

Earth Manifesto



Principal Reasons a Bill of Rights for Future Generations is Needed

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The respectable luminary Mark Twain has provided me with an unambiguous piece of excellent advice: "Anybody can have ideas -- the difficulty is to express them ^{[[[}without squandering a quire of paper on an idea that ought to be reduced to one glittering paragraph."

I ponder this idea as I reflect in this treatise on the need for a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. Why belabor the obvious? Why adduce a hundred good points, when the bottom line is really quite simple: Humanity should commit to treating future generations more fairly because it is the right thing to do. A new intergenerational and future-respecting Bill of Rights is an expansive extension of the fair-minded Golden Rule that would sensibly encompass not just neighbors, fellow citizens and people in countries worldwide, but all of humanity yet to be born. This idea is commendably consistent with each and every one of the eight principles of moral conduct taught by wise Buddhist philosophers in their Noble Eightfold Path. Of particular importance in these moral principles are Right Understanding, Right Intention, and Right Action.

While I've clearly failed to achieve the celebrated ideal of brevity in expression, I hope readers will indulge this shortcoming, for this essay contains some truly crucial understandings.

Our country's Pledge of Allegiance promises liberty and justice to all Americans. Yet most of our national policies utterly ignore fair treatment of our descendants. In recognition of this glaring oversight, a new Bill of Rights for Future Generations is proposed in this manifesto that will honor the greater good represented by a concern for the consequential impacts of our actions today upon all our heirs.

Soaring Prelude

The original Bill of Rights consisted of the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution. These great amendments were introduced in Congress about eighteen months after the Constitution was adopted in September 1787. They importantly outlined personal and collective rights of liberty and justice that were guaranteed to the American people. This Bill of Rights was designed to establish legal assurances to the people that basic principles of human freedoms would be fairly protected -- and that the power of the federal government would be specifically limited.

Today, different forms of power abuse are undermining the freedoms of the American people than the ones that bedeviled our colonial ancestors. Instead of economic exploitation of colonists and despotic governance by the British monarchy, wealthy people and large corporations are the entities exerting domineering power and influence, and they are taking advantage of people in nations around the world and contributing to an ominous deterioration in natural ecosystems that will inevitably prove to be disastrously unsustainable.

Global developments are making it clear that a new variety of protections are needed to best ensure public confidence that our elected representatives will govern well. These protections should assure young people and everyone in the future that our collective undertakings are honestly dedicated to farsighted, responsible and ecologically sane ends that are sufficiently beneficial to society as a whole.

A Bill of Rights for Future Generations is needed to provide overarching guidance to accomplish goals consistent with the greater good. In short, this new Bill of Rights is required not only because many intergenerational injustices are taking place, but also because of the increasingly extreme disparities in economic insecurity, social inequalities and political representation between the wealthiest 1% of Americans and all others. This trend is eroding democratic

fairness and undermining social cohesion and diminishing the prospects of our descendants to have a prosperous future. It is also creating bigger risks of social instability and possibly increasingly violent conflicts.

A Call for a Visionary and Yet Practical Strategic Initiative

"Great republics do not last. Whatever has been the rule in history may be depended upon to remain the rule. History repeats itself. Vast power and wealth corrupt a nation. It incites dangerous ambitions and could bring the republic down. It can pack the Supreme Court with members friendly to its purpose, rundown the Congress, and crush the people's voice. This has been a strange panic. It's like a blight, a paralysis, in which a mighty machine has slipped its belt and is still running." ^[1] _[SEP]

-- Mark Twain, written during the Panic of 1907

Since a primary reason we need a Bill of Rights for Future Generations is to prevent the on-going misguidance and subversion of our democracy by moneyed interests, a bold and truly transcendent Strategic Initiative must be formulated. Consider this closely. Professor George Lakoff defines a strategic initiative as "a plan in which a change in one carefully chosen issue area has automatic effects over many, many, many other issue areas."

There are, broadly speaking, two types of strategic initiatives: progressive ones and regressive ones. For instance, here is a positive progressive strategic initiative, the Endangered Species Act. This law was enacted in 1973, and was passed to protect critically imperiled species of life from extinction "as a consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation." This Act has had the collateral benefit of preventing some shortsighted damage to the overall ecological health of our providential environment. It has also had a wide variety of largely beneficial impacts on protections of habitats and ecosystems. Developers and giant multinational corporations do not like this kind of strategic initiative, but it does generally serve to advance the greater good in the long run.

Look what's happening here. No species goes extinct in isolation. When we drive species toward extinction, we are damaging the tree of life that is integral to our own flourishing and survival.

Humankind is involved in a coextinction of Orcas and wild salmon and Indigenous peoples, and indeed our entire species is at increasing risk due to our aggregate needs, desires, compulsions, ambitions and heedless behaviors.

We are apex predators — forms of life high in the food chain — and our cumulative activities are destroying biotic habitats and destabilizing the global climate, thereby drastically diminishing the carrying capacity of our home planet for our species. At the same time that our population is continuing unsustainably increasing, per capita demands on ecosystem services and natural resources continue to burgeon beyond rational measure, and pushers of anti-choice policies are doubling down on preventing women from choosing not to have children.

We must begin acting in ways that will be more likely to leave our descendants a habitable earth and a sustainable home planet.

A giant in conservation is primatologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall, who once shared this simple visionary insight: "There's a saying, 'We haven't inherited this planet from our parents, we've borrowed it from our children.' When you borrow, you plan to pay back. We've been stealing and stealing and stealing. And it's about time we got together and started paying back."

Republican politicians, unfortunately, are acting like unrepentant stooges for corporate power and private profiteering, are working fervently to reduce protections associated with the Endangered Species Act. The purpose of the Endangered Species Act, it turns out, is not just to save threatened species from habitat destruction and other harms, but also to save ourselves, since our fates are linked in this inter-connected and interdependent world. As Garrett Hardin wrote in 1968 in his influential article, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, "Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons."

A pathological example of regressive strategic initiative is giving big deficit-financed tax cuts to the wealthy. This is more than just a scheme to reward big donors and the moneyed class. It is really a plan that is a "double con" gambit to give more money and greater power to the rich so that they can in turn give our representatives large campaign contributions, and then the recipients of this political largess reward such legalized bribery with additional benefits

to the privileged and further regressive changes in laws that force public services to be eliminated and more progressive tax plans to be blocked.

When historically low tax rates for the highest income earners are financed by borrowing public funds that will saddle people with payment obligations in every future year, it is a damn unfair form of intergenerational exploitation. By making already fiscally irresponsible levels of national debt even worse, tax cuts are used to paralyze our nation's ability to finance investments in the greater good, like those made in public education, community well-being, physical infrastructure, social safety net programs, and protections of the environment. Regressive tax cuts are thus a type of strategic initiative that has negative impacts on the vast majority of Americans.

Anti-tax, anti-government conservatives support retrogressive gimmicks like this because they claim to want to shrink government "down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub." They seem to completely ignore the fact that tax cuts have consistently led to larger federal budget deficits, NOT to less government spending. This was particularly true during the years that Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush and Donald Trump were in the White House, when both spending levels and budget deficits spiked.

Anti-tax pledges that have been made almost every "conservative" politician are radically absurd. What they are really saying, under the guise of honorable principle, is that they refuse to even consider rolling back permission by the government for wealthy people to continue the intergenerational crime of running up the national debt to give historic tax cut windfalls to people in the top tax brackets. They staunchly refuse to end the all-but-criminal tax evasion by hedge fund managers' in the "carried interest" loophole for really fat cats on Wall Street. They adamantly refuse to alter the outrageous provision that allows zero percent tax on all capital gains made by the richest two out of every 1,000 taxpayers who are so wealthy that they are subject to paying estate taxes on their wealth after they die. And they refuse to consider closing any tax loopholes that giant corporations have written into the tax code to let them evade taxes.

Hear these words now. Here is one obvious and truly transcendent Strategic Initiative that should be implemented. Almost everyone is in denial not to recognize it and support it. This is the ultimate Strategic Initiative, and the fairest one possible: Make an overarching national commitment to new assurances in a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. This agreement would be a declaration that all people in the future have an unalienable right to live on a planet where vitally important ecosystem services have not been severely compromised, and resources have not been profligately depleted, and wildlife habitats have not been irreparably harmed, and pollution and toxic wastes are reasonably controlled.

This Bill of Rights for Future Generations would also commit us to a goal of leaving a legacy to future generations of societies that are financially sound, and ones that are not subject to extreme austerity measures, revolutionary unrest, or heightened risks of hyper inflation and future debt crises. This initiative would create a guiding context in which all national policies would take into account their likely impact on our children and grandchildren and their descendants. It would provide a strong and flexible framework within which we would see the overarching need to prevent or mitigate many of the extraordinarily shortsighted and unfair expediencies that have become such defining hallmarks of our dysfunctional economic and political systems. And it would include uncommon measures designed to create mutual security that would ensure our nation coexists more peacefully with people in other countries. It would also support worldwide movements that honor personal liberties, freedom of speech, freedom of religion (or irreligion), and economic and political fairness.

"The time is always right to do what's right."

--- Martin Luther King, Jr.

A specific proposal for the content of this new Bill of Rights is published in *Common Sense Revival* (available from Lulu Publishing), and on the Earth Manifesto website.

Once a Bill of Rights for Future Generations like this is developed and ratified by Congress, and indeed by people in nations worldwide, it would automatically focus our efforts on making all countries in the world better places. It might even help prevent hyper-partisan politics from enabling short-term-oriented political and economic expediencies that myopically undermine the prospects of people in the future.

People should have "unalienable rights" to have a fair modicum of opportunity to enjoy their lives with guaranteed personal liberties, and with hopes for prosperity and security and meaningful existence, and perhaps even with a lusty pursuit of happiness. Let's heed the words of the Dalai Lama and the Pope, and psychologists and deep ecologists, and hold these understandings with us during our daily trespasses. We surely have a collective need for the counsel of scholars and spiritual leaders to understand *What Really Matters* and other important stuff.

Additional detailed guidance for smarter ways forward can be found in Part Four of the Earth Manifesto online, particularly in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

"Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come."

--- Victor Hugo

To-Do List

I strongly believe the concept that it is our ethical obligation to "pay forward" some good deeds to improve the prospects for our descendants. To best accomplish this eminently fair idea, we should honestly redesign our economic systems. As the brilliantly sensible businessman and author Paul Hawken wrote in *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability*:

"To create an enduring society, we will need a system of commerce and production where each and every act is inherently sustainable and restorative. ... Just as every action in an industrial society leads to environmental degradation, regardless of intention, we must design a system where the opposite is true, where doing good is like falling off a log, where the natural, everyday acts of work and life accumulate into a better world as a matter of course, not as a matter of conscious altruism."

The fairest and most effective way to accomplish this goal, and to change people's behaviors and habits is by creating powerful motivations in the form of attractive incentives and deterring disincentives. Let's demand that these incentives be well designed -- and let's make sure they are implemented sooner rather than later!

Save Ourselves by Saving the Planet

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. once pointed out the false dichotomy "between economic prosperity on the one hand and environmental protection on the other." He noted ruefully that we treat the planet as if it were "a business in liquidation" by striving to convert natural resources to cash as quickly as possible. "Environmental injury is deficit spending", he said. "It's a way of loading the cost of our generation's prosperity onto the backs of our children."

One need not be an accountant to know that it is crazy to profligately squander assets instead of investing in earning a sustainable stream of income to finance operations and earn profits. Many corporate gambits are unethical, especially those of private equity firms and "corporate raiders" who buy undervalued companies to liquidate their assets and lay off employees in order to make big short-term profits. The resulting harm is a socially unacceptable aspect of what Naomi Klein writes about in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*.

It seems apparent to me that, not only should we be able to collectively afford to include the costs of reasonable environmental protections in the prices of all products and services, we cannot afford not to include them. Otherwise we will continue to sacrifice the material and ecological foundations of future well-being to goals that are disturbingly shortsighted. Since the trend in the past four decades is for poverty rates to increase and the middle class to find it increasingly difficult to get ahead, the majority of Americans cannot afford to pay higher prices for the things they need, so it becomes an overarching goal for us to make sure the distribution of wealth is broader and LESS CONCENTRATED in the hands of the richest few.

The main driving force behind increasing inequalities and intergenerational inequities in our society is the unwarranted excessive influence of wealthy people and multinational corporations. This influence enables them to dominate our national policy-making and subvert needed political reforms. Wealthy people and the organizations that facilitate their abuses of power are also driving forces behind wasteful consumerism and the Tragedy of the Commons degradation of the environment. Our national priorities are skewed by these forces, which deprive workers of collective bargaining rights and allow our national infrastructure to deteriorate, our military to overreach, and too-big-to-fail corporations to be subsidized and bailed out at the public expense.

The principal goal of wealthy people and corporate entities is to secure for themselves tax rates that are near the lowest levels since the late 1920s. They are doing this at the same time that the U.S. government is setting record levels of national debt year after year after year. To reverse these trends, an overarching commitment is needed to a Bill of Rights for Future Generations.

People who are enjoying really good fortune in their lives should not begrudge those who are experiencing severe economic insecurities the boon of being given a little more security. This is an essential, empathetic and deeply human assessment. It is a perspective so basic that it predates the development of the philosophy of ethics, and reaches back to the impulses that led to the evolutionarily positive aspects of religious mythologies, moral codes, cooperative problem-solving, and social cohesion in human clan groups.

People on Easy Street should not be allowed to pay historically low tax rates on the top levels of their incomes, capital gains and dividends -- and the inheritances they leave after they die. A more steeply graduated tax structure is the only good source for financing things like a basic affordable social safety net, universal healthcare, environmental protections and other programs designed to create a fairer, better functioning, and saner society.

"Government must give priority to the needs of ordinary citizens, workers, consumers, students, children, the elderly, the ill, the vulnerable and the underdog, and not to the needs of those already sufficiently powerful and affluent to afford their own lobbyists."

--- Theodore Sorensen (1928 - 2010)

After the following digression, an exploration of the principal reasons we need a Bill of Rights for Future Generations will continue, to provide a clearer understanding of this transcendent issue.

An Aside on Unity, Tone and Content

The top driver of sustainable peace is the quality of social relations, according to folks at Beyond Conflict. The norms that shape the "dialogue environment" are a key factor, like respectful debate, agreement to reasoned deliberations and forsaking ad hominem attacks that are directed against a person rather than the position they are maintaining.

There are many gottcha thoughts in my observations, and I am striving to make them fairer, more objective and less divisive. It does, after all, cause counterproductive division to antagonize others, and to cast doubts on their motives and integrity and patriotism. And it surely couldn't be helpful to severely criticize them and belittle them for the consequences of their choosing to side with political authoritarians, Big Money donors, avaricious CEOs, religious reactionaries and other repressive and regressive factions in our society.

Of course, one of the main aspects of effective satire is making fun of people's foibles, stupidity and absurdities, with a goal of inspiring an auspicious remodeling. Sometimes that works, eh, Voltaire?

Mark Twain famously frequently used the form of humor known as satire, with his great humorous exaggerations and irony that cast light on people's failings and stupidity.

Conservative politics in the U.S. has made itself into a real ripe target for laughter, ridicule, cynicism, suspicion and disdain. It's a pathetic parody of propriety, and often even sanctimonious about it, especially with regard to their stances against women's reproductive healthcare and choices, and against a better social safety net, and against immigrants, and against gun safety, and in their anti-environmental stands.

Conservatives in Congress and in state legislatures, and in the MAGA cult of Trump — and on the Supreme Court -- zealously prefer their own power and control over democratic fairness and fair representation and the integrity of free and fair elections — and democracy itself. And they know how to gain and maintain it: by treacherously dividing people over wedge issues and manipulative misinformation, and by using divide-to-conquer tactics from the Demagogue's Playbook.

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Republicans will do just anything to hurt Democrats and help their electoral chances in the upcoming midterm elections, even though it causes serious adversities to the American people.

The GOP shouts about freedom and limited government but then tries to prevent millions of people from voting, especially poor people and those in racial minorities, and they try to prohibit abortions and push policies that diminish democratic fairness. They use divisive strategies to prevent schools from including curricula about racism in American history, and ban books they don't like, and use emotion-hijacking tactics to drive wedges between people to keep them from uniting to reform government and promote the general welfare.

False patriots claim to honor our flag and country, but are zealously willing to undermine democracy to have their own way by cheating in elections, torpedoing equal representation and opportunities and social justice, trying to impose their rigidly anti-choice attitudes on women and deprive folks in racial minorities of fair representation, opposing common sense gun safety and anti-corruption reforms. ETC

These are my rationales for my passionate invective. Mine is a liberal-thinking perspective that aspires to the recognition of what should rightly be broad appeal.

"America is in danger of falling apart. We need to act now before it's too late."

Two-thirds of Americans still agree that "in the end, we're all Americans," and three-quarters believe it is still possible for the United States to achieve the ideal of our national motto -- "from many people, one."

