



The True State of the Union

Earth Manifesto Insights by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
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Every January the President of the United States delivers a generally upbeat assessment of the State of the Union to Congress and the American people. This speech is generally sprinkled with idealism, political spin, rosy rhetoric, shameless boasting, deceptive partial truths and some Big Lies, along with rationales for a proposed agenda. But make no mistake about it, the true State of the Union differs dramatically from this spin and propaganda, crafted as it is by the president and speechwriters, strategists and lawyers.

The current State of the Union right now is one of enormous challenges, dramatic potential and extraordinary risk. The true state of the union is, in a word, DIVIDED -- intentionally divided -- and it is only because *We the People* have been so antagonistically pitted against each other that ruling elites have been able to create extreme levels of inequality and wreak widespread injustices, and concentrate wealth and power narrowly in the hands of the few. We could easily build an improved democracy that works better for all of us, not just the wealthy few, and we should start by seeing clearly how master manipulators responsible for this retrograde state of affairs have rigged the economic system and indulged in highly unfair and oppressive social engineering.

On January 25, 2019, the longest government shutdown in U.S. history finally ended. This shutdown cast a bright light on how merciless the dominating forces have been in using vulnerable people as bargaining chips in their ongoing efforts to exploit and undermine the middle class and poor people. Many government workers became surprisingly desperate at not being paid for more than a month, and this is part of a much bigger issue. Some 78% of all U.S. workers are living from paycheck to paycheck, according to a report by Forbes Magazine, and three-quarters of workers are in debt. One out of every six Americans experiences food insecurity, and most minimum wage workers need to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. The average working person is unable to financially cope with an injury, emergency or turn of bad luck, and 40% of Americans would not be able to cover an unexpected \$400 expense, according to a report from the Federal Reserve Board.

This is a sensational contrast to more unified times like those of the 1950s when a household headed by just one breadwinner could afford to buy a house, two cars, groceries, schooling, medical insurance and other necessities. How did this negative change come about? Our corrupt system of corporate "vulture capitalism" has clearly been responsible. Corporate CEOs and politicians have worked hard to maximize private profits by taking unfair advantage of working people, depriving them of a fairer share of the profits made through their increasing productivity. This has drastically reduced the ability of employees to bargain collectively for a better deal. These scheming abusers of power have fooled millions of working folks into supporting "conservative" politicians who use deplorably deceitful propaganda and divisive white nationalist identity politics to gain unwarranted influence which has allowed them to perpetuate an oppressively unjust and diabolically discriminatory agenda. They also use up succeed in socializing costs, damages and risks, and encourage speculative risk-taking, and corrupt our politics by rudely engaging in a "cost shifting" uber-scam whereby taxes are radically slashed on profits made through these schemes -- and these profits are monopolized by the top dogs. At the same time, they have rigged the economy in ways that drive up costs for basic necessities, especially including housing, schools and child care. These shrewd schemes have made the majority of Americans worse off and at a bigger risk to their future welfare.

Our government has become a corporatocratic oligarchic plutocracy -- rule by the rich, and by ruthless profit-

maximizing corporate entities. The American people are being severely afflicted by greed-driven capitalists engaging in tragically misguided national priorities, a harsh middle class squeeze, treacherous anti-egalitarian political intrigue, economic malfeasance, fiscal irresponsibility, financial fraud, wasteful uses of natural resources, and rashly unsustainable ecological insanity.

The real responsibility of the President is to represent the true national interest, not just the narrow interests of rich people and a deceived, cheated and manipulated political base. Abraham Lincoln famously declared that a house divided against itself cannot stand, and we are all seeing that the processes involved in our nation being torn apart by hyped up conflicts can be exceedingly ugly. With polarized divisions reigning from sea to shining sea right now, progress toward a fairer, more just and more secure union is being paralyzed.

The true state of the union is this: we are living in a state of national crisis, under a Trump regime that appears to be becoming increasingly desperate, unjust, unhinged and lawless.

Conservative firebrand Ann Coulter hammered Donald Trump after he announced he would sign a funding deal formulated by Congress in January 2019 and then declared a national emergency in February in order to get money that Congress refused to authorize in order to build his border wall. "The only national emergency is that our president is an idiot," Coulter snidely declared. She also fumed that Trump was just "fooling the rubes" with his national emergency declaration. Trump was violating the Constitution and blatantly abusing the National Emergency Act to appropriate funds for a wall along the southern border. In doing so, he was setting a dangerous precedent to justify future abuses of presidential power. The National Emergency Act was intended to deal with real *emergencies*, "as in situations that hit so fast, such as the events on 9/11, that some response is required before Congress can convene." What those who wrote the National Emergency Act never contemplated was a situation in which the executive branch might use the law to simply overrule the outcome of negotiations within the legislative branch.

Conservative-leaning journalist Jennifer Rubin wrote in *There's an emergency - and it's Trump's power grab*, that "Trump, aided and abetted by McConnell, reveals himself (again) to be deeply hostile to the Constitution. His party, in the hands of Trump supplicants like McConnell, forfeits its role as defenders of the rule of law, separation of powers and limited government.

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

Republicans are emulating the Captain of the Titanic by ordering full speed ahead in dangerous waters with their blockheaded refusals to take action to reduce the severity and frequency of extreme weather events being caused by emissions of huge volumes of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere. Our leaders should rightly and responsibly demonstrate good stewardship of the resources, ecosystems and living beings of our home planet, but instead Trump Republicans are treating Earth like a business in liquidation, rashly converting natural resources into cash as insanely quickly as possible -- and funneling a maximum amount of the resulting profits into the pockets of a small minority of those who are most financially fortunate. And they are treacherously treating the American people like pawns in a merciless game of Monopoly, in which they cheat to gain unfair advantages and perpetrate harshly harmful social and environmental injustices for personal gain.

This is a part of a worldwide anti-democratic wealth-monopolizing scheme that has allowed rich people to get richer while poor people get poorer. In 2018 alone, billionaires got 12 percent richer while the nearly four billion people who make up the world's poorest half saw their wealth decline by 11 percent -- according to an Oxfam report published to coincide with the start of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on January 20, 2019. "This is not inevitable, this is unacceptable," said Winnie Byanyima, the Executive Director of Oxfam International. The report indicated that the number of billionaires has almost doubled since the financial crisis a decade ago, "yet tax rates on the wealthy and corporations have fallen to their lowest levels in decades." Byanyima, a leader on women's rights and democratic governance and peace building, added that economic elites like those in Davos have the power to help end extreme inequality, but that they have chosen not to take responsible fair-minded steps to

make this happen. Let's come together on common ground to demand they make things better, not worse.

