



## The True State of the Union

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Every January the President of the United States delivers a generally upbeat assessment of the State of the Union, one that is sprinkled with idealism, political spin, rosy rhetoric, shameless boasting, deceptive partial truths and Big Lies, along with rationales for a proposed agenda. But make no mistake about it, the true State of the Union differs markedly from this propaganda crafted by the president and speechwriters, strategists and lawyers.

The current State of the Union here in the year 2018 is one of enormous challenges and dramatic potential and extraordinary risk. Many of these issues are discussed below, in more accurate terms, with the political spin removed.

Twelve score and a year or two ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. The American colonists declared independence from Great Britain in 1776 to secure "unalienable rights" that included life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Recognizing that governments are instituted among men to secure these rights, and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, representatives of the people came together in 1789 to establish a Constitution to guide the new nation.

These Founders were striving to creating a more perfect union by establishing rules of law that would ensure fairness and justice for all, and promote the general welfare, insure domestic tranquility, defend the national security, protect people from external dangers, limit federal government power, and secure the blessings of liberty to all the people and every citizen to be born in posterity. To help in achieving these goals, our representatives should always strive to provide fairness of education, opportunity and legal justice. We must demonstrate intelligent foresight, clear vision and commendable courage in creating public policies that are consistent with these principles and ideas that contribute to the common good.

In the 242 years since the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, extensive economic, social, scientific, technological, demographic and environmental changes have taken place. Progressive legislation has been enacted to abolish slavery, prevent monopoly practices, guarantee civil rights, reduce worker abuses, limit unfair competition, improve workplace safety, protect consumers, guarantee women's rights, establish an adequately civilized social safety net, and protect public lands and the environment.

Today, the human race is being confronted with challenges that are increasingly global in nature. These problems pose more significant risks than ever before in the history of civilization. Our human activities are threatening the world with climatic instability, rising sea levels, worsening heat waves and wildfires, a heightened vulnerability to man-made and natural disasters, inexorably greater demands on the planet's finite resources, compromised ecosystems, devastating conflicts and diminished biodiversity.

Mark Twain famously observed that we have the best government money can buy. Will Rogers, known as Oklahoma's Favorite Son, was a famous humorist, Hollywood Film star, newspaper columnist and social commentator who cleverly expressed a contrapuntal idea: "It's a good thing we don't get all the government we pay for." And, "If Stupidity got us into this mess, then why can't it get us out?"

The primary causes of these increasingly dangerous risks are stimulated consumerism and wasteful production and consumption. Arrogant greed and excessive aggression and the continued rapid growth in the number of human beings on Earth are also contributing factors. These forces put humanity on a collision course with the limits of the carrying capacity of the Earth to support us. We are damaging or destroying ancient rain forests and temperate forests, wetlands, fisheries, coral reefs and wildlife habitats, and we are even adversely altering the gaseous composition of the atmosphere and the alkaline balance of Earth's oceans. And simultaneously, we are wastefully depleting aquifers, topsoil, minerals and fossil fuels worldwide. This is causing an accelerating deterioration of basic life support systems, making it ever more important that we immediately begin to enact bold conservation measures and family planning programs.

Pope Francis, early in his papacy, articulated a farsighted vision and philosophy in a controversial encyclical on climate change and poverty. In this document, the Pope blamed what he calls unbridled capitalism for ruining the Earth, and bemoaned the tragic effects this is having in particular on the poorest people. Reforms now!

When we honestly consider the legacy we are leaving to posterity, we should remember the words of Thomas Paine in *Common Sense*: "As we are running the next generation into debt, we ought to do the work of it, otherwise we use them meanly and pitifully. In order to discover the line of our duty rightly, we should take our children in our hand, and fix our station a few years farther into life; that eminence will present a prospect, which a few present fears and prejudices conceal from our sight."

Let's be honest with ourselves. There are more than 7.5 billion people on our home planet today, and it is projected that human numbers will reach 8 billion within 7 years. All the most consequential challenges we face today will be made much worse by this overwhelming human tide. Resources will be rashly depleted, harmful pollution will get worse, and greenhouse gas emissions will cause ever more extreme weather events like the powerful hurricanes, torrential rain flooding and terrible wildfires that afflicted locales around the globe in 2017. Sea levels will rise and storm surges will become more destructive.

