

Earth Manifesto



Tiffany Twain Tells a Tantalizing Tautological Truth

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It is a simple tautological truth that the vast majority of Americans will be significantly better off *ONLY* when the vast majority of Americans are actually significantly better off.

And the devil is in the details: "How the hell do we get our leaders to honestly work together to actualize this salubrious goal of really creating a healthier, saner and more inclusively equitable society?"

Right now, in the middle of another surge of out-of-control pandemic carnage, we can clearly see that to achieve this eminently salubrious goal, we must begin to honestly, comprehensively and fairly "build back better." This necessarily involves addressing the biggest and most stubborn challenges we face: improving public health and safety and dealing effectively with climate change, systemic racial and environmental injustices, extreme economic inequalities, and both abuses of political power and corrupting corporate abuses of influence.

What could possibly stand athwart this broadly beneficial and surpassingly positive, propitious and providential potential condition? Ah yes, rich people abusing the influence of their money and power, and privileged people taking excessive advantage of their great good fortune. In this, they are aided by religious fundamentalists who side with powerful people over the powerless and disenfranchised in pushing narrowly doctrinaire theological and temporal agendas. Shrewdly scheming politicians pander to these folks to satisfy their own selfish ambitions and greedy compulsions and strong drives to control others. So they treacherously defend the corruptly rigged systems that allow the proverbial Few to cheat and oppress the many more Many.

Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota believed that politics should NOT be solely about power, money and winning at any cost. He once said, "Politics is about the improvement of people's lives. It's about advancing the cause of peace and justice in our country and in the world." We should try to really make this happen! We need honorable public servants who will truly represent the best interests of constituents, not just those of big donors.

Professor Robert Reich provides excellent insights in his book *Supercapitalism* that tells us how to achieve such better ways forward. In general, the goals of businesses and consumers and investors have been given too much sway in our societies, and more vital "good citizenship goals" and long-term prosperity have been subordinated to greed and the narrowly-focused aims of special interest groups. Too much power is given to corporations and their CEOs to pursue benefits for themselves and the investors and speculators who get most of the spoils of their profit-obsessed goals. As a result, the compulsive drive to make money in the short-run wrongfully takes precedence over the common good and sustainable existence. This negatively affects working people and the well-being of most people in their communities, and the health of the environment as well.

These adverse outcomes are being promoted by means of shortsighted objectives and irresponsible political expediencies, fraudulent swindles, misleading economic measures, odd accounting gimmicks, and rulings like the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision that gives determinative influence to rich people and giant corporations by allowing unlimited campaign donations, often in secret. Corporate entities naturally invest some of the huge largess of Tax Cut policies into further legalized bribery to advance their greed-driven excessive profitability.

As we plan intelligently to build back better in recovering from the pandemic, we should accurately understand the world and ourselves to make sure we achieve this goal in safer, healthier and more sustainable ways. This is key to improving the quality of life, and informing and guiding our public policy decisions and priority setting.

The pandemic has sharpened our attention to our mortality and the fear of death, and has made people feel a contrasting increase in awareness of the potential pleasures of life. As John Fowles insightfully observed in *The Aristos*, "One consequence of our renewed awareness of death must be, and has been, an alarming growth of both national and individual selfishness, a Gadarene rush to enjoy the pleasures of the shops and senses before they close for ever, for it has not been the economic conditions that have fostered the current desire to spend and enjoy regardless of the historical situation, but ever more nakedly seen death that has created the tomorrow-we-die economic conditions." ... "Such terms as 'affluent society' and 'conspicuous consumption' are euphemisms, in the context of our poverty-stricken and starvation-ridden world, for selfishness."

Clear-Eyed Commentary

"The true rule, in determining to embrace, or reject any thing, is not whether it have any evil in it; but whether it have more of evil, than of good."

--- Abraham Lincoln

What specifically should we rightly do to responsibly remedy the problems we face today with our critically divided electorate and the wrongful provisions of our rigged economic and political system? To fix things, we should strengthen our democracy by making it more fairly representative. The top goals in a fairer democracy should be improved representation of all citizens and their needs. Accompanying this new direction, we should institute more effective anti-corruption measures, and make stronger efforts to reduce inequality by creating more broadly shared opportunities for education, good jobs, prosperity and well-being. Adequate controls on banking and stricter limitations on unacceptable corporate abuses of influence should also be put into place, as well as voting rights protection reforms like those passed by Democrats in the House with the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

And in the interests of all Americans under the age of 18, who cannot vote, and every one of those to be born in the future, the USA and every nation around the globe should ratify a Bill of Rights for Future Generations, as proposed in this manifesto. In addition, revolutionarily good plans should be put into effect as recommended in *One Dozen Big Initiatives to Positively Transform Our Societies*.

So, my fellow Americans: ask not how our economic system can be rigged to be of greater personal benefit to you, ask what you can do to help make our nation more broadly prosperous and fairer in the here and now, and how to ensure that our world will remain healthy and sustainable for generations to come. Let us hear the ringing of the bells of individual freedom and responsibility, and thereby support this overarching cause, seeing it to be just, for it should be clear for whom the bell tolls, and it tolls for all of us.