"But we have to match that hope with action before it's too late. America's warning lights are blinking red. What will you do now?"

This is what Pearce Godwin asks. He is the founder of the Listen First Project and the #ListenFirstCoalition, which consists of more than 400 organizations striving to bring Americans together across differences. He requests your attention: "I invite every American who wants to relieve the pain and paralysis of division to show up April 21 or April 23, 2022 when we pioneer a stronger path together at America Talks. (He can be reached at Pearce@ListenFirstProject.org.)

Transcend Division and Enjoy Greater Domestic Tranquility

A principal cause of the polarization and accompanying resentments in our society is partisan gerrymandering, which forces politicians in both parties to pander to the further extremes in their own parties, so the representatives that get elected are antagonistic to working together with other representatives of the people in common cause.

Federal legislation must be enacted ASAP that will prohibit partisan gerrymandering in every state, because it is a big contributing cause to how divided people are in this country, and around the world.

My criticisms of conservatives are often well-earned because so many of them have been radicalized to espouse positions contrary to every one of the ideals articulated in the Prelude to the U.S. Constitution.

Let's admire our Constitution yet again: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Let's come together and help solve the daunting problems that face us, and tell the Dividers and authoritarians to go to hell.

"Well observed, Doctor."

Clear-Eyed Assessment of Republicanland

Fringe elements have come to dominate the Republican Party, like the 2020 election loser Donald Trump, and like the likes of Lauren Boebert, Paul Gosar, Matt Gaetz, Madison Cawthorn, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Jim Jordan, Devin Nunes, Josh Hawley, Ted Cruz and Mo Brooks, as well as apologists for insurrectionists and others who lead our nation's many white supremacist groups and Neo-Nazi groups, "or take up space on the right-side of our nation's Capitol."

People on the fringes are the ones most susceptible to being dangerously antagonistic to others, or motivated by hate that often has been inculcated by master manipulators and Divide-to Conquer demagogue, and people like Vladimir Putin and Fox News celebrities Sean Hannity and Tucker Carlson.

Another right-wing firebrand is Alex Jones, a radio show host and prominent pusher of conspiracy theories. His "journey from Sandy Hook to the January 6 assault on the Capitol is a reflection of how conspiracy theories in the United States have metastasized and corroded public discourse in the digital age. After Trump appeared live in an interview on Infowars' website in December 2015, Alex Jones went from the fringes to become part of a newly radicalized Republican Party.

People on the fringes are the ones most likely to be riled up by social media and the corporate conservative media complex to support reactive policies and exhibit insurrectionary passions.

Our media and echo chambers are okay with the division; they benefit from controversy and scandals, and on the right, they love their passion-engendering news/entertainment on Fox News and worse right-wing media outlets.

One way to make bigger profits is to get customers addicted to services or content being provided by these profit-seeking entities.

Consumer addiction strategies utilized by social media providers are a main method to hook in more customers, for profits sake, a story viscerally told in the important documentary *Social Dilemma*.

Social media outlets, especially Facebook and Twitter, are having far-reaching influences on our psyches, our worldviews, our understandings, our beliefs, our feelings, and even global suicide rates.

Marketing and political propaganda campaigns are often manipulative, especially when they use misinformation, falsehoods, lies and disinformation, and microtargeting on social media that is designed to addict our attentions causes insidious problems.

Persuasive advertising, commercial messaging, manipulative marketing and political propaganda addle our brains and affect people's drives and prevent them from helping combat insidious threats of climate disrupting disasters and the assault on biological diversity and the survival of many species of life.

In our echo chambers, we are often misinformed, deceived, indoctrinated, deluded and in effect brainwashed, and 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.

Citizens United against the *Citizens United* Ruling by the Supreme Court

Several years ago, Professor Robert Reich weighed in about the dangers of increasing extremes of inequality, a "perfect storm that threatens American democracy: an unprecedented concentration of income and wealth at the top; a record amount of secret money, drowning our democracy; and a public becoming increasingly angry and cynical about a government that is raising its taxes, reducing its services, and unable to get it back to work. We're losing our democracy to a different system. It's called plutocracy."

Plutocracy is rule by the rich, with political power controlled by wealthy people. The respectable journalist Bill Moyers warns us about the dangers of allowing our democracy to be dominated by Big Money. "Plutocracy and democracy don't mix," says Moyers. And the Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis provided Americans with a provocative perspective when he said, "We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both."

Corporations are the basic vehicles by which wealthy people gain the preponderance of Big Bucks and benefits of our capitalist economy for themselves. Wealthy people and investors then use some of the great wealth generated to mold public opinion, influence elections, and lobby for greater advantages for themselves.

Corporate lawyers have managed, over the years, to effectively get a doctrine of "corporate personhood" established. This doctrine subverts Equal Protection and Due Process clauses of the 14th Amendment and other rules by giving corporations the rights to enjoy the legal status and protections meant for real human beings. These supposed "corporate personhood" rights allow big businesses to evade the responsibilities of good citizenship by using their

deep pockets to radically influence elections, corrupt our laws, stack the courts with ideological conservatives, and profit by taking unfair advantage of people, depleting resources, and degrading the environment.

The abuse of corporate power is a root cause of many of the daunting challenges that face humanity. Our nation's decision-making has been allowed to be controlled and contorted by this narrowly self-interested segment of society. This trend is proving to be harshly contrary to the interests of the American people. *We the People* should emulate our honorable ancestors who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution by placing greater value on good governance and responsibility for keeping a positive legacy for people in the future.

"The political and commercial morals of the United States are not merely food for laughter -- they are an entire banquet."

--- Mark Twain

Multinational corporations have narrow legal purposes, and so they are amoral by design. They use three main methods to drive shortsighted strategies on behalf of investors who want high returns on their investments:

- (1) They exploit and deplete resources as if there will be no tomorrow;
- (2) They privatize profits while socializing some of their production costs, such as those related to workers and the environment, by externalizing these costs onto the general public and all people in future generations; and,
- (3) They abuse their political power to get the federal government to stimulate the consumer economy through deficit spending, and to allow big businesses to minimize the taxes they pay, and they evade sensible regulations and demand to be bailed out when their gambles fail.

The *Citizens United* ruling by the Supreme Court in January 2010 was patently political and legally wrongheaded. This ruling has allowed the influence of Big Money to become further entrenched in our political system, and it has enshrined profits as more important than people, subverting hopes of achieving greater good goals.

"I hate to hear people say this Judge will vote so and so, because he is a Democrat -- and this one so and so because he is a Republican. It is shameful. The Judges have the Constitution for their guidance; they have no right to any politics save the politics of rigid right and justice when they are sitting in judgment upon the great matters that come before them."

--- Mark Twain, Letter to the *Alta California*, 1868

Ever since John Roberts and Samuel Alito were appointed to the Supreme Court, the 5 "conservative" members who formed a narrow majority on the Court consistently sided with corporate interests against the people in its rulings. In both houses of Congress, Republicans have been obstructing most legislation that would give fairer representation to the people, and it is really reprehensible that Republicans in the Senate refused to do their duty to replace Scalia while President Obama was in office. A Constitutional Amendment is needed that would reform campaign finance laws to reduce the overriding influence that rich people and big corporations have in our political system. Such an Amendment would reverse the Supreme Court's rigid anti-democratic interpretation of our Constitution that was evidenced by the *Citizens United* ruling. The time is NOW to act to return power to the people!

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, while grilling the attorney backing the Mississippi anti-abortion law during oral arguments, suggested the court would be perceived as highly politicized were it to undermine the 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* and related rulings since then, and that such a decision would be viewed as merely a reflection of the court's new lopsided 6-3 conservative majority.

"Will this institution survive the stench that this creates in the public perception that the Constitution and its reading are just political acts?" she asked. "I don't see how it is possible."

Democrats Have a Messaging Problem

Democrats have a messaging problem and the problem isn't just President Biden. To Democrats, a "message" consists of policies they've enacted or want to enact. Republicans don't bother with policies. For seventy years they've stayed relentlessly "on message" with a narrative about Democrats as socialists and communists who want to take away peoples' freedoms. More recently they've also used thinly-veiled racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia to suggest that Democrats are allowing the nation to be taken over by "them."

Democrats offer white papers and they talk in paragraphs. Republicans offer fearful stories and talk in bumper stickers. Republicans have their own message problems, of course. As long as the former guy retains his grip on the GOP, Democrats have a chance to remind up-for-grabs voters what is at stake this year and beyond.

In 2021, Republican state legislators proposed over 440 bills with the intention to limit voting rights. Of those, 34 became law in 19 states. "That's the bad news. The worse news is that they aren't done yet. ... Republicans control 30 of those state governments, and they are back at finding ways to limit access to the ballot box."

At the federal level, Republicans stalled the For the People Act. Then Republicans prevented the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act from passing. Then they stopped the Freedom to Vote Act.

Trump's Big Lie claiming he didn't lose in the 2020 presidential election has caused widespread and damaging distrust in our elections and the people that help administer them. In early February 2022, the impacts of his actions continued to threaten our democracy as the Republican National Committee actually called the Jan. 6th insurrection "legitimate political discourse", adding fuel to the fire.

The blatant misinformation that caused a mob of violent insurrectionists to storm the U.S. Capitol -- the very heart of our democracy ... has now led to many of them seeking to gain power over elections in cities and states across the nation. Numerous insurrectionists are looking to become local election officials and poll watchers, which is all part of a broader effort for them to gain control over which ballots are counted and which are discarded. "We need to do everything we can to keep these insurrectionists out of Congress and from becoming election officials."

As the elected officials that will oversee the administration of elections and the certification of results in many states, secretaries of state play an important role in safeguarding our democracy. To ensure Americans' faith in our elections and in our democracy, Secretaries of State must disqualify all insurrectionists from serving in office, including as election officials.

Our government has the tools, resources, and authority needed to prevent the people who participated in January 6th's insurrection from gaining power over our elections. Keeping them from becoming election officials and running for office is just a matter of political will.

This is a make-or-break moment for our democracy.

"What was once the Party of Lincoln has become the Party of David Dukes, Richard Bertrand Spencer, Trump, Lauren Boebert, Paul Gosar, Marjorie Taylor Greene, and others who lead our nation's many Neo-Nazi groups or take up space on the right-side of our nation's Capitol."

Gosar and Greene spoke in late February 2022 to the audience of a white supremacist organization rally, calling itself the America First Political Action Conference, or AFPAC. Greene claimed that she knew nothing about the organization or its organizer, Nick Fuentes. Yeah, right!

Utah Senator and former presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, offered his opinion of the incident. "I'm reminded of that old line from the Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid movie," said the Utah senator and 2012 presidential nominee. "One character says, 'Morons. I've got morons on my team.' I have to think anybody that would sit down with white nationalists and speak at their conference was certainly missing a few IQ points."

As expected, House minority leader Kevin McCarthy initially said and did nothing, "convincing me that he, too, is a supporter of the white supremacy movement."

However, Wyoming Representative, Liz Cheney did speak out. She was "censured" by McCarthy and the RNC for being part of the investigation into the failed coup attempt on January 6, 2021. The Wyoming congresswoman wrote in a Twitter post, "As Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and Rep. Paul Gosar speak at this white supremacist, anti-Semitic, pro-Putin event, silence by Republican Party leaders is deafening and enabling," and she included a video of Fuentes' remarks.

"All Americans should renounce this garbage and reject the Putin wing of the GOP now," Cheney said.

The event was filmed and offered multiple chants in approval of Putin's invasion. During other parts of the event, there were offerings of praise for Adolf Hitler.

Remember, Trump called Putin "a genius" when he invaded a sovereign, democratic nation without provocation.

Multiple Neo-Nazi groups recognized Trump as the leader of the white supremacy movement in America during his first year in office.

Trump supporters remain in denial. They refuse to believe that Trump is an agent for Putin, or that he is a fascist. It worries me that although the facts are undeniable, they would follow a man who is not an American, a confirmed malignant narcissist, and lacking in basic intelligence.

"Our nation should not be divided, but it is. We should be united in our condemnation of Trump for his crimes against America, and Putin for his attack on the innocent people of Ukraine. We must never forget that Putin is the enemy, and if Trump continues his effusive praise of the murderous dictator, he stands with Putin, not the people of the United States of America."

--- Op-ed by James Turnage

Declaration of Independence from Corporate Power

Imagine the positive impact that could result if millions of American citizens were to join a "We the People" Campaign and signed this powerful pledge:

I pledge my support for America's founding principle of government of, by, and for the People. I believe that a corporation is not a person, money is not speech, and corporate money should not be allowed in our country's elections.

I pledge to work with other grassroots Americans for reforms that will free today's politics from the dominating power of what Thomas Jefferson called "the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations."

I encourage all of my fellow Americans to set aside partisan biases that you may have, and hear what Bernie Sanders said upon entering the race for president at the end of April 2015: "The issue here is the huge amounts of money that it takes to run a campaign today. I wonder now in this day and age whether it is possible for any candidate who is not a billionaire or who is not beholden to the billionaire class to be able to run successful campaigns."

This is a big problem for Americans who cherish democratic self-government, and for hopes that any electable presidential candidate can honorably espouse visionary long-term greater good goals.

Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders declared on CBS *Face the Nation* that, if elected president, he would have a litmus test for any new Supreme Court Justice. Any such nominee that he made would need to support the overturning of the *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court. I heartily endorse this notion, because Bernie Sanders was right in pointing out the obvious:

"The disastrous decisions of the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* case and in other related cases are undermining the very foundations of American democracy, as billionaires rig the system by using their Super PACS to buy politicians and elections."

I strongly encourage all Americans to consider the highly negative implications of giving Republican politicians overwhelming power, and to ignore the blaring noise of Big Money-fueled conservative spin in our elections. Reject these politicians' bid for uncompromising dominance! I observed before the 2016 elections, "The next President will likely fill three or four vacancies on the Supreme Court, and if Republicans were able to choose more ideological conservatives, the Supreme Court could become a body overwhelmingly reactionary and biased against the rights and prerogatives of workers, women, minorities, and the vast majority of the American people."

Weigh In Some More, Mark Twain

The honorable rascal Mark Twain lambasted the extremes of economic inequality during the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century. Such unjust conditions prevailed at the time that they were once described as "the Great Barbeque". There was a deceptive patina of prosperity in that era because wealthy industrialists, financiers and 'robber barons' were indulging in extravaganzas of conspicuous consumption. Rich people dominated American society and politics, and they corruptly used the power of their money to put economic and political policies in place that allowed them to amass great fortunes. They tactically and sometimes violently suppressed worker organizations,

causing intense labor strife. Also, rich people were able to gain most of the benefits of the economy for themselves because federal income taxes had not yet become a permanent fixture of the U.S. tax system. There were, in fact, no federal income taxes until 1913.

Industrialists made huge profits in those times without being required to share the bounty of their often ill-gotten gains with society at large. Working conditions were dangerous, worker security was almost unknown, and environmental protections were all but non-existent. Industrialization and urbanization trends, however, were creating very serious social and ecological problems.

The strife between capital and labor has been one of the biggest stories ever since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. This conflict led to the ideas asserted in the *Communist Manifesto*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848 ("Workers of the World, Unite!"). This strife was the main driving force behind the unionizing era from the late nineteenth century through 1980. Unions and collective bargaining rights gave workers improved workplace safety and the power to gain a share of the benefits derived from their labor and productivity, and this movement helped create a healthy, growing and socially beneficial middle class.

The social ills associated with unbridled prerogatives of people with capital sparked the Progressive Era, a far-reaching reform movement, in reaction. This period of reform to the prevailing system of laissez-faire industrialization lasted from the 1880s until about the First World War. In response to serious problems associated with industrialization, the supporters of the Progressive movement advocated a wide range of economic, political and social reforms, targeted to improve working conditions and to reduce unfair competition and corrupt practices.

One of the most important reforms was designed to reduce monopoly interests by busting up large corporate 'trusts' like railroad conglomerates and big oil companies. More than 130 giant companies were 'busted' into smaller entities to thwart the corrupting power and monopoly practices of businesses that had come to dominate various industries. At the same time, a number of vitally important government regulatory agencies were established.

Decades later, during the Great Depression, the failings of capitalism became even more starkly apparent. Massive unrest resulted from the nation's most severe economic recession, which came abruptly in the footsteps of the Roaring Twenties with its lavish consumerism, low taxes on the wealthy, stimulated growth of a speculative bubble in real estate and stocks -- and flappers, Art Deco and the Jazz Age. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 ushered in this disastrous economic depression.

Eventually, the political elite was forced to allow policies to be implemented that created a social safety net and made society fairer in many ways. These policies helped build a larger middle class, and the concentration of income and wealth became less extreme for the following 50 years.

