



Earth Manifesto

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 propaganda and spin, crafted as it is by the president and speechwriters, strategists and lawyers.

The current State of the Union right now, in the middle of the worst wave of the coronavirus pandemic, is one of enormous challenges and terrible hardships for millions of Americans, as well as great potential and extraordinary risk. At this juncture in history, 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 their own hands. 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 glaring 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. More than three-quarters of all U.S. workers are living from paycheck to paycheck, according to a report by Forbes Magazine, and an equal proportion of workers are in debt. One out of every six Americans experienced food insecurity even before the pandemic, 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 in 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 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, sadly allowing them to perpetuate an oppressively unjust and diabolically discriminatory agenda. They also 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 health care, prescription drugs, housing, schools and child care. These shrewd schemes have made the majority of Americans worse off, and undermined the prospects of their

future welfare.

The U.S. government has become a corporatocratic oligarchic plutocracy -- ruthless rule by the rich, and by their profit-maximizing corporate entity tools. The American people are being adversely afflicted by greed-driven capitalists engaging in tragically misguided national priorities and a harsh middle class squeeze. This is anti-egalitarian political intrigue, treacherous economic malfeasance and fiscal irresponsibility, and often involves 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 moment of crisis, with a severe global pandemic that is playing out on top of a state of severe economic disruption and a continuing national emergency declared by Donald Trump in order to get money that Congress refused to authorize to build his border wall. This state of the union is unfolding under a Trump regime that appears to be becoming increasingly desperate, unhinged, unjust and lawless after the U.S. Senate refused to find Trump guilty of abuses of power and obstruction of justice. Then he deservedly lost the 2020 election, and has refused to concede, assaulting the very foundations of our democracy in free and fair elections and a peaceful transfer of power.

Conservative firebrand Ann Coulter hammered Trump after he announced he would sign a funding deal formulated by Congress in January 2019 and then declared a national emergency in February to get money to build a wall that he had repeatedly promised Mexico would pay for. "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's separation of duties provisions and blatantly abusing the National Emergency Act to appropriate funds for building a wall on the border with Mexico. In doing so, he set 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 White House 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.

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 amounts 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 on 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 more than 10 percent. This information is according to an Oxfam report published to coincide with the start of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 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, 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 \$75 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*. This debt is a part of a dangerously high \$250 trillion of total global debt, according to a report published by the International Institute of Finance.

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 investor Seth Klarman sounded an alarm about rising debt, growing social tensions and the pathetic absence of American leadership, in a highly anticipated annual letter to clients. Klarman wasn't at the economic summit in Davos, but in a *New York Times* report, it was revealed that he sent a 22-page letter that was "being passed around" at the gathering. "It can't be business as usual amid constant protests, riots, shutdowns and escalating social tensions," he wrote. "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 honestly realistic, point out that it is unwise and improvident to borrow huge amounts of public funds from all future taxpayers to use it for wrongheaded purposes. They know that it is folly to promote priorities that are too short-term oriented, because that will leave a disastrous legacy to 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 mounting 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. To summarize, 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; exacerbating 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 excessive influence; foolishly undermining peaceful coexistence both at home and abroad; engaging in economic risk-taking and stimulating speculation that will require more 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 compound 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.

How have capitalists managed to undermine the American Dream, and the hopes and prospects of the majority of the people? Surely, it is by deceitful, politically corrupt and illicit means. The vulturish swamp master Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is probably more responsible than anyone else. He revealed himself to be an arrogantly unrepentant villain in supporting the federal government shutdown debacle and the deeply inappropriate, unethical and illegal declaration of national emergency. "Moscow Mitch" has acted as a Trojan horse for crony capitalists, allowing them to wield domineering influence over 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 wealth concentrating and anti-environmental policies on the people. 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. The American people, and the world, would be much better off if voters chose to Ditch Mitch!

The new majority of Democrats in the House of Representatives beginning in January 2019 introduced a landmark bill, the "For the People Act", which would combat corruption and protect people from politicians who put higher priority on corporate goals and special interest demands than on the best interests of American citizens. This legislation would strengthen our democracy by expanding voting rights, ending 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 agenda, the influence of vested interests that have been preventing such change should be reduced. 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 push 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 repetitively claimed that there is "border emergency" to justify the shutdown of the federal government, but this is merely xenophobic white nationalist spin by Trump, Stephen Miller, Ann Coulter, Sean Hannity, 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 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, most of the illicit drugs entering the U.S. from the south come through legal ports of entry, so a costly 2,000-mile-long wall would do little to stop them.

What is really happening here is that 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 assaults against democratic fairness and his wrongful activities. 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 in January 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 20,000 false claims since he took 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 as 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, the 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."

The 2018-2019 shutdown impasse took place due to a 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 other party that represents the majority of the people. The 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 four 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 also 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 threats, 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 recommit to honestly helping provide fairness of education, opportunity, healthcare and legal justice. They should 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.