Former McKinsey consultant Anand Giridharadas criticized the Davos elites in his book *Winners Take All*. He argues that the people who attend this conference are hypocrites who bear responsibility for many of the problems ailing the world today. "You enabled the nationalism that threatens our societies. You stiffed so many of us. You fought for rules that let you steal the future from our children. You pushed for monopolies and austerity and deregulation. People got angry, and some of them voted for hell. And who benefited? You again. Because instead of following their anger up to the summit where you gather, the enraged were goaded, sometimes by your fellow plutocrats, into punching downward and turning on the most vulnerable."

Another aspect of this global scheme by rich people is that governments worldwide are running up huge amounts of debt. The United States and emerging countries have unconscionably pushed the total global debt to a record high \$70 trillion or so, as measured in U.S. currency. This riskily opprobrious debt burden is more than twice as much as it was in 2007, when the financial crisis was beginning to unfold, according to Fitch Ratings' *Global Government Debt Chart Book*.

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."

Billionaire Boston investor Seth Klarman sounded an alarm about rising debt and related growing social tensions and the pathetic absence of American leadership, in a highly anticipated annual letter to clients. Klarman was not at the economic summit in Davos, but in a report in the *New York Times* it was revealed that his 22-page letter was "being passed around" at the gathering. "It can't be business as usual amid constant protests, riots, shutdowns and escalating social tensions," Klarman writes. "As the post-World War II international order continued to erode, the markets ignored the longer-term implications of a more isolated America, a world increasingly adrift and global leadership up for grabs. ... There is no way to know how much debt is too much, but America will inevitably reach an inflection point whereupon a suddenly more skeptical debt market will refuse to continue to lend to us at rates we can afford. By the time such a crisis hits, it will likely be too late to get our house in order."

Broader perspectives should be welcomed. Economists, when they are being cautious and honest, point out that it is unwise and improvident to borrow huge amounts of public funds from taxpayers in every future year to use it for wrongheaded purposes. They know that it is folly to promote priorities that are too short-term oriented, because such courses of action will 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 that businesses and governments are considering. These folks also provide us with cautionary tales regarding the damaging impacts of activities like the depletion of fisheries and the clear-cutting of forests, and they warn us about the "threat multiplier" of global warming-stoked climate change and the increasing costs and risks associated with recklessly profligate uses of fossil fuels and fresh water resources. They tell us there is an overarching need for a transformation in our societies to make them sustainable for a longer period of time, and that big, smart and effective steps must be taken SOON. And they remind us of the risks of failing to courageously address the causes and consequences of population overshoot.

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.

Republican politicians are demonstrating a rash degree of irresponsibility through a pathetic constellation of treacherous undertakings. They are stimulating the use of fossil fuels and failing to take action to prevent climate change; helping giant corporations foist cost-externalizing schemes onto the public; driving up the national debt to further enrich the rich; aggressively exploiting working people and natural resources; pathologically discriminating against millions of people in racial and ethnic minorities; undermining the rights and prerogatives of

women; stoking the insecurity of the vast majority of the people; abusing power by imposing austerity measures on the masses; treating poor people with an extreme deficiency of empathy and compassion; perpetrating a multitude of social injustices; manipulatively inspiring fear and blaming others to divide and control people; and propagating woefully unethical and deceitful lies and misinformation and disinformation. On other fronts, they are giving far-right extremists stupidly excessive influence; foolishly threatening peaceful coexistence both at home and abroad; engaging in economic risk-taking and stimulating speculation that will require taxpayer bailouts; promoting materialistic consumerism; waging a cruel, counterproductive and costly war on cannabis; egregiously wreaking extensive harms on people worldwide, and generally sacrificing the greater good. These actions exacerbate 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.

The way capitalists have managed to undermine the American Dream, and the hopes and prospects of the majority of the people, is by politically corrupt and illicit means. The vulturish swamp master Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell may be more responsible than anyone else. He revealed himself to be an arrogantly unrepentant villain in supporting the government shutdown debacle and the deeply inappropriate, unethical and likely illegal declaration of national emergency. "Moscow Mitch" has acted as a Trojan horse for crony capitalists, allowing them to seize control of our national politics and decision-making. He has been diabolically opposed to fairer political representation and expanded voting rights, and getting Big Money out of the driver's seat of American politics and honestly reforming our system of campaign finance. Along with efforts to create extremely partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts in dozens of states, Republicans in Congress have been able to subvert our democracy and get away with imposing anti-egalitarian and anti-environmental policies on the people. Mitch McConnell can accurately be regarded as "the gravedigger of American democracy", according to a Holocaust historian, and he has been instrumental in enabling malfeasance and demagoguery-facilitated abuses of power by Donald Trump and his corrupt cronies. Ditch Mitch!

The new majority of Democrats in the House of Representatives beginning in January 2019 introduced a landmark bill titled the "For the People Act", which would combat corruption and protect people from politicians who put higher priority on corporate goals and special interest group demands than on the best interests of American citizens. This legislation would strengthen our democracy by expanding voting rights, ending the skewed gerrymandering of congressional districts, and giving regular Americans much more influence in determining our national policies and priorities. To make progress on an ambitious progressive agenda, we need to give restrict the influence of vested interests that have been preventing such change. As part of this initiative, the American people must be persuaded how corruption and influence peddling distort our national policies on Capitol Hill.

