faire 'Free' Markets, Low Marginal Tax Rates on Rich People and Ineffective Smaller Government.

Since the effect of giving tax breaks to the already wealthy is to increase disparities of wealth, such policies make our societies less equitable and physically less healthy, and therefore less secure. Contrasting policies that increase social fairness have positive implications for the overall physical and psychological health of a nation's people. This was proved to be true by the impacts of measures implemented in Japan after World War II. When the U.S. occupied Japan after the unconditional Japanese surrender on board the USS Missouri on September 2, 1945, many of the Allied Occupation staffers who worked under General Douglas MacArthur were policy veterans of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal program. At the time, Japan was a deeply unequal society. Americans worked to transform it into a more equal one by using the "three D's" of economic equality: demilitarization, democratization of the political process, and decentralization of wealth and power.

These reforms made people in Japanese society more equal, and the population became much healthier as a result. Sensationally, the average life span of a person in Japan was less than 45 years before World War II, and then life expectancy increased extraordinarily because of the public policies put into effect to increase equality in Japanese society. Within 40 years, the people of Japan had achieved the greatest average longevity of any nation in the world at over 80 years!

The U.S., meanwhile, has chosen to pursue policies that are increasingly anti-egalitarian since 1980. A significant increase in inequality in American society is revealed by trends toward more pronounced disparities in earnings and wealth between the top 1% and everyone else. The "conservative" policies that helped create this state of affairs have led to America being ranked behind 46 other countries in the world in life expectancy today, according to World Bank Data for 2023. Woe is us! Our sadly unfair and dysfunctional healthcare system is disturbingly costly, and so are such things as deregulatory policies that create risky economic bubbles and military policies that harm and infuriate people around the world. We should implement initiatives that are more egalitarian -- domestic 3 D's! -- to create greater fairness in our health care system, as well as in opportunity, education, legal justice, political representation, taxation and the military.

The health insurance industry is dominated by huge corporations obsessed with making bigger profits every year, so they have rapidly increased insurance premiums at the same time that they deny coverage to millions of people and try to avoid providing insurance to people who have 'pre-existing condition' health problems. These strategies may be good for maximizing profits, but they are negative for the vast majority of people!

The exposure of faults and weaknesses of ideological doctrines make it clear that we need to be more flexible. Flexibility will allow us to be more effective in achieving propitious outcomes. Reckless consumerism, lavishly wasteful resource usages, trickle-down unfairness, speculative excesses, ideological shortsightedness, ruthlessly exploitive disaster capitalism, a lack of sensible regulation and oversight, and antagonism to sensible family planning programs are all facets of a doctrinal worldview that denies vital understandings about ecological well-being, sustainable resource uses, and the value of moderation, prudence and smart pragmatism.

President Obama made commendable efforts to create a form of post-partisan political pragmatism that would result in more positive conditions for our nation and the world. Millions of people hoped from the day he was first elected that he would succeed in fostering truly farsighted, even transcendent change. A review of Obama's eight years in office reveals how astonishingly high the hurdles are to basic reforms in our political system, and it is astonishing how rancorous Republican opposition was to his efforts -- and now to those of President Biden. But this in no way diminishes the overarching need for fair-minded cooperative problem solving!

After Trump Republicans seized power in 2016, they demonstrated loyalty to their Party's extreme policies, not to the best interests of the country. This shows that short-term goals can be achieved even though they are contrary to the common good. Once Donald Trump was in power, he made it his top priority to try to reverse almost everything President Obama accomplished, as if in a fit of egomaniacal and racially prejudiced pique.

Trump is a lifelong self-promoting con man who promised with demagogic fervor to "drain the swamp" in D.C. -- and then filled his administration with a cast of characters so compromised by conflicts of interest that the news almost every day brought to light a toxic brew of new instances of betrayals of public trust. In this pervasive culture of corruption, treachery and tyranny were par for the course, and these fraudulent eminences cheated on their scorecards by claiming their double bogies were birdies, banking on dishonesty and deceitful spin to absolve them of their wide-ranging misconduct and wrongdoing.

The Republican Party deserved to lose power for having fostered the negative conditions that led to political extremism and divisive developments, for it betrayed the country with its crazy policy priorities and pandering slavishly to rich people, and its helping to empower giant corporations, male chauvinists, white supremacists, racists, abusers of authority, violent domestic extremists, opponents of environmental protections, and those who are against sensible gun regulations and comprehensive immigration reforms.

"We're living in a season of corruption the likes of which we haven't seen but in a banana republic," observed Steve Schmidt, a veteran GOP strategist and Trump critic, after one of many chaotic weeks in the Trump administration. "Everywhere you look you see incompetence, malfeasance, self-dealing and corruption."

Trump was one of the most pathetic "standard bearers" in political history. One of his most prominent social-conservative supporters, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, made a revealing observation in reaction to the disclosure of the outrage-provoking *Access Hollywood* tape in which Trump told Billy Bush that he liked to kiss

beautiful women even without their consent, and "grab them by the pussy". Perkins said these guarded words: "My personal support for Donald Trump has never been based upon shared values."

I guess not! Perkins is a sycophant who gives support to a man who was a "one man Constitutional crisis", as the ACLU stated before the 2016 election. "In the event of a Trump presidency," the ACLU had written, "we have undertaken a constitutional analysis of his most controversial policy proposals. These include his pledges to deport over 11 million undocumented immigrants, to ban Muslims from entering the United States, to surveil American Muslims and their houses of worship, to torture again, and to revise libel laws. We have found them all wanting, to say the least. According to our analysis, Trump's proposals taken together would violate the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth Amendments to the Constitution."

It is a national embarrassment that the once respectable Republicans have demonstrated obsequious loyalty to such a man, for he is deplorably an ultimate divider, as if his presidency were a Reality TV Show where winning by any means whatsoever was the top priority. In this situation, victory by Republican politicians means the American people suffer the imposition of a disastrously illegitimate set of policies. Many Republican politicians were forced to distance themselves from the toxic Trumpster after his outrage-provoking words bragging about sexual assaults on beautiful women came to light in October 2016, just before the elections. Yet almost every Republican in Congress and state politics is willing to let women die from complications from pregnancy, as a blogger at OnTheLeftCoast has written, "even if those pregnancies came from the kind of assault or rape that Donald Trump boasted about. Let that sink in. Republicans might say they're disgusted by Trump's words but they're perfectly willing, no, they DEMAND, that women be allowed to die if they were raped. And we're supposed to believe they're upset with Trump's statements? Really?"

"Oh, I'm sure a few Republicans will condemn Trump's latest outrage. They'll do the political math and decide he's too much of a liability for them (I'm looking at you, Paul Ryan). But until they stop trying to control women's bodies with transvaginal ultrasounds, or forcing the Hyde amendment into every spending bill, or requiring burial of miscarriages, or demanding 72 hours "waiting periods" to get an abortion, they are no different than Trump bragging about grabbing pussy. They just use different words to get what they want."

Trump asserted with bizarre dishonesty, "Nobody has more respect for women than I do". That claim was really preposterous, given his oft-repeated vulgar insults and grotesquely demeaning comments about women who he deems to be insufficiently attractive, and in light of his crudely lewd, sociopathically lascivious and piggish sexual objectification of women, and his history of cheating on his wives and sexually harassing women, and his "locker room talk" descriptions of how he likes to abuse his celebrity status to kiss and grope women against their will. Treating women as sex objects is a seminal aspect of gender interactions in male dominated patriarchal societies, but times, they are a-changin', and everyone would be best off if people strived to become more inclusive, more nimble, and more supportive of gender equity, golden rule fairness, broadly shared opportunity and general prosperity, along with more expansive initiatives designed to help improve human well-being.

Common Sense and Precautionary Principles

Humanity has been making big gambles, rather than acting with precautionary prudence and sensibility. Our leaders have created perverse incentives and stimulated debt leverage and encouraged risk-taking, resulting in the financial crisis in 2008, and then a country unnecessarily vulnerable to the ravages of a global pandemic. They have hyped up wars and religious conflicts and divisive antagonisms, and domineering forces have continued their unmitigated exploitation of planetary ecosystems, damaging them mindlessly even though we ultimately depend on them completely. And the American people have allowed social conservatives and religious evangelicals to grab excessive influence in our societies. These partisans often oppose sensible family planning measures and broader initiatives to educate and empower women.

One of the most sensible strategies would be to follow more honest and reasonable approaches focused on actions and behaviors consistent with shared prosperity and the common good. This idea is like the "no regrets" approach that serves as the basis for the precautionary principle enunciated in Principle 15 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This principle states: "Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage,

lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

All legislative considerations should include a Precautionary Principle of ecological propriety. Such principles should be designed to make sure we "pay forward" deeds that are auspicious for our heirs, rather than leaving them a legacy of depleted resources, polluted environs, widespread injustices, record levels of burdensome and risk-laden debt, and ruthlessly internecine conflicts. To the extent that our actions damage the environment and are not sustainable, new methods should be developed to guarantee the vitality of the environment and protect the prospects of life on Earth in coming years. We simply cannot continue to plunder the planet without regard for the consequences of our actions.

We should also establish a Precautionary Social Principle that enshrines a fair and bipartisan concern for the common good as the highest value. Barack Obama was right when he noted that "a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous", so an ethical earthquake is needed to shake up our entrenched, wasteful and inequitable priorities, and to emasculate shortsighted doctrines and deceptive propaganda.

