



Divide-to-Conquer Roguery

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A majority of Americans want their political representatives to work together to fairly and effectively address the big problems we face and achieve common good goals. Polls in the last year confirm that more than two-thirds of Americans want representatives in Congress to make reasonable compromises rather than stubbornly standing on ideological grounds and refusing to govern responsibly in the interests of the greater good.

Voters "don't want crazy." They prefer moderation, NOT extremism, and good order, not chaos, and honorable principle rather than roguish skullduggery. "Many Americans say they are simply tired of the bickering, name-calling and faux outrage that have become all-too-common among members on either side of the aisle in Congress."

Other people seem to want to have trench warfare and civil war, and galvanize the probability of such undesirable outcomes by using divisive rhetoric. Divide-to-conquer roguery is sadly responsible for cultivating dysfunctionality in politics that facilitates bad governance, while undesirably undermining good governance.

Given the preference of citizens for collaboration and fairness in problem solving, why do we instead get divisive power-tripping politicians and conflicted policies that are almost always tailored to benefit the already privileged? The answer, of course, is that moneyed interests are allowed to exert excessive power and influence due to the corrupting campaign finance system in the U.S. that allows wealthy people excessive influence in determining our national policies and priorities. This problem is compounded by excessive restrictions on voting rights, as well as by extreme partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts that exacerbates polarization and gives more and more power to extremists rather than centrists. Moreover, the structural rigging of our economic and political systems is making inequalities and inequities drastically unfair, giving energy to dissatisfactions that drive extremism.

Undermining hopes for collaborative problem solving, many scheming opportunists greedily gain power, money and/or narrow political advantages for themselves through the cynical and harm-causing strategy of driving cultural, racial or gender wedges between people, dividing them to more easily impose unfair policies on the populace. This has the negative consequence of preventing sensible reforms and the enactment of anti-corruption measures. Such strategies have woeful impacts of fracturing social cohesion, torpedoing peaceable coexistence and deeply disturbing domestic tranquility in communities across the country.

Those pushing for "a national divorce" and civil war and violent extremism are causing the American people to be deprived of unity and peace, and instead give us widespread conflicts and tribal camp warfare. Those who fan the flames of DISCORD deserve round condemnation -- especially those who do so for power and money.

We the People have the power to build a better future, and it would better be achieved by building relationships and working together. This would be vastly better than allowing extremists to succeed in their imperious demands and inflexible intransigent beliefs. Yet they still perniciously use divide-to-conquer strategies to rule ruthlessly over people.

This essay examines the political, economic, social, environmental and spiritual reasons that the burdens of divide-and-rule are so heinously unacceptable.

Political strife at the national and state levels is often ugly and counterproductive. The worst shenanigans, perhaps, are those that leaders engage in who gain excessive influence through roguish means, especially when they

poisonously divide the citizenry to grab power, and use deeply dishonest, deceitful and manipulative suasion to accomplish this, without being willing to compromise to properly improve things.

The right thing for us to do would be to all come together in demanding that our representatives take **STRONG STEPS** to improve our system, freeing it from its highly inequitable contrived rigging.

Divide-to-conquer strategies include blaming others, scapegoating opposition groups, sowing suspicion and distrust between various factions, and hijacking people's emotions by riling them up over hot button wedge issues, especially including women's reproductive rights, immigration policies, gun safety, law enforcement, school curricula, criminal justice, and identity politics. Related divide-to-conquer tactics include arousing racial, religious and class prejudices and stoking people's fears and goading their anger. During the calamitous global pandemic, tactics included politicizing mask wearing and getting vaccinated and other public health and safety measures.

Republicans augment these tactics with efforts to ban books they don't like and prevent topics from even being mentioned in public schools like structural racism and gender differences in our society.

"The divide and conquer strategy has been widely used throughout history. The origin of the divide-to-conquer strategy traces back to Julius Caesar, who made it most famous, and Napoleon, who frequently employed the tactic of separating his enemies." ... "Both the Roman Empire and the British Empire played small tribes and groups against one another in order to control their lands and territories. It was used by the Romans when they took Britain, and when the British Empire took India, and when the Anglo-Normans took Ireland. A staple political strategy, divide and conquer is still used by many countries today."

In our increasingly dystopian modern times, radically partisan far-right factions have become so zealous in their pursuit of money, power and control that they are monomaniacally fervent in their eagerness to sacrifice democracy, fair dealings, political moderation, just compromise, the common good, honesty, decency, peaceable coexistence, judicial integrity, basic principles of equity and inclusion, honorable public service, the natural rights of women, social cohesion and domestic tranquility -- and even future well-being and the providential conditions for the survival of life on Earth found in healthy habitats and ecosystems, and a stable climate and sustainable living.

Democracies are instituted to ensure freedoms for the people and popular control over government authority. Demagogic politicians try to turn power derived from rallied popular support into a force that undermines the very freedoms and rule of law that democracies are designed to protect. The Greek historian Polybius wrote more than 2,100 years ago that democracies are vulnerable to being undone by demagogues, indicating that every democracy eventually degenerates into "a government of violence and the strong hand," and leads to mob rule and a reign of violence and "tumultuous assemblies, massacres, banishments ..."

A demagogue is a person "whose lust for power without recourse to principle leads them to seek to become a master of the masses." Demagogic leaders gain power by exciting the passions of the mob against government or elites or more moderate factions -- and against anyone opposed to their insurgency and demanded domination.

Rogue Gerrymandering

A core understanding in this essay is that an intentionally polarized populace and gerrymandered congressional districts lead directly to deep political dysfunction in Congress. Scheming politicians in gerrymandered districts are able to entrench themselves in power, and they mainly need to compete with more extreme candidates within their own party, so that winning candidates on both sides of the political aisle are those who are often unwilling to compromise with other representatives in the opposing party.

But it is critically important that we address the big problems we face, so we must demand fairer representation and nonpartisan redistricting. This requires more expansive and inclusive voting rights for all American citizens.

Gerrymandering is wrong for many reasons, but foremost because it drastically increases polarization between people. Understand the incontestable truth that polarization of the populace prevents the overwhelming majority of the people from joining together in common cause to reform our pathetically unfairly rigged system. Greater unity is highly desirable because it would be the most auspicious avenue for achieving a more broadly inclusive range of greater good goals, like reducing inequalities in opportunity, education and healthcare, and helping prevent

corporate entities from running roughshod over working people and the environmental commons. More fairly drawn redistricting maps would give more power to the people, thus giving more weight and respect to public opinion and preferences -- like regulating polluters' egregious activities, and proactively preventing bank bailout seekers from being rewarded for rash moral hazard risk-taking, and diminishing the excessive control of anti-abortion activists, and succeeding in reducing gun violence. These outcomes would greatly improve the general welfare in our society.

Fox News Exposed

One of the most pernicious influences in recent years is the divisive culture war-promoting, anti-immigrant, pro-Trump tactics of Fox News Channel. Fox "News" has had a more negative, divisive, antagonizing, dangerous, far-reaching and harmfully impactful impact on the USA than almost anything else.

"The people running the country's most popular news network knew Mr. Trump's claims of voter fraud in the 2020 election were false but broadcast them anyway in a reckless pursuit of ratings and profit." This is the central allegation of the Dominion Voting Systems huge defamation lawsuit against Fox, which Fox lost at a cost of almost \$800 million. And remarks made by Rupert Murdoch add to the evidence that Dominion adduced to prove its case.

The lies Fox pushed about the election "did not simply harm Dominion. They harmed democracy. They harmed the idea of creditable elections." The many Fox falsehoods, repeated repetitiously, helped provoke the fervor that led to the deadly and injurious mob assault against Congress on January 6, 2021.

Fox "News" not only pushes emotion-manipulating propaganda but also operates by omission, like when it refused to broadcast the sensational January 6 House Committee's hearings into the MAGA mob attack against Congress, and instead zealously began concerted efforts to whitewash the insurrection. Fox hosts wanted people to not "believe their lying eyes", but to trust hosts like Tucker Carlson who unethically twisted the truth and made people believe that participants in the MAGA crowd were merely tourists and peaceful protestors, rather than an assembled mob led by subversive Trump conspirators and violent extremists like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and other heavily armed militia groups. These extremists were intent on preventing the peaceful transfer of power to a duly elected new president.

Since the beginning of Trump's 2016 election campaign, Fox News has morphed into a Trump state media organ, coordinating and conspiring with Trump and other Republicans to push divisive and antagonizing viewpoints and false conspiracies. Sensationally, the media colossus Fox News Channel has been revealed to be highly unfair and exceedingly poorly balanced, and often deceitful and intentionally inaccurate. Claims of being "Fair and Balanced" were an outrageous deception.

Fox "News" peddles lies and "confirmation bias" to the viewers in its manipulative echo chamber, telling them what they want to hear, not what Fox knows to be true. Fox thus cynically engages in devious and incendiary hucksterism that has broadly damaging and dangerous influence and impacts in the USA. So much damning information is coming to light about Fox Corp. that I wrote another revealing essay titled *Fox News Treachery: Profiteering through Perniciously Pushing Polarizing Propaganda*. Check it out!

Emotion Hijacking Straight from the Propaganda Playbook

Tucker Carlson is a dangerous demagogue who, until he was fired in the wake of the Dominion defamation lawsuit, used manipulative communication strategies from a "Propaganda Playbook", as explained by Professor Jennifer Mercieca.

"Propaganda is a type of communication built for warfare. It is communication as a kind of force, a weapon in itself. War propaganda typically focuses on 'us versus them', emotional appeals, conspiracy and other tactics designed to erode the confidence of the enemy or build the confidence of one's own side."

"But we don't find these propaganda tactics used just during warfare. We find them being used daily on social media and cable news and other media that work on the metrics of attention and engagement. Propaganda is great at getting our attention, but it's terrible for democracy." Professor Mercieca continues: "I teach classes on effective and ethical communication and lately I've been teaching my students how to recognize propaganda when they see it. These tactics are effective in warfare, I explain, and fundamentally unethical in daily life. They

amount to 'influence without consent,' denying our ability to think critically. Politics is not warfare."

"We've known since Aristotle that emotional appeals are persuasive. We know, especially, that appeals work. Media effects scholars have explained that strong emotions like outrage and fear can be elicited through media content, and can be contagious, and can misinform our understanding of threats like violence and crime."

Propagandists, writes Jennifer Mercieca, often use manipulative conspiracy theories as an emotion-hijacking appeal to people's fears. "In response to perceived danger the stress hormones adrenalin and cortisol flood the brain, hijacking the amygdala and preventing critical thinking." It should be clearly understood that critical thinking is vitally important to the greater good.

Misunderstandings are easily propagated by bots on social media, amplifying negative impacts. Bots, according to an expert, are "built to manufacture the illusion of popularity. Repetition is the core weapon of propaganda and bots are really good at repetition. They're good at getting information in front of people's eyeballs."

Divide-to-Conquer and the Perspective of "Mad Dog" Mattis

James Mattis was an influential retired Marine four-star general who served for two years as Donald Trump's secretary of defense. He resigned over his concerns that Trump was undermining "an international order that is most conducive to our security, prosperity and values."

For more than a year after his resignation, Mattis had refused to explicitly criticize Trump or his actions. But in June 2020, he was rattled after Trump's militant response to the widespread protests that took place after George Floyd, an African-American, was murdered by white police officers in Minneapolis. Mattis harshly accused Trump of trying to divide America, and roundly denounced the militarization of the U.S. response to civil unrest during the protests.

Mattis wrote in a statement, "The Nazi slogan for destroying us ... was 'Divide and Conquer.' Our American answer is 'In Union there is Strength.' We must summon that unity to surmount this crisis -- confident that we are better than our politics." That is a noble notion, and a big challenge to achieve in our excessively divided world today.

Mattis' comments accompanied "a growing affirmation from within the Pentagon's leadership of the US military's core values, including to uphold a constitution that protects freedom of assembly and the principles of equality."

"Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people -- does not even pretend to try," Mattis wrote in the statement, which was published by *The Atlantic*. "Instead he tries to divide us. We are witnessing the consequences of ... years of this deliberate effort." Trump is driven to ham it up, and tell lies wantonly, and pander to his base, often pantomiming some sick parody on rally stages.

Another observer noted, "Sure, American politics was polarized before Trump. Trump's strategy is to exploit and enlarge these divisions." ... And, "Sure, this paranoia is based on the same racism and xenophobia that has smoldered in America since its inception. Trump's strategy is to stoke it daily."