Trump and obsequiously loyal Republicans in Congress have been aided and abetted by dishonest facilitators on Fox News who are pushing the propaganda that says illegal immigration is a national emergency. They have been crying wolf so zealously and disingenuously that it comes as a stunning surprise that illegal immigration today is near the lowest level in 50 years. Conservative propagandists have repetitively claimed that there is "border emergency" to justify the shutdown of the federal government, but this is merely xenophobic white nationalist spin by Donald Trump, Stephen Miller, Ann Coulter, Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh and their ilk. "The number of apprehensions at the southern border declined 75% in the past two decades -- from 1.6 million in 2000 to 397,000 last year", according to conservative columnist Max Boot. "The number of undocumented immigrants in the United States is at a 15-year low. Immigrants, both legal and illegal, commit fewer crimes than the native-born. And there has never been a terrorist attack in the U.S. carried out by terrorists who entered the United States from Mexico." Also, contrary to Trump's claims, the fact of the matter is that most of the illicit drugs entering the U.S. from the south come through legal ports of entry, so an expensive 2,000-mile-long wall would not stop them.

What is really happening here is that Donald Trump has been hyping up threats to our national security posed by immigrants and asylum seekers on the border with Mexico in order to distract people from his malfeasance, his undermining of democratic fairness and his wrongful activities and priorities. In dramatic contrast, all the top U.S. intelligence chiefs, including the head of the CIA and the FBI, contradicted Trump in testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee in their annual worldwide threats assessment on January 29, 2019, indicating that the

actual biggest threats are climate change, foreign interference in our elections, and nuclear weapons in the hands of rogue nations like North Korea. They did not mention dangers from immigrants.

Predictably, Trump reacted angrily to these intelligence experts, declaring they are "naive". Well, here's the truth. Either the thousands of employees in U.S. intelligence services are wrong, or Trump is lying through his teeth. Given that the Deceiver-in-Chief has made more than 15,000 false claims in his three years in office, it is all but certain that Trump is consequentially lying, and it seems obvious that he is becoming like a cornered rat, trying to protect himself by continuing to do his con man routine and act like a fear-mongering, immigrant scapegoating demagogue with a compulsion to abuse authority.

Oh, what a tangled web he weaves in his attempts to deceive — and cheat, swindle, betray and make the rich richer and the masses less secure.

Walter Shaub, former Director of the Office of Government Ethics, observed on January 1, 2019: "Above all else, military and civilian members of the United States government have a duty to place loyalty to the Constitution, laws and ethical principles above the private gain of individual politicians and political parties. Much the same is true for the citizens of this nation. Freedom is ours to lose. Enemies of that freedom include not only foreign powers but also domestic actors who would supplant democracy with authoritarian rule."

Last year's shutdown impasse took place due to a preposterously stubborn refusal by Trump Republicans to face the fact that their despotic dominion-demanding One Party rule is crashing into the reality that the United States is a democracy guided by a great living Constitution and rules of law, and that they cannot continue to govern without reasonably cooperating with the party that represents the majority of the people. This shutdown mercilessly made pawns of millions of Americans, in a cynical ploy by authoritarians engaging in moral turpitude.

A Big Picture Overview

Twelve score and three years 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 understanding that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, representatives of the people came together in 1787 to create a providential Constitution to guide the new nation.

These Founders were striving to create a more perfect union by protecting the people from despotism and ensuring a reasonable modicum of fairness and justice for all. They declared their intention to promote the general welfare, insure domestic tranquility, defend the national security, make people secure from external dangers, sensibly limit federal government power, and secure the blessings of liberty to all the people and every citizen to be born in posterity. To help achieve these good goals, our representatives should strive to honestly provide fairness of education, opportunity and legal justice, and 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 years since our ancestors declared independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776, extensive economic, social, scientific, technological, demographic and environmental changes have taken place. Progressive laws have been enacted to abolish slavery, constrain monopoly practices, reduce abuses of working people, guarantee civil rights, improve workplace safety, protect consumers, limit unfair competition, establish an adequately civilized social safety net, ensure more expansive rights for women and gay people and those in racial minorities, and protect public lands and the environmental commons from despoliation.

Today, humanity 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, worsening heat waves, destabilized Arctic polar vortex cold snaps, terrible wildfires, insufferable droughts, rising sea levels, a heightened vulnerability to man-made and natural disasters, widespread refugee crises, devastating conflicts, overpopulation, inexorably greater demands on the planet's finite resources, compromised ecosystems and diminished biodiversity.

One main cause of these increasingly dangerous risks is 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. Rainforests and temperate forests are being clear-cut, and wetlands, fisheries, coral reefs and wildlife habitats are being destroyed, and we are even adversely altering the alkaline balance of Earth's oceans and the gaseous composition of the atmosphere. And simultaneously, streams and lakes and seas are being polluted, and aquifers, topsoil, minerals and supplies of fossil fuels are being wastefully depleted worldwide, causing an accelerating deterioration of basic life support systems. This is making it increasingly important for us to begin enacting measures to protect ecosystems, conserve resources, strengthen family planning programs and educate and empower women, contributing to their well-being.

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

Let's be honest with ourselves, and *See Clearly*. There are about 7.7 billion people on our home planet today, and our numbers are projected to reach 8 billion within 4 years. All the most consequential challenges we face today will be made worse by this overwhelming human tide. Resources will be rashly depleted, fresh water supplies will become scarcer, pollution will get worse, and greenhouse gas emissions will cause ever more extreme weather events like the powerful hurricanes, torrential rains and destructive wildfires that afflicted locales around the globe in the past few years, and storm surge flooding will become more harmful as sea levels rise.

Ambrose Bierce defined politics as "a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles." The intense political strife we are experiencing today is a titanic struggle for the hearts and minds of men and women. It is an ugly struggle, in essence, between forces that seek to give powerful and privileged persons ever-greater influence and benefits, and opposing forces that instead champion greater fairness and advocate wise and far-sighted planning to protect the public and safeguard assets and prevent ecological catastrophe, and limit abuses of power inherent in inadequately regulated capitalism and domineering rule by hyper-partisan politicians.

With humanity engaged in a vast uncontrolled experiment in casino capitalism and stimulative debt-financed tax cutting, and with inequality being stoked and an increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of a power-abusing few, it is unfortunate that the federal government under Republican control has abdicated its critical obligation to address big problems. By giving increasingly unleashed power to the executive branch and big corporations, "conservatives" have abandoned fair-minded governance in favor of the detrimental influence 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 predations and damages.