Another Precautionary Principle is needed in arenas of economics and finance. We should limit the level of our national debt to 100% of GDP, and take strong steps to prevent economic bubbles and unsustainable schemes. The Ponzi scheme perpetrated by Bernard Madoff, which "robbed Peter to pay Paul", cost thousands of people their life savings, yet a much larger Ponzi-type scheme continues unabated. This is an insidiously inter-generational one -- the Social Security system. Workers today pay taxes from their earnings to the government for Social Security. These funds, plus matching amounts paid by employers, are put in a fund that is continuously being disbursed to people who have reached retirement age. As more and more people retire, the number of people collecting Social Security payouts increases and the burden on current workers becomes more oppressive. Eventually the system will be bankrupt unless it is restructured and made more financially sound. Without a growing population of working younger people and immigrants, the Social Security scheme will fall apart as currently structured. It is like a Ponzi scheme rather than a sound retirement plan because money from today's workers is given to retired people rather than being saved and invested for future obligations. The federal government has, in fact, borrowed every cent and more of Social Security "surpluses" for decades and then commingled the money with general funds and squandered it on annual exigencies and excesses of the moment.

It is time to honestly begin treating Social Security as a retirement insurance plan rather than a Ponzi-like scheme, as spelled out in *Radically Simple Ways to Make America Fairer, and to Fix Both Social Security and Health Care So We Can Move On to Address Much Bigger Issues*.

A Precautionary Principle of Reproductive Responsibility should also be embraced. Nadya Suleman represented a metaphor for human irresponsibility; she is the woman who had six children she could not afford to support, and nonetheless sought artificial fertility procedures that resulted in the birth of octuplets in 2009 -- another eight children! Just as Suleman was stupidly selfish, and her fertility doctors were outrageously irresponsible, we are collectively being foolish to deny we cannot afford to continue policies that encourage rapid population growth.

The quality of life for our children, and NOT the number of them we can spawn, must become a more important consideration. From this qualitative standpoint, the opposition to family planning programs by social conservatives should be overcome and rejected. Public family planning programs prevent about 2 million unwanted pregnancies and 800,000 abortions every year, according to a study by Guttmacher Institute. This saves billions of dollars in taxpayer money and staves off more negative outcomes. Let's take a stand against imposed bans on abortions.

The Promise of More Fairly Shared Prosperity

Worker productivity rose more than 100% in the 35 years from the end of World War II until 1980. Simultaneously, median family income rose by roughly a similar amount. Since then, worker productivity has more than doubled again, but median family income has barely increased. To create a fairer system in which prosperity is more broadly shared, we need to implement policies that reconnect real growth in wages to worker productivity. This could be done by tying both management and worker incentives to performance, increasing the minimum wage, strengthening labor laws, and expanding education and job training. And by levying higher taxes on the dividends

and capital gains of shareholders, and reducing taxes on working people so that all the benefit of corporate profits do not go to capitalists while little goes to working people. Or we should implement progressive tax reforms that would reduce taxes on every taxpayer's first \$50,000 in taxable income, and offset the lower tax revenues with higher rates of tax on higher levels of income.

Studs Terkel was a working class hero who died in 2008 at the age of 96. Studs was a journalist who stood up against the Establishment to defend the rights of workers and the common good. He always seemed to be a step ahead of everyone else, expressing outspoken opposition to fascism and McCarthyism in his early years. At a time when the mainstream media was largely enthralled by Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" rhetoric in 1986, Studs neatly sized up the era: "The only thing trickling down from the top is meanness."

Studs Terkel received a Lifetime Achievement award in 2006 from the workers' advocacy organization American Rights at Work. After accepting the award, he said: "What brings workers together can be a belief, a hope of improving the climate and community at work -- the spaces where so many of us spend so much of our lives. Respect on the job, and a voice at the workplace, shouldn't be something Americans have to work overtime to achieve." Right on! It would be a great contribution to the common good to find better ways to deal more respectfully with working people, and to provide them with fairer compensation and more influence at work.

Hurrah for Studs Terkel! Asked if he was optimistic about the future, Terkel was cautious, but he did say that "you've gotta have hope. Hope dies last." Hope is good, and it is even better with actualizing energy to provide improved prospects of flourishing and salvation in the here and now. Unfortunately for the vast majority of the American people, MAGA Republicans have been abusing power by professing to care mainly about working people to dupe voters into giving them support, but then diabolically pushing regressive changes in taxation that are primarily benefitting the biggest shareholders in corporations and the wealthiest Americans.

We should rightly demand greater honesty and fairness, and throw the authority abusers out of office who are betraying the American people.

A Progressive 'Slippery Slope Strategic Initiative' for the Greater Good

Think about the scope and nature of our human activities, and how exhaustively and rapidly we are depleting natural resources like fossil fuels. Consider also the enormous wealth transfer from consumers to those who get profits from fossil fuel production and who externalize costs of pollution and fighting wars in the Middle East to protect access to oil supplies. And think about deforestation and the billions of tons of greenhouse gases we are spewing into the atmosphere every year, and related phenomena of global warming and changes in weather patterns almost everywhere, all of which contribute to growing environmental problems and assaults on biological diversity. Here are some of the most serious and far-reaching challenges that humankind has ever faced, and it is simply astonishing that ALL these existentially daunting obstacles could be effectively addressed with the same policy prescription: by committing to making significant investments in a new Apollo-like program to develop renewable clean energy alternatives, more efficient resource usages and better ways of conserving fossil fuels.

A bold strategic initiative like this would contribute to solving many of the big problems we face, and it would also create jobs, improve public health, and mitigate impacts of anthropogenic climate disruptions. Such an initiative should be designed to help developing countries with new greener technologies for their energy needs. By reducing existing subsidies to fossil fuel and nuclear industries, and increasing investments in renewable energy alternatives, there would be a desirable movement away from our dependence on polluting fuels and resources that are non-renewable.

Powerful resistance exists to such courses of action. This is ironic, since a sensible restructuring of our economies is clearly needed to make our human activities sustainable over the coming decades and centuries. We should alter the cold calculus that contributes to these increasingly adverse circumstances and the partisan bickering and ideological deceptions promoted by excessively greedy vested interest groups and deceitful leaders who are hijacking our national priorities and causing us to fail to solve overarching problems.

Everyone across the entire political spectrum from very conservative to very liberal should be willing to come together to form a broad consensus as to the optimal courses of action for the greater good. Then we need to

support good plans to achieve these courses of action. This should include powerful motivating incentives and disincentives designed to encourage people to act in more responsible ways. This would be among the best means for ensuring that we move along a pragmatic path toward well-being in the long run.

Here is this concept presented in *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Population Overshoot*: "Marvelously, there are good solutions to daunting dilemmas like climate change that confront us. Putting a much higher price on carbon emissions through a fee-and-dividend plan, for instance, would create powerful incentives for the conservation of resources, more efficient uses of fossil fuels, and a more rapid transition to renewable alternatives. Such a system could be structured in non-regressive and egalitarian ways that would be fair to the majority of Americans, including people living in poverty and those struggling in the middle class. It also would be vastly fairer to people in future generations to take such action to slow the depletion of fossil fuel resources and reduce the culminating harm we are doing to natural ecosystems by failing to rein in emissions."

This proposal to implement an eminently fair carbon-fee-and-dividend plan is so compellingly convincing that it is astonishing that we Americans cannot put it into effect. Hyper politicized politics and political corruption and excessive influence by fossil fuel industries are the main obstacles standing in the way.

The motto of Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations is "Be Prepared". Everyone can try to prepare themselves better to deal with challenges and potential emergencies by knowing the right thing to do at the right moment, and then doing it. The moment has come for us all to be prepared to support smarter priorities. Lend your voice!

Kyoto, Copenhagen, and Obliviousness

The Copenhagen Climate Change summit held in December 2009 was said to be one of the most remarkable meetings of world leaders in history. The summit emphasized scientific evidence and facts about global warming, and highlighted the failures to rein in emissions of greenhouse gases since the 1997 Kyoto Accords. The summit most unfortunately failed to produce strong steps to avert future climate disasters, principally because vested interests blocked effective reforms. The summit also made it clear that a minority of people obtusely deny the overwhelming preponderance of scientific evidence that reveals global warming IS occurring, AND that it is caused in large part by human activities. These activities include the burning of fossil fuels, the cutting down of vast tracts of forests, and the maintenance of large herds of methane-gas-producing cattle and sheep.

A reasonable surcharge on energy use should be included in prices of all products and services to fund actions that mitigate climate change impacts. Rational individuals and societies should be willing to pay this cost as a form of insurance against future damages. A reasonable projection of cumulative economic damage costs due to climate change in the U.S. through 2050, if we follow a business-as-usual plan, is \$50 trillion. The International Monetary Fund estimates that an extra investment of a cumulative \$12 trillion to \$20 trillion is needed to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. This would be a smart course of action to prevent an untold amount of human suffering associated with increased costs related to widespread flooding of islands and coastal areas, and damages to regional food production due to more frequent powerful storms and intense floods and droughts. Should we not be required to pay an additional surcharge on the price of every gallon of gasoline, or some such similar measure, to finance remedial preventative measures like reforestation, effective conservation initiatives, more efficient uses of energy, and greener renewable alternatives to fossil fuels?

It is a distinct 'tragedy of the commons' that individuals and vested interest groups are so strongly opposed to paying a reasonable and affordable on-going price to prevent or mitigate such risks. This is a matter of political will. We could dramatically alter our current propensities by using wisely-targeted incentives and disincentives. Market methods like this have been proven to be very effective in modifying collective demands and behaviors, and they seem to be one of the fairest ways to affect people's actions. Targeted incentives and disincentives would change our collective course of harmful activities. This would be preferable to alternatives like laws and regulations that are burdensome, in general, since they are fairer mechanisms for influencing choices people make. Many recommendations are set forth in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

Climate Change Deniers

The psychological underpinnings of denials that human beings are contributing to global warming and climate change are 'curious and curiouser'. So what, some say, if the human race is spewing tens of billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year? They tend to dismiss concerns about the unsteady increase in a geologic instant of the concentration of carbon-dioxide from a pre-industrial level of 280 ppm to the highest level in millions of years, at over 424 ppm on May 29, 2023. So what, they say, if current trends portend a probable increase to more than 500 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere within 50 years or so? Gee, say the skeptics, it's still real cold in Chicago in the winter, and a little warming would be welcome! So what if we happen to flood more than 100 million people out of coastal areas worldwide in the next 100 years? These 'deniers' cling to ideologies propagated by entrenched interest groups that say we simply can't afford to alter our habits and shift incentives from dirty fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources. Many of them even deny that renewable energy sources are a better plan than aggressive exploitation of the remaining fossil fuel resources in the world. Climate change deniers often seem to think that liberals and the majority of scientists are too radical because they advocate that we take precautionary steps. I believe differently! We should seek the most accurate understandings, and follow where they lead!