As vaccines against the coronavirus protect more and more people from the worst ravages of the miserable contagion's physical harms, it should be a top priority to make sure we actually do recover in ways that are smarter than the pre-pandemic status quo. Once the threat of contagious disease diminishes, people will no doubt begin trying to resume their "normal" lives. They will likely go back to indulging in mass consumerism and mass tourism with a profligate wave of spending on travel. That will probably mean that freeways and roadways and tourist destinations will be clogged with cars, rather than having much bigger subsidies for improved mass transit. Holidays like Christmas will once again feature spending large sums of money on conspicuous consumption and useless items and "time-saving gadgets", much of which will end up in landfills (like 99% of everything we buy does within 6 months of purchase). "Will we once again be persuaded by advertisers that consumerism is the way to happiness and social prestige?" (Probably, considering how seductive marketing is designed to be.)

A Riff on Visionary True Responsibility

"The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value."

--- Theodore Roosevelt, *Speech to the Colorado Live Stock Association, Denver, Colorado, August 19, 1910*

Humankind is converting natural resource assets into cash almost as fast as possible, and showing pathologically little restraint by hyper stimulating this profligate effort with record levels of debt stimulus. Recognizing this, one would be extraordinarily well justified in stating that we are treating our home planet like a highly vulnerable company targeted by predatory capitalists who run private equity firms that buy businesses using huge amounts of debt leveraging and then break them up, extracting huge fees and laying off employees to maximize profits on the amoral and empathy-deficient transaction. To compound the ecological insanity of destructive and depletionary schemes like this, private equity capitalists invest some of the Big Money proceeds they make on transactions like this to buy politicians and corrupt governments to get away with this scam while paying the smallest possible amount of tax on the rotten spoils they gain.

Consider this insight-revealing digression. One of the most outrageous and indefensible tax breaks in the U.S. tax code is the "carried interest provision" that allows a very few wealthy hedge fund managers and private equity moguls to pay low long-term capital gains rates of 15% on their profits, compared with 35% due for ordinary income in the top bracket. Barack Obama, during his first Presidential campaign, pledged to reform the tax on carried interest and, in 2012, went after Mitt Romney for having enjoyed its benefits as the co-founder of Bain Capital. Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump all attacked the loophole during the 2016 election campaign, often using hedge-fund managers as the rhetorical target. As Trump put it, "They're paying nothing, and it's ridiculous. ... These are guys that shift paper around and they get lucky."

With all the hyper partisan stands taken on issues that face us in the world today, including the climate crisis, gun safety issues, women's reproductive rights, immigration, and requiring mask wearing and getting vaccinated during the pandemic, it is revealing that tax laws are among the most politically determined laws of all, for they involve money and the top priority rich people place on paying low rates of tax. For anyone who might have ever wondered how it is possible that the American people have been unable to get rid of the "carried interest provision" of the tax code, which gives extremely high-earning private equity moguls lavishly generous loopholes for paying low tax rates on windfall profits, I heartily recommend reading all about it in the succinct, incisive and sensational story that Matt Taibbi told about Mitt Romney in his 2012 article *Greed and Debt: The True Story of Mitt Romney and Bain Capital -- How the GOP presidential candidate and his private equity firm staged an epic wealth grab, destroyed jobs -- and stuck others with the bill.*

One measure of the political corruption in government excessively influenced by moneyed interests is found in a bombshell report published by the US Treasury that revealed the richest 1% of Americans are getting away with not paying \$163 billion they owe in taxes each year. This state of affairs has been facilitated by funding cuts for the IRS of almost 20% over the last decade, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. As a consequence, the IRS lost more than 33,000 employees between 2010 and 2020, including those that audit returns and collect unpaid taxes. These cuts resulted in the IRS auditing fewer than 2 out of every 100 taxpayers earning more than \$1 million in 2020.

Due to the IRS being so underfunded and understaffed, millionaires are far less likely to be audited than they used to be. "Just collecting all unpaid taxes from the richest 1% would generate at least \$1.75 trillion over the next decade." As inequality has exploded, our unjust tax system has simultaneously allowed the richest Americans to finagle their way out of paying billions of dollars in taxes each year. Funding for the IRS to beef up enforcement would help collect unpaid taxes from the richest Americans, and it would be an excellent investment, because every additional \$1 of IRS funding yields \$3 of tax revenue, mostly from the very rich who illegally avoid paying taxes owed. Conservatives, of course, are zealous to give a million dollars to every billionaire but opposed to giving \$100 to the neediest.