Republicans try to manipulate public opinion by charging progressive proposals as being "socialists." As they aggressively defend their national policies by telling people that Democrats want to impose socialism on our country, they confuse issues. A clear-eyed understanding, however, reveals that the goal of fairer progressive plans are simply, as the incisive economist Paul Krugman put it, to have "a market economy, but with extreme hardship limited by a strong social safety net, and extreme inequality limited by progressive taxation." That, in essence, is not "socialism."

When conservatives scream "socialism!", they are revealing they really don't want to have an honest debate. Their opposition to "socialism" is partly a campaign to prevent a redistribution of income and wealth downward to benefit the vast majority of Americans. It is also a stubborn defense of their ideological certitude that income and wealth should continue to be redistributed upwards to mostly benefit the richest Americans. The Trump tax cut is the most recent giveaway involved in this strategy. At a cost of adding about \$2 trillion to the national debt in the next 10 years, the cuts largely redistribute income upwards to rich people and inheritors of the biggest estates, and to corporate shareholders and high-end "pass-through businesses". When government revenues are diminished due to cuts in taxes, budget deficits go up, and those who do the tax cutting argue that we must cut social insurance programs and the safety net.

As many observers like Martin Luther King, Jr. have noted over the years, our system is one of "socialism for the

rich and rugged free market capitalism for the poor". All the policies that pundits call "corporate welfare" are ways that favorable treatment is bestowed upon particular corporations by the government, with the capitalist economy allowing huge corporate entities to privatize profits and socialize costs and risks.

Linguist Noam Chomsky has criticized the way in which free market principles have been applied. He has argued that the wealthy use free-market rhetoric to justify imposing greater economic costs and risks upon the lower classes, while insulating the top dogs from the rigors of the market and giving political and economic advantages to those who are rich and well connected. Decrying state protection for the rich, Chomsky contends that the rich and powerful "want to be able to run the nanny state so that when they are in trouble the taxpayer will bail them out", citing "too big to fail" bailouts as a prime example of this swindle.

In September 2008, Senator Bernie Sanders said with regard to the bailout of the U.S. financial system: "This is the most extreme example that I can recall of socialism for the rich and free enterprise for the poor". The same month, economist Nouriel Roubini stated: "It is pathetic that Congress did not consult any of the many professional economists that have presented alternative plans that were more fair and efficient, and less costly ways to resolve this crisis. This is again a case of privatizing the gains and socializing the losses; a bailout and socialism for the rich, the well-connected and Wall Street".

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

The rebuke of one-party rule by voters in the 2018 elections is consequentially contributing to the exposure of the depth of the culture of corruption that Republicans have allowed to fester in Washington D.C., and all around the land of the free. The Mueller investigation looked into the Trump campaign collaboration with Russian operatives that helped Trump Republicans to grab power in 2016, and their many attempts to cover up what they did. Investigations are also looking into blatant abuses of power in the Ukraine Plot, and in concerted efforts to stonewall information and cover up the damning details of this perfidy. Other investigations are on-going into the Trump family's violations of the Emoluments clause of the Constitution. Illegal uses of the Trump charitable foundation have been revealed, and abuses of money in the Trump inaugural fund are being examined. In addition, malfeasance in the leadership of many federal agencies is being scrutinized, especially in the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior, the Treasury Department, the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security. It is time for new federal government management that is much more honest and responsible!

Let's enthusiastically give congratulations to the record number of women who won political office in the 2018 midterm elections. This was an achievement long overdue. While many women were successful in their election contests, many more like Stacey Abrams in Georgia were cheated out of power by the GOP political machine. Women have been broadly kept out of power in our sexist patriarchal republic ever since it began. This unjust disenfranchisement of the best interests of females has helped facilitate discrimination against women in compensation and benefits, and made them more insecure, and reinforced an exceedingly hard-to-break glass ceiling. It has also allowed too much sexual harassment and too many violations against both the dignity and safety of females, and ignored many episodes of domestic violence. And it has fostered discrimination based on race, and harshly deprived women of reproductive choices and rights. Women of the world, unite! Men, give us greater respect.

Illumination

Keep in mind that accurately understanding the big picture context of the current state of our union is valuable for shedding illumination on our best courses of action. Let's strive to see beyond the barrage of distractions and misinformation and propagated disinformation and distortions of reality that politicians are deluging us with, for it is clear that vested interests are working overtime to hide comprehensive versions of the truth. Let's rise up in unison and demand they stop torpedoing prospects for broadly fairer solutions to problems.

Capitalists and speculators screwed up the economy so badly during the Roaring Twenties and early 1930s that the world suffered the worst global depression in all of human history. To fix the extraordinary inequities this created, a New Deal was instituted in the 1930s to give the public greater protections from the predations of Big Business, and to give working people a moderately better degree of security, and to dramatically improve the social safety net for those left behind, forgotten, by ruling forces.

By the 1980s, wealthy people and bankers and corporate management had finally become real tired of the New Deal generosity toward poor people and the lazy masses, and "the whole fairness bullshit", so they installed the B-movie actor Ronald Reagan as a puppet to do their bidding. After he had milked the lucrative vein of their lavish financial support to get elected, he famously declared, "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Reagan then proceed to cut taxes on the highest level of incomes from 70% to 28%, and told the Big Lie that this great solution would sure-as-shootin' trickle down to benefit the many, just you wait and see. We're still waiting! -- and the swindle has caused the national debt to dangerously spike from less than \$1 trillion in 1980 to \$23 trillion today.

Reagan had exploited the fact that the U.S. economy suffered a period of recession and stagflation during the late 1970s and the early 1980's, and he promoted the ideological spin that less taxes and fewer regulations were the solution to the economic "crisis". He basically contended big government was bad from an economic standpoint. The wily politician knew exactly what control-freak dominion-demanding elite groups wanted to have done, so he acted like a perfect pawn of his puppet masters, and declared he would fix the problem, but proceeded to brazenly rig the system more radically to the advantage of the few, to the detriment of the many. The few included Wall Street bankers, the Savings-and-Loan industry, speculators, rich people, CEOs and giant corporations, especially those involved in oil, coal and petrochemical industries, and the pharmaceutical drug industry, and gun and munitions manufacturers and others engaged in the profitable military-industrial complex.