Record snowfalls paralyzed Washington D.C. in February 2010 when severe winter storms hit much of the East Coast. Climate change deniers were practically apoplectic with jubilant derision about this alleged refutation of the fact that the planet has been on a warming trend for decades. Sean Hannity on Fox News took advantage of the snowfalls to declare that these weather events "seem to contradict Al Gore's hysterical global-warming theories." Stunning! Even junior high school students know that scientists have been warning for many years that atmospheric warming will inject more energy into the climate system and cause more extreme weather events of all kinds, including more severe hurricanes, floods and droughts -- and yes, cold snaps and snowstorms. Weather and climate are different things, and as one pundit put it, "we owe it to our offspring" to know the difference.

Deniers not only reject precautionary principles, but they also seem to be zealously willing to gamble that current trends will not result in a double-glazing warming of the Earth in coming decades. These skeptics hold this risk-taking conviction mainly so that people will not be collectively required to invest responsibly in inevitably necessary efforts to wean our civilizations from our addiction to burning finite reserves of non-renewable fossil fuels. Most of these deniers admit the obvious -- that changes in weather patterns have been taking place in recent years -- but they dispute that increasing incidences of record-unusual storms, melting glaciers, heat waves, droughts and wildfires are related to human activities. Maybe it's just sunspots, they say.

These same people tend to be the ones on the extreme right who rashly support aggressive American military occupations of Middle Eastern nations. They are often the same ones who buy the shrewd propaganda that says the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were unrelated to our economic efforts to assure access to global supplies of oil. The largest remaining reserves of oil on Earth are located in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and other Persian Gulf countries, and this fact poses real risks to our well-being and security.

The U.S. has already burned more than 200 billion barrels of oil from its own domestic supplies. As these reserves dwindle and we frack the hell out of underground formations, the temptation tends to increase to use military means to assure access to oil supplies abroad. In international matters, we should always remember that our greatness as a nation can best be measured by our free, fair and peaceful trade with other nations, not by our coercive military might.

What happened to our faith in free markets, fair competition, peaceful coexistence, cooperative problem-solving and respect for the sovereignty of people in other countries? Why are we so eager to involve our country in preemptive warfare when threats to our national security are not imminent? Could our military aggression in Iraq actually have been merely a front for our supremacist hubris and resource needs and the greed of investors in fossil fuels? Shouldn't all nations agree that every country should, without exception, honestly and fairly compete for declining reserves of fossil fuels and other resources? "Wars are not the answer."

Climate change deniers are not stupid people, but they are easily duped by corporate spin that says we should allow costs related to pollution and climate-related natural disasters to be externalized. Such people sometimes figuratively have poor peripheral vision, or are most comfortable when they wear blinders. It may be convenient

for them to blindly believe in partisan ideologues who cherry-pick facts and distort accurate understandings and hold more constricted points of view, but the time has come for us to see and seek the most propitious perspectives for the long-term common good, rather than for short-term advantages and profit-making.

It is easy to be cynical about people who deny risks of global warming and climate change. It is ridiculous that they can be so strongly opposed to economic initiatives that would require every product and service to include a small assessment to mitigate future climate catastrophes and help pay for the spiking costs of natural disasters. Such insurance is needed to minimize the extent to which we impose burdens on people in future years. We simply must be much more responsible for taking actions to guarantee our home planet remains habitable.

California's state legislature passed a farsighted Resolution in October 2016 that urged the federal government to pass a revenue-neutral carbon tax. This proposal should have been an inspirational tipping point for effective action to begin mitigating the costly impacts associated with anthropogenic disruptions of previously normal climatic conditions. This is a great idea, and a good plan that would alter the current status quo that allows costs and damages associated with anthropogenic climate disruptions to be foisted upon everyone in the future. Such a fee-and-dividend system of incentives to reduce carbon emissions could be used to reward people who have a light carbon footprint and make those with heavy carbon footprints pay more for the harms caused and costs incurred due to natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. Let's adopt this smart national carbon tax plan!

This California legislature Resolution read: WHEREAS, A national carbon tax would make the United States a leader in mitigating climate change and the advancing clean energy technologies of the 21st Century, and would incentivize other countries to enact similar carbon taxes, thereby reducing global carbon dioxide emissions without the need for complex international agreements; Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature hereby urges the United States Congress to enact, without delay, a tax on carbon-based fossil fuels; and be it further Resolved ... That all tax revenue should be returned to middle- and low-income Americans to protect them from impacts of rising prices due to the tax.

It is disturbing that, according to a *Planet Politics* manifesto, "the current architecture of international society is failing to see and address the global ecological crisis. Our global governance is too focused on interstate bargaining and human interests, and sees the environment as an inert backdrop and resource for human societies. Yet the reality is that the fates of society and nature are inextricably bound together -- and the planet is letting us know that." The writing on the wall is clear.

The global need for more farsighted planning is greater and more crucially important than ever, and must take precedence over the myopic exigencies of allowing corporate entities to rashly exploit resources and make unsustainable profits by foisting extensive costs on people in the future. It is absurd to act like we can continue with impunity to undermine the health and sustainability of natural ecosystems and the biological diversity of life on Earth, for these are the very foundations of our human well-being. Aristotle wrote long ago in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that VIRTUE is acting "at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way." We ought to respect this -- and more virtuous initiatives in our politics.

Why Are Common Good Values So Often Subverted?

Vested interest groups fight ferociously to gain and maintain perks and privileges for themselves. Our system unfortunately panders to many things contrary to the common good. Workers, investors, consumers, retirees, homeowners and people both rich and poor all tend to want the most they can get from the government for themselves. Our political system is dominated by insider groups, with powerful influence exerted by corporate CEOs, bankers, wealthy people, Wall Street 'masters of the universe', retirees and religious conservatives. As a result, these interest groups manage to skew our national policies to their own narrow advantages, while the general public is betrayed by big corporations and government. Those with the most influence win this serious game, and those who have little power have little voice, and consequently lose. Big ambitions for making profits should not succeed so wildly -- while ambitions for the self-preservation of humanity falter and threaten to fail.

"Men of aim must always rule the aimless. Yet there will always be singing birds."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Expediencies often dominate our national decision-making, to the pronounced detriment of the average person. The most harmful expediency in the long run is our sacrifice of the foundations of a good quality of life for people in future generations because of our unwillingness to find fairer ways to live within our means today. It is folly to borrow huge sums of money from everyone in the future instead of courageously seeking to achieve a better balance between spending and revenues, and between the ultra-rich and everyone else.

In addition, it is unwise to use up natural resources as fast as humanly possible, and to deplete and degrade fresh water resources and pollute and dump obscene amounts of toxic wastes into the environment. These activities damage habitats and ecosystems, and drive untold numbers of species of life toward eternal extinction. This undermines the foundations of survival found in healthy conditions that support biological diversity. Is nothing sacred anymore? Factions also obstruct initiatives for social justice and let the status quo prevail even in the face of absurd policies like excessively risky banking deregulation and speculative debt leveraging, outrageous healthcare inequities, instability-creating bubble economic policies, and amoral profiteering by health insurance corporations, Big Pharma, Big Oil and the military-industrial complex.

Deconstructing Social Darwinism

Ironies abound in our crazy world. Who would have imagined, for instance, that the "conservative" political party would work so steadfastly to undermine precautionary ecological principles? Who would have been able to guess that conservatives would be the main ones who would recklessly promote risk-engendering deregulation, bubble economics, and fiscally imprudent deficit spending? Who would have thought that conservatives would thus be most responsible for causing the most serious global economic crisis since the 1930s (which began in 2008)? Who would have anticipated that Republican rule would have led to bigger and more intrusive government, and to the consequently urgent need for even BIGGER government and more government interventions to bail out banks and stimulate spending to create jobs and get the economy out of its hardship-engendering doldrums?

Who, for that matter, would have thought that social conservatives would reject Charles Darwin's scientific understandings of biological evolution while at the same time finding such mesmerizing merit in theories of Social Darwinism that justify special advantages for the few and the imposition of austerity policies on the masses even though they are contrary to many of the principles and ideals that our Founders held dear?

Social Darwinism is a theory that sees the struggle for existence as being driven by fierce competition and the survival of the fittest. It in effect holds that this competition overrides needs for ethical fairness in the social compact between citizens. Social Darwinism rationalizes the domination of the weak by the strong, and thus is used to justify the deepening of class inequalities, the intensification of resource exploitation, the oppression of workers, and even military imperialism. The Social Darwinist theory was first formulated by philosopher Herbert Spencer during the highly inequitable Gilded Age of so-called robber barons in the late 19th century. He coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" to justify a political philosophy that opposed humanitarian justice initiatives.

By championing such simplistic and selfish theories, Social Darwinists try to undermine constraints like social justice, fair-minded democratic governance, and equal treatment of all citizens. They portray capitalism and its sink-or-swim gambits as being necessary and inevitable, instead of recognizing how important it is to establish a fairer social compact. This ideology has been used as a justification of pathetic policies that are opposed to the egalitarian principles enunciated by our Founding Fathers. It does so by promoting profit making and "progress" in an oddly retrogressive sense, and by discounting the general welfare and other fair-minded values.