Everyone who takes an oath to uphold the Constitution and everything for which it stands has certain obligations. General Joseph Lengyel, Air Force Chief of the National Guard Bureau, wrote in a published statement in June 2020, shortly after George Floyd was kned to a slow and agonizing death: "If we are to fulfill our obligation as service members, as Americans, and as decent human beings, we have to take our oath seriously. We cannot tolerate racism, discrimination, or casual violence. We ask for the intercession of what Abraham Lincoln called 'the better angels of our nature.' Join me."

Diane Goettel explains in *What is a Divide and Conquer Strategy?:* "A divide and conquer strategy, also known as 'divide and rule strategy' is often applied in the arenas of politics and sociology. In this strategy, one power breaks another power into smaller, more manageable pieces, and then takes control of those pieces one by one. It generally takes a very strong power to implement such a strategy. In order to successfully break up another power or government, the conqueror must have access to strong political, military, and economic machines."

And in such overbearing power, tyranny lurks. It is thus that corrupt coalitions of the rich and the plutocratic corporatocracy rule, with the blessing of, and in cahoots with, fundamentalist right-wing Christian Nationalists.

Divide-to-Conquer Tactics Perpetuate Inequalities, Inequities and Injustices

In Matthew 12:25 of the Bible, Jesus said "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."

Despite the overarching undesirability of desolation and societies falling apart, or being chaotically riven with civil strife and impulses toward factional warfare, many politicians and demagogues over the ages have found that the best way to achieve their selfish goals is to divide people asunder.

Divide-and-conquer tactics have had epic short-term success in many countries throughout history. As a result, we can clearly see that good governance requires us to find effective ways to prevent rogue leaders from exploiting weaknesses and division to the harsh detriment of the people.

Increasing inequalities of income and wealth are one of the worst consequences of strategies used to divide people and override fairness principles and policies. Such unjust disparities are also one of the main contributory causes of division and discord.

The USA today is suffering the bitterly miserable effects of our house being purposely divided for the narrow benefit of greedily scheming power-prepossessed "dividers", so it is critically important for us to adopt effective measures to alter this perilous course.

Civil liberties are seriously being infringed upon, and Republicans are rendering government inadequately effective and unable to guarantee voting rights or protect people from abuses of power. The two main arenas where this is glaringly clear are their domination of legislatures in red states and of the Supreme Court. These pose serious problems with the fundamental bulwarks of democracy.

In addition, House Republicans are holding the nation hostage by threatening a default on the national debt. This could spark an international financial crisis and seriously damage the American economy. "Indeed, the willingness of the Republican Party to default on the country's debt shows how thoroughly radicalized it has become. Even the Republican leaders who do not embrace the racism, sexism, religiosity, nihilism, and authoritarianism of the hard-core MAGA Republicans appear to believe they cannot win an election without the votes of those people. And so the extremists now own the party."

The MAGA Republican base continues to support 2020 election loser Trump, who at a recent Conservative Political Action Conference promised "those who have been wronged and betrayed: I am your retribution." The Republican Party has become one of grievance and revenge, feeding on their false belief that Trump won the 2020 election.

Look here now: a big reason that coldly calculating factions are getting away with these abuses of power is because they often yield huge monetary rewards for the dividers.

Every person who has a net worth of \$5 million or more is quite financially fortunate. And the many Many are struggling mightily. The financially fortunate are largely well off because of the particular provisions involved in the rigging of our economic and political systems. And those provisions have been written into law and tax policies by guess who? Yes, of course by those with Big Money! The solution, simply put, would be to change our national system of taxation so that it is a much more highly graduated system (i.e., more "progressive").

People with high net worths should not be allowed to have so much influence in determining the structure of tax policies. Instead, of course, as it is, they write the laws, perpetuate public debt-financed tax cut swindles, and grab the most they can get of the proverbial national pie while indulging in a great national scam of evading taxes. And at the same time they engage in a gargantuan subterfuge by continuing to be principal contributors to causing an increasingly heavy burden of mounting national debt obligations by refusing to pay a larger share of their incomes, dividends and capital gains in taxes, even on the inheritances they leave after they die.

Understand that there has been a net increase in the national debt since 1980 from under \$1 trillion to over \$30 trillion -- and at the same time, the total net worth of the top 1% has probably increased by more than \$40 trillion.

One particularly pernicious ploy that conservatives use to gain power is to blame leaders who oppose them for what they themselves are actually most guilty. The Trump Republican base, as a prime instance, is angry about their

economic and social status, for indeed the bottom 90% of Americans have been ripped off in our rigged system, and are right to be resentful about it. Here's the story, as told by the sensible billionaire Nick Hanauer and a colleague.

There has been an "upward redistribution" of income in the U.S. over the past 45 years that has cost American workers a staggering \$50 trillion. Working people have been ripped off! "This is not some back-of-the-napkin approximation. According to a groundbreaking new working paper by Carter C. Price and Kathryn Edwards of the RAND Corporation, had the more equitable income distributions of the three decades following World War II (1945 through 1974) merely held steady, the aggregate annual income of Americans earning below the 90th percentile would have been \$2.5 trillion higher in the year 2018 alone. That is an amount equal to nearly 12 percent of GDP -- enough to more than double median income -- enough to pay every single working American in the bottom nine deciles an additional \$1,144 a month. Every month. Every single year."

Price and Edwards explain that, for 30 years after World War II, real incomes grew close to the rate of per capita economic growth across all income levels. That means those at the bottom and middle of the distribution saw their incomes grow at about the same rate as those at the top. "This was an era in which America built the world's largest and most prosperous middle class, an era in which inequality between income groups steadily shrank (even as shocking inequalities between the sexes and races largely remained). But around 1975, this extraordinary era of broadly shared prosperity came to an end. Since then, the wealthiest Americans, and particularly those in the top 1 percent and 0.1 percent, have managed to capture an ever-larger share of our nation's economic growth -- in fact, almost all of it -- their real incomes skyrocketing as the vast majority of Americans saw little if any gains." This state of affairs must be remedied.

A Good Solution: One Person, One Vote

One of the biggest near-term threats to survival of our constitutional republic is found in the extreme imbalance of power between the top dogs who are most financially fortunate and everyone else in the bottom 90%.

We simply must change the cold calculus that has caused this woeful state of affairs. It is an outrage against fairness and decency that, as reported by researchers in a Princeton study, "The preferences of the average American appear to have only a miniscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy." Lawmakers mainly heed the policy demands of big business and wealthy individuals -- those with the most lobbying prowess and deepest pockets to bankroll campaigns and promote their views. And they get what they want.

To rectify this consequential imbalance, more power must be given to the people by limiting the influence that rich people and corporations are currently able to exert. To accomplish this, a strict "one person, one vote" policy must be established, and more expansive voting rights and opportunities must be given to all voting age citizens. And campaign finance reform must be instituted to prevent Big Money from wielding overwhelming sway.

See expansive understandings of this idea in my essay *The Crucial Need for Fairer Voting Rights*. It contains an entertaining counter-proposal expressed by Tom Perkins, a surpassingly presumptuous multi-billionaire who reckoned that the best way to make the world a fairer place would be by depriving every citizen who doesn't pay any taxes of the right to vote, and to make our system a "one dollar, one vote" system so that rich people would have even more unassailable influence in determining our national tax and spending policies. In this, Perkins threw a wicked curve, and it was a serious Laffer! (Tom Perkins, RIP.)

Women's Rights: Another Front in Divide-to-Conquer Schemes

It seems clear that anti-choice absolutism is another front in divide-to-conquer triumphalism, and a dastardly form of Pyrrhic victory of males over females, and of myopic unfairness over the greater good.

Many conservative politicians are intent on outlawing abortions. In this offensive against women's rights and their health and agency in their lives, "conservatives" are displaying sexism and misogyny by rigidly pushing willfully hard-line male supremacist policies. Misogyny is a contemptuous attitude toward women that keeps women at a lower social status than men, thus maintaining the discriminatory societal roles of patriarchy.

"Patriarchy is an institutionalized social system in which men dominate over others, and have particular dominant

control over women. It extends to a variety of manifestations in which men have social privileges over others to cause exploitation or oppression, such as through male dominance of moral authority."

One main patriarchal goal is to perpetuate gender inequities by depriving women of rights, freedoms, economic security and personal agency. In this, male politicians and judges wield social policy as oppressive instruments of power, reflecting an authoritarian social norm that maintains an inflexible and often draconian control over women.

Religions with dominion-demanding male gods have been around for thousands of years, and are ascendant in the world today because they supplanted earlier religions that worshipped Mother Earth goddesses long ago in history. Male-dominated religions facilitate a knee-on-the-neck type of overarching subjugation of females, and tend to restrict women's roles in families and society to traditional ones that sought to keep women "barefoot and pregnant." This figure of speech is commonly associated with the idea that women should not work outside the home, and should have many children during their reproductive years -- whether or not they want to.

Suddenly one of the most negatively powerful branches of government is the federal judiciary, with the Supreme Court and many other courts newly captured by conservatives. The judiciary is supposed to be an independent and just institution that defends the citizenry from abuses of power by the legislative and executive branches. It can no longer be trusted to fill this role honestly and fairly.

An integral part of a strong and inclusive democracy is having a fair and just judiciary, and judges who will follow the law and science rather than doing the bidding of corporate interests, polluters or religious fundamentalists.

Elizabeth Warren observes, "Extremists have hijacked the judiciary, and they're using it to advance a far-right agenda that they'd never be able to pass through Congress. They're using it to rig the rules even more in favor of the rich and powerful, and they're using it to rip away our freedoms." They have done this with voting rights and gerrymandering, and environmental protections cases and abortion rights and gun safety cases, and are considering doing this by ruling that the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is unconstitutional, and that the medication abortion drug mifepristone should be outlawed, and that the government cannot cancel student debt.

Three of the conservative Justices who have overturned Roe protections are control-demanding white males, and one is the reactionary, ethics-deficient Clarence Thomas, and the last is a former "Handmaiden" for People of Praise, "a charismatic Christian religious group that holds that men are divinely ordained as the 'head' of the family and faith. Former members of the group say it teaches that wives must submit to the will of their husbands."

Judicial activism by Supreme Court conservatives is giving force to mandatory birthism that is imposing heavy burdens on women, causing widespread caustic discord, acrimony and chaos. And far right conservatives are acting as strict authoritarians by staking out rashly uncompromising positions.

Republican politicians have become so radicalized with absolutism in pursuit of political advantages and male dominion over women that they are now zealously willing to fall on their own swords of anti-abortion fervor by elevating the status of a woman's sperm-fertilized egg to have superior rights to any and every woman who becomes pregnant. They are thereby treating every female and her natural human rights as being inferior, subjected to male dictates in what resembles the dystopian totalitarian white supremacist male patriarchy in the 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. In that story by Canadian author Margaret Atwood, "handmaids" are forcibly assigned to produce children for "commanders" -- the ruling class of men.

It is a harsh dictate for politicians and governments to deny every woman that becomes pregnant the right to make her own personal decision about whether or not to carry the fertilized egg for nine months.

Republican politicians are turning this ultimate wedge issue of absolutist anti-abortion politics into a cudgel of zealous advantage-seeking in a maniacal pursuit and abuse of power. They are demanding dominion for themselves and their embattled and embittered supporters and fellow believers over women, and seeking to have people in their radically reactionary extremist political tribe triumph over all others by imposing anti-choice decrees on women. In this, they seem hell bent on creating a patriarchal dystopia like that imagined in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Advantage-seeking politicians have weaponized this hot button issue to galvanize fund raising off resentments. In that, they hijack people's emotions and amplify hate and pursue scorched earth divide-to-conquer tactics, painting

neighbors as enemies and demanding dominion over everyone else by acting like totalitarian dictators.

Rachel Carmona, executive director of the Women's March, helped organize and participated in a major protest that took place in Washington, D.C. in May 2022. She said women and their allies nationwide were marching "to see an end to the attacks on our bodies," and vowed, "You can expect for women to be completely ungovernable until this government starts to work for us." She added, "If it's a fight they want, it's a fight they'll get."

In Chicago, where thousands also marched, a spokeswoman for the executive committee of the Indivisible Chicago Alliance, said, "Right now, a minority of lawmakers in Washington are taking away our voice. So we're here, thousands strong, to use our voice and stand up for what we believe in." For freedoms and rightful prerogatives.

Let's Honorably Respect Women's Rights

It is morally wrong to adopt an uncompromising and inflexible stand by banning abortions and intrusively interfering in women's lives. This is an unacceptably wrongheaded subjugation of women.

Sex can be a beautiful form of intimacy, and it is absurd and wrong for politicians to force every heterosexual couple engaged in enjoying it to be risking a lifelong obligation to raise a child.