Since 1980, the gap between rich people and poor people has again been widening dramatically, largely due to regressive changes in tax policies put in place by Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush and Trump Republicans. Another "great barbecue" is going on today, and it's sure not all that "great" for the majority of Americans! The disparities of wealth between rich people and poor people today have grown to be nearly as large as they were during the Gilded Age. The top 10% of people in California, for instance, saw their incomes increase more than 40% from 1987 to 2008, while the top 1% earned 80% more; but the bottom 60% of people experienced a net decrease in their incomes of more than 10%. Since 2008, inequalities of income and wealth have grown markedly more extreme - and they are disproportionately beneficial to the top 1%.

People who are super-rich have been using the power of their money to pervert our democracy into a plutocratic feast, from which the majority of Americans are being excluded. Workers are being squeezed, with their incomes stagnating while many costs for basic necessities like housing, healthcare, education, food, utilities and water are increasing. At the worst point in the recession, there were more than 15 million unemployed Americans, out of a workforce of about 150 million people. Home foreclosures reached an extremely high level, and a record number of homeowners were financially "underwater" due to bubble economic policies that trapped them into negative equity positions in their homes. Tax revenue declines, together with the costs of the bloated military and entitlements for senior citizens, have been the biggest contributing factors to record budget deficits. In the face of this reality, few politicians are courageous enough to make fair-minded difficult choices, or to honestly tackle extreme imbalances.

It is high time that we cooperated together to achieve fair-minded goals, and to redesign our system so that it works better for everyone. Sacrifices are going to have to be shared by all. Highly compensated people and investors and rich people must contribute the most, because they receive the lion's share of the income and benefits and privileges in our society.

Instead of admitting the truth of this characterization, "conservatives" in Congress are trying to slash spending on public education, infrastructure investments, environmental protections, public broadcasting, family planning, and programs that help women and children and poor people. These opportunistic politicians are striving to reduce regulations on banks and other corporations, and to further weaken the power of workers by eliminating collective bargaining rights. Public workers in Wisconsin and Ohio attest to these facts, their influence having been emasculated by Republican politicians in recent years. Congressional Republicans have voted more than 60 times to effectively take away healthcare coverage ("Obamacare") from many millions of Americans. This is cruel politics, for surely the words of Martin Luther King Jr. are true: "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

Corporate industry groups and lobbyists are fighting tooth and nail to stop the Environmental Protection Agency from protecting clean air, clean water and a stable climate. This attempt to undermine the greater good was supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which differs markedly from local chambers of commerce because it is financed by giant corporations. More than 50% of the budget for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce comes from less than 20 giant companies.

All these problems are exacerbated by regressive changes in taxation that have reduced revenues the government receives by cutting taxes on high incomes, capital gains and inheritances to nearly the lowest rates in 90 years. Simultaneously, the share of the national budget that corporations have been required to pay has been reduced by 60% since 1960. Sixty percent less! What a deal.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, less than 11% of total federal revenues were collected through corporate taxes between 2000 and 2009, in contrast to almost 30% of revenues collected through corporate taxes in the 1950s. This shift in taxation from corporations and wealthy people to working people, and to all people in the future by means of deficit financing, is the result of outrageous systemic corruption. This misguidance is irresponsible to society and the common people.

This development comes at a time when corporate profits in the United States are the largest ever in history. This is an obscenely unfair state of affairs. The interests of our children and all of our descendants in future generations are being sacrificed to give ever-larger benefits to the Few. The lives of tens of millions of Americans are being figuratively burned to a crisp in this "disaster capitalist" barbecue. The USA today is clearly engaged in a race to the bottom that benefits the few on top at the expense of the vast majority of Americans. This sustained headlong rush to pander to those who already have the most perks and power is characterized by wrongheaded assaults on worker pay and benefits, and on environment protections. The results are a social and ecological disaster to the people in our diminished democracy.

We have gotten into this predicament because we have allowed our politics to be corrupted. It reminds me of a thought-provoking political cartoon that shows two guys in a prison cell, with one saying, "I followed accepted marketing strategies, but I strayed from generally accepted accounting principles." Ha!

When a new proposed international trade agreement with Pacific Rim nations was being pushed in Congress for "fast track approval" in May 2015, some observers said that it would be like the NAFTA agreement on steroids. Elizabeth Warren sensibly suggested that the agreement should not include the "Investor State Dispute Settlement" process that could allow foreign investors to sue governments over what they consider unfair treatment, so that "unfair treatment" charges could be invoked to knock down legitimate regulations that protect workers, public safety and the natural environment.

Historical Perspective

The famous pamphleteer Thomas Paine published his carefully considered and passionately expressed treatise *Common Sense* in January 1776, adducing his reasons why a country subject to colonial mercantile exploitation and taxation

without fair representation and other forms of tyranny should throw off the yoke of the despotic government of British King George III. Thomas Paine published his revolutionary ideas anonymously because their content was treasonous at the time from the perspective of the ruling British.

Our Founders soon thereafter declared independence from the oppressive rule of the British Empire. They embraced the radically progressive principles of the Age of Enlightenment on July 4, 1776 in the Declaration of Independence. Hear their words anew:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

These words in the Declaration of Independence were followed by an interesting list of particular offenses that so seriously provoked the liberty-loving American colonists in those days. Today, we are experiencing a new but similarly oppressive form of tyranny. This new kind of power abuse is being perpetrated by a tiny minority of Americans who have huge amounts of money that they are using to exert an outsized influence on our national priorities. Many of them are among the richest 1% of the people, who possess more than 40% of the nation's wealth. And an even longer list of specific wrongs can be adduced today that are being foisted on our society by these few who control our economic and political systems.

These challenges are discussed at length in this manifesto, which is the *Common Sense* manifesto of modern times.

"The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary in the same hands -- whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective -- may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny."

--- James Madison, *Federalist Paper 47*

Think about this quote, and then consider the sobering fact that Republicans today control the White House and the U.S. Senate, and an ungodly proportion of them are so ambitious and unethical that they blindly support Donald Trump, despite the man's demagogic, divisive, dangerous, Constitution-violating ways and his economically bankrupt tax plans and con man tactics. They thus enable a temperamentally unfit and bizarrely unhinged character to be the kingpin of a new overriding tyranny. Reject the rascals, I say!

The Risks of Revolutionary Unrest

Professor Robert Scheer, a prominent American journalist, made a sensational point in April 2011 in an article titled *The Peasants Need Pitchforks*:

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*. In an article titled *Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%*, Stiglitz states that the top thin layer of the super wealthy 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% of the people take nearly a quarter of the nation's income -- an inequality even the wealthy will come to regret."

Billionaire Nick Hanauer wrote a thought-provoking article in 2014 that provides a somewhat similar perspective (paraphrased a bit for relevance):

"Let's speak frankly to each other. I'm not the smartest guy you've ever met, or the hardest-working. I was a mediocre student. I'm not technical at all -- I can't write a word of code. What sets me apart from others, and helped me become a billionaire, is a tolerance for risk and an intuition about what will happen in the future. Seeing where things are headed is the essence of entrepreneurship. And what do I see in our future now?"

"I see pitchforks." (stereotypical weapons carried by angry mobs or peasants enraged by gross injustices).

"At the same time that billionaires are thriving beyond the dreams of any plutocrats in history, the rest of the country -- the 99.99 percent -- is lagging far behind. The divide between the haves and have-nots is getting worse really, really fast. In 1980, the top 1 percent controlled about 8 percent of U.S. national income. The bottom 50 percent shared about 18 percent. Today the top 1 percent share about 20 percent; the bottom 50 percent, just 12 percent."

"But the problem isn't that we have inequality. Some inequality is intrinsic to any high-functioning capitalist economy. The problem is that inequality is at historically high levels and getting worse every day. Our country is rapidly becoming less a capitalist society and more a feudal society. Unless our policies change dramatically, the middle class will disappear, and we will be back to late 18th-century France. Before the revolution."

"So I have a message for my fellow filthy rich, for all of us who live in our gated bubble worlds: Wake up, people. It won't last."

"If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequities in this economy, the pitchforks are going to come for us. No society can sustain this kind of rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated like this and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. Or an uprising. There are no counterexamples. None. It's not if, it's when."

Less than two years after this article was published, anti-establishment fervor broke out in the presidential primary elections of 2016, and since then a civil war between opposing factions seems to be brewing in the USA.

These are the reasons I believe that an exceedingly convincing case can be made for making modestly larger investments in "social insurance policies" that give wealthy people increased protections against the mounting dangers of social unrest associated with rising inequalities and increasing anger and desperation in America. The best form of financing these policies is not by adding to the national debt, but by assessing higher tax rates on the highest levels of incomes.

"There are really two Americas, one for the grifter class, and one for everybody else. In everybody-else land, the world of small businesses and wage-earning employees, the federal government is something to be avoided, an overwhelming, all-powerful entity whose attentions usually presage some kind of financial setback, if not complete ruin. In the grifter world, however, government is a slavish lapdog that financial companies ... use as a tool for making money."

--- Matt Taibbi, *Griftopia: Bubble Machines, Vampire Squids, and the Long Con That Is Breaking America*

The Big Picture and the Bottom Line

Thoughts cascade through my consciousness like flurries of snowflakes falling from a fulsome sky. Often when my thoughts are not focused on the follies and absurdities of human behaviors and activities here in the second decade of the 21st century, they observe thusly: "Yay for good fortune! We live in a bountiful world, and rich experiences are widely available. A big yay for rich experiences!"

Unfortunately, these rich experiences, along with the leisure time, material goods and personal health that can make them more easily accessible, are being greedily and jealously hoarded by those who feel entitled to abuse their power to gain as much of a monopoly on these things as they can. Unempathetic attitudes like this are often ruthlessly mean-spirited in their practical impacts. They cause undue hardships and stresses in the world, and undesirably provoke frustration and anger. These attitudes carry the foolhardy risk that eventually they may stoke intense social strife, and a revolutionary zeal may arise that would be especially dangerous to the privileged. The populist Occupy movement and reactionary Tea Party and the rise of strong anti-establishment sentiments -- and the radicalization of the Republican Party -- are manifestations of this destabilizing unrest.

It is for a very good reason that the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution asserts that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." One main purpose of government should be to help ensure that all people are accorded "certain unalienable rights". Fairness is a cornerstone of democracy. Many different interest groups naturally want to grab bigger shares of the extensive benefits of economic policies for themselves rather than

accepting a fairer distribution of them to the majority of people. To fairly balance this aspect of our natures with overarching social and moral goals, we need to cultivate empathetic understanding and enact smarter national policies.

Empathy is at the center of human values, and true morality is grounded in empathy. Morality is found as much in empathetic understanding as in reason, and much more fundamentally in ethical empathy than in righteously moralizing religion. Linguist George Lakoff points out that the neural circuitry of our brains is wired for perceiving the emotions that others feel. This is the biological basis for empathy. Empathy is of great value in social groups because it allows us to connect with others, and to share a wider appreciation in life. The natural companion of empathy is responsibility for helping others, not in taking advantage of them or harming them.

It would be advantageous, in the aggregate, if we redesigned our societies to ensure that the potential for positive experiences and economic security are shared more broadly, and to make sure we also 'pay forward' a fair legacy to future generations. What would the character of this fairer legacy be? For one, we should not wantonly deplete natural resources. Secondly, we should not overly degrade natural ecosystems. We should act to prevent the extinction of other species of life, instead of continuing to slaughter wildlife and rapaciously destroy habitats by disrupting climate patterns and causing ocean acidification through uncontrolled emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. We should insist that our societies be governed more fairly, and effectively, and in a reasonably frugal and conservationist manner.

We should strive to see that our state and federal governments, and governments worldwide, allow a maximum of personal freedoms for all people while at the same time ensuring that prosperity is more fairly shared, and that desperate poverty is alleviated. Young people and everyone in future generations should be assured that their prospects will not be overwhelmingly compromised by short-term-oriented expediencies that pander to those with the most power, influence and money.

While we are at it, we should create a Department of Peace with a mission to help foster international peace. A Cabinet-level Secretary of Peace should be appointed to demonstrate a new commitment to the causes of conflict-resolution and international cooperation and peaceful coexistence with other peoples. These commitments would help us achieve a truer kind of national security.

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

--- Albert Einstein

Stronger commitments to fair guiding principles are needed so that we have a better chance of achieving big-picture goals that advance the longer-term greater good. A Bill of Rights for Future Generations would help provide our societies with this overarching guidance. Fairer societies will be healthier societies, in a physical sense as well as in psychological and spiritual senses. This is one reason our principal national goal should be to make our societies fairer.

Instead of helping accomplish greater good goals, many of the people who dominate our politics cling passionately to their ideologies and work tirelessly to make our societies ever-more UNFAIR to the vast majority of people. They do this to get bigger benefits for themselves and their benefactors and financiers. Our economic and political systems are primarily oriented to allowing such corrupt dealings, so radical reforms are required. We need to reduce the overbearing influence of rich people and corporations on our legislatures and the Executive Branch and federal courts.

Enormous obstacles confront us in this quest for intergenerational fairness. At the top of the list of these obstacles is the obstruction of progress and reforms by established interest groups that are powerfully vested in maintaining the status quo. These words are focused on the overarching importance of promising reasonable rights and prospects to people in future generations, as well as to taking steps today to create greater social justice for Americans who are not in the top 1%.

Fairness: A Golden Rule Necessity

My feminine sensibilities have been upset by the glaring growth of economic inequalities in the past 40 years in the United States. The fervor of my outrage has been stoked by the fact that the policies that have helped create this state of affairs are unnecessarily unfair. The ideals of our Founders are being betrayed by the ruling class in our country so that wealthy people are able to get more and more of the benefits produced in our capitalist economic

system. My maternal and humanistic intuitions are offended at this betrayal of ideals, and even more so by this very real betrayal of the interests of young people and those in future generations.

The wealth gap between older and younger Americans has widened sharply in recent years, according to an analysis by the Pew Research Center. People over age 65 saw their net worths increase on average by 42% between 1984 and 2009, while those in the 35-to-44 age group had their net worths decrease by 44% and those younger than 35 experienced a decline in their net worths by 68%.

Attention! Read that last paragraph again. Mark Twain is often credited with having declared that there are three kinds of lies: "lies, damned lies, and statistics". This observation generally describes the potentially persuasive power of numbers, particularly when statistics are used to bolster weak arguments. But it does not take a great amount of perspicacity to see the damning implications of these statistics in their practical impacts on people in our society. Even more damning is the cause of this trend.

The policies that have enabled this trend are a form of intergenerational warfare that is another aspect of the class warfare waged by the richest 1% against the other 99%. Such widening economic inequity represents a pathetic misallocation of our national resources to old people instead of investing in younger people. If we could extrapolate this trend and measure the gap between the relative prospects of people alive today and those of all people to be born in the next 50 years, we would find a similar and even more startlingly extreme trend of growing inequities. This is one main reason that we need a Bill of Right for Future Generations!

Betrayals of the interests of young people and those in future generations, and the hardships that result from this consequential undertaking, have been facilitated by the corrupting influence of Big Money in our elections and in the halls of Congress. The corporate-controlled media is partially responsible for this situation because it has too often served as a propaganda organ for greedy interests and the extreme right. Big Media has given these special interests the ability to unfairly influence our national political debate by manipulatively engineering consent and using misinformation and deceptive spin to mold public opinion.

Trends toward the increasing concentration of the media in recent decades have resulted in more than 80% of all radio stations, television stations, cable networks, and newspapers being owned by a very small number of massive corporations. With this status, it is not surprising that our democracy is careening off the rails!

Since two of the primary purposes of the U.S. Constitution were to create a national framework for democratic fairness and to prevent usurpations of power by either a despotic few or by the federal government, it is bizarre that we find ourselves today with the most unfair distribution of wealth since 1929. It bears repeating: Rich people have collectively abused the power that comes with wealth by getting politicians to assess taxes on them that are near the lowest since the Roaring Twenties on income, capital gains, dividends and inheritances.

The privileged class has furthermore managed, in a very real sense, to grab more than \$29 trillion from future generations in the past four decades by means of the fiscally irresponsible expediency of deficit spending. The confirmation of this contention is found in national debt statistics. In 1980, just before Ronald Reagan took office, the national debt was less than \$1 trillion. By March 2022, it had exceeded \$30 trillion. (To see the spiraling costs of this debt, and the even more rapidly increasing level of unfunded government liabilities, search the Internet for "National Debt Clock".)

If a law had been passed in 1980 that required a balanced federal budget, thereby prohibiting this \$29 trillion increase in the national debt, it would have been necessary to control government spending more rigorously AND continue to assess marginal tax rates at high levels like those in effect from 1936 to 1980. Instead, Ronald Reagan slashed these rates from 70% to 28% between 1981 and 1988, and as a result we have unwisely mortgaged the future to give this windfall to rich people.

To begin to correct this rash intergenerational transfer of wealth, and to diminish the rash inequities that accompany it, we should undertake a bold course of action. We should reform our tax system to make it more steeply graduated. Robert Reich recommends revising the income tax rates to 70% on all portions of anyone's annual incomes that exceed \$1 million per year.