Fast forward to December 2017, when Trump Republicans foisted an outrageous new swindle on the American people by authorizing \$1.5 trillion to be borrowed, burdening the public, to give the lion's share of the spoils to the top 1% of taxpayers. They gave relative crumbs to the poorest 50% of Americans, and promised that this form of debt financing would stimulate the economy and create jobs, deceitfully asserting that this would be the best way to benefit everyone.

Republicans have not only slashed taxes on corporations, but have also given them many expanded privileges and perks, including allowing them to pollute the air and water, and to foist harms onto the public through cost externalizing gambits. They have also given corporate entities expanded opportunities to engage in price gouging, and given them excessive access to public lands to make big profits on our natural resources. This misguided governance makes it appear that the REAL problem in the USA today is inadequately regulated corporations and corrupt bad management in government. This perspective gives compelling credence to the words of firebrand Sarah Kendzior, that the Trump administration is acting like "a transnational crime syndicate masquerading as government." Vladimir Putin is pleased to head this global Party of public graft, fraud and vice.

We see that 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 rich conservatives announced at one of their secretive conclaves in the California desert just 9 months before the 2018 midterm elections that they would spend \$400 million to influence election outcomes and national policies. This was a big increase from the \$250 million they spent in the 2016 elections. This is incorrigible corruption incarnate. (See Postscript for an update on the Koch donors' activities in late January 2019).

While Republican politicians are doing a great 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 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 we should spend unlimited amounts of money on the military and aggressive dominance to make us secure. This ignores the mutual security needs of the vast majority of Americans and peoples in other countries, and it also posits that we should advance America's economic supremacy while being stingy in spending on social programs and sustainable development, 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 we can and should 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, ethnocentric self-righteousness and nationalistic feelings to advance rash goals. The book *Addicted to War, Why the U.S. Can't Kick Militarism* provides insightful revelations into good reasons we should alter this perverse priority now by adopting more just policies. The best policies require a principled balance between freedom and equality, between inadequately regulated capitalism and protections of the public.

Not only are the Founding Principles of our nation being eroded, but so is the sensible system of checks and balances established by 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 political partisans like Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. 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 people in the future. We must use reason, not blind faith in doctrine and deregulation and privatization. We should strive to make the world a better place by making fairness of opportunity a top goal of our society. We should emphasize decentralized power and the health of our communities, and fight poverty and injustice, and strive to build a cooperative consensus, and improve mutual security and peaceful coexistence, and conserve energy and protect a healthy environment. We should be open to progressively adapt to change, moving forward, not backwards.

Our leaders have the duty to help create a truly healthier and fairer society. Since politicians tend to pander to the already privileged, we need to establish more effective institutions to prevent such unfair outcomes. 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. Fairer representation required!

Our one-party dominated politics under Trump Republicans from 2017 to 2019 pushed retrogressive priorities, despite their having gained power by illegitimate means. The federal government is becoming more authoritarian and unjust due to the success of distorting propaganda, institutionalized corruption, sexist policies, capitalistic exploitation, aggressive militarism, and deceptive rhetoric, fake news and right-wing influence in mass media. This is not good.

Capitalism is powerfully opposed to efforts to regulate it. It resists efforts to make its operations fairer, more socially responsible, more accountable, and more ecologically sound. It demonstrates disdain for social justice and environmental sanity, and even democracy itself, due to its single-minded focus on profits over all other values. One reason for this is that capitalism and democracy are fundamentally antagonistic to each other in many ways, just as freedom and equality basically involve struggles against each other. The greater the unrestricted 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." Deregulated capitalism, in contrast, strives for monopoly, maximized profits at the expense of workers, and special tax privileges and dominating control 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 harmful consequences. They do not demonstrate adequate care for working people, communities, the environment or a sustainable future, and they strive to gain short-term advantages and capitalize on opportunities to get special subsidies. They lobby to gain the prerogative to externalize costs of pollution and related healthcare onto society. Corporations act almost exclusively in ways that, in an individual, would be

regarded as psychopathic. Joel Bakan makes this point clear in his insightful book *The Corporation - The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* -- and in the thought-provoking film is based on it, *The Corporation*.

An Aside - Environmental Consideration on February 16, 2019

Surely the best way to achieve good governance is through collaborative approaches like the years-long process involved in a public lands bill that was passed in the Senate on February 12, 2019. Government works most fairly when representatives of the people make reasonable compromises, not when they take staunch power-abusing stands against the common good. Bravo! for the U.S. Senate for having collaboratively worked together to approve this bill. The legislation finally reauthorized -- permanently -- the Land and Water Conservation Fund, in connection with approving this major public lands bill. The new law would protect 1.3 million acres as wilderness, the nation's most stringent protection of public lands, where even roads and motorized vehicles are prohibited. It would also expand several national parks and create four new national monuments.

The legislation contained more than 650 pages of head-spinning details about things like land conveyances in many states. It represented "an old-fashioned approach to deal-making that has largely disappeared on Capitol Hill." It is a "hodgepodge bill" that combines more than 100 separate bills and offers something for nearly everyone, with projects stretching across the country. It designated more than 350 miles of river as wild and scenic, added 2,600 miles of new federal trails, and created nearly 700,000 acres of new recreation and conservation areas. The bill also permanently withdrew more than 370,000 acres of land from being mined around Yellowstone and North Cascades National Parks in the states of Montana and Washington. Senators from across the ideological spectrum celebrated home-state gains and congratulated each other for bridging the partisan divide.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund supports conservation and outdoor recreation projects all across the country. It is one of the most popular and effective programs Congress has ever created. The program uses federal royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling to fund conservation and public recreation projects around the country. The program has supported more than 42,000 state and local projects throughout the U.S. since its creation in 1964. Even so, the bill had been derailed in 2018 after Republican Senator Mike Lee objected, saying he wanted to exempt his home state of Utah from a law that allows the president to designate federal lands as national monuments protected from development.

The passage of this legislation is a paradoxical win for conservation at a time when Trump Republicans have pushed for development on public lands and scaled back safeguards established by his predecessors. It shows that there really are many win-win solutions to the challenges we face, and makes it clear by contrast that our leaders should not be so hyper-focused on win-lose triumphs against political opponents and the common good in order to achieve personal gain.