Forced birthism is not only a severe infringement on the rights of women and their families, it is also a serious privacy issue. State governments shouldn't be allowed to mean-spiritedly interfere with doctor-patient decisions and privacy-protected relationships.

An estimated 30 percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage every year, and some of the methods of managing a miscarriage are the same as abortion. "Doctors in Texas, which has a total 6-week abortion ban with no exceptions for rape or incest, report that pharmacists have begun questioning patients about miscarriage medications, suspecting they may be used instead for abortions." The surveillance state is becoming more and more oppressive.

This is a pathologically harmful and unjust consequence of new dictates imposed on women. When a pregnant woman suffers a miscarriage, she may be subjected to suspicion and liability for being charged with homicide, and livelihoods of her doctors are threatened by possible charges of aiding and abetting their patients by providing them with life-saving medical care.

And this is an issue that involves not only miscarriages. Something like two percent of pregnancies are ectopic. Ectopic pregnancies are ones in which a fertilized egg implants outside of the uterus, most commonly in the fallopian tube. "The fallopian tube is not made to hold a growing embryo and can't stretch like a uterus. This condition can lead to bleeding in the mother, and can be fatal."

Since ectopic pregnancies are life-threatening conditions, they require emergency treatment. In such pregnancies, the fetus is not viable, so forcing a woman to endure delays in addressing the situation is mercilessly harmful. Republican politicians, nonetheless, have created this state of affairs and seem to be staunchly opposed to fairly allowing women to enjoy human rights to good medical care. This is an outrage beyond comprehension. Many women are being harmed and forced to suffer.

Other intended and unintended consequences of outlawing abortions are becoming clearer by the day. "Mass chaos" is happening in many hospitals due to the unworkable confusion created by rapidly shifting laws, and many doctors are afraid of being subjected to criminal penalties for helping their patients.

Republicans in red states are trying to scare health care providers into refusing to perform abortions, even when they are legal. This anti-abortion tactic is another heinous development, involving the harassment of doctors for doing their jobs and helping women.

"Pro-life" Republicans in Idaho have even declared that pregnant women should be left to die rather than abort a fetus. Idaho's Republican Party voted in 2022 against adopting an amendment in its party platform that would have added an exception to its official policy on abortion for cases to save the life of the mother. "Scott Herndon, a Republican running unopposed for a state Senate seat, argued to delegates that 'for the last 49 years we have essentially lost the argument in the culture because we have focused on abortion as the termination of a pregnancy and not the termination of a living human being.' He added, 'We will never win this human rights issue, the greatest

of our time, if we make allowances for the intentional killing of another human being.' Obviously, he did not note that withholding life-saving care from a pregnant person, knowing they could die, is also an intentional killing, because that would apparently require too much reflection on his part."

The idea that life begins at conception and deserves absolute protection from that moment is based on a religious belief held by some conservative Christians. And if lawmakers such as GOP Rep. Lauren Boebert have their way, we may see more religion-based laws imposed in Republican-controlled states. In 2022, Boebert told folks at the Cornerstone Christian Center in Basalt, Colorado that she was "tired of this separation of church and state junk," arguing, "The church is supposed to direct the government." She is Constitutionally completely wrong about this.

One Damning Circumstance Among a Multitude

Radically extreme interest groups have captured the Supreme Court and many federal trial courts and District Courts of Appeals, especially in the South, and they now pose a terrible threat to voting rights, democratic fairness, reasonable rules of law and our democracy itself.

The blind injustice of the ruling by Republicans on the Supreme Court that overturned *Roe v. Wade* resulted in Ohio Republicans' egregious "trigger law" going into effect. Soon thereafter, a 10-year-old girl was the victim of being raped and was forced to go to Indiana to get an abortion. Indiana Republicans rushed in turn to match Ohio's forced birthism mandate, which would make it that much more difficult, expensive and dangerous for even young girls who have been raped to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

This is an outrageous further victimization of victims of vile rape assaults, and it is being done to defend religious fundamentalist dogmas and reinforce usurped power. This rash abuse of authority is drastically contrary to the rights of women, and to common sense, true morality, empathy, economic fairness and basic human rights. An image of Amy Coney Barrett's face looms into the national consciousness, as seen on an Internet poster that read: I DEMAND THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM TO IMPOSE MY RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ON YOU.

Right-wing commentators jumped on this story about the 10-year-old rape victim, trying to discredit it. Tucker Carlson called it a lie, and verbally attacked President Biden for mentioning the case in a speech. Other prominent Republicans, including Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan suggested the case was fabricated. Trumpian Governor Kristi Noem of South Dakota cast doubt on the story, calling it "fake news". The Republican Attorney General of Ohio, Dave Yost, said during an appearance on Fox News that he hadn't heard "a whisper" from law enforcement in the state about any reports or arrests made in connection with such a case.

"Another lie. Anyone surprised?" Jordan wrote in response to Yost's comments in a tweet -- which has since been deleted after the story was corroborated by a rapist having confessed to having had sex with the young girl.

In the immediate aftermath of Ohio police having arrested the rape suspect in the case, Attorney General Yost had to scramble to make a statement, and declared that his "heart aches for the pain suffered by this young child." Well, thoughts and prayers are not adequate in circumstances like this. Protecting young girls from oppressive Republican dictates has become suddenly increasingly urgently necessary.

Ohio Rep. Brian Stewart also dismissed the story, tweeting that he "wouldn't trust an abortionist to tell me whether the sky is blue." One giant problem in our politics today is that Republican politicians cannot ever be trusted to tell the truth, or to act responsibly, or to fairly represent majority opinion, or to put Country over Party and defend the best interests of the majority of real live people.

Conservatives are acting thus, at this stress-engorged moment in history, to distract people from their efforts to whitewash their complicity in fomenting the January 6 MAGA insurrection against Congress and their slow-motion on-going coup against democracy, fairness, reason, gender equity and fairer representation of all constituencies.

Invoke the Fourteenth Amendment

Many Republican lawmakers in the GOP admit the violence on January 6 "was bad or potentially unlawful, without admitting that Trump or his lies about our election system inspired it, lies that have continued widely since." (Lies promoted, knowingly, by Fox "News" hosts.)

"There was a time when Republicans contemplated a different direction. Right after the Jan. 6 insurgency, GOP leaders in the House and Senate gave speeches blaming Trump for the assault, and many observers thought that the mob that attacked Congress were engaged in a seditious conspiracy to prevent a peaceful transition of power to a duly elected new president."

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, in a rare moment of explicit honesty, stated unequivocally that Trump was culpable in the January 6 assault on Congress: "There's no question, none, that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of the day. No question about it. The people who stormed this building believed they were acting on the wishes and instructions of their president. And having that belief was a foreseeable consequence of the growing crescendo of false statements, conspiracy theories and reckless hyperbole, which the defeated president kept shouting into the largest megaphone on planet Earth."

The House January 6 committee showed that Trump is an unrepentant conspiring rogue who should be disqualified from public office for the danger he represents to our democracy, due to his frequent violations of the test of current and "imminent lawless action" that the Supreme Court established in 1969 as a "clear and present danger".

In a classic case of having "buried the lede", here is my most important point. Before I get to further seriously belaboring the sadly wrongheaded ruses involved in shrewd divide-to-conquer schemes, let's demand accountability, and require reasonable restitution for harms inflicted and damages done to our Constitutional institutions by the treachery Mr. Trump has engaged in.

Let's agree to do the right thing. Let's demand that Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment be invoked to disqualify Trump from ever again holding office. This provision, after all, clearly requires that no person shall be President who has "engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the Constitution of the United States." This will consign Trump to the disreputable dustbin of history, where he belongs.

Note that the Fourteenth Amendment also stipulates that "No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress ... who has engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the Constitution of the United States." There are a number of members of Congress, like Sen. Josh Hawley and Rep. Jim Jordan, that should be disqualified from office because of their roles in having helped foment the insurrectionary coup attempt.

Josh Hawley had encouraged the assembling rioters on January 6 by giving them a notorious fist pump, raising his fist in solidarity with the crowd. But then he was forced to run scared when the threatening siege mob got close. Journalist Adam Serwer acerbically tweeted, "Hawley riling up the mob and then fleeing in terror is an incredible political metaphor." Cowardly and traitorous.

The Diabolical Machinations of Arthur Finkelstein

An early instigator of divide-to-conquer strategies was Arthur Finkelstein, a political consultant from Brooklyn who had worked to elect Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond and Ronald Reagan, among other conservatives. "Try to polarize the election around that issue which cuts best in your direction, i.e., drugs, crime, race," Finkelstein wrote in 1970, in a memo to the Nixon White House.

Finkelstein had helped Benjamin Netanyahu get elected in Israel by using lies to divide the populace and win. In 2008 Netanyahu introduced Finkelstein to Viktor Orbán, the authoritarian leader of Hungary, and he steered Orbán, who "had been running against globalism, multiculturalism and bureaucracy in Brussels. These were abstractions. By 2013, Finkelstein had an epiphany: the face of the enemy should be (the liberal Hungarian billionaire) George Soros." Notably, in 2023, Netanyahu is trying to eliminate independence of Israel's judiciary, for corrupt reasons. The Israeli people, commendably, organized and demonstrated against this in large numbers.

Viktor Orbán had once been considered a progressive, but after he lost an election in 2002, he resolved to return to power and change "the rules of the game" -- so that he would never lose again. When he returned to power, he did so repressively. And similar things to what are happening in Hungary are happening in the United States today. "The frog isn't boiling yet, but the water's getting hotter." To better understand this nefarious influence, read the article by Andrew Marantz about the increasingly radically right Republican Party, in his article *THE ILLEBERAL ORDER*, which was published in the July 4, 2022 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine.

Republicans today are members of a Party controlled by extremists. This is an extraordinary contrast to the days when President Dwight Eisenhower honorably talked about the desirability of moderation and a reasonable modicum of justice in our society. He observed in a great Military-Industrial Complex Speech that we must consider things "in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs -- balance between the private and the public economy, balance between cost and hoped for advantage -- balance between the clearly necessary and the comfortably desirable; balance between our essential requirements as a nation and the duties imposed by the nation upon the individual; balance between actions of the moment and the national welfare of the future. Good judgment seeks balance and progress; lack of it eventually finds imbalance and frustration."

Here is another commendable quote from Ike's great Military-Industrial Complex Speech: "Down the long lane of the history yet to be written, America knows that this world of ours, ever growing smaller, must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect."

He compellingly added: "You and I -- my fellow citizens -- need to be strong in our faith that all nations, under God, will reach the goal of peace with justice. May we be ever unswerving in devotion to principle, confident but humble with power, diligent in pursuit of the Nation's great goals."

In drastic contrast, Trump while president verbally assaulted Black Lives Matter protestors, calling them "thugs" and "terrorists". He also made Asian Americans the target of hate crimes by calling the deadly coronavirus the "Chinese virus" and "Kung flu". And he appealed to his white supremacist supporters, telling a mostly white crowd in Minnesota they have "good genes." And he lied brazenly with his claims that he did not lose the 2020 election.

Background of the January 6 Insurrection

The House January 6 committee did an extraordinarily good job of revealing the extent to which the assault on the U.S. Capitol was planned, and the criminal actions that made this perhaps the worst incited insurrection and seditious conspiracy in American history.

The Committee provided the American people with incendiary revelations about Trump's role in this attack against Congress. The event was obviously a rogue attempt to obstruct an official proceeding of Congress, and it sure looks like Trump was a top coup plotter in a seditious conspiracy trying to prevent the peaceful transfer of power.

See clearly that Trump formulated a premeditated plan before the 2020 election to claim victory, knowing that there has been "a red mirage" in recent elections that makes it appear that a candidate with fewer mail-in votes is leading before the mail-in votes are counted. He set up this diabolical scheme to claim that if he lost, that would mean the results would be invalid.

Then he resoundingly lost the election, and began using incendiary rhetoric to claim that the election had been stolen from him. FRAUD, he proclaimed, and monomaniacally pushed this big lie. He had his due process to contest the election by waging legal battles that featured over 60 seriously frivolous lawsuits, in which he and his surrogates, like his slimy lawyer Rudy Giuliani, tried to overturn the certified election results -- and they abjectly failed in every case, because facts, evidence and truth still fortuitously have sway in our courts.

Once his legal challenges were over, he continued to contest the election, and began violating the sacred oath he had taken to uphold the Constitution. He and his allies formulated a plan to certify fake electors. "In an attempt to overturn the 2020 election, Trump campaign officials tried to subvert the Electoral College process by installing fake GOP electors in seven swing states. The Trump backers then signed fake certificates proclaiming their votes for president and vice president."