Stentorian voices can be heard muttering in the heavens. Thunderbolts strike trees, which smolder in consequence. The wealthiest 1% of people are outraged by ideas like this. But it is an integral conclusion of these observations, nonetheless, that we must create a more progressive system of taxation. It is not at all true that there are no good ways to reduce budget deficits. It is simply that widespread conflicts of interest exist, and hardly anyone is willing to compromise in a fair-minded manner, particularly not those fortunate enough to earn huge incomes. Issues are very complex, but excellent ways exist to fix these problems. A detailed and eminently fair proposal on how to restructure our tax system can be found in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

The Need for Campaign Finance Reform

The rich get an astonishing "return on investment" for their political contributions. They gain hundreds of billions of dollars in special deals for mere millions in contributions to politicians.

Essentially, to successfully change our tax structure to make it fairer to the vast majority of Americans, new legislation must be put into effect to change the status quo by reforming the "multi-trillion dollar influence racket" of our national political system.

This is why Fair Elections legislation should be passed that mandates public financing of election campaigns. This is a matter of common sense. A good first step to accomplish this goal would be to enact a well-designed Fair Elections Now Act. At a public cost of say \$5 billion of campaign financing in presidential elections, we could have saved hundreds of billions of dollars a year in taxpayer funds that are being squandered on corporate welfare, no-bid contracts, banking excesses, bailouts, corrupt deals, military misappropriations, no-bid contracts, misguided earmarks, banking excesses, bailouts, and low marginal tax rates for the highest income earners. Yada, yada, yada.

This would be the best return on investment for the vast majority of taxpayers that they will ever see in their lives -- and this, just from such a simple change! Simple, that is, except for one menacing obstacle: plutocrats and divisive demagogues.

As Bill Moyers says: "So the multitudes go on faithfully voting (well at least half of them do), knowing that the savior on the ballot likely will turn out to be one more pretender, making only nominal changes to a system that is costly and inefficient but thrives by rewarding the very people who have gamed it."

People of the World, Unite! We cannot afford to let our societies fall apart, particularly when the remedy that is most easily affordable would affect people to whom the burden would be the least cumbersome. Republicans say remedies like this are "politically impossible". But one certainty in the world is that things change; and big changes come about when they become needed in an urgent enough way. This time is rapidly approaching in the United States!

I encourage faith-embracing conservatives to stop gullibly buying the snake oil that the billionaires in the Koch network are selling them about the merits of making more tax cuts for the wealthiest 1%, and I evangelically advise them to join progressive-minded people who see the heavenly illumination that a better America is a more equitable one that invests in the general welfare of all Americans, especially including the well-being of younger people and all those to be born in the future.

Let us demand that our representatives take into account fairness toward future generations in all the public policy decisions they make. All economic and political equations should factor in long-term impacts on people and the natural world. These are the basic ideas behind my advocating that we make an overarching commitment to people in the future by ratifying a Bill of Rights for Future Generations. Let us make a courageous and honorable determination to do this!

A Perspective of Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

--- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Point taken, Dr. King, with heartfelt appreciation to you and your philosophic soul mates for such sentiments! I don't want to quibble, but the arc of history is, in the long run, toward one of a terminal destiny for every individual living thing. In the interim, during our individual times alive, it behooves us to enjoy life as much as possible -- and doing so responsibly -- and we are best advised to seek meaningful connections and fair-minded involvements. But meanwhile,

many factions seek to bend the arc of our national policies toward special deals for themselves that can wreak injustices on the masses, so we need to be eternally vigilant and proactively involved to prevent this hijacking of social justice. And we should never forget to honor our transcendent obligation to play a fair role in leaving our human heirs a planet on which natural resources and ecosystems are not too severely compromised.

Economies of Scale

It is stunning to realize that there were less than 3 million colonists in America in 1776. Many of them were sufficiently outraged at what they regarded as British tyranny that they willingly risked their lives and fortunes in the cause of gaining national independence. There are now more than 332 million people in the United States, and the glaring extent to which the ruling class is depriving the majority of these people of fair dealings is arguably even more extreme than was the case during British colonial days. This essay analyzes the nature of this economic exploitation, and explores modern issues that involve even more far-reaching inequities.

Our revolutionary leaders were courageous men with great ideals, for the most part. After throwing off the yoke of British oppression, they united to create a new kind of federal government that was designed to prevent future despotism. They wrote a Constitution that brilliantly set forth the purposes and method of organization of the federal government. We can take pride in the fact that our Constitution is the oldest written constitution still in use by any nation in the world today, other perhaps than the one in effect in the tiny Republic of San Marino in northeastern Italy.

Our leaders created a clever system to balance power between the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches within the federal government, and between the Federal Government and the various States. Every system, unfortunately, can be gamed and held hostage for the advantage of greedily shrewd and unprincipled people.

In recent years a new form of divisive economic exploitation has gained ascendancy. The new despots in charge have built a political coalition of rich people and social conservatives and religious fundamentalists to achieve rigid, domineering and self-serving goals. These unprincipled privileged people use misleading propaganda and the unfair influence of Big Money in our political system to create a new variety of political oppression that jerry-rigs the economy of the nation and the world to benefit an extremely small proportion of the populace at the expense of the Many.

This political corruption gives the rich many benefits at the direct expense of people in the future, so it is an epic form of treachery. It is extraordinarily anti-egalitarian, sensationally unfair, and immorally unjust. It is a form of insidious warfare against the greater good. In many ways, it is an assault against economic stability, intelligent investments, social fairness, responsibly balanced budgets, peaceful coexistence and ecologically sane precautionary principles.

This new tyranny adversely affects the vast majority of Americans alive today, and billions of people worldwide. This makes it a far more odious form of treachery than the British tyranny of 1776, which adversely affected only 3 million colonists. This new system of tyranny is being perpetrated not by a King, but by a small cabal of rich and powerful people who control the economy by legally bribing politicians and getting corporate shills appointed to the nation's federal courts and the Supreme Court to do their bidding.

Observations Concerning the Extension of the Regressive Bush Tax Cuts

The need for a Bill of Rights for Future Generations became startlingly clearer in light of the tax "compromise" that President Obama and Mitch McConnell came up with in December 2010. This was a compromise that extended the regressive Bush Tax Cuts for two more years at a cost of an estimated \$858 billion. The entire cost of this overly generous deal was borrowed, adding to our national debt.

A disproportionately large portion of the \$858 billion benefitted the 1% of Americans who have the highest incomes and largest net worths. This profligate generosity is absurd in light of the fact that the U.S. today has historically low tax rates on income and capital gains and inheritances for multi-millionaires and billionaires.

Such borrowing is a gimmicky, shortsighted expediency that allows us to irresponsibly avoid making difficult choices and trade-offs that a balanced budget would necessitate. It is an undisciplined course of action, and because of its

essential intergenerational treachery, it is a dastardly form of tyranny. We must stop mortgaging the future to give benefits to rich people today!

Make no mistake about it. This state of affairs is absurd precisely because of our overwhelming national need for investments in better education, public health, social well-being, research and development, physical infrastructure, and environmental protections. We also have a compelling international need for investments in efforts to mitigate climate disruptions, and in environmental justice and peaceful coexistence.

How could we have allowed inequalities in income and wealth to become the most extreme they have been since the Roaring Twenties while allowing rich people to pay the lowest tax rates in generations? How can we let our national infrastructure crumble around us merely to ensure that those who are already wealthy get richer? Mark Twain would have unleashed a cynically sardonic salvo of invective at such a frankly foolish lack of credible consideration for the greater good.

"Something is fishy here. It looks like an *Inside Job!*"

--- The underground Mole

It is a wrong-headed priority to allow regressive changes in taxation to be perpetuated. And it is a misguided national policy to be so conveniently undisciplined as to facilitate the on-going risky fiscal expediency of allowing the national debt to increase year after year after year.

We need to honestly face the difficult decisions that need to be made. The best footing upon which to make tough choices is to understand problems from the most comprehensive and inclusive possible perspective, and to be guided by fair-minded principles.

What's It All About, Alfie?

"I'm going to level with you. I'll tell it to you straight. We are facing far-reaching challenges. We don't need a one-party plan; we need an inclusive plan. We need plain brown wrapper ideas, not fancy, complicated, gimmicky ones. We need to avoid evasion and obfuscation. We don't need polarization and partisanship; we need collaboration and cooperation for the larger good."

--- California Governor Jerry Brown, to the L.A. Chamber of Commerce (paraphrased)

It is a corruption of the purposes of government to facilitate ever-increasing extremes of inequality in our societies. The U.S. has the biggest income inequality of all nations in the developed world. Is this civilized? Over the past 40 years, this measure of disparity between rich people and poor people in the U.S. has increased at a rate in excess of that found in most other nations of the world. Why is this trend toward the increasing concentration of wealth taking place?

Many factors contribute to income inequality, as discussed in books like Professor Larry Bartels' *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. A significant reason for this inequitable trend is to be found in public policies that determine tax rates as well as the amount of spending on education, public health, and social safety net programs. Republicans generally are strongly opposed to policies that would reduce income inequality, like increases in the minimum wage. Professor Bartels concludes that "economic inequality is, in substantial part, a political phenomenon." Thanks a lot, guys!

Passionate ideological arguments are made in opposition to policies that "redistribute wealth". Conservatives tend to dismiss egalitarian efforts to increase income and wealth equality by labeling them as being "socialism", as if they are some sort of abstract but distinctively threatening force. Liberals point out that without fairer public policies, the real redistribution of wealth is one that concentrates wealth upwards. "Trickle-down" economics has resulted in the gushing up of wealth into the hands of a small minority of the Few. This outcome is enabled by a suspiciously unfair "choreography of American politics" in which inequality is stoked to feed into political polarization, and polarization in turn creates policies that further increase inequality. Ouch!

"Redistributive policies" are discussed in the book *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Increasing inequality means that most people are becoming less financially secure. This increase in insecurity, in turn, creates economic instability. The greater good of society is strongly correlated with fairer policy-making and fiscally

sound planning, not with initiatives that encourage economic booms and busts and increasing concentrations of wealth in the hands of the few.

Having a lot of money buys not only a relative freedom from economic insecurity, but also a bigger variety of choices. When wealth is highly concentrated in a society, it tends to concentrate not just money but the keys to variety and financial security and freedom. A sufficient excess of money also buys power, and power gives those who wield it with aggressive ruthlessness an ever-greater concentration of wealth at the expense of all others. Conservatives like those in the billionaire Koch network and the Waltons and the Sciafe family and the Coors family are prominent among these abusers of power. The tragedy is that to accomplish their achievements and make more money, they resort to curbing workers' rights and externalizing some of the costs of their business activities onto society.

Read Jane Mayer's *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* for an eye-opening understanding of how these wealthy people have distorted our national decision making.

The Constitution and laws that govern us should rightly treat each person fairly. The people who have the most power and influence in our country must be firmly steered toward dealing more fairly with others. At a time when the challenges of governing human affairs is pregnant with overarching global implications, those who have the most influence and the most money must be responsibly required to contribute according to their capabilities.

Those who benefit the most from the way our society is structured should be required to contribute commensurately with their wealth to environmental protections and the maintenance of our national infrastructure and a more generous social safety net. These people should not be allowed to abuse their influence to gain an ever-greater proportion of the benefits of our economy. They should be prevented from grabbing expanded prerogatives to exploit our rigged political system for narrowly selfish advantages, particularly now, when the need to invest in healthy and sustainable courses of action for the greater good is growing so imperatively clear.

A National Addiction About to Hit the Wall

The United States is addicted to deficit spending like a junkie to heroin. The withdrawal symptoms associated with going "cold turkey" would be really ugly, so the chances of us balancing the federal budget anytime soon are slim, despite the sober warnings of fiscal conservatives and the dawning common sense realizations of the American public.

Who are the pushers who have helped enable this dangerous addiction? FOLLOW THE MONEY! In general, the responsible parties have been lobbyists and apologists for rich people, and ideologues, and operatives in right-wing think tanks, and others who distort facts and deny the truth. A comprehensive list would be very long, and it would include the expensive efforts of the Obama administration to stimulate the economy in the aftermath of the 2008 recession and then of two administrations in dealing with the global pandemic.

George W. Bush's administration was prominent among those responsible. It admonished and later fired its economic advisor Larry Lindsey for giving an estimate during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in September 2002 that the war could cost up to \$200 billion. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld claimed his estimate was too high, calling it "baloney". It is now expected that the eventual cost of this war was more than 15 times as much, or more than \$3 trillion.

Other facilitators of deficit spending are proponents of laissez-faire capitalism and "trickle-down" propagandists and "supply-side economists" who claim that tax cuts for rich people will stimulate the economy enough to cause total tax revenues to increase. What really happens when taxes are cut is that revenues generally decrease, deficits increase, and the stability of the system can be put at bigger risk.

Congress is also culpable for making deficits worse by spending wastefully. It allowed a pay-as-you-go law to expire in 2002, a misguided action that has helped facilitate a rapid increase in the national debt since that time. Republican efforts to sell the Medicare Prescription Drug Act to legislators in 2003 featured a deliberate and scandalous underestimation of the cost of this new entitlement program in order to get enough of our Congressional representatives to vote for it. Drug company profits have increased substantially since then, while federal budget deficits have ballooned, because the plan was designed to maximize prices for drugs that the companies were selling, increasing drug company profits while dumbly preventing the federal government from negotiating volume discounts on drug prices.

And economic stimulus programs and huge government bailouts were necessitated by the credit crisis of 2008 and the ensuing recession, and again in even larger sums with the pandemic. This has dramatically worsened the debt problem. The list goes on and on and on.

The political and propaganda battle associated with efforts to wean ourselves from this dangerous addiction are intense. The unintended consequences of our undisciplined and weak-willed inability to responsibly manage our affairs will have far-reaching detrimental impacts on people in the future. This issue is explored in depth in *Earth Manifesto* essays like *Existence, Economics, and Ecological Intelligence*. But let me make one thing perfectly clear here: we are deceiving ourselves to think we can fight trillion dollar wars without paying for them. And we are being stupid to continue to let rich people pay historically low tax rates, financed by borrowing money, without expecting unacceptably high costs to be incurred.

These costs will eventually be found in higher interest expenses, and also in slower future economic growth and an eventual spike in inflation. It could also come in the form of a severe economic shock that would profoundly affect the lives of most Americans and our overall well-being and standard of living. The people of Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Britain have already been paying the piper for similarly foolish enormous amounts of debt financing and consequent austerity politics. We would be wise to seriously reform our econopolitical system before our debt addiction reduces us to similar levels of desperation and austerity measures and social unrest.

Town councils and mayors in local communities, and city and county supervisors, and state officials and governors have all dealt periodically with challenges posed by shortfalls in their budgets. These financial challenges were made worse by the 2008 credit crisis and the recession and volatile property values. Then there are high costs of needed investments in repairs and maintenance of the nation's infrastructure. And look here! Hugely inadequate funding of liabilities loom for government commitments to employee retiree healthcare and pension plans.

All these challenges are complicated by the growing strength of anti-tax sentiments among taxpayers, particularly by those in the political donor class who have been required to pay a larger share of the tax burden in the past and who could most easily afford to do so today. These vested interest groups are not required to pay more, predictably, because the representatives they have bought with their political contributions give outlandish preference to their greedily self-centered priorities.

Observations on Horse Trading and Hostage Taking

Rich people often demand that our representatives not give benefits to anyone without getting even larger perks for themselves, and they have the power to secure these advantages. The only way, for instance, that President Clinton was able to increase the minimum wage from \$4.25 per hour to \$5.15 in 1996 was by coupling the law with a variety of big tax breaks for banks and the wealthy. Bill Moyers noted with understandable cynicism that: "In Washington D.C., you can't even give working people a modest raise without giving big contributors a windfall."

Conservatives in 2010 said: "You want to extend unemployment benefits for a whole year for millions of people adversely impacted by the credit crisis and the economic downturn? No way! That would cost too much. Not on your life! Deficits are evil. We're against them. Well ... unless, of course, you are willing to come up with \$100 billion for business tax breaks and \$200 billion for lower taxes on the wealthiest 1% of Americans. Say, I think we have a bipartisan deal in the making here!" And the fat cats added, "This is the best deal you're going to get, you can trust us on that!"

A Florida Republican in the House of Representatives said that the December 2010 tax compromise represented "a bipartisan moment of clarity." Clarity? I think clarity would include concern for, and insight into, the unintended consequences of this action on future budgets and future generations!

Misguided generosity to the wealthy was made starkly more extreme by the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003. These initiatives reduced taxes in a significantly regressive way to primarily benefit rich people and big corporations. As a result, the wealth of rich people has gotten much larger while the fortunes of almost all other Americans have stalled in limbo. The Big Lie of "trickle-down theory" has been exposed, for very little has trickled down to the vast majority of Americans in the past three decades of stagnating wages and high rates of inflation for many costs of living. This

is a dramatic contrast to the 30 years from 1950 to 1980, before the "Reagan Revolution", because in that earlier and fairer period, workers saw their average earnings increase very substantially.