The rebuke of one-party Republican rule by voters in the 2018 and 2020 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 Republicans grab power in 2016, and their many attempts to cover up what they did. Investigators also looked into blatant abuses of power in the Ukraine Plot, and in concerted efforts to stonewall information, defy congressional subpoenas, 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, forcing it to cease operations, 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. We need new federal government management that is much more honest, law abiding, and responsible!

Let's give hearty congratulations to the record number of women who won political office in the 2018 midterm elections. This achievement was 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 is an unjust disenfranchisement of the best interests of females that has facilitated discrimination against women in pay and benefits, making them less secure, and reinforced a hard-to-break glass ceiling. It has also allowed too much sexual harassment and too many violations against the dignity and safety of females, and ignored many episodes of domestic violence. And it has pathetically contributed to 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 action 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 nearly \$27 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 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 his fix was 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 every taxpayer in every future year, 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 claiming 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 bigger opportunities to engage in price gouging, and allowed them increased access to public lands to make 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, who says 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 to this essay for an update on the Koch donors' activities).

While Republican politicians are doing a great job of representing the interests of rich people, 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 promote America's economic supremacy while being stingy in spending on social programs, 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 increasing the prerogatives of the rich and powerful. Political philosophies advocating huge 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 by adopting more just policies. The best policies require a principled balance between freedom and equality, and 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 the 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, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. 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 unjust and authoritarian due to the success of distorting propaganda, institutionalized corruption, sexist policies, capitalistic exploitation, aggressive militarism, and deceptive rhetoric, fake news, the politics of distraction 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 basically means 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. Big 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, their 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 in February 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 in February 2019. Government works most fairly when representatives of the people make reasonable compromises, not when they take power-abusing stands against the common good. Bravo for the U.S. Senate for having collaboratively worked together to approve this bill for a change. The legislation finally reauthorized -- permanently -- the Land and Water Conservation Fund, in connection with approving this major public lands bill. The new law will 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 combined more than 100 separate bills and offered something for nearly everyone, with projects 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. It 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 and fossil fuel drilling and mining.

The passage of this legislation is a paradoxical rare win for conservation at a time when Trump Republicans have pushed hard to allow extractive oil drilling, natural gas fracking and coal mining on public lands -- and scaled back safeguards established by their 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*.

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 Congressional Budget Office projected the national debt would increase by another \$10 trillion in 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 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 challenged Black Americans, brazenly asking, "What do you have to lose?" We are tragically seeing.

In glaring contrast to Ronald Reagan's nod to values, Trump 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 a serious mistake for anyone 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 nearly four years 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, immorally separating children from their parents, manipulatively deceiving people, exploiting popular prejudices, stoking fears, bearing false witness, promoting wildly misleading 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, using 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.

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 greater good to goose profits by allowing natural resources to be excessively depleted and letting businesses externalize costs onto the public. At the same time, they are 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 have been 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 by dethroning Trump and his treacherous Cabinet -- and Republicans in the U.S. Senate.

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. Republicans 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 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 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." To distract their loyal supporters, they engage in trying to "own the libs".

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 were revealed anew by impeachment investigators in the U.S. House of Representatives who tried to fulfill 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 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 hard 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 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 rectitude or conscience.

In another view with regard to legitimacy, consider this. While 63 million people voted for Donald Trump, some 74 million Americans voted for candidates that were 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.

Then in November 2020, most fortunately for all, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris got more than 6 million more votes than Trump and Pence, despite all the Republican skullduggery around elections.

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 usurping power through these dishonorable and unethical methods, they have brazenly 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 fundamentalism, rash 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

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 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 and terribly high costs of

extreme weather events and rising sea levels on billions of people. They see the extent to which industrial activities are driving a Sixth Mass Extinction of animal and plant life on Earth. This is not good.

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 that would reduce their domineering power. 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 control. Their efforts to improve our system of public education, for instance, are skewed toward reinforcing libertarian ideologies that would help cement in place the power and privileges of elite individuals and favored groups.

Many progressives are rightly 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." Hey, guys, the costs of social insurance policies needed to save your necks is really quite low!

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 a 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.

Germinating for inclusion in Book Eight

Republicans painted Democrats as opposed to lawful order in the weeks and months following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers by claiming they want to "defund the police", rather than the truth, which is that they want to shift resources from hyper-militarized and unaccountable police forces that routinely profile and brutalize Blacks and Latinos to taking positive steps to ameliorate racial injustices and deal with police misconduct and racial targeting of minorities.

The fact of the matter, however, is that Republicans are the ones that want to consequentially defund things. Without a single vote from the opposition party in Congress in December 2017, they significantly defunded the government by slashing taxes on corporations by 40% and reducing taxes on the highest income earners who primarily benefit from the public debt-financed Tax Cuts scam. The net effect of this rash tax code change is to increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, widen the extent of extreme inequalities and inequities in the U.S., and drive up the national debt.