Prosecutors in Georgia are finally, over two years later, pursuing criminal charges against those involved in this "fake electors" scheme in Georgia.

On December 14, 2020, Electoral College delegations met in each state to officially cast their votes, which had been certified in every state, and Joe Biden got 306 votes and Trump 232 votes. The final step in the constitution-prescribed process is the official count of electors' votes in a joint session of Congress -- this on January 6, 2021.

Trump continued to promote his big lie about alleged widespread election fraud, even though he was told repeatedly

that this wasn't true. He and his scheming allies "mounted pressure campaigns against local officials in swing states, top officials in the Justice Department and ultimately Vice President Mike Pence, seeking to persuade them to disregard established norms and laws to keep Trump in office."

As his desperation increased, he let a motley group of treason plotters into the White House on Dec. 18, 2020 for a reportedly rancorous and crazy six-hour conspiratorial confefe. Late that night, at 2:42am, Trump tweeted out a mob boss alert: "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. ... Be there. Will be wild." He was signaling to his loyalists to assemble, and promised a real rumble, and began plotting a coup to be led by violent extremists that included the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers. Many have since been found guilty of seditious conspiracy.

Extremist groups had been obediently but impatiently standing by -- ever since Trump told them to, during widespread Black Lives Matter protests that were roiling the nation in the hot summer of 2020. Back then, he lied about even knowing who the Proud Boys were, but he told white supremacists to cool it for a while, and actually told them "to stand back, and stand by."

When Trump gave his speech at the Ellipse on January 6, he urged an angry armed mob to march on the Capitol. Then he went back to the White House and watched the attack unfold on Fox News for 3 hours after the Capitol building was breached. Instead of telling rioters to stop, he called a main coup plotter, Rudi Giuliani, who incited the crowd on January 6 to march on the Capitol and wreak violence, declaring, "Let's have trial by combat." He also called Republican Senators to get them to vote against the scheduled certification of the vote in the official proceedings. Despite urgings from White House lawyers, staff, Fox News commentators and his daughter Ivanka, among others, Trump refused for more than 3 hours to act to tell his rioting supporters to stop their assault.

This was a grave and intentional dereliction of duty and an egregious violation of his presidential oath of office to "faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States," and "to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

During the day on January 6, secrecy was the order of the day, with no official White House records for a good part of the day. The phone call logs are blank for more than 7 hours, and there were big gaps in the presidential daily diary, and the White House photographer was told she couldn't record the historic event by taking pictures. And the Secret Service unethically erased text messages they had been told to retain.

The evidence is damning about Trump's push to overturn the election by planning to lie about the outcome, then lying about the results when he lost, and making false claims of voter fraud, and then exhausting legal means to contest the election through the courts by the middle of December 2020. And then, after his legal recourse was thwarted, he summonsed his loyalist supporters and incited tens of thousands of his followers to march in an insurrectionary mob to the Capitol building, where they attacked the Capitol Police and Congress.

Trump can never again be trusted with power, for he refuses to place the best interests of the Country over his own selfish greed and egomaniacal thirst for power. And, as he was getting ready to formally declare his 2024 candidacy for the presidency, one observer noted, "he won't just be running for another term in the White House. He'll be running away from legal troubles, criminal charges, and even the specter of prison time."

As explained in *Trump Tells Team He Needs to Be President Again to Save Himself from Criminal Probes*, "In recent months, Trump has made clear to associates that the legal protections of occupying the Oval Office are front-of-mind for him, four people with knowledge of the situation tell *Rolling Stone*."

Trump not only wants presidential immunity for his misdeeds, but also the power to pick his own loyalist attorney general to stop Justice Department investigations. He wanted to announce another run for the presidency early -- "even before Election Day 2022 -- in the hopes of clearing the field of primary rivals." But GOP leaders, including some of Trump's closest advisors, didn't want him to declare his intentions until after the midterm elections. The GOP wanted to keep voters focused on President Joe Biden and their inflammatory, devious and virulent attacks against him, rather than transforming the contest into a referendum on the loser Donald Trump. Trump reluctantly agreed to hold off, "only to return shortly thereafter with threats to make an early announcement, either out of self-interest, spite or some combination of the two." He subsequently impatiently declared his intentions to run again for the presidency just one week after the November 8 elections.

History Morphs

More than two years after the riotous insurrectionary MAGA attack on Congress, the American public is still being subjected to whitewashing of the events and the dangerous influence of lawmakers who actively participated in terrorizing our country and desecrating our democracy. "Crisis upon crisis pile on, adding weight to our already heavy hearts while pulling our thoughts away from the gruesome events of that day. Meanwhile, those representatives and senators who attempted to subvert the will of the people continue to dress in suits and ties, showing up for their jobs as if they have a clue about what service to their country means. Seeming untouchable like their instigator-in-chief, still on the loose, will any of them ever face justice for their traitorous actions?"

Remember, Republican Rep. Liz Cheney was demoted in the U.S. House because she had the courage, honesty and integrity to stand up to Trump's lies about the 2020 election and his conspiratorial efforts to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. She was replaced as chair of the House Republican Conference -- the third-highest position in the House Republican leadership -- by Elise Stefanik, a Trump sycophant who had initially been elected to the House as a moderate in New York, but then opportunistically tacked radically to the right to support Trump against being impeached for his misdeeds. Stefanik has been outspoken in standing up for Trump in his obsessive efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. On the day the House investigation into the attack began, she preposterously asserted that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was responsible for the attack. Or, that maybe the perpetrators were actually "antifa", as many deceitful conservatives absurdly claimed of the ugly MAGA mob.

Jackassery rules in Republicanland! It overrules honor, integrity, honesty and the duty pledged in the oath of office to support and defend the Constitution and the country against all enemies at home or abroad.

We cannot afford to "stand back and stand by" and watch as Trump's authoritarian Republicans run roughshod over the common good in so many arenas, especially as concerns voting rights, women's reproductive rights, planned parenthood, economic inequities, fair-minded justice, gun safety and climate action.

A damning political cartoon shows Liz Cheney in the first frame speaking TRUTH through a megaphone, and Kevin McCarthy and Matt Gaetz in the second frame declaring, "We're getting rid of Liz Cheney because she isn't carrying out our message." In another revealing cartoon, there are eight frames, and in the first seven, a baffled obese elephant guy wearing a red-and-white GOP badge stands in front of a mat reading Welcome, and sequentially holding arms wide open for Q-ANON; PROUD BOYS; WHITE SUPREMACISTS; JAN. 6TH INSURRECTIONISTS; NEO-NAZIS; FLAT EARTHERS; CLIMATE CHANGE DENIERS; and RELIGIOUS ZEALOTS. In the final frame, the same GOP elephant is scowling angrily at LIZ CHENEY in front of a mat reading SCRAM.

Liz Cheney once said, "A former president who provoked a violent attack on this Capitol, in an effort to steal the election, has resumed his aggressive effort to convince Americans that the election was stolen from him. He risks inciting further violence." She added, "Every one of us who has sworn the oath must act to prevent the unraveling of our democracy. This is not about policy. This is not about partisanship. This is about our duty as Americans. Remaining silent and ignoring the lie emboldens the liar."

"I will not participate in that. I will not sit back and watch in silence while others lead our party down a path that abandons the rule of law and joins the former president's crusade to undermine our democracy. ... We must speak the truth. Our election was not stolen."

It is terribly tragic to have an excessively powerful political party be so monomaniacally prepossessed with fooling the people and betraying their best interests, and depriving them of their human rights, and driving wedges between them for narrow political advantages and money and greed and ego and overweening power. To succeed in their crusade, they try to deflect people's attention to inflation, the border and culture war issues -- so that they won't notice the profound extent to which they are being deprived of things and forced to endure draconian laws and policies that are detrimental to the general welfare and reasonable security of the vast majority of us all.

Conservative dominance over governments in red states and many church establishments is perpetuated not because it is popular or appeals to majority opinion or the general welfare or the common good, but because of its superior ability to manipulate people's fears, emotions, prejudices, suspicions and susceptibility to tribal affiliation -- and often to their religious beliefs in allegiance to a Christian male God.

No one should accept being so fooled by the deceitful messaging promoted by right-leaning tax-cut-demanding rich people, giant corporations and the "conservative media complex" of Fox "News" and even more far right cable news networks, along with right-wing spin, distortions, misinformation and conspiracism on social media.

Fox News hosts have tried to downplay the role of Trump's lies in inspiring the effort to violently disrupt the election's conclusion. This is a widespread phenomenon. It's essential to the "conspiracy-mongering, demagogic, populist personality cult nonsense that defines so much of prime time Trumpism."

Fox News is continuing to cultivate mass hysteria in our country for ratings and profit, making many believe falsehoods and making people feel resentful that they might be replaced by immigrants, and tricking them about COVID-19 vaccines with allegations they are dangerous and should not be taken, and other such nefarious things.

"The very influencers that peddled murderous misinformation about the pandemic and mask wearing and vaccines continue to spew venomous and fact-free beliefs without even a slap on the wrist. If a million deaths are written off as collateral damage in the war on truth, what will winning look like, and at what cost?"

The poet and novelist Charles Bukowski once incisively observed: "The problem with the world is that the intelligent people are full of doubts, while the stupid ones are full of confidence."

Marjorie Taylor Greene made a "gaspacho gaffe" that "came at a head-spinning moment, when hyper partisan politics and the long-running pandemic have combined to produce a cavalcade of misinformation, disinformation, ignorance, conspiracy theories and self-defeating protests -- as if knowing nothing has become a feature, not a bug of 2022."

Insidiously invidious efforts to spread conspiracies are a new manifestation of the divide-to-conquer strategy to gain power by cynically sowing doubt and propagating distrust to then usurp and abuse authority for greedy, selfish and oft times evilly unfair, discriminatory, money grubbing and manipulatively predatory purposes.

The Greek Goddess Nemesis was thought to wreak divine rightful retribution against those who act with hubris, and thus deserve comeuppance. Oh, you divine goddess, daughter of Erebus, primordial deity of darkness, wreak your vengeance now, that *We the People* may enjoy greater peace, security and fairer treatment.

Since many power-seeking politicians today are brazenly using incendiary tactics to grab attention and gain influence, like Senators Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz, and Reps. Jim Jordan and Marjorie Taylor Greene -- "and Trump-kowtowing cowards like Kevin McCarthy and divide-to-conquer schemers like Mitch McConnell" -- we must now realize that many of our leaders are consequentially betraying the vast majority of people in our great country.

Remember that Julius Caesar was surprised, on the Ides of March when he had just understood that his ambitions for abusing power in ancient Rome had finally provoked even his friend and trusted ally Brutus to turn on him and stab him. He asked, "Et tu, Brutus?", astonished that Brutus had joined those who opposed his hubristic effort to become a supreme emperor over the Roman people, contrary to their proud republican traditions.

Let's now ask, "Et tu, Republicans?". The powerful energy of this question might just provoke needed urgency in reflecting how badly persons have been hurt by those who have been trusted.

Listen, My Friends

Republicans are not friends of working people on most issues. They oppose increases in minimum wages that would help people keep up with inflation. They are against paying overtime pay for hours worked in excess of 40 hours per week. They staunchly oppose affordable healthcare and lower prescription drug prices, thereby preventing millions of people from enjoying benefits associated with such policies. Their zeal to gain political advantages by making regressive cuts in taxes to mainly benefit the rich is a ploy that constrains larger public investments in a broadly beneficial and more inclusive social safety net -- and drives up the national debt and interest obligations.

"There are some who blame the current plight of working Americans on structural changes in the underlying economy -- on automation, and especially on globalization. According to this popular narrative, the lower wages of the past 40 years were the unfortunate but necessary price of keeping American businesses competitive in an increasingly cutthroat global market." But in fact, there has been a transfer of wealth that has cost American

workers a staggering \$50 trillion, as mentioned above, and this "has occurred entirely *within* the American economy, not between it and its trading partners. No, this upward redistribution of income, wealth, and power wasn't inevitable; *it was a choice.*" A choice replete with hubris and treachery.

Much of this rip-off began as a direct result of trickle-down policies that Republicans have relentlessly and mercilessly imposed upon the American people. They have done this, to be clear, acting on behalf of wealthy donors who lavishly support them. "They *chose* to cut taxes on billionaires and to deregulate the financial industry. They *chose* to allow CEOs to manipulate share prices through stock buybacks, and to lavishly reward themselves with the proceeds. They *chose* to permit giant corporations, through mergers and acquisitions, to accumulate the vast monopoly power necessary to dictate both prices charged and wages paid. They *chose* to erode the minimum wage and overtime thresholds and the bargaining power of labor."