Billionaires, economic fundamentalists, social conservatives and people in right-wing think tanks have been pushing the story since 1980 that big government is the source of all our national problems. But an honest understanding reveals that an even bigger problem is the selfish abuse of power by the superrich and the privileged class at the top. These people have rejected fairly-shared prosperity in order to get expanded prerogatives. The time has come today for the privileged class to be held accountable for this domineering despotism! The time has come to hold the top 1% responsible for helping make our societies a little fairer and a bit more egalitarian.

What has Congress done instead? In a counterproductive and inequitable development, Republicans in the House of Representatives pandered to their richest friends in America by voting in April 2015 to repeal the federal estate tax entirely. This tax law change, if approved by the Senate and President Obama, would have given the richest two-tenths of 1% of Americans an average of \$3 million in reduced taxes after they die. This giveaway would have added more than \$250 billion to the national debt over the following 10 years. That crazy idea is still being fervently pushed by Republican aspirants for the White House and Congress.

Examining Some Important Lessons of History

The legendary historians Will and Ariel Durant spent decades of their lives studying thousands of years of the history of civilization and writing an eleven-volume *Story of Civilization*. Then they distilled the insights they had gained from this extensive study of world history into a momentous and brilliantly concise book, *The Lessons of History*. One lesson they discovered is that there is a natural tendency in human societies for wealth to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of small groups of privileged people, and that this trend occasionally reaches a critical point where either sensible legislative redistributions of wealth must be enacted (like progressive tax reforms), or else exacerbated conflict and occasionally even violent revolutions take place that generally destroy wealth rather than providentially redistribute it.

Today, *We the People* are finally getting really frustrated and angry at the domination of our economic and political system by excessively greedy rich people. The Occupy movement and subsequent growing anti-establishment fervor are an expression of this anger. It would be smart for the wealthiest 1%, and better for the national security of everyone, if the rich were to responsibly act like wise rulers who compromise "while the getting is good", and act with greater fairness, and show better stewardship of the natural resources our civilizations depend upon, and show more concern for investments in the greater good. The richest 1% should agree now to higher marginal tax rates to help finance the good causes that need strong support.

Let these observations be a shot fired across the bow of our privileged-class-dominated ship of state. "Stand and Deliver!" Mark Twain was once accosted with these words by a gang of robbers who held up a stagecoach in which he was riding one cold night while he was on his way to Virginia City, Nevada. Let us collectively demand that the wealthiest 1% of Americans "Stand and Deliver". Let's also make greater commitments to collectively create fairer societies and more equality in education, job opportunities and universal healthcare. Let us demand initiatives that will give fairer representation to 99% of Americans, and make justice more equal for all. And let us find ways to mitigate the exploitation of people in the future by today's frenzy of the few to gain more money, possessions, perks and power.

Since governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, *We the People* must withhold our consent from the corrupt state of the status quo. We arguably need First Amendment remedies to national problems, so I heartily encourage every American to speak out forcefully for fairer policies and the greater good!

Moving Forward for the Greater Good

Hope springs eternal, and well it should. Life can be filled with marvelous experiences, and the world is an extraordinary place with much beauty and existence-affirming potentialities. Hope springs eternal because each of us individually, and all of us collectively, figuratively stand in every moment at a juncture in the woods where two paths diverge. We are faced with a choice of traveling one way or the other, and thus we have an opportunity to make

choices that can make a remarkably positive difference. As poet Robert Frost wrote in *The Road Not Taken* (paraphrased): "Knowing how it is that way leads on to way, I doubt if we shall ever come back."

Now is the time for us to make the best choices for the greater good as a matter of responsible conduct, right understanding, and sensible direction. Social justice and environmental justice are matters that should transcend politics, partisanship and propaganda. Greater fairness and Golden Rule considerations are not some God-dispensed grace or mere utopian ideal, nor do they rely on belief in any deity. And they are certainly not some sort of reprehensible socialist dogma.

The Golden Rule actually has roots that grew long before holy books were written. Its tenet of "doing unto others, as you would have them do unto you" is a principle born of empathy and the evolutionarily adaptive advantage of social cohesion. It is an insight of reason, and of an innate sense of empathetic fairness. Treating others fairly is a kind of social intelligence, aesthetics, and even of fundamentally hygienic propriety of action.

John Fowles analyzed the motives for our failure to do good in his thought-provoking book *The Aristos*. He noted that most people fail to do good, despite the fact that "almost every great thinker, every great saint, every great artist has advocated, personified and celebrated -- or at least implied -- the nobility and excellence of the good act as the basis of the just society." Fowles concluded that there is a *functional* quality of doing good that is a form of right action, and that it is characterized by what he describes as *basic acts of hygiene*, rather than shallower motives of gaining recompense or pleasure or self-esteem for good actions. He essentially asserts that we should collectively take actions against injustice and inequality in our societies as a matter of functional right-doing and the public health and the greater good, not just merely as a means for getting personal rewards.

"Over the last two hundred years there has been a great improvement in personal and public hygiene and cleanliness; and this was largely brought about by persuading people that the results of being dirty and apathetic in the face of disease were not acts of God, but preventable acts of nature; not the sheer misery in things, but the controllable mechanisms of life. We have had the first, the physical, phase of the hygienic revolution; it is time we went to the barricades for the second, the mental. Not doing good when you usefully could is not immoral; it is going about with excrement on the hands."

--- John Fowles, *The Aristos*

Yuck -- that metaphor is disgusting! But, then again, the set of unethical behaviors and unfair attitudes that it refers to are markedly worse. Let us seek to understand this observation in practical terms. It is a basic aspect of the human condition that we are NOT all created equal. Each of us is born with different individual abilities and circumstances. This lottery at birth is a ticket, for better or worse, to material and emotional and spiritual rewards - - or adversities -- later in life. The rightful purpose of government should not be to encourage fortunate persons to leverage their advantages to the distinct detriment of all others.

A Disclaimer

Generalizations can involve degrees of mischaracterization that are sometimes grotesque. There are many generous and wonderful rich people. As with any group, it is almost always a small number of the members of a group who can give the entire group a negative image. Billionaires Charles Koch and David Koch (R.I.P.), for instance, have acted for decades with zealously self-interested ruthlessness, and they demonstrate dramatically more greed and anti-worker, anti-environmental attitudes than other sensationally more fair-minded billionaires like Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, George Soros, or Michael Bloomberg.

Words like 'greedy' and 'mean-spirited' may sneak into these Earth Manifesto observations in the passion of the moment, but let me make one thing perfectly clear. These words are not meant as personal insults or mere hyperbole. When the power affiliated with Big Money is abused to radically skew benefits to special interest groups, and to create public policies that are contrary to the interests of the vast majority of Americans, passionate expostulation is an appropriate and possibly effective means of motivating people to support significant reforms.

The bottom-line understanding, to be redundantly clear, is that Big Money wields unconscionably unfair influence in making decisions and formulating policies in the USA. Wealthy people have been abusing their influence and insidiously undermining our democracy, and this influence is having consequences that are socially and environmentally disastrous.

As a result of the ruthless and regressive ratcheting up of the recklessly domineering power of Big Money, marginal tax rates on the highest levels of incomes have been reduced to nearly the lowest level in generations.

In the process, wealthy people have managed to get policies put into place that have achieved three highly undesirable things:

- (1) They have engineered the theft of more than \$29 trillion from the American public and future generations, as explained previously;
- (2) They have insidiously squeezed workers, and then squeezed them some more, again and again, and again, with the negative outcome of radically increasing income inequality and disparities in wealth and economic insecurity of the overwhelming majority of Americans; and,
- (3) They have wreaked reprehensible harm on the climate and the environmental commons, and torpedoed initiatives that would have protected the public from the ramifications of these activities.

There are deep structural problems in our public policies and wasteful programs in our economy, along with these unfair influences. But bigger dynamics are also at play. Giant multinational corporations have spent decades moving jobs abroad to take advantage of cheap labor overseas. At home, technological innovations and ruthless management actions are eliminating jobs to increase profits. And the power of anti-tax and anti-government fervor has grown overly strong.

Some people are more fair-minded than other people, and more generous in nature and magnanimous in spirit. Those who abuse the power of their influence may just be doing what almost every self-interested person would do if they had the same power: strive to get more advantages and perks for themselves. It is apparently beyond our collective capabilities, within the context of the current economic and political systems, to limit the influence of these various constituencies, and to thus create greater fairness.

So, the best course of action is to require every person who makes out like a bandit, by whatever means they succeed in this, to contribute a bigger percentage of the highest levels of their earnings, on a more steeply graduated scale, to the financing of our societies.

People that make more than \$1 million per year achieve this monetary success in a wide variety of ways. The people who do this include corporate executives, bankers, hedge fund managers, real estate developers, big investors, speculators, inheritors of vast fortunes, Hollywood stars, and those who have impressive skills in professional football, basketball, baseball, golf, NASCAR racing and other sports. Bravo for their success!

But, so sorry! The top 2% of income earners and wealthy people must be required to take a breather for a while and stop pressing for ever-increasing advantages in their relentless crusade to gain more and more money to get more power for themselves at the expense of all others who have less money and influence. It may be self-righteously self-interested extremists like those billionaires in the Koch network who spearhead efforts to get taxes reduced for those who earn high incomes, but all people who earn more than \$250,000 in any given year are big beneficiaries of those efforts. So all of them should be required, willingly or not, to contribute more to the greater well-being of our societies.

The Fairness Doctrine in the Media

Look. Listen for the truth underlying these words. Media matters. Big Media is often in cahoots with those who scheme to help entrench the unfair status quo. About 85% of all television stations and radio stations are owned by fewer than a dozen giant corporations. Republicans have been making concerted efforts for decades to eviscerate the counterbalance that public broadcasting provides to this dominating control of the media by giant corporations.

One reason these politicians are doing this is seemingly to cynically undermine people's understanding of true causes and effects of public policies. Outlets like Fox News prefer unbalanced reporting, divisive spin, and biased "arguing heads" rather than objective, fair-minded reporting. Conservatives appear to want a conforming electorate rather than a free flow of fair-minded ideas. Perhaps they want broadcasting to be used principally to disseminate propaganda, rather than to responsibly provide accurate and meaningful information.

A free press is critically important to an honest understanding of issues, so it is crucial to the fairness and vitality of democratic governance by the people and their representatives. One main reason that debate in our nation has become so sharply partisan and so intensely contested, and so filled with antagonism, is that many news outlets have become biased, unbalanced and sensationalistic.

John Fowles once observed that a marked atrophy of the civic sense in ordinary people is strongly correlated to "an asphyxiating smog of opinions foisted on them by society." He wrote these words long before partisanship became as extremely polarized as it has become in recent years. Today, the smog of opinions and propaganda and marketing that envelops us has only gotten denser.

These developments are correlated to the termination of the Fairness Doctrine in the media. The Fairness Doctrine was a Federal Communications Commission policy for almost 40 years from 1949 to 1987. The policy required radio and television stations to present controversial issues that are important to the public, and to do so in a manner that is honest, equitable and balanced.

Ronald Reagan used an Executive Order to abolish the Fairness Doctrine in 1987. This ending of fairness-oriented broadcast rules has had the negative effect of reducing open and free debate, and of suppressing a balance of diversity in viewpoints expressed. Reagan's order also had the effect of giving more influence to conservatives on talk radio shows and of helping enable the rise of Fox News, which has become a media arm of corporate interests and the Republican Party. This, in turn, has given more power to extreme views like those opposed to fair reforms of our financial system and our healthcare system. And it has undermined the social insurance policies found in the current social safety net.

Without the Fairness Doctrine, scientific understandings have been denied and scheming spokespersons for socially irresponsible corporations have tried to prevent our representatives from taking responsible environmental actions to address far-reaching problems like that of human-exacerbated global warming and climate disruptions. Big Money has been allowed too much influence to use the airwaves and ballot initiative processes to further narrow goals. The lack of a fairness doctrine has contributed not only to unbalanced and deceptive reporting, but also to dishonest journalism, and an overly heavy influence of Big Money on reporting related to controversial issues. This distorts people's thinking, and contributes to support of wrong-headed ideas by millions of people. It also lends support to regressive, retrogressive, wrong-way-Charlie reforms to our out-of-whack economic and political systems.

A more diverse media ownership is needed, along with strong protections of a free press. Today's ownership of various broadcasting outlets is already too dominated by big corporations. Publically-supported broadcasting is needed to provide a counterbalance to the corporate slant of the news and its propaganda and shallow entertainment aspects. An increase in minority ownership of print media and broadcast outlets would also help ensure the news is more honestly and fairly portrayed.

Republicans have tried for decades to cut funding for public broadcasting television (PBS) and public radio (NPR). The simple fact of the matter is that viewers and listeners can trust the news on public broadcasting services much more than news and content provided by stations like Fox News. Public broadcasting also provides substantially better programming on public affairs.

Congress attempted to cut \$430 million from public broadcasting in early 2011. This would have had the negative effect of disproportionately impacting small communities and rural television and radio stations, because these outlets rely on the services provided by public broadcasting for much larger percentages of their budgets than stations in urban areas. By bankrupting rural news outlets, a further undesirable concentration in the media would result.

The trend in recent years toward the increasing concentration and consolidation of the media in large corporate outlets serves to thwart unbiased reporting and reduce the valuable diversity of opinions. We are being distracted from focusing on important issues by sensationalistic reporting and slanted opinions and shallow entertainment values of corporate broadcasters. Public broadcasting is important because without it there would be fewer entities that would explore local issues or focus on truly vital public interest problems.

An old Chinese blessing/curse goes, "May you live in interesting times." For better or for worse, we sure do live in real interesting times! A sense of curiosity about the true nature of our times is a positive quality, so let's explore the

nature of this reality. Let's honestly assess the preponderance of the evidence to see if it suggests any even relative truths. Let's develop more expansive worldviews!

Are You Joshing Me?

A famous scandal took place in the 1880s that involved a counterfeiting operation in which 1883 Liberty Head V nickels were gold-plated and passed off as five-dollar gold pieces because the U.S. Mint had inadvertently failed to include the word "cents" on them. A deaf mute named Josh Tatum was one of the principal perpetrators of this scam. He and several others were apprehended and prosecuted for the fraud, but while the others were convicted, Josh Tatum never said they were \$5 gold pieces (because he was a deaf mute) and he merely used them to make small purchases of less than a nickel and then accepted the change, so he was found "not guilty" of the most serious charges against him. This episode was the source of the saying, "Are you joshing me?"

Josh Tatum had been gilding the nickels to give them a false appearance of being \$5 gold pieces. It is not too big a stretch to say that a Gilded Age is an era that is given a tawdry patina of prosperity by those in power, even though it is an age of desperate conditions for millions of people. It is reprehensible for those with vast fortunes to turn their backs on society by obstructing fair-minded reforms during times of such inequitable extremes. It is wrong for the 1% of Americans who have more than 40% of all the wealth in our nation to refuse to pay a larger share for military costs and prisons and environmental protections and costs of dealing with social ills associated with unbalanced economic and political systems. Such attitudes by wealthy people are objectionable because they are a form of harsh "tough luck" hubris, of "you're on your own" anti-social avarice, of sociopathic selfishness, and of a lack of basic ethical individual responsibility.

Politicians play a perverse game when they favor those with Big Money. This is a modern expression of the strife between capital and labor. By allowing the nation's wealth to be ever-more concentrated in the hands of the few, power and influence are concentrated in the hands of those whose goals undermine the middle class and disempower the vast majority of Americans. A litany of new ills is being foisted upon Americans and future generations in these efforts by greedy super-rich people to gain more and more and more of the benefits of the economy for themselves.

The destitution of the masses in America is being engineered by aggressive industrialists like the billionaire Charles Koch. He is a powerful partisan that is in cahoots with amoral profit-obsessed corporate entities, and bought-and-paid-for politicians and even a narrow majority of corporate apologists on the Supreme Court, all of which collaborate to perpetuate this abuse of power.

These persons seem to hold the opinion that *We the People* are mere rabble in the shadows of the wealthiest Americans, and they treat elites in business as the most deserving people, the noble rich, the first-class citizens, the cream of society -- like privileged new robber barons of the twenty-first century. While the rich are paying the lowest tax rates in generations, due largely to the excessive political power of pandering and misguided "conservatives", the need is unprecedented for investments in public policies that are more socially just, and for better and more affordable public education, and for environmental protections, cleaner water, greater commitments to cleaner renewable sources of energy, and initiatives designed to prevent too extreme a destabilization of the climate. Perhaps it would be inconvenient for the super-rich to be deprived of the power to dominate our politics, but the time has come that we simply must have fairer representation so that we can create more just laws and broader enforcement of these better laws.

The American people are being treated as second-class citizens, subservient to moneyed interests and to socially irresponsible giant corporations. Our freedom, our well-being, our democracy, the life support systems of the Earth, and the prospects of all those yet to be born are being sacrificed on the ideological altar of a hypothetical superiority of the prerogatives of moneyed interests over workers and the larger community.

