

Earth Manifesto



The Sixteen Worst Ways that Powerful People Abuse Power, And How to Protect the People from Eviscerating Harms

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Those who abuse Big Money influence and push a deregulated hegemony of corporate power over the best interests of the people create conditions that are unacceptably detrimental to the *Common Good, Properly Understood*. Knowing how outlandishly powerful people usurp and abuse power, it behooves us to gain a clearer understanding of how best to re-institute responsible and ethical good governance.

Trump Republicans have been radically abusing power ever since they succeeded in illegitimately usurping it through a long litany of unscrupulous tactics in the 2016 elections. Let's give close attention to these abuses of power, for they are a drastic expansion of what has been going on for decades, and have become particularly ominous hallmarks of authoritarian one-party dominance of the federal government since Donald Trump was inaugurated on January 20, 2017.

(1) Republicans are championing corporate and banking power and strengthening the power elite by fostering an excessively close collaboration between Big Business and the federal government. Trump has appointed a hard-right Cabinet of loyal sycophants who have gutted many protections of public lands and reversed climate action commitments and made it easier for giant corporations to externalize costs onto society in order to artificially increase private profits. One especially egregious instance of this abuse of power is found in the pandering stance toward Wall Street tycoons that allows them to evade paying large amounts of tax by preventing the "carried interest" loophole from being closed that lets wealthy investment bankers pay tax rates on their huge incomes that are lower than rates paid by working people in the middle class on their much more meager incomes.

(2) Conservative interest groups undermine the power of working people by disempowering labor unions and rights of workers to bargain collectively for better treatment, and by opposing minimum wage laws, and overtime pay for overtime work, and equal pay for women.

(3) Republicans utilize a wide variety of unscrupulous actions to effectively make elections fraudulent so that they can gain, maintain and consolidate power. To get support and accomplish these goals, they use demagogic fear-mongering and the scapegoating of immigrants and religious minorities, and they bully and intimidate critics. They rally supporters into a patriotic frenzy over foreign terrorists, yet ignore domestic right-wing terrorists that Trump is inciting to violence, like the Ku Klux Klan, the Proud Boys and idiotic believers in QAnon conspiracy theories. They nefariously portray immigrants, refugees, poor people and liberals as enemies. They also engage in foundational abuses of power by working to restrict voter turnout in states governed by Republican majorities, and by gerrymandering Congressional districts into contorted boundaries to get a disproportionate number of Republicans elected to the House of Representatives. They stack state and federal courts with partisan ideological conservatives who will go along with legislative efforts to allow Big Money and secretive *Dark Money* to further corrupt our economic and political systems. And they refuse to even consider needed democracy reforms passed by the House of Representatives in H.R.1 that would make elections fairer, freer and more genuinely representative.

(4) One of the most egregious abuses of Trump Party power is in the consequential arena of the federal judiciary. Through the treacherous machinations of the self-proclaimed "grim reaper" Mitch Mc Connell, Trump Republicans have illegitimately stacked the Supreme Court with three far-right dogmatic partisans who are most likely to unleash corporate predations and favor the rich and powerful over the downtrodden they duntrod upon. To achieve their goals, they changed Senate rules to ram through the appointment of Neil Gorsuch as a Justice on the Supreme Court, after they had violated long-standing precedent by not allowing President Obama to fill the seat left vacant when Antonin Scalia died in February 2016. Then they rammed through the appointments of Brett Kavanaugh in November 2018, and even more outrageously of Amy Coney Barrett while early voting in the 2020 elections was already underway.

(5) Trump Republicans have made the U.S. a rogue nation in the world by denying the on-rushing risks of climate change and demonstrating hubris by refusing to take climate action or take steps to cut greenhouse gas emissions. They also are trying to torpedo climate justice and refuse to help poor countries that are harshly impacted by climate-related natural disasters like increasingly powerful storms and more frequent extreme floods, droughts and wildfires made worse by climate disruptions.

(6) Republicans engage in discriminatory policies that include blatant racism and sexism, and the Trump administration is excessively dominated by white males who effectively make traditional gender roles more rigid by working against equal pay for women, by suppressing women's reproductive rights to contraception and abortion services, and by turning their backs on lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people.