Ambrose Bierce defined politics as "a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles." Today's political strife is, on the surface, a titanic struggle for the hearts and minds of men and women. It is a profound struggle, in essence, between forces that seek to give the powerful and the privileged ever-greater influence and benefits, and those opposing forces that advocate wise, far-sighted planning to protect the public and to safeguard its assets and prevent ecological catastrophe, and to limit abuses of power that are inherent in inadequately regulated capitalism.

Humanity is engaged in a vast uncontrolled experiment in stimulative debt-financed tax cutting and the stoking of inequality and an increased concentration of wealth in the hands of a power-abusing few. Unfortunately, the federal government has abdicated its critical obligation to address big problems by giving an increasingly unleashed power to corporations, abandoning fair-minded governance in favor of the hegemony of Big Business over the fates of working people. This facilitates lousy management of natural resources, and irresponsibly fails to protect people and the biosphere from harms and predations.

The wise Solon was a great statesman, skilled negotiator and consensus-seeking lawmaker who is known as "the father of democracy". He was chosen back in ancient Athens more than 2,500 years ago to take bold actions to save the republic from revolutionary strife, which was stalking Greece at the time as elite factions were abusing their power and jealously preparing to defend their excessive privileges with force.

Abraham Lincoln famously declared that a house divided cannot stand. Fast forward to 2018. Polarized divisions reign in the land of the free, serving to paralyze progress toward a fairer, more secure and more just union. Republican politicians are demonstrating a severe degree of rash irresponsibility by stimulating the use of fossil fuels, denying climate change, helping foist cost-externalizing schemes onto the public, aggressively exploiting working people and natural resources, promoting materialistic consumerism, manipulatively inspiring fear to divide people, perpetrating social injustices, further abusing power by imposing austerity measures on the masses, propagating woefully unethical and deceitfully manipulative misinformation, stoking the insecurity of the vast majority of the people, undermining women's rights and prerogatives, waging a cruel, costly and counterproductive war on cannabis, discriminating against millions of people in racial and ethnic minorities, treating poor people with an extreme deficiency of compassion and empathy, supporting mercilessly egregious payday loan rip-offs,

sacrificing the greater good, empowering far-right extremists, threatening peaceful coexistence at home and abroad, engaging in excessive economic risk-taking, and egregiously wreaking extensive harms on people worldwide. This constellation of broadly unethical tactics compounds their basic sins of mindlessly damaging the environment, promoting policies that decimate wildlife, and refusing to address the underlying human causes of millions of species of life being driven toward eternal extinction.

Institutionalized corruption is stalking the land of the free, and rich people are using some of their huge tax cut windfalls to further promote their system-corrupting agenda. As always in matters like this, we should "follow the money!" The Koch network of really wealthy conservatives announced at a recent conclave in the southern California desert that they would spend an estimated \$400 million on politics and policy in the 2018 election cycle, up from \$250 million they spent to influence the 2016 elections. This represents corruption incarnate.

One form of legalized corruption is the phenomenon known as regulatory capture, which is very bad for society. This term describes the state of affairs when powerful vested interest groups and their lobbyists succeed in getting what they want for themselves at the expense of the greater public interest. When regulatory agencies have been captured by giant corporations, they insidiously circumvent common good plans and recklessly undermine our nation's priorities. Regulatory capture operates in ways similar to the *Tragedy of the Commons* phenomenon, in which individuals or groups with high-stakes interests in regulatory decisions or policy outcomes focus their energies and resources to gain outcomes narrowly favorable to them, while members of the public have a weaker and less-focused individual stake in the outcome, so are much less influential. When intently-focused entities devote their energies to particular policies by successfully capturing agencies whose purpose is to sensibly regulate them, it almost always undermines the greater good. One glaring instance of this was the failure of regulatory agencies like the Federal Reserve and the Securities and Exchange Commission to anticipate and prevent the hyper-costly financial meltdown of late 2008.

But after the Republican electoral coup took place on November 8, 2016, regulatory capture was superseded by a profoundly irresponsible takeover of the government itself, and of regulatory agencies, by authority-abusing operatives who act as puppets of profit-prepossessed deregulatory zealots. This development is proving to be harshly detrimental to the people, and Trojan horse agency heads have been put in charge that are sabotaging the missions and guiding purposes of the government agencies directly from within.