Another important law is the National Environmental Policy Act, one of the bedrock environmental laws in the U.S. It saves taxpayer dollars, ensures that projects are done correctly from the start, keeps communities healthy, builds local consensus, and allows people in communities to offer local expertise to make good projects safer and more efficient. The Trump's administration, in its usual counterproductive stands, is trying to impose tough new restrictions on communities that want to make use of the safeguards afforded by the National Environmental Policy Act. They are doing this under the guise of "streamlining" regulations that it says are "bad for business". They want to eviscerate this vital legislation -- "the nation's oldest environmental law" -- to provide giveaways to special interests, "such as allowing corporate polluters to conduct their own environmental impact studies or skip them altogether." This effort "is nothing short of a public gag order."

The federal government funds and carries out projects in communities across the country. Many of these projects cater to wealthy corporations that seek to profit at the expense of the health and safety of their workers and the people living near the project sites. Many of these projects have an outsized negative impact on working-class communities and people of color, who often also happen to face disenfranchisement in our political system. The American people need more honest representatives who will prevent this "thinly veiled attempt to rubberstamp permits for corporate polluters by rolling back NEPA environmental reviews." Everyone should have a voice in such matters.

One form of legalized corruption is the phenomenon known as regulatory capture. This is where powerful vested interests 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 big corporations, they insidiously circumvent common good plans and distort our national 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 and 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 in trying to prevent the cunning and damaging swindles. When intently-focused entities devote their energies to particular policies by 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 prevent the costly financial meltdown of 2008.

But after the Republican electoral coup took place on November 8, 2016, regulatory capture was exacerbated by a profoundly irresponsible takeover of the government itself, and of the management of regulatory agencies, by authority-abusing operatives who act as puppets of profit-prepossessed corporate 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 risk in this state of affairs is that it undermines fairness principles, the public health, 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, but, shamefully, the top two Republican priorities since January 2017 have been: first, to eviscerate the Affordable Care Act, causing millions of disadvantaged Americans to lose medical coverage, in order to eliminate a small tax on the investment income of wealthy people. Recognizing that gender inequities are among the harshest of all injustices in our patriarchal society, we should heed the perceptive understandings of Martin Luther King, Jr., who once famously declared that injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane of all forms of inequality. Injustices related to basic health care, pre-existing medical conditions and reproductive rights are particularly opprobrious to women, and they are just one aspect of a multitude of gender inequities, including many being exposed by aggrieved women through the #MeToo movement.

The second top Republican priority has been to give big tax breaks that overwhelmingly benefit those who don't need them, irresponsibly financed by borrowing huge amounts of money from every taxpayer in the future. Having already run up the national debt from less than \$1 trillion in 1981, when Ronald Reagan signed on to Arthur Laffer's ideological Big Lie trickle-down tax-cutting "supply side" economic theory, to \$23 trillion, we should chuckle derisively, but know well how consequentially this contributes to increased risk and adversity.

The vicissitudes of fate are fickle, so it is hubristic folly for the fortunate few to foist a Tough Luck political system onto the populace. It is unethical to forsake the vast majority of the people to rashly give wealthy elites ever-larger shares of the spoils of capitalist systems. Knowing that negative circumstances can befall anyone at any time, and that both accidents and diseases can afflict any person at any age, the only rational national plan for healthcare is one that provides medical care for everyone at an affordable price. Since it is simply true that, of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane, it is crazy to coddle profiteers and speculators by playing politics with health insurance, medical care, drug prices and lethal issues like opioid addiction and racially unjust mass incarceration. 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 cuts to the wealthiest 1% would have been a much better starting proposition for fair-minded tax reform. The smart 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 enabled by deeply corrupt politics and deceit, and through all but malicious abuses of power.

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 are much smarter -- "good debt" -- but bad debt that is incurred to finance profit-maximizing, resource-squandering, inequality-stoking, tax-cutting priorities is really 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 Donald Trump's 2018 State of the Union address. Those qualities of American character are inspiring, and are increasingly necessary in light of assaults by Republicans on unity, fairness, equality, the truth, the general welfare, women's rights, domestic tranquility and the prospects for sustainable existence.

When Ronald Reagan ran for office in 1980, he painted 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, and said, "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 Trump mounted the stage during 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, brazenly, "What do you have to lose?"

Then, in glaring contrast to Ronald Reagan's nod to values, the Master-Manipulator-in-Chief offered his solution. "I am your voice", he said. "I alone can fix it. I will restore law and order." He did not mention liberty or justice or inclusiveness or the ramifications of increasing inequality. 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 didn't ask for their help. He asked them to place faith in him. "Believe me, I'm trustworthy!", he basically boasted, despite many blazing warning signs from throughout his life that it has always been folly to trust him.

The truth of the matter is that Trump Republicans are a force for rigging the economic system ever more to the advantage of rich people and corporate entities, and against the common good and the best interests of people in future generations. After a long 36 months in office, the results are clear. The fix is in. To succeed in this gambit, Trump and swindling politicians have emulated the tactics of many demagogues throughout history by hijacking people's emotions, demonizing and scapegoating immigrants and asylum seekers, manipulatively deceiving people, exploiting popular prejudices, stoking fears, bearing false witness, promoting false claims, divisively using inflammatory rhetoric, and making arguments based on emotion rather than reason. They have done this to distract people from their scandalous activities with a constant barrage of outrageous tweets and stands on issues. They have been personally attacking and threatening opponents in order to zealously impose their twisted domineering control drives over the populace. They are doing this in greedily self-centered and 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 damaging the consequences will be.

Back in 2011, the then Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney smugly declared, "Corporations are people, my friend". I thought at the time, "Oh, is that so?" Well, let's call in the political economists, sociologists and historians, and 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 an American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* handy by his side. Corporations, he concluded, if regarded as people, would be seen as pathological sociopathic psychopaths, due to their typical behaviors and inherent tendencies. He cited convincing instances in which they act in ways that are manipulative, socially irresponsible and unempathetic,

and they seem to be almost incapable of guilt, remorse, moral rectitude or genuine responsibility for the greater good.

Joel Bakan emphasized the fact that big corporations are basically designed to socialize costs onto the public, declaring 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 that says the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees corporate entities the same rights of Due Process and Equal Protection as individuals. Lawyers assemble! Honest representatives?