A Profoundly Perplexing Existential Paradox

A perplexing paradox confronts humanity in the world today. We rely on instinctive impulses and conditioned habits that motivate us to consume and use up natural resources with little regard for the sustainability of these resources to provide for the needs of people in the future. Our growth-addicted capitalist economic system relies on marketing-stoked desires and materialistic compulsions that are destroying habitats, wiping out native wildlife, depleting mineral and fresh water resources, and driving many species of life toward eternal extinction. At the

same time, we are allowing many costs of pollution, toxins, waste and ecological damages to be foisted upon the providential commons. In addition, our biological drive to reproduce is becoming a Faustian bargain with the devil, because many people want to have unlimited freedom to have children, whether or not they can afford to raise them, and irrespective of natural limits on the carrying capacity of Earth's natural ecosystems to support our burgeoning human numbers and expanding needs.

Henk Ovink, a Dutch climate-change guru, says that planning for climate change requires a sweeping societal transformation -- in personal habits, in the way cities are planned, in the resources we extract, transport and exploit, and in the politics of energy. There is a paradox here too, in that climate action demands a combination of both urgency and patience. "We have no time to waste, but we also have to think in terms of generations to come. Cultural change never comes overnight."

Caged canaries were carried into coal mines for many years to serve as early warning systems to alert miners of dangerous buildups of methane or carbon monoxide that could kill workers in underground mines. Today, scientists are symbolically serving as similar early indicators of dangerous conditions by warning us of great dangers associated with deteriorating conditions on Earth caused by uncontrolled emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Something like 97% of all climate scientists agree that climate change poses far-reaching risks, and the other 3% are generally being paid by well-funded interest groups to sow doubt about this issue. Astonishingly, more than one-third of Americans are said to believe there is some doubt that our rash burning of fossil fuels is creating ever-more costly natural disasters and proliferating future risks. It is as if these doubters believe that the temperature in a greenhouse might actually be cooler than the temperature outside it. We should heed scientific warnings, not deny them -- this is a moral imperative!

Senator Whitehouse Weighs In

Rhode Island Senator Sheldon Whitehouse tells us, "Wake Up!" Senator Whitehouse made his 100th weekly speech in the Senate on the issue of climate change on May 18, 2015, decrying "the sophisticated scheme of denial being conducted by the polluters." Here are some of the incisive observations he made at that time:

Climate change tests us. First, it is an environmental test, a grave one. We will be graded in that test against the implacable laws of science and nature. Pope Francis has described a conversation with a humble gardener who said to him: "God always forgives. Men, women, we forgive sometimes. But creation never forgives."

There are no do-overs, no mulligans -- not when we mess with God's laws of nature. Behind nature's test looms a moral test. Do we let the influence of a few wealthy industries compromise other people's livelihoods, even other people's lives, all around the planet and off into the future?

It is morally wrong, in greed and folly, to foist that price on all those others. That is why Pope Francis is bringing his moral light to bear on climate change, and to quote him: "There is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act." Our human morality is being tested.

Anybody who is paying attention knows those special interests are lying. Anybody paying attention knows they are influence-peddling on a monumental scale. And while the polluters have done their best to hide that their denial tentacles are all part of the same denial beast, people all over who are paying attention have figured it out. "If you are a Senator who is not sure climate change is real, manmade and urgent, ask your home State University. Even in Kentucky. Even in Oklahoma."

Dr. Riley Dunlap of Oklahoma State University assessed the "organized climate-denial machine." He found that nearly 90 percent of climate-denial books published between 1982 and 2010 had ties to conservative fossil fuel-funded think tanks, such as the Heartland Institute. In other words, it is a scam.

One day, there will be a reckoning. There always is. If we wake up, if we get this right, if we turn that ponderous balance of destiny in our time, then it can be their reckoning, and not all of ours.

Anthropogenic climate disruption is happening across the globe, and Pope Francis has been outspoken in saying that climate change will "affect all of humanity, especially the poorest and future generations. What's more, it represents a serious ethical and moral responsibility." So we need to responsibly embrace a forward-looking

movement to change the dangerously retrograde aspects of the status quo. Interestingly, social and political change doesn't take place as a steady and incremental process, but instead it proceeds through a kind of punctuated equilibrium of relatively long periods of stability, interrupted by sudden bursts of rapid change that are "catalyzed by disruptions in pre-existing systems". This is what Paul Hawken called *Blessed Unrest*.

Such destabilizing developments create instability that can shatter conventional ways of doing things, often freeing up resources and leading to fundamental reorganizations of economic, social and livelihood systems. Natural disasters like floods and droughts can be a form of powerful impulse for change. In the aftermath of a natural disaster, people are much more aware of risks they face and factors contributing to their vulnerability, so the physical and social disruption that disasters bring often upsets the entrenched status quo. Economic, social and political systems then come under greater scrutiny for putting people at risk, and greater pressure arises for underlying risks to be dealt with fairly. Also, an influx of disaster relief assistance can provide necessary resources to facilitate changes that would be impossible under normal circumstances. Thus, disasters and crises provide a window of opportunity during which real social change can occur. (Why wait for calamity?!)