The great risk in this state of affairs is that it serves to undermine fairness principles and financial stability and ecological integrity. Irrationally exuberant investors and speculators want a piece of the inside action, so the boom-and-bust cycle will speed up, and a debt crisis or other fiscal calamity looms. The last financial crisis and recession, notably, was an *Inside Job*, as made clear by Charles Ferguson in the film by that name, and in his brilliant exposé, *Predator Nation: Corporate Criminals, Political Corruption, and the Hijacking of America*.

There are a thousand things that government should deal with, and they should be sensibly prioritized. Shamefully, the top two Republican priorities since January 21, 2017 have been to eviscerate the Affordable Care Act, causing tens of millions of disadvantaged Americans to lose medical coverage, in order to eliminate a small tax on the investment income of wealthy people, and to borrow a huge amount of money from people in the future to give tax breaks that overwhelmingly benefit those who don't need them. We already have run up the national debt from less than \$1 trillion in 1981, when Ronald Reagan signed on to the Arthur Laffer ruse of the Big Lie trickle-down "supply side" economic theory, to more than \$21 trillion today. This would be laughable, if it were not so consequentially harmful.

The vicissitudes of fate are fickle, so it is hubristic folly for the fortunate few to design a Tough Luck political system that forsakes the vast majority of the masses in order to rashly give the rich ever larger shares of the spoils of capitalist systems. Knowing that adverse circumstances can befall anyone at any time, and that both accidents and diseases can afflict every person at any age, the only rational national healthcare plan is one that provides medical care for everyone at an affordable price.

It is simply true that, of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane, as Martin Luther King declared, so it is crazy to coddle profiteers and speculators by playing politics with health insurance and medical care, and drug prices and lethal issues like opioid addiction. Comprehensive solutions need to be devised that holistically address the root causes of such problems.

During the frenzied Republican push to double down on their regressive taxation schemes by hurrying up tax cuts while they were still able, one fact got swept under the carpet. Even before the Republican idea of giving another generous dose of comforting the comfortable by afflicting the afflicted, the national debt was projected by the Congressional Budget Office to increase by another \$10 trillion in the next 10 years. This is unconscionably fiscally irresponsible! "NOT ONE MORE PENNY" in tax breaks to the wealthiest 1% would have been a far better starting proposition in fair-minded tax reform. The wise investor Warren Buffett called the recklessly short-term-oriented Republican tax scam the "Relief for the Rich Act." It is scandalous that this legislation was fostered by profoundly corrupt politics and enabled through wrongheaded abuses of power.

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics."

--- Mark Twain

It is a colossal folly to build a financial house of cards on a shaky foundation of excessive amounts of borrowed money. Debt financing of investments in future well-being may be smart, but debt financing of inequality-stoking, resource-squandering, profit-maximizing, tax-cutting priorities is imprudent and fiscally irresponsible.

"The state of the union is hopeful, resilient and enduring," declared Rep. Joe Kennedy of Massachusetts in his passionate response to the official 2018 State of the Union address. Those qualities of American character are inspiring, and they are increasingly necessary in light of the assault by Republican politicians on unity, fairness, equality, the truth, the general welfare, women's rights, domestic tranquility and the prospects for sustainable human existence.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan ran for office by painting a dark picture of a troubled nation, and he offered a message of redemption. He called on Americans to work together to solve their problems, saying, "I ask you not simply to 'Trust me', but to trust your values -- our values -- and to hold me responsible for living up to them." When Donald J. Trump mounted the stage in his campaign for president, he similarly told America that the nation is in crisis, that "attacks on police and terrorism threaten the American way of life. That the United States suffers from domestic disaster, and international humiliation. That it is full of shuttered factories and crushed communities. That it is beset by 'poverty and violence at home' and 'war and destruction abroad.'" He even asked black people, "What do you have to lose?"

And then, in glaring contrast to Reagan's nod to values, the Master-Manipulator-in-Chief offered a solution. "I am your voice", said. "I alone can fix it. I will restore law and order." He did not mention liberty and justice. He did not appeal to prayer, or to God. He did not ask Americans to measure him against their values, or to hold him responsible for living up to them. He did not ask for their help. He asked them to place their faith in him. "Believe me, I'm trustworthy!", he basically implied, despite numerous blazing indications to the contrary.