The fact that accidents, diseases, bankruptcy and other adversities can afflict anyone at any time suggests that the best system a society could establish would be one that provides fair opportunities for every person to improve their circumstances while also creating an affordable social safety net for everyone. Healthy societies should establish effective incentives and disincentives to guide citizens and entrepreneurs and businesses, and they should encourage organizations to operate successfully in ways that are consistent with the common good.

In actual fact, Social Darwinism appeals to entrepreneurs, industrialists and rich people because it gives a rather deterministic and seemingly superior moral justification to capitalist schemes in their long-fought struggle against fairness to workers. Social Darwinists use ideological arguments to persuade people of the desirability of laissez-

faire policies and reduced regulation of corporate entities. This ideology is promoted in conjunction with traditional methods used by capitalists to suppress the prerogatives of labor, which include the coercion of workers, efforts to undermine the freedom of workers to organize and bargain collectively, corrupt politics, the oppression of minorities and people in lower classes, and even outright violence against workers.

The incisive writer Frank Norris wrote a number of novels, most famously *The Octopus - A Story of California*. This novel, published in 1901, was one of the earliest muckraking novels of the Progressive Era. It is based on a pivotal incident in which an actual bloody shoot-out took place in 1880 between ranchers who were growing wheat on land leased from the Southern Pacific Railroad in California's central San Joaquin Valley and a United States Marshall and his deputies who were acting on behalf of the railroad conglomerate to evict the ranchers. Complicated legal efforts had been made before the deadly confrontation by the Settler's League, an organization of wheat farmers, but the ranchers had lost out to the Railroad in both the courtroom and in the legislative chambers of Sacramento and Washington D.C.

The story revolves around the growth of the railroad industry at a time when the expansion of the railroads was being heralded as a vehicle for progress. In *The Octopus*, Frank Norris "was telling the rest of the story -- the real story as it affected the lives of people who were subjugated and oppressed by the sprawling railroads. We follow the lives of farmers and aspiring business-folk who are crushed by the untethered demands of the railroads, and we watch with heartbreak as their lives are ruined by the greed of this new industry."

The Octopus exposed the operations of ruthless laissez-faire capitalism that was sanctioned by turn-of-the-century Social Darwinists. In it, Norris "pictures with bold symbolism the raising of wheat in California and the struggle of the wheat growers there against a monopolistic railroad corporation." The novel is a shocking tale of greed and lust for power, and of betrayal that plays out during the last days of the western frontier. "The Railroad personified evil back in the late 19th century as a type of corporate monster that encircled and strangled farmers. Through its owners and agents, the company controlled the local paper and the land and the legislature, and after the farmers organized to protect themselves, it even manages to exert domineering influence over representatives on the state transportation rate-fixing commission."

This novel is an excellent example of the Naturalist movement in American literature. Naturalism, among other things, sought to apply discoveries of science to literature: "scientific order in the world, random occurrences, and most of all the indifference of the universe. Contrary to the concept of a loving and benevolent God maintaining order in all things, Naturalist writers portrayed the universe as a cold, indifferent machine that could and would crush anything that is in the wrong place at the wrong time." In his Introduction to *The Octopus*, historian Kevin Starr discusses the debt of Frank Norris to Emile Zola, a French novelist and journalist, on account of the extraordinary sweep, scale and abundance of characters and details in the novels of both writers.

This epic turn-of-the-century novel about the rapacity of the monopolistic Railroad corporation gives us pause to consider the dangers of giant corporate entities today that will stop at nothing to maximize their profits and extend their domination. Like the tentacles of a giant octopus, the tracks of the railroad reached out across California back in those days, "as if to grasp everything of value in the state." ... "To the tough-minded and self-reliant farmers, the monopolistic land-grabbing railroad represented everything they despised, including: consolidation, organization, conformity. But Frank Norris idealizes no one in this epic depiction of the volatile situation, for the farmers themselves ruthlessly exploited the land, and in their hunger for larger holdings they resorted to the same tactics used by the domineering railroad: subversion, coercion and outright violence."

In stark contrast to the laudable Progressive era back then, we are living in an era with powerful reactionary regressive factions today, and the need is growing for journalists and progressive politicians and responsible citizens to join together to overthrow the hegemony of giant multinational corporate entities and authoritarian leaders that are uncompromisingly abusing their power, to the detriment of the vast majority of people alive today, and everyone in the future.

We've had quite enough of Wall Street financial elites and corporate CEOs who rig our economic system to gain outlandish blessings for themselves at the expense of the stability of the system and the greater good. The costs of allowing this state of affairs were proved to be excessively high with the hardships engendered by the 2008

recession. It has become starkly apparent in recent years that weak economic and financial conditions can create negative feedback loops that reinforce themselves and threaten to spiral into even worse problems.

Economic turmoil creates a risky state of affairs. Volatile job markets and home values and equities markets and high levels of national debt, along with a sustained non-productive cost of wars-without-end, are all converging to cause increasing threats to our national security and well-being. It would be a better plan to create a sound economy with moderate levels of consumption, slowly rising asset values, a balanced level of risk-taking and reasonably limited debt leveraging than to stimulate boom-and-bust economic bubbles, wasteful consumerism, unsustainable usages of resources, poorly regulated risk-taking, high levels of leveraging and volatile asset values.

Many people might disagree with these ideas. The novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand, for example, undertook a monumental assault on what she saw as collectivist ideas in her novel *Atlas Shrugged*. She created a towering paean to individualism, rational self-interest and personal freedom in this novel and other works, and she harshly portrayed forces like government and organized labor that fight against the presumed deserving triumph of industrialists and their selfish motives. Let us honestly debate ideas like these, and create a new approach that incorporates our best understandings in light of the common good in the long term.

"If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own."

--- Wes 'Scoop' Nisker

Parenthetically, Ayn Rand's first name is pronounced to rhyme with "mine". This little known fact is curiously appropriate because her philosophy was staunchly oriented around selfishness and egoism. Mine, mine, mine, chimed Ayn! She even wrote a collection of essays titled *The Virtue of Selfishness*.

The Sorry Advent of Con Man Trump

Robert Reich, writing about the specifics of Donald Trump's shrewd con game in an editorial piece in July 2016 concluded: "The real Trump isn't a populist. He's a plutocrat. Above all, he's a con man. And the people being conned are average working Americans who are buying Trump's ruse of being a man of the people."

Paul Krugman wrote another of many thought-provoking opinion pieces in *Trump Is No Accident*. Hear his words:

The truth is that the road to Trumpism began long ago, when movement conservatives -- ideological warriors of the right -- took over the G.O.P. And it really was a complete takeover. Nobody seeking a career within the party dares to question any aspect of the dominating ideology, for fear of facing not just primary challenges but excommunication.

You can see the continuing power of the orthodoxy in the way all of the surviving contenders for the Republican nomination, Mr. Trump included, have dutifully proposed huge tax cuts for the wealthy, even though a large majority of voters, including many Republicans, want to see taxes on the rich increased instead.

But how does a party in thrall to a basically unpopular ideology -- or at any rate an ideology voters would dislike if they knew more about it -- win elections? Obfuscation helps. But demagoguery and appeals to tribalism help more. Racial dog whistles and suggestions that Democrats are un-American if not active traitors aren't things that happen now and then, they're an integral part of Republican political strategy.

During the Obama years, Republican leaders cranked the volume on that strategy up to 11 (although it was pretty bad during the Clinton years too.) Establishment Republicans generally avoided saying in so many words that the president was a Kenyan Islamic atheist socialist friend of terrorists -- although as the quote from Mr. Rubio shows, they came pretty close -- but they tacitly encouraged those who did, and accepted their endorsements. And now they're paying the price.

For the underlying assumption behind the establishment strategy was that voters could be fooled again and again: persuaded to vote Republican out of rage against Those People, then ignored after the election while the party pursued its true, plutocrat-friendly priorities. Now comes Mr. Trump, turning the dog whistles into fully audible shouting, and telling the base that it can have the bait without the switch. And the establishment is being destroyed by the monster it created.

A Compelling Case for Better Ways of Achieving Peace

One of the subtexts of all Earth Manifesto writings is that a stronger role for women would be a positive thing for our societies. Dee Dee Myers, the White House press secretary for President Clinton from early 1993 until the end of 1994, advocated this idea in her book *Why Women Should Rule the World*. She noted that women have stronger inclinations to cooperate and seek a win/win consensus than men do, so in nations where women are educated and empowered, democracy is stronger and those nations are characterized by a greater cooperative spirit, and generally have fairer and more practical priorities. Women in power tend to favor spending on health, nutrition and education, and to be less eager to commit excessive amounts of money to the military.

Dee Dee Myers wrote that history reveals an increased likelihood for a country to get involved in wars when that nation spends heavily on its military. She concludes from this fact that policies oriented toward making more generous investments in the education and empowerment of women would provide a strong impetus for fewer wars. For deeper introspection into ideas about this topic, see my essays *A Peaceable Proposition: The Golden Rule 'Greening' of U.S. Foreign Policy* in the Earth Manifesto, and *Reflections on War - and Peace*.

Politics Makes Odd Bedfellows!

"The Republicans are the party that says that government doesn't work -- and then gets elected and proves it."

--- Political satirist and writer P.J. O'Rourke

Political expediencies can create some exceedingly odd alliances. Republicans were traditionally the party of small government, but they have been the most ardent supporters of a large interventionist military and they have often championed the ideological and practical goals of expanded corporate power and vested interest privilege. The Republican Party continues to affiliate itself with obnoxious and rigid religious evangelicals who oppose the rights of women to determine their own destinies when it comes to choosing to use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. And most conservative Republican politicians indulge in hot-button-social-issue politicking when they almost unanimously align themselves with government intrusiveness in women's lives, as can be seen by their boneheaded opposition to Planned Parenthood or allowing women the last resort of choosing to have a safe abortion, often even in cases of rape, incest or a high risk of complications in a pregnancy that is likely to kill the woman.