(7) Trump Republicans have engaged in political corruption and enabled rampant cronyism and nepotism. Trump is an unscrupulous narcissist who is eager to enrich himself and his family and his cronies at the cost of sacrificing people's health and the environment and prospects for the well-being of people in future generations -- and the survival prospects of many species of life on Earth. He seems to give little regard to norms of fairness and the common good in his maniacal pursuit of achieving his self-serving narrow-minded "wins". Trump and most other Republican politicians promote a white male nationalist agenda that seriously disadvantages women and folks in racial minorities. They constantly use "post-truth" propaganda and misinformation in this manipulative endeavor, and use patriotic slogans, flags, symbols, tweets, ideological rationalizations and mottos like "America First" and "Make America Great Again", while striving to deceive millions of Americans into thinking they do this for the greater good of all.

(8) Donald Trump has persistently played politics with the pandemic, putting millions of people's health at risk, and he and other Republicans have been trying to take away affordable health care from millions of people. Trump has repeatedly played down the risks of the contagious coronavirus, and pretended the miserable affliction will magically soon go away, and lethally incited people to ignore healthcare experts by flouting the good advice that they should follow preventative measures like wearing masks and social distancing. And they have thereby contributed to the pandemic spiking out of control, partially through superspreader events like political rallies.

In arrogantly trying to "repeal and replace Obamacare", Mitch McConnell used blatant secrecy in developing a plan in the U.S. Senate that would give people earning over \$250,000 per year a big tax break while reducing benefits for low-income people and older Americans. A majority of American voters did not vote to have extreme policies imposed on them like those that these politicians are trying to force onto the nation.

Back on May 4, 2017, Republicans in the House of Representatives were gloating and downright giddy as they celebrated their slim margin in narrow-mindedly voting to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Those politicians went straight to the White House after the vote to party in the Rose Garden with the scheming Trumpster, and to take a self-congratulatory photo op. This action to get rid of Obamacare was not only done to give hundreds of billions of dollars in lower taxes to high-income earners, but also to scurrilously and shamefully make medical insurance coverage more expensive for tens of millions of Americans. The action even put pre-existing conditions coverage for up to 130 million Americans at risk. This fact apparently did not reduce their coldly-calculating glee at having taken this step to triumph over people that this action disadvantaged. This shortsighted and outrageously unethical and inequitable "victory" represented an abuse of power and a violation of the public's trust. This assault

against the general welfare was just one of the many actions in a stunning array of power abuses that have marked the Republican minority's domineering rule in Washington D.C.

(9) Trump has enacted a record number of anti-democratic, anti-progressive and anti-environmental Executive Orders, and preempted the responsibilities of the legislative branch of government. Government ethics watchdogs have charged that Trump and officials in his administration trampled over the Hatch Act, which prohibits most senior officials, outside of the president and vice president, from engaging in electioneering activities while on the job. A report by Sen. Elizabeth Warren said that 14 Trump administration officials had been found to have violated the law a total of 54 times, and at least 22 more officials are under investigation for nearly 100 other violations.

"What we are seeing now is totally unprecedented," said Noah Bookbinder, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. "There have certainly been cases where Cabinet officials or other senior officials happen to have meetings in battleground states. . . . But the wholesale co-opting of the federal government to keep a president in power — which I think is an accurate way of describing what is going on now — is something that we have never even approached before."

"What we're seeing now would have been inconceivable to the previous administration," said a former Obama White House aide, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the person's new job did not authorize on-the-record comments. "It's not simply the Hatch Act violations. Those are the symptoms. The broader disease at play here is the intermingling of political interests and the national interest."

Republicans in Congress have also engaged in an unprecedented abuse of the Congressional Review Act to overturn many sensible rules enacted by Barack Obama and his administration.

(10) Trump shows disdain for human rights and democracy itself. He is trying to persuade people that human rights should be ignored, supposedly to make Americans more secure. He and his Attorney General push for things like deportations, more draconian enforcement of federal drug laws, harsher incarcerations of prisoners, and the suppression of dissent and protest. In taking hard line stances on crime and punishment, Republican politicians give police more power to enforce laws and engage in police misconduct against Blacks and protestors, and they demonstrate a willingness to overlook police abuses and curtail civil liberties. They also pander excessively to the gun lobby, refusing to support even the most common sense restrictions on who can buy guns and assault weapons. Trump has repeatedly expressed support for other authoritarian regimes like those of Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Erdogan in Turkey, Abdel el-Sisi in Egypt, Narendra Modi in India, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and others. This support bodes ill for reasonable hopes for peace, and for truer liberty and justice for all.

