



The True State of the Union

Earth Manifesto Insights by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
January 21, 2022

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 real whoppers, along with a proposed agenda and rationales for it. But make no mistake about it, the true State of the Union differs dramatically from this propaganda and spin that is crafted by the president, strategists, lawyers and speechwriters.

The current State of the Union right now, still in the throes of the disastrous coronavirus pandemic, is one of big 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 growing levels of extreme inequality and wreak widespread injustices while concentrating wealth and power in their own hands. We could easily build an improved democracy that works better for all, 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.

The United States is being torn asunder by warring political parties preoccupied with gaining power and raising money and propagandizing the populace to score political points. And it will get worse without Congress or the Supreme Court being willing, or able, to act to control gerrymandering and make representation fairer. The bitter polarization in American politics is caused by many factors, but "critics of Washington's persistent gridlock point to partisan gerrymandering as a leading reason lawmakers in Congress have little incentive to compromise -- indeed, are discouraged from it."

Redistricting after the 2020 Census is taking place around the country as 2022 begins, and many of the maps released in various states suggest a coming decade of even more deeply entrenched partisanship for Congress. "If you draw a district that's safe, the party no longer cares about recruiting a broadly appealing candidate," said David Wasserman, a veteran analyst of election data for the Cook Political Report. "This is a vicious cycle in that the decline of competitive seats leads to a more extreme and dysfunctional Congress."

Politicians should not be allowed to draw political boundaries, either Republicans or Democrats, for the simple reason that gerrymandered maps cause Americans to become more polarized and make our political system even less capable of solving problems. With our politics so broken, we must fix the broken process.

Republicans dominate state politics in Texas, Florida and most other states in the South only because of the aggregate impacts of gerrymandering and discriminatory restrictions on voting, coupled with the overwhelming influence of Big Money in promoting propaganda that deceives people with misinformation, and tells people the 2020 election was stolen, and hijacks their emotions, exploits their fears, stokes resentments and anger, and favors giant corporations over working people. These factors are compounded by religious authorities who side with the rich and powerful over the vast majority of their faithful flocks and the general populace.

The U.S. government has become a corporatocratic oligarchic plutocracy -- ruthless rule by the rich, and by profit-maximizing corporate entities that function as organizational tools that significantly contribute to this sad state of affairs. As a result, the American people are being adversely affected by greed-driven capitalists who push

tragically misguided national policies and priorities. 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.

Corporate capitalists are powerfully opposed to efforts to regulate their organizations. They resist efforts to make their operations fairer, more socially responsible, more accountable, and more ecologically sound. They show disdain for social justice and environmental sanity, and even democracy itself, due to a single-minded focus on profits over all other values. One reason for this is that capitalism and democracy are oft times antagonistic to each other,, 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.

Over the last four decades, corporate PAC spending on congressional elections has more than quadrupled, even adjusting for inflation, and much of it is given to Republicans to buy influence. "Labor unions no longer provide a counterweight. Forty years ago, union PACs contributed about as much as corporate PACs. Now, corporations are outspending labor by more than three to one," according to Robert Reich. "Since January 2010 when the Supreme Court opened the floodgates to big money in the *Citizens United* case, and SuperPACs and 'dark money' began dramatically increasing, there have been huge corporate returns on this mountain of money. In addition to corporate tax rates having plunged over the last forty years, regulatory protections for consumers, workers, and the environment have been reduced, and antitrust initiatives have become so ineffectual that many big corporations face little or no competition."

"The profits of big corporations just reached a 70-year high, even during a pandemic. The ratio of CEO pay in large companies to average workers has ballooned from 20-to-1 in the 1960s to 320-to-1 now. Meanwhile, most Americans are going nowhere. The typical worker's wage is only a bit higher today than it was forty years ago, when adjusted for inflation. But the biggest casualty is the public's trust in democracy. In 1964, just 29 percent of voters believed that government was 'run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.' By 2013, 79 percent of Americans believed it."

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, and they show inadequate concern for the harmful consequences. They also demonstrate wholly inadequate care for working people, communities, the environment and a sustainable future, and they strive to gain short-term advantages and capitalize on opportunities to get special subsidies and bailouts. They lobby to gain and maintain prerogatives 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 based on it, *The Corporation*.

A sensational story casts a bright light on the seeds of this great problem. In August 2019, the Business Roundtable, an association consisting of nearly 200 chief executive officers of America's leading companies, announced a new organizational "Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation" that outlined a "modern standard for corporate responsibility," one that can be characterized as embracing "a fundamental commitment to all our stakeholders," including customers, employees, suppliers, communities (including the natural environment) and shareholders. This Statement was signed by 181 CEOs.