Again, follow the money! Corporate profits are near all-time record highs right now, and yet corporations pay less than 9% of all federal tax revenue. This fact reveals a measure of the corrupt abuses of power by corporate entities, for there has been a drastic decline from 33% in 1950 of the portion of federal taxes paid by corporations. In effect, corporations have managed to get the taxes they pay reduced by more than 70%. Shareholders are getting bigger cuts of profits made by exploiting working people and using up Earth's natural resources, and damaging Earth's ecosystems and altering the global climate.

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

--- Mark Twain

Senator Kamala Harris expressed 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! We should 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 "conservatives" are sacrificing the common good to goose profits by allowing natural resources to be excessively exploited and letting businesses externalize costs onto the public, while at the same time broadly disempowering working people and eviscerating protective regulations, and recklessly pushing their agenda that primarily favors millionaires and billionaires.

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, possibly apocryphally, "Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it."

Several prominent national security experts have stated that Trump represents "a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States." Citing his demonstration of an "unbelievable acquiescence to Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, that was positively shocking to those of us who've worked in national security all of our lives" and "all the many things you've read about in the charging documents of people associated with the president, all those point to a reasonable inference, that, and it's a painful anguishing thing to acknowledge ... the President of the United States a clear and present danger to the national security."

"The Framers were concerned that a president could abuse his authority in ways that would undermine the democratic process and that could not wait to be addressed. So they created a mechanism for considering whether a president is subverting the rule of law or pursuing his own self-interest at the expense of the general welfare -- in short, whether his continued tenure in office poses a threat to the republic. This mechanism is impeachment." Trump's actions during his first three years in office "clearly meet, and exceed, the criteria to trigger this fail-safe." Trump should be found guilty in his impeachment trial, recognizing the brilliance of the observation made by Alexis de Tocqueville long ago, "The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults." The time has come to defend our Constitution and strengthen our democratic republic!

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 demagogic 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, rules of law and ethics, and the greater good of the people. Republican politicians are taking increasingly desperate stands to protect their illegitimate and excessively harsh rule against common sense judgments that call them to account for their insidious efforts to rig our system and engage in fiduciary irresponsibility, improper unethical actions, fraudulent indulgences and downright criminality. Mitch McConnell stands with Trump, both guilty.

The system is 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, Pulitzer Prize winning investigative journalist 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 2017 Republican Tax Cut folly can be understood by recognizing how our tax system really works, and his 2003 book explains this with clarity. Together, let's peruse *Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich - and Cheat Everybody Else*.

Fareed Zakaria made this interesting point: "The Republican Party has many good people and good ideas. But none of them matters while it houses and feeds fantasies, conspiracies and paranoia, tinged with racism, bigotry and anti-Semitism. Republicans are now squarely the party of McCarthy, and until that cancer is excised, they should not be entrusted with power."

A Focus on the Downsides of the Current Culture of Corruption in Washington D.C.

Lord Acton was a member of the British Parliament in the late 1800s who once famously wrote, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". The Founders of our great but faltering American experiment in democratic governance understood this basic political truth: this is why they created a Constitution that contained effective checks and balances to prevent corruption, despotism, demagogic abuses of power, self-dealing by politicians, and taxation without fair representation. Ever since the Constitution was ratified, there has been a broadly progressive evolution of laws, rights and protections that have helped make our democratic republic more providential in assuring the majority a fair modicum of liberty, justice and reasonable cause for being able to share in the American Dream of opportunity, equal treatment and fair dealings under the law.

The truth in Lord Acton's words are being revealed anew by impeachment investigators in the House of Representatives who are fulfilling the responsibility given to them in the Constitution to wield oversight over the Executive Branch and federal agencies. Despite stonewalling and conspiratorial cover-ups by Republican politicians, details of corrupt activities and foreign intrigue are coming to light about the malfeasance they have been scandalously engaged in, while exerting domineering One Party power in the executive and legislative branches of government. And when Special Counsel Robert Mueller's findings are coupled with the impeachable offenses being committed by the Trump administration, we see how Trump Republican politicians have abused their domineering power, and how honesty-deficient, unprincipled and corporate-kowtowing they are. This makes obvious the depth of wrongdoing and illegitimacy during the current crisis of reckoning that is engulfing our public sphere. Check out *See Clearly - Sanity During Insane Times: Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto* online for outstanding ideas and plans for how to sensibly deal with this!

Pope Francis notably condemned the "evil" of fake news in a first document by a Pope on the subject. "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", he wrote. Pulitzer Prize-winning Michiko Kakutani's book *The Death of Truth* explores this phenomenon in the age of Trump, and makes it sure seem like this is premeditated murder.

The phrase 'fake news' has been co-opted and its meaning has been perverted by the Deceiver-in-Chief, and now it is being used by authoritarian leaders around the world. According to the late 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 distorted sense of reality characterized as "fake news" are undercutting legitimate reporting to "strip activists of one of their most powerful tools of dissent."

Senator Jeff Flake delivered a landmark speech in the Senate in early 2018 to underscore the deleterious effects

of Trump's "sustained attack on the truth." The Arizona Republican began by quoting Daniel 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 -- 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." Jeff Flake deemed it "shameful" for Trump to use the term fake news and call the free press "the enemy of the people", and called Trump's repeated attacks on the media "repulsive". He declared that he "has it precisely backward," pointing out that despotism is the real enemy of the people, not a free press, for reporters and journalists are generally an enemy of despots and a guardian of democratic fair-mindedness. Jeff Flake also said 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."

With Donald Trump hating criticism so much that he characterizes the free press as "an enemy of the people", he is echoing the chilling phrase and tactics employed by the ruthless Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Fittingly, and in a curious parallel, Stalin was the subject of a pervasive personality cult, while the Cunning-Celebrity-in-Chief is the subject of a denialist cult of die-hard fundamentalist supporters. These enablers 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 extra \$100 million each, or so, on average, that the wealthiest 5,000 families in the USA are receiving annually. Even worse, it's ominous that this tax cut swindle is being financed by borrowing more money and piling it onto an increasingly risky level of national debt.

The Rand Corporation, a nonpartisan think tank, characterizes this issue as an epidemic of "truth decay" in which there is increasing disagreement about basic facts, and a blurring of the line between fact and opinion, and 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 immigration and anthropogenic climate change, because leaders cannot even agree on the nature of a problem.