"For four decades, we chose to elect political leaders who put the material interests of the rich and powerful above those of the American people." Why did the majority make such befuddlingly poor choices? Because in our political system, there are many forms of legalized bribery and influence-peddling, so the demands of the rich are met, and the deserved compensation and needs of the vast majority of working people are not satisfied.

To achieve this state of growing inequality, divide-to-conquer ploys are used, and there is a tidal wave of devious propaganda and blaming of progressives and liberals, generously financed by rich conservatives and libertarians and operatives in right-wing think tanks. And these schemes are treacherously facilitated by courts captured by conservatives, which make rulings that diminish democracy and help prevent people's voices from being heard, and polarize the populace so that the "dividers" can prevail. Koch network billionaires and the Murdochs and Fox "News" have been integral parts of this treachery.

There are many riffs in Earth Manifesto essays about the rise of disaster capitalism and the American and global corporatocracy. Naomi Klein elaborates in her excellent book *The Shock Doctrine*. Watch the documentary of the same name on YouTube for an easy way to better understand. Suffice it to say here that a stronger democracy may be our only salvation to counter abuses of power that are sabotaging fairness and curtailing freedoms.

Corporations are not people, and allowing corporate entities to spend unlimited money is not "free speech". More inclusive democratic fairness is desperately needed in our imperiled world.

Conservatives deviously blame progressives and liberals, and libel them by calling them dangerous "socialists". What we really have here is socialism for the rich, and swim-or-sink Tough Luck capitalism oppressively burdening most everyone else. Republicans seem to be "going nuclear" on divide-to-conquer toxic emotion-hijacking fervor and woefully misplaced Trumpian loyalties. They retreat into their insular echo chambers and reinforce them with hardened silos of unneighborliness, mean-spirited stinginess, refusals to compromising, unchristian fomented animosity, ethnic and racial intolerance, and political malfeasance. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is specializing in this.

This game of "owning the libs" is a form of "rage farming", a slang term for political tactics of intentionally provoking political opponents in order to create or increase exposure for one's group or cause. "The tactic is especially associated with conservative and far-right political groups. It is typically applied to the act of posting intentionally inflammatory content, or otherwise trolling political opponents online, with the goal of eliciting a large number of angry responses." This leads to wider exposure for the content originally posted. The term is also applied to practices other than online posts, such as making inflammatory comments in interviews or speeches that will be widely covered by the media. Bots magnify this rage farming, making this a type of sickly viral affliction.

The Wise Good Professor Professes

The insightful professor Robert Reich wrote in February 2018 about *Trump's Divide-and-Conquer Strategy*:

Trump has intentionally cleaved America into two warring camps: pro-Trump and anti-Trump. And he has convinced the pro-Trumps that his enemy is their enemy.

Most Americans are not passionate conservatives or liberals, Republicans or Democrats. But they have become impassioned Trump supporters or Trump haters. Polls say 37 percent of Americans approve of him, and most disapprove. These numbers are the tips of two vast icebergs of intensity.

Trump has forced all of us to take sides, and to despise those on the other. There's no middle ground.

The Republican Party used to stand for fiscal responsibility, states' rights, free trade, and a hard line against Russian aggression. Now it just stands for Trump, and pro-Trump Republicans remain the majority in the GOP.

Schooled in reality television and New York tabloids, Trump knows how to keep both sides stirred up: vilify, disparage, denounce, defame, and accuse the other side of conspiring against America. Do it continuously. Dominate every news cycle.

Fox News is his propaganda arm, magnifying his tweets, rallies, and lies. The rest of the media also plays into Trump's strategy by making him the defining controversy of America. Every particular dispute -- DACA, the "wall," North Korea, Mueller's investigation, and so on -- becomes another aspect of the larger national war over Trump. (Editorial: and, more recently, there is the on-going insidious big lie about widespread election fraud.)

It's the divide-and-conquer strategy of a tyrant.

Democracies require sufficient social trust that citizens regard the views of those they disagree with as worthy of equal consideration to their own. That way, they'll accept political outcomes they dislike.

Trump's divide-and-conquer strategy is to destroy that trust. Supporters of Trump will strive to block any consequential challenge to his authority.

Nothing could be more dangerous to our democracy and society.

Trump is a demented master of trolling and gaslighting people. He also excels at manipulating people's emotions, blame shifting, scapegoating and pushing misinformation and disinformation. His evil genius is to appeal to people's basest emotions, and disturb the nation's psyches with his malignant demoniacal narcissistic self-centered devious attention-seeking. He bullies people, deceives and exploits weaknesses to gain power through demagogic divide-to-conquer con man ruses. Most MAGA Republicans are weak imitations of the con man demagogue-in-chief's pathologically cunning genius, and the intimidating effects and power generated by his fits of rage. Not to mention the astonishingly bigly amount of funds Trump raises "from those who are duped by the Cheeto Con Man, formerly of Teflon Don fame and notoriety."

Satirical harsh criticism has a higher purpose than mere ridicule of political foibles and absurdities, and that is to inspire a much needed remedial remodeling.

More on Divisive Inequalities

Since the main cause of extreme inequalities of income and wealth in the U.S. is deceitful "trickle down" tax cut policies, these policies should be changed. After Ronald Reagan's tenure in office began, "a rising tide" most definitely has not lifted all boats. The reason for this is that nearly all the benefits of economic growth in the past 40 years have been captured by those at the very top.

In the USA today, there are unprecedented extremes in disparities between rich and poor. The 400 wealthiest Americans have more wealth than the bottom two-thirds or so -- more than maybe 200 million people. This reality casts a glaring beam of infamy on defenders of the rights of the rich to buy commitments from influence-peddling "conservative" politicians to unalterably oppose reforms or any tax increases on the wealthy.

The only way to keep the masses from uniting in common cause, in a mutually beneficial effort to succeed in creating a fairer, safer and more secure society, is by distracting us, fooling us, and dividing us asunder.

Inequality continues to rise. According to the Economic Policy Institute, in 2021 "The top 1% now hold a record share of total earnings, while the bottom 90% share of earnings has hit a historic low." Annual wages rose fastest for the top 1% of earners (up 9%) and top 0.1% (up 18.5%). Those in the bottom 90% saw wages fall by .2%. Since 1979, wages for the top 1% have skyrocketed by 200% or so, while wages for the bottom 90% grew only 28%.

These statistics are merely numbing numbers that drily summarize underlying facts that reflect countless hardships and insecurities and much unnecessary suffering for tens of millions of Americans. These negative outcomes cannot be justified by efforts to defend giving unbelievably generous perks and privileges to the wealthy,

which they are receiving in our rigged economy and political systems, severely exacerbating inequality.

That Economic Policy Institute report garnered considerable attention on social media. In a tweet sharing the inequality graphic, Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan wrote, "A system that doesn't work for working people is a system that doesn't work, period." Indeed, the continuous growth of wage inequality reaffirms the need to center policies to rebuild worker power and generate robust wage growth for the vast majority. Passage of the *Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act* would be an important first step. Read *Why Workers Need the PRO Act* to see why.

The ruthless ruses of our American overlords include the use of militant divide-to-conquer tactics and dishonest propaganda that allows them to get away with betraying the public trust, and acting as traitors against a more perfect union, real economic justice, domestic tranquility, the general welfare, broadly shared security, democratic fairness, social cohesion, peaceable coexistence, fiscal responsibility, ecological sanity, and the blessings of liberty and justice for all -- including our heirs in posterity.

When conniving politicians pretend to be honest, responsible and patriotic, but deviously deceive people, this subterfuge of defending the indefensible must be seen as the treachery it really is.

Class in America

Think about this 2011 article *The Peasants Need Pitchforks*, by journalist Robert Scheer:

A "working class hero," John Lennon told us in his song of that title, "is something to be/ Keep you doped with religion and sex and TV/ And you think you're so clever and classless and free/ But you're still fucking peasants as far as I can see."

"The delusion of a classless America in which opportunity is equally distributed is the most effective deception perpetrated by the moneyed elite that controls all the key levers of power in what passes for our democracy. It is a myth blown away by Nobel Prize winner Joseph E. Stiglitz in the current issue of *Vanity Fair* (May 2011 issue). In an article titled *Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%*, Stiglitz states that the top thin layer of the superwealthy controls 40 percent of all wealth in what is now the most sharply class-divided of all developed nations: 'Americans have been watching protests against repressive regimes that concentrate massive wealth in the hands of an elite few. Yet, in our own democracy, 1 percent of the people take nearly a quarter of the nation's income -- an inequality even the wealthy will come to regret.'"

"That is the harsh reality obscured by the media's focus on celebrity gossip, sports rivalries and lotteries, situations in which the average person can pretend that he or she is plugged into the winning side. The illusion of personal power substitutes consumer sovereignty -- like which Smartphone to purchase -- for real power over the decisions that affect our lives. Even though most Americans accept that the political game is rigged, we have long assumed that the choices we make in the economic sphere as to career and home are matters that respond to our wisdom and will. But the banking tsunami that wiped out so many jobs and so much homeownership has demonstrated that most Americans have no real control over any of that, and while they suffer, the corporate rich reward themselves in direct proportion to the amount of suffering they have caused."

"Instead of taxing the superrich on the bonuses dispensed by top corporations such as Exxon, Bank of America, General Electric, Chevron and Boeing, all of which managed to avoid paying any federal corporate taxes last year, the politicians of both parties in Congress are about to accede to the Republican demand that programs that help ordinary folks be cut to pay for the programs that bailed out the banks (and other such things.)"

"It is a reality further obscured by the academic elite, led by economists who receive enormous payoffs from Wall Street in speaking and consulting fees, and their less privileged university colleagues who are so often dependent upon wealthy sponsors for their research funding. Then there are the media, which are indistinguishable parts of the corporate-owned culture and which with rare exception pretend that we are all in the same lifeboat while they fawn in their coverage of those who bilk us and also dispense fat fees to top pundits. Complementing all that is the dark distraction of the faux populists, led by Tea Party demagogues, who blame unions and immigrants for the crimes of Wall Street hustlers."

"The lobbyists are deliberately bipartisan in their bribery, and the authors of our demise are both Democrats and Republicans. 'Ronald Reagan first effectively sang the siren song of ending government's role in corporate

crime prevention,' but Democrat Bill Clinton also helped accomplish that goal. It is an 'enduring conceit of the top Democratic leaders' that the Clinton administration did not play a big role in the disaster of the last 30 years. 'Yet the sad tale of income inequality that Stiglitz laments is as much a result of their policies as those of their Republican rivals. In one of the best studies of this growing gap in income, economists Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty found that during Clinton's tenure in the White House the income of the top 1% increased by 10% per year, while that of the other 99 percent of Americans increased by only 2.4 percent a year.'"

"Thanks to President Clinton's deregulation and the save-the-rich policies of George W. Bush, the situation deteriorated further from 2002 to 2006, a period in which the top 1 percent increased its income 11 percent annually while the rest of Americans had a truly paltry gain of 1 percent per year."

"And that was before the meltdown that wiped out the jobs and home values of so many tens of millions of American families. 'The top 1 percent have the best houses, the best educations, the best doctors, and the best lifestyles,' Joseph Stiglitz concludes, 'but there is one thing that money doesn't seem to have bought: an understanding that their fate is bound up with how the other 99 percent live. Throughout history, this is something that the top 1 percent eventually do learn. Too late.'" (And at a colossal cost.)

Introspection into Populism

Right-wing populist movements like the Tea Party, the Freedom Caucus and the MAGA minions are, quite bizarrely, UNPOPULAR. They are wrongheaded movements with authoritarian followers led by demagogic leaders who sell the populace down the river to unnecessarily harsh fates through the snide tactics of stoking fears, anger, resentments and antagonism toward out-groups, while basely appealing to in-group tribal instincts and domineering fundamentalist dominion-demanding religious supremacist fervor.

Right-leaning populists demand rule by a minority faction -- their own -- over all others. In salient contrast, progressive populists support popular policies and priorities and common good values. See my essay *The Common Good, Properly Understood* for a good detailed understanding of the whole constellation of values that progressives support, and the extraordinary contrast of these things to what right-wing populists support.

Salubriously, progressive populists embrace core democratic values and rule by the popular majority, which are commendable common good goals.

Don't Be Fooled by Fake Pro-Lifers

Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." There are many forms of reproductive health care, like those provided to needy women and families by Planned Parenthood. Injustices in this arena are abominable.