This statement has been referred to as a radical new vision of the role of shareholders when compared to its September 1997 "Statement on Corporate Governance", which declared: "The paramount duty of management and of boards of directors is to the corporation's stockholders; the interests of other stakeholders are relevant as a derivative of the duty to stockholders."

But surprisingly, that 1997 Statement stood in stark contrast to an earlier commitment made back in October 1981, when the Business Roundtable issued a "Statement on Corporate Responsibility" that identified seven constituencies it deemed critical to the success of publicly traded corporations: customers, employees, financiers,

suppliers, communities, society-at-large and shareholders. According to the Business Roundtable at that time, these seven constituencies form "the web of complex, often competing relationships" within which corporations operate." In this 1981 "Statement," the Business Roundtable recognized that "shareholders have a special relationship to the corporation" and "they must receive a good return, *but the legitimate concerns of other constituencies also must have the appropriate attention.*"

Two of the most egregious instances of corporations succeeding in wielding raw political power at the expense of the American people are found in the two biggest tax cut laws in U.S. history. The first took place under Ronald Reagan, who slashed top tax rates on the highest income earners by a huge 60% (from 70% in 1981 to 28% by 1988). The second was in 2017 during Donald Trump's first year in office, when taxes on corporations were cut by 40% (from 35% to 21%), giving the richest people enormous windfall gains because more than two-thirds of all dividends and capital gains are received by the top 1%, due to the unconscionably rigged system that facilitates the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of the few.

The Nefariously Corrupt 'Kochtopus'

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, and has gotten worse in 2020 and 2021.

In a move similar to the greenwashing shift expressed by the CEOs of the Business Roundtable, it is noteworthy that the Koch conclave of billionaire donors began to try to "rebrand itself as kinder, gentler and less political" at their January 2019 meeting in Indian Wells in the Southern California desert. There were 634 wealthy donors in attendance and all of them committed to giving 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 were 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 undermining our democracy, harmfully tearing our national unity asunder, and preventing climate action that would help forestall catastrophic impacts and terribly high costs of hot temperatures, extreme weather events, and epic floods and wildfires 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. These are harbingers of a dystopian future unfolding before our very eyes.

Despite this charm offensive by those at the Koch conclave, we must make no mistake about it: really rich people in the donor class are still acting as puppet masters in giving conservative politicians Big Bucks and excess influence so that they do their bidding -- by cutting their taxes cut and eliminating regulations and preventing reforms of campaign financing that would reduce their excessive power. The wealthy are highly motivated to get our representatives to allow corporate lobbyists to continue to have undue influence on our national policies and priorities. They have wildly succeeded in their dastardly attempts to stack federal courts with right-wing judges who are predisposed to decide issues in their favor, contrary to 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 dominating influence. But even in their efforts to improve our system of public education, they skew them 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 real costs of social insurance policies needed to save your necks are really not very high!

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.

The real responsibility of the President and Congress is to represent the true national interest, not just the narrow interests of rich people and folks in red states who tend to be deceived, cheated and manipulated. Abraham Lincoln famously echoed the Bible in declaring 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.

Republicans in the past year have been making extremely antagonistic efforts to prevent the Biden administration and Democrats in Congress from enacting vitally important legislation that would protect voting rights and democratic fairness, address the increasingly disastrous destabilization of the climate, act honorably toward Dreamers and refugees, reform rogue policing policies, increase safety from gun violence, make prescription drugs less expensive, shift taxes to the highest earners, and provide a nationwide safeguard for women against abortion bans and medically unnecessary restrictions that push abortion out of reach for millions.

By preventing these popular plans, Republicans are succeeding in frustrating the American people and making them disappointed with President Biden and Democrats while deflecting the blame they richly deserve for their uncompromising intransigence and coldly calculating opposition. This may give them an avenue back to power as the 2022 midterm elections approach, even though they don't merit it in the least, due to their treachery against the common good and their radically inequitable, undemocratic and unsustainable agenda.

In their monomaniacal pursuit of winning at any cost, Republican politicians have so radicalized their supporters that they seem to have lost interest in doing the critical work of responsibly coping with the biggest problems that confront us. This includes climate change, the extinction crisis, improving public health and safety, living sustainably, overpopulation, comprehensive immigration reform, achieving peaceful coexistence, and balancing government spending and revenues to keep the national debt within safe levels.