A Square Deal, A New Deal, and A Bad Deal

Decades after Theodore Roosevelt advocated a fair *Square Deal*, President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented a *New Deal* that established a social security safety net for people in the wake of capitalism's disastrous speculative excesses of the 1920s and the subsequent severe Depression. In contrast, Ronald Reagan offered the American people what was effectively a *Bad Deal*, in which he radically stimulated inequalities by enacting changes in taxation that gave rich people significantly more after-tax income. He packaged this scam in shining rhetoric and freedom-ringing ideological narratives, but history is proving that his tax-cutting initiatives were sold with deceptive and erroneous rationalizations, and are leading to unsustainable debt and damages to the prospects of the average person in our country. Then a decade ago, the Tea Party offered Americans *No Deal*, trying to shut down the government and threatening to default on our national debt obligations and refusing to compromise on almost every issue. With the advent of the "Freedom Caucus" in the House of Representatives and then the chaos-engendering election of Trump, the American people in our "post-truth" political world were told they were going to be given a *Great Deal*, but the devil is in the details, and the reality is that Republicans gave us a disastrous and deadly *Rotten Deal*, especially with respect to public health and the environment.

Mark Summer, a "Lefty Blogger" for Daily Kos, contended that beginning in "the time of Newt Gingrich," Republicans "realized they could simultaneously weaken the government, complain about the failure of programs they had just sabotaged, and create a perpetual-motion machine of government destruction ... Republicans [would] take on anything, no matter how insane, so long as it kept dragging the conversation ever rightward."

This point of view has a visceral ring of truth to it, making it crazy that huge amounts of money will be given to support Republican politicians due to the fact that Congress has abjectly failed to enact fair-minded campaign finance reform and voting rights guarantees -- and due to the wrongly-decided Supreme Court ruling by partisan conservatives that gives Big Money domineering and blatantly corrupt influence on our national politics.

Recognizing and Rejecting Ploys from the Demagogue's Playbook

To achieve the desirable state of dramatically improving the general welfare of the American people, we need to unite against the scheming politicians who are benefiting so outlandishly, irresponsibly, unethically, unsustainably and immorally by engaging in devious and harmful divide-to-conquer strategies. Bottom line, they are betraying the public trust and sacrificing the common good for the inimical purpose of dominating and controlling people.

We see how calamitous it has been for us to let leaders grab control who fail to demonstrate more honest and honorable concern for their citizens and the world, and our societies, cultures and the environmental commons that sustains us.

We see how negative the impacts are of having "leaders" who indulge in generously rewarded influence peddling, and who oppose reforms and common sense progress, and who facilitate public corruption and abuse authority, and who congenitally lie to us and evade every effort made to hold them accountable.

It is particularly irksome that "conservative" leaders exert so much control through a long litany of illegitimate and

dishonest means, and that they dangerously indulge in cult-follower-enabled fear-mongering rabble-rousing demagoguery. Disturbingly, they emotionally hijack their duped followers, who are too easily swayed by self-serving untruths and persuasive propaganda and the promulgation of manipulative misinformation and dastardly divisive disinformation. And they act as Trojan Horse traitors against the vast majority of Americans in their zeal to pander to the rich, and to cling desperately to power.

We are seeing how pathological the success of fomented division turns out to be, with its incited polarization and agitated partisan rancor. And when those who benefit from division start inciting violence instead of striving to cooperatively solve the big problems we face, they upset domestic tranquility -- in effect torpedoing social cohesion and the great Golden Rule principle of treating others fairly and seeking to coexist peaceably.

The American people would be much better off if our representatives demonstrated integrity by investing in desirable greater good goals, and ignored the bullhorns of the treacherous abusers of power who demand that they be allowed to continue to maintain their opprobrious monopoly on domineering political influence.

Let's choose our national policies and priorities in accordance with the smart precept that we invest in common sense progressive principles. For instance:

(1) Invest in the *Common Good, Properly Understood* -- "good citizen goals" -- rather than in expanded special privileges for the few, and power usurped by minority factions.

(2) Provide more generous funding for programs that improve the general welfare, instead of using public debt to finance big Tax Cut giveaways to the top dogs. Pass legislation to amend the 2017 Republican Tax Cuts swindle so as to reverse every penny of benefit given to those in the top 1%, for they have already been making out like bandits for decades from taxpayer-financed tax cuts on the highest levels of income that were enacted by Republicans under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

(3) Dedicate our nation to social justice rather than increased inequalities and the defense of the domination of our government by industry. And take steps to dramatically reduce the overwhelming influence of white males in both government and Big Business.

(4) Invest in a rapid transition to an increasing use of renewable energy sources, rather than costly indulgences in continuing to burn fossil fuels that are destabilizing the global climate. We should stop allowing corporations to increase private profits by abusing influence to get "conservative" politicians to allow them to externalize so many costs onto the public. The most sensible and sustainable course of action is to invest in clean energy rather than stimulating fossil fuel use through perverse incentives and rash subsidies. At the same time, we should take stronger steps to protect public lands and the environmental commons.