For these reasons, we need political reform NOW. We should be working together to create a Golden Age of peace and fairly-shared prosperity. A true Golden Age would be characterized by social justice and enlightened support for maximizing personal freedoms and human potentials, and it would be a responsible age of humanistic fair-mindedness, ecological intelligence, and overarching commitments to the long-term greater good. It would not be gilded with false appearances, but would focus on true justice and the best ways of achieving peaceful coexistence. It would involve a

revival of broad-minded learning, and of artistic and intellectual accomplishments, and of enthusiastic dedication to humanitarian achievements.

Instead of moving in this laudable direction, an increasingly unfair nation is being created that features obscenely-growing disparities between wealthy elites and tens of millions of others who suffer from insidiously-growing financial insecurity. This may ephemerally seem like a Golden Age for the super-rich, but it is an age in which opportunities and financial well-being are unequal and unfair, so change must come!

Anti-Union Developments

Notably strident developments took place in Wisconsin in February and March of 2011. A better understanding of these conflicts is illuminating. Collective bargaining rights give organizational power to workers to negotiate better wages and benefits and working conditions. More power often results in abuses of power, and sure enough, some unions are involved in serious issues like pension spiking, teacher tenure inequities, large unfunded liabilities for retirees, and other challenges related to compensation for public employees. Pension reform is, in fact, becoming increasingly necessary.

But there should be no doubt about the fact that the real bulwark of power in our capitalist economic system lies with capital, not with labor. The most outrageous abuses of power are being perpetuated by bankers, corporations and rich people, NOT by workers. One result is that union participation in the private sector has been eviscerated, declining from a peak of 36% of workers in 1945, and more than 25% of all workers between 1945 and 1975, to less than 7% of all private sector workers today.

Intense discord took place in Wisconsin over rights of public employees to use collective bargaining. Curiously, the budget for the state of Wisconsin was on track to record a surplus until the newly-elected Republican Governor Scott Walker signed two new business tax breaks into effect that reduced overall tax revenues and created a fiscal crisis. Having helped create a budget deficit, the Governor then used the funding shortfall as a justification to advance an agenda of cutting the compensation of public employees and busting unions and crushing the rights of workers to organize. And having supported tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, he then turned his focus to reducing salaries for teachers and slashing funds for public education while giving well-to-do people vouchers for private schools.

Scott Walker was scammed by a telephone caller who misidentified himself as one of Walker's biggest financial supporters, the since deceased arch-conservative billionaire David Koch. Walker told the prank caller it this was a defining moment in history similar to the time in 1981 when his anti-union hero Ronald Reagan fired 11,345 striking air traffic controllers. Ian Murphy, the liberal editor of *Buffalo Beast* website, was the man who made this call to Governor Walker in the middle of the acrimonious conflict in Wisconsin over the right of public employees to use collective bargaining.

David Koch had been one of the biggest contributors to Governor Walker's election campaign, so the Governor talked on the phone to the impersonator in a very chummy tone for 20 minutes. He made some embarrassingly candid remarks to the man he thought was his patron. Walker stated that he would continue to refuse to negotiate or compromise. He even indicated that he had thought about planting troublemakers in crowds of protestors.

Governor Walker referred to State Senator Tim Cullen as the "only reasonable" Democrat, "but he's not one of us". Cullen was not, in other words, a member of the corporate rich people's club -- people who claim they know exactly what's right for public policy. Tim Cullen was one of fourteen Democratic members of the state senate who actually resorted to fleeing the state for several weeks in 2011 to delay the Republican majority from railroading through anti-union legislation.

Workers in the private sector have had their benefits frozen or reduced to a much greater extent than public sector employees. They have been subjected to stagnating wages, longer working hours, significant increases in healthcare costs, worse risks during the pandemic, and heightened job and retirement insecurity. Millions of them have been laid-off. A primary reason that employees in the private sector have been subjected to such adverse developments is that unions in the private sector have been crushed by the power of giant corporations in the past 40 years. Curiously, Republican strategists and exploiters have used the grievances that have resulted from these ploys to

blame liberals and grab more power, with the intention of doubling down on these hardship-imposing tactics. This is grotesquely irresponsible.

Ohio is another state where Republicans have tried to drastically limit the bargaining power of unions and public workers like firefighters, police officers and teachers. In November 2011 elections, voters handily rejected a law passed by the Republican establishment that would have curtailed collective bargaining rights.

The widespread unrest that affected authoritarian regimes in the Arab world during the tumultuous Arab Spring showed that when nations do not deal fairly with the causes of deep discontent, they become more vulnerable to political chaos. Many nations are beset by outraged citizens because they have failed to address extreme social disparities of class and privilege, high rates of unemployment, a lack of fair economic opportunities, high costs for necessities, a lack of fair representation, and corruption in the government that enables these injustices.

These destabilizing developments provide Americans with a stark lesson as to the inadvisability of failing to adequately deal with our own unemployment and underemployment problems and healthcare injustices and high costs for housing, energy and nutritious food. This is a cautionary tale to those who oppose fair-minded reforms and fairness of opportunity and collective bargaining rights for working people.

Valuing Social and Environmental Justice

The desire for respect and approval is one of the defining yearnings in human relationships. One of the central convictions of my personal worldview is that a society should cultivate a reasonable modicum of fairness and social justice so as to create a healthy and adequately harmonious and secure social group.

People tend to have longer individual life spans in societies that are more fair and egalitarian in the opportunities they provide and in their systems of healthcare and legal justice. This makes it wise to support progressive policies that are focused on Golden Rule fairness, for such policies are the best ways to ensure that greater good goals are achieved. Such policies are the best means to institutionalize greater equality, justice and respect for individuals.

The famous writer and philosopher Ayn Rand maintained a perspective that was passionately contrary to this one. She felt that titans of industry deserve all the money and power they can get. She thus contended that societies should allow such individuals an unalloyed freedom to gain and enjoy the fruits of their accomplishments, without being required to contribute to the societies that helped them. Her ideals of selfish individualism, rational self-interest, materialistic gains and hard work were stridently opposed to what she regarded as 'collectivist' notions.

Actually, I am not intimately familiar with the whole scope of Ayn Rand's intellectual philosophies. But I do know that they have been powerfully influential with people like Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve regulator who basically opposed effective regulation. Rand's convictions seem strange because she regarded laissez-faire capitalism and defiant individualism as the only *moral* system. She felt that the economy should be organized in ways that minimize government rules. She believed that rationality, free will, logic, productivity, property rights and the narrow self-interest of individuals should be paramount.

The merits of Ayn Rand's worldviews are undermined by undesirable effects of extreme inequalities created in capitalist systems, and by the overriding absurdities involved in systemic schemes that increase profits by socializing costs. By foisting costs onto everyone, the prospects of people in future generations are jeopardized. More money is given in "welfare to the rich" than in welfare for the poor due to the lopsided distorting effects of political power and influence.

Ayn Rand's belief in the virtue of selfishness, and her unremitting hostility to taxation and the state, were simply absurd in light of the exigencies that face humanity today. The political sentiments found in the Earth Manifesto are more sensible and hopeful for a propitious future. The proverbial "social contract" requires every individual to be more responsible to the societies in which they live. We simply must create effective incentives that motivate every person to act in ways that are a bit more consistent with fairer outcomes for society as a whole.

Glaring unfairness in the economic system of the United States was documented in the 1963 report by the Commission on the Status of Women, which had been empanelled by President John F. Kennedy. This report provided a cogent understanding of how systemic injustices and inequalities come to dominate, and thereby refute extreme stances on intellectual ideals like those that Ayn Rand held dear.

Making our economic and political systems fairer for the vast majority of people is the best plan from the standpoint of the whole of society. Our national goal should be to actualize the greatest good for the greatest number of people over the longest period of time. This means that instead of putting public policies into place that continuously increase the disparity in income and wealth between older people and younger people, and between rich people and poor people, we should act to ensure that these gaps are actually made smaller.

Greater fairness is the cornerstone of a healthy democratic republic. More unfairness is dangerous, so it is NOT in the best public interest. Public policies should be changed to ensure that the benefits of economic activities are fairer to the vast majority of workers, as well as to the countless number of our heirs who will follow us.

To Have or Not to Have, That Is the Question: Gimmickry or Wise Priorities?

Federal and state budgets should express properly weighted priorities of the aggregate values of the people. Fatefully, they do not. Budgetary decisions are perversely distorted by the undesirable and excessive influence of the wealthy. Deficit spending makes this misguided tendency worse by allowing avarice driven, materialistic, and anti-empathetic values to dominate. The protectors of the established order are stubbornly intransigent, and public officials often recalcitrantly oppose reforms because they are part of this order. Some of the privileged are cold and arrogant in their greed, to paraphrase Martin Luther King, as if their hearts had been hardened by long winters of traditionalism and socially reactionary opposition to fairer attitudes.

Gimmickry dominates our public decision-making and budgeting. We seek easy answers and half-baked solutions and engage in shortsighted expediencies. We live in a short-attention span, simplistic-sound-bite, bumper-sticker-sentiment society in which the average person posts on social media or Twitters more frequently than they write a heartfelt letter or read a good book.

Donald Rumsfeld once wrote a 'snowflake' memo to himself in which he noted that "bumper sticker statements" should be used to rally public support for unpopular wars. I assert that we need deeper and wiser understandings of issues, not merely slickly manipulative bumper sticker sentiments!

We could do much better. Let's start by simplifying our laws, and making them fairer!

"I do not feel obligated to believe that the same god who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forego their use."

--- Galileo Galilei

Some years after these words were written, Trumpism burst on the scene, joining authoritarian autocratic Putinism, and the exploitation of people's fears, insecurities and antagonisms has made stupidly simple ideas seem even more dangerous than before.

An Aside on Peaceful Revolution

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* was a revolutionary call to arms. The Earth Manifesto, in contrast, is a call to revolutionary social change through peaceful action. Some of the greatest philosophers and activists the world has ever seen have been proponents of non-violence and commitments to making positive change in their societies. Think of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama. These are true heroes of humanity. Most religious traditions preach non-violence, but many religious establishments nonetheless often hypocritically join with oppressive governments to effectively oppose fair-minded and salubrious changes in social policies.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once convincingly expressed the feeling: "Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and not concerned about the city government that damns the soul, the economic conditions that corrupt the soul, the slum conditions, the social evils that cripple the soul, is a dry, dead, do-nothing religion in need of new blood."

The changes we need are bigger than economic and political ones. The global challenges that face humanity today require extensive changes in the habits and behaviors of all people. It is clear that human drives and propensities do not change much over time, for they are basic aspects of human nature, but our habits and behaviors are quite malleable and can be easily influenced by incentives. One need go no further for proof of this contention than to a

local retail clothing shop with a big red **50% Sale** sign in the window to see how eagerly consumers respond to targeted incentives.

Nick Cooney points out in the Introduction to his book, *Change of Heart: What Psychology Can Teach Us about Spreading Social Change*: "If we want to change society, the only way we can do so is by changing the attitudes and behaviors of human beings." As indicated repeatedly herein, the fairest and most effective way to change people's behaviors is by creating powerful motivations for them to change, in the form of attractive incentives and deterring disincentives. "Let's design these incentives well, and do it soon!"

Sarah Palin wrote in *America by Heart* that there is a "shameful tendency on the left not simply to declare their opponents wrong, but to declare them evil." People "on the left" point out that this tendency is most often characteristic of people who believe in Manichean worldviews of absolute good and absolute evil. Curiously, Sarah, it is people on the political far right who have the strongest tendencies to cling stubbornly to self-righteous dogmas and simplistic black-and-white interpretations of issues. It is people on the far right who cling to worldviews that regard their in-group as being the only good one, while others are condemned as evil.

To win election, demagogue Donald Trump declared that Hillary Clinton is unfit and "a monster." This example of psychological projection was preposterous, and pointed to his own much more devilishly unfit character.

Folks like this fall into the folly of "seeing one's own sins in others". They criticize others for having tendencies of which they themselves are guilty. This is often true of religious fundamentalists, and of people on the extreme right in general. Such skewed perceptions are a form of misunderstanding with deep psychological underpinnings, which spring, perhaps, from a lack of self-awareness, or from feelings of paranoia, persecution, resentment, inadequacy or insecurity. Repressed desires may even be involved. But whatever their source, such attitudes reflect a sprawling kind of hypocrisy. I'll have to read *Idiot America* again to see if the book provides any clues to why people act the way they do. Ha!

"Sarah Palin: Excellent argument for separation of church and brain."

--- Denis Leary (Ho, Ho, Ho!)

In the parlance of the Bible, we need to inspect the logs in our own eyes before attending to the splinters in the eyes of others. The ideas in the Earth Manifesto have been scrubbed to make them more scrupulously fair; this is an on-going challenge of objectivity, with perhaps only moderate success on my part. I hope others will strive for similar sensibilities!

A Prelude to Calls for Action

One of the precautionary principles of intelligent action is to choose the best option whenever faced with uncertainty in the future. The best choice is generally the one that leaves the most options open. It is highly incautious to choose courses of action that foreclose many other potentially good options!

Conservatives in the United States advocate austerity measures because of rising national debt and revenue shortfalls related to low tax rates on those who can afford to pay them. Such austerity measures may well prove to be extremely shortsighted. Nearly half of the police force and about one-third of the firefighters of Camden, New Jersey were laid-off in January 2011 to balance the budget. While many people may begrudge the high pay and benefits of public servants and first responders, there must be a better way to balance our institutions than by endangering the citizenry!

Listen. The issue of skyrocketing U.S. national debt in the past few years is made even more risky by the fact that the percentage this debt represents, relative to the Gross Domestic Product, has been radically increasing. In 1980, federal debt was about 35% of GDP; this ratio is now about 130% of GDP. It is risky, indeed crazy, to put policies in place that allow this to happen!

It is downright stupid to borrow money from future generations to squander it on short-term oriented expediencies. Even assuming that we will never pay back any of the principal borrowed, the obligation for interest costs on all borrowed money adds up to more than 100% of the amount borrowed every 18 years, over and over again, indefinitely, assuming a very low long-term average of just 4% interest cost on federal debt. From this perspective, it is even

more foolish to incur large amounts of deficit spending for non-productive purposes, and it is really a bizarre "plan" to allow the rich to get us to borrow money to let them amass larger fortunes!

Mark Twain once satirically stated: "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class, except Congress." Woe is us! Too many of our representatives lie to us about their principles, and betray our best interests once they are in office. They allow our national priorities to be profoundly perverted by our pay-to-play political system and the excessive power of the "complex" of military, industry, banking, Congress, corporations and big media interests.

Overarching principles are required. New guidance for sensible national priorities is needed. Yep! -- We need tax policies that are more progressive, and a commitment to a far-reaching Bill of Rights for Future Generations! As Martin Luther King, Jr. once observed,

"On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question, "Is it politic?" And Vanity comes along and asks the question, "Is it popular?" But Conscience asks the question, "Is it right?" And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but it must be done because Conscience tells him it is right."

Another Voice Heard

Jesus must have been really riled at rich people, for he told a rich man that he should help the poor, supposedly saying, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Today, the cavalier attitudes of many of the wealthy, when combined with the domineering influence of giant corporations and their amoral and narrowly-focused purposes, make our society even more ruthless, unempathetic and uncompassionate. Our societies reek of mindless self-serving mean-spiritedness and plenty of criminal negligence of greater good goals.

Politics sure does create exceedingly odd bedfellows! When Bible-thumping social conservatives throw in with the wealthiest Americans, something strange is going on. Absurdity reigns when conservatives are against conservation, and when religious fundamentalists join those who stand staunchly against initiatives that embody Golden Rule fairness. Absurdity is ascendant when people deny that human activities are disrupting Earth's climate, and they thus stand resolutely in opposition to scientific understandings and precautionary ecological principles. It is not at all acceptable for our representatives in Congress to give lip service to fiscal responsibility while enacting policies that are fiscally, socially and environmentally irresponsible.

I once watched the film *What Would Jesus Buy*. The film brings home the point that consumerism is a rather insane approach to meaningful and healthy living. Thanks, Reverend Billy and the "Church of Stop Shopping Choir" for your over-the-top entertainment and poignant insights! Check out *Profound Psychological Perspectives and Prescriptions for Trying Times* to find an incisive discussion of the motives that drive mindlessly compulsive buying and high levels of consumer debt and other such materialistic foibles.

It is precisely because human nature does not change, and because selfish avarice is widespread, that we need to re-design our economic and political systems to fairly prevent corporations and rich people from unduly taking advantage of everyone else. We can no longer allow big corporations to externalize so many costs onto society, and we can no longer afford to let investors gain big profits at the expense of the greater good.