This is the bottom line. This is why it is so important to "watch what they do, not just what they say." Do not take their word -- either CEOs or wealthy donors to conservative politicians -- for what they may say in their greenwashing efforts and devious attempts to maximize their advantages and profits at the public expense.

In an opinion piece, Thomas Mann and conservative Norman Ornstein analyzed the dysfunction in D.C. and concluded: "We have no choice but to acknowledge that the core of the problem lies with the Republican Party." The GOP, they say, is "ideologically extreme, scornful of compromise, unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science, and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

The once respectable Republican Party has obviously decided that it is to their exceedingly narrow, selfish, disreputably onerous and disgustingly greedy and opprobrious advantage to become oppositional extremists and authoritarians leading blind followers.

After Trump was defeated in 2020, there was hope that conservative pragmatists could take back control from political extremists. But they appear to "maintain a viselike grip on the national and state parties and the process

for fielding and championing House and Senate candidates in next year's elections", according to Miles Taylor, former Republican governor of New Jersey for 8 years, and Christine Todd Whitman, the first head of the Environmental Protection Agency under George W. Bush. These conservatives add, "Rational Republicans are losing the party civil war. And the only near-term way to battle pro-Trump extremists is for all of us to team up on key races and overarching political goals with our longtime political opponents: the Democrats."

"This year we joined more than 150 conservatives -- including former governors, senators, congressmen, cabinet secretaries, and party leaders -- in calling for the Republican Party to divorce itself from Trumpism or else lose our support ... Rather than return to founding ideals, Republican leaders in the House and in many states have now turned belief in conspiracy theories and lies about stolen elections into a litmus test for membership and running for office."

Lifelong conservative and evangelical Christian Michael Gerson, the chief speechwriter for George W. Bush from 2001 to 2006, has become a harsh critic of Donald Trump. He recently observed that it is clear that Trump, "this same lawless, reckless man, has a perfectly realistic path back to power. The GOP is a garbage scow of the corrupt, the seditious and their enablers, yet the short- and medium-term political currents are in its favor." He added, "This is a national, not just a Democratic, emergency. Trump has strengthened his identification with the seditious forces he unleashed on Jan. 6. He has embraced ever more absurd and malicious conspiracy theories. He has shown even less stability, humanity, responsibility and restraint. And his support among Republicans has grown. Trump and his strongest supporters are in a feedback loop of radicalization."

"If Trump returns to the presidency, many of the past constraints on his power would be purposely loosed. Many of the professionals and patriots who opposed him in his final days would have been weeded out long before. There is no reason Trump would not try to solidify personal power over military and federal law enforcement units to employ as a bully's club in times of civil disorder. There is no reason he would refrain from using federal resources to harass political opponents, undermine freedom of the press and change the outcome of elections. These are previously stated goals."

"What attitudes and actions does this require of us? Any reaction must begin with a sober recognition. Catastrophe is in the front room. The weather forecast includes the apocalypse."

Hooptedoodle: A Digression on Recent History

Give consideration to the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, which took place from December 22, 2018 through January 25, 2019. This shutdown cast a glaring light on how merciless the dominating forces have been in using vulnerable people as bargaining chips in their on-going efforts to undermine and take advantage of the middle class and poor people. Many government workers became surprisingly desperate at not being paid for more than a month, and this was part of a much bigger issue. More than three-quarters of all U.S. workers were living from paycheck to paycheck (before the pandemic), according to a report by Forbes Magazine, and an equal proportion of workers were in debt. One out of every six Americans experienced food insecurity, and most minimum wage workers need to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. The average working person is unable to financially cope with an injury, emergency or turn of bad luck, and 40% of Americans would not be able to cover an unexpected \$400 expense, according to a Federal Reserve Board report.

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 and 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 discriminatory agenda. They also engage in foisting socialized costs, damages and risks onto the masses, and encourage speculative risk-taking, and corrupt our politics

by rudely indulging in a "cost shifting" scam that causes a harsh economic squeeze on the middle class and poor people. Simultaneously, taxes are radically slashed on profits made through these schemes -- and a near monopoly on these profits is given to the top dogs who have rigged the economy in ways that drive up costs for basic necessities, especially including health care, prescription drugs, housing, education and child care. These schemes have made millions of Americans worse off, and undermined the prospects of their future welfare.