Supreme Court reactionaries are creating social chaos by giving a green light to domineering Republicans to force hundreds of thousands of females who are impregnated by any male, no matter what the circumstances, to remain pregnant against their will. "This is not Pro-Life, folks." Neither is the zeal of 21 state lawmakers in South Carolina who have outrageously proposed the death penalty for women who have an abortion.

Republicans that have pursued a top goal of depriving millions of Americans of healthcare coverage by repealing the Affordable Care Act cannot be considered "pro-life", because their favored policies put the health and lives of millions of people at greater risk. They are certainly not pro-life when they uncompromisingly side with profiteering gun manufacturers and the NRA against taking effective steps to reduce gun violence and help prevent mass murder shootings. They are not pro-life when they support the death penalty, which has led to people being put to death who were innocent.

And they surely are not pro-life when they force pregnant women to give birth against their will, for such dictates inevitably lead to deaths from unsafe outlawed abortions and increased risks of women dying in childbirth. It is worse than insensitive to impose heavy burdens and huge future financial and time-consuming obligations onto women. Forced birth mandates are a catapulting assault in the male patriarchal siege against the battlements of female autonomy, privacy and dignity. They reveal a deep-seated lack of respect for human beings of the female gender. This is part and parcel of actions that treat women as stereotypical objects, and sexualize them and

diminish them and demean them and trivialize them -- and condemn them. In media portrayals, this is called "symbolic annihilation", and it facilitates omission of females and exclusion of them from equality in social roles. In more common Trumpian parlance, what this represents is crass and perverted "grab 'em by the pussy" attitudes.

Further Introspection

All of us are indoctrinated in a real sense through ads, promotional schemes and political propaganda in broadcast news and emails and social media feeds. A barrage of falsehoods, disinformation and lies besets us.

And this contributes to resentments and polarization, causing us to barricade ourselves in effect in our individual and group echo chambers, with many people belligerently defending their positions whether or not there are other contrary facts, evidence or more comprehensive perspectives.

One extraordinarily dangerous and unacceptably risky consequence of the citizenry becoming hyper polarized is that extreme partisans are willing to excuse even the most dire threats to democracy -- if it is THEIR side that is posing the danger. This is proved unequivocally by the staunch defense of persons who have engaged in a seditious conspiracy to overthrow the government and keep the Demagogue-in-Chief in power.

In our echo chambers, we are often misinformed, deceived, indoctrinated and deluded -- basically brainwashed. One of the most insidious ways that twisted spin and emotion manipulation works is by having a selective focus on news that exaggerates some stories and ignores others. Fox "News" damnably specializes in this.

One of the Ultimate Hot Button Issues

Let's be honest and reasonable, and give close consideration to comprehensive understandings of issues involved in the Supreme Court ruling by Republican judges to overturn protections guaranteed by the *Roe v. Wade* precedent.

An independent judiciary is a crucially important feature in our democratic republic, for it is part of a healthy system that provides necessary checks and balances in governance to ensure that legislatures and executive branches do not violate constitutional rules.

Unfortunately, even though brilliantly designed, federal and state courts have become corrupted by political partisanship and the influence of Big Money. And the Supreme Court, with three extremely conservative Justices appointed by Donald Trump for their known right-wing jurisprudence -- and personal opposition to abortion -- has become highly political.

The current crisis in our democracy is due to extreme political polarization, and we appear to have actually moved beyond the problem being merely hyper partisan. As Cassie Miller, a senior research analyst with the Southern Poverty Law Center has said, "Americans are living in two wildly different realities and are viewing each other increasingly as enemies that they have to contend with."

Crimes against humanity can be perpetrated against people when unaccountable individuals use Divide-and-Conquer strategies, and distract people from clearly seeing, and manipulate them through media. These strategies include:

- Encouraging divisions, conflicts and chaos among the opposing groups to prevent the formation of strong alliances and unification that could challenge the power of the Controller or Ruler.
- Promoting and heavily rewarding those predatorial people that are willing to cooperate and participate with the Controller objectives or an agenda to absolutely rule others, no matter how mean, immoral, inhumane or unethical.
- Fostering distrust, hostility and hatred to incite violence or war between any powerful people or groups that could pose a threat to the Controller.

"Divide and Conquer or Divide and Rule should be thought of as a warfare tactic that is purposely used against the perceived enemy in order to weaken and destroy them. If we observe divide and conquer tactics being used everywhere in the human civilization globally, then we can easily recognize the fact that this warfare tactic is being implemented to incapacitate and disable humanity. This means that we are being perceived as the enemy and warfare tactics are being implemented against us, without us realizing what is occurring. The question to ask as we

investigate the macrocosm of planetary leadership and beyond, is who is it that perceives the human race as the enemy?" My unambiguous answer: obviously, men with little moral compass!

Some of the Sources of Unnecessary Woes

The world is beset by excessive greed and speculation, selfish myopia, internecine freedom-threatening control drives, egomaniacal ambitious authoritarians, and gullible susceptibility to propaganda, marketing and materialistic consumerism. These woeful characteristics are made worse by having excessively conservative judges acting like politicians and making narrow rulings that are contrary to the general welfare and the common good.

One wrongheaded ruling was made when right-wing judges on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated a Texas law designed to flood large social-media companies with lawsuits "if they moderate propaganda, because moderating propaganda disproportionately affects movement conservatives who spread lies for political gain."

The courts should be on the side of the people, not on the side of rich people and power-abusing corporations -- or on the side of far-right political factions.

Let's Be Lucid

The clear-seeing historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat is a scholar on fascism and authoritarian leaders. She is a professor of history and Italian studies at New York University who writes *Lucid*, a Substack newsletter about democracy and autocracy. She explains clearly in *Lucid: Big-Picture Thinking about Threats to Democracy around the World*:

"Democracy is in decline. Over half of the world's population now lives under some form of illiberal rule. Wherever democracy deteriorates, so does support for transparency and accountability. Disinformation about current events thrives, as do versions of history that cover up authoritarian crimes."

"Scholars said the predominance of election deniers in the GOP bears alarming similarities to authoritarian movements in other countries, which often begin with efforts to delegitimize elections. Many of those promoting the stolen-election narrative, they said, know that it is false and are using it to gain power."

"Election denialism is a form of corruption,' said Ben-Ghiat, author of *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*. 'The party has now institutionalized this form of lying, this form of rejection of results. So it's institutionalized illegal activity. These politicians are essentially conspiring to make party dogma the idea that it's possible to reject certified results.'"

Ruth Ben-Ghiat makes incisive and valuable cautionary observations about Trump. "Trump's goals as a candidate and as president were authoritarian, not democratic. He sought to subject the GOP to autocratic codes of loyalty and discipline, build a leader cult and a civilian army of extremists, make money off of public office, normalize racism and homophobia, and create an environment where violence and crime would be tolerated and rewarded. This would prepare Americans to support autocracy at home and alliances with illiberal forces abroad."

"Corruption is always at the center of autocratic projects. Clouding minds with propaganda meant to disseminate hate and silence the inner voice of conscience prepares people to do the unthinkable. ... Bringing the unthinkable into being, and getting people to act on behalf of the cult leader, is a strongman specialty."

"The essence of authoritarianism is getting away with crime. That's why this indictment (34 felony counts on April 4, 2023) is so important. ... It's why corruption was the subject of my very first *Lucid* essay, *Drain the Swamp*, published two years ago, which looked at how Trump follows Benito Mussolini and Vladimir Putin in his claims to modernize and clean up his country. 'Drain the swamp' was a Fascist slogan."

"Authoritarians arrange the institutions of government to protect them from exposure. To cite one current example, this is why Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces corruption charges, immediately launched a 'judicial reform' upon returning to office."

"Trump followed a century of illiberal leaders in using propaganda to turn the public against the press, prosecutors, investigators, judges, and anyone else with the ability to uncover his corruption or charge him or his allies with crimes. ... Posing as the victim of those same groups ('the deep state,' in Trump's formulation) is another authoritarian classic. Trump's advertisement of his coming indictment, his reported desire to appear in handcuffs

during legal proceedings connected with that indictment, and the 'WITCH HUNT' cards his campaign gave to followers to display for the media at last week's Waco, TX rally are part of this cult leader-as-victim strategy."

"In the meantime, pressure and threat are used to silence individuals with knowledge of the leader's corruption. 'The less you remember, the better,' Trump's thuggish White House 'ethics' lawyer Stefan Passantino told his client Cassidy Hutchinson before her testimony to the House Jan. 6 Committee. Cue also Trump posting a photo of himself with a baseball bat next to a photo of Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg, whose office was in charge of the indictment by a grand jury in Manhattan."

"We have already seen the start of authoritarian rituals of expressing public loyalty to the cult leader. GOP political elites indebted to Trump have dutifully appeared on Fox and other disinformation channels. In the case of those who are strongly bonded to him, the prospect of their idol falling can bring on intense emotions, including fear. Senator Lindsey Graham appeared close to tears in his television appearance/loyalty display last night."

"We have also seen the predictable swing of Fox back to defending Trump. I argued in a recent *Lucid* essay that Fox is not just a far-right disinformation machine but also the GOP's de facto propaganda arm. Whether the Murdochs personally like it or not, Trump is the front-runner for that party's Republican nomination. Fox is also partnering with the GOP to cover up their joint support for the attempt to overthrow the 2020 election and pull off a coup on Jan. 6. There is far too much at stake for Fox -- and too many other secrets that Trump, an expert blackmailer, can reveal -- if Trump is neutralized as an active political contender. Closing ranks behind the cult leader is the result."

"Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis have a conflictual relationship, and we should see DeSantis's alarming statement that he will not extradite Trump from Florida less as a buddy-support move than as his attempt to use this situation to reinforce his extremist reputation. His antisemitic labeling of Bragg as a client of George Soros is also a clue. The freedom evoked here by the mini-Trump leader of Florida's 'free state' is freedom from the rule of law and freedom to ignore the Constitution, which mandates that governors honor other states' extradition requests."

"While in the short-term Trump will milk this indictment (charging him with 34 counts of falsifying business records) to raise money and become more popular with his base, based on my research for *Strongmen*, prosecution is fundamental to showing a nation that the leader is not in fact above the law, not untouchable, not immortal nor a semi-deity. As I recount in my book, prosecution of Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi and Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet after they left office started the deflation of their personality cults and reputations.

Former prosecutor Andrew Weissmann frames it from a legal perspective. The indictment shows that "the teflon is off. It no longer is unthinkable and unheard of to hold any person, regardless of prior station in life, to account for their crimes. For those who thought this day would never come, the teflon is off Teflon Donald."

"As I concluded in a 2022 *Lucid* essay, 'the history of authoritarianism shows that appeasing bullies and not acting due to fear of possible future violence merely sets up the conditions for more violence. It allows the bully to feel empowered and righteous in his lawlessness, which triggers more feelings of omnipotence and grandiosity and more reckless actions.' This indictment matters because it asserts the power of the law to punish anyone. It also sends a statement that government officials will not be swayed by authoritarian threats. Right now, our democratic judicial system is working, and our free press can report on it."

"I did not imagine in March 2021, when I called out Trump's 'drain the swamp' scam as a genre of authoritarian history, that I would write an essay exactly two years later about Trump's indictment. And yet this is why we must never give up hope in our institutions and our power to shape history. Remaining lucid in our thoughts and resolute in our intentions is part of that."

Another Serious Wedge Issue: Guns

Rupert Taylor wrote back in September 2021 in his article *Guns for Children: America's Tragic Gun Culture* about how young people are introduced to America's loose and stalwart gun culture early in their lives, and that this contributes to many terrible tragedies for children, families and others.

Taylor observed that there are 124 firearms in private hands for every 100 adult Americans, "so perhaps gun makers sense they might be getting close to market saturation."

"What to do? What to do? Somewhere in the merchandising boiler room that powers the \$6 billion gun industry, someone had an 'Aha' moment. Our fictional pitchman makes his case: 'Why don't we market guns to children? There are more than 60 million nippers under the age of 14. That's a huge untapped market and once hooked on firearms, we'll have customers for life. Of course, in the case of some of the little tykes that won't be very long.' And that takes us to several communities in the United States."

"Marlin Firearms of Madison, North Carolina, shuns the cutesy names for its youth weapons. The company promotes its model XT-22 Youth Series as a way for proud moms and dads to 'Pass on your love of shooting and hunting to the next generation, and give them the right start with this new line of rifles.'"

Thinking about the nature of "America's Gun Culture", Taylor wrote: "Isn't the idea that having more guns around will make people safer like saying if you want to lose weight you should eat more potato chips?"

"The belief that it is a God-given right to own firearms is rooted in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution of 1791. It says 'A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.'"

"Gun ownership is seen as a birthright, and an enthusiast will only give up his or her firearm when, in the words of a National Rifle Association slogan, '... you pry it from my cold, dead hands.'"