One powerful way to tackle the climate crisis would be to end the flow of money to fossil fuel development. In the last 5 years alone, the world's 60 biggest banks have put something like \$4 trillion of financing into fossil fuels. A new bill in Congress, the Fossil Free Finance Act, would require the Federal Reserve to use its power and exercise its responsibility to make big banks align their financing with science-based emission targets and obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement. Demand that it be enacted!

(5) Improve public education rather than subsidizing private schools for the fortunate. Young people are being treated unacceptably shabbily by our "conservative" leaders, so give greater priority to THEIR best interests.

(6) Seek and ratify peace initiatives rather than spending such a god-awful amount on poorly controlled military expenditures every year.

(7) Reform our economic system and strengthen our democracy to create greater democratic fairness, and reject policies and priorities that discriminate against women, people in racial minorities and the poor.

(8) Strengthen voting rights and pass criminal justice reform rather than letting the status quo of harsh drug laws and systemic racism persist in our *Incarceration Nation*.

(9) Protect *Roe vs. Wade* reproductive rights rather than allowing evangelical conservatives to deprive women of their rights to decide whether or not to carry a fertilized egg for nine months, no matter how begotten.

The Corporate Triumph over Working People

Donald Trump is a con man. He told voters that he would 'protect' and 'fight for' workers, but once in power he only made weak pretenses to do so. Instead, his administration systematically did the opposite, and the pandemic provided the administration another opportunity to continue its attacks on workers' rights. Rather than fairly instituting policies to protect the nation's "essential workers", the administration remained largely silent on workplace safety standards, and refused to issue new ones or even enforce the old ones to protect workers against terrible threats posed by the contagious coronavirus. Doctors, nurses and caregivers have been especially harshly affected, along with farm workers and people working in meat-processing plants.

A report from the Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank, provided a review of the Trump administration's 50 most egregious attacks on working people. This analysis revealed that Trump's chaotic tenure was marked by a clear commitment to advancing a pro-corporate and anti-worker agenda. These 50 ways that Trump and his administration and Republicans in Congress worked against the best interests of workers included engaging in persistent efforts to take away health care from tens of millions of workers, failing to act to protect the health of workers on the job during the pandemic, trying to prevent increases in minimum wages, preventing millions of workers from receiving overtime pay, proposing a rule that would lower the earnings of tipped workers, and issuing guidance that allowed states to deny unemployment insurance benefits to workers who refused to return to unsafe jobs. Trump temporarily suspended funding for Social Security, and opposed adequate fiscal stimulus during the pandemic, and excluded millions of workers from paid leave provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (including 9 million health care workers and 4.4 million first responders). And Republican Senators rammed through appointments of numerous anti-labor judges onto federal courts, and made it a top priority to satisfy the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's anti-worker wish list and its lobbying efforts to weaken the ability of employees to organize with co-workers to bargain collectively for better pay and benefits from their employers.

The Trump administration also persisted in attempts to end protections for Dreamers, and it suspended the issuance of green cards, pushed to lower wages for migrant farm workers, obstructed workers' right to fair union elections, decreased workplace safety inspections, allowed the misclassification of gig workers to deprive them of paid benefits, repealed a requirement that employers report workplace injuries and illnesses, and reduced collective bargaining rights of federal workers. And all too often, it continued to encourage the offshoring of jobs to lower wage countries that have fewer labor protections and environmental safeguards.

Trump gave angry American workers a deeply misleading prescription for how to fix the loss of manufacturing jobs, for most of them have been lost to computers and machines, not people in countries like Mexico and China. It is noteworthy that American manufacturers produce twice as much as they did in 1984, but with one-third fewer workers, according to Thomas Friedman. Trump declared that we should build walls and increase trade barriers, in addition to giving huge tax breaks to the rich, but Thomas Friedman expressed a convincing and diametrically opposed opinion about a much better course of action during the first year of the pandemic: "The smartest thing we can do now is to keep our economy as open and flexible as possible -- to get the change signals first and be able to quickly adapt; create the opportunity for every American to engage in lifelong learning, because whatever jobs emerge will require more knowledge; make sure that learning stresses as much of the humanities and human interactive skills as hard sciences; make sure we have an immigration policy that continues to attract the world's most imaginative risk-takers; and strengthen our safety nets, because this era will leave more people behind."

Abraham Lincoln once purportedly stated (possibly attributed apocryphally): "... I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As a result of the (Civil) war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands, and the Republic is destroyed." It is our shared responsibility to come together to reject today's Trump Republican efforts to strengthen corrupting corporate power.

Candidate Trump promised to fix the "rigged system" and "drain the swamp" in Washington D.C., but once in office it turned out that this promise was one of the biggest political bait-and-switch schemes that has ever been

perpetrated. Not only did he fill his Cabinet with billionaire donors, Wall Street bankers, corporate CEOs, unqualified partisans, treacherous schemers and extreme right-wing conservatives, but his agenda in many ways represented a double-cross of his rural white supporters. Instead of standing up for the health, well-being and best interests of those supporters and the vast majority of the American people, Trump Republicans gave huge debt-financed tax cuts to corporations and rich people, and rolled back remedial Wall Street reforms. They undermined the healthcare system, unsuccessfully sued in the Supreme Court to end Affordable Care, and attacked consumer rights and the collective bargaining rights of working people. And they acted to gut regulations that protect clean fresh water supplies and the atmosphere, land and climate.