The truth of the matter, it turns out, is that Trump Republicans are the perfect force for rigging the economic system ever more to the advantage of rich people and corporate entities, and against the common good and the greater good of people in future generations. After a long 18 months in office, the results are clear. The fix is in.

To succeed in this gambit, the Demagogue-in-Chief and swindling politicians emulated the tactics of demagogues throughout history by hijacking people's emotions, demonizing others, scapegoating various groups, manipulatively deceiving people, exploiting popular prejudices and fears, promoting false claims and really fake news, divisively using inflammatory rhetoric, and generally making arguments based on emotion rather than reason. They did this to distract people from their scandalous activities with a constant barrage of outrageous stands on issues. They personally attacked and threatened opponents in order to zealously impose their twisted domineering control drives over the populace. They are doing this in greedily self-centered and blatantly self-serving ways that betray the common good. Emotional intelligence whisperers tell us that civilized behaviors involve impulse control, not unleashing the worse devils of our instincts by succumbing to temptations to take unfair advantage of others, irrespective of how negative the probable consequences will be.

Back in 2011, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney smugly declared, "Corporations are people, my friend". I thought, "Oh, is that so?" Well, let's call in the political economists, sociologists and historians, and the psychologists and psychiatrists, and let's analyze exactly what kind of person the preponderance of giant corporations resemble in their actions these days. Conveniently, the insightful professor Joel Bakan has already done clear-eyed research for us on this topic, and he had a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

handy by his side. Due to their typical behavior and inherent tendencies, he concluded, corporations, if regarded as people, would be pathological sociopathic psychopaths, because they often act in ways that are manipulative, socially irresponsible, unempathetic, and practically incapable of guilt, remorse, moral rectitude or genuine responsibility for the greater good.

Joel Bakan observed that big corporations are basically designed to externalize costs onto the public. He declared that corporations are "deliberately programmed, indeed legally compelled, to externalize costs without regard for the harm it may cause to people and communities and the natural environment. Every cost it can unload onto someone else is a benefit to itself, a direct route to profit."

Corporations should not be given the full rights in courts of law that are constitutionally assured to real people, for too many abuses of power have wrongly been made using rationalizations like the one saying the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees corporate entities the same rights of Due Process and Equal Protection as individuals.

Again, "follow the money!" Corporate profits are near all-time record highs right now, and yet corporations pay less than 10% of all federal tax revenue, as was the case in 2016. A measure of the corrupt abuses of power by corporate entities can be seen in the statistic that this amount represents a dramatic decline from the portion of federal taxes paid by corporations in 1952 of 33%. In effect, corporations have managed to get the taxes they pay reduced by 75% less than the share of federal revenues they paid 66 years ago. Shareholders are getting a bigger and bigger cut of the profits engendered by using up Earth's natural resources and damaging Earth's ecosystems and altering the global climate.

Senator Kamala Harris expresses the opinion that "When people of all ages, colors, religions and backgrounds come together, unified in our collective struggle for justice, there is nothing we cannot accomplish." Let's do it!

The Demagogue-in-Chief hates criticism so much that he charges journalists and investigative reporters with propagating "fake news" and characterizes the free press as "an enemy of the people". In this, he is echoing the phrase and tactics employed by ruthless Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Fittingly, and in a rather curious parallel, Stalin was the subject of a pervasive socialist personality cult, while the Cunning-Celebrity-in-Chief is the subject of a denialist cult of die-hard supporters. These enabling supporters seem to gullibly believe that the relative crumbs given to poor people and middle class folks by provisions in the Republican Tax Cut plan prove that conservative politicians care about the Forgotten Man, despite austerity measures being imposed, and despite the fact that their relatively paltry tax breaks pale in comparison to the huge sums of money given to millionaires and billionaires, like the nearly \$100 million each, annually, on average, that the wealthiest 5,000 families in the USA are forecast to receive. Even worse, it's ominous that this tax cut swindle is being financed by borrowing more money, piling it on to an increasingly risky gargantuan level of national debt.

We should sensibly make smart and fair-minded investments in broadly-shared current and future well-being -- in the common good, social justice, public education, vital physical infrastructure, and a sustainable future. Instead of investing in sustainable well-being, however, scheming "conservative" Republicans are sacrificing the common good to goose profits by allowing natural resources to be excessively exploited and letting businesses externalize a variety of costs onto the populace, while at the same time broadly disempowering working people and eviscerating protective regulations, and recklessly pushing their agenda primarily favoring billionaires.