Strengthening Democracy by Empowering Women

Many more young Americans under the age of 30 cast their votes for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primary elections than they did for both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump combined. Young people have a longer-term stake in living in a fairer, more just and environmentally sound world than older people, so their best interests should be given greater priority. The interests of all people under the voting age of 18 should be given more consideration, as well as the interests of all people to be born in future generations. To accordingly shift our national priorities in this proper direction, voting rights should be extended to 16 and 17 year-olds, and a Bill of Rights for Future Generations should be enacted, as spelled out in this manifesto.

We all live in a house divided. The insightful pollster Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight adduced statistics that show that not only are we divided by age, but also by gender. Silver reported that, if women were not allowed to vote, Trump would have overwhelmingly won the presidential election in 2016, instead of having barely eked out a narrow Electoral College victory over Hillary Clinton. This is due to the fact that Trump won by a big margin among men, but lost by an even bigger margin among women. The understanding of this outcome spurred a number of Trump supporters to create a Twitter hash tag that called for the repeal of the 19th Amendment, so that women would once again be denied the right to vote, as they had been prior to 1920. Republican sexism, misogyny and white male supremacy reached new depths with this revelation.

There is a good gauge for determining when social unfairness is too dangerously excessive, and that is when wealth becomes too concentrated in the hands of the few. When there is too extreme a degree of social and racial injustice, it is bad for everybody, including the rich, for this dangerous condition leads inevitably toward either violent revolution or a police state needed to defend the unfairness of a deeply unjust status quo.

Women should be given more influence in helping create a healthier and safer world AND a heavier overweight emphasis should be given to the best interests of young people, who have a longer time horizon concern in wanting to have a habitable world in the future.

Miles Rapoport, a longtime democracy advocate who served as Secretary of State in Connecticut, penned a convincing article in *The American Prospect* titled *From a Contentious Election to a Stronger Democracy -- Strengthening democracy is the key to all other reforms*. He expressed this persuasive idea in 2016:

Reviving our democracy will be a paramount challenge for the new administration. The intertwined issues of race, inequality, and democracy have been at the center of the 2016 campaign. Hillary Clinton put it well at the Democratic National Convention in July: "Our economy isn't working the way it should because our democracy isn't working the way it should." The primary challenge to Clinton by Bernie Sanders was driven by the widespread feeling that big money is crowding out the voices and views of the people. Fights over voting rights have roiled states around the country. And in a perverted way, these issues have fed Donald Trump's appeal, too. Many Americans feel unheard and unrepresented. Trump conflates real issues of the dominance of money with the paranoid message that voter registration and voting tallies are "rigged" as well.

Millions of Americans are legitimately angry that politicians have betrayed them by rigging our economic and political systems to primarily benefit (1) rich people, (2) giant corporations, and (3) politicians themselves. And most Americans want injustices in our society to be remedied. But millions of Trump supporters are willing to go along with simple-minded or bombastic proposals for solving national and global problems, even buying into Trumpian prescriptions and embracing dangerous attitudes like denying risks related to anthropogenic disruptions of the global climate and beliefs in the righteousness of white supremacy and overriding male prerogatives. Trump uses misdirection and deceit to come up with wrongheaded dictates on how we should fix things, and they generally revolve around rejecting everything his smart black predecessor accomplished. He wants to build walls instead of bridges, pushing to have a wall built along the entire border with Mexico, and to deport millions of immigrants and impose protectionist tariffs that would launch damaging trade wars. People are foolish to trust the man, because he is like a macho male drama queen who has shown himself to be pathologically dishonest, obsessed with money, brazenly unethical, belligerently divisive, eager to evade taxes, aggressively intimidating, hyper-litigious, ruthlessly vindictive, hyper insecure, vile in personal insults, inadequately empathetic, exploitive and demeaning to women, female objectifying, narcissistically maladjusted, reactively authoritarian, overly willing to use demagoguery and fear mongering and the evoking of dark visions, and filled with hubris and lacking in human decency.

In *Rebellion and Authority - An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, the authors talk about classic theories of the deterrent influences that authorities have on those who would defy them. Recognizing that excessive social unfairness undermines the legitimacy of leaders, Malcolm Gladwell provides a better explanation for why people obey or alternatively defy authority, and it involves LEGITIMACY. Gladwell's theory describes three main circumstances under which people willingly obey an authority: (1) if they feel they have a voice that will be heard and respected; (2) if the authority or system is regarded as trustworthy and predictable; and, (3) if they feel the authority or system is fair. "It can't treat one group differently from another."

When people feel that an authority or a system isn't legitimate, they get angry. A mistake authorities make over and over, Gladwell says, is underestimating such anger. When those in authority want the rest of us to obey them, it matters above all how they themselves treat people.

Why Are Our Public Decision-Making Processes So Messed Up?

Mark Twain once observed: "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination."

It is becoming increasingly important for us to honestly examine our beliefs and the things we are told by the media and our leaders, and to make better public policy decisions in light of these better understandings. We should base our decisions on the broadest range of relevant facts and information, and on fairer and more clearly established priorities. Unfortunately, our public decision-making is profoundly affected by culture war conflicts, fomented antagonisms, racial biases, selfish ideologies and undue influence of narrowly focused vested interests.

Researchers have found that there is an apparently genetic component to the way we see and feel the world. In a study done in Nebraska, a surprisingly strong correlation was found between the degrees that a person is susceptible to sudden noises or scary images and how strongly they hold political opinions. It turns out that conservatives tend to be much more easily frightened than liberals. This means there may actually be a basic *biological component* of political beliefs. This is one reason that actuating people's fears is such an effective way to manipulate them. This is one reason that micro-targeted advertising on social media outlets like Facebook was so effective in allowing Republicans to win election contests in 2016 by employing fake news and pushing often bizarre conspiracy theories and using character assassination tactics.

This research was reported in the September 2008 issue of the prestigious journal *Science*, in an article titled *Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits*. The researchers found a strong correlation between political views and unconscious reactions to immediate threats. Subjects had been tested for strongly-felt attitudes related to issues like foreign aid, military spending, gun control, the death penalty, the Iraq war, warrantless searches, the Patriot Act, torture of political prisoners, women's rights, premarital sex, school prayer, gay marriage and immigration policies.

The researchers explored this so-called 'Startle Reflex' and found that people tend to react either strongly or more calmly to a sudden threat. Watch out! Those who had the most significant physical reaction to stimuli tended to have conservative attitudes on political issues, and those who had calmer responses tended to have liberal attitudes toward these issues.

So people not only have rational reasons for philosophical differences on issues and deeply ingrained socially-conditioned biases, but even biological predispositions that affect what they believe. When we recognize this, we can see that it's important for us to communicate better and debate more honestly, and be more willing to compromise on finding the best plans for public policies. While it would be advantageous for us to reduce the institutionalized bribery in our dysfunctional political system so that rich people and lobbyists do not dominate it so excessively, we also need to find ways to facilitate constructive public debate so that we can find the fairest compromises between all competing interests. To do so, we need to keep in mind the greater good, as it is most reasonably assessed in light of the long-term best interests of society as a whole. A focus on long-term goals is sometimes even a good way to make better things happen in the short run.

How can we diffuse the hyper-partisanship and win-lose tribalism that gives public support to ideological arguments that affect our public policy making? Deep subtexts affect partisan conflicts, as was evident in the preposterous 'birther' controversy that was fomented against President Obama by an extreme fringe that thereby unscrupulously gained power. Those folks cultivated suspicions about Barack Obama's citizenship and rejected definitive proofs of it. This and many other facts make it clear how difficult it will be to overcome biases, racism, economic fundamentalism, radical anti-environmentalism and authoritarian rule in the USA. By having constructive debate in our communities, and by working together, and by marginalizing those with extreme viewpoints and agendas, we could move forward together toward a rosier future.

A marvel-inducing conundrum confronts us with the rise and persistence of Trumpism. Americans apparently don't really want politicians who tell it like it is, they seem instead to want politicians to "tell it like it isn't." During the run-up to the 2016 national elections, politicians made many promises that are bigger, bolder and less tethered to reality than those of previous presidential races. "Voters appear to want candidates who will deliver nothing short of their wildest partisan dreams (and delusions), alongside the unconditional silence and submission of their ideological adversaries."

We are living in topsy-turvy times in which shrewd politicians are channeling the anger and frustrations of disaffected people by exploiting their increasingly desperate anxieties and the growing envy of the Have Nots, while also obsequiously pandering to the increasingly reactive jealousies of the Haves. These trends are playing out in a context of national priorities that are excessively focused on contributing to increases in inequalities and fomented discord and stoked passions and goaded anger and trumped up feelings of frustration and disaffection.

Republican presidential candidates like Trump and Ron DeSantis, along with extreme conservatives like Sean Hannity (and Tucker Carlson) and other Fox News commentators have riled up people's passions over religion and

women's reproductive prerogatives and acceptance of gay men and lesbian women and other hot button issues, but let us not "take our eyes off the birdie". Much better governance and policy-making are achievable, and marching to the tune of bigots, billionaires and charlatans is the wrong way to achieve desirable goals.

John Steinbeck gave voice to downtrodden folks like migrant farm workers who faced harsh conditions in a society without a social safety net during the hard times of the Great Depression. He focused in *The Grapes of Wrath* on refugees who were forced to flee the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma and other parts of the Midwest. He saw clearly that dissatisfactions and political unrest grow in the fertile soil of economic despair and social upheaval. It was in such soil that the fascist demagogue Adolph Hitler rose to power in Germany by exploiting people's feelings of humiliation and struggle due to the hard times that followed World War I and the harsh reparations imposed by the victors of that war, and a severe inflation that buffeted the Weimar Republic as a consequence.

Today we should strive to improve conditions so that the soil is prepared for a saner, healthier and more providential harvest, and we should demand that our leaders stop sowing bitter seeds. Vote accordingly!