The number of unethical scams that are being perpetrated upon the nation, and the world, at any given moment is beyond counting, and beyond knowing. In addition to corporate abuses of power, there are Ponzi schemes, embezzlements, investment scams, insider trading, mortgage frauds, monopoly-pricing practices, price fixing, cheating on Medicare billings, contractor over-charging, money laundering, tax evasion scams, thefts by con artists, many varieties of swindles, pyramid schemes, counterfeiting, pension spiking by some retiring public employees, fatal Black Widow intrigues, scheming uses of tax-advantaged philanthropy, dark money abuses of influence, war services overcharging, and many other fraudulent and unethical activities.

American Greed is a CNBC program narrated by Stacy Keach that had been documenting cases of financial crimes on TV since 2007. The segments profile the dark side of American profiteering, as reflected in a wide variety of

misdeeds that are being perpetrated upon the public. The program is intriguingly titled *The Scams, the Schemes, the Broken Dreams: Some People Will Do Anything for Money*. They sure will, and sure do!

But make no mistake about it: the harm caused by these numerous egregious instances of greed pales in comparison to corrupt practices by giant corporations that involve tax evasion and the externalizing of costs onto society of pollution, harms to workers, environmental degradation, and rapid resource depletion. "Small-potatoes" criminal activity is overshadowed by banking shenanigans and systemic frauds that cost trillions of dollars in bailouts and manipulations in markets for unregulated derivatives. Even more insidious inequities exist -- intergenerational ones, in the form of the deficit financing of wars and social programs and the underfunding of security net entitlements and the assessment of historically low taxes on the highest levels of incomes.

The inflation of the real estate bubble and its subsequent collapse in 2008, along with the entire mortgage-backed securities debacle and the resulting credit crisis and economic recession, were merely a few of the most blatant and harmful of these scams. This economic disaster was, sadly -- because it could and should have been prevented -- an *Inside Job*.

Another Interesting Perspective from John Fowles

In *The Aristos*, John Fowles expressed an opinion that there is an "alarming growth of both national and individual selfishness", and that this condition has been caused, in part, by a growing awareness that each of us has only one life to live, and that death will be the definite end for every individual, and that dying will involve a complete termination of our consciousness as well as our bodies.

Some people fervently contend that selfishness is good in many respects. They enthusiastically reassure us that this is surely true, despite significant numbers of instances in which this cliché is blatantly and ridiculously false.

Every tick-tock of the clock brings each of us closer to our final moment alive. All of us have an indeterminate length of time to live, and at the moment that each of us individually expires, the world will then be inhabited by every person still alive, and all other animate members of species of life that have survived extinction until that date. It is highly probable, but certainly not certain, to assume that none of us will be the last ones of our species to survive on Earth. In any case, it is our responsibility to help ensure that the legacy we leave will be a propitious one, and not one that seriously diminishes the prospects of our descendants to be able to survive and lead good lives.

In some senses, each of us has an earlier expiration date than our deaths. We will all no doubt get to the point where, like the brilliant Voltaire in his old age, we will be content to proverbially appreciate tending our gardens. In the mean time, a little positive and honorable social activism, anyone?

Money Rules

The respectable ideals of our political system are being undermined by people with Big Money today. This source of unwarranted influence dominates our decision-making and controls and dictates our national policies. Our system is one of excessive lobbyist influence and institutional bribery, of too-big-to-fail banks, Big Oil, Big Pharma, the Military-Industrial complex war machine, sprawling Homeland Security, a multi-trillion dollar "war on terror" and a multitude of intelligence agencies engaging in clandestine activities. And of the socially irresponsible National Rifle Association and widespread ownership of guns and assault weapons, and a hyper-costly war on drugs and prison guards' unions and corruption in Washington, D.C. Etc., etc.!

This system is costing us far too much, and in too many foolish ways. When Mark Twain cynically stated, "We have the best government money can buy", he recognized that government and industry were even then too wasteful and inefficient, and that an enormous premium is paid for the privilege. Two of our primary social institutions -- corporations and governments -- have created an unholy alliance that is unacceptably unfair and that encourages an "ethical rot" in Washington D.C.

Our political system is broken primarily because Congress has become a multi-trillion-dollar influence racket. Private Big Money has broken it. Our economy is rigged, and it is requiring large amounts of public money and borrowings. We should get the public big money from those who have private Big Money, rather than from their victims, i.e. working stiffs and ordinary taxpayers and people in the future. Once again, it seems obvious that we need to stop blatantly

saddling our heirs with enormous debt and interest expense obligations just to let rich people pay historically low tax rates.

To continue failing at this is to allow an irresponsible exploitation of those who will follow us, for it sacrifices the well-being of everyone in the future. This is a radical political expediency fraught with myopic shortsightedness, a form of tyranny that arises because of self-centeredness and undisciplined greed and anti-democratic influence peddling.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt once pointed out the pathetic nature of such gambits. He stated: "The malefactors of great wealth have concentrated into their own hands an almost complete control over other people's property, other people's money, other people's labor, and other people's lives." For rich people, this is a game not only about money, but also control, power, unbridled ambition, ego, protected privileges and indulgent dominion. But it is a pathetically rigged game that extensively and adversely affects the lives of millions of honest hard-working Americans.

Thomas Piketty in his epic tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* adduces convincing evidence that the capitalist system will continue the on-going trend toward increasingly concentrated wealth and power, unless smart remedies are implemented.

And Bill Moyers asserts that there is "a widespread recognition that unaccountable authority and cutthroat capitalism will not produce a fair and just society." He concludes that it is time to fight the good fight and "to make the crooked ways straight ..."

"An imbalance between rich and poor is the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics."

--- The Greek historian Plutarch, in the first century BCE

An Escalation of Absurdities

Investors in the U.S. have been seriously celebrating the success of giant corporations in being able to make bigger profits. Both the recession of 2008 and the 2020-2022 pandemic crimped the power of workers to gain wage and benefits increases, and this improved the corporate bottom line and the fortunes of CEOs and rich investors. But it did so at the expense of millions of laid-off workers. This marvelous outcome was effectuated to the detriment of millions of people who lost their jobs and tens of millions of people who are still employed but have diminished purchasing and bargaining power.

The Texan commentator and author Jim Hightower once pointed out another facet of such triumphs by multinational corporations. He wrote in *Playing with Economic Dynamite*: "America's corporate elite have learned that they can prosper by deliberately holding the workaday majority in a new normal of job insecurity."

"No one at the top wants to admit it," he continued, "but big business has quietly been imposing a structural transformation on our economy, shifting from a workforce of permanent employees to one in which most jobs are temporary, scarce, low-paid, without benefits and with no upward mobility. Of the 1.2 million jobs created by the private sector last year, for example (he wrote of 2010), 26% were temporary positions, and in November, temporary jobs soared to 80% of that month's total. What's happening here is not merely a matter of a few million folks being momentarily down on their luck, but of an intentional dismantling of America's middle-class structure."

Another serious change in America has been a dramatic increase in CEO compensation. In 1965, CEOs at the biggest U.S. corporations made 24 times as much as the typical worker. By 2007, these CEOs made 275 times as much, according to the Economic Policy Institute, and that percent continues to increase. In 1970, the top 1% of Americans received 8% of the total national income, and by 2012, they received more than 20% of it.

Furthermore, IRS data reveals that the top 1% of Americans collectively earn more than the bottom 50%. These facts are the rude details of an increasingly unfair income gap that make it even more egregious to have regressive tax breaks given to principally benefit wealthy people. Predictably, the disparity in people's net worths in the U.S. is even more extreme than the income gap.

These are among the reasons that our tax system should be restructured so that it is graduated more steeply. This would serve as a counterbalance to the rapid growth in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the top 1%, and of the accompanying inequities that affect the vast majority of Americans. In radical contrast, because money is

equivalent to power in our corrupt influence-peddling political system, our tax system has been made significantly more regressive since 1980. Those who benefit the most from the ruthlessness and unfairness of our economic system once again become the ones who can easily game our political system so that it gives them more advantages. Simultaneously, our system gives ever-lower priority to workers and the young, the unemployed, the vulnerable and the powerless -- and to the health of the environment and the prospects of people in future generations.

Our econopolitical system drives our nation and the world further along the path toward less equity and more strife. This outcome is not merely unsustainable and unenlightened, it is a severe violation of democratic principles. It is also a harsh violation of the true values of an honest, sensible and just republic that is supposed to fairly represent all of the people. Indeed, in its widespread and far-reaching inimical impacts, our system is a veritably fraudulent crime against humanity.

Not only do we need fairer political representation and reformed income tax policies, we need more steeply graduated estate taxes. It is sensational that such plans currently affect only the wealthiest two out of every 1,000 Americans. Estate taxes are a good mechanism to settle up, once every generation, for the inequities caused by giving rich people most of the benefits of tax evasion schemes and the cumulative effect of national deficit spending. It is revealing to realize that something like 60% of the value of estates worth more than \$100 million is made up of untaxed capital gains. This means that more than half of really rich kids' inheritances are already being passed on without being taxed at all. And most Republican politicians are proposing that we extend this generosity to the richest of the rich -- after they die.

It would make much more sense to extend the estate tax so that it is paid by the top 50 in every 1,000 of the wealthiest families, rather than just the top 2. That way we would ensure that the biggest beneficiaries of the benefits of our economic system will also be the ones who help finance more of the investments and social costs necessary to a civilized society. As it currently stands, we are allowing too many of the costs for national security, the military, prisons, healthcare, and environmental protections to be foisted upon today's "wage slaves" and everyone in future generations!

The Vision of Our Nation's Founders

Let's go back and see if our present day actions are in any way in accord with the intentions of our Founders. Let's see, the Founders designed the Constitution to create government by fair rules of law to protect American citizens from abuses of power. Hmmm. The Founders also went to great lengths in the Constitution to make sure that States and local communities had enough power to prevent the federal government from abusing its power. Hmmm ...

The Founders were strongly opposed to infringements on personal rights, or unfair treatment of any citizen, or religious interference in any way, or foreign military adventurism. They promised to promote "the general Welfare". They surely would be aghast to see the extent to which rich people are being favored in our nation, and how staunchly these people and their representatives are rejecting fairly-shared prosperity and the general welfare of the American people.

The Founders would be shocked -- shocked! -- to see how poorly we have safeguarded their carefully designed balance-of-powers system. They could only be dismayed to see that our federal government and federal courts are now primarily dedicated to the welfare of rich people and the State and the political class that runs it. Ambrose Bierce's most terse definition in *The Devil's Dictionary* is also one of the most telling: "Impunity, *n.* Wealth."

A class war is going on here, folks, and ordinary people are losing it. This clash has been taking place for centuries between the moneyed class and workers, but this internecine warfare has intensified since 1980, and it is high time that *We the People* negotiated a fairer deal. It is time that we negotiated a fairer truce between the strife-torn opposing sides.

Our representatives betray us when, as Mary Elizabeth Lease observed long ago, our political system "clothes rascals in robes, and honesty in rags. The Parties lie to us and the political leaders mislead us."

As redundantly explained in *Existence, Economics, and Ecological Intelligence*, "Regressive changes in our system of taxation tend to concentrate wealth and increase disparities between the fortunes of the Few and the Many. This results in increases in inequality that make everyone in society less secure. Poor people and those in the middle class

become less secure in economic terms because their struggle is made harder to pay for safe housing, good nutrition and adequate healthcare. The rich become less secure because a heightened impetus develops in society toward stress-engendered conflicts, crime, and excessively costly repression and incarceration. More money is consequently needed for police forces and prisons to enforce this inegalitarian state, and to defend against increasing impulses toward revolutionary or reactive change. More money is also spent on wars to distract people from a lack of fair opportunities, and from the daunting existential dilemmas associated with our unfairly rigged and gimmicky econopolitical system."

How has our noble Constitutionally brilliant system gotten so screwed up?

The Supreme Court's Ruling in the *Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission Case*

Eighty-nine-year-old Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens was one of the four Justices who disagreed with the Supreme Court's January 2010 ruling to allow unlimited corporate and union spending in our elections. He read his dissent aloud to give additional emphasis to his words, saying that the decision "rejected the common sense of the American people, who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt."

Jim Hightower wrote scathingly in his February 2011 issue of *The Hightower LOWDOWN* about the corporate bent of the Supreme Court. He indicated that, with the narrow majority of "conservatives" on the Supreme Court, the judicial body "has become openly and aggressively political, deliberately rigging the scales of justice to enthrone big corporations -- the least democratic force in our society -- over the rest of us." Hightower adduced decision after decision in which the Supreme Court has made decisions that have "enhanced the power of corporations at the direct expense of workers, consumers, local communities, our air and water, voters, the elderly, and ... well, anyone and everyone who stands up in court to resist the rise of corporate hegemony in America."

Hightower continued: "The Supreme Court's corporate bloc has evolved into the most dangerous branch of the federal government, routinely using its arbitrary power to undermine the people's democratic authority over our country's economy, environment, and political process." ... "By stomping on traditional principles of conservative jurisprudence, jettisoning clear Court precedents, perverting constitutional and statutory language, ignoring logic, distorting legislative intent, and simply making up laws, these Supremes have delivered a rash of sweeping victories to the corporate class."

Hightower concluded that Chief Justice John Roberts "is doing major structural damage to America's unifying sense of fairness and justice. We can't allow him to keep hiding behind the judicial robe while he mugs us and our democratic ideals. He should be impeached." Tell us how you really feel, Jim Hightower! (Since 2011, with three new Justices appointed by Trump, things have gotten much worse and more politically partisan.)

In the October 2011 issue of his *Lowdown*, Jim Hightower provided readers with a menu of action that could help achieve "big democratic results." One of these actions he recommended would have been to impeach Justice Clarence Thomas for his "blatant disregard of basic ethics" and undisclosed conflicts of interest, such as involvements with the billionaire Koch brothers while deciding the *Citizens United* ruling.

Bob Edgar, back when he was President and CEO of the nonpartisan advocacy organization Common Cause (and still alive), wrote a public letter to Chief Justice John Roberts suggesting that Supreme Court Justices should formally commit themselves to the Code of Conduct for federal judges. This Code of Conduct applies to all other federal judges, so why is it, exactly, that Supreme Court Justices do not abide by such common sense ethical rules that would help ensure their integrity and impartiality, and prevent glaring conflicts of interest? With Ginni Thomas having become blatantly involved in politics in recent years, Clarence Thomas should rightly recuse himself from any case involving Trump or insurrectionists.

Perhaps God took justice into His own hands by prematurely whisking Antonin Scalia off to his eternal fate, whatever it may be, for that believer in the devil. But Rump Republicans in the U.S. Senate denied the divine will altogether, and the people's will, by absolutely refusing to do their constitutional duty to consider the well-qualified replacement that President Obama nominated to replace Scalia after he died in February 2016.

A Clarion Call for Sensible Tax Reform

Think again about the fact that rich people have gotten increasingly wealthy since Ronald Reagan presided over the slashing of the marginal tax rate on the highest levels of income from 70% to 28%. And consider that, simultaneously, the poor have gotten increasingly desperate, and middle class people have seen their prospects stagnate, partially due to unfair and unwise national policies. One can only conclude that we should increase the marginal rates on highest earners again, and make our tax system significantly more steeply graduated. If rich people don't like it, I guess they can take their pro-war-slogan advice from the Vietnam War era, and "Love it, or leave it!"

I call for true tax reform to improve fairness, make taxes more progressive, raise more revenue, finance needed infrastructure investments, boost U.S. competitiveness, protect the health of Earth's ecosystems, and allow us to undertake energy modernization projects and move toward independence from dirty fossil fuels, and to make a simultaneous transition to a greener and more sustainable economy.

Let's act honestly to improve and strengthen our democratic republic for a change. In addition to establishing a Bill of Rights for Future Generations and enacting a fairer and more sensible system of taxation, other good ideas abound, and a long list of them can be found in *Common Sense Revival - Book One of the Earth Manifesto*.

"American Exceptionalism" --- Yay for Us!!

This leads to another compelling insight. A new era must begin that advances a new narrative of American Exceptionalism that is based on healthier communities, social justice, respectful dialogue, responsible fiscal propriety, peaceful coexistence, 'soft power', and ecological intelligence. This new form of exceptionalism should explicitly renounce the old "shining light on the hill" variety of American Exceptionalism that was based so fixedly on the hubris-filled 'hard power' of the military-industrial complex. This complex is dominated by Wall Street profiteers, crony capitalists, politicians with empire-building aspirations, and corrupt conservatives who favor retrogressive, war-engendering and special prerogative-defending ways and deficit-financed tax cutting.

E.J. Dionne Jr. of the Washington Post Writers Group once wrote: "There are more important priorities than preserving low tax rates for rich people, and larger strategic concerns than Iraq or even Afghanistan, and more compelling national purposes than rote attacks on government or a fear of new immigrants, or Islam, or our diversity as a nation. And we will all be in this effort together only if all of our citizens know they will have an opportunity to share in a resurgent America's success. For Obama, political renewal requires a bold and persistent campaign for national renewal. This would challenge his political opponents. But more importantly, it would challenge all of us."