Broader perspectives should be welcomed. Economists, when they are being cautious and honest, point out that it is unwise and improvident to borrow heavily from future generations for misguided purposes. They know that it is folly to promote priorities that are too short-term oriented because such courses of action are likely to leave a disastrous legacy for our descendants. Ecological philosophers and environmentalists advise that long-term impacts should be taken into account in all assessments of courses of action to be taken by businesses and governments. They also provide us with cautionary tales regarding the damaging and risky impacts of activities like the depletion of fisheries and the clear-cutting of forests, and they warn us of the increasing costs of global warming-stoked climate change and risks associated with recklessly wasteful uses of fossil fuels and fresh water and other natural resources. They tell us that there is an overarching need for a transformation in our societies to make them sustainable. And they remind us about the risks of failing to courageously address the causes and consequences of population overshoot.

Republican politicians are emulating the reckless Captain of the Titanic -- ordering full speed ahead in treacherous waters! -- with their blockheaded refusals to take action to reduce the severity and frequency of extreme weather conditions that are being caused by climate-disrupting greenhouse gas emissions. Instead of responsibly demonstrating good stewardship of the resources and ecosystems of our home planet, Trump Republicans are treating the Earth like a business in liquidation, trying to ruthlessly convert natural resources into cash as quickly as possible and to funnel a maximum amount of the resulting profits into the pockets of a small minority of the most financially fortunate people. And they are treating the American people like pawns in a merciless game of Monopoly, in which they cheat to gain unfair advantage and exacerbate social and environmental injustices for personal gain.

Our current leaders do not inspire trust or respect for their myopic spin when they are brazenly dishonest or engage in distracting ruses, distorting propaganda, unscrupulous political overreach and imprudence in fostering activities that are resulting in ecological overshoot. See *Climate Change Considerations, Carrying Capacity, and Ecological Overshoot* for a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of related issues.

True patriotic Americans in our democracy are loyal to the Founding principles of our country, NOT to the officeholders who are currently in control of the government. It is especially foolish to support officeholders when they are abusing their authority. As Mark Twain purportedly observed, "Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it."

Republicans in Congress are being obsequiously deferential to the narcissistic Egomaniac-in-Chief to such an unprincipled degree that they are broadly betraying their country. It is ironic, hypocritical and morally wrong for representatives of the people to be loyal to this bullying abuser of authority, because the right thing to do as a public servant is to fulfill the oaths of office and to be loyal to the Constitution, the rules of law and ethics, and the greater good of the people in our great country.

Republican politicians and apologists are taking increasingly desperate stands to protect their illegitimate and excessively harsh rule against common sense judgments that call them to account for their deep state efforts to rig our system and engage in ethically improper actions, fiduciary irresponsibility, fraudulent indulgences, and downright criminality.

The system is broadly corrupt even without this far-reaching malfeasance. An honest understanding of how an economic system is rigged gives us the best basis for deciding how to re-design it to be fairer, healthier, saner and more sustainable. In matters of economics and tax issues, the Pulitzer Prize winning investigative journalist and author David Cay Johnston is one of the foremost authorities. So it is a very good bet that insights into the misguided provisions and perverse incentives contained in the Republican Tax Cut folly can be well understood by recognizing how our tax system really works, and David's 2003 book explains this in sensational clarity, with the title telling all: *Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich - and Cheat Everybody Else*

### Breaking News

Pope Francis has condemned the "evil" of fake news in a first document by a Pope on the subject. Francis indicated, "Fake news is a sign of intolerant and hypersensitive attitudes, and leads only to the spread of arrogance and hatred. That is the end result of untruth." The Pulitzer Prize-winning Michiko Kakutani's new book *The Death of Truth* explores this phenomenon in the age of Trump, and it sure seems to me like this is an egregious case of premeditated murder.

The phrase 'fake news' has been co-opted by the Deceiver-in-Chief, and now it is being used by authoritarian leaders around the world. According to Republican Senator John McCain, authoritarians are using the term "to silence reporters, undermine political opponents, stave off media scrutiny and mislead citizens", and to undermine the free press to "make it more difficult to hold governments accountable." McCain also stated that constant cries of a perverted sense of reality characterized as "fake news" are serving to undercut legitimate reporting and "strip activists of one of their most powerful tools of dissent."