Opportunities and Obstacles

The French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States for nine months in 1831. After his return to France, he wrote the renowned book, *Democracy in America*, in which he provided insightful observations about the USA and its politics, economy and people. One idea he introduced was "self-interest rightly understood". This concept is valuable in the world today because of the seriously adverse consequences being suffered as a result of misguided understandings of what actually constitutes true self-interest and the common good. Our prosperity ultimately must be consistent with basic human values, and with an adequately protected environment and renewable resource usages and a sustainable economy -- AND with a stable number of people on Earth, rather than a rapidly increasing number in relatively poor countries.

Proponents of specific special interest groups focus intently on their goals, so they are well organized to assert their power and exert powerful pressure on politicians to give them special privileges and benefits. In contrast, common good interests are less immediate and somewhat less tangible, so they generally do not have equally strongly committed proponents. This is why socially beneficial priorities in our political system do not receive the support they should. Tragic assaults on the environmental commons result, along with rapid resource depletion and the unethical exploitation of government profligacy and corruption.

People who believe in economic fundamentalism, and others like those who formulate policies in right-wing think tanks, tend to cloak their arguments in spurious spin about why courses of action are most desirable for the nation. These rationalizations serve their own greedy interests and those of the cash-flush constituencies that finance such propaganda. The trickle-down theory that champions tax cuts being given mostly to rich people, for instance, is an example of excessively greedy and often dangerous perspectives of such people. Ideologies like this facilitate selfishness, avarice, shortsighted politics, partisan intransigence and wrong-headed ideological certitudes, all of which -- in general -- detrimentally affect our world.

It is sensational how effectively the inertial forces of the status quo subverted Barack Obama's "change you can believe in". Wall Street bankers grabbed huge bailouts and obstructed meaningful reform of the banking system despite the Great Recession. Since then, we have been unable to make our system of taxation significantly more progressive. And the best ideas for really good healthcare reform have been torpedoed, even though millions of people are being made less secure as a result. And the pandemic revealed catastrophic vulnerabilities that harshly impact millions of essential workers, especially people in racial minorities and persons in nursing homes.

The need to get Big Money out of the driver's seat of our political system is becoming clearer every day. And the challenges to this goal have been dramatically ratcheted up by the narrow majority of conservatives on the Supreme Court while Antonin Scalia was still alive, and by their rulings that corporations and wealthy people should be allowed to spend unlimited amounts on influencing elections. "Free speech" for Americans is being dealt a blow in favor of 'paid speech' by corporations. We really need to reform our system, and do so boldly, and soon!

As the League of Women Voters succinctly states, "When citizens are frozen out of the process, government doesn't respond to our needs -- it only serves special interests." The organization rightly recommends that we

need to take our democracy back from corporate and partisan interests.

Context and Perspective

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us ..."

--- Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

These opening lines by the famous British author Charles Dickens launched his tale of London and Paris during a period of economic and social turmoil in England and France in the latter half of the 18th century. Taxes and war-engendered national debt were heavy burdens in France at that time. This was the period of King Louis XVI's reign from 1774 to 1792, a time characterized by popular discontent and political unrest that culminated in the French Revolution of 1789, a violent upheaval of the people against an oppressive aristocracy. Charles Dickens concluded the opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*, quoted above, by noting that "... in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only." Today, hyperbole is proliferating like a deadly algal bloom!

Similar outrage against tyranny and neglect of the common good contributed to the Revolutionary War against British hegemony that American colonists began waging in 1776, and won in 1783. At a bleak point early in that war, Thomas Paine, the English immigrant to the American colonies who had become a passionate advocate for American independence, noted in the pamphlet *The American Crisis*: "These are the times that try men's souls."

Today we are living in another era with widespread economic, political and social turmoil. Once again it seems like this is the best of times and worst of times. And once again our souls are being tried. And the souls of many of our representatives seem to be in the process of being tried and convicted of treasonous wrongheadedness!

In addition to serious domestic problems, there are many violent conflicts around the world, and poverty, hunger and strife haunt societies worldwide. There are many crises today that involve impacts that are more intricately intertwined and global in scope than ever before. Environmental side effects of agricultural and industrial activities are growing more complex and damaging every year, and human activities are causing increasingly ominous changes in the basic ecological, biological and climatic conditions on Earth. All these conditions together are contributing to social and geopolitical challenges around the globe.

Economic and social malaise provides us with a "dangerous opportunity" to reform our econopolitical systems and to invest in a more positive future. In theory, the financial crisis of 2008 should have made it necessary to alter the absurd aspects of partisan politics. As playwright Tony Kushner wrote: "There are moments in history when the fabric of everyday life unravels, and there is this unstable dynamism that allows for incredible social change in short periods of time. People and the world they're living in can be utterly transformed, either for the good or the bad, or some mixture of the two."

We should not have let that crisis go to waste! We should have taken advantage of the opportunity to transform our societies in ways that are best for the common good in the long run. We should be more honest with ourselves and embrace a new freethinking "Great Awakening" attuned to accurate understandings and common sense and prudence -- AND to fairness to future generations. This modern Great Awakening should be far-seeing and ecologically smart, in contrast to historical episodes of "awakenings" that were bizarrely obedient to blind faith in religious myths and strictly fundamentalist interpretations of ancient "holy books."

Let us acknowledge the strong connection between the unprecedented rapid growth in the number of human beings on Earth and all the overarching problems we face, including human-caused climate disruptions, shortages of fresh water, deforestation, habitat destruction, the decimation of wildlife, ocean warming and acidification, resource depletion, poverty, inter-generational conflicts and violent wars, injustices and terrorism. Let us accept more responsibility for future human well-being, including social responsibility, fiscal responsibility, environmental responsibility and reproductive responsibility.

Like a kaleidoscope colorfully morphing from one pattern to another, the relative equilibrium of our societies is being shattered by economic hard times for millions of people. During this unsettled interregnum, we have the great opportunity to create a more sustainable and sensible future. We should find better ways to prevent powerful vested interests from hijacking our societies, as they have done during other crises. Naomi Klein wrote about this tendency in her valuable book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. During a crisis, we are more vulnerable to increased injustices and fraudulent forms of profiteering and the imposition of harsh austerity measures and more authoritarian forms of government. For this reason, we should choose to use periods of radical upheaval to implement real reforms, and not just yield to reactive and manipulative forces. Unfortunately, cunning demagogues have seized such opportunities, proclaiming to be populists and fooling enough people to enable them to grab power, and they are sowing distrust, causing chaos and egregiously abusing their ill-gotten power.

During times of unrest and upheaval, whether personal or societal, it behooves us to learn the larger lessons contained in the challenges we face, and to make "the growth choice, not the fear choice". In this way, we can take good advantage of adversity and improve our lives and future prospects. As our nation took desperate measures to contain the economic contagion caused by the bursting of the engineered real estate and equities bubbles, we should have realistically evaluated what had taken place, and why. We should also "think outside the box" for optimal solutions. In addition to the ideas explored herein, I highly recommend a review of the specific proposals in *Common Sense Revival*, or in Part Four of the *Earth Manifesto* online, particularly *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform our Societies*, and the *Progressive Agenda for a More Sane Humanity*.

New Directions: Progressive, Not Regressive

Entrenched interest groups that support the status quo are extraordinarily influential, and they are generally staunchly opposed to changes that would benefit the common good. In 2008, the American people voted for "change we can believe in", and we really should seriously begin to make fundamental changes that are needed in our government and business world. Our failure to do so is propelling powerful efforts for revolutionary change like that advocated by Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in 2016, and this failure also gave impetus to anti-establishment sentiment that helped Trump get elected. I feel strongly that stoking partisan conflict is a much worse strategy than uniting and cooperating together with fair-minded intention so that truly important goals can be achieved. We should seek common ground on what these goals should be, and on how best to accomplish them. Then we should commit our societies to act in ways consistent with these goals to achieve them. The backlash to hubristic Trumpism should rightly heed these idealistic sentiments.

We should begin to make the federal government a bit leaner, and stimulate the powerful engine of small businesses to create jobs. We should help finance micro-loans to people who need them, and reduce interest rates on student loans, rather than giving trillions of dollars in bailouts and cheap money to mega-banks and corporate entities. We should make health care a right for all citizens, and find ways to implement smart and effective cost controls. And we should give much greater respect to the sovereignty of other nations on the international stage, seeking win-win solutions and acting as good neighbors rather than reckless dominators.

We should dramatically restructure subsidies and incentives to reward activities that facilitate the common good, and discourage those that are counterproductive. We should make our societies fairer by making our graduated income tax system more progressive, with higher marginal rates on the highest levels of income. We should advance a 'green revolution' in several ways. For instance, we should give federal rebates to people who purchase high mileage vehicles, and finance this with fees on sales of SUVs and other vehicles that get poor mileage. We should revise property taxes, graduating them so that they are lower for small energy-efficient homes and higher for homes larger than 2,500 square feet. We should invest in greening the construction of homes and businesses in order to help us break free from our dependence on polluting and climate altering fossil fuels. We should finance these energy initiatives by increasing gasoline taxes and by putting a reasonable cost on carbon dioxide emissions, and we should begin to solve the national security threats posed by global warming and climate change.

We should enact a Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as was advocated by the great ecologist and explorer and filmmaker Jacques-Yves Cousteau. We should use this Bill of Rights as an overarching guide to help us determine

how to live our lives without harming the prospects of our descendants. We should, in summary, strive to make this a better world with brighter prospects and greater cause for hope, rather than a more unfair world with ever-worsening problems and ultimately unsustainable courses of action.