The true state of the union is that we are living in a moment of crisis, with a severe global pandemic that is playing out on top of many economic disruptions. This began unfolding under a Trump regime that appeared to be increasingly desperate, unhinged, and lawless after the U.S. Senate refused to find Trump guilty of abuses of power and obstruction of justice in two impeachment trials. After Trump deservedly lost the 2020 election, he refused to concede, and is repetitiously telling big lies about election fraud. This is a concerted assault on the very foundations of our democracy found in free and fair elections and peaceful transfers of power.

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

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 powers provisions and blatantly abusing the National Emergency Act to appropriate funds for building a wall on the southern border. 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." Those who wrote the National Emergency Act probably never contemplated a situation in which the White House might use the law to overrule the outcome of negotiations within the legislative branch.

The insightful 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 obstruction of efforts to reduce the severity and frequency of extreme weather events being caused by emissions of huge amounts of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases into the 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 quickly as possible. This ruse resembles treating planetary ecosystems like hostile takeover targets of a private equity firm that uses debt leveraging to make huge profits by buying up vulnerable companies to then tear them apart, fire employees and sell of the parts.

And Republicans are intent on incessantly trying to funnel a maximum amount of the resulting profits into the pockets of a small minority of those who are already financially fortunate. They are thus 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 almost doubled since the

financial crisis in 2008, "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 argued that the people who attend this annual 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. Countries worldwide have pushed the total global debt to a record high \$300 trillion or so, as measured in U.S. currency, according to the International Institute of Finance. This riskily opprobrious debt burden is more than twice as much as it was in 2007, when a severe financial crisis was beginning to unfold.

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 in 2019, 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 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 terrible legacy to our heirs. 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 about the damaging impacts of activities like the depletion of fisheries and the clear-cutting of forests, and they warn us that global warming-stoked climate change is a "threat multiplier" that accelerates the rate at which we are hurtling toward and through risky tipping points. They say that increasing costs and risks associated with recklessly profligate uses of fossil fuels and fresh water resources are too serious to continue to ignore. 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.

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.

During the years Trump was in office, Republican politicians demonstrated a rash degree of irresponsibility

through a pathetic constellation of treacherous undertakings. To summarize, they stimulated the use of fossil fuels and failed to take action to prevent climate change; helped giant corporations foist cost-externalizing schemes onto the public; drove up the national debt to further enrich the rich; aggressively exploited working people; pathologically discriminated against millions of people in racial and ethnic minorities; undermined the rights and prerogatives of women; abused power by imposing austerity measures on the masses; stoked the insecurity of the vast majority of the people; treated poor people with an extreme deficiency of empathy and compassion; exacerbated a multitude of social injustices; manipulatively inspired fear and blamed others to divide and control people; and propagated woefully unethical and deceitful lies and misinformation. On other fronts, they gave far-right extremists excessive influence; foolishly undermined peaceful coexistence both at home and abroad; engaged in economic risk-taking and stimulated speculation that will eventually require more taxpayer bailouts; promoted materialistic consumerism; failed to address an on-going epidemic of gun violence; waged a cruel, counterproductive and costly war on cannabis; egregiously wreaked extensive harms on people worldwide, and generally sacrificed the greater good. These actions compound their basic sins of mindlessly damaging the environment, promoting policies that waste natural resources and 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 through deceitful, politically corrupt and illicit means. The vulturish swamp master Mitch McConnell is probably more responsible than anyone else. He revealed himself to be an arrogant and unrepentant villain by supporting the federal government shutdown debacle and the deeply inappropriate and unethical declaration of a national emergency. "Moscow Mitch" McConnell 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, or getting Big Money out of the driver's seat of American politics by 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 was cynically instrumental in enabling malfeasance and demagoguery-facilitated abuses of power by Donald Trump and his 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 and ending gerrymandering of congressional districts, 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 must be reduced. As part of this initiative, the American people must learn to see how corruption and influence peddling distort our national policies.

Trump and Republicans obsequiously loyal to him in Congress have been aided and abetted by dishonest facilitators on Fox News who push the false story 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 was 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 was really happening here is that Trump was hyping up threats to our national security that are allegedly 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 were "naive". Well, here is the truth. Either the thousands of employees in U.S. intelligence services are wrong, or Trump was lying through his teeth. Given that the Deceiver-in-Chief made more than 30,000 false claims while he was in office, it is all but certain that he was consequentially lying, and it seems obvious that he was acting like a cornered rat, trying to protect himself by continuing to do his con man routine and acting as a fear-mongering immigrant scapegoating demagogue with a compulsion to abuse authority and evade accountability.