Senator Jeff Flake delivered a landmark speech on the Senate floor to underscore the deleterious effects of the Trump's "sustained attack on the truth." The Arizona Republican began by quoting the late Daniel Patrick

Moynihan's line that "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts." Flake quoted several despots -- from Bashar Assad to Rodrigo Duterte and Nicolas Maduro -- who have used the words "fake news" to dismiss reports about their abuses of human rights since Trump took office. Flake also invoked George Orwell, who said: "The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it."

Senator Flake deemed it "shameful" for Trump to use the term "fake news" and to call the free press "the enemy of the people". That chilling phrase is reminiscent of words infamously used by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Flake also called Trump's repeated attacks on the media "repulsive" and said he "has it precisely backward," pointing out that despotism is the real enemy of the people, not a free press, which is the enemy of despots and a guardian of democratic fair-mindedness. Flake also pointed out that when Trump calls news stories he doesn't like "fake news", he is generally the one who "should be the figure of suspicion, not the press."

The Rand Corporation, a nonpartisan think tank, characterizes this issue as an epidemic of "truth decay", a phenomenon characterized by increasing disagreement about basic facts, a blurring of the line between fact and opinion, an increase in the relative volume of opinion over fact, and declining trust in previously respected sources of information. The result of "truth decay" is that policy debates hinge more on anecdotal experiences and less on objective facts. This makes it next to impossible to find good solutions to big problems like anthropogenic climate change, when leaders cannot even agree on the nature of a problem.

The ruthlessly uncompromising domination of *We the People* by "conservatives" is not only profoundly unjust, but also outrageously illegitimate. Political legitimacy in a democracy is determined by the consent of the people. The litany of illegitimate ways that Republican politicians won their election campaigns is legendary, and it broadly violated basic principles of informed consent. Rather than earning people's votes by making honest commitments to improve conditions for the majority of the people, these politicians gained advantages by pandering to wealthy donors, suppressing the vote of millions of poor people, and gerrymandering congressional districts to give an unearned, undeserved and socially undesirable over-representation to Republican politicians.

To add insult to injury, they also have made insidious use of social media by micro-targeting people on platforms like Facebook with ads that provoked people's anger using deceitful fake news and slanderous character assassinations. They manipulated people's emotions through the use of dastardly demagogic tactics, acting in deeply dishonest ways and propagating devious ideological propaganda and taking shrewd advantage of anti-choice, anti-gay, religious fundamentalist, and anti-gun-regulation sentiments. In other words, they are still using "God, guns and gays" strategies to divide the people to gain and maintain power. And they continue to give more perks and power to rich people and capitalists by undermining the power of working people, and by pursuing fiscally irresponsible scams of running up the national debt to finance lopsided tax cuts that hugely benefit their wealthy donors. And they refuse to rein in the deeply corrupting influence of corporations and Big Money. It also seems clear that they treacherously collaborated with Russians hackers to get help in winning elections in 2016. And, as the multiple investigations close in, morbid symptoms are appearing, and the likelihood of a constitutional crisis is dramatically increasing. And risks of a *Wag the Dog* war ominously mount.

An integral aspect of the success of conservatives in seizing domineering control of the USA can be traced to another immoral and illegitimate tactic: the Republican Southern Strategy of capitalizing unscrupulously on racial biases, especially in states of the South, to gain support to get elected, even though they invariably betray their supporters by championing economic policies that are primarily focused on giving the lion's share of benefits to the already wealthy. Economist Paul Krugman has written about this cynical bargain with the devil that Republicans have made "to exploit racism to advance a right-wing economic agenda. Talk about welfare queens driving Cadillacs, then slash income taxes. Do Willie Horton, then undermine antitrust. Tout your law and order credentials, then block health care." Krugman elaborates:

"The cynical bargain that has been the basis of Republican strategy since Reagan has now turned into a moral trap. And as far as we can tell, no elected Republican -- not one -- has the strength of character to even attempt an escape."

All in all, these nefariously negative abuses of power are an outrage against government of the people, by the people and for the people. These cunning activities are disgraceful because they have been used divisively, with the merciless intention of winning the Presidency and gaining majorities in Congress. Then, after having stolen

power through these dishonorable and unethical methods, they are now abusing it to advance a radically anti-environmental, anti-egalitarian, fiscally irresponsible, oppressively discriminatory far right agenda.