But we are not doing the right things. We have not faced the need to reduce wasteful spending on the military. We have not cut misguided subsidies for oil and coal industries. We have slid backwards instead of being smart in reforming our political system to reduce institutional bribery and limit excessive influence of lobbyists for large corporations. We are failing to change our political system to make opposition parties constructive and to discourage extreme partisanship. We have been unable to take steps to reduce economic inequities. We continue to indulge in the expediency of deficit spending and so are dangerously driving up the national debt. We could make the changes needed, but only with courageous and fair-minded action. NOW is the time to start!

Partingtonian Propensities of an Explanatory Mind

It seems to me that people have collectively been denying the proverbial elephant in the room, that the majority of taxpayers cannot afford to pay more to invest in future well-being, and that we have already borrowed way too much money from all taxpayers in every future year. This makes it clear that there is really only one good plan of action: to require profitable businesses and wealthy people to pay higher amounts of tax. Successful businesses and rich people must be obligated to contribute more to the greater good, by enacting a progressive tax scale that is more steeply graduated on the highest levels of income. And these solutions should be put into effect in nations worldwide to prevent multinational corporations and rich people from evading taxes and failing to act responsibly in our societies.

It is in everyone's best interests to tap into the large source of funds of those who can afford it. We could probably even design some creative plan that would make it profitable in the long-term for successful businesses and rich people to contribute to the greater good today because they would ultimately benefit from better economic conditions and the greater prosperity for the majority.

While the global pandemic and economic and ecological crises continue to envelop our nation and the world, AI innovations in communications on the Internet and social media are having a major influence. These technologies, along with television, give people extensive knowledge about trends, circumstances, causes and interrelatedness of economic activities and social outcomes, and they also make us more acutely aware of inequities and injustices. As a result, it is becoming increasingly important for people everywhere to have clearer and more comprehensive understandings of what constitutes the common good, and not to fall hook, line and sinker for all the partisan spin, misinformation, fear-mongering and stoked anger that pervades the airwaves and haunts online forums. It is vital that people become more aware of the whole --- AND show more consideration for it.

Good Cause for Hope: The Positive Potentials for the Presidency of Barack Obama and Joe Biden

People want to have hope. They want to hope that their leaders will be honest and care about the common good. They hope for a government that protects them and invests in them, not a government that rips them off and abandons them in favor of a privileged few. They hope their own interests will be more fairly represented, and not just the interests of bankers, CEOs, and the 2% of Americans who own half of the wealth in the country.

We live in a society with short attention spans where sound bites and "bumper sticker sentiments" and simplistic talking points are used to mold public opinion. Right mindfulness involves smarter, more expansive and more inclusive ways of seeing things.

Think about the competing mega-interests in every country. It is desirable from the standpoint of the whole of society to have high quality and affordable education, better job opportunities, adequate protections for workers, good healthcare for all, a reasonable modicum of retirement security, and a healthy environmental commons. In contrast, from narrower points of view of businesses, which regard profits as the primary priority, it is desirable to have higher unemployment and thus conditions that favor lower wages, lower health care costs and smaller employer contributions to workers' retirement costs. Perhaps this is why statistics show there is a higher rate of joblessness during Republican administrations than during Democratic ones. Republicans favor business interests,

so they tend to be more adamantly opposed to government initiatives that promote broadened opportunities and common good goals, and that advance the rights and prerogatives of working people.

Statistics indicate that stock market returns have in general been higher under the administrations of Democratic presidents than Republican ones. This may seem surprising because the enactment of business-friendly policies would seem to be most likely to create bigger profits and therefore higher investor returns and stock prices. This may prove that policies designed to maximize benefits for a small segments of the people actually turn out, ironically, to be worse for society as a whole than policies that emphasize a greater modicum of fairness to people in the working classes.

Conservative talk radio hosts and people in right-wing think tanks confuse millions of Americans into believing spin that basically asserts that regressive policies are better than progressive ones. It is amazing that "conservative" propagandists have managed to create so much fear and distrust of tax-and-spend policies, yet when they have had domineering federal power, they implemented policies that were fiscally irresponsible by borrowing heavily to finance high-end tax cuts and many significant increases in spending. They managed to convince many Americans that job creation is better under Republicans than Democrats (the opposite is historically true), and that stock market averages do better under Republican administrations than Democrat ones (again, the opposite is true).

Facts and distortions of facts are used manipulatively by partisans of every stripe. In the face of such barrages of obfuscation, we need to understand the greater truth of the matter, in order to achieve better outcomes. The truth is that the policies of the hard right have seriously harmed our nation so far this century.

Early in President Obama's administration, I expressed the conviction that we should all hope that Barack Obama SUCCEEDS in making our country fairer, and not that he fails like the obstructionist naysayers of the radical right "hope". Consider the treachery of that sabotage! First, this crowd contributed both intentionally and inadvertently to the engineering of an economic disaster through deregulation of banks and fiscally irresponsible tax cutting combined with rash increases in government spending. And when they controlled Congress, they passed devious legislation like a new Prescription Drug entitlement program in 2003 that was designed in ways that would substantially increase profits for big drug companies at the public expense. They also irresponsibly pushed further deregulation and trickle-down economic policies, helping inflate speculative bubbles in real estate and risky financial derivatives. Then, in the throes of the ensuing economic hard times, they stubbornly refused to go along with most of the needed remedial measures.

Like a scratched old record album, they claim over and over and over again, in a tired refrain, that the only way to solve any problem is to cut taxes, even though this means running up the national debt. In the small print, these tax cuts are always designed to primarily benefit big corporations and wealthy people. In December 2017, Republicans rammed through more regressive tax cuts, without support from a single Democrat, and tried to conceal the details from the public.

Conservative politicians often deny scientific understandings, so they no doubt give little credence to the incisive insight of Albert Einstein, who defined INSANITY as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." It is high time to give greater influence to more trustworthy leaders and smarter approaches!

Should We Be Radically Cutting the Size of Government?

Most Republicans still march to the beat of discredited voices that say we must shrink the size of government until it can be figuratively drowned in a bathtub. Their actions have ironically resulted in the necessity for the federal government to take a much more active role during economic crises. In Sept. 2008, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae were nationalized and the giant speculative insurer AIG was bailed out, along with numerous banks, and then the auto industry. That financial crisis, and more recently the coronavirus pandemic, have made it all but mandatory for the federal government to increase already high levels of deficit spending to prevent the economy from sliding into a more serious recession or a depression. And yet Republican politicians still strive to obstruct solutions and perpetuate policies and systemic injustices that got us into these problems.

Good God, politics! Irresponsible politicians have dug a deep hole that is proving to be extremely difficult to get ourselves out of, and the failure to take smarter steps to improve the economy is hurting many millions of people.

To Bailout or Not to Bailout, That is the Question

Some people say that we should let businesses go into bankruptcy when they falter. Others say that when corporations become too big to fail, we must bail them out to prevent economic disaster. Good arguments can be made on both sides of this question. Bankruptcy proceedings allow corporations to reorganize in such ways that costs are reduced and workers as well as CEOs, top managers, suppliers and lenders are all forced to make concessions to save the organization. If successful, reorganizations like this help a business survive and emerge from bankruptcy as a healthier, more competitive entity. On the other hand, when government bails businesses out, it allows the persistence of excesses, inefficiencies, waste, and egregiously large bonuses for CEOs and management. Such bailouts are generally done at the expense of taxpayers and future generations, so they are radically inequitable. The danger of NOT committing to bailouts of banks and mortgage giants like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and insurers like AIG in 2009, and the auto industry, is that such failure to act would likely have led to a ripple effect that would have caused a further financial and economic meltdown.

One reasonable option would be to prevent giant corporations from growing so large that they become too big to fail. Trust busting was a responsible movement during the Progressive Era a century ago, when three U.S. Presidents -- William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft -- acted to break up monopolies that exerted too much power. Today, corporate abuses of concentrated power are once again too extreme, so we should again break up big businesses that have grown too dominant, and act to give smaller businesses a greater chance to succeed.

Ben Bernanke, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve from 2006 to 2014, declared during the financial crisis: "I want to be very, very clear: too big to fail is one of the biggest problems we face in this country, and we must take action to eliminate too big to fail." Congress should rightly take action to do this. But a majority of politicians have been bought and paid for by big corporations and their enablers, so they sabotage sensible efforts to fix problems related to monopolies. In 2016, Bernanke stated that, "... if major structural changes in the banking system are necessary to avoid another crisis, to promote financial stability, and to control moral hazard and excessive risk-taking, then we should all be for making the changes." Let's act accordingly!

We should once again implement sensible regulation of banks by reinstating the Glass-Steagall Act that kept depository banking separate from investment banking. And we should create laws that regulate financial instruments like mortgage-backed securities and derivatives like credit default swaps. See my essay *Existence, Economics and Ecological Intelligence* for further insight into economic issues like this.

Confidence in a Fairer and More Propitious Economy

President Franklin Roosevelt gave his first inaugural address during the depths of the Depression in January 1933. In that speech, he asserted his belief that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself". Interesting call, Mr. Roosevelt! There are no doubt valid things to fear, yet it's also true that in a market economy it is fundamentally important for people to have CONFIDENCE in the system so that credit is available and there is reasonable security and good prospects for the creation of both jobs and wealth. Market participants need to be able to trust in the legal tender of money, and in the adequate availability of credit; they must believe that unfettered supply and demand mechanisms work; and they need to feel assured that the marketplace will be managed well by state and federal governments to insure fairer competition and free exchange while at the same time protecting people against fraud, misinformation, monopoly abuses, dangerous products, unsafe workplaces, unfair labor and trade practices, and environmental damages.

Of course we need to have confidence in sound policies and institutions, and we should not harbor delusions about failed policies and corrupt institutions. Overconfidence has contributed to every Ponzi scheme in history, so we surely need to have confidence in good ideas, not in dangerously unsound ones. Confidence in a system that is inevitably unsustainable may be beneficial to those who benefit by perpetuating a corrupt system for a while longer, but ultimately we need confidence in a different way of doing things, one that IS sustainable. A solid foundation is needed for a durable structure, not shoddy construction or house-of-cards construction techniques or smoke-and-mirrors illusions. A house divided as a result of political treachery should be rejected.