"For people not raised in the gun culture, the attitude of the firearm enthusiasts is incomprehensible. Equally, gun owners are perplexed as to why anybody would see wisdom in increasing regulation of their weapons. The two sides live in separate silos and no amount of debate will persuade either that their opponents' argument has a scintilla of merit. There seems to be an unbridgeable divide between the pro-gun and anti-gun lobbies."

"To the outside observer, giving guns to children borders on insanity. Society restricts the age at which youngsters can drive a vehicle, or buy alcohol or tobacco, or engage in other potentially dangerous pursuits. But guns, it seems, exist in a different realm surrounded by a patriotic mythology that rational discourse cannot penetrate. The Gun Violence Archive reports 43,584 gun deaths in America in 2020. Children under 11 years of age accounted for 299 of the killed and 700 of the injured. Children shooting children has become almost as American as apple pie and the Pledge of Allegiance to the National Rifle Association."

"The unfettered right to own and carry weapons has come to symbolize the Republican Party's ideology of individual liberty. Lawmakers and activists have not been able to overcome Republican insistence on gun rights despite the mass shootings that have risen since their new emphasis on guns. Even though 90% of Americans -- including nearly 74% of NRA members -- support background checks, Republicans have killed such legislation by filibustering it."

The NRA should be declared a terrorist organization due to its deadly and excessively powerful influence over our representatives, or at the least it should be prohibited from making any contributions to politicians or 'political action committees' (PACs) or other influence-buying funds.

"What rational society lets children buy firearms?" The Washington Post columnist Ruth Marcus asked this central question: "Why do we let children buy guns?" She pointed out that the massacres in Buffalo and Uvalde that killed 31 people were the work of two 18-year-olds, both of whom purchased their weapons legally. "They can't purchase alcohol or cigarettes in this country until age 21. But deadly weapons? ... If you're 18 and want a semiautomatic assault rifle? No problem, except for a handful of states with stricter rules -- and those are being challenged in court as unconstitutional." (Challenged, unconscionably, by "conservatives.")

"Post columnist Michael Gerson, meanwhile, wrote that the so-called right of 18-year-olds to buy those weapons has lately come from 'originalist' readings of the Constitution."

"What principle of constitutional self-government requires that the permissible age to purchase an AR-15 should be 18 rather than 21? A recent ruling out of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit affirmed the right of 18-year-olds to buy what most of us would call 'assault weapons.' Its reasoning? 'America would not exist without

the heroism of the young adults who fought and died in our revolutionary army.' In fact, the enlistment age for the Continental Army was 16 -- just 15 with parental consent. Some served at age 14. Is this a sufficient legal and historical basis to allow teens to purchase nearly military-grade weapons in 2022? This type of 'originalism' is indistinguishable from idiocy." There are too many unprincipled people dividing us for power or profit -- or both.

Ethics-Deficient Skulduggery

Ponder the lessons learned when *The Smartest Guys in the Room* perpetrated the most massive corporate fraud in American history back when Enron Corporation in Texas illicitly gamed the electricity market to extort people in California by causing rolling blackouts and driving up prices through a variety of ruses. Recall that these included shutting down power plants to create artificial shortages, and engaging in price gouging to make bigger profits.

This display of ethics-deficient skulduggery revealed a deep contempt for any values other than profit making. This story is told in the book and documentary film, both titled *The Smartest Guys in the Room*. The film is narrated by the Peter Coyote, in his great authoritative voice.

The lesson it teaches us is that without an adequate degree of transparency, accountability, oversight, proper regulation, and fair commitment to common good goals and integrity -- and without following "generally accepted accounting principles" -- scheming CEOs and cunning exploiters, along with their highly-compensated promoters, lawyers and accountants, are able to make end runs around propriety and equitable action, and even the law. This win for them, of course, generally comes at a high cost for almost everyone else.

See this situation with crystal clarity. It is only by dividing the people into hyper polarized warring tribal camps that scheming cheating exploiting fooling gaslighting triumphing politicians (and the privileged groups that gain from their ruses) are able to continue to sell the vast majority of citizens down the river to vastly harsher fates than is necessary or acceptable.

One key to fixing this sorry state of affairs is to make sure that every American over the age of 18 can easily and conveniently vote. And they should be provided with good balanced information about big issues. This will make our democratic republic much stronger by giving fairer representation to the broad blessings of an improving general welfare and truer justice and peaceable domestic tranquility and greater equality of rights and opportunities.

A Hullabaloo Is Due; and A Call to Arms

Financial scandals and public malfeasance and graft are epically wrong. It is sad to have had a man at the pinnacle of power in the presidency for four years who is a foremost member of the grifter class, and to see how he does his thing, and has gotten away with so much, and to recognize the undesirability of the chaotic consequences.

Consider the case of Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who milked his connections with the kings and princes of Saudi Arabia to get a \$2 billion investment in some scheme he is enterprisingly operating. His good connections, of course, came from his time spent handling everything in the Nepotism I Administration. One headline laughed ruefully --- JARED KUSHNER'S \$2 BILLION SAUDI CHECK APPEARS EVEN MORE COMICALLY CORRUPT THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT.

Here's the story. "Back in April, *The New York Times* reported that Jared Kushner's four years of Saudi ass-kissing and murder-excusing had paid off in the form of a \$2 billion investment from the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund to his newly formed private equity firm. That struck a lot of people -- ethics officials among them -- as pretty shady, given that far from having impressed would-be clients with his investing prowess, the panel that performs due diligence for the Saudi fund concluded that no one in their right mind would give the former first son-in-law a dime. Among other concerns, the panel noted that management was 'inexperienced,' that the kingdom would be responsible for 'the bulk of the investment and risk,' that its fee seemed 'excessive,' and that the firm's operations were 'unsatisfactory in all aspects.' Given those reservations, it warned that the country's Public Investment Fund should stay far, far away from Kushner's firm -- a recommendation that was overturned by the fund's board, which happens to be led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, i.e., the guy who approved a plan to kidnap, kill, and dismember a journalist via bone saw and benefited from Kushner's unwavering support within the White House and reported insistence that the prince could 'survive the outrage just as he [had] weathered past criticism.' (Again, just so it's abundantly clear, the 'outrage' and 'criticism' were over a Saudi dissident and U.S.

resident being murdered and chopped up into pieces in the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul.)"

"It wasn't that difficult for people to put two and two together and infer that Kushner's firm seemingly got \$2 billion to invest -- and at least \$25 million to pocket regardless of performance -- as a thank-you for being so good to a human rights-abusing autocrat. And a new story from the *Times* suggests, somehow, even further shadiness than that. As reported by the New York Times' Kate Kelly and David Kirkpatrick, 'shortly before the 2020 election, Kushner unveiled a government-sponsored program dubbed the Abraham Fund, which the Trump administration said would raise \$3 billion for projects around the Middle East, capitalizing on the Abraham Accords, the diplomatic agreements normalizing relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. As part of that endeavor, Kushner and then Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin crisscrossed the Middle East in the final months of the administration on trips that included trying to raise money for the project.'"

According to the *Times*: "It was little more than talk: With no accounts, employees, income or projects, the fund vanished when Mr. Trump left office.... [The fund] was overseen by Adam Boehler, at the time the head of a newly formed development finance agency and a college roommate of Mr. Kushner's. Mr. Boehler joined Mr. Mnuchin on his Gulf visit in October and accompanied Mr. Kushner to Qatar and Saudi Arabia in December. Officials said the fund would invest in poorer countries that joined the accords, and its first projects were said to include upgrading checkpoints into Israel from the Palestinian territories and building a gas pipeline between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Neither project went anywhere. Nor did the efforts to enlist Gulf money."

"In January 2021, Mr. Boehler announced the only publicly disclosed investment in the Abraham Fund, 'a commitment of up to \$50 million' from Uzbekistan, a relatively low-income country. Uzbek officials said at the time that they sought to reduce poverty and foster regional cooperation. 'Long criticized for human rights abuses, Uzbekistan had begun a lobbying push in Washington to improve its image after a leadership change; its new president also gave Mr. Trump a \$2,950 silver replica of a historic building, and his wife a \$4,200 bed cover. But no money for the short-lived Abraham Fund was ever delivered.'"

Let's create a hellish (and peaceable) Hullabaloo over corruption and malfeasance like this -- it's over due.

More Extensive Analysis on Guns as a Wedge Issue

Atticus Finch said in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: "I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what."

Robert Reich: "All forms of gun violence -- including random violence, police violence, suicides and mass shootings -- are escalating. *We cannot continue to live this way.*"

After a high school gunman murdered 19 children and 2 adults at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas on May 23, 2022, historian Heather Cox Richardson wrote: "For years now, after one massacre or another, I have written some version of the same article, explaining that the nation's current gun free-for-all is not traditional but, rather, is a symptom of the takeover of our nation by a radical extremist minority. The idea that massacres are 'the price of freedom,' as right-wing personality Bill O'Reilly said in 2017 after the Mandalay Bay massacre in Las Vegas, in which a gunman killed 60 people and wounded 411 others, is new, and it is about politics, not our history."

"The Second Amendment to the Constitution, on which modern-day arguments for widespread gun ownership rest, is one simple sentence: 'A well regulated militia, being necessary for the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.' There's not a lot to go on about what the Framers meant, although in their day, to 'bear arms' meant to be part of an organized militia."

"As the Tennessee Supreme Court wrote in 1840, 'A man in the pursuit of deer, elk, and buffaloes might carry his rifle every day for forty years, and yet it would never be said of him that he had borne arms; much less could it be said that a private citizen bears arms because he has a dirk or pistol concealed under his clothes ...'"

"Today's insistence that the Second Amendment gives individuals a broad right to own guns comes from two places. One is the establishment of the National Rifle Association in New York in 1871, in part to improve the marksmanship skills of American citizens who might be called on to fight in another war, and in part to promote in

America the British sport of elite shooting, complete with hefty cash prizes in newly organized tournaments. Just a decade after the Civil War, veterans jumped at the chance to hone their former skills. Rifle clubs sprang up across the nation." Hmmm ... in skeet shooting, they yell PULL.

"By the 1920s, rifle shooting was a popular American sport. 'Riflemen' competed in the Olympics, in colleges, and in local, state, and national tournaments organized by the NRA. Being a good marksman was a source of pride, mentioned in public biographies, like being a good golfer. In 1925, when the secretary of the NRA apparently took money from ammunition and arms manufacturers, the organization tossed him out and sued him."

"NRA officers insisted on the right of citizens to own rifles and handguns but worked hard to distinguish between law-abiding citizens who should have access to guns for hunting, target shooting and protection, and criminals and mentally ill people, who should not. In 1931, amid fears of bootlegger gangs, the NRA backed federal legislation to limit concealed weapons; prevent possession by criminals, the mentally ill and children; to require all dealers to be licensed; and to require background checks ... It backed the 1934 National Firearms Act, and parts of the 1968 Gun Control Act, designed to stop what seemed to be America's hurtle toward violence in that turbulent decade."

"But in the mid-1970s, a faction in the NRA forced the organization away from sports and toward opposing 'gun control.' It formed a political action committee (PAC) in 1975, and two years later it elected an organization president who abandoned sporting culture and focused instead on 'gun rights.'"

"This was the second thing that led us to where we are today: leaders of the NRA embraced the politics of Movement Conservatism, the political movement that rose to combat the business regulations and social welfare programs that both Democrats and Republicans promoted after World War II. Movement Conservatives embraced the myth of the American cowboy as a white man standing against the 'socialism' of the federal government as it sought to level the economic playing field between Black Americans and their white neighbors. Leaders like Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater personified the American cowboy, with his cowboy hat and opposition to government regulation, while TV Westerns showed good guys putting down bad guys without interference of the government."

"In 1972, the Republican platform had called for gun control to restrict the sale of 'cheap handguns,' but in 1975, as he geared up to challenge President Gerald R. Ford for the 1976 presidential nomination, Movement Conservative hero Ronald Reagan took a stand against gun control. In 1980, the Republican platform opposed the federal registration of firearms, and the NRA endorsed a presidential candidate -- Reagan -- for the first time."

"When President Reagan took office, a new American era, dominated by Movement Conservatives, began. And the power of the NRA over American politics grew. In 1981 a gunman trying to kill Reagan shot him and paralyzed his press secretary, James Brady, and wounded Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy and police officer Tom Delahanty. After the shooting, then-representative Charles Schumer (D-NY) introduced legislation that became known as the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, or the Brady Bill, to require background checks before gun purchases. Reagan, who was a member of the NRA, endorsed the bill, but the NRA spent millions of dollars to defeat it."