This is a disastrously sad state of affairs, and a pathetic testament to the betrayal of the American people by 'conservatives' on tax issues that egregiously favor the rich, and on trade deals that primarily promote the interests of multinational corporations at the expense of the majority of the people. The overheated pressure cooker of social unrest could easily be made much less dangerous by turning down the heat under the pot of injustices and discord. Instead, we should seek common ground in relatively small investments in equitable social insurance policies like higher minimum wages, improved public education, truer national security, and greater domestic tranquility. To finance these social goods, a more progressive tax structure is needed.

A main reason that the American people have not been able to unite over common good goals is that conservative politicians have been "doing whatever it takes to win" in recent years, as if any means whatsoever are justified to accomplish self-centered narrow ends. Professor Robert Reich analyzed the exceedingly high cost of this prevailing ethos in the U.S. in an October 2016 article *The High Price of Winning at Any Cost*.

Reich pointed out that two observers from the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute trace the beginning of this divisive hyperpolarized scorched-earth strategy to Newt Gingrich back when he was Speaker of the House in 1995. The Republican Party under Gingrich became "ideologically extreme, scornful of compromise, dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition and unmoved by conventional understandings of facts, evidence and science." This stance betrayed the public's trust in government and decimated their hopes for good governance. Corporate leaders, too, have pursued consequentially harmful courses of action in order to benefit at the public expense. They have been able to continue doing so "thanks" to laissez-faire politicians.

These trends have gotten much worse over the years, creating a "vicious cycle of public distrust," wrote Professor Reich. "Leadership of our nation's major institutions is not just about winning. It's also about making these institutions stronger and more trustworthy." It time for us to work together to actualize common good goals and to reject the powerful divisive forces that keep us from achieving such auspicious priorities. We need stronger and more trustworthy institutions! Instead, the dangerous and highly detrimental influence of Trump Republicans has wielded dominating minority influence, enabled by Mitch McConnell and his corrupt cabal of Republican U.S. Senators. This has made a tragic travesty of civil discourse, honesty, rational thinking and fair-mindedness. And when it comes to grace in conceding to having become a big loser in the 2020 election, Trump has shown himself to be one of the worst and most treacherous losers ever. This is a titanic failing.

Conservatives Without Conscience

John Dean, the White House Counsel under Republican president Richard Nixon, penned a scathing portrayal in 2006 of the authoritarian impulses of conservatives in his book *Conservatives Without Conscience*. Dean provided illumination by examining the conservative movement's inner circle of leaders at the time, along with its policies and mind-set. He identified the movement as being fundamentally authoritarian, and pointed out abuses of power, and emphasized "the striking authoritarian character of contemporary conservative beliefs, attitudes and prejudices, and how these are expressed in policy and practice." He also conveyed a revealing portrait of leaders who do not honor "the founding principles of liberty and equality, and who cloak their actions in moral superiority while pushing the country further and further from its constitutional foundations."

Dean asserted that conservatism has been co-opted by people with authoritarian personalities and plans, and cited the perspectives of scholar Bob Altemeyer. "According to Dean, modern conservatism, specifically in the Christian Right, embraces obedience, inequality, intolerance and strong intrusive government." This stance stands in stark contrast to the philosophies and policies advocated by conservative politicians like Barry Goldwater, who was John

Dean's personal role model. "Using Altemeyer's scholarly work, he contends that there is a tendency toward ethically questionable political practices when authoritarians are placed in positions of power, and that the current (in 2006) political situation is dangerously unsound because of it."

"Dean cites the behavior of key members of the Republican leadership, including George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Tom DeLay, Newt Gingrich and Bill Frist as clear evidence of a relationship between modern right-wing conservatism and this authoritarian approach to governance. He places particular emphasis on the abdication of checks and balances by the Republican Congress, and of the dishonesty of the conservative intellectual class in support of the GOP, as a result of the obedience and arrogance innate to the authoritarian mentality."

"Regrettably, empirical studies reveal that authoritarians are frequently enemies of freedom, anti-democratic, anti-equality, highly prejudiced, mean-spirited, power hungry, Machiavellian, and amoral."

The right-wing agenda makes it clear that freedom is a fragile thing, and that demagoguery, dishonesty and misrule are threats to our personal liberties, security and overall well-being. John Dean's understandings in *Conservatives Without Conscience* were extraordinarily prescient in light of the rise of Trump and Trumpism.

In 2007, John Dean wrote *Broken Government: How Republican Rule Destroyed the Legislative, Executive and Judicial Branches*. In this book, Dean built on *Worse Than Watergate* and *Conservatives Without Conscience* to argue that the Republican Party has gravely damaged all three branches of the federal government in the service of ideological rigidity, with little regard given to the public interest or the general good. John Dean concluded that conservatism must regenerate itself to remain true to its core ideals of limited government and respect for the rule of law.