Confident Attitudes vs. Confidence Tricks

There is an unfavorable tendency for special interest groups to employ "confidence tricks" to exploit advantages and make gains at the public expense. This is very different from the real confidence we need, so it is no wonder such scams inspire uneasiness. Nobel-laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz wrote about the 2009 banking bailout by the federal government, saying that the Bush administration "talked about confidence building, but what it delivered was actually a confidence trick. If the administration had really wanted to restore confidence in the financial system, it would have begun by addressing the underlying problems -- the flawed incentive structures and the inadequate regulatory system."

The repeal of the Depression-era Glass Steagall Act in 1999 was foolhardy, as was the passage of the Commodity Futures Modernization Act in the year 2000 that contained provisions preventing the regulation of many types of banking derivatives and mortgage securities shenanigans. These actions contributed to the onset of the "Great Recession" that began in 2008. Let's reform these laws! ("Yes, we can!")

It was no big surprise that the Governmental Accounting Office reported in December 2008 that the Treasury Department was implementing the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout plan without adequate oversight, transparency or accountability to taxpayers. Similar ploys were employed in the gargantuan \$2.2 trillion pandemic relief CARES Act. Much evidence shows that grave damage can be done by leaders who are deceitful, ideologically inflexible, intellectually incurious, or overly influenced by vested interest lobbyists. The right wing in politics, in particular, has shown how selfish, greed-driven, obstructionist, corrupt, hypocritical, and mercilessly retributive it can be.

Almost no one predicted back in the year 2000 how detrimental Republican rule would be in the eight years that followed for the American people and others in the world -- either in terms of economic outcomes or of negative social impacts, or of environmental harms, or of the hopes for peaceful coexistence in our relations with other nations. When the stock market hit its bottom in early 2009, gloom and doom attitudes of investors coincided with people's fears and angst about economic prospects. Now, 15 years later, the banking system is plenty profitable and the stock market has been in a choppy bull market phase despite pandemic uncertainties and negative impacts. And life is exceedingly difficult for many billions of people around the world.

Conservatives mercilessly criticize and attack liberals. This is understandable; it is politics, after all, and counter-supporting power can be gained by demonizing opponents. But it's also ironic that Republicans have been impeding almost every initiative to honestly improve conditions for the masses. The need is growing for us to support smarter and more effective and fair-minded initiatives and more honest and responsible leaders.

We need to give more power to the people by finding ways to reduce the domination of our politics by narrowly-focused corporations, especially in light of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling on corporate "free speech". We should also recognize when individually rational decisions are leading to collectively irrational ones in our capitalist economic system, and accordingly formulate 'rainy day' plans to prevent systemic failures. And knowing our human natures and natural propensities better, we should strive to live healthier lives and embrace saner priorities and broader, more honest worldviews. If we cannot live with greater 'voluntary simplicity', we should at least "live large" in ways that are more responsible, and that reduce our depletionary demands on Earth's resources and our harmful impacts on our home planet's wildlife, biological diversity and ecosystems.

Capitalism is Coming to an End, Says World Renowned Economist

A former Greek finance minister named Yanis Varoufakis has claimed that capitalism is going to make itself obsolete. Varoufakis was a former economics professor, and an expert in economics, so it is thought provoking to hear that he told an audience at University College London that the increased prevalence of artificial intelligence and mechanization means the capitalist system will undermine itself. Varoufakis warned that Karl Marx "will have his revenge", saying technology is going to "destroy a lot more jobs than it creates." He says that capitalism will undermine itself because technology companies will make many other businesses and the private means of production obsolete. The pandemic dramatically accelerated these trends.

Mr. Varoufakis said the current system is "unsustainable" as vast swathes of people become unemployed due to the advent of automation in many industries. To get around this, Varoufakis said governments need to enact

redistributive policies. One way they could do this, he suggests, is to put 10% of all future issues of shares into a "common welfare fund" that 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 French economist Thomas Piketty in his tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

This type of visionary plan is needed because all developed nations on Earth are likely, astonishingly, to experience job loss rates of up to nearly 50% within the next 20 years due to mechanization, robotics, artificial intelligence and other labor-eliminating technologies, according to an Oxford study. 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 two decades. Refining this prediction in a September 2017 report, Carl Frey of Oxford 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 risk of being lost to 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 added, "Technological progress on sensors, data and software are as important as that in robots and drones to enable this automation."

While Frey argues that many retail jobs are going to disappear, 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 online commerce, accompanied by colossal quantities of wasteful packaging. These clear understandings mean that we face huge challenges, so it is titanically foolish for our leaders to be emulating the Roman emperor Nero, who fiddled while Rome burned. At least Nero did not set the fires! We must demand better!

Observations in the Age of Reason: Satisfying Our Needs without Destroying Planet Earth

In conclusion, we need to rethink what is right and proper. We must reassess what is best for our society as a whole. Reason, common sense and wisdom should guide us. There will always be big differences of opinions, and plenty of uncertainties, so we need to seek guidance from the most knowledgeable experts and the wisest leaders and philosophers among us, and we should familiarize ourselves with the lessons of history.

Two maxims carved in stone in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece offered good advice: "Know Thyself" and "Nothing in Excess". These principles are important for us as individuals, and they are even more crucial for us collectively. A better understanding of human nature and ourselves could help guide us in re-designing our public policies and laws and social institutions. It is valuable to clearly recognize our needs and our wants, our virtues and vices, our strengths and weaknesses, our emotional insecurities and compensatory behaviors, our consumer psychology and motives, our susceptibility to greed and speculative excesses, our drives to manipulate and control others, our compulsions to be right, our contrasting tendencies toward either 'Tough Love' or compassionate generosity, and our practically innate propensities toward either conservative strictness or more empathetic liberality.

"It's not only the most difficult thing to know oneself, but the most inconvenient."

--- Josh Billings

Everyone has basic wants and needs, as summarized by the famous psychologist Abraham Maslow in his "hierarchy of needs" pyramid. We have basic physiological needs for oxygen to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, and clothing and shelter to protect us. Beyond these basic needs, we have the desire for a more secure existence. We also have outer-directed impulses to belong, to be accepted, and to be liked and respected. We yearn to feel competent and gain status, and to have a good sense of self-esteem. Above these needs in Maslow's hierarchy are inner-directed needs, like the desire to learn, explore, satisfy creative impulses, appreciate aesthetics and actualize inner drives. At the top of this pyramid, according to Maslow, are drives to transcend selfishness and to be of service to others -- essentially to be good citizens in our communities and country.

The maxim at Delphi, "Nothing in Excess," has a corollary. BALANCE is desirable in almost all things. Balance is needed between individualism and social responsibility, between national security and citizen liberties, between thriftiness and lavish spending, between materialistic consumerism and sustainable consumption, and between excessive regulation and inadequate regulation. Businesses are by their nature oriented toward narrow short-term goals, so we need to subject them to sensible regulation and oversight, and there should be a better balance

between laissez-faire activities and accountability. Government should be managed in better ways that are more effective and more fiscally sound, so that devastating boom-and-bust economic cycles are prevented and there are fewer economic injustices. And our system should not be so unjust to people of color.

Wouldn't it have been better, in retrospect, if American leaders had promoted understandings that are more enlightened, rather than being emotionally hijacked to give support to Trump Republicans? Wouldn't it be better if we saw more holistic understandings of the greater good, and worked together to make our societies healthier and fairer and saner? Such guidance could help unify us and heal our societies of the deep divisions between competing and conflicting interests.

Finally, another right understanding of the common good is that it should include conditions in which individuals are encouraged to flourish, and their potentialities are fostered rather than being repressed. There is much to do, so let's get started -- and head with alacrity in the right direction!

When some of these words were first being written early in the year 2010, a new year and a new decade were upon us. The start of a new year is always a good time for reflection and assessment, and maybe even a resolution or two. A new year provides us with a rich opportunity to acknowledge the passage of another part of our lives, and it gives us a chance to step back, to assess, to acknowledge and appreciate, and to honor the positive things in our lives. I have spent New Years' Day many times on a fork of a Sierra Nevada river at about 2,500 feet in elevation, appreciating the granite-bouldered streambed and the clear flowing water of the river in its infinite babbling continuity. This experience has always been conducive to seeing valuable lessons in life. Lessons like these: Go with the flow. Make the best of whatever comes your way. Be nimble and maintain a sense of balance. Smile. Laugh. Live and let live. Breathe deep, and let go. Accept the ephemerality of all things. Appreciate the beauty of life and nature. Cultivate equanimity in the face of adversities, and humbleness in the arms of success. Let the river figuratively run through you!

Much remains to be done to re-focus our public policies on achieving common good goals. To create a society that has less stress, less conflict and fewer inequities, we must implement fairer policies -- ones that are affordable and sustainable. We need to have tax policies that are more progressive, and opportunities that are more broadly shared. We need better education and universal health care, and a more just legal system. And we must make a more serious commitment to peaceful coexistence. The sun has never shined on a cause of greater worth, as Thomas Paine liked to say.

We have it in our power to figuratively begin the world over again. This is our rendezvous with destiny. Let's do it properly! Let's all strive to become citizens deserving to be celebrated, as Jim Hightower suggests in *The Hightower Lowdown*, "who refuse to be 'idiotes' -- a word the ancient Greeks used for people who might have a high IQ but are focused exclusively on their own lives with no concern for the common good."

Remember the words of Dr. Seuss in his marvelous tale, *The Lorax*, in which Once-ler, a cantankerous exploiter, declares that the word of the Lorax -- who "speaks for the trees" -- suddenly seemed perfectly clear, UNLESS people like us care a whole awful lot, things aren't going to get better.

Thanks for your consideration of these ideas!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

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