Oh, what a tangled web he weaves in his attempts to deceive -- and cheat, swindle and betray -- and make the rich richer and the masses less secure. Walter Shaub, former Director of the Office of Government Ethics, observed on January 1, 2019: "Above all else, military and civilian members of the United States government have a duty to place loyalty to the Constitution, laws and ethical principles above the private gain of individual politicians and political parties. Much the same is true for the citizens of this nation. Freedom is ours to lose. Enemies of that freedom include not only foreign powers but also domestic actors who would supplant democracy with authoritarian rule."

A Big Picture Overview

Twelve score and five 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 honestly 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 colonial 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 excessive influence by Republican politicians by voters in the 2018 elections consequentially contributed 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 have been made into the Trump family's violations of the Emoluments clause of the

Constitution and illegal uses of the Trump charitable foundation that forced it to cease operations. Abuses of money in the Trump inaugural fund are still being examined. In addition, there was much malfeasance in the leadership of federal agencies during the Trump administration, especially in the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior, the Treasury Department, the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security. Federal government management must be 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 unjust disenfranchisement of the best interests of females 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 by dramatically improving 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 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 been a significant causative factor in driving the national debt up from less than \$1 trillion in 1980 to more than \$29 trillion today.

Reagan had exploited the fact that the U.S. economy suffered a period of recession and stagflation during the late 1970s and early 1980's, and he promoted the spin that the solution to the economic "crisis" was to cut taxes and reduce regulations. 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 big corporate entities, 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 the people, 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 cause harms to the public through other 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 by extracting natural resources from them. This misguided governance makes it seem obvious that the REAL problem in the USA today is inadequately regulated corporations and corrupt mismanagement in government. This perspective gives compelling credence to the words of firebrand Sarah Kendzior, who once said that the Trump administration acted like "a transnational crime syndicate masquerading as government." (Vladimir Putin is pleased to head this global Party of public graft, fraud and vice.)

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. 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 do 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 Supreme Court to remain stacked with extremely conservative political partisans like Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. And 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 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 adapting 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 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 is required!

One-party dominated politics under Trump Republicans from 2017 to 2019 pushed retrogressive priorities, despite their having gained power by a long litany of illegitimate means. The federal government is too unjust and authoritarian due to institutionalized corruption, sexist policies, capitalistic exploitation, aggressive militarism, and success by right-wing media outlets in promoting distorting propaganda, deceptive rhetoric, fake news, false

conspiracies, lies about election fraud, the politics of distraction and pernicious influences in social media. This is not good.

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 the U.S. Senate passing a public lands bill 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 Senate for having collaboratively worked together to approve this bill. The legislation finally reauthorized -- permanently -- the Land and Water Conservation Fund, in connection with the approval of this major public lands bill. The 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 also expanded several national parks and created 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. 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 was paradoxically a rare win for conservation at a time when Republicans were pushing hard to allow extractive oil drilling, natural gas fracking and coal mining on public lands -- and scaling 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 political gains.

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 projects safer and more efficient. The Trump administration, in its usual counterproductive stands, worked to impose tough new restrictions on communities that wanted to make use of safeguards assured by the National Environmental Policy Act. It did this under the guise of "streamlining" regulations that it claimed are "bad for business". They wanted 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 was "nothing short of a public gag order."

The federal government carries out and pays for many 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. Too 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 and honorable representatives who will prevent such a "thinly veiled attempt to rubberstamp permits for corporate polluters by rolling back NEPA environmental reviews." American citizens should have a greater 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 advantages 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 it is to sensibly regulate them, this 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 Trump grabbed power in an electoral coup 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 acted as puppets of profit-prepossessed corporate deregulatory zealots. This development proved to be detrimental to the people because Trojan horse agency heads were put in charge that tried to sabotage the missions and guiding purposes of the government agencies directly from within.

This undermined fairness principles, the public health, financial stability and ecological integrity. Irrationally exuberant investors and speculators always tend to want a piece of the inside action, so threats of another boom-and-bust accelerated, 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 reckless 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, regressively-structured tax-cutting priorities is imprudent and fiscally irresponsible.

Rep. Joe Kennedy of Massachusetts, in a passionate response to Trump's 2018 State of the Union address, declared: "The state of the union is hopeful, resilient and enduring." 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 portrayed a darker picture, telling people that the nation was 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 crushed communities and shuttered factories. That it is beset by 'poverty and violence at home' and 'war and destruction abroad.'" He even challenged Blacks, asking, "What do you have to lose?" We are tragically finding out.