Legitimacy? While 63 million people voted for Trump, some 74 million Americans voted for NOT TRUMP. Hillary Clinton got almost 3 million more votes than Trump, and more than 8 million people cast their votes for Libertarian Gary Johnson or Green Party candidate Jill Stein or Independent Evan McMullin or a write-in candidate. What this means is that Republicans DO NOT have a mandate to impose a far right agenda on the people, so their uncompromising rule is an insult to the nation. It is also notable that less than 60% of the estimated 250 million Americans who are eligible to vote actually cast ballots in 2016. And about 75 million Americans are under the age of 18, so are not old enough to vote, and the best interests of these young people are extremely poorly represented by the Republican agenda.

Our leaders speak idealistically of democracy, freedom, liberty, justice and peace, but in actuality they are primarily focused on forcefully pursuing policies that are focused on gaining greater power, domination, short-term profit, and unimpeded access to natural resources, markets and cheap labor. The book *Addicted to War, Why the U.S. Can't Kick Militarism* provides insightful revelations into good reasons that we should stop the cycle of violence now by adopting more just policies.

Capitalism shows a powerful opposition to efforts to regulate it. It resists efforts to make its operations fairer, more socially responsible, more accountable, and more ecologically sound. It often disdains social justice and environmental sanity, and even democracy itself, for it demonstrates a single-minded focus on profits over all other values. One reason for this is that capitalism and democracy are fundamentally opposed to each other in many ways, just as freedom and equality are basically struggles against each other. The greater the freedom a society allows, the more that inequalities naturally multiply -- and the rich get richer.

Democracy essentially stands for fairness, equal representation and government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Unregulated capitalism, in contrast, strives for monopoly, for profit at the expense of workers and the environment, for special tax privileges, and for power, dominating control and special privileges for a small elite. Giant corporate entities wrongly treat the natural world, upon which humanity is completely dependent, as if it were unlimited and expendable, with little concern for the consequences. They show inadequate care for workers, communities, or a sustainable future. They strive to gain short-term advantages and capitalize on opportunities to get special treatment and subsidies. They lobby to get the rights to externalize pollution and related healthcare costs upon society. Corporations ironically act almost exclusively in ways that, in an individual, would be regarded as pathologically insane. See the insightful book *The Corporation - The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* -- or the film based on it -- for valuable insight.

The best policies require a principled balance between freedom and equality, between unregulated capitalism and the protection of the public.

While Republican politicians are doing an extraordinary job of representing the interests of rich people and crony capitalists and the military-industrial complex, they are doing a lousy job of representing the best interests of the people. Edward R. Stettinius, the U.S. Secretary of State in 1945, once stated, "The battle for peace must be fought on two fronts. The first front is the security front where victory spells freedom from fear. The second front is the economic and social front where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace."

Today, "conservative" doctrine basically says that we should spend unlimited amounts of money on the military and aggressive dominance to make us secure. This ignores the mutual security needs of other countries and other peoples. It also posits that we should advance America's economic supremacy while being stingy in spending for social programs and in sustainable development programs and humanitarian aid, at home and abroad. We should understand that all people are in this existence together on planet Earth, and doctrines that myopically proclaim that we can go it alone are foolish and unacceptable as official policy.

Crony capitalists are corrupting the fundamental principles of our democracy. The pursuit of wealth has become distorted into a self-serving agenda aimed at continually increasing the prerogatives of the rich and powerful.

Political philosophies advocating enormous amounts of spending on weapons and military domination capitalize on people's fomented fears, self-righteousness and nationalistic patriotism to advance rash goals.

The Founding Principles of our nation are being eroded, and so is the sensible system of checks and balances in our Constitution. We must stand up and oppose these trends. We cannot, in particular, allow the increasingly intrusive Executive Branch to stack the judiciary with more ideological extremists like Neil Gorsuch. We need honesty, integrity, discipline and vision in order to establish sensible controls, equitable fairness, and accountability for responsible policy making in the White House and Congress.

We must begin to act more responsibly towards the majority of Americans, and towards future generations. We must use our reason, not blind faith in doctrine, deregulation and privatization. We should strive to make the world a better place by keeping fairness and equality of opportunity as top goals of our society. We should emphasize decentralized power and the health of our communities. We should fight poverty and injustice. We should strive for cooperative consensus building, mutual security, energy conservation, the protection of a healthy environment and peaceful coexistence. We should be open to a progressive adaptation to change, moving forward, not backwards.

Our leaders have the responsibility of helping create a healthier and fairer society. Since politicians generally pander to the already privileged, we need to establish more effective institutions to prevent such unfair tendencies. Our goal must be to encourage a maximum of personal freedoms for all people to pursue fulfillment, within the context of a secure, wholesome structure of fair and just laws and institutions.

Our increasingly one-party system is insidiously embracing retrogressive doctrines, masquerading as idealism to gain and consolidate power. The federal government is becoming increasingly authoritarian and unjust due to the success of distorting propaganda, deceptive rhetoric, institutionalized corruption, capitalistic exploitation, aggressive militarism, sexism, "fake news" and right-wing influence in mass media. This is not good.

In conclusion, our leaders are misleading us, and they are also leading us in the wrong direction. Their actions are far too often dishonest, hypocritical and cruelly uncompassionate. Their actions are too often contradictory of their deceptive rhetoric. They almost invariably choose to side with Big Business, Big Government and those with Big Money, rather than the best interests of the people, the environment and life on planet Earth. They are being socially, fiscally, politically and ecologically irresponsible in pandering to unbridled capitalism, deregulation-driven polluters, spendthrift consumerism, anti-democratic unfairness, politically-expedient deficit financing, shortsighted exploitation of public lands, aggressive militarism, American geopolitical dominance at any cost, and born-again religious fundamentalism.

We should strive to develop more enlightened attitudes towards job creation, the success of small businesses, employment policies, living wages, trade deficits, women's rights, civil rights, universal health insurance, stem cell research, the war on drugs and dignity in dying. We each make choices every day, and we must begin to understand the consequences of the choices we make, and start positively modifying our choices.

We must demand that our leaders lead us more fairly and wisely and honestly. We are at a juncture in human history where we need to reassess our purposes with clarity, optimism and justified hope. We need to cultivate the ability to better recognize what is best for ourselves, for our societies, and for future generations.

Many peoples in prehistoric cultures showed reverence for their ancestors, like the Rapanui on Easter Island who carved monolithic and iconic volcanic stone sculptures to commemorate their courageous forbearers, in honor of their having paddled huge wooden catamarans across uncharted waters to the remote reaches of the South Pacific. Unless we begin acting more responsibly, our descendants will look back with scornful dismay toward today's era of materialistic consumerism and mindlessly wasteful squandering of natural resources, and our myopic shredding of the fabric of the web of life on Earth.

The bottom line is that we must believe that we can make a positive difference in the world -- and know that it is vital and necessary that we strive to make such a consequential difference!

Truly,  
Tiffany Twain

Tiffany Twain is "the illegitimate great-granddaughter of the estimable and irreverent writer, lecturer, humorist and philosopher Mark Twain." She has published *Twelve Books of the Earth Manifesto* as a save-the-world treatise containing wide-ranging and far-sighted observations that deal with all the biggest issues facing humankind here in the second decade of the 21st century. Check it out online!

I, Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, feel fortunate that I seem to have inherited my great, great grandmother Jane Clemens' "sunshiny disposition". From my great grandfather Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain, I inherited an incisive philosophical bent, and it is sad that political philosophy has so rudely come to dominate our every moment's thinking, and is prepossessing people's minds and sucking too much oxygen out of the echo chamber bubble in which we find ourselves. This serves to prevent us from seeing clearly.

Crib sheet: My mother was Nina Clemens Gabrilowitsch. Her mother was Clara Clemens, Mark Twain's oldest daughter. Clara's mother was Mark Twain's wife Livy (Olivia Langdon Clemens). And Livy's mother was Jane Clemens, who was noted for her sunshiny disposition.

As the ancient Romans may have said, "Anche se non è vero, fa una buona storia." (Even if it isn't true, it makes a good story.)

"Dr. Tiffany B. Twain, the author of this manifesto, writes with optimism and a cheerfully bemused but vigilantly concerned tone. She provides scathing insights into the unjust and foolish aspects of human societies all around the world. She professes to be a wise Depth Assessor, and an indirect descendant of the famous author and humorist Samuel Langhorne Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain. She asserts that what the world needs now is a deeper connection to ancient human roots, and a greater clarity of perspective, and a more respectful appreciation of the natural world."