The uncompromising domination of *We the People* by "conservatives" is not only profoundly unjust, but also exceedingly illegitimate. Since political legitimacy in a democracy is determined by the consent of the people, it is outrageous how illegitimate the litany of ways were that Republican politicians used to win their 2016 election campaigns, for they 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 big advantages by pandering to wealthy donors, and by gerrymandering congressional districts and suppressing the vote of millions of people, so that conservatives can gain an undeserved and undesirable over-representation.

Adding insult to injury, Trump Republicans have made treacherous use of social media by micro-targeting people on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, using ads that provoke people's anger and spread deceitful fake news and slanderous character assassinations. In the 2016 elections, they made extensive use of stolen Democratic Party documents obtained by hackers in Russia's foreign military intelligence agency (the GRU), and they released them through WikiLeaks to damage Hillary Clinton and Democratic politicians in favor of Donald Trump and Republican politicians. They crudely exploited people's emotions through these dastardly demagogic tactics, acting in deeply dishonest ways, propagating devious ideological propaganda and taking shrewd advantage of anti-immigrant, anti-choice, anti-gay and anti-gun-regulation sentiments. In other words, they are still using "God, guns and gays" strategies to divide people to gain and maintain power, like they did during the times of George W. Bush. And they continue to give more and 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 tax cuts mainly beneficial to their rich donors. They refuse to rein in corrupting influence of Big Money and corporations.

An integral aspect of the success of conservatives in seizing domineering control in the USA can be traced to another immoral and illegitimate tactic. This is the Republican Southern Strategy, which unscrupulously capitalizes on racial biases, especially in states of the South, to gain support and get elected. Then 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."

Hate has spread like an oil slick over our democracy, and the smothering reason is clear. As the recently convicted felon and diabolical Machiavellian dandy and self-proclaimed "dirty trickster" Roger Stone once stated, "Hate is a more powerful motivator than love." Stone has spent his life taking advantage of this human foible, and he encapsulates the whole Republican drive to gain power by any means whatsoever, no matter how unethical or immoral. He knows that dividing people is the easiest way to conquer them and oppress them, and he may be right about the power of hate to motivate the Trump base, but it is utterly unconscionable to milk this toxic vein so effectively, and without ethical constraints or any semblance of conscience.

In another view with regard to legitimacy, consider this. While 63 million people voted for Donald 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 a rude insult to the nation. It is notable that less than 60% of the estimated 250 million Americans who are eligible to vote actually cast a ballot in 2016, and about 75 million Americans are under the age of 18, so they are not old enough to vote. It is certain that the best interests of non-voters and young people are extraordinarily poorly represented by the Republican agenda.

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 illicitly usurped power through these dishonorable and unethical methods, they have broadly abused it to advance a radical anti-environmental, anti-egalitarian, fiscally irresponsible, oppressively discriminatory right-wing agenda.

Most of our leaders speak idealistically of democracy, freedom, liberty, justice and peace, but conservatives are mainly focused in actuality on forcefully pursuing policies designed to give them more power, dominating control, short-term profits, and unimpeded access to natural resources, markets and cheap labor.

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

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, family planning, 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 better reasons for hope. We need to cultivate the ability to better recognize what is best for us, 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 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 deep dismay toward today's era of materialistic

consumerism and kowtowing to those who despoil our home planet, and to the 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 for us to strive to make such a consequential difference!

Truly,
Tiffany Twain

Postscript, January 30, 2019

It is noteworthy that the Koch conclave of billionaire donors began to "rebrand itself as kinder, gentler and less political" at their January 2019 meeting in Indian Wells in the Southern California desert. The 634 wealthy donors in attendance all committed to give at least \$100,000 every year to push their goals. At this posh event, they emphasized the consequential contributions they have made to recent reforms of the U.S. criminal justice system, and to their support of efforts to improve public education, help disadvantaged people, support research on overcoming intolerance and find common ground on some issues.

They are laudably trying to demonstrate a greater modicum of empathy and concern for the vast majority of Americans, because they are aware of how successful they have been in their efforts to create an economically and politically unjust society that is extraordinarily beneficial to themselves at the expense of the majority of Americans. They see that their success is severely damaging our democracy, harmfully tearing our national unity asunder, preventing climate action that would help forestall catastrophic impacts of extreme weather events and rising sea levels on billions of people, and destroying the fabric of life on Earth.

But make no mistake about it, really rich people in the donor class are still acting as puppeteers in manipulating conservative politicians to do their bidding to get their taxes cut and regulations eliminated, and to prevent reforms of campaign financing. They are highly motivated to get our representatives to allow corporate lobbyists to continue to have undue influence on our national policies and priorities. They are wildly succeeding in their dastardly attempts to stack federal courts with right-wing judges who are predisposed to decide issues in their favor, against the common good.

By showing a degree of magnanimity, these fine rich folks are really just buying some token insurance policies against revolutionary strife that could dethrone them from their positions of domineering power and control. Their efforts to improve our system of public education, for instance, are skewed toward reinforcing libertarian ideologies and cementing in place the power and privileges of elite individuals.

Many progressives are dubious and skeptical of this Koch rebranding effort. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island wrote: "I'm not convinced by the Koch network's new charm offensive; nor should your readers be. Until we know how much the Kochs, and the 634 other mega-donors who joined them, are spending on dark-money campaigns to block action on climate change, undermine public unions, confirm obedient judges, and cut their own taxes by billions of dollars, we should view their latest PR effort as more obfuscation. ... If Charles Koch's top goal is 'uniting with people across the whole spectrum,' he should unite them around honest facts and science, not deceitful campaigns funded by dark money."

King Louis XVI was the last King of France before the monarchy was overthrown during the French Revolution, and if he had adopted "a kinder and gentler" image and some more fair-minded policies, and acted honestly to prevent the national debt from reaching such opprobrious levels, he and Marie Antoinette might have saved themselves from having had their heads lopped off by the guillotine. So the Koch billionaire donors are sensibly demonstrating a modicum of progressive fair-mindedness to save their own necks from the unfolding strife caused by the staunch refusal of really rich conservatives to support populist reforms like tax policies that significantly reduce the riskily rising disparities in wealth and well-being between the Few and the Many.