Tea Party candidates had a major impact driving the Republican Party to the right during the Obama era, but this was not a mandate to pursue policies that are increasingly unfair, more retrogressive, more reactionary, or more militaristic than the status quo.

We are in uncharted territory here, folks. Shall we mindlessly and rashly proceed in obedience to established interests and accept business as usual? Or should we instead move boldly forward with more common sense, intelligence and smart planning? Let's demonstrate some moxie by demanding a radically progressive transformation! Bernie Sanders has called for a political revolution, and his provocative appeal resonated with millions of Americans. And his reactionary counterparts on the extreme right preached their own version of how to fix our country. Now it's up to the American people in every future election to make the clear choice of fair-minded representatives who will lead us forward with integrity, broadly inclusive honest principles, and sensible environmental sanity.

Common Sense Patriotism

In her book *America by Heart*, Sarah Palin criticized Big Government for many ills. She accused Hollywood of "reflexive anti-Americanism". And she declared: "America doesn't go to war for big business or for oil or for the sake of imperial conquest." She asserts that we get into wars only to defend our freedom.

This opinion was simplistic and naïve. It is a slogan, not a deeply-considered understanding. The motives for war are deeply entwined with profit motives, power, control and the "unwarranted influence of the military-industrial complex", as President Dwight Eisenhower warned against in 1961. Numerous untruths have been used to involve our nation in wars over the years. This fact was starkly revealed in the Pentagon Papers during the Vietnam War, and in many other documents and historical disclosures since then.

War is the ultimate expression of ruthless competition. It is a "continuation of politics by other means", as Carl von Clausewitz once wrote. And politics is a continuation of economics by other means. Political corruption is more than just some kind of clever game. It is a form of cheating that undermines fairness to millions of Americans. In our economy today, political corruption has joined with unethical and unfair methods of competing to make our societies less healthy and less secure.

Check out the deeper perspectives explored in *Reflections on War - and Peace* (paraphrased):

"The causes of wars and conflicts throughout history are clear. Rulers fight for control, power, competitive advantage, and their nation's ascendancy. They fight for nationalistic pride and for ideological supremacy. The underlying struggle is generally about acquiring or defending territory or getting access to energy or other natural resources or foreign markets or cheap labor. We also get into wars, in part, so that bankers and the defense industry and myriad contractors and war suppliers and investors in these companies can make bigger profits. Investors and shareholders seem to love growth in revenues and profits over all other values, and they wield enormous influence in our corporate-dominated capitalist society."

It is far from anti-American to make these observations. True patriotism consists of questioning and opposing abuses of power, not in obsequiously accepting them without question. Our American literary hero Mark Twain was incisively perceptive when he noted: "*my kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders.*"

Patriotism is not an unthinking obedience to the politicians in power. In truth, patriotism in America should be an honest commitment to the principles and ideals this country really represents. These principles include the main concerns of our Founding Fathers: fairness, justice, guaranteed liberties, expansive human rights, limited government intrusiveness, and fair representation of the best interests of the American people.

Rebounding Conundrums

Accurate understandings and ideas have the potential power to upset the established order, so they are a threat to rulers of every persuasion. This is one reason why authority figures try to suppress clear conceptions and populist movements. The people in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria and other Arab nations were ruled for decades by dictators, and they would attest to the truth of this statement as their countries experience agitated turmoil and violence. So would those under the ruthless censoring hegemony of Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping.

Nuances and ambiguity beyond our clear comprehension affect every situation and opinion. In light of this fact, a new tone and character of civility is needed in our societies. We should accord greater respect to others, even when we do not agree with their opinions.

The former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld once explained the nature of uncertainty during a press briefing when he confoundingly told the American public that, in our dealings with Iraq, there are "known knowns", "known unknowns", and "unknown unknowns."

This intriguing philosophic ramble inspires me to apply this analysis to the profligate levels of deficit spending by the government in the past 40 years. Known knowns of past debt-financing frenzies in world history include the fact that they increase probabilities of destabilizing debt defaults, create more pressure to diminish the value of a nation's currency, heighten risks of high rates of inflation, and make potential economic and social turmoil more likely.

There are overlapping unknown knowns in the extremely complex concatenation of causes and effects set in motion by fiscally irresponsible deficit spending. These include poorly prioritized spending cuts on essential investments, more urgent impulses to impose austerity measures on the common people, increases in the stimulated depletion of resources, and accelerated damages to ecological commons.

The unknown unknowns? Who knows?! We cannot accurately predict what the outcomes will be of our rash experiment in undisciplined increases in government spending and simultaneous historically low taxes on the wealthy. We do not know for sure, as we collectively grope in the dark for a safe and sensible way forward, the best direction in which to proceed. But we should not ignore the convincing preponderance of evidence, or the most likely probabilities. And we should courageously admit that adamant denials of adverse possibilities do not diminish the

probabilities that negative outcomes will occur, whether or not popular opinion agrees. Alert, deniers of global warming and climate disruptions! Unintended consequences occur -- gasp! -- even though they are not intended!

Another Unnecessary War

An outrageous political "climate war" has been taking place in recent years. Trillions of dollars are at stake in this conflict over whether or not to take bolder steps to limit emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Powerful vested interest groups oppose initiatives that would help preserve the habitability of planet Earth by limiting such emissions, and they have managed to sow doubt by denying the problem and delaying efforts to solve it. Big oil conglomerates like Exxon have known these risks for many years, yet they have spent large sums of money to instill doubts about the overwhelming scientific consensus on the risks involved. The well-being of billions of people and the fate of millions of species of life on Earth are at stake.

The evidence for climate disruptions, nonetheless, grows increasingly ominous. There has been an unmistakable increase in the number of incidents worldwide of catastrophic extreme weather events, including thousands of record high temperatures across many countries, record droughts, and devastating floods in many places like Pakistan, Australia, Brazil, Sri Lanka and Texas, Oklahoma and South Carolina. There have also been record cold snaps in many other locales as overall planetary warming has injected more moisture and heat energy into the atmosphere and caused the jet stream to shift from normal patterns.

Dr. Richard Somerville, a Nobel-prize winning scientist who led the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on climate science in 2007, provides this understanding: "This is no longer something that's theory or conjecture or something that comes out of computer models. We're observing the climate changing. It's real. It's happening. It's scientific fact."

Scientists are routinely measuring increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere. The Scripps Institution of Oceanography has maintained a research laboratory high atop Hawaii's Mauna Loa since 1958. Since that time, the concentration of carbon dioxide has increased from less than 320 parts per million to more than 420 parts per million. Within the rest of this century, this concentration is expected to increase to between 500 and 900 ppm. Changes of this magnitude would be environmental and social catastrophes.

Aggregate human activities are significantly contributing to this insidiously destabilizing effect on global weather patterns. The main mechanisms of this impact are the burning of copious amounts of fossil fuels that result in billions of tons of carbon dioxide being spewed into the atmosphere each year, while at the same time vast tracts of tropical forests are being chopped down. These forests serve as the "lungs of the planet", and it is stupid to insidiously harm these biotic systems.

The climate crisis is the most serious threat facing our planet today. The latest UN climate science report underscores exactly what's at stake. Each degree of warming leads to compounding extremes, with billions of people vulnerable to multiple climate hazards at the same time. From extreme heat to more frequent and severe storms and sea-level rise, climate change is the ultimate threat multiplier, and it's happening everywhere. These findings are a stark reminder of how urgently we must mobilize to save nature — and humanity — from irreparable harm. We cannot afford to be silent and complacent. Countries aren't doing nearly enough to protect against the disasters to come as the planet continues to heat up. And these disasters will be much more widespread and much more negative than expected.

In March 2022, it was reported that Lake Powell on the Utah-Arizona border has dropped below a critical threshold of 3,525 feet for the first time, shrinking the protective buffer of water the reservoir needs to produce hydroelectric power for millions of people in the West. As Lake Powell continues to dry up, there's growing concern that there won't be enough water in the reservoir to keep spinning the turbines that create electricity at Glen Canyon Dam.

An overarching challenge facing us all is that, at a time we need transformative change -- *Speed and Scale* -- the fact is that human nature stands athwart good solutions due to our habits and behaviors in aggregate, and our indulgences, social status seeking, consumerist drives and various compulsions (needs and greed), all in a world of nearly 8 billion people with expanding per capita desires. And we are confronted with more urgent problems than existential

challenges of greenhouse gas-driven climate change and assaults against biodiversity, including wars, the global pandemic, economic disruptions, inflation, proliferating natural disasters, desperate migrations, deep structural inequities and growing disparities of wealth and power between the Few and the Many, along with the machinations of divide-to-conquer political factions, reactionary opposition to reforms, political corruption and egomaniacal authority-abusing rulers, all within the dominating influence of a corporatocracy that is prepossessed with making profits by foisting cost externalities onto the populace.

So what can we do?

This political "climate war" is a side skirmish in an ominous development in which billionaires like Charles Koch, and unethical politicians and giant corporations, are stubbornly continuing to abuse their power by striving to discredit scientific understandings about the dangerous effects of our industrial activities. Many vested interest groups staunchly oppose the best idea for dealing with this issue -- enacting carbon taxes that would dampen demand for fossil fuels. Making matters worse, corporate entities that exploit fossil fuel resources have been abusing their power to achieve a wrongheaded goal of getting taxpayers to give them billions of dollars each year to subsidize the depletion of these critically important resources. This allows them to continue to make excessive profits at the expense of the victims of air pollution and climate-disruption disasters -- and of all people in future generations.

It seems obvious that we should be collectively acting more responsibly by adhering to sensible precautionary principles and reducing wasteful uses of fossil fuels. This has become glaringly clear in March 2022 as Putin's autocratic petrostate has gone brutally rogue by invading Ukraine and destabilizing geopolitics.

It would be a much smarter plan to take dramatically effective steps toward achieving independence from our risky addiction to fossil fuels. We should honestly do these things instead of allowing power-abusing vested interest groups to hijack our policy-making by buying our representatives and dishonestly casting doubt on the probable severity of the impacts of our activities. Many CEOs, big corporations and investors are complicit in this intrigue due to their exerting powerful political pressure to maintain the status quo of allowing costs of climate disruptions to be foisted onto the people in nations worldwide. The book and film *Merchants of Doubt* shed chilling illumination on these efforts.

The most effective way to correct this problem would be to create a powerful incentive to use fossil fuels more efficiently and to discourage wasteful usages of oil and coal and natural gas, and to simultaneously stimulate a necessary transition to a cleaner, greener and more renewable mix of energy sources. One simple plan would be to implement national carbon taxes that would increase in measured increments every year. To be successful, such a plan should be instituted with non-regressive fee-and-dividend provisions that ensure the bottom 50% of people are not burdened with higher costs that they cannot afford.

This plan would shift production processes and consumer demand in beneficial directions, since it would make fossil fuels more expensive to use in wasteful ways. This idea is better than cap-and-trade schemes that are utilized in some places like California to reduce carbon emissions. Cap-and-trade plans are too complicated, bureaucratic and vulnerable to cheating, and they are not adequately effective. We should heed Thomas Paine's simple insight, expressed in *Common Sense*, that "the more simple any thing is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered."

We clearly need a cleaner energy future. Unfortunately, lobbyists for Big Oil and Big Coal and their advocates in the Republican Party are again threatening to capture the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate in the November 2022 elections, and this myopic majority opposes actions to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions being spewing into the atmosphere. This aspect of business as usual is completely crazy!

A good solution to this overarching challenge needs to be found. The political will to find it begins with comprehensive understandings of the true nature and scope of the problem. One of the aspirations driving the creation of the Earth Manifesto has been the hope that clearly-stated ideas will sway the debate toward effective and intelligent solutions. *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot* is a valuable essay exploring this issue in depth.

[A Wee Catastrophe](#)

Uncertainties affect us at many levels. On an individual level, we often have a difficult time figuring out what our goals should be, or to come to grips with a wide range of perplexities that concern us in deeply personal ways. This is one reason that pundits caution people: "Be careful what you wish for!"

On a collective level, we all have a hard time deciding what best courses of action are for society. The best way to understand something is in a way that corresponds most credibly with reality.

There is some merit in almost every way of seeing things. Good arguments can be made on opposing sides of practically every issue. Deciding on the best course of action is thus quite complicated. People with conflicting interests passionately assert that their particular point of view is the right and proper and best one. But we are all in a kind of "Bet Situation". Just by living in society, we are inextricably involved in the game. Each of us essentially places our bets, either through our actions or our inactions. It is incumbent upon us to bet on which probabilities are the most likely, and the outcomes that are most potentially auspicious -- or at least potentially catastrophic.

"Experience is a good school, but the fees are high." --- Heinrich Heine

Albert Einstein called our perception that we are separate from the whole of the world "a kind of optical delusion of consciousness". We are demonstrably intimately interconnected and inextricably interdependent, so to solve the potentially dire problems facing us, we need to strive to see reality as accurately as possible. By gaining greater knowledge, rather than embracing customs, stubborn ideologies or inflexible doctrines, we will be more effective in providentially altering the status quo.

"Whoever undertakes to set himself up as judge in the field of truth and knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the god."

--- Albert Einstein

Human beings are having transformative impacts on planet Earth through the rapid growth in human numbers, along with industrialization and hyper-stimulated consumerism. The state of our planet today is brilliantly portrayed in the extraordinary ecological message conveyed by Yann Arthus-Bertrand in his beautiful large-format book of aerial photography, *Earth from Above*. The text that accompanies the stunning photographs contains incisive and vitally important insights. Check it out, or watch the compelling 90-minute film *Home*, which Yann Arthus-Bertrand produced based on this book. It can be viewed online. It is a sensational must-see!

There is no doubt that a growing series of urgent crises are confronting people worldwide today. The crises that are confronting us -- environmental degradation, pollution, overpopulation, worldwide economic and political disorder, growing inequities and injustices -- are partially a consequence of widespread conflicts of interest and delusion and misunderstanding.

"Individually there has developed a widespread feeling of helplessness and despair, in the face of what seems to be an overwhelming mass of disparate social forces, going beyond the control and even the comprehension of the human beings who are caught up in it."

--- Theoretical physicist David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 1980

Let's not be apathetic. Let's not despair. In fact, let's be cheerful and chipper! Bravo for positivity and hope! Bravo for honesty and fair-mindedness! But let's be seriously determined to radically reform our political system and make our tax system more steeply graduated to generate more revenue to help deal with gathering challenges. Let's not get lost in divisive arguments about partisan conflicts. Let's instead focus on overarching goals. And let's collaborate to find fair ways to achieve these goals! We will be much stronger together!

I strongly support a much more significant rights issue for the future of all humanity. Let's act to give fundamental rights to every child yet to be conceived in all future generations. Let's amend the U.S. Constitution to give all persons born in the future guaranteed rights to live on a planet with healthy ecosystems, unpolluted waters and skies, natural resources that are not exhausted, a stable climate, fairer institutions, and an economy that is more sustainable because it runs on renewable energy. Let's commit to a Bill of Rights for Future Generations!

That's All, Folks!

There is good hope for the future. But to really make our communities healthier and our society better, we must deliberately choose to change our system to empower the American people and to reduce the influence of those with entrenched power from abusing our systems for their own narrow benefit. My common sense intuition tells me the best approach for making our societies better would be to make sure that our economic and political systems are as fair as possible to the vast majority of people. We should strive to do this while maintaining a "live-and-let-live" attitude with regard to hot-button social issues. We can do it!

The constitutional framework of our democracy is entirely sufficient to allow the people to once again make our country one that is "of the people, by the people, and for the people." We simply need to assert our constitutionally guaranteed rights, and to demand reforms to our political system that will reduce the dominating influence of Big Money. We should simultaneously agree that, in turn, we must assure our heirs a modicum of rights so that our legacy to them will be a fair one.

I will wager that if we wisely restructure our societies to make them fairer, more egalitarian, more sustainable and more ecologically healthy, the Dow Jones Average would be at least twice as high in 20 years than it would be if we continue to buy the "trickle-down" Big Lie and let rich people have an ever-more extreme monopoly on the benefits of worker productivity. By allowing a rashly skewed concentration of wealth to continue to increase, and by enabling corporations to continue to indulge with impunity in business-as-usual cost externalizing activities, we facilitate the squandering of resources, the ravaging of the planet, and the undermining of the vital ecological underpinnings of our well-being. Here is a monetary gauge that coincides with a moral one that clearly tells us we should courageous "fight the good fight!"

I urge our leaders to act courageously in the best interests of the people. I urge them to stop being such blatantly sycophantic lackeys to wealthy people and giant corporations! To paraphrase Thomas Paine in *Common Sense*, "The Sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. Now is the seed-time of union and honor and faith. Now is the time for courage and truly fair problem-solving. To betray the common good today would be like engraving a rude name with the point of a pin on the tender bark of a young oak; the wound will enlarge with the tree, and posterity will read the ignominy of the material injury in full grown characters."

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

April 1, 2022 (begun in November 2011 and updated sporadically since then)