(11) Their tax plans are highly inequitable, serving to concentrate wealth more extremely in the hands of the wealthiest 1% -- to the detriment of everyone else. And Trump continues to hide his tax return information to conceal his business involvements in foreign countries and his many conflicts of interest and violations of the emoluments clause of the Constitution. This is an indelible sign of personal misconduct and abuse of executive power and authoritarian overreach.

(12) Trump and his loyalists attack, undermine and try to discredit journalists in the mainstream media, and promote really fake news by engaging in demagogic diatribes against all media outlets that criticize Trump Republicans, or that provide investigative reporting about abuses of power and anti-democratic activities. Conservatives support news outlets like Fox News and the alt-right Breitbart -- and ideological stalwarts like Rush Limbaugh -- that function as cheerleaders and apologists for hard-right ideological spin and "alternative facts" about events and national policies, and about election security, and then the reality of the presidential vote outcome that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris have been certified to have won by over 6 million votes.

(13) Republicans foment concerns over personal and national security and stoke people's fears to motivate them to support excessive power vested in the Republican Party.

Trump has engaged in nuclear saber rattling against North Korea, and he launched 59 cruise missiles onto a military base in Syria in an action that Trump's Commerce Secretary described as "after-dinner entertainment" for guests

at Trump's Mar-a-Lago golf resort in Florida. Actions like this create heightened risks and tensions and potentials for war in the world.

And they push to give big increases in funding to the military. They do this to goose the profitability of war services industries, as Major General Smedley Butler famously stated in his 1935 book about war being a racket. "It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious racket. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives." He went on to describe a racket "as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. ... It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes."

(14) A major cost of the war racket is that it leaves inadequate funds available to finance common good domestic priorities like healthcare for millions of vulnerable Americans and other vital strands in the social safety net, including Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and nutritional assistance food stamps.

(15) Powerful people show disdain for intellectuals and the arts, and promote open hostility to higher education, academia and scientific understandings. In doing so, they intertwine government and religion and use Christian faiths as a tool to manipulate public opinion, even when the government's policies or actions are glaringly opposed to the major moral tenets of religious doctrines.

(16) Trump Republicans have been using the power of government authority to protect their inner circle from accountability. These politicians obstructed all the investigations into meddling by Russia in the 2016 elections that helped Trump win. Trump then fired the FBI Director because he would not relent in the investigation, and Trump and White House operatives and Republican officials in Congress concealed Russian contacts and lied to the public and covered up evidence and refused to comply with legal subpoenas and tried hard to distract the American people from the Russia investigation and other corrupt acts, scandals and wrongdoing. And Trump has abused the presidential power to pardon people to let people off the hook because they were loyal to him, rather than to the Country.

It should be understood that political ends do not justify the means used when the means are so unscrupulous as to violate laws and broadly betray the best interests of the people. Donald Trump used a long litany of scurrilous means to seize power, and more and more of the sordid details are coming to light. In mid May 2017, less than four months after Inauguration Day, the Justice Department appointed a special counsel to lead its inquiry into interference by Russia in the 2016 presidential election, and by 2019 the findings became sufficient to impeach him to be removed from office. This prompted Trump to defensively decry the investigation, which he has called "the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history." History laughs out loud at this preposterous exaggeration and devious dearth of good judgment!

Trump knows this was not a "witch hunt". Impeachment was the reasoned response of democratic institutions to violations of ethical norms, truth-telling, and the honorable premises of oaths of office, rules of law and the Constitution. Properly understood, the Trump campaign actions and subsequent activities and executive orders have constituted a betrayal of the American people by men who have illegitimately grabbed power. And who have imposed a backward, retrogressive, deceit-filled, dumbly inequitable, anti-democratic, oppressively authoritarian and disastrously anti-environmental agenda. This is far worse than mere overreach of authority.