"After the Brady Bill passed in 1993, the NRA paid for lawsuits in nine states to strike it down. Until 1959, every single legal article on the Second Amendment concluded that it was not intended to guarantee individuals the right to own a gun. But in the 1970s, legal scholars funded by the NRA had begun to argue that the Second Amendment did exactly that." ... "In 1997, when the Brady Bill cases came before the Supreme Court as *Printz v. United States*, the Supreme Court declared parts of the measure unconstitutional."

"Now a player in national politics, the NRA was awash in money from gun and ammunition manufacturers. By 2000 it was one of the three most powerful lobbies in Washington. It spent more than \$40 million on the 2008 election. In that year, the landmark Supreme Court decision of *District of Columbia v. Heller* struck down gun regulations and declared that the Second Amendment protects an individual's right to keep and bear arms."

"Increasingly, NRA money backed Republican candidates. In 2012 the NRA spent \$9 million in the presidential election, and in 2014 it spent \$13 million. Then, in 2016, it spent over \$50 million on Republican candidates, including more than \$30 million on Trump's effort to win the White House. This money was vital to Trump, since many other Republican super PACs refused to back him. The NRA spent more money on Trump than any other outside group, including the leading Trump Super PAC, which spent \$20.3 million."

The NRA held its 2022 annual meeting in Houston not long after the mass murder of school children in Uvalde, Texas. Donald Trump spoke at it, along with Texans Ted Cruz and Rep. Dan Crenshaw, North Carolina lieutenant governor Mark Robinson and South Dakota governor Kristi Noem -- all Republicans. Texas governor Greg Abbott had been scheduled to speak before he saw how bad the optics looked in light of his aggressive opposition to any form of gun restrictions or gun safety legislation.

Wayne LaPierre, the NRA CEO, expressed his enthusiasm for the lineup by saying: 'President Trump delivered on his promises by appointing judges who respect and value the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and in doing so helped ensure the freedom of generations of Americans.'" THAT is twisted spin, for it gives no consideration to people having freedom from the escalating dangers of the gun violence epidemic that is sweeping the country.

President Joe Biden spoke to the nation after the Texas massacre of school children, saying: "Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen? ... It's time to turn this pain into action. For every parent, for every citizen in this country, we have to make it clear to every elected official in this country, it's time to act." ... "In the Senate, Chris Murphy (D-CT) said, 'I am here on this floor, to beg, to literally get down on my hands and knees and beg my colleagues ... find a way to pass laws that make this less likely.'"

"But it was Steve Kerr, coach of the Golden State Warriors basketball team, whose father was murdered by gunmen in Beirut, Lebanon in 1984, who best expressed the outrage of the nation. At a press conference, shaking, he said, 'I'm not going to talk about basketball ... Any basketball questions don't matter ... Fourteen children were killed 400 miles from here, and a teacher, and in the last 10 days we've had elderly Black people killed in a supermarket in Buffalo, we've had Asian churchgoers killed in Southern California, and now we have children murdered at school. WHEN ARE WE GONNA DO SOMETHING? I'm tired, so tired of getting up here and offering condolences to the devastated families. I'm tired of the moments of silence. Enough. There's 50 senators ... who refuse to vote on HR 8, which is a background check rule that the House passed a couple years ago.... Ninety percent of Americans, regardless of political party, want universal background checks. We are being held hostage by 50 senators in D.C. who refuse to even put it to a vote despite what we the American people want ... because they want to hold onto their own power. It's pathetic,' he said, walking out of the presser. 'I've had enough.'"

"Many Republican politicians and judges regard gun ownership 'as a sacred privilege enshrined in the Constitution, a privilege not to be infringed upon no matter how much blood is spilled in classrooms and school hallways around the country.'" ... "Thanks to that ardent following, and shrewd marketing, the AR-15 remains a jewel of the gun industry, the country's most popular rifle, irreversibly lodged into American culture."

"The AR-15 was developed in the late 1950s as a civilian weapon by Eugene Stoner, a former Marine working for small California startup called ArmaLite (which is where the AR comes from). The gun, revolutionary for its light weight, easy care and adaptability with additional components, entered the mainstream in the mid-1960s, after Colt bought the patent and developed an automatic-fire version for troops in Vietnam, called the M16."

"The civilian model wasn't mass produced until the 1980s, after the original patent expired and a variety of companies began making them. That transformed a specific brand to a more generic offering on which a mini-industry would flourish."

"When the AR-15 and other semiautomatic rifles began to turn up in shootings, a movement began to restrict their manufacture and sale. Much of the outrage stemmed from the militaristic appearance of those guns, and their ability to fire rapidly. But there was also a more visceral reason, involving flesh and blood. AR-15s inflict much more damage to human tissue than the typical handgun. That's largely because of the speed at which projectiles leave the weapons; they are much faster out of the muzzle of an AR-15 -- and deliver a more devastating blow to bones and organs. Those projectiles are also more likely to break apart as they pass through the body, inflicting more damage. The higher muzzle-velocity projectiles, if they strike an organ, you're more likely to have severe injury and bleeding and dying than with lower muzzle-velocity munitions," said Donald Jenkins, a trauma surgeon at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and the owner of several guns, including an AR-15.

The backlash against gun violence peaked in 1994, when Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed a law banning some versions of the AR-15. Politicized rancor resulted in the law being allowed to expire in 2004. "That

set the stage for an explosion in AR-15 sales." ... "By then, military-style weapons were becoming a more common sight in America, due largely to the response to the 9/11 attacks. Anti-terror police forces began patrolling cities and transportation hubs, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were covered intimately. That higher visibility seemingly fed a desire among gun owners to get what the troops and cops were using."

"With encouragement from the gun industry, the AR-15 grew popular not only among people who enjoyed owning the latest tactical gear, but also among recreational and competitive target shooters, and hunters. Many saw it as a pinnacle of firearms engineering -- ergonomic, accurate, reliable."

"Production of AR-style guns has soared since the federal ban expired. In 2004, 107,000 were made. In 2015, the number was 1.2 million, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry trade association. Today, one out of every five firearms purchased in this country is an AR-style rifle ... Americans now own an estimated 15 million AR-15s. New AR-15 style guns range widely in price, from about \$500 to more than \$2,000."

"Gun makers have goosed sales by emphasizing the AR-15s connection to the military and the fight to defend one's freedoms, an argument that grew more effective during movements to ban them. But gun-control advocates say the industry has exploited people's fears and desires, promoting a gun originally designed to kill people. They argue that AR-15s and similar guns cause more damage, and death, when used in mass shootings."

"The families of people killed in Newtown cited industry marketing techniques in a pending lawsuit against Remington, the maker of the killer's AR-style rifle. Gun groups say the company can't be held responsible, arguing that 'millions of peaceful, law-abiding Americans' regularly shoot ARs at the range with no ill effect." (Remington subsequently deservedly lost the lawsuit, and the gunmaker agreed to pay a whopping \$73 million settlement.)

"Crime rates in America have declined drastically during that period. Even so, AR-15s and similar guns are still used in mass shootings, drawing new rounds of condemnation -- and calls for new bans -- with each attack."

Interim Conclusion

Republican Supreme Court Justices, after having made the most rashly emboldened set of unfair rulings ever in its term ended on June 30, 2022, took up a case in October that would have given the green light to state legislatures to overrule state supreme courts and state constitutions. This could have been the end of our constitutional democracy, because it would have allowed highly discriminatorily gerrymandered state legislatures in red states to govern even more imperiously and unaccountably than they already are doing. This would compound the injustice of their having gained super-majority power in many states by illicitly using corrupting Big Money, highly partisan gerrymandering, voter suppression tactics, devious misinformation, and rude divide-to-conquer roguery.

To save our democracy and really make it fairer, more just and more inclusive, we need to nip the reactionary voter suppression movement in the bud, and take strong and effective steps to stop any and all schemers that are intent on subverting our national and state election apparatus.

The easiest and probably best way to do this is to make a powerful push to get enough states on board to commit to the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, and do it well before the 2024 presidential election. This would reasonably ensure that the presidential candidate who gets the most votes would become president.

This initiative would serve to circumvent all the problems associated with the Electoral College, including being vulnerable to undesirable shenanigans due to big lies about election fraud, and fake electors schemes, and undemocratic restrictions on voting, and other subversive activities.

The Constitution established the Electoral College to empower Electors to choose the president rather than having a candidate chosen directly by popular vote. This was done for a variety of reasons, including that it was a "fail-safe mechanism" for our democratic system of governance. Alexander Hamilton, the eminent statesman and one of our honorable Founding Fathers, evocatively explained these reasons in his Federalist Paper No. 68. The bottom line was that the Founders felt Electors would be "Men most capable of analyzing the qualities" needed for a candidate for "the distinguished office of President of the United States", and that these Electors would be best capable of making sure that the person to be chosen should be a character "pre-eminent for ability and virtue."

"Pre-eminent for ability and virtue!" Now, it seemed clear one month after the 2016 election, when the Electors

met to choose the next president, that almost any objective and dispassionate assessment of all the facts and evidence would have concluded that Trump was not a man of fair-minded governing experience or respect-worthy virtues. His long and sordid personal history of bankruptcies and cons revealed that his preeminent abilities were cheating, deceiving and manipulating people, and being impulsive, bombastic, demagogic, bullying, un-American and chillingly authoritarian. These are NOT honorable qualifications that would have made him fit for the role of honestly promoting "the general Welfare of the United States". Or of safeguarding our personal liberties.

Since legitimacy of authority in our democracy is derived from the informed consent of the governed, Trump's shallow, treacherously deceptive and ultra-divisive election campaign seriously undermined the foundations of our democracy. And in the month after the 2016 election, Trump's actions confirmed that he intended to violate the public trust, and it was becoming clearer that he posed an extremely dangerous threat to the economic well-being and overall security of the vast majority of the American people, and to our Constitutionally assured liberties.

There are 538 Electors in the Electoral College, and they are the ones that made the final choice of who was to be president on December 19, 2016. Of them, more than 40% were not legally bound to vote for their state's choice, and could have cast their electoral ballot for whomever they chose. More than 125 of those free Electors were provisionally poised to vote for Trump, but if just 37 of these Electors conscientiously chose to change their vote and give it to Hillary Clinton, who received in excess of 2.7 million votes more than Trump, SHE would have been anointed president, and the American people could have avoided the disaster of the Trump presidency and the worsening threat that MAGA Republicans now pose to us and our democratic republic.

The reasons the Electors should have done this are straightforward. Trump did not win "fair and square". He won by engaging in a long litany of devious tactics that were unethically illegitimate. He blatantly used demagogic emotional hijacking, con man deceptions, hard-times swindles, dishonest hiding of his tax return information, and a barrage of misinformation and outright lies in speeches and rallies, and on Twitter. "And Trump scurrilously set fire, like a scheming firefighter who had secretly become a flagrant arsonist, to the dry tinder of white identity insecurities and resentments in his brazen bid to get attention and grab power." Additionally, the election was thrown to a Trump advantage by the unprecedented intervention by the Director of the FBI in the last 11 days before the election, and by treacherous Russian cyber-hacking meddling that sabotaged our American political process by unleashing WikiLeaks leaks that helped give Trump unwarranted support.

Besides, Trump and David Pecker, publisher of the supermarket tabloid National Enquirer, engaged in felonious "catch and kill" gambits to pay off Karen McDougal and the adult film star Stormy Daniels to keep the public from knowing how despicable a rascal Trump actually is. All of this Machiavellian intrigue combined -- the deceit and treachery and demagoguery -- was made even worse by Trump gaining unfair advantages from many voter suppression laws that were put in place by Republican legislators in red states in the wake of the Supreme Court's wrongly decided 5-to-4 rulings that opened the flood gates to corrupting Big Money in our elections. A subsequent ruling to eviscerate the Voting Rights Act of 1965 made the situation and circumstances worse.

And it made matters critically worse that Trump began showing his true colors after the 2016 election by filling his Cabinet with billionaires and establishment conservatives and generals whose top priorities were to give vastly increased power and unethically irresponsible profiteering privileges to giant corporations. And to empower Wall Street at the expense of *We the People* on Main Street, and to deprive millions of white working class voters and tens of millions of other Americans of their healthcare insurance under the Affordable Care Act. Worse yet, in the long run, those Cabinet officials were chosen because they supported plans to eliminate many protections of the environment, and sided with polluters and the fossil fuel industry over the health and best interests of the people. This was unquestionably a betrayal of all Americans, now and in the future.

Truly,

Tiffany B. Twain

December 12, 2023 (begun in August 2022)