One of the most egregious instances of activities that conservatives without conscience engage in is the brainwashing of millions of Americans into believing trickle-down economic ideologies that serve to concentrate wealth into the hands of the few, at the expense of the many, because this undermines the general welfare and proves to be contrary to the common good and the fundamental tenets of democracy itself.

John F. Kennedy made an incisive observation about public opinion: "For the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie -- deliberate, contrived and dishonest -- but the myth -- persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought."

After four long and terribly chaotic years, Trump was finally fired, and he has narcissistically refused to concede, making baseless claims of widespread voter fraud and attacking the integrity of our U.S. elections. Republican efforts to maintain their monopoly on power are being thwarted, and criminal acts are being investigated. Right now we need better guidance and governance. One of Donald Trump's most brazen efforts to undermine democracy was to claim that voting my mail is rife with fraud, and to insist on the completely baseless idea that the November 2020 election was stolen from him.

It would be an ultimate folly to allow progress and reform to be stymied by an intransigent U.S. Senate ruled by Mitch McConnell, the self-proclaimed "grim reaper" of progressive legislation. For this reason, I appealed to voters in Georgia to elect Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff in the January 5, 2021 runoff elections, and was gratified that voters succeeded in this consequential effort. In all future elections, I urge voters to likewise choose the more honest, honorable, fair-minded and progressive candidates.

What we need is a "political revolution" that favors the 99% of Americans. What we got with the Trump regime was a reactionary political revolution that drastically exacerbated inequalities and made injustices dangerously worse. The politicians that foisted this revolting state of affairs on our country often recite a mantra of "jobs, jobs, jobs", but they use a range of deceitful schemes to gain power (and abuse it) by preying on the fears, insecurities and resentments of a large swath of the people, without offering truly beneficial policy proposals, plans, initiatives or remedial legislation.

Most revolutions are not caused by revolutionaries, but by stupidity and brutality of rulers. P.J. O'Rourke once provocatively stated: "Authority has always attracted the lowest elements in the human race. All through history mankind has been bullied by scum. Those who lord it over their fellows and toss commands in every direction and

would boss the grass in the meadows about which way to bend in the wind are the most depraved kind of prostitutes. They will submit to any indignity, perform any vile act, do anything to achieve power."

Betrayals

Poet, writer and civil rights activist Maya Angelou famously once wrote, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

Here are truths I find to be all but self evident. Trump Republicans have become violators of the public trust, the common good and democracy itself. How are they doing this?

They betray *Core Values of Democracy* by putting public health and safety far below their political interests in grabbing power and wielding ruthless control over the lives, fortunes and well-being of the people.

They betray the American people by corrupting government to favor capitalists over workers, and rich people over poor people, and they sabotage "power to the people" by giving determinative influence to corporations.

They betray all people everywhere by siding with fossil fuel industries and obstructing sensible efforts to prevent the destabilization of the global climate.

They betray the *Common Good, Properly Understood* by pushing an agenda that is detrimental to the vast majority of people alive today. This agenda is also pathologically harmful to all to be born in future generations.

They undermine the health and sustainability of the environmental commons by facilitating assaults against the natural world, and against balance in natural ecosystems and the diversity of life on Earth.

Republicans betray the people by putting Party over Country, and personal political advantages over their Country and oaths to the Constitution. They do this in their stands for ever-expanding rich privilege, and in their persistent attempts to block progressive reforms designed to achieve democratic fairness, social justice, fiscal responsibility, social cohesion, and truer and more expansive and inclusive liberties. And it is a betrayal of our democracy to show blind loyalty to Trump and his lies about the 2020 election having been stolen from him.

They betray the American people by abandoning moderation and embracing a lunatic fringe and shamefully claiming that the MAGA mob that attacked the Capitol were engaging in "legitimate political discourse" Images prove otherwise. They lie when they deny the insurrection was planned or incited, or when they claim it was led by "antifa" rather than a radicalized mob of Oath Keepers, Proud Boys and other white supremacists, Neo Nazis, QAnon zealots and other saboteurs of democracy.

They betray the majority of Americans by giving debt-financed tax cuts mainly to the already wealthy, even though in doing so they unfairly obligate every taxpayers in every future year to pay for this generosity. They act fiscally irresponsibly in this mortgaging national debt swindle that gives gargantuan benefits to the rich and wrongly drives an increasing concentration of money and power in the hands of the few.

They obstruct democratic fairness, thereby undermining equality, egalitarian values, expansive inclusivity and more equitable national policies and priorities.

They betray liberty and justice for all by broadly discriminating against women and Blacks and Latinos, and by perpetuating white male supremacy and systemic racism against people of color, and structural gender discrimination that broadly disadvantages females. Black lives certainly don't matter as much as white lives, the way things are, and fair steps should be taken to redress this pathetic situation.

They betray the greater good by engaging in corrupt Big Money campaign financing and pay-to-play politics. In buying and selling influence, Republicans have deeply corrupted both federal and state governments. It was the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling in January 2010 that helped facilitate Big Money abuses of power, and we should understand the incisive dissent expressed by Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens from that wrongly decided system-corrupting decision: "A democracy cannot function effectively when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold." The same is true when citizens see Republicans stack the Supreme Court and federal appeals courts with politically partisan judges and conniving knee-jerk "conservatives" who often disregard the general well-being of the majority in the partisan rulings they make.

They betray fairly representative government by using voter suppression tactics and gerrymandering and the 2020 sabotaging of the U.S. Postal Service to slow voting-by-mail, and by spreading disinformation, using partisan dirty tricks, and enacting racist voting restrictions in their cunning attempts to persuade tens of millions of Americans that their agenda is best, even though it perpetuates the rigging of the economy in favor of corporations and profiteers, contrary to the best interests of working people and the common good.

Republicans betray the people by having fooled a large proportion of the populace to enable them to usurp power, and then acting to dominate the people by imposing their exclusionary narrow-minded control over them.

They betray the people by persistently telling monumentally Big Lies about prosperity trickling down, and claiming they are trying to improve the general welfare while they mortgage and diminish the future.

Republicans betray Main Street businesses in their zeal to give greater advantages to Wall Street interests, and they work against good governance and honest accountability.

They betrayed our allies in democratic countries like Germany, France and Scandinavian countries when they let Trump demonstrate allegiance to an axis of power-abusing authoritarian leaders that included Vladimir Putin in Russia, Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, Recep Erdogan in Turkey and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

They gain power by dividing people, instead of trying to unite them in common cause. One of their main strategies is to scapegoat immigrants, betray Dreamers and treat refugees cruelly. The Trump administration even separated children from their parents in horrendous border camps, and used this unconscionable treatment and scandalous efforts to hide it to divert attention and blame from the negative outcomes of their malfeasance, incompetence and pandemic turpitude.

They and their divisive co-conspirators on Fox News weaponize lies, deceit and false conspiracy disinformation, and twist the truth by acting as emotion-hijacking rabble rousers against Democrats, progressives, liberals, women, immigrants, reformers, corruption fighters and disenfranchised people.

Nonetheless, Good Hope Persists

Hope lies in honorable patriotic allegiance to the great values set forth in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution -- striving for unity, establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the national defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing blessings of liberty to ourselves and those in posterity.

In the context of the values crucial to civilized society, right-wing conservatism is wrong. The moral good is essentially those things that are consistent with the common good and the greater good of the group. Rashly reactionary doctrinaire conservatives generally side with economic elitists, and are anti-democratic in favoring the few over the many. An unfortunate adjunct aspect of this concocted extreme of unfairness is that they champion policies that are authoritarian and oppressive to keep the many in their subjugated place.

Conservative satirist P.J. O'Rourke once wrote: "The Republicans are the party that says government doesn't work and then they get elected and prove it." He made this satirical statement in the early 1990s, and today it is clear that Trump Republicans pose a much bigger threat to democracy and overall well-being than merely a group who proves government does not work.

They prove how susceptible our great 245-year-old democracy is to demagoguery, despotism and corruption. Our Founding Fathers warned us that eternal vigilance is required to keep our democratic republic safe from tyranny.

So what has become of us? Distracted by our devices and overwhelming overloads of polarizing propaganda and pervasive advertising and microtargeted misinformation on social media -- and deceived by profiteers and coldly calculating demagogues -- we dumbly allowed a civilian coup to take place right under our noses. Millions of Americans have died defending our country from threats from abroad, and yet insidious subversion from within allowed a group of scheming swindlers in the Trump regime to grab power and flagrantly abuse it by imposing an unethical, dishonorable and extremely inequitable agenda on the people. This cruel agenda contributed to the sacrifice of "essential workers", and countless thousands of Americans who have died as a result of the cunning politicizing of precautionary health measures during the pandemic.

The U.S. Government Service Code of Ethics

People deserve to have confidence and faith in their government. Representative democracies governed by a Constitution and rules of law offer the best hope for helping assure such a state, and are thus vastly preferable to regimes that illegitimately abuse power and peddle influence.

To understand the depths of ethical rot that is subverting our democracy from within, it is valuable to understand the stipulations made in *Fourteen Principles of Ethical Conduct for Federal Employees* that President George H.W. Bush signed in Executive Order 12674. To summarize, this ethical code of conduct, which is now part of the Code of Federal Regulations, requires any person in government service to demonstrate "loyalty to the highest moral principles and to country". Among these 14 Principles are:

Public service is a public trust; employees must place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain. Employees shall not use public office for private gain.

Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.

Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.

Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.

Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all financial obligations, especially those imposed by law, such as Federal, state or local taxes.

Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.

Employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards set forth in the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

This Code of Ethics has been broadly abrogated by many federal government employees, especially in the Trump administration. Far too many members of the corrupt culture in the Trump administration, and Republican politicians in Congress, get a flagrant "F" for their overall conduct and performance.