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 the future. After 4 years in office, the results were clear: The fix was in. To succeed in this gambit, Trump and swindling politicians 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 did this to distract people from scandalous activities, using a constant barrage of outrageous tweets and stands on issues. They verbally attacked and threatened opponents in order to zealously impose their twisted domineering control drives over the populace. They did 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.

In another instance of broad deceit, Republicans painted Democrats as opposed to lawful order in the weeks and months following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. They claimed liberals want to "defund the police", instead of telling the truth, which is that reformers 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 has been to increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and widen the extent of extreme inequalities and inequities in the U.S., and drive up the national debt.

Kamala Harris once 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 fair-minded investments in broadly shared current and future well-being -- in social justice, public education, vital physical infrastructure, and a sustainable future. Instead of investing in sustainable well-being, however, scheming conservatives place top priority on trying to sacrifice the greater good to goose profits and allow natural resources to be excessively depleted, and to let businesses externalize costs onto the public. At the same time they deprive working people of power and eviscerate protective regulations, and recklessly push their agenda that primarily favors millionaires and billionaires.

Several prominent national security experts stated that Trump represented a significant danger to the national security. Citing his demonstration of an "unbelievable acquiescence to Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, which was positively shocking to those of us who've worked in national security all of our lives", they wrote "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 is 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 time in office "clearly meet, and exceed, the criteria to trigger this fail-safe." Trump should have been found guilty in both his impeachment trials, in light 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 treacherous Trump Republicans in Congress.

Republicans were obsequious in their deference to the narcissistic Egomaniac-in-Chief to such an unprincipled degree that they were basically broadly betraying their country. It is ironic, hypocritical and morally wrong for representatives of the people to have been 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 and rules of law and ethics, and to the greater good of the people. Republicans are taking increasingly desperate stands to try to regain power, and fight 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 expressed this belief: "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 Joseph McCarthy, and until that cancer is excised, they should not be entrusted with power." They should stop distracting supporters by 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 American experiment in democracy 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 respectable 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 House who tried to fulfill the responsibility given to them in the Constitution to wield oversight over the Executive Branch. Despite stonewalling and conspiratorial cover-ups by Trump and his cronies, details of corrupt activities and foreign intrigue are coming to light about the malfeasance they engaged in when they exerted domineering power in the executive and legislative branches of government. And when Robert Mueller's findings are coupled with the impeachable offenses committed by the Trump administration, including the January 6 incitement of violent insurrection against Congress, we see how Republican politicians have abused power, and how honesty-deficient and unprincipled 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!

Far-Reaching Impacts of Deceit

Trump evaded accountability by calling investigations into his malfeasance "a hoax" and "fake news." Fake news? Pope Francis 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 literary critic Michiko Kakutani explored the phenomenon of falsehoods in the age of Trump in her book *The Death of Truth*, and makes it seem that such assaults on truth resemble 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 use 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 in recent years. 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 said Trump's repeated attacks on the media were "repulsive". He declared that Trump "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 enemies of despots and guardians 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 echoes 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 supporters. These are enablers who 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 the fact that austerity measures are 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, on average, that the wealthiest 5,000 families in the USA are receiving every year since 2017. Even worse, it is ominous that this tax cut swindle is being financed by borrowing more money and piling it onto an already risky level of national debt.

The Rand Corporation, a nonpartisan think tank, states that we are suffering 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.

Intrigue and Illegitimacy

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 could 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, and used 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 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 in the corporate world 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 the wealthy donor class. And they refuse to rein in the corrupting influence of Big Money in elections and lobbying.

An integral aspect of the success of conservatives in seizing dominating control in the USA in 2016 can be traced to another immoral and illegitimate tactic. This is the Southern Strategy, a highly unscrupulous tactic that 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 mainly 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 in 2016, 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 DID NOT have a mandate to impose their far-right agenda on the people, so their uncompromising rule was a rude insult to the nation. It is notable that less than 60% of the estimated 250 million Americans who were eligible to vote in 2016 actually cast a ballot, and about 75 million Americans were younger than the age of 18, so they were 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, fortunately for all, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris got almost 7 million more votes than Trump and Pence, despite all the Republican skullduggery around elections.

All in all, nefariously negative abuses of power are an outrage against government of the people, by the people and for the people. Such 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 by means of these dishonorable and unethical methods, they brazenly abused it to advance a radical anti-environmental, inequitable, fiscally irresponsible, and oppressively discriminatory right-wing agenda.

In conclusion, Republican politicians 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, undemocratic unfairness, born-again religious fundamentalism, 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, wisely and honestly. We are at a juncture in 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 large 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,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain